

# **Class struggle without Borders**

**The recolonisation of Africa and the future of the left**

Workers Solidarity Federation

August 1998

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I would like to thank the Socialist Caucus for extending an invitation to a speaker from the Workers Solidarity Federation (WSF) in South Africa. I would also like to thank the University of Zambia for hosting me this evening.

I am a member of the Workers Solidarity Federation. Let me start by saying what the WSF is not. We are not a political party that runs in elections. Nor are we a trade union. We are a libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) political organization. We believe that socialism must come from below through the direct action of workers and peasants. We support all forms of struggle against privilege and oppression. However our main focus is on the trade unions, which we see as a crucial mechanism for bringing about radical & necessary - social change. Our membership base is predominantly amongst Black students and Black workers.

## **CONNECTIONS**

The WSF recognizes that South African and Zambian workers and peasants have a number of important connections. In the colonial period, both South Africa and Zambia were based on a system of racial capitalism- the super-exploitation of Black workers and peasants through the migrant labour, low wages, an absence of basic rights, and white domination of agriculture. Zambian workers have helped build the South African mines; the same giant mining companies, notably, Anglo-American, exploited both South African and Zambian workers. Our paths diverged in the 1960s. South Africa would remain under brutal apartheid rule until 1994, when a non-racial government was elected. Zambia became independent in 1964 but played a vital role in materially supporting the South African liberation movement in exile during the apartheid era.

## **1990s- LEFT AND RIGHT**

Today, however, the workers and peasants of our two countries again face a common set of problems, a common set of difficulties.

The 1990s has been a time of immense international change. At the most immediate level, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the east bloc has been interpreted by many as signifying the death of any form of socialist alternative. We do not agree. But the fact remains that this is how many people see the current situation. The result has been a crisis for the left.

Matching this crisis of confidence in the left has been an aggressive capitalist attack on the rights and conditions of working and poor people across the entire globe.

In the West, this has taken the form of Thatcherism and Reaganism. In the east, it has taken the form of "shock therapy" programmes. In Africa, this assault has taken the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes. In Latin America, the same sorts of programmes are called neo-liberalism.

## **NEO-LIBERALISM**

At the heart of neo-liberalism & what the International Monetary Fund calls "structural adjustment"- are the following principles:

1. Privatisation & the sale of state companies and land to local and international firms

2. Economic deregulation– the removal of all controls over prices (including basic foodstuffs and goods), and imports (no real restrictions)
3. Linked to this deregulation- the formation of regional trading blocs with united internal economies.
4. Cutbacks in government spending, with two immediate consequences for ordinary people– (a) cuts in social spending (health and education) and (b) mass retrenchments of public sector workers
5. Cutting corporate taxes to promote an environment which is more friendly to foreign exploiter-investors, based on cheap labour costs
6. Attack on workers rights by:
  - (1) Sub-contracting out jobs, which divides labour and allows the employers to avoid paying pension and medical aid;
  - (2) Taking on casual workers rather than permanent workers with rights and benefits;
  - (3) Undermining trade union rights such as the right to strike;
  - (4) Undermining existing working conditions and downgrading workplace safety mechanisms

The basic idea of these programmes is that countries must develop by relying on the free operation of the market. Concretely this means that profit-seeking big companies will drive development. It also means that countries should develop through exporting their goods— not by developing and protecting local jobs, but by selling goods on the international market. The rationale is that even elected democratic governments should allow their economies to be determined by capital. And workers must accept lower (so called market-based) wages.

Both South Africa and Zambia are implementing these policies. In fact the governments of the whole southern African region have committed themselves to these policies. In the "Windhoek Declaration" signed by all governments in the Southern African Development Community in October 1997 it is stated that "the private sector [is] the locomotive of economic development," and that "business requires ... a climate in which it can develop safely, freely and profitably". SADEC includes Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

## **EFFECTS**

The effects of these policies on ordinary people are terrible. They result in job losses, slashed social services, higher taxes (usually through means such as sales tax), and reduced union rights.

Lets take the example of Zimbabwe. Here a Structural Adjustment Programme in 1991 relaxed price controls and resulted in dramatic rises in the inflation rate (running between 25 percent and 40 percent), and a fall in consumer demand of up to 30 percent. Average real wages fell to the lowest levels since the early 1970s (due in part to wage restraint and high inflation), and at

least 55,000 jobs were lost in the first four years, particularly in the civil service where 22,000 employees have been retrenched. These job losses are especially severe given a situation of massive unemployment in which fewer than 20 percent of school-leavers each year are able to enter the formal sector.

