

Revolution

Thinking about Anarchism

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ANARCHISTS SAY that capitalism can not be reformed away. We say it must be overthrown through a revolution. Many people however believe that the failure of the Russian revolution of 1917 shows revolutions just replace one set of rulers with another. The failures of the revolutions in Nicaragua, Iran and Cuba to fundamentally change life for the workers of these countries seems to point to the same thing. So why all this talk of revolution?

A revolution essentially is a sudden upheaval in society which fundamentally alters the way that society operates or who that society is run by. It occurs when the mass of the people desire change that their rulers are unwilling or unable to grant. It can not be the result of the action of a small group of plotters.

History is full of revolutions. Capitalism gained dominance over feudalism through revolutions, particularly the French revolution of 1789. Revolutions in countries like Cuba, Nicaragua and Iran since the second world war have had major effects on a global scale.

Of course none of these were anarchist revolutions. They all resulted in the substitution of one ruling class for another. They failed to bring about classless societies.

MISSING FACTOR

What was missing was an independent working class fighting for its own class interests. Instead working class militancy was harnessed by radical nationalists in a fight for 'national liberation'. In power these radical nationalists crushed the working class at home while seeking terms with imperialism abroad.

In the case of Nicaragua and Cuba at least the radical nationalists in power used socialist jargon as a cover for their policies. Cuba went so far as to nationalise the economy. A successful socialist revolution however involves more than nationalisation and left wing jargon.

In the course of a revolution the working class spontaneously throws up organs through which it tries to re-organise society. These organs however are normally made subservient to the new state within a short period of time. Normally there is some resistance to this but such resistance is brutally crushed. In 1917 the Bolshevik state apparatus crushed the Soviets and factory committees, in Iran the radical nationalists around Khomeini performed the same function.

SMASH THE STATE

This could only occur because the vast majority of the workers accepted the necessity of state rule. This is why anarchists emphasise the importance of smashing the state rather than using it's apparatus to introduce socialism. There is no more utopian idea then the idea of a minority introducing socialism through the state apparatus.

Anarchists believe that a successful revolution which introduces socialism must for the first time in history involve a huge subjective factor. This subjective factor is a large proportion of the working class holding anarchist politics. This does not mean the WSM must be the largest faction or even that anarchist groups must be the largest faction. It does mean that workers must see the introduction of socialism as something that is their task, and that the state has only a counter-revolutionary role to play.

BATTLE OF IDEAS

This will not just happen spontaneously. Some anarchists make the mistake of thinking politics will become irrelevant once workers seize the factories. They think that the various Leninist and reformist left theories will become instantly irrelevant. In actual fact this is the period when politics will become relevant as never before. It is a period where millions of workers will be looking for a political direction.

In the past revolutions have been led to disaster because the ideas that led the working class were reformist or author-itarian. Once in power such parties brutally crushed working class activity. This is as true of the reformists in the German revolution of 1919 as it is of the Bolsheviks in 1917–21. Anarchist organisation must be capable of debating and defeating such ideas as they arise.

CRYSTAL BALL

Not being crystal ball gazers we can not predict when the next opportunity for revolution will occur. In Ireland at least it would appear to be many years away. We do know such opportunities will arise however, they are a product of the inability of capitalism to meet the needs of all the people. Capitalism may have changed and developed over the years but this has not changed.

This does not mean we do nothing until such an opportunity arises. Now is the time for us to develop and spread anarchist ideas. We need to build strong anarchist organisation(s), not just in Ireland but internationally. Indeed it is likely that revolution will arrive on the agenda in Ireland due to the success of revolutions elsewhere. We ensure the continued relevancy of our ideas by involvement in the struggles of fellow workers and demonstrating the usefulness of anarchist politics and tactics.

This is the purpose of the WSM. We are in the process of building an organisation capable of asserting anarchist ideas. We are developing these ideas while being involved in struggles at all levels of society. We are building international links with anarchists in other countries. If you too wish to see this rotten system smashed and replaced with anarchism then get in contact and get involved.

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