

Modules for the Anarchist Political School

APS Trainee's Workbook

Anarchist Political School



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Introduction: What is Anarchism?

Introduction

Anarchism was born out of the class struggle of the workers, poor and peasants (the popular classes) to overthrow capitalism

It first arose within the trade unions associated with the First International in the 1860s and 1870s

Many of these trade unions were openly anarchist, and based their struggles on the goal of attaining stateless socialism, and the ending of all forms of oppression, through revolution

As such, a number of prominent activists in the First International became associated with anarchism, including Mikhail Bakunin (Marx's great rival)

Anarchism, therefore, should not be seen as some abstract idea — invented in the isolated minds of intellectuals — but rather an idea — and set of strategies and tactics — that arose in revolutionary working class struggles against capitalism and the state

Anarchism, therefore, was forged in struggle

Anarchism at times has played a leading role not only in the fight against the state and capitalism, but also in the fight that the working class has waged against racism, sexism, and imperialism

By the 1900s anarchism had spread across the world, and many mass movements and trade unions in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and North America were anarchist between the 1870s and the 1930s and fought against local and imperialist ruling classes

At its height, anarchism was identified as the most dangerous movement by the ruling classes

Due to this, it faced mass repression and for much of the latter half of the 20th Century it was overshadowed by Marxism

But because anarchism was born in the struggles of the popular classes it never disappeared and it remains relevant to the struggles of the popular classes today, including in South Africa

In recent years, anarchism has experienced a revival within working class struggles, and in some cases — although sadly not all yet — it has come once again to play a leading role

Anarchism

Anarchism has always argued that the statist path to socialism, which was practiced in many parts of the world including Africa, was and is inherently flawed

Thus, along with fighting capitalism, anarchists believe that all states need to be smashed, along with all forms of oppression such as racism, imperialism and sexism

To do this, anarchists believe in fighting for a future society, through revolution, in which there are no bosses or state managers; where oppression whether based on race, class or sex doesn't exist; where workers manage themselves; where the economy is democratically planned through community and worker assemblies and councils, where society is democratically run

from the bottom up by people themselves using federated assemblies and councils; where the entire economy is socialised; and where the goal is to meet peoples' needs and to not make profits

Anarchists developed this vision of a new society through being involved in past revolutions where people themselves started to build such self-managed and self organised structures based on direct democracy; which only ended because they were crushed either by states, capitalists or Communist Parties

The Road to Revolution

To build towards revolution, anarchists work within and are involved in building working class movements

While anarchists don't seek to impose their will on these movements, they do work to promote the ideas of anarchism in them and to win over activists in these movements to anarchism

In fact, the basis of anarchism is that only workers and the poor can free themselves through their own movements – freedom will not come via political parties or a state – this is one of the main differences between anarchism and Marxism/African socialism

Within working class movements and trade unions, anarchists promote the idea that these movements should be prefigurative – in other words they should work towards becoming the basis on which a future free society could be built

This means that if we want a society based on direct democracy and freedom, then movements need to also be based on direct democracy

Indeed, movements or political parties that are not democratic, or in which leaders make the decisions and instruct followers what to do, are not going to be able to win a world where everyone is free

All top-down movements, like the ANC, Marxist or Pan-African parties can do is replace one set of rulers for another

So if we want freedom and equality in the future, then our movements need to be as free and equal as possible in the present

To do this, anarchists promote the idea that working class movements should be based on the following principles: these are **direct action, self-organisation, direct democracy, self-discipline, and mutual aid**

The reason why anarchists promote these principles is because they allow for members to be in control of movements and they form the basis of a free society of the future

Anarchists believe that the best way for activists and movements to fight capitalism and the state is through their own direct actions like protests, strikes, and occupations

Throughout history it has been direct action that has won gains for workers and the poor

The 8 hour working day was won through strikes and protests by anarchist trade unions, and not because bosses, socialist parties or any state wanted to reduce working hours

In South Africa the apartheid state was ended because people fought and protested – they used direct action and ended it themselves; and not because of the ANC or Mandela

The effectiveness of direct action partly explains why anarchists promote it

Fortunately, many of the post-apartheid movements, like the ABM, have also come to adopt direct action as the most effective tactic in struggle

It is through direct action that people can also win things in the present and these victories for reforms can be used to build the confidence of workers and the poor, so that they will eventually have the confidence themselves to overthrow the state, capitalism and the ruling class through revolution

In fact, it is vital today that the popular classes win reforms that extend their power and improve their lives — while being weary of reforms granted from above that are aimed at blunting struggles

Indeed, direct action is the opposite of political action, like voting for leaders to go into parliaments or municipalities (often promoted by Marxists and Pan-Africanists), which involves workers and the poor giving away their power to ‘officials’ and politicians

Through direct action, workers and the poor learn to manage their own struggles and build their own structures, which is going to be vital for any genuine revolution and why anarchists support and promote it

An important part of anarchist principles is that working class movements should be based on direct democracy

This means that decisions in working class movements should be made in a way where everyone has an equal say and power stays at the base with all members, and not officials at the top

The aim of this is to build democratic structures, in working class movements, so that these structures could one day replace the state through revolution

So anarchists believe that direct democracy in our movements today sets the basis for direct democracy in the future; once we know how to practice direct democracy we don’t need directors

By building structures of direct democracy we set the basis for extending these during a revolutionary period, and we can then be in a position to replace the state immediately with structures of self-governance — like federated worker and community councils based around the structures of our movements — through which the popular classes (workers, peasants and the poor) could run society without the need for rulers

Anarchists argue that as a central part of any revolution, workers need to seize all factories, socialise them and run them democratically without bosses to meet the needs of everyone

Within unions in South Africa, anarchists have been promoting these ideas — although they are very much still in a minority

However, the vision that workers can take over and run factories themselves is going to be needed if unions are to once again become revolutionary organisations

Added to this, a struggle is going to have to be waged inside the unions to transform them into fighting militant organisations, based on direct democracy — so that workers at the base control them

If workers, through their unions, seize factories, the economy could be run and co-ordinated democratically, using councils, the trade unions and assemblies, to meet everyone’s needs

In past revolutions, like in Spain in 1936, workers built such structures and took over the economy through their unions

Likewise, in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s unions like those in FOSATU were based on workers’ power and also championed the idea that workers should seize factories directly, and it is this we need to return to

Building a Counter-Power

It is, therefore, vital that through direct action, direct democracy and a revolutionary vision we build our working class movements and trade unions into a counter-power that can end all forms of oppression and exploitation

Fighting against racism, homophobia and sexism needs to be a central aspect of this drive to build a counter-power – it is racism, sexism, nationalism and homophobia which has divided working class struggles and these divisions in the working class need to be overcome if we are to challenge the ruling class

Within South Africa, the black working class has been oppressed both in terms of race and as workers

As such, central to building a counter-power in South Africa is the struggle to end the system whereby the black working class is super-exploited

Indeed, in building a counter-power we need to build relations of solidarity and mutual aid within our movements, and this includes challenging any sexist or racist ideas within our own movements

As such, to build a counter-power, we need to be building a counter-culture in our movements that breaks, as far as possible, with capitalist and hierarchical ideologies – we need popular education in our movements

In Defense of the Revolution

Like Marxists and African socialists, anarchists believe that any revolution will have to be defended

Unlike Marxists and African socialists, anarchists argue a state can't be used to do this

Rather anarchists argue that to defend revolutions, instead of a state, structures of direct democracy are needed, like armed militia made up of workers and the poor and controlled by workers and the poor

Co-ordination of the defence of the revolution could be achieved through councils, elected and accountable by workers and the poor

Indeed, in the Ukraine between 1917 and 1921 a democratic militia – co-ordinated via a council and elected officers – proved to be a highly effective fighting force capable of defending a revolution

Conclusion

The reality is that the popular classes are capable of building their movements and trade unions into a counter-power

In the past, working class movements – based on anarchism – have won major battles against the ruling class and have been a power that could not be ignored

For example, some of the biggest trade unions in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Cuba, Japan, China, France, Egypt, Italy, Portugal, Korea, and Spain were anarchist from the 1870s to the 1930s and in many cases they won major improvements for workers

Anarchism too is not a foreign idea to South Africa

The first black trade union in South Africa was the Industrial Workers of Africa, which was formed in 1918, was an anarchist influenced union

Anarchist ideas and working class counter-power also played key roles in revolutions like in Mexico in 1910, Ukraine in 1917, Korea in the 1930s, Italy in 1920 and Spain in 1936, but they were eventually smothered by capitalists, the state and Communist Parties

In recent years anarchism has started to grow again in working class movements

This has once again opened up the possibility that such movements could be built into a counter-power to challenge the ruling classes

Today, in Spain the anarchist union, CGT, has over 70 000 members

Some of the biggest social movements today, like sections of the Piqueteros in Argentina and the APPO in Mexico are organised around anarchist influenced principles and are beginning once again to challenge the ruling classes

Currently, anarchists are also at the front of protests in countries like Greece

In different parts of Africa, anarchist movements have also been formed in recent years, like the Uhuru Network in Zimbabwe and Zabalaza in South Africa who work within working class movements and trade unions

Hopefully, through movements and trade unions that take up anarchism, we will come to build a massive counter-power that is able to defeat capitalism and states, and we will replace these with a society where workers run factories without bosses; where people use direct democracy and their own structures like assemblies and councils to run their own cities, neighbourhoods and regions; and where the aim of the economy is to meet people's needs

Indeed, hopefully through revolution we will create a world where everyone is truly free and equal – an anarchist-communist world

Module 1: Anarchism and Class Struggle: Why Anarchists Oppose Capitalism, the State, with the Struggle of the Popular Classes.

What is Capitalism?

We live in a capitalist society. By capitalism we mean a system in which different firms compete with each other in the market to make profits.

Under capitalism the means of production — the land, factories, mines, offices and so on — are owned and controlled by a small section of society: senior managers, bosses, employers, and top government officials (elected and unelected). These people — **the ruling class** — live off the profits and dividends and taxes and salaries they make through their business activities and top government posts. To put it another way, the ruling class is the economic and political elite of society, resting on two main bodies of centralized power: the corporation (private as well as state-owned) and the state machinery.

Most people can only make a living by working for a wage or by growing cash crops to sell. Those who are dependent on earning a wage are the **working class** (blue collar workers, white collar workers, workers in the service sector, farm workers, the poor, the unemployed, the marginalised youth, rank-and-file soldiers). Those who make a living through farming with family labour, and who don't employ others, are called the working **peasantry**. Systems like plantation slavery were also part of capitalism because they were organised around making profit for a few rich men.

In capitalism there is also a so-called "**middle class**" made up of professionals, middle level management and small capitalists. This is not really a class with a shared interest, but more a borderland of quite different groups, between the ruling class and the exploited and oppressed classes: the working class and peasants. So we can speak of a "middle class" but it's not the same as the ruling class (at the top) and the **popular (oppressed) classes** below.

Task:

Put the different professions/ groups of people into the class you think they belong to.

*workers in the service sector / senior managers / white collar workers
/ bosses / professionals / employers / middle level managers / rank-and-file
soldiers / top government officials / the poor / farm workers / small
capitalists / the marginalised youth / blue collar workers / the unemployed /*

Working Class	Middle Class	Ruling Class
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

We are opposed to the capitalist system. Capitalism is based on exploitation. Because the bosses own the factories, banks, mines, etc. we, the workers, have to sell our labour to the boss for a wage. The boss is interested in squeezing as much work out of us for as little wages as possible so that he/she can maintain high profits. Thus the more wages we get, the less profit the bosses make.

As a rule, workers never get the full value of our labour back in wages. The same goes for the working peasants. The lower prices the bosses and state marketing boards can pay the peasants for the crops, the more profits they make. The ruling class lives off these profits – and uses them to get richer by setting up more and bigger firms. Practically all productive work is done by the workers and working peasants (the only exceptions to this general rule are some sections of the middle class who do useful productive work e.g. doctors, teachers). The ruling class is parasitic and lives off the working and poor people.

Discussion:

- What is productive work?
- Do capitalists do productive work? Who does?

Clearly, the interests of the ruling class, on the one hand, and the working class and working peasantry, on the other, are in total opposition to each other: capitalism systematically produces, and is based on, inequalities in wealth, power and opportunity. It is almost impossible for an ordinary person to make enough money to set up in business. Instead, the rich get richer at the expense of the poor: in 1960 the richest 20% of the world's population got 70% of the world's income – by the 1990s, the elite 20% got a massive 85% of the world's income (United Nations Human Development Report, 1996).

Capitalism is also an authoritarian and undemocratic system. At the workplace level, capitalist enterprises are run by unelected managers and owners, who make all key decisions on the basis of profit. The vast majority of people in a workplace — the workers — have no real say at all. At the social level, class inequality systematically excludes most people from active and equal involvement in political activity e.g. lack of time, education.

Simply put, capitalists are only a minority of people in capitalism. Most people in capitalism are from *the popular classes*. But they have no ownership or control. So a large corporation like Coca Cola or ESKOM is mostly staffed by workers, who do everything from filing papers to driving trucks to fixing wires to recording who comes into the plant, to actually making the cold drink, or power. They are exploited and dominated, making goods or services to the primary benefit of the ruling class.

In this way, the class divide cuts across private and state corporations.

This same class inequality also exists in every part of the state — not just in state-owned corporations. (see below).

Capitalism puts profit and power before human needs. Production under capitalism is not based on the needs of ordinary people. Therefore although there is enough food in the world to feed everyone, people starve because profits come first. Food is not given out on the basis of hunger, but on the basis of ready cash. The bosses let food rot rather than give it away for free. Similarly, trillions are spent on guns, prisons, surveillance and weapons of mass destruction, to be used by ruling classes in wars against each other — or to suppress the popular classes. Meanwhile, billions are hungry, poor and insecure.

Answer the following questions true (T) or false (F).

1. In capitalism, the rich get richer through hard work? T / F
2. It is easy for working class people to escape poverty and become rich if they work hard? T / F
3. Capitalism is an undemocratic system that does not respect people's rights or needs. T / F
4. Capitalism is a system of exploitation and domination. T / F
5. At the workplace, workers under capitalism have a say in how production is run and for what. T / F
6. There is not enough food in the world for everyone. T / F
7. Under capitalism, production is for need and not profit. T / F
8. Capitalism is a man-made system, and can therefore be changed. T / F
9. Anybody can own land and the means of production under capitalism. T / F
10. Capitalism is a system that gives rise to opposing social classes. T / F

This is why capitalism is also an inefficient and wasteful economic system: there is no planning beforehand to make sure that enough goods are made to meet needs — instead, the bosses have goods made, and then try to sell them. If not enough people have money to buy the goods, they are just thrown away. There is no match between what is actually needed and what is actually produced. Poverty, bad working conditions etc. all take a back seat to the goal of money. Instead of values like mutual aid, and solidarity, capitalism promotes ruling class values like greed, aggression, and hunger for power.

Finally, as we show later, capitalism is also a primary cause of racism and other forms of oppression. Racism was developed to justify slavery, colonialism and apartheid- capitalism, enable extreme forms of exploitation, and divide the popular classes (see next module).

Discussion: Which of the following do you associate with capitalism, and why/why not?

mutual aid / greed / aggression / solidarity / thirst for power / respect
for others / individualism / community

The Class Struggle

Capitalism must be fought and ultimately overthrown. The only people who can successfully accomplish these tasks are the masses of the people — the workers, the poor, and the working peasants. Because the workers produce all wealth, we have a powerful weapon in our hands: our ability to hit the bosses to disrupt the profit system through workplace action like strikes, go-slows, occupations etc. This ability to hit the bosses where it hurts most — the pocket — is the most powerful weapon in the hands of the people. Workers resistance is aided by the concentration of workers in large factories, which makes it easier to develop the resistance organisations that we call the trade unions.

But this does not mean that only workers can fight back — working class neighbourhoods and schools also bring people together in large numbers in a way that facilitates action. And peasants have proved themselves again and again as capable of massive fightbacks against the exploiters. Overall, then, we believe the class struggle is the most effective way for ordinary people to fight back.

The ruling class will never get rid of capitalism. They will fight to defend capitalism because they benefit from it. The middle class is generally too privileged to support radical change. So there is little point in trying to involve the rich and powerful in a movement against capitalism. They live in different conditions to ordinary people, and have different interests. The ruling class

can only be kept in a coalition with ordinary people if that coalition does not do anything too “threatening” (like opposing capitalism). Only productive classes like the workers and peasants can build a free, non-authoritarian society because only we do not exploit — we do not live off other people’s backs.

Discussion:

Who do anarchists think are the only people that can fight and overthrow capitalism? Why do anarchists believe this?

What powerful weapons do the workers have to hit the bosses where it hurts most?

Class struggle is also the way to defeat forms of oppression like racism. Because these forms of oppression are rooted in capitalism and the State, they can only be defeated by an anti-capitalist struggle. Such a struggle can only be made by the workers, the poor and the working peasants.

Rich blacks may not like racism but they do like capitalism and so they will, when push comes to shove, defend the profit system against the Black working class. Their privileged class position shields them from the worst effects of racism. They can go to fancy schools and live in the suburbs — we can’t.

The fight against racism and other oppressions is not something separate to the class struggle: these are working class issues. We say this for the following reasons. Firstly, these oppressions are rooted in capitalism and the State, and can therefore only be finally defeated by a class struggle and a revolution by the workers and the poor. Secondly, the majority of people who are affected by these forms of oppression are obviously working and poor people. In fact, working and poor people suffer far more from the effects of these forms of oppression because we are not shielded by our class status. Thirdly, a united struggle by the working class, working peasants and the poor can only take place if people are mobilised on the basis of opposing all oppression and all exploitation, on the basis of a programme that addresses all of the ordinary people’s concerns: that programme is Anarchism.

Answer the following questions true (T) or false (F).

1. Only organised workers can fight back against capitalism. T / F
2. Only the working class can build a free, non-authoritarian society?
T / F
3. Working class Blacks can rely on the support of rich Blacks to overthrow capitalism T / F

4. Rich Blacks suffer less from racism because of their class position. T / F
 5. During the course of the revolution, the whole middle class will side with the workers. T / F
 6. The class struggle is the only way to effectively fight other forms of oppression such as racism, sexism etc. T / F
-

We believe that capitalism and all forms of oppression can only be ended for once and for all when the workers, the poor and the working peasants overthrow the ruling class and create a democratic stateless socialistic society based on grassroots democracy. That is to say, an Anarchist society. In the course of this social revolution, the middle class will probably also split, with part of it siding with the bosses and part of it siding with the revolutionary masses.

This revolution cannot come through, and must not preserve, the State.

Discussion: In groups, discuss the following statements. A member from each group to make a short presentation to the class on their findings.

1. Why do anarchists believe that oppressions like racism are working class issues?
 2. How do anarchists believe these oppressions can be overcome?
-

What is the State?

For the needs of the workers, the poor and the working peasantry to be fully met we must get rid of the bosses and rulers, that is, the ruling class. But this is no easy task. The bosses are organised. They have the mainstream newspapers, TV, and magazines on their side, as well as social media.

They also have the State (army, police, government departments, Parliament) and the forces of repression that go with it. We only have to look at the struggles and repression of the 1980s in South Africa to see how the forces of the state can be used against workers and poor.

The State (i.e. governments, armies, courts, police, etc.) is a direct result of the fact that we live in a class society. A society where only 5% of the people own 85% of the wealth, 120,000 capitalist farmers own almost all land in the historically "White areas," 5 and 5 big companies control 80% of all shares on the Stock Exchange (South African figures ca. 1994).

The State is there to protect the interests of this minority, the ruling class, if not by persuasion, then by force. Laws are made not to protect us but to protect those who own the property and have the power.

For the state to work, it has to have a large workforce. Within the state itself, therefore, there is also then class divided – between those who actually run and control the state – the top officials, generals, Mayors, MPs, ministers, heads of department, MECs, head of state corporations, VCs – and those under them. The state needs soldiers and police; it needs people to keep records; it needs people to carry out whatever other activities the state has undertaken. In most countries, this means the state also has to employ teachers, gardeners, scientists and academics, cleaners, road builders, journalists and many others.

It is impossible for the small minority – top state officials and politicians -which actually runs the state to do what the state needs to do – the state only works when this elite can instruct and control the labour of millions of others.

This means class struggle takes place across the state. Just like a private corporation, the state is centralized, exploitative and dominating, it does not change because you change the personnel, at the top. Just like the private corporations, which compete with each other, the states compete with each other. Just like the private firms are funded by exploitation, so is the state – either directly (by exploiting its own workers) or indirectly e.g. by getting taxes on corporate profits which are in fact all derived from exploited work (surplus value), as well as from other sources, like tax.

And just like the corporation must be abolished, to be replaced by a democratic system, so must the state.

The state is built in a way that allows the minority to rule the majority: it is a very centralised, bureaucratic, hierarchical (top-down) structure of rule over a territory that concentrates power in the hands of the few at the top. There is absolutely no way that ordinary people can participate in the running of this apparatus. These features – authoritarianism, violence, centralisation, bureaucracy, hierarchy, territory, class rule – are the defining characteristics of all States, including the so-called socialist states such as Russian/the Soviet Union (see below for more on Russia).

Discussion:

What is the function of the State?

What means does it make use of to achieve this?

Discussion:

In groups, list and discuss the seven defining features of all States.

The State pretends to be a neutral governing body, ruling in the interests of all. The reality is very different. When workers go on strike we are met by police dogs and rubber bullets, as well as media hostility and the threat of dismissal. But the bosses who exploit workers and throw people out of work, their homes, or off the land and into more misery never face punishment. Who has ever heard of the bosses being assaulted and arrested by the police during a strike? No. The bosses are called “investors” and treated to all sorts of perks and government support.

If you think that the State is here to protect you, think about the fact that most tax in South Africa is collected from ordinary people through VAT, rents and rates. The companies pay under 25% of all tax (SA figures).

Answer the following questions true (T) or false (F).

1. The needs of the working class can only be met with the help of the bosses and rulers. T / F
 2. The role of the State is to protect private property and minority rule, and to maintain the capitalist system. T / F
 3. The State is a neutral body, which can be used by either the working class or the ruling class in pursuit and defence of their interests. T / F
 4. Ordinary people can participate in the running of the state apparatus through elections etc. T / F
 5. The State concentrates power in the hands of a few, and can never be used for the liberation of the masses. T / F
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Module 2: Race and National Liberation: From Apartheid to Neo-Liberalism: The Black Working Class.