Social services were drastically cut: health spending fell by 39 percent in 1994-5, spending in the primary education sector fell to its lowest levels since Independence, and cost recovery principles were imposed that required all but the very poor (earning under Z\$400 a month) to pay school and clinic fees. A government "Social Development Fund" to cushion the impact of economic liberalisation has been characterised by poor planning and implementation, and proved inadequate and largely ineffective.

Even in the western powers the effects have been negative. Under Reagan in the USA, real wages fell to the level of the 1940s and wage inequalities between bosses and workers almost doubled.

A second effect of these policies is that they enforce the rule of large international corporations. In practice, many Third World countries are reduced through these policies to their traditional economic role- exporting raw materials and providing cheap labour. The local governments act as junior partners for international capitalists- as their loyal allies. In many countries, privatisation simply means the sale of local industries to the multi-national companies. Handing over the family silver, as it were, to foreign burglars.

Will such policies bring development in the long run? There is no evidence for such a claim. Firstly, those third World countries that have developed fairly successful economies &ndash; such as South Korea- have been based on systematic state intervention in the economy. Secondly, international evidence indicates that the fall in popular living standards and employment levels is not a temporary but a permanent and increasingly intense characteristic of these neo-liberal policies. In fact job losses are not merely a spin-off of neo-liberalism &ndash; they are a core reason for the policy because it saves corporations money and reduces their vulnerability to organised labour.

## **WHY**

Neo-liberal policies are not adopted across the world because they are the most sensible or the most rational policies. Their roots lie in an international, massive shift in the organisation of the capitalist world system.

Why are these policies being applied across the world? These are the main reasons:

Firstly, capitalism entered a deep economic crisis on the early 1970s. Between 1945-73, the world capitalist system went through a boom unprecedented in all history. When the crisis hit and economic growth slowed down, profits came under threat. Now, capitalist firms are always in competition with each other. They had to keep competing with each- despite the crisis. The main way that they have done so has been to cut back on all drags on profitability. This means two things - a drive to cut back on labour costs and at the same time forcing workers to work harder and longer. This has taken place through work reorganisation, with the aim of cutting wages (for example, through casualisation and subcontracting), and increasing productivity while keeping wages at the same or lower level. In addition, capital has pushed for lower taxes- this frees up money that would otherwise be going into welfare or government investment for profitable uses.

Secondly, the nature of capitalism has changed. It is obviously still based on exploiting workers and peasants. However, capitalist firms have grown to massive sizes in the period since 1945. To get some idea of the size of the huge multi-national companies, consider the following

- The multi -nationals account for 2/3rds of world trade
- Workers directly employed by the multi -nationals produce about 25% of all manufactured goods in the world
- By the year 2000 about 400 multi-nationals will own two thirds of the fixed assets of the entire globe The largest TNC's have sales that exceed the Gross Domestic Product (total output) of most Third World countries (for example, in 1984, Exxon had sales of \$73,6 billion, which exceeded the total output of Nigeria (\$73,5 bn), Algeria (\$50,7 bn), Libya (\$30,6), Egypt (\$30,1), Morocco (\$13,3) etc.)
- 500 transnationals control 80% of all direct foreign investment
- Transnationals account for 90% of all trade in which the USA is involved and also dominate the marketing of Third World exports

The growth of these giant companies is sometimes called globalisation. What these giant companies are building is an international system of free trade (in other words unrestricted exploitation based on cheap labour). Concretely, they do not want trade barriers that will hinder their international operations. They want countries to offer them low taxes, cheap labour, lax safety, labour and environmental laws, and the sale of public assets at knock down rates.

Thirdly, we cannot ignore the role of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. These international capitalist organisations have &endash;since their founding in 1945- have promoted these sorts of free trade policies. The way that they work is that they provide various forms of loan for countries. However, these loans are not philanthropic &endash; they come with strings attached. For many African countries, loans have been made conditional on the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programmes/ neo-liberalism. At present such programmes are being implemented in Russia, Africa, and parts of Latin America and Asia. They have universally, in every case, resulted in massive job losses, economic collapse and the rise of Nineteenth Century &endash;style robber baron capitalism. There is also a growing global popular uprising against such fascism, but we will get to that later.

Lets first look at the example of the recent economic crisis in Asia. This crisis was in large part caused by the financial manipulations of multi-national companies- the speculation of these companies led to a collapse of their currencies. As a result, many countries have had to turn to the IMF and World Bank for "aid". Projected job losses for the region- as a result of the crisis and as a result of neo-liberal programmes include the following

- Thailand: 2 million
- Korea: 3 million
- Indonesia: 9 million
- Mainland China: 11 to 15 million

It is no coincidence that the drive towards neo-liberalism is coming at the same time as the collapse of the Soviet Union - the crisis of the left has emboldened the capitalists to push back hard against workers in a one-sided class war from above.

Thus, neo-liberalism is born from the changing economic, ideological and political situation of economic capitalism.

