

Solidarity Message from Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF) of southern Africa to FWCUI conference in Baghdad on 2 April 2005

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Michael Schmidt

April 1, 2005

23. March 2005

Comrades!

Revolutionary syndicalist greetings to the FWUCI from the Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Federation (ZACF) of southern Africa. [“Zabalaza” means “Struggle” in Zulu & Xhosa].

We are friends with a veteran of the 300-strong Shagila, which split from the Iraqi Communist Party (HCI) in 1973 and waged a guerrilla war against the Ba’athist security police and whose members crossed into Iran to support the worker’s Shorahs and community Kommithehs during the Iranian Revolution 1978–1979. As as opponents of the US-lead invasion of Iraq, we have a great interest in your organisation.

We are a revolutionary organisation — not a party! — that advocates direct democracy, working class unity and the control of industries and municipalities by workers and the poor, as was achieved in Iran before Khomeini’s Hezbollah thugs smashed the revolution. We were formed in 2003 after the emergence of black anarchist organisations in townships like umlazi and soweto. Our membership is roughly 50/50 “white”/“black” and many of our activists have been involved in anarchist organisation, union and community struggles for more than a decade, dating back to before the end of apartheid.

Black anarcho-syndicalists like Thomas William Thibedi built the first black trade union in British Africa (the Industrial Workers of Africa) in 1917 and we are proud of standing in this tradition which built the most powerful working-class revolutionary unions the world has ever seen.

May Day of course commemorates the martyrdom by judicial murder in 1886 of anarcho-syndicalists in Chicago, a day that is still recognised by all working and poor people of the world

because of the dominance that anarchism achieved within the labour movement in the 1890s to the 1930s (especially in Argentina, Brazil, China, Cuba, Mexico, the Netherlands, Portugal and Uruguay). This dominance was eroded by both the reformism of social democracy and by corporatist fascism (Mussolini, Stalin, Peron, Castro, and Nasser).

The final thrust of the early phase of anarcho-syndicalism was in 1956, when anarchist labour organisers dominated the Cuban Revolution, provoked Argentina's largest-ever general strike, and came close to siezing power in Chile (until betrayed, as usual by the so-called "communists"). Despite last gasp attempts by anarchist guerrillas in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Spain, Iraq (Shag-ila) and Iran (the Scream of the People) to sieze the initiative in the 1970s, the old "shock battalions of the working class" — the anarcho-syndicalist unions — were virtually dead.

Capitalism developed ever more sophisticated and cruel means to ensure its survival at the expense of the global underclasses: computerisation; casualisation; third world sweat-shops; etc. But the objective conditions of exclusion, repression and extraction of profit that define those underclasses still exist and have given rise to a new anti-capitalist movement in which autonomous grassroots syndicalist organisations similar to your own — and anarchist political organisations like our own — are again surfacing and starting to win the "leadership of ideas" among the resistance which is emerging in countries like Iraq.

The fall of the Berlin Wall transformed most old "communist" parties, either into tiny red fascist factions, or into social democratic frauds ("capitalism with a human face"). The union federations linked to such parties, like the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) in France and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) here, have lost their way in the wilderness. Here, the South African Communist Party (SACP) has become a social democratic front for the neo-liberal elite's assault on the working class, peasantry and poor, a process that we see the new elite In Iraq is starting to accelerate.

In France in 2000, the traditional May Day demonstration in Paris saw 6,000 anarchists — mainly of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT — outnumbering the 5,000 CGT members present. And this year (2005), the anarcho-syndicalist CGT in Spain — the inheritor of the Spanish Revolution's CNT — became the country's third-largest trade union federation, representing 2-million workers, while alternative grassroots syndicalism emerges in Latin America, Europe, and it seems, Iran. As during anarchism's "glorious years" (1895–1956), these organisations are intimately linked into the social struggles beyond the factory gates, so cannot be considered "workerist" or for the employed only. Rather, they are rooted in real communal equality and social struggles.

We know anarchist communism as a living, organised grassroots tradition. We believe in the dynamic tension between communal responsibility and individual freedom. As Marx's great opponent, Mikhail Bakunin, said: "Freedom without socialism is privilege & injustice. Socialism without freedom is slavery & brutality." We are impressed with the FWUCI's aim of building workers' councils across all industries in Iraq, irrespective of the ethnic origin, gender etc, of the workers concerned.

We are also very impressed with the decision-making process of the FWUCI, which embraces the powerful anarcho-syndicalist concept of policy decisions being made by the entire membership — rather than by a "democratic centralist" elite committee that rules the membership as if it was counted among the boss-class.

We wish you all strength and success in your struggles. Not simply because you are comrades to us in the global fight against capitalist exploitation and its handmaidens of imperialist war and religious/ethnic prejudice. But also because you have chosen the most powerful working-class

tools for resistance: reliance on your own class unity & integrity across all false capitalist-induced divisions, and directly-democratic processes that strike fatal blows at the roots of elite rule. We look forward to a fruitful interaction between our organisations and our regions.

red & black regards

– Michael Schmidt (ZACF International Secretary)

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