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin teaches:

“There is no greater enemy for a nation than its own State.”¹

This workbook examines

- what is “racism”?
- what is “national” oppression?
- What causes these problems?
- what explains the rise and fall of apartheid in South Africa?
- what has replaced apartheid?
- ending national oppression and racism using anarchism
- completing the working class national working class struggle in South Africa

Please pay very close attention to the definitions.

The definitions provide a clear understanding of the issues.

The definitions are the building blocks of the arguments.

PART 1: Roots of racism and national oppression

Questions

What race are you? What is a race? Name some races? Are Arabs whites?
Are Somalis blacks?

¹ Quoted in Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labour Movement: the idea of the nation in socialist and anarchist theory* p. 37

What is a “Race”?

A “race” is a group of people with a shared descent and physical appearance.

People usually think of four big “races”: whites (Europeans), blacks (Africans), Native Americans (“red Indians”), and East Asians (Chinese, etc.). In reality, the world is much more complicated: there are many groups that don’t fit neatly into any of these groups: for example, are Arabs whites? Are Egyptians blacks? Are Jews whites or Arabs? Are Native Americans actually East Asians?

Also, there are hundreds of millions of people descended from more than race. For example, most Mexicans are called “*mestizos*,” who are descended from whites as well as Native Americans. Often where people get placed differs from country to country.

For example, in the USA, people with African blood are all called “black” or “African American.” It does not matter if they have white ancestry. For example, US President Barack Obama is considered to be black in the USA, although his mother was white. In southern Africa, such people of such mixed descent would be considered “Coloured” (so would Mexican *mestizos*).

Because it proves very difficult to draw neat lines between races, many people argue that the notion that there are different human “races” is not a very useful way of thinking.

All people, however they look, are part of one race: the human race. Differences between people are very small, compared to what they have in common.

There is no evidence that any one race is better than — or deeply different to — any other race.

There is no difference that members of any one race are more stupid, greedy, evil etc. than any other race.

Questions

What race are you? What is a race? Are Africans are a race? Is everyone who lives in Africa every people an African? What about people who live in Africa who are not black? Are Zulus a race?

Racism

However, “race” is very real because it affects people’s experience of the world. In almost all countries, there is some degree of racism.

“Racism” is a term that gets thrown around a lot.

Basically, racism is:

1. The *idea* that certain “races” are inferior to other “races” (*racial prejudice / hate*). This may include ideas that some races are more evil, more stupid, and more violent than other races, and should be treated worse. This is often called “hate speech.”
2. The *practice* of discriminating against particular races (*racial discrimination*).

This means that members of those races suffer from things like: violence against races; more police harassment and violence; less access to jobs, housing and services than other races; physical attack; colour bars blocking access to certain jobs, facilities and opportunities.

(Racism also has a psychological impact – it creates feelings of inferiority for the victims of racism).

People can be racist in many ways.

South Africa’s history is deeply marked by racism, and by a white supremacist social order in the 1900s that was prejudiced against and discriminated against blacks, Coloureds and Indians. The many measures will be discussed below.

Racist attitudes are a problem, but racial discrimination is the biggest problem. You can ignore someone who hates you, but when hate speech gets tied to racial discrimination (for example, violent attacks), then it cannot be ignored.

For example, in South Africa under apartheid, severe racial discrimination against Africans, as well as Coloureds and Indians existed. There was both racial prejudice by most whites, as well as active racial discrimination by the state and the corporations.

Questions

Have you experienced racism in their lifetime? Explain why this incident was “racist.”

In what ways have you yourself been racist?

Who is a Racist?

Anyone can be racist, no matter what their race. The notion that black people can’t be racist is not true.

Black people, like any other people can hold racist attitudes. Black people can also promote measures of discrimination.

For example, Jimmy Manyi's comments on Coloureds (that they are "too concentrated") in the Western Cape are racist. Why shouldn't Coloureds live where they like? Manyi proposed changes in the Employment Equity Act, that equity targets must be measured by national proportions (not provincial proportions) of races, This would mean only 1 in 10 jobs in the Western Cape would be for Coloureds: this is because 1 in 10 South Africans is a Coloured. But Coloureds are 5 in 10 people in the Western Cape province.

Therefore, such a law change would actively discriminate against Coloureds by forcing them out of jobs *because they are Coloureds*. It would in fact push Coloured people into unemployment or to force them to move into another province, *because they are Coloureds*.

Robert Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe is racist against whites. His government and its supporters have called whites "snakes," "demons," and "killers." Any black who opposes Mugabe is called a tool of whites. The issue of land reform was tied to solely to the issue of white farms: in fact, white farmers only accounted for about 20% of all land in the country, the rest being held by the ZANU-PF state, or by chiefs in the homeland system in Zimbabwe, or by black elites.

People *within* races can also be racist towards some sections of those *same* races. For example, European Jews are by all appearances whites. However, they suffered hundreds of years of severe racism from other whites. They were accused of being evil, greedy, and dishonest, of causing diseases etc. The most famous example was the mass murder of 6 million Jews by the Nazi (Hitler) government of Germany (1933–1945).

Non-Racialism

Anarchists are against all racism.

Our policy is that of non-racialism: there must be unity of people from all races, because people have a common nature and common rights and common hopes.

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin said: "What do we mean by respect for humanity" but "the recognition of human right and human dignity in every man, of whatever race" or "colour."²

What is National Oppression?

**National oppression is the oppression of members of a particular *nationality*.
At the heart of national oppression, is the denial of the nationality's right to govern itself, i.e. its right to self-determination.**

But what is a nation?

Questions

Is South Africa a nation? Are South African blacks a different nation to white South Africans? Are Zulus a nation? Are Afrikaners a nation?

² Bakunin, "Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism," p.147

A nationality (or a “nation”) is a group of people with a common culture, history, and background.

National oppression means that members of that group face both prejudice (hateful ideas) and discrimination (active measures that discriminate against them).

Nations do exist, but sometimes, who fits into one nation is a real difficulty.

Often (but *not* always), race is closely linked to “nationality”: often members of a nationality are members of the same race. Races are believed to be groups with a common descent, and so are nationalities.

National oppression is also often mixed up with national oppression. For example, national oppression is often justified with racist ideas.

Some examples of national oppression include:

- the historical oppression of the Irish by the British state
- the historical oppression of the Koreans by the Japanese state
- the oppression of the Native Americans in Mexico by the Mexican state today
- the oppression of the Palestinians by the Israeli state today

The struggle against national oppression is called *the national liberation struggle*.

Some examples of national liberation struggles include:

- the Korean struggle against Japanese imperialism
- the Indian struggle against British imperialism
- the Ukrainian struggle against Russian imperialism

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin declared “strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression,” stating that every people “has the right to be itself ... no one is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its languages and its laws.”³

Diagnosing the Illness: The Roots of Racism and National Oppression

Racism and national oppression have many causes. For example, children are sometimes taught racist ideas by their parents. For example, cultural ideas about what is clean and dirty sometimes lead people to look down on other races or nationalities.

Racism and national oppression have existed for many thousands of years. These are not new problems.

But these problems do not just come from bad attitudes. They can come from certain *social causes*.

However, it is inescapable that racism and national oppression today are deeply rooted in the class system, capitalism and the State.

³ Bakunin, quoted in Guerin, *Anarchism: from theory to practice* p. 68

1. The Role of Imperialism

European imperialism expanded rapidly over the last 500 years.

“Imperialism” is a system in which the ruling class of one country expands to control other areas and countries. This can be direct (through force) or indirect (through trade, treaties and so on).

Colonialism is direct imperial rule: people are conquered and become a “colony” of the imperial state.

Modern imperialism is closely tied to racism and national oppression. When powerful European ruling classes, from Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium, expanded, they instituted racial discrimination and national oppression over the people that were conquered.

The British Empire (of which South Africa was part until 1961), had 400 million people in 1900 (this was, at the time, 1 in 4 people in the whole world). But almost all of the Africans, Asians and Native Americans under British rule, as well as whites like the Irish, suffered both racism and national oppression.

The whole country of India, for example, was ruled by the British government, in alliance with Indian princes. The Indian workers and peasants (small farmers) were treated like dirt, were beaten and killed when they protested, were paid much lower wages than British people, lost land, etc.

Local Elites Join with Imperialism (Sometimes)

This point about the Indian princes is very important. In every country ruled by imperialism, a large part of the local ruling class joined with the imperialists. For example, the homeland system in South Africa was created under British imperialism. The chiefs, on the whole, worked with the British against the ordinary people in the villages, to collect taxes and recruit workers for the mines.

Racist ideas were used by British imperialism: the British state said that it was “civilizing” the colonies, because their people were inferior. In some colonies, like Australia and the USA, indigenous people almost died out: racism justified this, by saying these people did not matter, were “savages,” etc.

Imperialism cannot accommodate real national self-determination, because it is based on conquest and rule by a foreign state.

Later, when Japan (and the USA, a former British colony) grew in power, their ruling classes also started to be imperialist. Their expansion also involved racism and national oppression. Japan for example conquered Korea, Taiwan and part of China.

2. Imperialism: Link to Capitalism and the State

Underlying the so-called “civilizing mission” of imperialism was a hidden agenda: imperialism gave huge profits and power to the imperialist capitalist ruling classes of Europe, Japan and the USA. It provided access to land, to cheap labour and more markets.

The ideology of racism, and the concrete facts of racial discrimination and of national oppression, provide cheap labour and divide the working class.

Groups of the working class that face racism and national oppression provide cheap labour:

- they have less rights than other workers
- they are afraid to organise
- they face continual political and economic oppression So, these are **cheap labour**.

3. How the Ruling Class Uses Racism and National Oppression

Above, we saw that racism and national oppression are closely tied to imperialism, the state and capitalism.

Let us be more concrete: Racism and national oppression provide

- cheap labour because they discriminate against some workers
- cheap labour because they divide all workers, which harms every worker
- confusion: people blame other races for their problems, not the ruling class
- confusion: race explanations of problems seem obvious, but they are nonsense

As an example: we spoke about Mugabe earlier. Mugabe runs a dictatorship. It is extremely oppressive to the majority of Zimbabweans. Even the so-called land reform was really just a way to get more land for one section of the ruling class. More than 2 million black workers were forced off the farms.

Any attempt at opposition is met with repression, Any criticism of Mugabe is met with the racist view that the critic is the enemy of blacks, and the tool of the whites. And Mugabe, as we have seen, describes whites in racist terms, meanwhile hiding the wealth of the black elite.

This is a good example of how racism is very bad for working class people.

Meanwhile, the working class *as a whole* is desperate. It is short of wages, of houses, of jobs and services. Very often, the workers blame other workers for their problems: for example, they say that the “foreigners” are “stealing their jobs.”

This division is deliberately promoted by the ruling class through ideologies of racism. This is done through the media, the schools and so on.

A very common form of racism today is so-called xenophobia

Xenophobia is the fear and hatred (“phobia”) of foreigners (“xeno”)

4. Imperialism Today

Imperialism exists today, but in more subtle ways.

Questions

Is the USA today imperialist? Explain your answer. Is South Africa today imperialist?

Summary

- The core causes of racism and national oppression in the modern period are imperialism, capitalism and the state
- Specifically, these
 - justify conquest
 - justify land seizures
 - justify mass killings
 - provided cheap labour
 - divide the working class
 - strengthen the ruling class
 - create an extra burden of misery for the victims of racism and national oppression

The world is extremely unequal in terms of economic development and political power

In every country, it is the ruling class that benefits the most from this situation

Local ruling classes generally work with imperialist ruling classes.

Sometimes however, they get frustrated and rise up against imperialism.

As we will see later, they have a hidden agenda.

PART 2: South Africa: from apartheid to neoliberalism

What is now South Africa started as a colony at the Cape by the Dutch East India Company (VOC).

VOC and Racism

The VOC was in fact both a corporation and a state. The VOC was very oppressive. Even its white workers were subject to torture for small crimes. As the VOC expanded, it conquered the KhoiSan, and imported African and Asian slaves. The VOC was racist against the slaves, and nationally oppressed the KhoiSan.

Then the VOC collapsed. The Cape then came under Britain. By 1902, Britain had conquered all of southern Africa up to the Sudan, except for the areas under Portugal (Mozambique, Angola). It built on VOC racism, and instituted national oppression across the region.

Questions

What was the migrant labour system of apartheid? What were key features of apartheid? **List 5.** Consider housing, moving, family, language, homelands

The Mines and Cheap Black Labour

A big reason for this was that the British ruling class wanted to develop mines in the region. The opening of diamond and gold mines in the 1870s in the northern Cape and Transvaal strengthened the racism against and national oppression of the African people.

Why? The mine bosses and capitalist farmers needed ultra-cheap labour to make higher profits. So the colonial state forced Africans into wage labour through taxes and land dispossession. The Coloureds in the Cape saw their rights rolled back, as the British decided they were of an inferior race.

Where this was not enough, it imported Indian semi-slaves for the sugar farms. These Indians were indentured.

“Indentured” means to be locked into an unbreakable contract for a long period. Breaking the contract (by striking, by quitting, by not working) is illegal and is usually punished with forced labour or jail time.

The blacks on the mines, who came from South Africa as well as nearby colonies (especially Lesotho, Mozambique and Zambia), were also indentured.

Blacks were subject to repressive systems like the compounds, and the pass laws and job colour bars. State services were bad, and police focused on enforcing these racial laws rather than on fighting crime. Indians and Coloureds, like blacks, did not have basic political and union rights.

All of these measures divided the working class, and kept African, Indian and Coloured labour cheap and tightly controlled.

Many blacks were migrant labourers based in the homelands: they worked in town, but their families stayed in the countryside. This allowed the ruling class to keep their wages down (they did not have to pay a family wage) and to slow the development of volatile urban working class ghettos (they were not allowed to settle in the cities).

This system benefited the state elite:

- It generated high levels of taxation for state spending (and funding the army and bureaucracy)
- It allowed the state to maintain tight control over the working class, which was divided and closely monitored
- Key to this, was extremely tight control of the urban areas
- Also key, was tight control of the black rural areas by the black chiefs

Divide and Profit

Meanwhile, the blacks, Coloureds and Indians were divided from each other and amongst themselves.

Divisions by tribe amongst black working class people were strongly enforced. For example, the mines housed workers on tribal lines, with each hostel for a different group. Jobs also tended to be allocated by tribe: for example, mine police were usually Zulus, drillers were often Basotho (from Lesotho), and “lashers” who loaded rock were often Shangaans and Tsongas. Even townships were segregated: for example, different zones of what is now Soweto for different tribes e.g. White City was for Zulus.

The Role of the Black Elite

The black elite – the chiefs – were an integral part of the apartheid system. Chiefs governed the black rural areas (called at different times: “native reserves,” bantustans, homelands etc.).

Sometimes the black chiefs resisted the system. They were met with force. For example, the Anglo-Zulu Wars of the 1870s led to the defeat of the Zulu kingdom. After that, the Zulu chiefs played a key role in maintaining the system of cheap migrant labour.

Those seen as unreliable, like King Solomon kaDinizulu, were marginalised.

As this shows, the black elite was part of the system, but it was not an equal partner. In fact, it was very frustrated. For example, the chiefs were under strict control. Sections of the black, Coloured and Indian elite faced serious barriers to running businesses, owning land, getting good education and advancing their careers.

As we will see in part 3, this led to the rebellions by that elite.

From Imperialism to Apartheid

Such a system was not just the result of white Afrikaner racial attitudes. These played a role, but the real driver of the system was the racist ruling class.

The apartheid government just continued the system created by the British Empire. The Afrikaners were conquered by the British in 1899–1902. Until 1948, they were marginalised in the South African economy.

The National Party promised to end British imperialism and the *geldmag* (the “money power” i.e. break the power of the capitalists). It also stated that it would divide South Africa into different (and independent) countries in which different races and tribes could govern themselves.

In power, the National Party soon changed. Talk about ending the *geldmag* were replaced by close alliances with British capitalists. Having complained about the mining capitalists, the National Party now prioritized creating *Afrikaner* mining capitalists (especially the Anton Rupert corporation). The Volkskas (“people’s bank”), an Afrikaner self-help scheme, became a capitalist bank (today it is ABSA).

Rather than divide South Africa into separate countries, the National Party just kept the system of cheap black migrant labour going. Some of the homelands were

The National Party government was highly racist.

But underlying the racism was the drive for capitalist accumulation (through cheap labour and a divided working class) and state power (through closely controlling a divided working class).

White Working Class Divided

White workers were afraid of cheap labour taking their jobs. Black migrant, indentured mine labour was almost five times cheaper than white, urban, free urban labour. Rather than fight this problem *by fighting for higher black wages*, many fought for job reservation (job colour bars).

So they did not join the blacks, Coloureds and Indians.

White workers and poor whites were also deliberately divided from their black comrades through racial discrimination, like high wages and very good social services and the job colour bar. This meant most (but not all) of these workers were willing to defend racial capitalism. The state and capital did this deliberately in order to strengthen the military forces of the system, by giving white workers a small stake in the system.

All of these measures were put in place by Britain, long before the apartheid government took office in 1948.

Summary: Capitalism or “The Boers”?

While the apartheid system was supported by most whites, and while the Afrikaners played a key role in keeping the system going, apartheid was basically a system of capitalism based on cheap black labour.

Such a system could not have emerged without imperialism, with the conquest of the blacks. Such a system would not have survived unless it benefited capitalism and the state, and therefore the ruling class: cheap labour, small urban areas, a divided working class.

This was fundamentally because the system

- benefited the system provided cheap labour and a deeply divided working class
- was forged in imperialism and was deeply racist in outlook and policies

The Collapse of Apartheid

This system of racial capitalism worked well for the bosses up until the 1970s. It made huge profits and kept the masses down.

But the system entered a crisis in the 1970s:

- The local market was restricted to whites (who had the best wages) and was thus too small for further capitalist growth.
- Also, massive skills shortages developed. Only whites got a decent education and were allowed to do skilled work.
- South African companies were not able to sell goods overseas because the skills problem meant the economy was not competitive.

Just as important, the black working class (joined by some middle- and upper class elements) rose in revolt: the 1973 Durban strikes, the Soweto rising of 1976, the emergence of a mass trade union and civic movement in the 1980s, the revolutionary uprisings of 1983–6, the mass protests of the late 1980s.

This crisis forced the racist ruling class to the negotiating table in 1990.

1994 A Massive Victory

The 1994 elections were a massive victory. For the first time in 350 years Black people are not ruled by a racist dictatorship. We have the right to vote, to free speech, to trade unions, to equal social services. We must defend these rights with mass action if necessary.

Incomplete National Liberation

Questions

What are some of the problems facing the black working class in South Africa?

Give some everyday examples.

How has the apartheid of the past shaped your life today?

Limits of Elections

However, elections do not bring full freedom. The state always serves the ruling class, and parliamentary politics corrupts just about any politician.

Even if politicians in the African National Congress (ANC) wished to destroy capitalism they would not be able to do so using the State. They cannot introduce any programmes (such as worker self-management of factories, and free or even adequate housing for the black working class) that go against the interests of the ruling class.

But the ANC's programmes are, in any case, pro-capitalist: land reform through the market, house building with bank loans, privatisation, sending police against community protests and strikers, evicting squatters, enforcing the payment of rent and service charges, lowering tariff rates, creating a "friendly investor climate."

The Elite Pact Against the Working Class

The majority of the new political elite have joined the old white ruling class by virtue of their wealth, expanding business operations, and role in defending capitalism.

There is in South Africa today an **elite pact**: that is, there is a strong alliance between the (mainly black) state managers, who run the state (including state companies like ESKOM), and the (mainly white) private capitalists, who run the big private companies (like Anglo-American).

The black elite is free.

The black, Coloured and Indian working class is not.

This elite requires

- Capitalism

- The state

That is why we see many problems from the past continue, including

- authoritarian rule by local councilors and the police
- the enrichment of politicians
- the system of exploitation
- high levels of inequality in all areas of life

No matter what the talk of the state and the politicians, they are not there to represent the people. This is a lie: they represent and are part of the ruling class.

Legacy Continues

The black, Colored and Indian working class still suffers the legacy of apartheid: poverty, rotten schools, landlessness, unemployment, etc. Many workplaces still rely on cheap black labour, and many private companies still operate in the old apartheid ways. The state may not actively discriminate against black, Coloured and Indian workers, but it oppresses them through:

- low wages
- outsourcing and retrenchments
- high service charges, e.g. for electricity

In this sense, the black, Coloured and Indian working class still suffers racism and national oppression. People say that they are free, but for the majority of the working class, this is incomplete freedom.

The national liberation struggle *of the working class* continues. It still suffers many of the problems under the past:

- the township school system
- townships with bad conditions, far from work, in dangerous or dirty areas
- high levels of black and Coloured (as well as Indian) working class unemployment

Proof of the Elite Pact: Neo-Liberalism

The holding of the elections represented, on the one hand, a massive advance for the African working class, insofar as the election signified a new political order in South Africa that outlawed national oppression.

On the other hand, however, the elections were the product of a compromise between big (white) capital and the leaders of the ANC.

The ANC, as a bourgeois-bureaucratic-nationalist party, adopted a hard-line neo-liberal approach once in office.

Neo-liberalism is an economic policy based on deregulating the economy through policies like commercialisation, privatisation, casualisation, free trade, and state spending cuts in welfare. Its aims is to increase profits.

The ANC was shifting towards neo-liberalism throughout the 1990s. All countries have moved to neo-liberalism.

The ANC sees neo-liberalism as key to:

- building the black elite (e.g. through BEE tenders/ privatization)
- increasing capitalist profits
- pushing the working class down

The ANC's neo-liberalism is a document called GEAR, released in June 1996.

GEAR's key strategic aims are:

- Privatisation and commercialisation of state-owned companies and utilities, including electricity, water, steel, and telecommunications
- Cutbacks in social spending
- Cutbacks in the size of the state sector workforce
- The deregulation of trade, investment and prices -The promotion of casual labour

What this means in practice has become clear over the past five years.