Neo-liberalism in no way, however, means the disappearance of the State. Although under neo-liberalism, the State withdraws from much of its economic role, the State continues to play two key roles

(a) Organising the reconstruction of the economy in a neo-liberal direction. It is states which have agreed to and implemented neo-liberal policies, it is states which allow trade to be liberalised, it is state which provide the laws which allow privatisation and private property

(b) Managing discontent under neo-liberalism &ndash; the coercive power of the State is maintained and expanded under neo-liberalism because police and soldiers are needed to enforce the exploitation and increasing poverty of the working class and peasantry.

## **THE STATE**

The State under capitalism is not a neutral organisation. The State (army, police, government departments, Parliament) is not a neutral governing body, ruling in the interests of all. When workers go on strike they 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 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?

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. The State is built in a way that allows the minority to rule the minority: 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 Russia/the Soviet Union (see below for more on Russia).

## **IN COMMON**

Neo-liberal policies are something we both share. In Zambia, it is called "Structural Adjustment".

In South Africa, the government adopted a similar policy in 1996, called GEAR. This stands for the "Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme". Aside from its fancy name, GEAR is an orthodox neo-liberal programme. It has promised to create 400, 000 jobs a year and a 6% economic growth rate. However, it has led to closures and downgrading of hospitals, as well as

an attempt to dismiss 40,000 teachers two months ago. Economic growth has taken place, but job losses are continuing. Overall employment fell by 1,5% since June 1996 (when GEAR was adopted). Jobs are at their lowest level in the last 16 years . South African capitalists are not investing in industries that create jobs, rather they are spending their rime buying up other companies&emdash; Zambians will be aware of the role of South African companies in buying up privatised Zambian companies.

The Workers Solidarity Federation believes that the basic nature of neo-liberal policies is a CLASS WAR from above against working and poor people. It is an international attack on workers, the peasants and the poor. It is an attack by capitalists aiming to maintain their greedy luxury. It is the modern form of capitalist exploitation and imperial domination. Neo-liberalism represents a deep shift in the nature of international capitalism- similar in scope to the shift to imperialism that took place in capitalism in the 1880s. Neo liberalism is the latest stage of capitalist development- a stage that threatens to destroy every gain and every rights that working and poor people have. A stage which &endash;judging from the effects that neo-liberal policies have had over the past 20 years- is taking the working class, poor and peasantry to the very jaws of hell.

Can these policies be defeated? Yes, they can.

Working and poor people across the world are fighting back against neo-liberalism. Lets just look at the last four years. Between 1994-1997 there were general strikes against neo-liberal policies in Nigeria (1994), Indonesia (1994), Paraguay (1994), Taiwan (1994), Bolivia (1995), South Africa (1996), Brazil (1996), Greece (1996, 1997), Spain (1994, 1996), Argentine (1994, 1996), Venezuela (1996), Italy (1996), South Korea (1996-7), Canada (1995-7), Haiti (1997), Colombia (1997), Ecuador (1997), and Belgium (1997).

In addition to these general strikes there have also been smaller mass actions- in December 1995, for example, French public sector workers successfully defeated neo-liberal drive to cut railway services, increase taxes on workers, and reduce access to pension and health-care programmes. Most recently, there was a two-day general strike in Puerto Rico against privatisation in July 1998- this followed after weeks of strike action in telecommunications. And general strikes may also be looming in Russia &endash;where workers have not been paid for months- and in South Korea- where the trade unions are under renewed attack.

## **INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

None of this should be surprising. Where there is exploitation and oppression, there is resistance. Where workers and peasants are under attack, they will fight back.

Now there are different ways of fighting back- looking at the new situation, we would see the following guiding principles as crucial.

First, crucial to any successful resistance must be international solidarity. As long as big companies are able to move around the world freely, to pick up their enterprises and move them to politically repressive, low wage countries, the fight back is weakened. What's needed here is a policy of international labour solidarity- organised labour must fight to build and strengthen labour movements in other countries. Concretely, this means that we must forge links between all workers and peasants in southern Africa. All workers in all countries have basically the same interests- and the same enemies.



South African and Zambian unions must and workers co-operate with each other- and with the Zimbabwean workers, the Mozambicans, the Swazis, the Namibians and so forth. Such solidarity cannot be built at the level of leaderships, at the level of intermittent meetings between top union officials in the SA Trade Union Co-ordinating Council. Instead links need to be built between the grassroots militants. The basic principles of such solidarity must be

- (a) An injury to one is an injury to all- an active identification with the struggles of workers throughout the region and
- (b) A policy of fighting to defend and advance the basic conditions of all workers.
- (c) A fight for an international minimum wage and standard set of decent labour conditions

## **CLASS UNITY**

The struggle to strengthen and to democratise the trade unions is absolutely crucial. Worker activists in the unions should form rank and file movements which will fight to defend and promote union democracy, to challenge union policies which do not take us forward, and to build support for workers struggles.

