

# ZABALAZA

**FROM EACH ACCORDING TO ABILITY, TO EACH ACCORDING TO NEED!**

**The people in Egypt said:**

**MUBARAK**

**MUST GO!**

**we say:**

**They ALL must go!**



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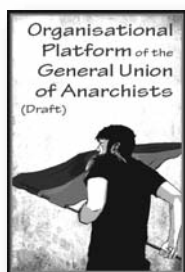
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## THE ANARCHIST PLATFORM ARCHIVE

The Anarchist Platform Archive is an archive of texts relating to the publishing of the *Organisational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists (Draft)* by the Group of Russian Anarchists Abroad ("Delo Truda" Group) in 1926. Also, and maybe more importantly, we hope to archive texts that have added to, and expanded on, this tradition in the hope that this can play however small a part, in the development and continuing growth of the organised class-struggle anarchist-communist movement.

<http://anarchistplatform.wordpress.com/>

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## ZACF EDITORIAL

This issue of *Zabalaza* (no. 12) comes out in a period characterised by significant political changes and transitions. On the international terrain, the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, which began in late 2010 but have continued into recent months, have been a key topic of discussion - in both the mainstream media and in activist circles. There has been a tendency for these to be portrayed in the media simply as "struggles for democracy". Likewise, the media often reproduce an incomplete version of events - depicting the uprisings as "coming out of nowhere". In fact, in many cases the demands of the masses have raised far more profound questions about the basic distribution of both wealth and power in society, and are the culmination of struggles that go back some ten years, by both the masses and organised labour, around high unemployment, rapidly rising food prices, poor living conditions, open corruption by the ruling elites, and a lack of basic political freedoms (produced in part by the introduction of neoliberal reforms). In this issue we focus attention on the Egyptian case, looking specifically at the possibilities the situation holds for the future.

This upsurge was also felt much closer to home. In Swaziland, protests erupted on April 12<sup>th</sup> involving political organisations, trade unions and other popular pro-democracy groups (many of which were banned under the longest standing state of emergency in history), demanding an end to the undemocratic and dictatorial monarchy and the hunger and suffering it has brought to Swazi people. In Zimbabwe too, 46 activists were arrested, tortured and charged with treason for supposedly attempting the overthrow of the Government, "the Egyptian way". In reality, the activists had simply gathered to watch films and hold discussions about the uprising in Egypt. Members of the ZACF were involved in the solidarity campaign with the trialists by contributing to the bail and defence fund, and in facilitating the release of an international anarchist statement in solidarity with the accused.

Since the last issue some interesting developments have occurred in South Africa too, including the launch of a new umbrella body, the Democratic Left Front (formerly the Conference of the Democratic Left) that seeks to unite social movements, independent trade unions and political organisations. With some reservations, the ZACF has played a role in this process, attending the national conference, which took place in January this year.

Our involvement in this body has also seen us active in a Mieline/TAP Workers' Solidarity Committee formed in support of the historic factory occupation, which was undertaken by Mieline/TAP workers at their factory near Krugersdorp in Johannesburg, and courageously held down until the factory was auctioned on May 19<sup>th</sup> this year.

South Africans protesting for basic rights and a decent life have also been confronted with an alarming increase in police brutality and state repression. The death of Andries Tatane, covered in this issue of *Zabalaza*, is just one example, and must be seen against the backdrop of heightened "securitisation", including the militarisation of the police force and the attempted introduction of a new "Secrecy Bill" designed to limit public access to, and introduce heavy penalties for those in possession of classified information.

As with all our issues, this release reiterates the insights and contributions made by anarchism and syndicalism to the movement of the working class, and emphasises the effectiveness of anarchist ideas and practices to popular struggles, both at home and abroad. We are also very pleased to welcome articles from new writers who have recently joined the *Zabalaza* Collective.