- cuts in state pensions, massive layoffs
- declining public hospitals, schools and roads
- a general fall in wage levels
- daily electricity and water cut-offs in poor communities
- de-industrialisation (closing of industries) under the impact of cheap imports **1**

GEAR promised 400, 000 new jobs a year by 2000: instead, over a million jobs were lost, and total employment has shrunk to the levels of the early 1980s.

Welfare spending has fell consistently over the last five years, whilst tax on large companies has been cut such that tax on company profits now makes up less than 15% of overall government income (down from over 50% in the 1970s).

Besides capitalist exploitation and state domination, the black, Coloured and Indian working class also faces the misery of incomplete national liberation.

South African Imperialism

Not all states are imperialist. Some states are subordinate to imperialism. They are weak, and subordinate. States compete with each other in a world system of states, just as capitalists compete with each other.

Those states that have enough resources and power almost always become imperialist. Imperialism is, as noted earlier, the system in which the ruling class of one country expands to control other areas and countries.

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin explains that “The supreme law of the State is self-preservation at any cost. And since all States, ever since they came to exist upon the earth, have been condemned to perpetual struggle — a struggle against their populations, whom they oppress and ruin, a struggle against all foreign States, every one of which can be strong only if others are weak — and since States cannot hold their own in this struggle unless they constantly keep on augmenting their power against their own subjects as well as against the neighbourhood States — it follows that the supreme law of the State is the augmentation of its power to the detriment of internal liberty and external justice.”⁴

The South African state is far weaker than a major imperialist power like the USA.

However, *within the southern African region*, the South African ruling class (and therefore, the South African state) acts as an imperialist power. This includes

- the expansion of South African private corporations into the region e.g. Shoprite
- the expansion of South African state corporations into the region e.g. ESKOM
- the role of South African elites in pushing neo-liberalism, cheap labour, and

deindustrialization in the region

- the role of the South African state in dominating regional structures such as SADC (the Southern African Development Community)

Summary

This section has shown that that problems in South Africa must be explained as due to

- imperialism
- cheap labour for capitalism
- dividing the working class
- British imperialism and racism built a system of racial capitalism
- the black elite collaborated with this system (but was also frustrated by it)

⁴ Bakunin, M. Ethics: Morality of the State. In Maximoff, G (ed.) 1953. The Political Philosophy of Bakunin. The Free Press: United States.

South Africa is not just the creation of imperialism: it is also an imperialist power, although a small one compared to (say) the USA.

The transition in 1994 was mixed in effects:

- it was a huge victory for black, Coloured and Indian working class in terms of winning legal equality, ending legal racial discrimination and basic political and legal rights
- however, it also involved an elite pact that united the (new) black (mainly state-based) black elite and the (old) white (mainly private corporation-based) white elite
- this elite maintains capitalism, the state and implements neo-liberalism

PART 3: The anarchist way forward: proletarian national liberation

The anarchist Mikhail Bakunin said:

“Convinced that the real and definitive solution of the social problem can be achieved only on the basis of the universal solidarity of the workers of all lands; the Alliance rejects all policies based upon the so-called patriotism and rivalry of nations.”⁵

Basic Anarchist Approaches

Anarchists fight against all forms of domination.

Therefore, naturally anarchists are opposed to racism and to national oppression. All people are basically the same, all people have inherent human rights, and racism and national oppression are always wrong.

Anarchists therefore support struggles against racism and national oppression.

However, while anarchists support these struggles, they take an anarchist approach:

First, the anarchists insist that the plants of racism and national oppression are deeply rooted in the system of capitalism and the state. These are not the *only* causes, but they are central causes.

Second, the anarchists insist that real freedom from racism and national oppression, for the majority, requires a new society: the anarchist society. Only in such a society, without capitalism and the state, can we expect the plants of racism and national oppression to die. Only in such a society can the economy be used to end the legacy (the continuing effects) of past racism and national oppression

Third, anarchists focus on the struggles of the *working class* as the key means to end racism and national oppression. The upper class in oppressed races and nations must *not* lead the struggles against racism and for national liberation. This is because these elites will hijack those struggles for their own purposes, leaving the mass of the people only partly free.

Fourth, anarchists insist that racism and national oppression are deadly enemies of *all* working class people, not just those who suffer from racism or national oppression. This is because racism

⁵ M. Bakunin, [1868] 1980, “Preamble and Programme of the International Alliance of the Socialist Democracy,” In *Bakunin on Anarchism*, edited by S. Dolgoff. Montreal: Black Rose pp. 427–428

and national oppression divide the workers, promote cheap labour, and confuse the people about the real causes of – and solutions to – their suffering.

Fifth, anarchists support all useful reforms that undermine racism and national oppression, such as the removal of discriminatory laws.

Sixth: however, realizing that the state and capitalism will always oppress the masses, they argue that anarchist revolution is the only complete solution to the problems that the working class faces. Also, because capitalism and the state continually generate and feed the poisonous plants of racism and national oppression, and because racism, and national oppression cannot be completely ended under capitalism and the state, anarchist revolution is the only solution.

Class Struggle

Only the working class (and, where they exist, peasants) can create a free society: the anarchist society (or through anarchism...whichever you want to use).

The workers and peasants create all social wealth. Only we can build a free society because only we do not exploit. Therefore only our class struggle can defeat the state and capitalism. Since the defeat of capitalism and the state is necessary to end the legacy of apartheid, the continued racism and national oppression of the masses, **this means that only class struggle can lead to complete national liberation.**

Simply: anarchism is the road to the complete national liberation of the working class.

These problems cannot be solved by the capitalists or the state.

Anarchist Society Needed

They require massive wealth redistribution, and an economy planned from below by the working class to meet people's needs, not profits.

In other words they can only be resolved under a stateless socialist (or "anarchist") system.

Such a system is opposed by the ruling class blacks and whites. Placing the economy under worker-community control means ending exploitation and domination. It means ending the state and the corporations. Without the state and the corporations, the ruling class will no longer rule, get wealthy and exploit.

Naturally, the ruling class – black as well as white – will oppose the anarchist revolution – which is essential to provide full freedom from racism and national oppression.

This means that racism and national oppression, exemplified by the legacy of apartheid, will not be fully removed from society without a class struggle and a worker-peasant revolution.

Such a revolution includes a determined struggle **against the new black elite.**

Can the Black Elite Unite with the Black Masses?

No.

The black elite suffered from racism and national oppression under apartheid. Even then, it was partially shielded from the worst effects by their privileged status in capitalism and the state. They could access private schools, and universities and better jobs. Many (although they deny this now) got rich through collaborating in the homeland system, especially the so-called self-governing states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Venda).

Today the black elite is free. It controls the state and vast wealth. 4 out of 10 of South Africa's ten richest people are blacks.

The working class, including the black working class, should not build alliances with black managers and capitalists, because they will always choose profits and power over anarchism. In fact, they benefit from the exploitation of black workers in their companies and state corporations, and they therefore defend the capitalist system and the state. In objective terms, they are the allies of the white capitalists and state managers.

Reject Nationalism

It should be clear where we disagree with the various nationalist political parties such as the ANC, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO). (The National Party was also an example).

By nationalism, we mean the idea that all members of a nation (nationality) should unite across class lines, and use the state to liberate the nation.

The ANC, PAC and AZAPO are all nationalists.

We disagree with their nationalist politics.

Why?

Although we recognise that these groups were progressive in the anti-apartheid struggle, they are wrong on some key issues.

First, they insist that all black people share the same basic interests and must unite as a nation. However, the black working class, as we have seen, has nothing in common with the black elite of capitalists and state managers. In fact, they are in a struggle with each other.

The gap grows wider every day: the richest 20% of African households increased their real incomes by over 40% between 1975 and 1991, whilst the incomes of the poorest 40% of African households decreased by nearly 40% over the same period. The wealthiest 10% of African households have incomes over 60 times those of the poorest 10%, compared to ratios of roughly 30 times amongst Whites, Coloureds and Indians (SA figures, ca. 1996).

The rich get richer, the poor stay poor or get poorer.

Second, these groups think that change must come through taking control of the state, either through elections or, in the past, armed struggle. But the state is part of the problem, not the solution.

So we should boycott elections and rely on mass struggle to win change. We should not rely on our so-called "comrades in government" to get rid of capitalism and oppression, or to deliver complete national liberation.

Why Do Elite Nationalists Fight Racism and National Oppression?

They fight because they get frustrated, Generally, local ruling classes work with imperialist ruling classes. But sometimes imperialism frustrates them:

- it limits their ability to grow their businesses
- it is racist to them

- it blocks their education and careers
- it attacks them physically, to destroy their power

Local Elites Fight With Imperialism (Sometimes)

This is exactly what happened in South Africa. The black elite worked usually hand-in-glove with the British. We saw thus: the chiefs played a key role in the apartheid system.

Sometimes however the imperialists attack. They want more than the local ruling class will give. This is what happened to the Zulu kingdom in the 1870s. After that, the Zulu chiefs were incorporated into the system – although any seen as unreliable e.g. King Solomon kaDinizulu were marginalized.

When South Africa was united in 1910, the chiefs continued to play a key role in the system. However, they were frustrated by limited land. The educated black elite (lawyers translators etc). capitalist black farmers (esp. the *amakholwa* in the East Cape) and black business people (e.g. estate agents) were all made very marginal.

Frustrated chiefs, and the black educated, capitalist farmer and business elite, were very frustrated. They formed the ANC in 1912. After 30 years of being ignored. They decided to mobilize the masses. Ignored again, they went underground.

Eventually they were able to ride the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s into negotiations with the apartheid state. The elite pact that resulted emancipated the black elite, and allied it to the white elite.

The black masses, who had been led by the black elite through a nationalist movement, were marginalized. This is natural, because elites prioritize their own interests.

They hijack mass struggles.

For Bakunin, national liberation had to be achieved “as much in the economic as in the political interests of the masses.” If the national liberation struggle is carried out with “ambitious intent to set up a powerful State,” or if “it is carried out without the people and must therefore depend for success on a privileged class,” it will become a “retrogressive, disastrous, counter-revolutionary movement.” He believed that:⁶

Every exclusively political revolution – be it in defence of national independence or for internal change... – that does not aim at the immediate and real political and economic emancipation of people will be a false revolution. Its objectives will be unattainable and its consequences reactionary.

The ruling class elite within each race or nation will always act against the interests of the majority of people within each race or nation. As the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin teaches: “There is no greater enemy for a nation than its own State.”⁷

⁶ Bakunin, “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,” p. 99

⁷ Quoted in Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labour Movement: the idea of the nation in socialist and anarchist theory* p. 37

Class Unity Across Race, Not Race Unity Across Class

Class struggle requires the unity of all working class people. The struggle in South Africa will centre on the African working class. But other working classes should be welcome to join – they will also benefit from anarchism.

With the removal of apartheid privileges, it is even possible that large sections of the white working class will join black, Coloured and Indian working class people in struggle.

The income of the poorest 40% of whites fell by 40% in the period 1975–1996.

We have already seen signs of this with the 1995 affiliation to COSATU of the predominately White SASBO union, the South African Society of Bank Officials.

White Workers Do Not Benefit From Racism

Nationalists on the left, and racists on the right, often argue that white workers benefit from racism, and that it is therefore in their interests to *defend* racial discrimination.

In examining this issue, we must be careful to distinguish between different circumstances.

In *South Africa*, the small white working class certainly received real benefits from apartheid. This was made possible by the economic boom that lasted until the 1970s, and by the ruling class's fear that the white workers would rise up (as they did in 1913, 1914 and 1922). Also the white working class was only a small number of people. It was possible, while the boom lasted, to give them special treatment.

Today, the situation has changed. The ruling class no longer needs the support of white workers, and is no longer willing or able to look after them specially. If white working class people want a future, they will have to join with other working class people.

The strength of racist ideas however means that this will be a slow process and it is possible that many White workers may never become progressive.

However, any unity is only possible on an anti-racist basis that addresses the interests of the black, Coloured and Indian majority of the working class.

Myth Of Western Labour Elite

In countries like *Australia, Europe and the United States*, the situation is very different. The white working class is the *majority* of the population.

The white workers in these countries may face lower levels of unemployment, and better access to services, and definitely do *not* face the racism and national oppression that many non-white minorities in these regions face daily.

But the white working class in these countries is not an elite: it is an oppressed majority. Most of the casual workers, the poor, the unemployed and people living on welfare in these countries are white.

The struggle of the white working class in these countries is severely damaged by the racism and national oppression that the minorities face.

Racism and national oppression is against the interest of the white working class in these countries.

It divides and weakens working class struggles. The white workers are easily misled into blaming the blacks, Indians, immigrants etc. for their own suffering. **But it is the ruling class, not workers from other races and countries, that causes low wages, insecurity, housing shortages, bad hospitals, etc.** Blaming the minorities for these problems is foolish.

In the USA, the working class is severely divided between local whites, immigrants, Mexicans and blacks.

It is no accident that the USA has the weakest unions and the weakest mass struggles of any Western country. It is also not an accident that the USA has the most poverty, the highest inequality and the most backward mass politics of any Western country.

Benefit From Unity Against Racism, National Oppression & Imperialism

The white working class in the USA has everything to gain, and nothing to lose, from the complete freedom of the blacks and immigrants and Mexicans from all racism and national oppression.

Also, Western working classes (of all colours) do not benefit from imperialism as it strengthens the repressive power of their own rulers, wastes resources and lives on the military, promotes reactionary ideas that divides the workers, and allows big companies to cut jobs and wages by the shifting operations to repressive countries in the countries elsewhere.

Workers solidarity and unity is also in the direct interest of the oppressed racial and national minorities in these countries. These minorities are, at the end of the day, too small and isolated to beat the system on their own. They need allies.

It is thus in the interests of all workers that specially oppressed sections (like minorities and those from other countries) are drawn into the unions, and that the unions take up the fight against racism and national oppression.

Therefore, we fight for workers unity across race, on an anti-racist and pro-national liberation basis, as a necessary and immediate step towards the revolution in these countries.

Defend the Immigrants

The structures of capitalism and the state have always fed racism and national oppression, and they continue to do so.

We can see this when we look at the situation of African immigrants in South Africa today.

The ruling class promotes racism to these groups through media propaganda: for example, this includes the idea that Nigerians are drug lords, that Mozambicans steal jobs and so on.

The ruling class uses this to divide South African and immigrant workers, and to use the immigrants for cheap labour.

Yesterday, it was apartheid. Today it is the arrest and deportation of “illegal immigrants” from Africa. The immigrants are blamed for crime and unemployment, both of which are really the bosses’ fault. The immigrants must be defended!

An injury to one is still an injury to all.

Direct Action, Working Class Autonomy, Counterpower

While as anarchists we insist upon the need for revolution, we know that revolution requires:

- revolutionary counterpower: strong mass democratic organisations of people power that can fight the ruling class, and eventually take over the running of society and the economy
- revolutionary counterculture: revolutionary consciousness among the majority, of anarchism

To get to this, it is not enough to go around saying “revolution, revolution.”

It is necessary to organise with the working class today, on concrete issues, while promoting counterpower and counterculture.

So, while we believe in the need for ANARCHIST revolution, the anarchists should raise a number of immediate demands around issues that will help build mass organizations, resist the ruling class, and provide opportunities to spread the word of anarchism.

We oppose the following approaches:

- elections and political parties
- trust in the ruling class, black or white
- participation in the system, including elections, court battles, and NEDLAC

We favour the following approaches:

- direct action from below
- working class autonomy (outside and against the state)
- promoting anarchist consciousness

Immediate Demands

Using these approaches (mass struggle), we favour mobilizing around the following demands and campaigns around the issue of fighting racism and national oppression:

- land redistribution to worker cooperatives
- replace the three level school system (private, Model C, township) with decent free and democratic education for all and a better student-teacher ratio
- democratize the universities and technikons, with staff, workers and students having the main say
- more universities and technikons, with free education on the basis of aptitude only (not ability to pay)
- open up skilled and professional trades to blacks, Coloureds and Indians
- end the apartheid wage gap
- cut management salaries, increase worker salaries

- end all privatisation of basic services; free electricity and water allocations to be greatly increased
- end retrenchments, using occupation if needed
- demand decent housing (not RDP houses) for the masses
- the right to work: mass job creation programme at a living wage
- end attacks on immigrants
- unite black, Coloured and Indian workers
- also unite with white workers where possible
- unite casual and full-time workers
- no participation in elections, no control by NGOs, no participation in NEDLAC

Programme as Bridge to Counterpower

Why these demands?

These demands are posed because they are all seen as

- strengthening the working class e.g. better conditions, education
- exposing the system e.g. wage gaps, unequal education
- questioning inequality that seems normal e.g. RDP houses
- uniting the working class e.g. defend immigrants, equal wages
- preventing elites hijacking the struggle e.g. land to co-ops, not capitalist farmers
- deepening the class polarization e.g. occupations
- defending working class autonomy e.g. election boycotts
- pushing working class control e.g. cooperatives, occupations, university democratization

Module 3: Anarchism and Strategy: Revolution, Counterpower, Counterculture and Problems of Organisation.

“The revolutionary collectivists [i.e. Anarchists] try to diffuse science and knowledge among the people, so that the various groups of human society, when convinced by propaganda, may organise and spontaneously combine into federations, in accordance with their natural tendencies and their real interests, but never according to a plan traced in advance and imposed upon the ignorant masses by a few “superior” minds.”

— Mikhail Bakunin

1. Introduction

As we have seen in previous modules, anarchists fight for the creation of a society based on the principles of anarchism: that is, a society based on a federation of worker and community councils, where production would be organised for use and not profit, distribution is arranged according to need through which decisions are made through processes of participatory democracy.

In order for us to achieve a society like this our class must have two things:

First, a revolutionary consciousness. We must understand the current capitalist system and the position we occupy in it. We must believe in our own ability to change the system, and possess the desire to do so — while rejecting solutions that do not tackle the state, hierarchy and all forms of oppression.

Secondly, industrial and community organisations. We need to be able to physically take over, seize the factories and farms and destroy the state, and to rebuild society on more equal and democratic lines.

But we also need to be able to put these together into a *strategy*. Even the best bottom-up organisation will fail to develop into a revolutionary movement without revolutionary ideas.

Without a revolutionary perspective, strategy and tactics we will continually fail to develop in a revolutionary direction.

2. What is a Strategy?

A strategy is the *means* adopted to reach a *goal*.

For anarchists, the goal is the society in which there is hierarchy (no state and no class) and no domination (based on race, gender etc.), and where everyone has the same opportunities to access to the things they need and the power to make decisions that affect them.

The goal is set by larger *principles* and guided by *theory*.
In the case of anarchism, the principles include the following:

- anti-capitalism
- class struggle
- internationalism
- opposition to oppression
- commitment to building a society based on self-management, equality and
- participatory planning

Did you notice that these principles are in line with the goals described above?

Within these principles, there are different possibilities for *strategy*, and it is possible to identify two main anarchist ones:

- *Insurrectionary anarchism* :

This strategy pictures the use of armed action, called “propaganda by the deed” to spark a spontaneous revolution

- *Mass anarchism*:

This strategy focuses on mass organisations and “propaganda by the word.”

Tactics are the smaller measures, or concrete steps (work-plan) taken to *implement* the strategy. The tactics must also not contradict the theory or strategy.

3. Anarchism and Strategy

We can divide strategy into long-term and short-term components. Short-term strategy deals with more immediate conditions in specific conditions, so short-term strategy necessarily varies depending on several factors.

We said above that there are two main strategies in anarchism. Both of these are long-term anarchist strategies. We will only discuss *mass anarchism* in this module, because mass anarchism is the dominant form of anarchism today.

4. Mass Anarchism

The main long-term anarchist strategy centres on the view that only mass movements can create a revolutionary change in society, and that such movements are typically built through struggles around immediate issues or “reforms” (such as wages, police brutality, housing, or high prices and so on), and that anarchists must participate in such movements to radicalise and transform them into levers of revolutionary change.

This entails building a *revolutionary counterpower and counterculture* within mass movements with a view to seizing control of production and administration through a *social revolution*.

Group Discussion

What do you think the terms *Counterpower* and *Counterculture* mean?

Hint: Think about the dominant forms of power and dominant culture in capitalist society.

5. Social Revolution

We have discussed in previous modules the fact that under capitalism the *means of production* (farms, factories, land etc.) are owned and controlled by a small group of capitalists – who use this economic power to force the working class to work for them for wages. Although the working class produces all the wealth in the world, under capitalism it is unable to share in it.

But the working class constitutes the vast majority of the world’s population. How can it be that the majority allows this situation to continue?

The current situation of capitalism and the state is maintained by two main things:

- **Physical control** – when we challenge the system by going on strike or protesting for services and rights, the ruling class uses the police and military to suppress us by physical force.
- **Ideological control** – where capitalism and the state are made to be seen as natural and unavoidable, and certain ideas are promoted which make the system *seem* fair.

Although there are many things that can be done in order for the working class to improve its situation and take control of its own destiny here and now (we will discuss this in the next section), we will not be able to do much unless we profoundly change this situation. This is because we need those valuable resources currently held by a small group of capitalists.

This means we need to take back what is rightfully ours: we need to seize the farms, factories and land from the capitalists and state and place them under worker and community control so that what we produce can be shared between us equitably.

This is called a *social revolution*: where the ordinary workers and poor take over society; we collectivise the economy from below.

In concrete terms this means that we organise ourselves into strong, revolutionary mass organisations — unions and social movements that have the capacity and strength to occupy the land on a mass scale and lock out the bosses. However, although this rupture is an important part of revolution, it is not all of it. We need to start preparing for that day right now.

6. Counterpower: Building Tomorrow Today

A big part of the mass anarchist strategy says that the struggle for a new, free society must contain within itself the seeds of the new order, so that the basic framework of the new society would have already been created inside the old, so that when we are strong enough to seize the means of production, all the pieces are already in place.

This means that today's working class organisations (trade unions and community organisations) are the building blocks — right here and now — of a post-capitalist world. The structures we put in place in those organisations now, will literally become the structures of self-government later. This means that the revolution is understood as a *process*, of building “socialism from below.” We call this process “*prefiguration*”: our organisations *prefigure* the self-governed society. This is why it is important that they are run democratically, and from the bottom up.