Equally important is the need for the trade unions to build alliances with other working class and peasant organisations. Trade unions must build links with 0in fact must actively organise- the unemployed. The unemployed are part of the working class, and should be organised in marches for jobs and bread. Trade unions must also link to the working peasants and the agricultural workers.

It is mass organisations that have shown the only ability to organise a fight back against neo-liberalism. Political parties have been almost entirely absent from the mass actions against neo-liberalism mentioned above.

Elections do not offer a way forward either. Such is the power of these combined international developments that no government in the world has been able to withstand them- not even those governments elected to oppose them. Thus, we have the spectacle of socialist party governments embarking on mass privatisation programmes, and of newly elected democratic governments in Africa, Latin America and east Europe doing likewise. However, today even the mainstream "left" parties have abandoned even their nominal socialist pretensions, and have bought into neo-liberal policies lock, stock and barrel- the key example here is the so-called "New" Labour Party in Britain, but it is hardly alone.

We do not think elections can possibly stop the tide. In this era, elections operate to create illusions that the government can and will act on behalf of ordinary people- something which they cannot do. States do not serve the interests of ordinary working and poor people- they implement the dictates of powerful and wealthy elites.

## **CLASS AUTONOMY**

What counts is action- not words. Certainly not the sweet words of politicians at election time. Needed is policy of workers and peasants autonomy &endash;autonomy and independence from the capitalists and from the governments.

In building alliances, we must pick our friends carefully. It does not make sense to ally with any sections of business or government. These are precisely the forces that support and enforce the neo-liberal agenda. To make an alliance with them is to join the enemy. There is absolutely no common interest between the two groups, and so such a cross-class alliance can only be forged at the expense of any attempt to build a consistent struggle against neo-liberalism. We oppose all form of social partnership because these ends up making workers conform to the agendas of their enemies- instead of organising workers to fight those enemies.

Instead of relying on elections, or on business, we can only rely on ourselves- on the worker and peasants struggle. The basic principle we would advocate here is direct action &ndash; it is only through mass organisation and united popular resistance that we can start to turn the tide. The aim of such struggles is to fight against any attempts to undermine workers conditions. the basic guiding principle is direct action in defence of basic needs.

Examples of direct action that can help win are

- Factory occupations to fight against dismissals
- Linking worker and user struggles in the social services- for example teacher strikes should be linked to popular calls for better schooling
- Strikes backed by solidarity by other workers in the same company or industry
- Mobilising the unemployed on marches for jobs and bread
- Land occupations by the landless
- Mass strikes against broad attacks- for example tax rises and anti-worker laws

## **PRIVATISE OR NATIONALISE?**

We do not see the issue as one of making a choice between privatisation and nationalisation.

Our guiding principle is defence of the basic needs of working and poor people against the attack of capitalism. We are opposed to schemes for the privatisation of State assets in the current period. This is because we are opposed to the massive job losses that privatisation of State companies almost always entails, and because we are opposed to any attempt to run essential social services (e.g. hospitals) on a fully commercial basis as this will put them outside of the reach of the poor who cannot afford to pay the price set by the market. Privatisation is a concrete example of how the State supports the neo-liberal agenda.

However, we do not see nationalisation as in any measure an alternative to capitalism. To understand this point, we need to return All that nationalisation means is that a company is transferred from the hands of the small elite that run the economy to the hands of the small elite that run the State. It has got nothing to do with real workers control of industry. In addition, the bosses (because they control the State and the economy) are generally able to block the nationalisation of any company that they wish to keep private. Any nationalised company still has to operate inside the larger capitalist economy and will thus be forced to operate in a similar way to private companies.

## PARLIAMENT OR DEMOCRACY

It is obviously better to live under a multi-party system than a one-party dictatorship. This is because under a parliament the people have at least some basic rights of free speech and free assembly. Such rights were won by direct action, by direct action that forced the State to make concessions.

However, we do not believe that freedom for ordinary people can come through parliament. Real change and real progress cannot come through Parliament. If we look at a country like Chile we can see why. In 1973 the people elected a moderate socialist government led by President Allende. This democratically elected government was toppled by a CIA backed military coup. Repression followed in which the workers movement was smashed and thousands of militants lost their lives.

This happened for two reasons. The Chilean socialists did not understand that real power is not in the Parliament but in the boardrooms of the multinationals, the State bureaucracy, and the military. The choices that the government makes are not determined by the voters but in the end by the needs and demands of the ruling class. For example, we never voted for privatisation but it is happening anyway. This is because it is in the interests of, and is demanded by, the bosses and rulers.

