

Statement to the international anarchist movement on the dissolution of the WSF

Workers' Solidarity Federation

26 September 1999

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The Workers Solidarity Federation of South Africa (WSF) has been dissolved by unanimous mutual agreement of all its active membership in its Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town branches.

The former WSF comrades will, however, be involved in several new projects including Bikisha Media Collective and Zabalaza Books (formerly Land and Liberty). Both of these organisations are primarily concerned with the production and distribution of revolutionary media. Publications to follow include a southern African edition of Sam Mbah & IE Igariwey's African Anarchism, and Breaking the Chains, a history of anarcho-syndicalism from the 1870s-1980s.

Our former Durban branch is currently involved in talks with the Industrial Workers of the World with a view to establishing an IWW section in the region. They can be contacted via the Zabalaza Books address.

We feel that – in the current situation in South Africa, characterised by the attrition of the left and the betrayal of the worker's struggle by the labour and political elites – these initiatives will provide an effective means of spreading the revolutionary idea. The comrades remain fully convinced of the urgency of the libertarian socialist revolutionary project.

WHAT WAS THE WSF?

The WSF was founded in April 1995 as an anarchist political organisation based on the Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists written by Nestor Makhno and Peter Archinov. We built an organisation based on theoretical and tactical unity with the aim of reviving the revolutionary syndicalist tradition of workers control in the South African labour movement.

The roots of revolutionary syndicalism in South Africa go back to the 1910s, when a local revolutionary syndicalist movement deeply influenced by the IWW set up the first black trade union in southern Africa, the Industrial Workers of Africa, in 1917. This autonomous, workerist tradition, although eclipsed by bourgeois nationalism and the allied forces of Stalinist communism, remained a constant undercurrent in the fight against racial capitalism.

WSF picked up the torch by locating the contemporary workers' struggle firmly within the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, building a organisation of class struggle militants, both black and white.

Our first project was to develop a set of clear theoretical and strategic perspectives on a range of issues. These analysed capitalism, racism, imperialism, women's oppression and other forms of economic and social injustice globally and in southern Africa, and outlined a class war tactical response.

Our analysis of the ANC as a party of the capitalist elite – not, as its apologists claim a leftist party “with a working class bias” – has been borne out by that party's brutal neo-liberal offensive as champion of an increasingly deracialized ruling class centred on monopoly capital. Through its GEAR austerity programme, the ANC has been at the vanguard of the capitalist agenda in South Africa. It is thus, for the moment, a key local enforcer of the international class war against labour: “neo-liberal globalisation”.

Today, despite the ANC having come to power on the back of massive popular resistance, driven by a desire for socialism, there is not a single left-wing seat in parliament.

Organised labour is fundamentally crippled by its cross-class alliance with the ruling elite, and Stalinist members of the South African Communist Party and capitalist bureaucrats have joined forces in an attempt to silence and sideline the remaining militants.

THE RECORD OF THE WSF

From the start, the WSF played a role in the struggle against capitalism, the State and all forms of social oppression. We were directly involved in the radical student movement, and became increasingly drawn into worker education and labour protests against the ANC's capitalist policies. Throughout this time, we also campaigned against issues such as the oppression of gays and lesbians, and violence against women and immigrants. Despite our small size, WSF's achievements include:

- a. the revival of the anarcho-sindicalist idea among the workerist revolutionary movement;
- b. the formation of a thorough, consistent libertarian socialist politico-economic analysis of the region;
- c. the regular publication of Workers Solidarity magazine, plus thousands of pamphlets and posters which were distributed to acclaim at strikes and protest marches;
- d. the establishment of a disciplined and educated core of anarchist militants, including several shop stewards;
- e. aid in the establishment of the first-known anarchist group in central Africa, in Zambia, in 1998;
- f. the formation of links with the international movement (including attendance as an observer organisation at the 1997 conference of the International of Anarchist Federations in Lyon, France) and contribution to the global debate on tactics for its resurgence;
- g. participation in the radical student fight against racism, reaction and the commodification of education;
- h. participation in the general strikes of 1995, 1996 and 1997, and in the campaigns in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal and against Bill Clinton's visit to South Africa.

A detailed history of the organisation will be made available in due course on the web.

THE CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF REVOLUTION

The neo-liberal capitalist onslaught against the world's working class and poor points to the need for fundamental social change. The failure of parliamentary democracy and the collapse of the State-capitalist dictatorships of the former East bloc as alternatives to capitalist exploitation point to the need to reconstruct class struggle anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism as a viable alternative for ordinary people. Social democracy, so-called "communism" and ultra-left posturing have failed the working class, and aided the global shift to the unabashed exploitation

of the neo-liberal phase of capitalism. Only libertarian socialism — with its core ideas of worker self-management, class war and economic and social equality for all — can offer any alternative to the vision of hell opened up by the capitalist offensive.

The global working class is fighting back — and we must be a central part of the greater class struggles yet to come. The movement is presented with a historical opportunity. It is our responsibility as anarchist revolutionaries to seize the day.

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