Syndicalist (revolutionary anarchist) unions and community organisations must therefore perform three main functions. They must be:

1. The *fighting organisations* of the workers and poor against the ruling class (bosses and politicians)
2. A *school* to train workers and the poor so that they will be able to manage economic and social life in the future. Most mass struggles and campaigns are an education in themselves where we can gain first hand and valuable experience (of other leftists, the law etc.) that will prepare us for the fight.
3. The *nucleus* of the future free society.

In this sense, our unions and social movements become *at the same time* organs of *resistance* and of *revolution*. They become structures of “*counterpower*” resisting the powerful, in order to *supplant and replace* them. We must gradually but forcefully push back the boundaries of ruling class power — so that we constantly expand our own sphere of control and power.

A lot of work needs to be done before we can finally take over!

This can happen in all spheres of life: at work, school, university, and in our communities. This way we take back control over our own lives.

Activity

Can you think of any examples from South African history where ordinary people were successfully able to do this? Write your answer in the space provided.

A strategy of *prefiguration* (“building tomorrow today”) raises important questions about the nature of struggle required. Anarchists argue that this struggle needs to be *independent* and *oppositional* - it must be a self-managed struggle conducted *outside of and against* the state. This means that we should never help or rely on the ruling class – in workplaces or in our communities. We should always try to win what we want by relying on ourselves and fighting the class war.

7. What Changes What?

This does not mean that we shouldn’t fight political struggles: fighting for changes in state policy and rights are absolutely important, it simply means that *political action* which entails using the state machinery to create these changes is not. We argue strongly against reliance on politicians, the courts, arbitration etc. It is through mass oppositional struggle that the greatest possibility for victory lies.

Neither can the state be used by the working class in order for it to take control. History is flooded by examples of the failure of this strategy – even revolutionaries who entered the state through workers parties with a vision of creating socialism ended up turning against the very people that put them there. This is not because they were bad people who had bad intentions; it is because the very the nature and structure of the state produces corruption.

Rather than people changing the state, the state changes people!

This goes back to the argument made before – that strategy (means) must complement the goal (ends) you want to achieve. A self-managed, independent, bottom-up society is only possible through a self- managed, independent, bottom-up mass movement.

Activities

In groups, discuss and list five characteristics that our organisations would need to possess if they were going to *prefigure* an anarchist society.

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
 4. _____
 5. _____
-

8. Counterculture

Capitalism pervades every aspect of our lives. In some cases we are able to see its impact very clearly – for example in the inequality that exists between the rich and the poor. But sometimes it is more difficult to see just how deeply engrained capitalism is in society.

Capitalism is not just an economic system, it also promotes a set of values and certain ideas about the way things are and the way things should be. For example, capitalism promotes the idea that the poor are poor because they are lazy or stupid, and that the rich are rich because they work hard and are innovative, or are “entrepreneurs.” These ideas undermine the struggle of the workers because they deny that it is the *system* – not one’s character – that puts people in these positions!

In many cases, we unconsciously accept these ideas and absorb and internalise these values without even realising it. This means that our practices as the working class often reflect these ideas.

The ideas, values and practices promoted by capitalism together make up a capitalist or *ruling class culture* that penetrates most parts of society.

Group Discussion

Do You Think That People Are Greedy And Selfish By Nature?

9. How is “ruling class culture” promoted?

From the time we are very young, ruling class culture is forced on us. The school system is a major channel for this process. While we do learn some useful things at school, school learning also involves the learning of beliefs, attitudes and values that are accepted as ‘normal’ and ‘good’ by the society we live in. Many of these ideas are designed to prevent the working class from breaking free from its current position in capitalism. Negative ideas like these are also promoted

in the mainstream media — through TV, radio, magazines and newspapers — which are owned by the ruling class.

There are 3 main aspects of this dominant ruling class culture that we learn at school and through the media:

- **“Respect” for authority.** This teaches us to accept the fact that most of our lives will be ruled and determined by decisions made by others. In this way, school makes us into good subjects of the ruling class.
- **A culture of passivity.** By stamping out active and critical thought and inquisitive investigation, we are turned into submissive consumers. While school does train us to work hard (so that we can become good workers for our bosses), we are not encouraged to question what is said by those in power.
- **Competitiveness and individualism.** We are constantly being made to compete with others,

whether in the classroom, on the sports field or with others at work or in our communities.

Anarchists say that part of building a working class counterpower is about *ideas*. We need to build a *working class counterculture*. this is a set of ideas, values and practices that can oppose and challenge ruling class culture and are more in line with the values of anarchism. So, instead of competition, selfishness and submissiveness, our movements need to be filled with a sense of pride, a belief in our own capacity, co-operation and mutual aid. We need to spread awareness that we can create our own working class culture, class pride and working class identity.

**Winning victories by relying on our own independent actions is
how we build up our revolutionary muscles!**

In other words, *counterculture* is about those practices of the working class that have been developed consciously to challenge and take ground from the dominant class.

For too long the ruling class has dominated the sphere of culture! We can also use our organisations to set up our own newspapers, magazines and radio programmes — that can oppose the anti-poor messages we get from the mainstream media!

**Case Study: The International Working People’s Association (IWPA),
Chicago**

In 1886, four anarchist trade unionists linked to the IWPA, a revolutionary anarchist organisation, were hanged for their role in the struggle for the 8-hour day. Many people don't realise that May Day started with the anarchists.

The IWPA was a vibrant organisation, with several of its own organs of **counterculture**. It ran 14 newspapers — including the first ever anarchist daily. As one commentator has put it, the IWPA “created networks of orchestras, choirs, theatrical groups, debating clubs, literary societies, gymnastic and shooting clubs that involved and encouraged the participation of thousands of people. They also organised lectures, concerts, picnics, dances, plays and recitations in which children as well as adults took part. Saloons and beer-gardens...became bustling centres of radical life”¹ The IWPA provided services to members and their families who were in need. In all their pageants and festivals, music played a central role in disseminating revolutionary ideals.

In this way, the IWPA anarchists were able to subvert ruling class culture, and reaffirm their identity and pride as workers.

Writing activity

Can you think of an example of counterculture in your own organisation?
Explain why it is **counter** cultural.

10. Divisions in the Working Class

Having the working class accept this ruling class culture is very useful for the ruling class.

For example, if we think that hard work will make us rich, then we are not going to fight to change the unjust system. Similarly, if we accept that authority must be respected, we are not going to confront the bosses and rulers that keep us down.

¹ Paul Avrich, 1984, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, p. 136.

But, even more dangerous is the way that mainstream culture promotes ideas that keep the working class divided. The bosses and politicians are terrified of the potential power that the working class holds, and they should be! But they also know that where that power lies is in the unity of the working class. That's why they do everything they can to keep the working class divided. One of the ways they do this is by promoting divisive ideas in the media.

For example, many working class men are constantly exposed to hateful ideas about women on TV. This often makes them disrespect women, view them as inferior and even abuse them. The ruling class, through the media, is also involved in spreading xenophobic ideas about foreigners.

Xenophobia is very useful for the government because rather than asking why the system produces so much poverty and so few jobs, working class brothers and sisters were too busy beating each other up for the problems in the system. Similarly, the capitalist elite in South Africa promoted racism and tribalism to keep the working class divided under Apartheid, so that they could profit from the super-exploitation of the black working class. Although Apartheid is now over, racism still exists and is still used to weaken and divide the working class. Anarchists oppose racism, as with all forms of discrimination and oppression.

When these sexist, racist or xenophobic practices are brought into our organisations, it weakens our collective power — because the more we fight amongst ourselves, the less strength we have to fight the rulers!

Discussion

Do you think that sexism benefits working class men? Why/why not?

11. The role of ideas

The tragedy of our history is that people fight and they rise up against oppression and exploitation, but others reap the fruits of the tree of freedom. We fight the same fights over and over again. Mikhail Bakunin, the great anarchist revolutionary, explained that the masses will always rebel. The fact that so many of us are so poor and so disempowered generates our “instinct” of revolt. Our desire for better conditions, but also for more say over our own futures are important — they provide the potential for us to remake the world through revolution.

But this is not enough. For Bakunin, what we need is a “new faith” in the possibility of a new world, and in the ability of ordinary people to create it. Ideas play a vital role in our struggle. Without them we will remain the tools and fools of the elites.

What does a “new faith” mean? It means we need a new vision of society, along with a clear idea of how to get there, strategically and tactically. We need anarchism.

We must make anarchism the *leading idea* of the working class; it must inspire the mass organisations of the working class to rise up in their own name. According to a famous document written by Russian anarchists called the “Platform” (we will revisit this later), it is “only on the

theoretical base of anarchism that the social revolution can succeed in the complete emancipation of labour.”

We recognise that different levels of consciousness exist within the working class. In fact, many working class people are so tied to the ruling class culture that pervades our society. But on the other hand, it is therefore possible to say that an “advanced” section (“vanguard”) of workers and the poor does exist. A minority of working class people do have a clearer picture of the way the system works, the role of the state and the nature of capitalism. By virtue of this fact these people are in the forefront of class struggle and play a leading role in that struggle.

“Vanguard: The foremost or leading position in a movement or field, or those occupying such a position.”

In some sense this conscious minority constitutes a “vanguard.” But the role of this “vanguard” is that of educators and instigators. In so far as they are leaders, it is because they are a “leadership” of ideas.

We have no time for the leadership of personalities or that of a higher committee of a party. This makes anarchism different from other socialists (Leninists, Trotskyists). For these socialists, the fact that this minority understands things better, or is more class conscious, means that they should have the “right” to take decisions for the class (whether we like it or not), and the “right” to take power in our name. We reject this sort of leadership. We are totally opposed to the idea that power must be held and controlled by the “vanguard party” during and after the revolution. We must always fight against that influence in our class that seeks to promote the idea that a permanent, unelected leadership is necessary.

Our aim as anarchists is to try minimising such unevenness in consciousness, without compromising the clarity of the content of our own ideas. We must fight to make anarchism the dominant idea in the working class.

12. Defence of the Revolution

The ruling class will not want to share their wealth and power with everyone, therefore there will be a big backlash by the old ruling class who will try to turn everything back to the way things were.

Because of this, we will need a *workers militia* to defend the new, free society. This militia will be internally democratic, accountable to, and bound by, the decisions made at congresses (general assemblies) of the mass organisations.

A “militia” is a military force made up of ordinary people to provide defence and secure peace

13. After the Revolution

By building a revolutionary working class counterpower right now, we are essentially preparing for the day when we take over. But the work does not stop on the day of the revolution. After we seize the means of production and administration the workers will need to continue their efforts to reorganise society in the interest of all.

In place of top-down rule by corporations and states, we must build a global federation of self-governing workplaces and communities based on voluntary association and participatory democracy.

Revolutionary social movements replace the municipalities with street, block and ward committees and meetings. Revolutionary alliances of education workers, parents and learners govern the schools.

Revolutionary trade unions occupy and run the workplaces (this is called anarcho-syndicalism).

Decisions would be made by those affected by their outcomes. Those decisions that could be taken at the local level would be taken at the local level, through assemblies and mandated committees.

When co-ordination is needed between the local structures, this would be done through mandated delegates and congresses. These delegates receive no privileges – they simply carry out instructions from below. In this way, every effort is made to avoid a situation where a permanent layer of experts and officials emerges.

Permanent structures of co-ordination would exist within local areas, regions, provinces, countries, continents and the whole world. Such a system would have no top-down hierarchy. It would be run from the bottom up and would have no state. It would be a *democracy without the state*.

One of the core functions of this system would be *participatory economic planning*, where production would be placed under the control of all the workers. We would *plan* the economy from below – where production would be organised to meet the needs and wants of everybody. This means that we would all provide information about what we need, and then we would arrange production on the farms and factories to meet those needs. There would be no unemployment and all goods would be freely available to those who contribute to the community by working.

14. Social and Political Levels of Organisation

The lack of visible organisation, normal and accepted by each one of its members makes possible the establishment of arbitrary, less libertarian organisations.

Luigi Fabbri

Having looked at the anarchist strategy for social transformation (through a **social revolution** built by revolutionary working class **counterpower** and **counterculture**), we now turn to examine one of the essential tools anarchists believe necessary to achieve this transformation – organisation.

The main idea behind the term “organisation” is that of **self-management** in the sense that anarchists believe that every form of organised struggle must be “managed” only by those involved and, let there be no misunderstanding here, by ALL those involved.

This concept separates anarchists from all those who seek to turn organisation into a tool for establishing their own political power.

For anarchist communists, there are two levels of organisation, which correspond faithfully to two levels of consciousness and of struggle: the “**specific**” or “**political**” organisation and the “**mass**” or “**social**” organisation.

Discussion

What is the difference between *social* and *political* organisation? Give a few examples of each.

The mass organisation (trade union, social movement etc.) unites various categories of workers and poor on the basis of their immediate survival, and on the basis of the need to improve their living and working conditions.

The mass organisation does not require a complete vision of the broader class struggle, only a practical capacity and a desire to fight capital. In non- revolutionary times it is concerned with the immediate day-to-day struggles and concerns of the working class, and is not necessarily revolutionary.

The members of the mass organisation are all those among the proletariat who understand that it is only by struggle and not through prayer, entrepreneurship or being obedient to the bosses that improved living and working conditions can be obtained.

The specific anarchist political organisation, or anarchist party, unites those class-struggle militants who share a similar understanding of all the difficulties of the class struggle and how to struggle against them; that is to say a precise theory and a clear, well-defined and concrete historical plan (strategy).

The specific organisation is truly anarchist. It is made up only of anarchists and is distinguishable from other political organisations by its characteristic theory, organisational form, historical plan and practices.

Discussion

Why is it important for anarchists to organise themselves into anarchist-only political organisations?

15. The Role of the Anarchist Political Organisation

Only an anarchist organisation is capable of dealing with the problems raised by the class struggle, because only an organised group of class-struggle militants can link the immediate needs of the working class to a historical project for the complete emancipation of the working class and poor through social revolution.

The role of the anarchist organisation is to win the most widespread understanding and influence of anarchist ideas and methods amongst the workers and poor. We said before that anarchism must become the “leading idea” of the working class – it is the job of the anarchist political organisation to make this happen.

To do this we have to be able to explain and clarify what is happening in capitalist society; to provide answers to the pressing questions of our class. The anarchist organisation aims to be a “collective memory” for the class – in terms of combating false ideas (like Marxism and nationalism), and in terms of keeping alive and developing the traditions of the working class movements and anarchism. This includes analysing the lessons of past community and workplace struggles, and preserving them to be learnt from.

The anarchist organisation does not aim to “lead” the workers and poor into socialism, or to declare socialism “from above.” **The workers and poor must make the revolution by and for themselves. The role of the anarchist organisation is to educate and organise the masses to take power in their own name.**

In concrete terms this means we need to build a mass international anarchist organisation.

This organisation must aim to link a criticism of the modern state/ capitalist society with a vision of a new way of organising human society. It will produce propaganda and help to build the confidence and ability of the workers and the poor to fight for themselves and make their own decisions.

“How do we get from where we are (capitalism) to where we want to be (anarchist communism)?”

It should work inside the unions, social movements and other class organisations for the leadership of the anarchist idea. It should fight for the reconstruction of the union movement on the basis of anarchist ideas (class independence, self-management, direct action, workers’ democracy etc.). The unions must become the fist that can smash capitalism.

The anarchist organisation must be big enough and effective enough to defend the mass movements of the working class from opportunists, reformism, authoritarianism, and to block the ambitions of political parties to “substitute” themselves for (stand in place of) the masses. The anarchist organisation, and its sister organisations internationally, must aim to build such an international anarchist organisation.

16. Structure of the Anarchist Organisation

When speaking of organisation, we must at the same time deal with two different problems: the CONCEPT of organisation and the PRACTICE of organisation.

By concept, we mean the conscious and clear identification of the relationships which exist between the various elements that make up the political organisation, the party.

By practice, we mean the difficult task of translating those concepts into the DAILY PRACTICE of the political organisation.

One of the most important attempts to develop a theory of anarchist political organisation which could unify theory and practice was the Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists, drawn up in 1926 by exiled anarchist veterans of the Russian Revolution.

The “Organisational Section” of the Platform proposed four core organisational principles:

1. Theoretical Unity.
2. Tactical Unity.
3. Collective Responsibility.
4. Federalism.

The first two principles express the need for an agreed political programme based on a shared understanding of both the goal and the method of revolutionary anarchism. **The requirement of collective responsibility is simply a recognition that democratic membership rights carry with them the responsibility of abiding by collective decisions: “there can be no decisions without their execution.”** The principle of federalism will not be looked at in this module.

The authors of the Platform understood the need for an anarchist political organisation, based on an agreed programme, which can provide answers to all the problems and concerns of the masses;

“from the moment when anarchists declare a conception of the revolution and the structure of society, they are obliged to give all these questions a clear response.”

In order for anarchism to have a resonance in the working class movement there are a number of concepts which, we believe, must serve as a foundation in the building of a mass anarchist organisation.

We will now look at these concepts systematically.

17. Theoretical and Tactical Unity: The Need for a Programme

The strategy must be shared by all members of the anarchist organisation because, as it defines the historical role of the anarchist communists, it represents the very soul, the motivation and the reason of our political action. Any lack of unity at this level would inevitably lead to chaos when deciding the simplest problems of strategy, method and alliance.

The agreement between all the organisation’s militants with its political strategy is an important condition for reaching the objectives that it sets out.

Anarchist communist unity is based on theoretical unity. The historical role of anarchist communists is proved by their strategic unity. The long-term political objective (anarchist socialism), the political project which is the basis of the organisation is achievable because there

is unity on **political strategy – the anarchist communist strategy for social revolution through counterpower and counterculture.**

“The only method leading to the solution of the problem of general organisation is, in our view, to rally active anarchist militants to a base of precise positions: theoretical, tactical and organisational, i.e. the more or less perfect base of a homogeneous programme.”

If the theoretical disagreements are too great, then unity of action will largely be impossible and the organisation will disintegrate or exist purely as a debating society.

Discussion

Why is unified or collective practice important?

18. Collective Responsibility

If the militants of the organisation adopt anarchist theory as being correct for the class struggle, and if they recognise in the organisation they are members of the best form for correctly expressing their political ideas, they must consequently conceive of the organisation as a unit. In other words, the members of the organisation acting collectively in the class struggle become a unit when they recognise that they share substantially similar ideas.

The whole organisation becomes responsible for the political activity of each member, which represents the organisation in the class struggle and, the other way around, each member is responsible for the political activity of the organisation in general.

By collective responsibility, we mean in practice that if militants make a decision which politically concerns those who make it, then each member is answerable to the others for any lack in carrying out his or her political task.

Writing activity

Give a few reasons why you think collective responsibility is important in a political organisation. Explain why you think so. Think about your own experience in struggle.

Political development requires **self-education** which in turn is a vital precondition of internal democracy . We anarchists want to build an organisation which can wage and win the “ battle of ideas “ against all rival ideologies. Thus in order to prevent the dominance of a few “experts” there should be a comprehensive internal education programme.

Such a programme is necessary to facilitate informed decision-making and participation in the policy-making process. There will inevitably exist a contradiction between experienced and inexperienced members. What is important is that this contradiction is consciously minimised by the political organisation taking responsibility for the political education of its membership.

Anarchist political schools however are only one part of the equation, experience is the other. The class struggle itself is the best form of education, and for developing activist skills. Thus membership of a cadre organisation must entail active involvement in all spheres of political life: as trade unionists, in student unions and social movements, unemployed groups and in the political campaigns which concern our class.

The organisation must therefore encourage, facilitate and co-ordinate the activities of its members in order to make the most of the experience of struggle. A new and developing organisation must carefully select and prioritise its activities in order to make the most of its limited resources. The important point nonetheless is that the activism of the membership takes on an organised character.

As we have seen, a cadre organisation is not an organisation of the whole class like trade unions and social movements, but of a politically conscious minority of anarchists.

Recruitment to a cadre organisation must depend on broad agreement with, understanding of, and commitment to the programme of the organisation. Recruits must be aware of the responsibilities to the membership: regular attendance of meetings, payment of dues, execution of collective decisions and mandates.

We advocate an internal education programme to ensure maximum internal democracy. Only an active critical membership can prevent the emergence of a division between leaders and led, which is a defining feature of authoritarian socialist (Marxist, Leninist etc.) and nationalists (ANC, IFP etc.) organisations.

Our “cadre” is not a core of “leaders” within a chain of command, but the most skilled, committed and competent of activists. An anarchist cadre is not a bureaucracy or executive committee, it is an instrument for building a different political movement where everyone is a leader and no-one has any privileges or political rights over anyone else.

We want a movement of revolutionaries who can win the arguments in all working class forums, who can think and act without being told what to do by a central committee, who know how direct democracy works and who can democratise struggles accordingly.

Characteristics of an Anarchist Communist Cadre

The cadre of an anarchist political organisation are the most conscious, committed and reliable class struggle militants, who share a clear analysis and understanding of capitalism and the state and a common plan of action to advance the class struggle towards social revolution. The cadre of an anarchist political organisation should be:

- Reliable
 - Honest
 - Trustworthy
 - Ethical
 - Committed
 - Hard-working
-

We want anarchists to be able to decisively influence the course of the class struggle in an anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist and revolutionary direction. Ultimately such organised anarchists must be able to play their part in the working class destruction of the capitalist state, and in preventing opportunists and authoritarians from hijacking a successful workers revolution.

Capitalism today can no more satisfy human needs than it could in Bakunin's day. We appeal to all those who are serious about consigning capitalism to history: join us in building an anarchist movement which can arm the working class with the politics necessary to accomplish this task.

Module 4: Anarchism & Its Rivals Part 1: Why Anarchists Oppose Nationalism, and the ANC.

1. Rivals to anarchism in the working class and peasantry

As anarchists, we believe that a socialist revolution is not inevitable – it won't spontaneously arise because of people's daily conditions. However, people who were suffering oppression and domination have, throughout known human history, organised to fight for better daily conditions of work and life for themselves and their communities.

In doing so, they fought in a variety of ways, for a variety of causes, e.g. for independence from colonial rule, against capitalism for a socialist society, etc. Because they fought for a variety of causes, it shows that they were influenced by a variety of ideas.

One can only fight for national liberation: that is, the freedom of an oppressed race or nation. But how? Does national liberation mean:

- a new state, ruled by a ruling class drawn from the nation?
- ordinary working class people governing themselves in an anarchist society?

What you fight for depends on your *ideas*.