This point is not understood by the so-called socialist parties who run in elections (these are often called "Social-Democrats"). In the 1980's in France, Spain and Greece 'socialist' governments are pushed working class peoples living standards down because international banks wanted loans repaid and multinational corporations wanted to maintain profits.

The second reason is that the Chileans did not smash the state but tried to capture it peacefully. We must understand that the army and police are against us. They are there to protect the wealth of the ruling class. To make a revolution it will be necessary to use violence, not because we believe in violence for the sake of it, but because we recognise that the ruling class will not give up its wealth without a fight.

There must be democratic workers militia under the control of democratic workers organisations like the trade unions, to defend the revolution against the ruling class when it happens. Allende refused to arm the workers and so made the job of the military much easier.

## ELECTIONS

People often say that if we really want to change things we should run in elections. Take a good look at this idea and it becomes clear that it cannot be done if we are to remain true to our Revolutionary industrial unionism/ Anarcho-syndicalism.

Electioneering inevitably leads to revolutionaries forsaking their revolutionary principles.

Look at the so-called Labour Party in Britain. First of all they do not go to the people with a clear socialist message. They go for whatever is popular and will ensure that they get elected. This becomes more important to them than educating people about the meaning of socialism. It also means that they look on the mass of voters as mere spectators. People are seen as voters, not as people who can be actually involved in politics and bringing socialism about.

We do not accept that we should hand over the running of our lives to 400 or so people who are not accountable between elections and can basically do whatever they like. To 400 people

who enjoy, and are corrupted by, all the benefits of luxurious Parliamentary lifestyles, the gravy train. In fact, we would say that these politicians are part of the ruling class because they live of the workers, and because they defend and manage capitalism and the State.

Parliamentary democracy is about putting numbers on a piece of paper every five years. We are given a choice all right but between parties who all agree with the system of a tiny minority ruling the country.

## **THE NEED FOR SOCIALISM**

As we said earlier, people should have the right to vote for whom they please. This is their own business. But freedom will not come through voting.

Instead of elections, we should rely on direct action to win real change.

Instead of capitalism, we need a system in which there is genuine social and economic equality for all, in which hunger is abolished, and in which all people have some real control over their lives.

Instead of a State that defends capitalism and concentrates power in the hands of a tiny elite, we want working class democracy.

## **RUSSIA AND SOCIALISM**

But can we still talk of a socialist alternative? At a basic level, we MUST develop an alternative to capitalist barbarism. At some point, working and poor people are going to have to move from resistance to challenge- and develop a coherent challenge to a capitalists system that exploits, that dehumanises, a capitalist system that has led to a situation in which

\* 358 billionaires have more assets than the combined incomes of countries home to 45% of the world's people. Half of these billionaires are in the Third World.

\* The richest 20% of the world's population gets 85% of the world's income. 30 years ago, the richest 20% only got 70% of the world's income,

Now, any discussion of a socialist alternative to capitalism must obviously confront the issue of the collapse of the Soviet Union. We do not see the collapse of the Soviet Union, as the death of socialism for a basic reason- the Soviet Union was not socialist.

In 1917, a mass revolution broke out in Russia. It was driven by the struggle of workers and peasants and soldiers. Workers began sizing their factories, peasants took the land away from landlords, and soldiers refused to fight in the imperialist World War One. Freedom was in the air, and millions of ordinary people mobilised to win a better life. Grassroots organisations were set up by the working class and peasantry to fight the capitalists, the landlords and the government.

Factory Committees based in workplaces and elected by mass assemblies of the workers were given the role of overseeing the running of the factory and co-ordinating with other workplaces in the same industry or region.

Many books have argued that the revolution succeeded later in 1917 when the Communist party seized power. However, we disagree. The actions of the Communist Party- however well intentioned &ndash; undermined the gains of the revolution, and led to the formation of a one

party State and what we call State capitalism- capitalism in which the means of production is owned by the State, and controlled by the State bureaucracy.

The Communist Party had an authoritarian conception of socialism, which led them to create a one party state and a centralised economy under the control of a small bureaucracy. As Trotsky wrote in his book, *Terrorism and Communism*, "socialism" meant "authoritarian leadership...centralised distribution of the labour force... the workers' State (considering itself) entitled to send any worker wherever his labour may be needed". Trotsky advocated the militarisation of labour in which, as he put it : the working class...must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded just like soldiers. Deserters from labour ought to be formed into punitive battalions or put into concentration camps.

The Communist Party had little respect for the principle of working class democracy. In reply to those who took the Communist Party to task for repressing workers democracy, Trotsky stated in 1921 that such critics "have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers democracy!"

