

Against Imperialism: International Solidarity and Resistance

**A Discussion on Anti-Imperialism, National Liberation Struggles, & Extending
Social Struggles to an International Level of Resistance**

Endless Struggle

1990

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“It is our opinion that our failing to have any significant presence in the reality of present day struggles is largely due to complacency & lack of up to date analysis of problems in an increasingly complex social structure.”

(Bratach Dubh collective, intro. to *Anarchism & the National Liberation Struggle*, by Alfredo Bonanno)

The following article was part of a discussion on International Solidarity & Revolutionary Resistance presented at the Regional Anarchist Gathering held in Jan.26-29/90 in Vancouver, Canada.

The first half of this article is a brief introduction to the historical development of imperialism, including the rise to dominance of US capital in the global economic order. The second half discusses national liberation struggles, their contradictions & limitations, & an anarchist perspective to these struggles. It certainly isn't definitive in total, but we hope it provides a starting point for discussion. A lot hasn't been analysed, such as the present global economic thrust towards mobility in production, significant changes in capitalist production (i.e. technology, flexibility), & the relationship between these factors & the class struggle in the advanced capitalist countries corresponding with the national liberation struggles. It is beyond the scope of this article to fully address these, nevertheless, if anarchist or autonomist struggles are to have any impact, a complete re-assessment of our analysis & methods is necessary. Developing this means addressing ourselves to an analysis against capital – something which this article also mentions.

Anarchists tend to reduce anarchism to mere anti-statism or opposition to authority, a superficial & all encompassing “anti-authoritarian blanket” draped over all social struggles. Instead of extending an analysis to patriarchal & capitalist exploitation, which by its nature demands an international struggle, anarchists have restricted their perspective (if at all) to the most blatant products of this: sometimes in the “life-stylist” approach by boycotting multinationals, at other times in the pursuit of “alternative economic communities”. Capitalism is acknowledged, but only as some kind of background setting with no specific structures or conditions. When the Economic Summit of the G-7 (the seven leading industrial countries consisting of the US, Canada, Japan, W. Germany, Britain, France & Italy) was held in Toronto in June /88, the movements lack of anti-capitalist analysis was clear: “Protesting the 7 leaders is somewhat of a red herring, seeing as it's not just these 7 who are the problem, but all leaders & capitalism itself” (from Ecomedia Toronto, our emphasis). In this, the world economic order, dominated primarily by US capitalism, & its structures the IMF & World Bank, in which the G7 maintain dominant positions, is reduced to a problem of “leaders” & “capitalism” remains as something lurking in the background. The article continues on, making the point of resistance a question of who controls the streets rather than one of who maintains the levels of exploitation: “But many anarchists came out to support the days actions because the issue turned from one of protesting the leaders to... reclaiming the streets of our city, which have been blocked off for us for the length of the Summit”.

This is a reflection of the fact that most anarchists don't see various social struggles (ecological, anti-sexism, anti-racism) as having a basis in class struggle. But this isn't to say that these social struggles are irrelevant or secondary to the class struggle, as some Marxists (as well as some anarchists) do, but rather the opposite: these social struggles make up the basis of the class struggle. In the minds of those who delegate these social struggles to a secondary position it is commonly argued that capital created racism, sexism etc. as a tool to divide the class. But such a simplistic analysis ignores the patriarchal & racist ideological basis that makes up the domination & expansion of capitalism. Today, capitalism shapes & effects our cultural & social relationships like no

other social culture has. Anti-capitalism is not only an economic struggle but is also a cultural struggle.

For most anarchists, the logical conclusion of an international class struggle against international exploitation, imperialism, is not seen. A primary component of resistance to imperialism has been the national liberation struggle. The anarchist response has been silence, reluctance, or outright hostility to these movements. We think there is another approach, one of intervention & solidarity.

DEVELOPMENT OF IMPERIALISM 1800 – 1900

Between 1800–1900, the full division of the world amongst the major European and American powers was completed. From this point on, only the re-division of the world was possible. During this period, Great Britain acquired 3, 700, 000sq. miles with 14, 700, 000 inhabitants, and so on (from Lenin's Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism where he quoted economist J.A. Hobson).

