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Pacifism, Terrorism, and Beyond

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

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April 2006

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1. There are three basic positions which can be adopted on the 'violence question' — pacifism, terrorism or defensive violence. With regret we have to dismiss pacifism as being hopelessly unrealistic. Restricting a struggle to pacifism or non-violent direct action in a campaign or strike can in certain circumstances seriously undermine that struggle. We are against the adoption of such tactics as a principle.
2. We reject "propaganda by deed", regarding it as elitist, at best ineffectual but more commonly counter-productive.
3. Terrorism is an attempt to substitute an armed vanguard for the class. The murder of individuals in no way weakens the system. Bosses, police and so on are all replaceable. What does actually happen is that the lives of working people are often put at risk which makes it easier for the state to introduce more repressive measures with mass support. Such armed groups are only adventurists

who have no confidence in the ability of ordinary people to make a revolution.

4. Even if sizable popular support can be won for armed struggle it still means that a small group is attempting to substitute itself for the class, and is therefore opposed to the methods of anarchism which are about involving the masses in self-managed action. In the conditions of any country with an industrial working class of any size there is no excuse for such carry on.
5. Revolution should be as bloodless as possible. Violence becomes inevitable as the ruling class will not give up their power and wealth without a bloody struggle. Our violence will be in defence of the gains of the revolution. We will work to minimise it by winning the armed forces to the side of the workers. The defence of the revolution will be organised through a workers' militia under the control of the people. The need for such violence will be almost universally understood.
6. Short of revolution there are many occasions on which the state uses violence to break the collective power of the working class. Picket lines and demonstrations are attacked and activists victimised and jailed. We always support those victimised and defend them from state repression.
7. On occasions demonstrations or strikes can turn to violence. We recognise that this is an inevitable feature of large scale resistance to the bosses. In cases where a period of sustained violence is inevitable we argue for the creation of self-managed defence squads under democratic mass control. Albeit we recognise that the likely necessity of covert organisation of the transmission of the democratic will of the mass movement to the

defence squads is inevitably problematic.

It may occur in smaller situations due to frustration or the necessity of intimidating scabs. While the best way of winning is mass action we nevertheless defend those involved from state repression. In cases where such manifestations can only damage the struggle we argue against such tactics. In cases where they are correct we argue for the greatest democratic control of their use and implementation.

8. We do not support the tactic of small groups provoking a violent response from the state in order to "radicalise" the majority. In fact this often is used by the state to victimise activists and intimidate those involved. Unless a mass base of support exists for violence as a tactic it will just serve to create a gulf between an active minority and the passive majority. Any decision to use violence must have mass support. In any case we never side with the state against such groups.
9. We do not glorify and encourage random attacks on members of the ruling class. Attacks on individuals or their property may well demonstrate an ineffective expression of legitimate anger but the function of anarchists is to argue for collective action by the working class. Encouraging individual actions is little more than a toned down "propaganda by deed". Such tactics may make individual members of the ruling class uncomfortable but in no way undermines the ability of this class to rule. Obviously we defend those who show their anger in this way but we also argue that such energy is better directed at winning mass support for anarchist ideas and methods.