In the factories, the Party replaced workers control with one-man management by state officials. Lenin argued in *The Immediate Task of the Soviet Government* that there must be "unquestioning obedience to the orders of individual representatives of the Soviet government during work time ... iron discipline, with unquestioning obedience to the will of a single person, the Soviet leader". In 1919, individual managers ran only 10,8% of enterprises; by 1920, this figure had risen to 82%. In many cases, the managers were the same people the workers had expelled from the factories in 1917!

A similar process took place in the Red Guards, the workers militias set up in the early stages of the revolution. In March 1918, the right of ordinary soldiers to elect their officers was removed by the Communist leader Trotsky, and in mid-1918, nearly 50,000 officers from the old regime were drafted into the new army (now renamed the "Red Army" and placed under the control of the Communist-dominated State) and given commanding posts.

The workers councils (Soviets) were not where power lay- the workers councils were subordinated to a state bureaucracy, drawn largely from the old regime. The civil service was largely run by officials from the old system, for example, in late 1918, on average, less than 10% of the senior officials of key ministries such as Finance were actually members of the Communist Party

The Russian Communist Party itself had a tiny membership of 600,000 in a country of about 80 million in 1920. Almost none of its leaders came from the toiling masses and the Party did not have a large working-class or peasant membership: in 1923, two thirds of its members occupied administrative posts and only one in seven was a manual worker.

There are two basic reasons why the Communist party took this route.

First, the party had an authoritarian conception of socialism that was based around State control and control from above.

Second, the Party argued that it was the only revolutionary force- it was the vanguard of the working class. Therefore any criticism of the party was seen as inherently counter-revolutionary. Anything that threatened the party &ndash;even workers revolt- was seen as a threat to the very survival of the Revolution.

Thus, even before the outbreak of the civil war in May 1918- when imperialist armies invaded to smash the revolution- the Communist Party had begun to crack down on its other socialist groups. The libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) were subject to a massive wave of raids, arrests and closing down of printing presses from 9 April 1918 . On the pretext of "fighting crime", 26 centres were raided in Moscow. 40 libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) were killed and wounded, and 500 taken prisoner. Similar raids followed in Petrograd and the provinces. In May, most of the main Anarchist papers were closed down, usually permanently. The victims included openly pro-Bolshevik Anarchists who campaigned to convert other anarcho-Syndicalists to communism and Marxism!

In the Ukraine, the second biggest country in the old Russian empire, government troops were used to crush local revolutionary forces. We'll discuss these developments a bit more later. But another case is instructive. In February 1921, a general strike broke out in Petrograd, a strike in which workers demanded better conditions and also new elections to the workers councils. The strike was smashed by the Cheka- the secret police. When sailors at the nearby Kronstadt military base came out in support of the same demands, they were called counter-revolutionary and were crushed by the army and the Cheka. The Kronstadt demands (as formulated in the "Petropavlovsk Resolution") called for the release of left-wing and Anarchist political prisoners, free speech, free trade union activity, the right of peasants to use the land as they saw fit (short of using hired labour), new elections to the workers councils and the removal of the special privileges of the Communist Party.

The actions of the Communist party have been defended by their supporters as necessary steps taken to defend the Russian Revolution. That is, these steps are excused away as emergency measures to fight off the threat of external counter-revolutionary intervention the fact of the matter, though, is that the crackdown on workers democracy and workers control began in late 1917- and before start of the Civil War in May 1918. Similarly, the crushing of the Petrograd general strike and the Kronstadt revolt took place after the defeat of the counter-revolutionary armies in most of the country by November 1920. (There were a few pockets of resistance left in the east).

Of course, any worker-peasant revolution needs physical self-defence, a co-ordinated economy and international support. Nonetheless, putting reactionary generals in power in the army, putting the capitalists and bureaucrats in charge of the factories, subordinating workers and peasants to a one-party State, maintaining wage-labour and setting up death squads to murder strikers and other socialists is not a recipe for creating a free society. It is a recipe for dictatorship and capitalism. A genuinely socialist and free society can only be created by the working class and working peasants acting on their own initiative to smash the chains of oppression.

## **LESSONS OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION**

The Russian experience shows a genuine democratic (and stateless) socialism is to triumph, power must stay with those who produce society's wealth. No party, no matter how well intentioned, can deliver socialism on a plate. Repression cannot create freedom; it can only create more repression. Workers and peasants must take power and build the new order themselves. It cannot come through a State (no matter what its colour); all States are inevitably instruments of a minority over a majority.

There is an alternative form of socialism: the libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) tradition. This has always rejected the authoritarianism of Marxism. It has refused to see socialism as something being imposed by a minority wielding state power "on behalf of the majority," whether that minority was in parliament or a "workers state." We reject the elitist and undemocratic idea that political party is needed to make the revolution for the workers. This can only lead to the creation of a new ruling elite.

Libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) believe that both freedom and socialism are essential. Mikhail Bakunin, one of the founders of this tradition, put the point this way "Socialism without freedom is slavery and brutality; freedom without socialism is privilege and injustice". Society must be based on real social and economic equality for all. Goods and services must be made available on the basis of need- not on the basis of how much money you have. All forms of oppression and privilege must be removed. People must be free to live their own lives as they see fit- the only limit on this freedom being that it must not infringe on the freedom of others.

The capitalist economic system must be done away with and replaced with a new economic order in which the working class of the world will own and share all the wealth they produce. The economy should be democratically planned from below by factory committees and democratic peasant village councils. The hierarchical and authoritarian political institutions of capitalism must also be replaced by the rule of the working class and peasantry. . The state structures cannot introduce socialism but will actively sabotage the working class cause.

We argue that "ordinary people" are the only ones who can bring about the deep social changes that are needed to purge the world of the miseries created by capitalism. Every member of the working class and working peasantry.

The role of the Workers Solidarity Federation and other anarchists is to encourage ordinary people to take their struggles in their own hands and to fight for a society without bosses or governments. The crisis of the traditional Left opens the way for the spread of the anarchist idea. As a result anarchism is growing rapidly across the world, including in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Experience demonstrates that there is no authoritarian route to socialism.

It is no coincidence that the drive towards neo-liberalism is coming at the same time as the collapse of the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union was itself a product of the new international conditions. The Soviet Union was a state capitalist country. Whilst this model of development &dash;based on extensive state regulation of the economy, low wages, and the development of a massive military industrial complex- did help the Soviet Union industrialise, it did not prove very effective in the new conditions of crisis and globalisation. These problems &dash; of efficiency and integration- have been at the very centre of the "reform " policies of the Soviet rulers since the late 1970s.

## **THE REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION**

Just what is the libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) tradition? The domination of the socialist left by Marxism over the last seventy years has resulted in the proud and principled ideas and achievements of this tradition to be less well known than they need to be. Socialists need to identify with the libertarian tradition.

Within the First International, the International Working Men's Association (1864-76) in the last century the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists), notably Bakunin, consistently ar-

gued against a turn to reformism and parliament. They argued against the view that the state apparatus could be seized and used to introduce socialism. The introduction of socialism could only be carried out by the working class itself, not by a minority of revolutionaries acting through the state. These arguments help to explain much of what went wrong with the socialist movement in the twentieth century.

At the same time the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) showed that they were capable of organizing the scale of struggle needed to threaten capitalism. In the USA in the 1880s the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) were organizing a huge campaign for the eight-hour day involving demonstrations of more than a 100,000 workers. This showed the ability of the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) to connect building for a socialist revolution with the winning of reforms from the bosses. In 1886 this was to result in 8 libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) being sentenced to death in Chicago, an event that May Day originated from.

At the end of the century libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) in the US, most notably Emma Goldman, were taking up the fight to unionise women workers and break the ban on contraception. At a time when most other socialists saw women's liberation as a side issue the anarchists were fighting against those aspects that most oppressed working class women.

The libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) fight against the use of parliament by socialists continued when the Second International (Labour Parties) was set up in 1889. Libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) attempted to argue against reformism at the first three international congresses in 1889, 1891, and 1893. The 1893 congress passed a motion excluding all non- trade union bodies that did not recognize the need for parliamentary action.

The next congress in 1896 however included anarchists who had been made delegates by trade unions. They were physically assaulted when they attempted to speak and a motion from the German social- democrats Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel and Eleanor Aveling (Marx's daughter) banned all those who were anti- parliamentarians" from future congresses.

Libertarian socialism was from the first not simply an internationalist but an international movement, rooted in most regions of the globe, with support in countries as diverse as Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Britain, Bulgaria, China, Cuba, Korea, Mexico, Poland and Sweden.

Equally, it was a movement with a tradition of anti-colonial struggle and integrated anti-racist industrial unionism. Anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists played important roles in anti-colonial struggles in, for example, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia (1880s-1900s) , China (1905-1920s) , Cuba (1890s-1900s) , Ireland (1916-22) , Mexico (1906-1919) , Ukraine (1918-21) , Nicaragua (1926-33) , and Korea (1920s-1940s) . In Mexico, for example, the anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists of the PLM, the General Confederation of Labour, and the IWW challenged the political and economic dominance of the United States, and opposed racial discrimination against Mexican workers in foreign-owned enterprises, and within the United States. In Ireland, the national hero, James Connolly, was a Syndicalist who was killed by British imperialism in the aftermath of the armed Easter rebellion in 1916. In Nicaragua Augustino Sandino, an anarcho-syndicalist organised an armed revolt by peasants between 1927- 33 that drove out the US marines who occupied the country since 1910.