But not all ideas are correct. For example, working class people are continually exposed to ideas that serve only the interests of their *enemies*, the local and international ruling classes.

Examples of incorrect ideas are:

- racism
- xenophobia
- the belief that “any one can make it big” if they work hard enough
- support for wealthy politicians, because they are of our race

Did you notice that all of these incorrect ideas divide and confuse the working class?

Thus we believe that one of the most important roads to anarchist revolution is to train and educate ourselves in anarchism and to spread the word and ideas of anarchism in the working class and poor.

However, history has shown us that the working class can be influenced by a number of different ideas.

This workbook is part one of a two-part series of workbooks on rival ideologies to anarchism in the working class, and focuses on defining and explaining nationalism, the effects on working class struggle and the role of nationalism in South Africa. This requires an examination of the most important nationalist party in South Africa today, the African National Congress (ANC)

2. Revision: what is anarchism?

To begin with, let's recap briefly what anarchism is — what we've covered so far in the previous workbooks and workshops.

Anarchism is a tendency within the working-class movement that opposes all forms of exploitation and domination. We think that all people are fundamentally equal, and should have the freedom to live their lives as they see fit, as long as they do not harm the freedom of other people.

Remember: The ruling class owns the means of production and/or controls the means of administration. The working class (including the unemployed) and peasantry do not..

We oppose capitalism because it is a vicious profit system that is based on the exploitation of the workers and the poor to the benefit of a small class of bosses and top government figures. We do not think that the state (courts, army, and bureaucracy) is there to look after everyone; instead its role is to keep the ruling class in power.

Capitalism is a system which impoverishes and oppresses the majority of the world's population, must be resisted and defeated. It cannot be reformed away. As long as this system exists, there will be poverty, repression and racism.

Repression means the persecution of people for their political beliefs and actions.

The only people who can fight and overthrow capitalism, the State and all forms of oppression, are the working and poor people.

Only us — the working class — can manage the job because only we

- have no vested interest in the system

- have power in our ability to organise (particularly in the workplace)
- produce all the wealth of the world
- only a productive class can build a free, anti- authoritarian society because only such a class is not based on exploitation.

The working class must build revolutionary COUNTERPOWER and COUNTERCULTURE so that it can fight — and defeat — the ruling class.

Question exercise

What is counterpower? Give two examples of counterpower.

What is counterculture? Give five examples of counterculture activities.

In place of capitalism we want a free socialistic economic system in which the workers and peasants directly manage the land and factories, and use these resources to produce for the benefit of all.

In place of the State, we want to manage our own affairs through grassroots workplace and community councils, united at the local, regional, national and international levels.

We do not think that the State can be made to help ordinary people. The only language the ruling class understands is the language of mass struggle from below. This is the only way to win any gains in the here and now, and definitely the only way to smash the system in the long run. Relying on the State to make the revolution is a recipe for disaster.

Instead of using the State, we believe that the struggle and the revolution must come about through mass democratic movements of the workers and poor. In particular, we emphasise the revolutionary potential of trade unions.

3. The battle of ideas

As we mentioned earlier, in seeking to fight against capitalism, the state and social and economic inequality, working class people have been influenced by a number of different ideas. Anarchism has been one influence. *Only anarchism has shown an ability to fundamentally free the working class and poor.*

But of course the masses are often influenced by other ideas. Most of these ideas are very different to anarchism. While sometimes they can play a **progressive** role, they often have many **reactionary** elements, and always fail to fully emancipate the people.

In fact, the other ideas have always ended up maintaining the basic class system, where the ruling class minority exploits and dominates the working class.

Also, a great deal of control by the ruling class, over the working class, is through **ideas**. People are told that the existing society is the only possible one. That their problems are due to laziness, or foreigners, or each other.

Exercise

With the examples above in mind, list other ways in which the ruling class keeps us under control.

This is precisely why it is necessary to build an anarchist political organisation to fight the battle of ideas i.e. to educate the working class on the correct anarchist approach to the struggle. This means showing people that the anarchist way is right, and why the other ways are wrong, and will lead to a dead-end.

That is one major reason why convinced anarchists must unite, in a tight and disciplined political organisation – to organise and educate the masses to march to freedom in their own name

Some key examples of successful anarchist political organisations in history were the Bakuninist Alliance (international), the FAI (Spain, Luz (Mexico), the Society of Anarchist Communist Comrades (China) and the International Socialist League (South Africa).

4. What is “nationalism”?

One of the main rivals to anarchism since it became a global mass movement in the 1870s is nationalism.

In this section we are going to discuss nationalism, and why anarchists reject nationalism.

It is important to start by saying that “nationalism” is not the same as “nationalisation,” although the words sound similar.

As previously discussed, **nationalisation** is when the state takes over an industry. For example, Eskom nationalised many power stations from the 1940s.

By contrast, **nationalism** is a specific political strategy for decolonisation that is based on the idea that all classes within a given nation or people must unite to achieve a common national interest.

Nationalist ideas exist in all countries. This includes imperialist countries.

In countries with a colonial history, nationalism is one of the currents that emerged in the anti-colonial movement. In imperialist countries, nationalism is commonly used to justify imperialism.

To summarise nationalism, it has two basic ideas:

1. That all members of a nation must unite in pursuit of common national interests. That is, that the capitalists and state managers in the nation, have common interests with the working class.
2. That the nation must express its common interests through a national state. It is the state through which the national will is expressed.

Imperialism

A system or policy extending the authority or rule of one country, or empire, over other countries, or capturing colonies.

Let us give an example. In many colonial countries, nationalists argue that the rich and the poor of the colony must unite against the imperial master. In place of being ruled by the imperialists, they should have a national state. This is “independence.”

For nationalists, freedom is achieved when an independent national government is established, for example, when the British colony of Gold Coast became independent Ghana in the 1950s.

5. Nationalism in the South African Context

Let us think of an example of nationalism in such a context.

This example is Afrikaner nationalism. This argued that all Afrikaners — poor whites and workers as well as rich capitalists and powerful politicians — should unite. They should have their own government — this would allow the Afrikaner people (or volk) to express common Afrikaner interests. What is this government? A “national” state.

And from a nationalist perspective, anyone who opposed this programme was a traitor to the nation, a *volksverraaier* (a “traitor to the volk”).

But this same basic model shapes the main African political parties as well. Here we can include the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), the Inkatha Freedom party (IFP) and the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO).

They disagree on who exactly forms the nation:

- the **ANC** (from the 1950s) argued that it represented the black African nation, but that this should merge with the white nation, into a “new nation”
- the **PAC** argued that it represented the black African nation, and that Indians and whites could not be part of the nation
- Inkatha argued that it represented the Zulu nation, which had different interests to the white nation, the Indians and the other black nations
- **AZAPO** and the **Black Consciousness** tradition argued that it represented a black nation comprising black Africans, Coloureds and Indians

As you can see, all of these traditions claim to represent a slightly different nation. But what all the main African political parties share with each other, as well as with Afrikaner nationalism, are the basic nationalist ideas:

1. Your nation is more important than your class. You have more in common with other members of the nation — regardless of their class position — and you must unite as a nation
2. Your nation should represent itself through its own national state. The state is seen as representing the will of the nation.

Questions

1. why would anarchists oppose the view that the working class must unite with the ruling class?
 2. why do anarchists oppose the idea that the state can be used to benefit the working class?
-

The ANC Example

The ANC was founded in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress (it adopted the name ANC in 1923). It was set up by and for the black elite.

This formation of the South African Native National Congress illustrated a key virtue of nationalism for the African elites: it helped unite the highly differentiated *elites* themselves, replacing

ethnic and regional divisions with a “national” identity. Pixley ka Izaka Seme, a landowner, the first treasurer of the South African Native National Congress, and later the ANC president, provided a classic statement of this outlook in the run-up to the Bloemfontein meeting:¹

”The demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basuto and every other Native must be buried and forgotten... We are one people. These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of all our woes and all of our backwardness and ignorance today.”

Twelve members of the first executive were ministers of religion, the remainder including a building contractor, a teacher, a newspaper editor, and a labour recruiter and interpreter, while a “house of chiefs” was also built into the organisation.² The class character of the organisation was hidden by its nationalist discourse, which united the elite and enabled it to seek allies from the popular classes, while simultaneously denying the relevance of class. To raise class questions was, by definition, to imperil the project of “national unity,” and so was a “cause of woes.”

6. Anarchists Reject Nationalism

Anarchist reject nationalism. This follows from our basic positions on:

- **the class struggle**
- **the nature of the state**
- **the way that society needs to change** (we stand for counter-power and class struggle: see above)

Let us explain the anarchist critique of nationalism:

1. The classes in the nation do not have a common interest. **The capitalists and landlords and state managers in each nation oppress and exploit and dominate the working class within their own nations.** An example: Patrice Motsepe exploits and oppresses black workers. Yet he is a black man. Clearly, a rich black man will oppress a poor black man. Just like a rich Chinese man will oppress a poor Chinese man, and a rich white man will oppress a poor white man.
2. National unity across the class divide is only possible if the working class in the nation, accepts the rule and exploitation of the “national” capitalists and the state. That is, **nationalism says all classes in the nation must unite.** It does **NOT** say that the elite must be overthrown. It says that the working class must unite with that “national” ruling class. But to unite with that elite, the working class must accept in reality the right of that elite to oppress and exploit. **Unity with the ruling class betrays the working class.**

¹ Quoted in Walshe, 1970, *op cit.*, p.33

² Walshe, 1970, *op cit.*, p. 36

3. **The state cannot be used by the working class.** The state is part of the system of class rule, of the few ruling over and exploiting the many, the working class. Therefore, a national state will in reality be a state by and for the national ruling class. It will not represent the majority of the nation, which is the “national” working class.
4. The state, instead, will continue to oppress the working class. The radicals that join the state will be changed by joining the state; they change their ideas and views. **The former “liberators” of the people will become their oppressors.** This is an iron law across the postcolonial world.
5. **While the “national” state can play a role in opposing imperialism, it cannot do so in a way that benefits the national working class.** When the nationalists are in power, and control the national state, they consistently prove themselves to be enemies of the people. For example, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is against British imperialism. That cannot be doubted. But he severely oppresses his own people. He is a **bourgeois anti-imperialist** i.e. he is against imperialism, but it is for the Zimbabwean *bourgeoisie* (the elite). But to be for any bourgeoisie is to be against the working class. Therefore, Mugabe has two enemies: the British imperialist bourgeoisie *and* the Zimbabwean working class.
6. Normally, however, the nationalists, once they take state power and join the ruling classes in former colonial countries, work with imperialism.

In order to get richer, and more powerful, many national ruling classes in formerly colonial countries aim to attract foreign direct investment to their countries. They attract this by offering cheap labour. Who provides that cheap labour? The “national” working class. Why is it cheap?

Because it is oppressed by laws that weaken unions, high unemployment, repression etc. Therefore, the “national” ruling class works against the “national” working class, up to and including working with the imperialists that they claim to oppose.

So, why do they work with imperialism? Because of their own **class interests**

- a. every ruling class needs a strong economy based on exploitation, which can generate taxation and technology;
- b. every ruling class needs a strong state bureaucracy and military, which is funded by taxation

Working with imperialism is one way to achieve these goals. Imperialist ruling classes provide investments, loans, military support and other aid and investment.

7. Decolonisation through the formation of a new nation-state may achieve some goals, but fundamentally the ordinary people will (at most) trade foreign capitalists and state managers for local capitalists and state managers. This will

In short, nationalism cannot change the basic system that oppresses the working class. It can bring some improvements, but at the same time, its main goal is simply to replace foreign capitalists and state managers with local capitalists and state managers.

As anarchists we believe that nationalist politics are fatally flawed and are unable to deliver freedom from domination to the majority of people in the colonial and imperialist- dominated world.

What happens in decolonisation led by nationalists is that the foreign ruling class is replaced by a new local ruling class. That new local ruling class oppresses the “national” working class. And in many cases, it works with the former imperialist ruling class in ways that undermine the national working class. **But even when it remains anti-imperialist, it remains anti-working class.**

EXAMPLE: the real aims of the Freedom Charter

Nelson Mandela explained the Freedom Charter as follows, in the June 1956 issue of *Liberation* magazine (article called “In Our Lifetime”):³

“Whilst the Charter proclaims democratic changes of a far-reaching nature **it is by no means a blue-print for a socialist state but a programme for the unification of various classes** and groupings amongst the people on a democratic basis. Under socialism the workers hold state power. They and the peasants own the means of production, the land, the factories and the mills. All production is for use and not for profit.

“The Charter does not contemplate such profound economic and political changes. Its declaration ‘The People shall govern!’ visualises the transfer of power not to any single social class but to all the people of this country be they workers, peasants, professional men or petty-bourgeoisie.

“... in demanding the nationalisation of the banks, the gold mines and the land the Charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold-mining monopolies and farming interests ... **The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the**

development of a prosperous Non- European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country the Non- European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own in their own name and right mills and factories, and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before. ... It is precisely because the Charter offers immense opportunities for an over-all improvement in the material conditions of **all classes** and groups that it attracts such wide support.

“[The nationalist struggle] ... is conducted by an alliance of **various classes** and political groupings amongst the Non-European people supported by white democratic African,

Coloured and Indian workers and peasants, **traders and merchants**, students and teachers, doctors and lawyers, and various **other classes** and groupings: all participate in the struggle against racial inequality and for full democratic rights...

ANC nationalism has always served the agenda of creating a black elite. This was hidden by talk of “black unity.”

³ <http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/bunting-brian/kotane>

7. Nationalities, Cultures and Anarchism

Obviously people across the world have different cultures, and “national” groups with common cultures, histories and ancestors exist. This is a fact.

Sometimes these groups share a common territory; quite often they do not.

Every single person belongs to a “national” group or “nationality.”

This difference is a natural and valuable part of human existence.

Anarchists support and promote cultural diversity.

We recognise the right of nationalities to freely associate, even to separate themselves, so long as they do not oppress groups *within* the nationality (through class, or sex etc.) or groups outside the nationality (through colonialism, discrimination etc.)

We oppose cultural imperialism i.e. suppressing any groups culture by means of imperialist economic and political power.

We oppose national oppression, whether by an imperialist state or by a nation-state. For example, anarchists oppose the national oppression of minorities within a country.

But there is one limitation to all of this: anarchists oppose any and all cultural practices that are oppressive and incompatible with anarchism. Universal rights and truths are more important than any local cultural practice. It would be a contradiction for anarchists to stand for freedom, but accept, in the name of “culture” or “national rights” any oppressive practices. Even if a practice is traditional, it does not automatically mean it is **right**.

Cultures are not static (unchanging), and all cultures have within themselves tensions between progressive / democratic/ anti-authoritarian elements, and backward/ hierarchical/ oppressive elements. This is only natural, because national cultures are **contested** between the different classes in the nationality.

As anarchists we only support the progressive / democratic/ anti-authoritarian elements in the culture, because only these are compatible with our anarchist values, and with the interests of the working class. The backward/ hierarchical/ oppressive elements only divide the working class and promote oppression of specific groups (usually women and youth).

Last, we do not think national or cultural difference should be a barrier to working class unity. The working class, no matter its race or nationality, has the same basic interests, and despite cultural differences, generally share a common working class experience and outlook.

There is a difference, culturally, between a Chinese worker and a Brazilian worker, but they also share a **common working class culture** an interest that binds them. This includes the culture of trade unions, strikes, socialism.

The current system promotes national hatred and racial hatred. It has to do this to

- divide the working class by tribe, nation, race and culture, so that it cannot unite and fight
- because the different ruling classes are always competing with each other for profit and power, they keep the ordinary people in a state of fear and hate towards the other countries in case a war starts

So, while we recognise the rich diversity of humankind, we stress the common INTERNATIONAL interests and struggle of the working class of the world. We are INTERNATIONALISTS.

Bakunin on National Freedom and Rights

“Nationality... is a historic, local fact which, like all real and harmless facts, has the right to claim general acceptance... Every people, like every person, is involuntarily that which it is and therefore has a right to be itself.. Nationality is not a principle; it is a legitimate fact, just as individuality is. Every nationality, great or small, has the incontestable right to be itself, to live according to its own nature. This right is simply the corollary of the general principal offreedom.”

“Fatherland and nationality are, like individuality, each a natural and social fact, physiological and historical at the same time; neither of them is a principle. Only that can be called a human principle which is universal and common to all men; and nationality separates men, therefore it is not a principle if a certain people or person exists in fact in a determinate form ... the less they think of themselves and the more they become imbued with universal human values, the more vitalised they become ... We should place human, universal justice above all national interests...”

8. Nationalism: Whose Class Interests Does It Serve?

A common national background makes nationalism *possible*: because people have a shared background, the idea that the nation should unite makes a certain sort of sense.

However, a common national background does not make nationalism *inevitable*: not everyone is a nationalist.

Nationalism is a political ideology, with very concrete political implications. **As we show in the next part, nationalism is a ruling class ideology, basically serving ruling class**

interests. It can sometimes play a progressive role, but it can never serve the basic interests of the working class. Therefore, anarchists should never “liquidate” (dissolve) their politics into nationalism.

There are three basic types of nationalism in the modern era:

1. **the nationalism of imperialist countries.** This is promoted by the imperialist state and the imperialist ruling class to
 - a. confuse the working class
 - b. divide the working class
 - c. make the working class support imperialism

2. **nationalism in national liberation struggles.** In situations of national oppression — which are usually caused by colonialism or imperialism — all sectors of the oppressed nation are second-class people. Anti-colonial or anti-imperialist nationalism is how the local frustrated local ruling class and “middle class” responds. Frustrated by imperialism — and which seeks to replace the foreign elites with a local or “national” elite. They promote nationalism to:
 - a. weaken imperialism
 - b. win working class support for their (hidden) elitist agenda
 - c. hijack the national liberation struggle for a small minority (the elite)

- d. lay the basis for the elite to create and take over a “national” state
- 3. **the nationalism of ruling classes in postcolonial countries.** Once these elites win power, they almost always continue to maintain a nationalist ideology. This is promoted in the new nation-state formed after (“post”) colonialism. They do this to:
 - a. confuse the working class
 - b. win working class support for their elite agenda
 - c. build a strong “national” state

A very good example of this situation is the ANC today. The ANC presents itself as a revolutionary national liberation movement (even a “mass democratic movement,” MDM) fighting for the freedom of all blacks, especially the working class.

In reality, the ANC is a party of a tiny elite of black state managers and capitalists, a party of black billionaires. This party actively oppresses the black working class, through means like exploitation, police violence, retrenchments, bad schooling and services, outsourcing, cut-offs etc. Meanwhile, it works hand in glove with white capitalists and imperialist states.

So, it uses nationalism to confuse the masses. Jacob Zuma and Julius Malema pose as saviours of the working and poor people, when they are part and parcel of the ruling class that oppresses the masses.

9. Are We Against Nationalists?

Yes, we are against nationalism as a set of ideas and as a political project, because nationalism leads to a serious disaster for the working class.

We always reserve our right to criticise and to speak freely. We do not liquidate (dissolve) our politics into nationalism.

Therefore, we take sides with the working class *against the nationalists*.

We *always* oppose nationalist politics and ideas. We always explain clearly why we disagree with nationalism.

We always oppose nationalist control of the working class and its movements,

10. Can We Work With Nationalists?

Question: Do you think anarchists can work with nationalists? If so, how?

Well, we do sometimes.

In some circumstances we work *with the nationalists in common actions, while we oppose them politically.*

We can work with the nationalists are involved in progressive struggles i.e. struggles against oppression.

The nationalism of imperialist countries. We can never support imperialist nationalism, as this is always tied to the project of oppression. In imperialist countries, we seek to convince the working class that their national identity is valid, but that *nationalism* is not. They must oppose the imperialist state, as it is their enemy, as much as it is the enemy of the oppressed classes in other countries.

Nationalism in national liberation struggles. The main case in which nationalists are basically progressive is when they fight for the rights of oppressed nationalities or races i.e. in national liberation struggles.

The only time when the nationalists consistently do this, is when they are outside of power. (Once they are in power, they do not fight oppression, they promote it – see above).

That is, the main time that it is possible to work with nationalists is when the nationalists are involved in a national liberation (anti-colonial/ anti-imperialist) struggle

We can never work with imperialist nationalism, because this is always and everywhere oppressive.

But we can work with anti-colonial nationalism in some circumstances.

Anarchists can work alongside nationalists in national liberation struggles, so long as this benefits the working class and on condition that the anarchists retain complete political independence

In the fight against imperialism or national oppression, *we work with the nationalists* (that is, we work alongside them against imperialism), *but at the exact same time we oppose them politically.* Concretely, during a national liberation struggle this means:

1. anarchists join the national liberation struggle
2. anarchists promote anarchist ideas and methods
3. anarchists seek to turn the national liberation struggle into an anarchist revolution
4. anarchists work alongside the nationalists in the national liberation struggle (against the common imperialist enemy) i.e. **in the medium-term and ONLY on clearly defined terms, for limited goals that benefit the WORKING CLAS.**
5. anarchists defend the right of people to be nationalists and to an independent nationstate (because they defend free choice) but they consistently point out why nationalism is a dead-end for the working class
6. anarchists oppose repression of the nationalists by the colonial or imperial forces (again, because anarchists defend free choice)
7. anarchists **compete** with the nationalists for leadership of the national liberation struggle (anarchists maintain their political independence and seek to defeat the nationalists)

8. anarchists refuse to liquidate their independent positions in the name of “national unity,” the common anti-colonial front etc.
9. anarchists oppose cross-class alliances and they oppose the nation-state

The nationalism of ruling classes in postcolonial countries. The situation is different when (if) the nationalists achieve state power:

1. the nationalists are now part and parcel of the ruling class, by virtue of holding office. This places them opposite to the working class because they have now replaced the imperialist rule with local elite rule.
2. If the nationalists in power oppose imperialism they will do so at the expense of the working class
3. If the nationalists in power work with the imperialism they will do so at the expense of the working class
4. Therefore, while imperialism still remains AN enemy, the nationalists are NOW another enemy. While the anarchists worked with the nationalists against the imperialists beforehand (while undermining the nationalists) They now oppose BOTH the imperialists and nationalists directly, and NO LONGER work alongside the nationalists in a common front.
5. Anarchists therefore no longer defend the nationalists or cooperate with them. The only exception would be where the nationalists are involved in popular struggles — such struggles necessarily meaning a clash with the nationalist government e.g. in the unions or in the student movement. It is possible to work alongside the nationalists on particular actions, but without any longer-term cooperation i.e. now cooperation is only possible with **in the short-term** in these unusual circumstances.
6. The anarchists refuse the choice between the imperialists and the ruling nationalists. They take sides with the working class. Therefore, they take sides against both groups.
7. Anarchists oppose imperialist attacks on any nation-state (as part of their opposition to imperialism), but they do not align with any state in any situation (they align with the working class in both the imperialist and the attacked country, calling for “No War but the Class War”

While we defend the right of people to *choose* to have an independent State, and while we *support* the establishment of systems of free elections to governments as an immediate demand, we disagree with nationalism as it cannot provide freedom for the majority of people living under a situation of imperial domination.

