

The Growth of Anarcho-Syndicalism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation

2019

The Bangladesh anarchist workers' movement is less than five years old, born out of the ashes of failed Marxism-Leninism. The author of this article recalls the antecedent period in Bangladesh history where Marxism-Leninism held hegemony. This was a time of deep faith and affection for the thought of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tsetung, and Trotsky. As far as the author understands, none in the movement knew of anarchism as a political ideology and would not know of it until decades later. We revered the hanging portraits of Marxist leaders, we studied their books, and we integrated discussion of their ideas into our daily lives. Our life's pursuit was to become socialist revolutionaries.

We were so fervent in our beliefs of a better world that we sacrificed clothing for books, food for paper. The socialist movement was already active in Bangladesh when my generation moved from studying socialism to helping develop a mass socialist movement. In Dhaka, the capital, we helped in the dissemination of pro-Soviet papers, we joined student organizations, and we participated in interviews. We explained socialism to the people, to workers, from the factories to the fields. Our path was guided by science and freedom of expression, and we spread our ideas without imposing on others. But we faced public rejection and death in our efforts.

When speaking in Muslim-dominated areas, many condemned us as atheists and unrighteous. And where we were not simply denounced, many of us were murdered. Our struggle has been the history of bloodshed. We have lost many of our companions. And although the oppressive apparatuses tortured and killed us, we proceeded ahead with the dream of revolution and continued to take those steps to make the revolution. Our work increased the number of socialist organizations and supporters across cities and villages. These bodies were intent to fight against the tyranny of oppression, against the national military dictatorship and against imperialism.

As early as 1980 we were able to hear about the Soviet Union and China's authoritarian nature and contradictions. We did not believe this was the truth, that "scientific" socialism could be false. Rather, we believed this was imperialist and CIA propaganda. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and the breaking of Lenin's statue greatly shocked us all. Together with the eastern bloc, the socialist countries of the world changed. They moved away from having even a veneer of socialism and openly embraced a capitalist restructuring.

This produced a tremendous shock in the thought of our movement. We re-read Marxism over and over, its fundamentals. But none of this helped us to better understand the failure of “socialism”. We did, however, take an interest in the revolutionaries who criticized Marxism-Leninism. This led us to read the works of many anarchists, such as Mikhail Bakunin, William Godwin, PJ Proudhon, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, Errico Malatesta, Alexander Berkman, Max Stirner, Élisée Reclus, and Noam Chomsky. Their works are not in print form, nor are they in Bengali. So our medium of learning has been through reading anarchist texts through the internet in foreign languages.

By 2012, many of us former Marxists acquired a clear idea of anarcho-syndicalism from our continuous internet studies. Because I have been involved in tea workers’ struggles since 2000, it was among tea workers and close, political friends that we first introduced anarcho-syndicalist practices through the development of The Tea Workers’ Council. This council did not bear the name of any specific doctrine or party. Because old, authoritarian ways persisted, a clear articulation of anarchism and a regrouping along anarchist principles was necessary. As a result, on 1 May 2014, many militants formed a twenty three-member committee of those committed to the principles of anarcho-syndicalism. This committee has fostered the development of anarcho-syndicalist organizations in across fifty-six places in Bangladesh today.

Presently, we are receiving support from the (ASF) Anarcho-syndicalist Federation of Australia. Now BASF are recognized as section of IWA-AIT.

We seek solidarity from sister and brother comrades all over the planet. We want to work together with everyone.

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