"Syndicalist movements", one recent survey has commented, "probably belonged to those parts of the international labour movement which were the least sensitive to racism" . Certainly, revolutionary syndicalism traditionally placed its emphasis on the need to organise the unskilled and excluded millions of workers ignored and maligned by the craft unions . As Bill Haywood put it at the founding conference of the United States IWW: "I do not give a snap of my finger whether



or not the skilled workman joins this industrial movement at the present time. When we get the unskilled and labourer into this organisation the skilled worker will of necessity come here for his own protection". This focus on the excluded entailed organising workers from oppressed nationalities, immigrants, and women, and an opposition to racial segregation and national oppression. The American IWW actively organised Asian, Black, Hispanic and foreign-born workers, rejected racist immigration restriction laws, and opposed racial discrimination, prejudice and violence. In Cuba, the anarcho-syndicalist trade unions of the 1880s and 1890s not only gave active (and armed) support to the anti-colonial struggle, but successfully organised the "mass mobilisation of people of diverse race and ethnicity" to eliminate "most of the residual methods of disciplining labour from the slavery era" such as "racial discrimination against non-whites and the physical punishment of apprentices and dependientes". In Australia the IWW encouraged for "the first time in the labour movement ... a coherent anti-racist view point". The IWW attacked the "White Australia Policy" of the Labour Party as well as other expressions of White chauvinism, and set out to organise all workers - immigrants and Asians included &ndash; into "One Big Union" against capitalism.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 confirmed the warnings made by the anarchists some 50 years earlier in the First International. The Russian Revolution was the first real test of anarchism in a revolution. The anarchist movement at that time was comparatively small but it had major influence particularly in the factory committees and the Southern Ukraine.

The libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) were amongst its foremost supporters and were the only group to support the dissolving of the constituent assembly on the grounds that the soviets were a more democratic form of government. (In contrast the Bolsheviks were clear that they wished to use the Soviets rather than the constituent assembly because they had more support in the soviets.)

The libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) fought to push the revolution as far as it would go, recognizing that this would maximize the willingness of the Russian workers and peasants, and workers internationally, to defend it. When the Bolsheviks started to impose their dictatorship the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) fought them through the soviets and factory committees.

In the Ukraine, libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) movement organised by Nestor Makhno smashed the local elites, redistributed land, and created an environment in which workers and peasants ran their own lives through worker and peasant councils. The Makhnovist armed forces &ndash;as they were called- were under the strict control of the councils, and were internally democratic- officers were elected by soldiers. This movement was opposed to racist attacks on Jews, and defeated the counter-revolutionary external armies of intervention. At first it had a working alliance with the Communist Party, but this was ton up by Trotsky and the Makhnovists crushed- 90% of the Makhnovist armed forces were crushed, their farming collectives smashed, and their activists executed.

By 1921 the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) alone recognized that the revolution had been destroyed and either died trying to bring about a third revolution or fled into exile to warn the world's workers of what had happened.

The 1920s ushered in a period of ruling class counter- revolution against workers struggles and organizations carried out. This was carried out through fascism/ Nazism and dictatorship (including communist dictatorship). These regimes were installed throughout Latin America, Japan and Europe.

The libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) organized workers resistance to the repression, but in many cases the labour parties and the communists weakened their efforts. In Italy the struggle against Mussolini was undermined by the social democrats. In Germany the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party stood back as Hitler took power. In Korea, the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) were in the forefront of the fight against Japanese colonialism and fascism, and set up a large liberated territory in Manchuria.

In Spain the libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) trade unions organized workers militias against an attempted fascist coup led by General Franco. At the same time libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) workers and peasants collectivised the land and the factories. But even here the Socialist- dominated Republican Government and the Communist Party did everything they could to turn back this far- reaching working class revolution, contributing to the fascist victory in 1939.

In World War Two and after, more libertarian socialist (anarcho-syndicalist) movements were wiped out by fascists and Soviet forces. In countries Italy, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine and Korea there were anarchist resistance groups throughout the war. In Italy they were involved in the land seizures after the war but were defeated by the combined forces of the Italian Communist Party and the Allies. In Bulgaria the libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) movement after the war grew rapidly by was wiped out in 1948 by the Bulgarian Communist Party. Again, hundreds were executed or sent to concentration camp. Libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) in other East European countries, China and North Korea shared a similar fate.

Libertarian socialists (anarcho-syndicalists) re- emerged in the working class and student revolts of the 1960s, in countries such as France, Mexico and Czechoslovakia. It continues to grow through out the world, in countries as diverse as Nigeria, the former Soviet Union, Paraguay and Japan

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Talk given by comrade MS of the WSF at the University of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia, August  
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