11. Liquidating itself into nationalism :: the error of the SACP

The anarchist approach outlined above stressing the importance of anarchists having an independent political approach, and of fighting for anarchism first and foremost. Sometimes this means alliances with non-anarchists. This includes with nationalists, in some circumstances.

However, the anarchists always follow their own agenda. They refuse to become the junior partners of other forces. They refuse to “liquidate” their politics into nationalism. What is the point of being an anarchist if your political work means promoting the nationalists? What is the point of anarchism if you effectively adopt nationalism in place of anarchism? And since nationalism is basically a ruling class ideology, liquidating into it means serving the ruling class.

Communist Party history in SA

The SA Communist Party (SACP), which was formed in 1921 as the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), has on the contrary liquidated itself into the nationalist ANC, i.e. into nationalism.

In 1928, the CPSA decided that the immediate struggle was NOT for socialism, but for “national democracy” i.e. for a majority rule in a capitalist South Africa. This first “stage,” they said, must be achieved before the “stage” of socialism was possible.

From the late 1940s, the CPSA started to agree that the ANC would be the vehicle for the first “stage.” When the CPSA was banned, and reformed as the underground SACP, this approach got entrenched, and it remains in place nearly 70 years later.

Basically the CPSA/SACP embraced nationalism, not socialism, as its immediate goal. Socialism became something put off forever into the future.

Why is this liquidationism?

It is liquidationism because all SACP efforts are directed to ensuring the ANC gets into — and keeps — state power.

The SACP does not run any campaigns that can undermine the ANC. It only runs campaigns that ignore the ANC: for example, against private banks not giving services in poor areas, or in support of Cuba.

This is why, for example, the SACP does not join service protests. Service protests (outside the Western Cape) are almost always protests *against the ANC councillors*.

It is also why the SACP refuses to engage in any serious campaigns against ANC policies like e-tolling, privatisation.

It is also why the SACP supports almost all ANC policies, including the worst ANC policies, uncritically. For example, the

SACP marched on parliament to support the ANC’s Secrecy Bill, which would (if implemented) basically protect corrupt ANC leaders. This will keep the working class uninformed and unaware of the decisions made by the local ruling class in the state — decisions that the working class and poor do not have a say in making.

The SACP only conducts campaigns to strengthen the ANC: for example, using its influence in COSATU to get votes and funds for the ANC, and to suppress views against the ANC.

The SACP also focuses on strengthening the ANC as an organisation. Therefore, SACP leaders are continually “deployed” into the ANC to build the ANC. The majority of the SACP’s central committee serves in high positions in the NAC government, mainly as ministers or as deputy ministers, or as provincial MECs.

This is more important than building a strong SACP. These SACP leaders are in the ANC to serve the ANC, *not the SACP*. In fact, the SACP constitution forbids SACP members active in the ANC to form SACP caucuses. It states that these activists “deployed” to the ANC must obey ANC resolutions and rulings, *even if these contradict SACP policy*. Thus, SACP figures who are ANC ministers are instructed by the SACP to carry out ANC policies, like privatisation!

The result is that the SACP basically acts as a **service provider** to the ANC.

No amount of radical talk using revolutionary language can disguise the fact that in reality the SACP is the ANC's junior partner, and does what the ANC tells it to do. Communism is not on the SACP agenda. ANC support is. What, then, is the point of the SACP?

This disastrous situation has been ongoing since the late 1940s. The CPSA was much bigger than the ANC in the 1930s and 1940s, with much stronger structures, control over the main black unions and over many white unions, a weekly newspaper, strong presence in township struggles, and seasoned militants. Once the CPSA/ SACP decided to support the ANC as vehicle of the first "stage," it handed this over to the tiny nationalist ANC. That is how the ANC became a mass party in the 1950s!

12. Further Discussion: Nationalist Politics Cannot Deliver Freedom From Internal Domination

The State is a hierarchical structure of coercion that concentrates power in the hands of a small ruling class. It defends the class system and the forms of oppression (e.g. sexism) that the class system generates. Rule by the State makes it impossible for the mass of the people to actively participate in the decisions that affect their conditions of life.

Decolonisation on the nationalist model — carving a new national state out of the imperialist state — delivers power to a new "national" ruling class. It does not provide real selfdetermination for the working class and peasant majority. It cannot, because the state is part of the system of class oppression, no matter if run by imperialism or by a local "national" elite,

In some ways, the situation with a nation state replacing imperialism is better than direct imperialist rule. For example, naked national oppression is usually removed.

This is an important gain.

However, it is not enough.

Even if nationalists take up socialist sounding slogans in order to win working class support, the interests of workers are not central to these movements.

Nationalist politics hides the very real class differences that exist even amongst colonised populations, and open the door for the frustrated local elite to take state power.

Nationalism is a politics of the frustrated local elite who seek to build a mass base for their own class programme by arguing that class alliances and State power are the way to resolve the genuine anti-colonial grievances of the popular masses.

In power, the nationalists continue

- elite rule of society
- exploiting the working class
- inequality in terms of incomes and decision-making power
- oppression of working class women
- usually, the nationalists also impose national oppression onto minority groups (examples: the San in Botswana, the whites in Zimbabwe, and the blacks in Sudan).

The class agenda of nationalism is to replace foreign elites with local elites.

Some people say there are no real ruling class in the postcolonial countries.

For example, this argument sometimes pops up in the African context in the form of the claim that the holders of state power who currently govern the country are really only a “petty bourgeoisie” (a middle class).

This is just plain wrong.

As anarchists we do not accept the idea that the only criterion for determining class status is economic power.

Any group with state power is by definition part of the ruling class.

Also, the postcolonial elites *do* control substantial parts of the local economy, both through state ownership and control of key industries such as mines and railways, and through private companies.

The claim that there is no “real” local ruling class is also inaccurate as it ignores the massive disparities in wealth and power that exist everywhere in postcolonial countries — differences that the nationalists always try to hide.

A huge amount of wealth accrues to a tiny section of the local population. [*stats showing wealth differentials???*]

13. Further Discussion: Postcolonial Nationalist Ruling Classes And Imperialism.

Question:

Who controls countries of the “developing world,” i.e. most African, Asian and South American countries? Why do you think so?

Postcolonial ruling classes often work with the imperialist ruling classes, but they are NOT just tools of the imperialist ruling classes. These local ruling classes have their *own interests and agendas* and work with the imperialist ruling classes *when it suits those interests and agendas*

The local ruling class who hijack national liberation struggles often use a strong antiimperialist rhetoric. This is to mislead the masses into blaming their problems on people outside the country. Obviously this is very useful to the local ruling class!

But the local ruling class often (although not always) sees its survival and prosperity, its economic and political power, as requiring close ties with imperialism.

For example, under colonialism, many countries were structured to export (sell overseas) raw materials. For example, Zambia produces copper.

The national ruling class will continue to export those materials in order to keep their economies functioning, fund the state and enrich the elite.

Often national ruling classes work with the multinational corporations, which they joins in business ventures, and to which they sells or rent land and mineral rights, and upon whom they impose taxes and bribes. Getting these companies to invest means more jobs, technology and business opportunities.

They are funded by IMF/World Bank loans and other forms of aid.

They enter military alliances to access weapons, training and military aid.

The national ruling classes want to get more powerful, and eventually move away frm raw material production. They want to create their own multinational companies and banks. Partnerships with imperialist ruling classes, in the ways described above (trade, investments, loans, military cooperation) are good ways to achieve these aims.

All of this requires, in turn, that national ruling classes dominate and exploit the working class in their own countries, the people who do the actual work in the agricultural, mining and manufacturing industries.

When the masses rise up, the local ruling class is always happy to call on the aid of their friends in the imperialist states for aid.

However, local ruling classes have their *own interests and agenda* in acting in these ways,

Sometimes, these own *own interests and agenda* will lead to a break with imperialism. For example, the local elite may feel it is trapped in an unfair relationship of selling raw materials, and cannot escape.

In such situations, good examples of which are Cuba from 1959 onwards, South Africa in 1961, Libya from the 1970s, Nicaragua and Iran in the 1980s and Zimbabwe in the 2000s. It may rebel and follow its own road (Libya, Iran), turn to another imperialist power (Cuba turned to Russiam Mugabe is turning to China) or collapse (Nicaragua).

But all these anti-imperialist regimes were and are based on the repression and suffering of the mass of the people, that is to say, the working class. All keep power in the hands of a political and economic elite. Sometimes foreign property is nationalised, but then it just goes to the local elite – never the working class. At most power is transferred from foreign elites to local elites.

Even if the local ruling class is against the imperialists, it must still maintain a social system based on the oppression of the working class. It is these ruling classes who beat workers, throw people off the land, shoot students etc..

And given a choice between working class revolution, and striking a deal with imperialism, they will always choose imperialism as it is in their direct class interests.

Meanwhile, imperialist ruling classes will put aside whatever conflicts they have with a local ruling class if continuing on a confrontational path threatens the bigger picture of continued State/capitalist rule. Thus, the US-led forces withdrew from their invasion of Iraq in 1991 when deserting soldiers joined with peasants and workers in the North and South of the country to establish workers councils (“shoras”) and raise radical demands. This withdrawal provided Saddam Hussein with the opportunity to slaughter the local rebels.

Even if the local ruling classes are anti-imperialist, we would still fight them because their existence as a ruling class is based on the dispossession and exploitation of the majority of the population, which is the working class and working peasantry.

14. The Way Forward

We, anarchists

- fight against all forms of oppression
- naturally this means that we oppose imperialism, as well as imperialist nationalism
- naturally this also means that we fight against national oppression, and immerse themselves in national liberation struggles
- at times, during a national liberation struggle, we can work with nationalists on certain issues
- however, we always maintain their political independence, and always aim to steer the national liberation struggle towards the anarchist revolution
- this is because, short of anarchist revolution, the majority of people in the oppressed nation or race — the working class- will never be truly free
- when the nationalists are in power, the anarchists must fight them, as they are part of the ruling class
- in exceptional cases, some alliances may be possible, but the overall anarchist aim remains: counterpower + counterculture
- we respect cultural diversity, but always fight to promote the progressive/ democratic/ anti-authoritarian elements in cultures, and against backward/ hierarchical/ oppressive elements
- we recognise the diversity of humankind, but always stress the need for internationalism: regardless of culture, the working class in one country always has more in common with the working class in another country, than members of the same culture from the ruling class
- Only an international struggle by the working class, regardless of cultures, race or state boundaries can free the world.

Bakunin Sums This Up Well

He declared “*strong sympathy for any national uprising against any form of oppression,*” stating that every people “*has the right to be itself... no one is entitled to impose its costume, its customs, its languages and its laws.*”⁴

“*The right of freely uniting and separating is the first and most important of all political rights.*”⁵

⁴ Bakunin, quoted in Guerin, *Anarchism: from theory to practice* p. 68

⁵ Quoted in Eltzbacher, *Anarchism: exponents of the anarchist philosophy* p. 81

For Bakunin, national liberation had to be achieved “*as much in the economic as in the political interests of the masses.*” If the national liberation struggle is carried out with “ambitious intent to set up a powerful State,” or if “it is carried out without the people and must therefore depend for success on a privileged class,” it will become a “retrogressive, disastrous, counter- revolutionary movement.” He believed that:⁶

Every exclusively political revolution — be it in defence of national independence or for internal change... — that does not aim at the immediate and real political and economic emancipation of people will be a false revolution. Its objectives will be unattainable and its consequences reactionary.

For Bakunin, the “*statist path involving the establishment of separate ... States*” was “*entirely ruinous for the great masses of the people*” because it did not abolish class power but simply changed the nationality of the ruling class.⁷

⁶ Bakunin, “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism,” p. 99

⁷ Bakunin, “Statism and Anarchy,” p. 343

Module 5: Anarchism & Its Rivals Part 2: Why Anarchists oppose Marxism, the SACP, Trotskyism and Social Democracy.

1. Rivals to anarchism in the working class and poor

Last month we discussed how people suffering from oppression and domination have always organised to fight for better daily conditions of work and life for themselves and their communities. But we also said that in doing so, they have adopted a variety of different ideas to guide their struggle.

Nationalism (discussed last time) is just one of those sets of ideas; its aim is to unite all the members of a nation, regardless of class, for their own national government (e.g. against colonial rule, for an Afrikaner “volkstaat,” for a “New South Africa” etc). The ANC, PAC, NP and the black consciousness movement are examples of movements based on nationalism.

In this session we are going to look at 3 different sets of ideas whose aim is the **abolition of the system of capitalism**: two versions of **Marxism** (mainstream Marxism (SACP) and Trotskyism), as well as **social democracy**.

Anarchism is also one of those sets of ideas that has had influence amongst people and movements struggling against oppression in history. But *only anarchism has shown an ability to fundamentally free the working class*. That is why we must fight the battle of ideas to ensure that anarchism becomes the leading idea of the working class and poor.

2. Marxism

Marxism is one of the most important rivals to anarchism because is currently the most influential idea within the left in South Africa, and even internationally. It is the official ideology of the SACP and Cosatu, and it is embraced in various forms by the majority of social movements and other political organisations – even if in many cases ordinary workers and the poor are not fully aware of what Marxism is actually all about. Although Marxism from the late 1910s came to enjoy a lot of legitimacy because it was associated with real and living “socialism” in the Soviet Union, it wasn’t always the most influential ideology. Anarchism was by far the most influential left ideology for much of the 1800s and early 1900s.

2.1 What is “Marxism”?

Marxism is an ideology based on the ideas and writings of Karl Marx (and also Friedrich Engels, Marx’s close friend). Marx was an important German philosopher who spent most of his life (between 1818 – 1883) in a library writing about his ideas on politics and the economy. But Marx

didn't see his ideas as a opinion – he saw his theory as *scientifically* true. He believed that he had discovered the “laws” governing society, in the same way that Issac Newton discovered the laws governing gravity. Because of this, a lot of Marx's work was based on trying to analyse history and to understand how the world changes over time.

There are a lot of important things we can learn from Marx. A lot of economic theory in anarchism comes from the writings of Marx!

In this module we are going to concentrate on the following aspects of Marxism:

- Exploitation and class society
- Historical materialism and economic determinism
- Means/mode/forces and relations of production
- Stages of history
- Theory of Revolution and the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat”
- Trade unions, social movements and the vanguard party
- Problems with Marxism
- Versions of Marxism: SACP, Trotskyism

Don't Worry! Although these words look difficult, their meanings are not that complicated!

2.2. Exploitation and class

By this stage you probably already know what exploitation is. The theory of exploitation is one of the most important aspects of Marxism, and a theory that anarchists accept.

Recall that we discussed how the world is divided into 2 main classes – the working class (or “proletariat”) and the ruling class (or “bourgeoisie”/ “capitalists”). For Marxists, class is defined by *ownership*: the capitalists own all the land, all the factories and all the farms while the proletariat owns nothing. All the ordinary working class person has if he/she wants to put food on the table, is his/her ability to work for a wage. And so, in this way, the proletariat must sell its labour to the capitalists (who usually do no work at all) in return for a wage. The capitalists, although they don't even work, earn much more than the workers – because they get profit.

But where does the profit come from? It comes from work of the workers. When workers get paid a wage, that wage is less than the real value of their work is. So basically profit is what is skimmed off the top of the wages, or stolen from the workers by the capitalists. All because their resources and land were stolen from them in the first place!

You might ask how this situation came to be? Well, over a long period in history, through a long and uneven process Marx called “primitive accumulation,” the ruling class came to take over and claim ownership of all the land and resources. This happened due to many mechanisms, but mainly it allowed capitalists to force ordinary people off their land. This was not a peaceful process; it always involved some form of plunder, conquest and enslavement.

Exploitation is the word describing this double robbery: the ruling class lives like parasites, by exploiting the working class

This is why Pierre-Joseph Proudhon said that **“Property is Theft”**

Revision

What is the difference between the Marxist and the Anarchist definition of class?

2.3 “Historical Materialism” and “Economic Determinism”

Marx and Engels said that if we want to understand the evolution of history, then we need to look at the “material basis” of societies. By this they meant that the nature and structure of *the economy*, in any era, always determines everything else – including the way people think and the way that politics and government are structured.

The economy/economics = how people organise production, consumption and allocation of resources.

So, “historical materialism” is the *method* of understanding and analysing the world which takes the economy as the starting point. “Economic determinism” simply means that the economy *determines* everything else; that the way everything is currently organised in society is organised that way because it is GOOD FOR CAPITALISTS AND CAPITALISM. This is why Marxists say that the state is the “agent” of capitalists – that it exists to protect the interests of capitalists, but is not actually *part* of the ruling class.

Think: What is the difference between this understanding and the way anarchists understand the state?

Group Exercise

Many Marxists argue that apartheid was good for capitalism and capitalists. Do you agree? Discuss in groups and write down your answer.

2.4. Means, mode, forces and relations of production

Marx developed 4 concepts that we need to understand:

- **Means of production** = resources e.g. land, factories, farms, machinery
- **Forces of production** = resources *plus* labour (as another resource)
- **Relations of production** = How the production process is organised in society (class relations)
- **Mode of production** = an economic and political system which has its own specific *relations of production*.

Do these terms sound familiar?

So, to give just one example:

Capitalism is one *mode of production*. Under capitalism, the *relations of production* are based on **private ownership** of the *means of production*, the existence of a **market** where goods exchanged, and production for **profit** and **accumulation** of wealth. The *forces of production* combine these privately owned resources with **waged labour**.

Note: there have been other *modes of production* which have different *relations of production*. Marx identified, for example, the “feudal” mode of production (based on feudal lords and serfs) and the “Asiatic” mode of production, which he claimed existed only in Asia.

Marx and Engels did not account for some modes of production because they mainly focused on history in Europe

2.5. Stages of History

Marxists argue that history is **linear**. This means that it goes in a *straight line* from the earliest point to the latest point, and that therefore history has a *direction*, and progresses in *stages*. Technically, we call this “teleology.” According to Marxist theory, all history everywhere (with some exceptions) follows this basic pattern:



Now, the theory of *historical materialism* says that from the beginning of each stage, the *forces of production* begin to **develop and expand**. Remember, the key ingredient in the forces of production is human labour. At some point, because of their expansion, these forces begin to become counter productive; they begin to come into conflict with the *relations of production* (or class relations). This process produces massive **class struggle** and **crisis**. When class struggle and crisis become too great, the entire *mode of production* is overthrown, and a new mode comes into being. And the process starts again...

To put this in simpler terms let's take the **capitalist mode** as an example:

At the beginning of capitalism, there were many small capitalists with small companies, all employing some workers. When we said the **forces of production expand**, here we mean that because capitalists were forced to compete, some of them were forced close, and others were absorbed into bigger and stronger companies. Eventually, capitalism developed so much, that many companies came to be huge monopolies and oligopolies employing tens or hundreds of thousands of workers.

Monopoly: when one company controls a whole industry

Oligopoly: when a few companies control an industry

When we say that the **forces of production expand**, under capitalism we are ultimately saying that big changes occur within industry, and within the working class. For example, the development of capitalism meant that millions of workers were brought side by side with millions of other workers — all doing the same horrible work. And, because of this competition between capitalists, wages decrease so much (in the pursuit of profit) that workers can't even buy the goods that they themselves produce. This leads to massive economic crises because capitalists are not able to sell all the goods being produced.

This is called a “crisis of overproduction”

When we say that the **forces of production come into conflict with the relations of production**, we are saying the existence of huge numbers of workers grouped together in massive industries (forces of production), brings about a situation in which workers start to challenge the *class structure (relations of production)* of capitalism, and therefore capitalism itself. They do this by forming trade unions and socialist political parties that can challenge and eventually even overthrow capitalism.

This is why Marxists talk about the “contradictions” in the relations of production. What they mean is that each mode of production actually contains weaknesses that will ultimately bring it down. In this case, the development of capitalism results in the formation of trade unions and political parties on the one hand, coupled with huge economic crises on the other. So, when you hear the phrase that “capitalism creates its own gravediggers,” you will know what it means!

This is why, according to mainstream Marxism, it is not possible to “skip” stages. You need feudalism before you can have capitalism, and you need capitalism before you can have socialism, you need socialism before you can have communism — this is because the previous stage creates the basis for the next. Therefore, according to Marxists, socialism is not something that we can bring about because we **want** it; but rather an **inevitable** fact of life!

This leaves us rather powerless, doesn't it?

Discussion point

Marxists argued that slavery and colonialism were “**progressive.**” Can you explain why?

At this point it is important to acknowledge the minor differences in the theories of Marx and Engels to other Marxist theories that came afterwards. For example, Lenin (the leader of the Soviet Union from 1922–1924) made some important changes to the way that we understand colonialism.

Where Marx and Engels argued that colonialism was *good*, because it brought stagnating “backwards” societies into the march of history, Lenin argued the opposite. According to Lenin (and other “Marxist-Leninists”), colonialism was actually *bad*. He said that in its “death throes,” capitalism had tried to preserve itself by reaching out into the “Third World” through colonialism, and therefore that imperialism (colonialism) was *holding back* the development of the forces of production. Lenin’s argument was therefore that colonialism was not progressive, and that the first task of the workers was to get rid of colonialism.

This is why people talk of the “**two stage revolution**”

For the mainstream Marxist currents throughout history this is to be done by creating a “national democratic revolution” (NDR) – although they don’t always use this term. This is a *capitalist political revolution* that would allow capitalism to develop unrestrained until it digs its own grave. This means that there must be **two stages**: one capitalist stage against colonialism, and only then is socialism possible.