For nations which had a level of independence after fighting colonial wars, the metropolises were already developing new forms of colonialism in the forms of debts and dependence. In the 1820s, English banks lent a total of £21 million to former Spanish colonies (Chile, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and Guatemala). The loans were directed towards developing export infrastructures: roads, railways, and ports, specifically from the mining and agricultural industries. The traditional agriculture was destroyed and replaced by monocultures, "cash crops", grown for export. The export of raw materials was essential for the industrialization process of the metropolises, England, France, Spain, etc. With the debts, it was also a way of ensuring dependency, through the import of technology and machinery necessary for large-scale export, the increase in loans for these projects, and loans to maintain a balance-of-payment on the debt.

This then, is the basis of the economic control of the "Third World", & the mass poverty & super-exploitation gripping the people in the Three Continents today; the peripheral countries provide agricultural & mineral raw materials for the imperialist centres, at the same time serving as sales markets for the manufactured goods produced in the metropolises, & as spheres of influence-investment for their surplus capital.

WORLD WAR II: THE AMERICAN CENTURY

The Second World War marked a substantial change for world imperialism, & out of it the US was to emerge as the dominant player.

The US ruling class entered the war with a clear idea of what it wanted. Competing imperialist nations would be dismantled & made dependent on US capital. Britain, Japan, Germany & France were exhausted & almost non-functioning economies from the war, & they would be reduced to junior partners. An important part of this was the Marshall Plan, in which the US gave or lent to W. Europe & Japan \$17 billion between 1947–55. This allowed the US to control post-war rebuilding along capitalist lines & to expand foreign investment by US multinationals. Alongside this, the US prepared plans for a new world trade & monetary order to prevent a world economic crisis as in the 1920's & to further develop the expansion of US capitalism. The IMF & World Bank were important steps in this direction. For obvious political reasons, the USSR & its satellites were

excluded. In fact the USSR was to be seen as the major threat to US interests, even though as a result of the war it wasn't in a realistic position to do this. Nevertheless, the US quickly began consolidating itself against this "spread of communism". Military & economic blocs, dependent on the US, were created to contain & encircle the USSR & its European satellites. These came in the form of NATO in 1949, SEATO in 1954 & ANZUS.

This was to be the "American Century"! But the post-second world war expansion was to last only 3 decades. The pattern of economic growth came to an end in '73 - 74. The investment boom making up for war-time losses & shortages, & capitalizing on new industries (electronics, jet aircraft etc.) had run its course with nothing comparable to take its place as a force of driving the capitalist accumulation process (Paul M. Sweezy, *US Imperialism in the 90s*). The interpenetration of the US market by W. European & Japanese manufactured goods forced the US to shift many of its manufacturing industries to the Asian market, where costs were low. The formerly dependent powers in W. Europe & Japan were in the process of breaking out of their dependence on the US (Already new developments are occurring, with the possibility of the creation of 3 competing blocs; the US & its dependents, the USSR & its dependents, & the European Economic Community, which in 1992 will abolish trade barriers within its borders. The Free Trade Agreement between the US & Canada is an integral part of this development. US imperialism can be said to be declining as a dominant world power).

Contributing to this decline of the US were revolutionary movements within the US itself & the development of national liberation movements. During this period a "record number of defections" from Western imperialism occurred: Ethiopia in 74, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, leading up to Grenada, Nicaragua, & Iran in 79, & Zimbabwe in 1980. These liberation movements had their roots in the struggles between 1954-75. During this period, 17 British colonies in Africa alone achieved nominal independence, the French followed ceding independence to 19 of its 20 African colonies. But upon independence, political power was merely transferred from colonial gov'ts to local bourgeoisies. In this way, the metropolises were able to maintain influence & control.

But this "formal break" with colonialism was only a prelude to revolutionary struggles in the form of national liberation movements. A primary characteristic of these were the nationalisation of industries & resources, the "ideology of nationalization" (Julio Rosad "Behind the US Economic Decline," *Breakthrough* vol. xii no. 1. Summer 88).