***The struggle continues!***  
***Forward to international popular class unity!***  
***Forward with anarchism and to the free society!***

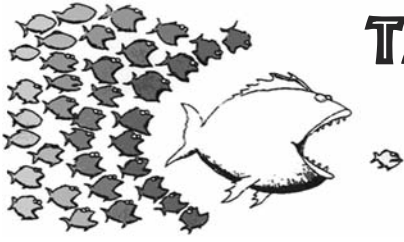
**THE ZABALAZA ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FRONT**  
 Johannesburg, June 2011

**International  
 Multi-Lingual Site for  
 Anarchist-Communist  
 News and Discussion**



The website of the Confédération nationale du Travail (CNT's) French paper *Afrique sans chaînes* (Africa without Chains), the quarterly French-language African sister journal to *Zabalaza*, where you can download copies of the magazine in .pdf format

<http://www.cnt-f.org/international/spip.php?rubrique33>



# TAKE BACK WHATS YOURS: THE MINE-LINE OCCUPATION <sup>1</sup>

BY SHAWN HATTINGH (ZACF)

The economic crisis in South Africa has seen inequalities, and the forced misery of the working class, grow. While the rich and politicians have continued to flaunt their ill-gotten wealth, workers and the poor have been forced to suffer. It is in this context that the majority of the leaders of the largest trade unions have, unfortunately, elected to once again place their faith in a social dialogue and partnerships with big business and the state.<sup>2</sup> So while the state and bosses have been on the offensive against workers and the poor, union officials have been appealing to them to save jobs during the crisis. Not surprisingly, this strategy has largely failed. While union leaders and technocrats have been debating about the policies that should or should not be taken to overcome the crisis, bosses and the state have retrenched over 1 million workers in a bid to increase profits.<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, sheer folly for union leaders to believe that the state and bosses are interested in compromise - without being forced into it. As seen by their actions, the elite are only interested in maintaining their power, wealth and lifestyles by making the workers and the poor pay for the crisis. For the elite, social dialogue is simply a tool to tie the unions up and limit their real strength - direct action by members. In fact, even before the crisis, social dialogue had been a disaster for the unions contributing towards their bureaucratisation and having abysmal results in terms of them trying to influence the state away from its pro-rich macro-economic policies.<sup>4</sup>

## THE MINE-LINE OCCUPATION ERUPTS

On the 20th October last year, it became clear just how powerful direct action could be during the crisis, as opposed to trusting in social dialogue. On that day, 107 workers occupied a factory on Johannesburg's West Rand, Mine-Line/ TAP Engineering (Mine-Line). The roots of the occupation of Mine-Line were set when the owner, Wynand Mulder, voluntarily liquidated the company in August 2010. He was doing so in a bid to escape responsibly for the deaths of three workers, who were killed in an accident at the factory due to lax health and safety standards.<sup>5</sup>

Before officially declaring insolvency, Mulder went about systematically looting the company - in a microcosm of how the elite

have looted the South African economy at large. As part of this, Mulder withdrew R 15 million from the company's account, along with taking a loan of R 35 million from ABSA Bank, shortly before liquidating it. With these ill gotten gains, Mulder - with the sheer arrogance that only the rich have - bought a fleet of luxury cars and a helicopter. This all took place in the context where workers at the factory, along with their families, were left with nothing.<sup>6</sup> Not even their final salaries or the benefits that were due to them were paid. Not merely content with this, Mulder began removing machines and other equipment from the premises, with the aim of re-opening a new factory in a different name.