We must note that Marxists have differed about **who** should be responsible for carrying out the “national democratic revolution,” and how fast this should happen. Some Marxists say that it should be a **nationalist** party (like the ANC), and others say it should be the “**vanguard party**,” or the “**mass workers’ party**.” Some say that there are two distinct phases, and others claim that the anti-imperialist capitalist phase should be “sped up” and somehow “linked” to the socialist phase. Although different groups of Marxists say that they differ widely on this issue (for example Trotskyists claim to oppose the NDR approach), in fact all Marxists believe in teleology, and all believe that anti-imperialist capitalist development is necessary **before** socialism can be achieved.

2.5. Theory of Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat

“Revolutions” happen in the process of the transition from one mode of production to another. “Revolution” really means a big change in the way that society is organised. There have been revolutions in the past (since we have already moved through various stages). For example, we can say that in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, a revolution occurred because the feudal lords and serfs were replaced by the bourgeoisie and proletariat.

However, all previous modes of production since “primitive communism” have been class systems – where one class lives off the work of another. Therefore these revolutions have only been *political revolutions* – because they only changed the ruling class, and did not actually change the basic class system (we still have a ruling class and a working class).

The big difference for Marxists in the transition from capitalism to socialism, is that the basic class relations are supposedly abolished. This is why Marxists often say that it is the great duty, or “historical mission,” of the workers in capitalist industry to make a revolution: by seizing state power and setting up the “dictatorship of the proletariat” or “workers state.” This new state, which comes to power through the revolution, will not be the agent of capitalists but rather the agent of workers!

After the revolution, the workers government will get rid of all the capitalists by *nationalising* all the industry — or putting the whole economy under the control of the state. Basically, this means that instead of being run by private capitalists, all the companies and industries will be run by the government (like Eskom). Marxists believe that this will get rid of exploitation, and therefore get rid of the class system because workers, through “their” state, will be paid the full value of their labour.

Writing Exercise

What could be the problems with an economy run entirely by the state?

2.6. Trade Unions, Social Movements and the “Vanguard” Party

We said before that for the Marxists, the ultimate objective is to seize state power and to set up a workers state, or “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Although Marxists *claim* that the proletariat is the only class capable of achieving socialism, they do not actually believe that the mass of workers and poor (organised into trade unions), or the poor (in the social movements) is actually *capable* of doing this themselves; that is, Marxists think the organisations of the workers and poor are *unable* to be revolutionary.

In fact, Marx called the unemployed, the self-employed and other petty traders etc., the “lumpen proletariat.” He said that the peasants and lumpens were not revolutionary, even “reactionary,” forces that might undermine the revolution!

Marxists argue that there are many reasons for this:

- Workers and poor sell out and get misled easily
- Trade unions are stuck in the capitalist system — they only negotiate terms of exploitation and don’t really challenge exploitation itself, i.e. they are reformist
- Trade unions are based in different sectors of the economy, and they can’t overcome divisions between say, miners and autoworkers
- That the existence of trade unions relies on the existence of capitalism, and that therefore trade unions will not want to abolish capitalism

- That because of these factors – workers can only develop reformist ideas, or “trade union consciousness”

“The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e. the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation etc.”

Lenin, VI. [1902] 1961, “What is to Be Done? Burning questions of our movement” in Lenin’s *Collected Works*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, Volume 1. p. 17–18

Because of these factors, Marxists say that only the *revolutionary political party* can take power *in the name of the workers*. This relates to their view that revolutionary ideas do not come out of struggle; they were “discovered” and developed by the middle class intelligentsia and were brought to workers from *outside* the workers movement – by the “revolutionary vanguard” armed with scientific theory. The revolutionary party (made up of this “intelligentsia” and an “advanced” section of the working class that are able to comprehend these “scientific,” or Marxist, ideas) are the only force that is able to lead the revolution.

The logic of this position is very dangerous: if the party has a monopoly on political wisdom and correctness, disagreements with the line of the party must then constitute a “false” consciousness. In other words, the party knows better about what the working class wants than the working class itself. And, anyone who opposes the party must actually be “counter-revolutionary”!

This is why so many anarchist revolutionaries in the Russian Revolution were sent to concentration camps or executed.

3. Marxism in the South African Context

In South Africa, Marxism is mainly represented by Cosatu, and by the SACP (Cosatu’s Alliance partner). There are also some other small Marxist political groups – many of these consider themselves to be Trotskyites; they identify with the theories of Leon Trotsky – another Marxist theorist and leader of the Soviet Union (see next section).

3.1. The SACP

The SACP (then CPSA) was established in 1921 in South Africa. It is interesting to note that syndicalists helped to set it up. This was because many anarchists all over the world, including in South Africa, were confused by the success of the Russian Revolution. In this period many anarchists looked to Bolshevism – a form of Marxism based on the ideas of the Bolshevik party in Russia – for inspiration. In the early period, the CPSA contained a variety of ideas, including anarchism and syndicalism and Marxism.

However, since then, the CPSA, and later SACP (the same organisation reformed underground after it was banned) have come to base its ideas and programme on **Marxism**.

You might recall some things about the SACP from our discussion last month. One of the points we made then was that the SACP’s politics were/are “liquidationist” where the SACP delivers all

its efforts into building the ANC and ensuring that the ANC retains state power. It does this by supporting ANC campaigns, by campaigning for the ANC as opposed to itself in elections, by deploying all its own cadre into the ANC, and by committing itself to “swelling the ranks” of the ANC etc. Basically the SACP embraces nationalism, not socialism, as its immediate goal. Socialism became something put off forever into the future.

But the last session didn’t explain *why* the SACP does this, even when it is obvious that it has an inferior position in the alliance, as a “junior partner” to the ANC.

As you will see below, the answer for this practice can be found in its theory: **Marxism**.

In 1928, under influence from the Soviet Union, the SACP adopted a theory called the “Native Republic Thesis.” This was essentially just a South African version of the theory developed by Lenin – that the immediate struggle was not for socialism, but rather for an anti-imperialist capitalist stage. This is called the “two-stage” theory, and the reason for it stems from the view that you cannot “skip” a stage in history.

Later, from about the late 1940s, the SACP began to see the ANC as the vehicle for completing this national democratic (capitalist) stage. Soon after, it started devoting all its energy into building the ANC, which was a very small organisation in the 1930s and 1940s. The ANC actually has the SACP to thank for its mass support.

When it got banned in 1950s, the SACP adopted a theory called “Colonialism of a Special Type” (CST). The SACP’s new theory built on the “Native Republic” thesis; it held that South Africa was operating essentially under colonial conditions – and that therefore the classic theory developed by Lenin applied. But rather than being colonised by an external country, it was *internally* colonised by the resident, permanently settled, whites.

What CST meant was that this struggle for national liberation was not waged between distinct territories, colony and coloniser, but *within* the borders of one country, between two nations, black and white. Struggling against the white “coloniser” would lay the basis for the transition to socialism – at some undefined future point in time.

CST theory formalised the role of the ANC as the *leader* in the “national democratic” struggle. In practice, it translated into displacing class struggle by racial/“national” struggle, and into unquestioning SACP support for the nationalist ANC at the head of the largest possible, cross-class, nationalist coalition.

It has been 70 years, and the SACP still claims we are in the national democratic phase, led by the ANC

Despite their support for the ANC in practice, the SACP claims to be *the* true “vanguard” party that alone has the ability liberate the South African masses. Like with the main thrust of Marxism historically, the SACP argues that it alone can define true and scientific strategy for revolution, based on its privileged position as deliverer of “scientific” Marxist theory. This is ultimately accepted by Cosatu as well.

FOSATU 1979 – 1985

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a trade union federation called Fosatu. This Federation adamantly opposed the view that workers should have to delay their struggle for socialism to some undefined distant future. They also refused to tie themselves to the nationalist project of the ANC because they understood that the ANC could

not be pro-working class. In fact, this federation took a position very close to anarchism! They argued for a working class national liberation struggle that was at the same time a struggle for socialism!

4. Why anarchists disagree with Marxists and the SACP

There are some things that anarchists and Marxists agree on. But there are important reasons why we do not accept all aspects of the Marxist analysis, and especially the Marxist political programme – including that of the SACP.

Let us explain the main anarchist critiques of Marxism and the SACP:

1. **While the economy is important, it does not explain everything about society.** There are many examples of laws that are quite irrelevant to the economy. There are also many examples of policies that are actually bad for capitalists and capitalism. For example, the restriction on skills for blacks by apartheid government was actually opposed by white capitalists because they were forced to import skilled white labourers from overseas, which was more expensive!
2. **History does not happen in stages or have a direction.** Marx argued that revolutions occur only when the forces of production are fully “developed” – so he predicted that the socialist revolution would happen in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe. But in reality it was Russia, a rural peasant economy with very low levels of industrialisation, where the revolution broke out. So Marx’s theory was actually *disproven* by history.
3. Linked to this, anarchists believe that **socialism is not inevitable**. We believe that ordinary people have the power to decide what they want for their lives, and to make this a reality. We do not believe that we should sit around and wait for the “forces and relations of production” to “expand” before we can create socialism. We believe that revolutionary people, with the will to change society and revolutionary (anarchist) *ideas*, make revolutions, and that these can occur at any point in history. Because of this **anarchists disagree with the whole notion of the National Democratic Revolution**.
4. The **state is not simply the “agent” of capitalists**. Like Marxists, we argue that the function of the state is to defend the class system. But this means that it is only necessary in a situation where a minority ruling class wants to maintain its rule over a majority working class. If the “dictatorship of the proletariat” was truly the expression of the power of workers and the abolition of class, there would be no need for it (nevermind the Soviet army, or a secret police). In fact, the Soviet Union even invaded and colonised, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia and several other countries in Eastern Europe!
5. Related, **the state cannot be used by the working class**. A “workers state,” or “dictatorship of the proletariat,” like any other state, will in reality be a state by and for the ruling class. The radicals that join the state will be changed by joining the state; they change their ideas and vie w.s. **The former “liberators” of the people will become their oppressors.** Bakunin predicted that Marx’s “Dictatorship OF the proletariat would very soon become a “Dictatorship OVER the proletariat.” He was right!

6. **Nationalisation does not mean socialism.** Nationalisation simply means that one boss is replaced another – the state capitalist replaces the private capitalist. Even in the Soviet Union, where almost the entire economy was owned by the state – the working people were still exploited and oppressed. This is why we say that the Soviet Union was state capitalist.
7. Anarchists completely disagree with the political programme of the Marxists, which is about substituting the vanguard, or Communist party and its “scientific” ideas for the broader working class. The idea that only a group of “advanced” workers and other intellectuals is able to properly understand society, decide on a way forward, and take power *in the name of the workers* is **authoritarian and elitist**.

Although we do not disagree with the need for a political organisation that can fight for anarchist ideas within the broader social movements and trade unions, we say that ordinary working class people, through the mass organisations, must liberate themselves and establish *self-management* of the economy and society – rather than a “workers state” and nationalisation.

8. **Trade Unions can be revolutionary.** Unlike Marxists, we believe that revolutionary consciousness is not something only a few intellectuals can possess. Consciousness is something that is produced through the experience struggling against capitalism and by self education. The anarchist trade unions in the Spanish Revolution were a central force in the revolution. We say that Marxism actually shows a lot of *contempt* for workers and their unions by arguing that they are inherently reformist.
9. **Anarchists don’t dismiss the peasants, or the unemployed, self employed** as non revolutionary or “reactionary” forces. Because all of these groups do not fundamentally benefit from capitalism, they have an interest in overthrowing it and have an essential role in ensuring the success of the revolution.
10. Anarchists don’t reject alliances with non-anarchists – including with Marxists in certain cases. However, **we always follow and fight for our own agenda**. We refuse to become the junior partners of other forces. We refuse to “liquidate” our politics into nationalism. What is the point of being an anarchist if your political work means promoting the nationalists?

Anarchism is not the life work of one philosopher (like Marxism is to Marx) – it is the product of the experience and conclusions of many generations of workers and thinkers! That’s why it isn’t called “Bakuninism”!

5. Trotskyism

Trotskyists, who are a kind of Marxists, claim to have the same goal as we anarchists: **a world-wide revolution by the working class and all the oppressed, against the capitalists and their states** (including the remnants of the “Communist” state capitalist regimes) – and to want to replace these states with associations of councils. They claim that they stand for “*socialism*”

from below”, and claim to “believe that the power to win real change comes from below...” Anarchists agree with this.

But they ruin it because of their methods: their attempt to re-create the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, which they often refer to as the “**mass workers’ party**”, and to do what Lenin and Trotsky did in Russia. However, they are very critical of Stalin – who came after Lenin and Trotsky – and claim that Stalin’s Marxism is fundamentally different to that of Lenin’s. This is not really true – there is a lot of consistency between the ideas of Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin, even if minor differences exist. When they deviate from wanting to create a “mass workers’ party,” it is only to use social democratic methods (which will be discussed later).

5.1 Is Trotskyism “socialism from below”?

If Trotskyism is “*socialism from below*” – as some claim – then why do anarchists reject it? Simply because its rhetoric hides an authoritarian reality. Marx dismissed the famous anarchist Bakunin’s vision of revolution being “*the free organisation of the working masses from below upwards*” as “*nonsense*.” Lenin agreed. He even admitted that it was anarchism, not Marxism, that stressed socialism from below. In practice, Trotskyists believe in creating a “mass workers’ party” that can take power, either through force or through parliament, and impose its programme – from the top down – on the masses. What Trotskyists should really say is that they stand for “socialism from **above as well as** from below.” But anarchists would argue that we can’t do both: rule from above will triumph, unless it is completely defeated.

There are many different variants of Trotskyism. The main tradition of Trotskyism sees the Soviet Union under Stalin as being a “**degenerated workers’ state**” – that is a workers state that has become compromised so that it is not “pure.” This means that they see the Bolshevik Party and state as becoming a *bureaucratic* layer but not a new *ruling* class.

State-capitalism is a system where the state takes over ownership of the means of production and operates them on a profit-making basis in a commodity economy.

Some “unorthodox” Trotskyists reject Trotsky’s theory that the Soviet Union under Stalin remained a “degenerated workers’ state.” These types, like anarchists, see the Soviet Union, as “**state capitalist**.” Where we differ, however, is that anarchists see the Soviet Union as being state-capitalist from the moment the Bolsheviks took power, and not just under Stalin. Trotskyists think that under Lenin the Soviet Union was still a workers’ state.

This is one thing that separates Trotskyists from the SACP and other Leninists. This section will only deal broadly with this topic, and try to demonstrate why anarchists believe Trotskyist theory and practice cannot bring about a worldwide revolution by the working class and oppressed, and therefore why it is a rival ideology to anarchism.

5.2 Why do anarchists reject the idea of “a workers’ state”?

For anarchists, any idea of the “workers’ state” – whether “degenerate” or not – is authoritarian in itself because it means a minority vanguard, or “mass workers’ party” establishing themselves in power – within the state – and imposing their own rule on the workers from above.

The Trotskyist goal is still the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Even though many claim that this can co-exist with workers control of industry, Trotskyists continue to support the idea of a centralised party, ruling a centralised state, managing a centralised planned economy, ultimately on an international scale. This would be a monstrously bureaucratic, inefficient, and oppressive system! Anarchists believe that this is incompatible with our goals of a worldwide revolution by the popular classes against capitalism and the state – and cannot lead to freedom and socialism. Instead we propose international federations of associations, decentralised communities and regions, worker run industries – all planned from the bottom up by negotiation among councils.

Trotskyists seek to create a “**workers’ state**”. But there is no such thing as a “workers’ state.” Engels defined the state as a “public force” which “consists not merely of armed men but also of material appendages, prisons, and coercive institutions of all kinds...” Its officials are “organs of society **standing above society**....representatives of a power which estranges them from society....**The state is an organisation for the protection of the possessing class against the non-possessing class.**” Does this sound like something the working class can use for its liberation? Certainly not! As we have demonstrated in other modules, history has shown us that all attempts to use the state to free the workers and poor have ended in disaster. Those who occupy the state end up inheriting the same power and privileges of those they replaced. They develop interests different to those of the working class, and will do anything to defend their new class interests. There are plenty of examples of this in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The ruling class needs the state because they are a minority who needs to hold down the majority in order to maintain their class position and access to wealth and power. The state is only necessary when a minority wants to rule over the majority. The working class and its allies are the big majority. In a revolution, we will not need a bureaucratic, military machine – a so-called “workers’ state” – to hold down the pro-capitalist minority. We will need the self-organisation of the workers and the oppressed themselves: workplace and neighbourhood committees, federated councils, and an armed people, a workers’ militia. This is not a state.

Group Exercise

Many Marxists argue that the state can be controlled by the workers, through the vanguard or “mass workers’ party.” Do you agree? Discuss in groups and write down your ideas.

5.3 Was the USSR a “degenerate workers’ state” or not?

The Russian Revolution was made by the workers and peasants. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky (who were both followers of Marx), rode on the back of it, hijacked it – and then suppressed its achievements of self-management of free soviets. It ended up as a totalitarian nightmare. Because the Bolsheviks aimed for a state, they ended up with a state – a bureaucratic monster that destroyed the Russian Revolution. Some groups of Trotskyists often blame this, not on the Bolsheviks they admire, nor on their poor strategy and tactics, but on “objective circumstances”

– Russia’s poverty, the failure of the revolution to spread, etc. All of this was real, but it is also true that the Bolsheviks never advocated multiparty/multi-tendency soviets, workers’ rank-and-file management of industry, independent trade unions, etc. By 1921, when Lenin and Trotsky were in power, they **outlawed all other parties** (and jailed and massacred the anarchists), **banned all caucuses inside the one and only legal party**, the Bolshevik Communist Party, and **insisted that the unions be controlled by the party**. Lenin and actually put bosses back in the factories, and crushed worker self-management, right at the beginning of the revolution – in 1918.

It was Lenin and Trotsky who legalised the single party police state! **Stalin only built on what they had created.** We anarchists argue that “Stalinist” dictatorship is the logical and inevitable outcome of a centralised, bureaucratic state – even when it is called a “worker’s state.” Trotsky and his Left Opposition fought Stalin on some issues, while agreeing with the single-party dictatorship. Until his death, Trotsky continued to regard Stalin’s dictatorship as a “worker’s state” because the economy was nationalised.

It is wrong to consider it a “workers’ state” just because the economy was nationalised. What makes capitalism is not just the private ownership of the *means of production*, but also **exploitation** through wage slavery in a commodity economy.

While unorthodox Trotskyists claim to be for a “democratic” “workers’ state,” they believe that Lenin and Trotsky ran a “workers’ state” when they established a one-party police state after the Russian Revolution. In fact, they believe that the Soviet Union continued to be a “workers’ state” under Stalin up until 1929 when he began a major industrialisation drive. Therefore they believe that there can be a so-called workers’ state, a rule of the working class, even after the workers have lost all political power for years. Someone else, such as the party, can stand-in for the working class, because the party knows best. This is no better than the views of the orthodox Trotskyists (who defend the Soviet Union). So, both “orthodox” and “unorthodox” Trotskyists agree with the authoritarian and undemocratic vision that a vanguard party must take control of the state in order to achieve socialism.

Although Trotskyists disagree on whether the USSR under Stalin was state-capitalist or a “degenerate workers’ state,” Trotskyist groups in South Africa today continue to support calls for “nationalisation under worker control.” They do this either because they think it is a step towards socialism, or as part of a “minimum programme” (which we will discuss later). As we have demonstrated previously, however, anarchists argue that this is incorrect. Centralising control of industry and resources in the hands of the state cannot lead to socialism. As we will discuss later, neither can a “minimum programme” of reforms.

5.4 Why do anarchists reject “nationalisation under workers’ control”?

Nationalisation under workers’ control is the idea that the state can take over **ownership** of an industry **and, at the same time**, allow the workers to **control** industry – while guaranteeing resources to them.

However, exploitation within state-owned enterprises is, at the very least, on par with that which occurs in the private sector – both operate under the oppressive and hierarchical logic of capitalism. In South Africa, state-owned companies (for example Eskom) – whether in the apartheid or post apartheid period – have been highly oppressive towards workers. Without a doubt, therefore, the state’s interests are the opposite of those of workers because the state is part of the enemy class. As part of ensuring the continued rule by an elite minority, the state’s goals are to safeguard private property and to put measures in place for the capitalist economy to operate as smoothly as possible for the benefit of high ranking state officials and the rich. This is done through depriving workers of property, dominating them and exploiting them. It seems highly unlikely, therefore, that having industries nationalised by the state would have any benefit for workers; on the contrary it would probably lead to the further domination and exploitation of the workers involved. As such, if anything is to be won from the state it has to be won through struggle, and through weakening the state by direct action and not strengthening it by having it take over ownership.

Even if the state was to nationalise industries this would not advance the prospect of real worker self-management at the workplace. The fact that the state would have ownership over the means of production would increase its power over the workers involved. If a conflict between the interests of the state and those of the workers arose, as would inevitably happen, the fact that the state owned the industry would enable it to more easily suppress the demands of the workers involved – as its power as owner would be immense. Rather than being a step towards socialism, having the state take ownership of an industry would further undermine the workers’ power, place them undoubtedly in a position of subordination to a higher authority, and hamper the possibility of class independence. Far from strengthening the workers position; it would weaken it!

Anarchists therefore reject the idea of “nationalisation under workers’ control” as a step towards socialism. We also condemn the dishonest practice of campaigning around dead-end strategies like “nationalisation under workers’ control” as part of a minimum programme.

Group Exercise

How do you think anarchists should position themselves in relation to calls for “nationalisation under workers’ control.” Could anarchists support mass-based struggles for nationalisation? Discuss in groups and write down your ideas.

5.5 What is a “minimum programme”?

A “**minimum programme**” of reforms is something typical of classical Marxism, and was endorsed by Lenin as part of a global “revolutionary” strategy. It is something maintained by Trotskyists today.

The basic idea is that Communists should propose a programme of reforms that are supposed to offer the appearance of bringing genuine benefits to the working class – but that are so extensive as to be unachievable within capitalism. At various times Trotskyists and other Leninists have pushed such programmes either by standing for election in their own right, or by backing social-democratic or nationalist groups while supposedly trying to push them in a more radical direction.