THE USSR & NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLES

It is without doubt that conditions for national liberation movements would be much more extreme without the aid of the USSR. The existence of this competing bloc has in ways reduced the movements of the western bloc. But this should be seen as the result of the USSR's own interests. Under the rhetoric of "socialist internationalism", the USSR has given aid according to its own geostrategic interests & designs. "...the Eastern bloc is a black stain in the political geography of leftism... it is mainly according to their geostrategic interests & the priority given to the consolidation of their own existence through the external policies of the Soviet Union are decided. The aspiration to be "recognised" & to have the equivalent of imperialism & not the aspiration of World Revolution is the red thread that runs through all of the world politics" (*Revolutionary, Cells/Red Zora Discussion Paper on the Peace Movement 1984*).

Afghanistan shows that the USSR, like the US, is prepared to defend these interests using violence in the form of armed intervention, napalm, & chemical weapons. Even with this however, the USSR cannot be placed on an equal level of that of the US. The USSR's expansion is based on need, not on a surplus, & in this way is incapable of developing a strong dependence. "In the face if [sic] imperialism is based on need & not on surplus. They cannot rely on the "gentle" violence of a mode of production, waiting for it, as a result of its inherent expansive logic, to build a durable dependence (RZ/RZ Discussion paper). In the age of perestroika, the East bloc shows its own integration into western capital in the form of its massive debts to western banks, the IMF & World Bank. Even today, the Deutsche Bank opens up offices within the East bloc.

THE LIMITATIONS & CONTRADICTIONS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLES

Today, the consolidation of national liberation & self-determination is an unrealistic goal. In these isolated struggles, one nation merely moves from one capitalist bloc to another, unable to determine its own economic direction. Because of this, many anarchists & marxists define the FMLN in El Salvador as the "left-wing of capital's political apparatus", while the US backed regime is the "right-wing". In a candid interview, Francisco Jovel of the 5 member FMLN General Command flatly stated "We are not talking about installing a socialist regime. This is a product of our analysis of national & international reality" (NACLA Report on the Americas, Vol. xxiii no. 3 Sept. 89). Eduardo Sancho, another member of the General Command, describes the FMLN's proposed "Gov't of Broad Participation", the "pluralistic democracy" which is the basis of the FMLN's proposals, as being "from an ideological & economic point of view, nothing more than (a program for) the development of capitalism in El Salvador ... We first have to develop our minimal program .. then later bases to construct socialism, & then later communism – which we think will develop in this country around the year 3,000" (talk about long-range development plans! From NACLA, Report on the Americas Sept. 89). Obviously, the FMLN is the "left-wing" of capital, but this reformist view of socialism is only a reflection of the reality that self-determination isn't possible in national liberation.

Increasingly, it becomes clear that the consolidation of social liberation, the breakout of national liberation, & the extending of the insurrection in the periphery is directly related to our own revolutionary struggles here & now, in the centres. This is the basis of Internationalism: "If Internationalism is not to be merely meaningless rhetoric, it must imply solidarity between the proletariat of different countries or nations. This is a concrete term. When there is a revolution, it will be as it has been in the past, in a precise geographical area. How much it remains there will be directly linked to the extent of that Internationalism, both in terms of solidarity & the spreading of the revolution itself" (Jean Weir, intro to Anarchism & the National Liberation Struggle).

In the absence of this Internationalism, the success of a Cuba (altho the continued repression including that against the anarchists is well known) in the eradication of mass hunger & extreme hunger, providing healthcare & schooling, takes on a new level of attractiveness for the people still fighting for these necessities. In this way, the "left-wing of capitalism", & its' accompanying condemnation, becomes little more than political posturing, true as it is. The total rejection of the FMLN as the left-wing ignores the context of what they are fighting for and what they must fight against.

Of course, there are countless other criticisms of national liberation fronts & struggles: that, as in Cambodia, there is the possibility of disastrous outcome or that they are mostly dominated by Marxist-Leninist positions. Perhaps we could let *Insurrection* no. 4 May 88 [reply]: “One could reply to the first that there is no such situation as one that can guarantee a revolutionary or progressive outcome in advance, but rather that such an outcome would be more probable in the presence of the anarchists & their struggle.” As for the blinding neo-McCarthyism, the same article goes on to say: “... the relationship between Marxism & the National liberation struggle is purely instrumental. That is, the people in struggle have adopted ... certain Marxist elements as they have nothing else at their disposition. And is this not the fault of the anarchists?” This also reflects the fact that anarchism, while addressing themselves to all sorts of social & cultural struggles, have recently failed to offer any kind of attack on capitalism’s economic exploitation. Is it no wonder that the most economically and socially oppressed peoples have always been areas where Marxists or Marxist-Leninists have been able to make inroads?