It was this, and the example of factory occupations in other regions of the world, that led the workers at the factory - who are members of the Metal and Electrical Workers Union of South Africa (MEWUSA) - to begin the occupation. They were determined that they would not be retrenched during the crisis, and decided that they would not let Mulder get away with his actions - as so many other bosses have been able to do since 2008. As part of this, the Mine-Line workers began guarding the factory day and night to stop Mulder removing any more machines and equipment. They kept this up for over a month, and it proved to be a highly important measure as Mulder and his son on numerous occasions returned to the factory, sometimes with hired security guards, to try and plunder it even further.<sup>7</sup> By December, however, the workers encountered an obstacle. Their resources were running low and they experienced a delay, due to union bureaucracy and a lull over the holiday period, in securing money for basic necessities from their union to maintain a physical presence in the factory. The result was that the physical occupation of the factory was ended in December, although weekly meetings are still held on the premises by the workers.

In fact, throughout the fight to keep some form of control over the factory, the workers have encountered an impediment in the form of the union leadership. The union claims to have been providing the workers with R 1 200 a week in order to sustain themselves and their families during the occupation.<sup>8</sup> Reportedly, however, the union had only paid over three payments to the workers, and it was suspected that the union leadership may have siphoned off the rest. Added to this, workers have reportedly also been afraid that the union's leadership have been receiving funds



from the liquidators of Mine-Line to ensure that the company could be liquidated, and sold over the workers' heads to an investor. Matters came to a head when the Mine-Line workers' delegates, and other sympathetic left leaning members of MEWUSA, raised a protest against the corruption of the leadership at a MEWUSA National Congress in March 2011. In response, the leadership called in security guards and the police to silence dissenting voices and end the meeting. As part of the Congress, a new leadership was also meant to be elected, but with its premature closing, the old leadership unconstitutionally appointed their hand picked successors.<sup>9</sup> At the time of writing the union was in limbo; and from the leadership's side there appeared to be very little real will to assist the Mine-Line workers.

The main goal of the workers in initially undertaking the occupation was to try and save their jobs, and to win the benefits owed to them. As part of this, the workers were explicit about their wish to take over the factory permanently, restart production and run the factory based on workers' control.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, their aim is to run the factory as a worker co-operative and they have embarked upon a process of trying to register it as a co-operative with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Linked to this, they have also approached this state Department for R 350 000 in funding. In all of this, they have been assisted by a non-governmental organisation, the Co-operative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC). In preparation for approaching the DTI, COPAC also provided workers with training around co-operative principles, the registration process, and marketing. Thus, the workers have decided to take a legal route in order to gain control over Mine-Line.

In attempting to embark on a legal route, the workers have inevitably faced various barriers. The liquidators of Mine-Line had delayed the handing over key documents and records that were needed to establish a co-operative. Indeed, the workers only received the documents after a lengthily process. Added to this, the factory itself is located on property owned by the giant mining company, Harmony Gold. The workers have been attempting to negotiate a lease with Harmony Gold, but feel that they can only do so effectively once they have DTI funding and are able to show that they can restart production. In fact, Harmony Gold has started taking measures to try to evict the workers.<sup>11</sup> With such legal barriers in place, workers are once again discussing undertaking direct action to win what they need. This, perhaps, is a hopeful sign, as it was direct action that gained workers physical control over the factory in the first place; not the law. Direct action may also place pressure on both the liquidators and Harmony to consent to some of the workers' demands.

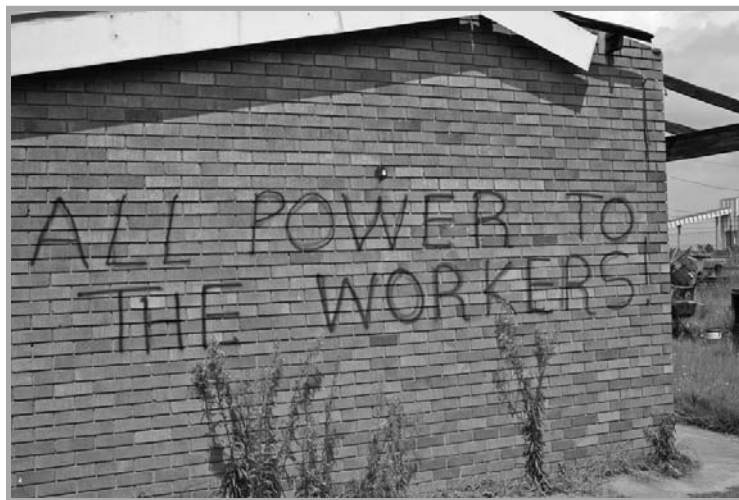
As an outcome of the occupation a solidarity committee was also established to offer support to the workers involved. Various organisations and initiatives like the Anti-Privatisation Forum, Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front, Landless People's Movement in Protea South, Conference for a Democratic Left/Democratic Left Front (CDL/DLF), COPAC, Concerned Wits Students and Academics, and Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) have become involved in solidarity and support work around the occupation. This seems to have been important as it has led to resources being mustered, it has enabled awareness around the occupation to be raised, and it has involved groupings and individuals providing information and materials to the workers.