The idea is that, once the “minimum programmes” somehow get to the point of being actually implemented, it would become clear to workers that they *were***n’t fully achievable** within capitalism in the first place, something Trotskyists already knew. Thus, the minimum programme is a way of *exposing* capitalism and other bourgeois and social democratic parties. It is designed as a mechanism to let workers see for themselves, and “learn the hard way” that capitalism needs to be overturned.

Examples of a “minimum programme” in S.A.

- Immediate re-nationalisation of all privatised services and assets
- Expropriation and nationalisation of monopoly owned commercial farms under democratic worker control and management
- Nationalise top-five JSE companies, the Reserve Bank and commercial banks under democratic worker control and management.”

At that point the vanguard, or “mass workers’ party” is supposed to turn round and announce this to the workers, proclaiming that the only solution is “proletarian revolution” and a working class dictatorship, led, of course, by the “mass workers’ party.”

When Trotskyists of the “mass workers’ party” tendency get involved in mass movements, they typically do so with the aim of taking them over (often by winning leadership positions) and carrying them in an electoral direction. They often push for putting up independent candidates in elections. They talk about “socialism” and the working class; but in keeping with their emphasis on the minimum programme, their political education efforts are often quite thin. Rather than trying to build working class strength and self-management, they seek to use working class struggles to build a support base for themselves, as part of the “vanguard.” In addition, instead of focusing on educating workers and poor about capitalism through honest discussion, self-education and debate, they lead workers down a path they themselves believe to be incorrect! Because of their strategy of trying to take power and rule for the masses, mass workers’ party type Trotskyists generally display a great contempt and disrespect for the working class. This is seen in the (unethical) way in which they seek to lead the working class down a dead-end road of minimum programmes.

5.6 “Socialism in one country,” National Democratic Revolution and Internationalism

It is difficult to accurately describe the positions of the various Marxist tendencies on the issues of “Socialism in one country,” National Democratic Revolution and internationalism. This is because of the constantly shifting debates among them.

5.6.1 Historical background

When the Bolsheviks took state power in 1917, they thought they were leading the revolution. And they believed the “revolution” could not succeed in Russia alone, because the productive forces in Russia were not advanced enough. As Marxists they thought **social revolution had to happen in the most advanced capitalist countries**; they particularly hoped for revolution in Germany. Actually proletarian revolution did break out in parts of Germany in 1919, but was then crushed by an alliance of the bourgeoisie, the military and the Social Democrats. (Revolutionary movements were strong around the world at this time, from Mexico to China, from the United States to South Africa. Anarchism/syndicalism was the most important ideology of these movements; but many revolutionaries were also attracted by the apparent success of Bolshevism in Russia.)

See the section on the **NDR** under **Marxism**

Lenin & Trotsky linked their reliance on revolution in Germany to the view that imperialism was holding back the productive forces elsewhere. In the early 1920s the global revolutionary movements were crushed and defeated – while the Bolsheviks defeated the most revolutionary forces in the Russian Empire itself (the anarchist peasant army in the Ukraine, and the revolutionary sailors in Kronstadt). The retreat of the revolutionary movements left the Bolsheviks in a dilemma. What could they do when revolution was clearly not about to happen in Germany?

From 1924, Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin defended the view that the productive forces in Russia were (just) advanced enough to **keep “socialism” going there for many years, until the revolution spread to the imperialist countries**. “Socialism in one country,” they said, could last a long time.

How was this to work? Stalin’s views changed over time. For instance, after 1928 – by which time he had crushed Trotsky and other rivals to become sole dictator – Stalin emphasised the need to industrialise the USSR very rapidly. Previously this had been Trotsky’s idea!

For Trotsky, this was part of the thesis of **“permanent revolution”**, an extension of Lenin’s view that imperialism was holding back development in colonial countries. Trotsky agreed with Lenin that **the “tasks of the bourgeoisie,” the development of the forces of production, needed to be accomplished in these countries**. But he thought the “national bourgeoisie” was not strong enough to carry them out, and **the “vanguard party of the working class” needed to take the lead**. He thought the party could quickly accomplish the bourgeois task and then **switch to leading a proletarian revolution – provided that the forces of production developed fast enough, and that revolution spread to the advanced countries**.

In the early 1930s Stalin’s views were actually similar to Trotsky’s. He believed that the **“national democratic revolution”** in colonial countries should be led by the vanguard party, which would develop the forces of production, carry on the tasks of the bourgeoisie, and then switch to

proletarian revolution at a later stage. It was only later that Stalin and Stalinists switched to the view that bourgeois nationalist parties (such as the ANC) should lead the NDR, with the support of Communist Parties.

Stalin mistakenly thought that global capitalism was on the point of collapse because of the economic crisis of 1929 and the Great Depression.

In short, Stalin spoke of NDR and “socialism in one country” while Trotsky called for “permanent revolution” and the spreading of the revolution internationally; but **their programmes came from the same Marxist-Leninist background, and it is sometimes very hard to see any difference in content.**

After he was thrown out of the USSR, Trotsky thought that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) could no longer lead a world revolution because of its “bureaucratic degeneration.” If this “degeneration” was not overcome, he predicted that the “degenerate workers’ state” would quickly give way to capitalist counter-revolution.

Stalin denounced Trotsky as an agent of capitalism and fascism, and had him assassinated in Mexico in 1941. After Trotsky’s death, Trotskyists faced further dilemmas, especially once the USSR started expanding, conquering, and spreading its system after World War II. It became harder to maintain that the “degenerate workers’ state” was post-capitalist but also unable to spread the revolution.

5.6.2 Anarchist and Trotskyist “internationalism”

Trotskyists claim to be internationalists, and argue that socialism is only possible through an international revolution. But if Trotskyists are internationalists, then why do anarchists, who are also internationalists, disagree with them?

Anarchists are internationalists because we are for a united humanity, because we want to end conflict between peoples; and also because both the popular classes and their ruling class enemy are international. If the popular classes try to win in just one country, they will be attacked by global imperialist forces; if they are not joined by workers within the imperialist countries they are likely to be crushed. (e.g. most imperialist countries – Germany, Italy, Britain, US – gave various forms of support to General Franco against the Spanish revolution.)

Some Trotskyists – although not all – supported the USSR’s occupations of central/eastern Europe and of Afghanistan, because they believed this was helping to spread socialism!

Trotskyists claim to be internationalist for many – perhaps all – of the same reasons. But like all classical Marxists, their internationalism must end up being poisoned by their **reliance on the state** and their belief in **stages of history**. Since Marx himself, all classical Marxists have regarded some states as more “advanced” than others, and have therefore supported some states against others. Thus Marx supported British, German, US and sometimes French imperialism as a means to advance capitalism and pave the way for socialism. Lenin and his successors turned against Western imperialism (see the section on Marxism) but still focused on the need to “advance the productive forces” and still wanted to support those states that were most advanced

along the road of history in some way or other. Thus both Stalinists and orthodox Trotskyists “defended” the USSR as being in some way post-capitalist, a “socialist state” or “workers state.”

Trotskyists have, of course, criticised the USSR, and were never as fanatically loyal to it than Stalinists. But this was easy for them: they had been defeated and were out of power! They might pour scorn on Stalin’s thesis of “socialism in one country,” but they had little in the way of constructive proposals for how to run a “workers’ state” differently. They might want to return to the political system that existed in Lenin’s time – but, as we have shown, that was actually the same system as Stalin’s! Their proposals on economic issues and global strategy were not that different from Stalin’s – especially Stalin’s programme of the early 1930s.

The Trotskyists never ran a state of their own – unless you count the pre-Stalin USSR when Trotsky was in power. But if they ever did, it would not look that different to the USSR, and they would worship it just as Stalin worshipped the USSR. It would become another party dictatorship patriotically supported by self-styled revolutionaries against its state rivals. And like the USSR and all other states, it would become imperialist if it got the chance.

5.7 Neither “mass workers’ party” nor “workers’ state”

For anarchists, a “workers’ state” is by nature degenerate – as are all states – since as we have shown the state is by nature an elitist, authoritarian and undemocratic minority institution, and cannot belong to the workers. Regardless of their motives, the Trotskyist strategy of taking state power to implement social change – even if it is a “mass workers’ party” controlling a “workers’ state” – will naturally transform into a “degenerate” authoritarian and undemocratic nightmare. For anarchists, the logical and inevitable consequence of using authoritarian, top-down methods is to get authoritarian, top-down results.

Since Trotskyists believe that the “workers’ state” does not have to be **prefigurative** (the “methods” do not have to correspond to the “goals”), and since they believe a “workers’ state” can exist without any control by the workers (as under Lenin and the early reign of Stalin, before it became state-capitalist), then it would seem dangerous to ever let a “mass workers party” get near state power. For anarchists, all attempts by Trotskyists and other authoritarian socialists to drag mass working class movements into elections must be combatted.

However, due to their “minimum programmes” and backing electoral campaigns, Trotskyism is often inclined to water down its revolutionary politics in order to appeal to more voters, who might not support the idea of a revolution. Thus their practice makes them more likely to be like wishy washy, defeated, social democrats than a revolutionary party that can seize the state.

6. Social Democracy

Social democracy is a political ideology and historical political system that considers itself to be a form of democratic **socialism**, although these days social democracy has become associated rather with a “nice” version of capitalism, but with some socialist “rhetoric.” It is considered be socialist (in theory) because classically its ultimate goal was to get rid of capitalism. Unlike all the models we have discussed so far, this was not based on the idea of a revolution. Instead, social democracy was understood to be a peaceful **parliamentary** road to socialism – where workers and the poor would ultimately achieve a just and fair world by “chipping away” at capitalism through piecemeal reforms. In this way, reforms were understood to have a cumulative effect

– lots of reforms (e.g. free healthcare, worker friendly laws, universal university access etc.), brought about by voting in the right party, would equal less capitalism. This is why its methods have been called “salami tactics” – because as you cut off pieces of the salami, the salami gets smaller and smaller! As you can probably see by now, social democracy is an approach that depends heavily on the state for its programme.

“**Rhetoric**” is the art of using language to persuade or manipulate people

The modern social democratic movement came into being through a break within the socialist movement in the early years of the 20th century. Speaking broadly, this break can be described as a parting of ways between those who insisted upon political revolution (capturing state power through revolution) as a precondition for the achievement of socialist goals and those who maintained that a gradual or evolutionary path to socialism was both possible and desirable. So, it comes down to **revolution** versus **evolution**!

This use of the state socialism is something that we have argued against in other modules. We have always emphasised that the road to socialism must always be outside of and against the state because the state is not our ally, but our enemy. Anarchists argue against both political revolution and gradual reform, or ‘evolution’ because both blindly place their faith in the state as the saviour of people. We instead argue that the real true liberation of the workers and poor can come only through a decisive and violent break with the state and capitalist system, through a social revolution from below.

The early social democrats did not reject Marxism (and in fact claimed to uphold it), but a number of key individuals wanted to reform Marx’s arguments in order to spread a less hostile criticism of capitalism. Such views were strongly opposed by the revolutionary socialists and anarchists, who argued that any attempt to reform capitalism is doomed to fail, for the reformers would be gradually corrupted and eventually turn into capitalists themselves. Anarchists went further than the revolutionary socialists, however, arguing that any attempt to introduce socialism through the state, be it by revolutionary or parliamentary means (revolution or reform), would only lead to the establishment of a new ruling class.

6.1 Social welfare and reformism

Because of this strategy of chipping away at capitalism, social democracy argues that all citizens should be legally entitled to certain social rights. These are made up of universal access to public services such as: education, health care, workers’ compensation, and other services including child care and care for the elderly. A social democracy is often known as a “welfare state” – like Sweden, where supposed universal access to public services is controlled and administered by the state. While anarchists support universal access to all these things, we do not agree that they should all be controlled and administered by the state. We believe that they should be controlled and administered collectively, through worker and community assemblies from the bottom up.

Be it by reform or revolution, anarchists reject the idea of taking over the state as a way to create change, however modest. If we were to look at history, we would see that all parties that entered into the state in order to bring about change, actually got changed themselves, and soon started to accommodate the system. They ended up getting swallowed by the system, and few

social democratic parties now really believe they are a part of the socialist movement. In recent years, public services in social welfare states in Europe have been massively cut to help bail out the banks since the onset of the economic crisis. Rather than changing capitalism, the social democratic states have helped to maintain capitalism by blending into it and, at times, giving it a more democratic and just face.

6.2 Nationalism and imperialism

Another negative aspect of social democracy is that of nationalism – which as we saw last time is an ideology that ultimately benefits the ruling class. Because social democracy is all about protecting the rights of its citizens, citizens of a particular nation-state, it becomes hostile to anyone who it does not consider to be part of that nation. When public services are owned and controlled by the state they are usually kept out of the reach of immigrants and foreigners, giving social welfare nationalist characteristics. Claiming to do so out of national interest, social democrats promote nationalism and hostility towards foreigners.

Moreover, again supposedly in the national interest and in the interest of expanding the wealth and influence of the state in question, social democratic states also seek to expand their investment in other countries in order to reap more wealth for the

state. While this is supposedly done so that more resources will be available for national development and provision of basic services, in practice these states develop imperialist characteristics. In order to make a profit for the state, they exploit and oppress people from the countries they invest in – usually so-called “Third World” or developing countries.

Labour Parties have similar programmes to Social Democratic Parties (SDPs); the difference of name reflects different histories that aren't all that significant for our purposes. The term “Labour Party” is particularly popular in Anglophone countries: Britain, Australia, the white Labour Party in early 20th century SA.

6.3 Social dialogue and cross-class alliances

Social democracy is connected with the trade union labour movement and supports collective bargaining rights for workers. This is done through a “social dialogue” between representatives of labour (the trade union bureaucracy), big business and the state. An example of a social dialogue and collective bargaining in South Africa is Nedlac. Social democracy says that better conditions can be made for workers through the unions negotiating with big business and the state and trying to influence government policies to favour workers and the poor. The logic of this approach is that all the “stakeholders” need to come together as “partners” and co-operate – in the “national interest.” The idea is that it is possible to create a win-win situation, where the state can mediate between bosses and the workers, and everyone can all be happy.

But we know that workers and the poor do not have the same interests as the bosses and the state! And we know that the bosses exploit the workers for their own selfish interests! Furthermore, the strength of workers and the poor is in their numbers and their mass organisations, not in tiny boardrooms with experts and technicians. “Social dialogue” therefore ignores the fact that workers do not come to the table as equal partners because bosses. This is why the elite call for social dialogue: because it is just a tool to tie the unions up in bureaucracy and paperwork and limit their real strength – direct action by members. Social dialogue also contributes to

the bureaucratisation and weakening of the unions because union employees spend more time negotiating with the bosses than organising the rank-and-file for strikes and direct action.

6.4 The demise of social democracy

Social democracies flourished in the mid-twentieth century, especially in Western Europe – with Sweden perhaps being the best example.

Apart from welfare, class collaboration and nationalism, as discussed above, other key features of social democracies in power include partial nationalisations (e.g. mines and railways in Labour Britain in the late 40s), minimum wages and other regulations on the private capitalists. In practice, social democratic states incorporated a lot of ideas from Keynesianism, like welfare and free social services.

Keynesianism is the economic idea of that extensive state spending to boost the capitalist economy. It widely implemented from the late 1940s, based on ideas proposed by Keynes in response to the Great Depression in the 30s.

By implementing this framework, social democratic parties moved in the direction of abandoning even the *idea* that their programme would eventually lead to the abolition of capitalism. And by the time they had adopted this framework of policies, most of them *did* reject Marxism.

At the same time, the social democrats appeared highly successful as **managers of capitalist economies**. Their ascendancy from the 1940s to the early 1970s coincides with the most impressive period of economic growth in the history of capitalism. And especially in the “First World,” the working class received significant material benefits (high wages, welfare) – at the cost of political demobilisation through class collaboration.

But capitalist growth can’t last forever. And social democracy depended on particular conditions: notably, state-led and nationalist as it was, social democracy was made possible by twentieth century economic *de-globalisation*, by an increase in the autonomy of national economies (in contrast to the earlier wave of globalisation around the end of the nineteenth century). When globalisation took off again in the 1970s, the independence of national economies began to fail. At the same time, a major economic crisis put an end to the years of growth. And at last social democracy succumbed, giving way to **neo-liberalism**: globalisation-from-above driven by multinational corporations, financial capital, and the World Bank/IMF. This meant “free trade” deals to protect and strengthen multinationals; the decline of regulation of private capital; attacks on minimum wages, welfare, and unions; widening gaps of wealth (both within and between countries), pointing towards a planet of slums; privatisation; and not least, strong lean states with extensive police and prison structures to crush proletarian resistance. This trend largely swept away the social-democracies and welfare states of the “First World,” the state-capitalist regimes of the “Second World” *and* the various developmental-nationalist/import-substitution states of the “Third World.” The ideologies of these regimes likewise succumbed; for instance, most leading social democratic and **Labour Parties** have in practice embraced neoliberalism (e.g. Britain, France, Germany, Australia, and more recently Brazil). So have anti-colonial nationalist parties such as the ANC. It is in these circumstances that calls for social-democracy (e.g. by Cosatu) now appear as little more than useless rhetoric.

The ideologies of statist socialism and nationalism have failed and been defeated. It is time for anti-state socialism to take the lead.

6.5 The anarchist road to socialism: neither “welfare state” nor “workers’ state”

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Marxism has been discredited for many people. This is not only because the system was unable to hold out against capitalism, but because of the nature of the system in the first place. In particular, the Soviet Union (under Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin) was:

- severely **authoritarian** and oppressive (almost 100 million people were killed under Stalin alone)
- **inefficient** and unable to provide for the majority of the workers and the poor
- **imperialist**
- **not that different** from ordinary capitalism (except that industry was mostly nationalised)

In fact, it was the workers and poor of the Soviet bloc that pushed for the return of the free market!

But not all workers have given up on a getting better deal than capitalism. Since the decline of the Soviet Union, popularity has begun to flow back into other radical traditions like anarchism. In many cases, people have begun to recognise that the Russian anarchists in the Russian revolution raised many important warnings about what would be produced by the elitist and authoritarian logic of Marxism and its strategies (which apply to all its variants including the SACP and Trotskyism).

For example, Bakunin argued that “when the people are being beaten by a stick, they are not much happier when it is called ‘the peoples’ stick.”

We disagree that the Soviet Union was some sort of deviation, or “exception” from “true” Marxism. What happened in the Soviet Union was a product of its theory and strategy, which were derived from Marxism. And because communist parties and Marxist groups all over the world endorsed Marxism, many of them (the SACP, as well as many groups of Trotskyists) **condoned** the terrible things – mass murder, torture, concentration camps, invasion and colonialism – that were perpetrated by the Soviet Union. In fact, these horrors were not unique to the Soviet Union; “actually existing socialism” everywhere suffers the same problems and has proved to be equally devastating for the working class. **This is because all these systems were based in the authoritarian logic of Marxism.**

Social democratic countries like Sweden were far less repressive and protected many civil freedoms, and for a time provided a lot of material benefits to workers and the poor. But these benefits came at a huge cost: workers and the poor had to rely on the state for everything, and their organisations and trade unions were made toothless by the logic of “social dialogue.” More importantly, social democracy in practice is just a nicer version of capitalism, which does nothing to rid the world of exploitation and oppression.

Bakunin made an early and powerful critique of the statist, reformist, class-collaborationist and counter-revolutionary tendencies of then emerging social democracy.

“...all historical experience shows that an alliance concluded between two different parties always benefits the more backward — the more advanced party is inevitably weakened because the alliance diminishes and distorts its programme and destroys its moral strength and self-confidence; whereas when a backward party lies, it always finds itself closer than ever to its own truth ... I have no hesitation in saying that all the Marxist flirtations with bourgeois radicalism — reformist or revolutionary — can have no other outcome than the demoralisation and disorganisation of the nascent power of the proletariat, and therefore the further consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie.” (Bakunin, 1870s.)

Neither the SACP, nor Trotskyism or social democracy are able to provide a suitable programme for the workers and the poor.

Way Forward

Anarchists

- fight against exploitation and all forms of oppression
- naturally this means that we oppose both capitalism and imperialism
- naturally this also means that we fight against national oppression. However, we reject the notion of NDR, and the idea of “stages of history.” We always maintain our political independence from nationalist parties and social democrats, and attempt to combine the revolutionary struggle of the popular classes with the national liberation struggle against racism and imperialism into a single struggle – to be won **simultaneously**.
- We do not mislead the working class. We are honest about what works and what doesn't and do not set up unrealistic demands that can't be won in the name of self-education. Instead, we involve ourselves in the workers struggle as means to build our knowledge, but we also commit to intensive study and learning so that we can effectively understand capitalism and the state and determine the way forward.
- We do not claim to want to lead the working class and to take power in their name. Our goal is to build a revolutionary counter-power and counterculture that empowers workers for their own self-liberation. Our political vanguard is a vanguard of ideas only.
- We are internationalists. We believe the working class in one country always has more in common with the working class in another country, than members of the same culture

from the ruling class. We strive for an international revolution of the popular classes. But unlike Marxists, we see internationalism as incompatible with the national state.

The anarchist Bakunin asked how Marxists could “speak of international solidarity when they wanted to keep states” because “the state by its nature the very rupture of this solidarity and permanent cause of war?”

- We are revolutionaries. We want to abolish the system of capitalism and the state as soon as possible. We oppose the notion that capitalism is a necessary precondition for socialism, and refuse to accept capitalism as a “necessary evil.” On the other hand, we completely oppose the idea that we can reform away the inherent problems in capitalism by “salami tactics.” All attempts at this have ended in workers being caught up in capitalism, watering down their demands, and even abandoning their programme for socialism. Our fight must be outside and against the state, and outside and against capitalists.
- We argue for self-management and workers’ control, not nationalisation and a “workers” or “welfare” state. We need to seriously confront the illusion that the state is the friend of the people. *No* state – and no revolution – has ever nationalised anything in order to place it under workers’ control. Our fight is to *reduce* the power of the state by building a counter power that places real power in the hands of the people. This is in contrast with almost all Marxists, including the SACP and Trotskyists and social democrats, which aim to *increase* its role and scope power!

Only a revolutionary, mass-based, directly democratic movement of all the workers and oppressed, that is organised from the base up – outside and against the state – can offer us any hope achieving true socialism!

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