National liberation fronts, as vehicles for achieving political & economic independence, contain contradictions in their very content, & these clearly lead to their limitations. These fronts generally encompass all people who are part of the specific ethnic group that is engaged in struggle. Thus for the ETA or native peoples in Canada, it becomes a question of the “liberation of ... Basques” or the liberation of native peoples, rather than one of specifically class struggle. Writing on this in the magazine *No Middle Ground* (no. 3-4/85), K. Sorel, in reference to the FSLN in Nicaragua, wrote: “From its very beginnings in the 1960’s the FSLN had emphasized multi-class co-operation against the regime & that the Patriotic middle-classes would play a central role...” and that the “Sandinista regime (after overthrowing Somoza) quickly demonstrated its class nature by inviting leading businessmen Alfonso Robelo & Arturo Cruz into top positions of the new gov’t. At the Managua labor seminar of the state-controlled labor union, the Sandinista Workers Central, Commander Carlos Nunez declared that it was “important to distinguish between those members of the bourgeoisie who are still influenced by imperialism & those who had been victims of the dictatorship because the latter are individuals the FSLN wants to attract & consolidate into the revolution” (Sorel quoted *Barricada* Sept. 25/79).

Expanding on this narrow view of ethnic culture, *Fronte Libertaire* wrote: “Ethnic culture is not that of all who are born or live in the same territory & speak the same language. It is the culture of those who, in a given group, suffer the same exploitation. Ethnic culture is class culture, & for this reason is revolutionary culture” (quoted from *Anarchism & the National Liberation Struggle*). In this way, the diversity of the “front” begins to contradict what should be the logical base of its struggle: anti-capitalism. “National liberation Movements are capitalist multi-class coalitions in which the proletarians of the Third World do the fighting & dying ...” (*No Middle Ground* no. 3-4). If anti-imperialist resistance (here or there) doesn’t expand beyond this, if it is in opposition to imperialism only, then it too begins to develop its own contradictions & can in fact become a reformist struggle. As Alfredo Bonanno writes “The enemy is he who exploits, organising production & distribution in a capitalist dimension, even if this exploiter then calls us compatriot, party comrade, or whatever other pleasing epithet ... Unity with the internal exploiters is impossible, because no unity is possible between the class of workers & the class of exploiters”.

In rejecting national liberation struggles some anarchists & marxists use the slogan “Nation or Class,” with the view that because we struggle for international revolution, limited national struggles are an obstacle. However, as has already been said, the limitations of these struggles

can be viewed as a direct result of our own revolutionary struggles lacking intensity & influence. Demanding “World Revolution” while rejecting national liberation struggles & ignoring the lack of revolutionary struggle here, is like trying to get blood out of a stone. With or without revolutionary solidarity, the exploited of the 3 continents will continue to build resistance on their own. Whether or not the national liberation struggles contribute to international revolution, by extending the insurrection, is something that also rests in our hands.

Our internationalism, which connects revolutionary struggles here with the struggles in the periphery, is what creates the anti-imperialist resistance. The basis of our anti-imperialist struggle is extending the social struggle to form a base in the anti-capitalist struggle within an international perspective. A contributing part of developing an anti-imperialist, international perspective is seeing that even with the contradictions & limitations, national liberation fronts also contain class fronts, & this is what connects our struggles into one. Our position should be one of intervening & extending the struggle.

“Anarchists should give all their support, concrete regarding participation, theoretical concerning analysis & study, to national liberation struggles.”
(Alfredo Bonanno, Anarchism & the National Liberation Struggle).

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Endless Struggle
Against Imperialism: International Solidarity and Resistance
A Discussion on Anti-Imperialism, National Liberation Struggles, & Extending Social Struggles
to an International Level of Resistance
1990

Retrieved on 25th February 2021 from mgouldhawke.wordpress.com
From Endless Struggle #12 [?], Spring/Summer 1990, Vancouver, pp. 13–15, 24 (a magazine
published by Gord Hill of the Kwakwaka'wak Nation)

(Credit for text mark-up: SB, JF)

Also edited and republished in the Love and Rage newspaper, July 1990

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