## TO NATIONALISE?

As part of their involvement in support work around the occupation, a number of left organisations – such as sections of the CDL/DLF, DSM and MEWUSA – have said that the ultimate goal of the occupation is for Mine-Line to be nationalised under workers' control.<sup>12</sup> This call for nationalisation under worker's control in part derives from a critique – which has some validity – that co-operatives run by workers can't indefinitely continue to exist as worker self-managed institutions within a market system. The main argument is that market forces, such as competition, will undermine democracy and lead to the resumption of capitalist relations of production in the enterprise. The solution, which sections of the CDL/DLF, DSM and MEWUSA therefore hold is for the state to take over ownership and guarantee resources to Mine-Line, but at the same time for it to allow workers' control of the factory. This, it is argued, would alleviate the worst effects of the market on such industries, and at the same time perform as a training ground for socialism.<sup>13</sup> Calling for such action, whether at Mine-Line or any other factory, does however raise certain issues relating to the

nature of states – in this context the existing South African state – and the power dynamics between states and workers in general; something that those making the call for nationalisation under workers' control often brush over.

One fundamental mistake that those calling for the nationalisation of Mine-Line seem to make is that they often misread the fundamental character of all states. They often acknowledge that states exist for one class to rule over another. States are, however, more than this. All



states, whether they claim to be capitalist or 'socialist', exist so that a **minority** can rule over a majority. They are the primary instrument through which this minority rule is exercised. Entire sections of the state, such as the courts, the military, and the police exist to enforce this rule and if necessary eliminate people who threaten it. As such, all states are oppressive and hierarchical. States don't and will never allow for direct democracy to exist. Even under representative democracy, an elite still decides over the lives and destinies of the majority, and then uses the state to enforce those decisions. States are, therefore, not neutral entities or potential allies of the oppressed; they are rather part of the oppression of the majority of people.<sup>14</sup> It is a fundamental mistake to believe otherwise. Certainly, concessions can be won from states through struggle, but ultimately states will never allow for freedom – it is not their purpose. It is in such a context that the call for the nationalisation of Mine-Line under workers' control needs be evaluated.

When one considers the nature of the South African state, questions about what would actually be gained by it nationalising Mine-Line need to be thought out. Over the years, whether in its apartheid or post-apartheid guise, the state has repeatedly unleashed a series of attacks on workers and the poor. Within the last few months it has even been attempting to classify vast amounts of information to squash the public's limited knowledge regarding its operations, expenditures, and failings. In the industries it has not yet privatised, it has been involved in attacking workers through driving down wages and cutting jobs. Exploitation within state-owned enterprises is, at the very least, on par with

that which occurs in the private sector – both operate under the oppressive and hierarchical logic of capitalism. In South Africa, state-owned companies – whether in the apartheid or post-apartheid period – have been highly oppressive towards workers. Without a doubt, therefore, the state's interests are the antithesis of those of the workers involved in the occupation. As part of ensuring the continued rule by an elite minority, the South African state's goals are to safeguard the sanctity of private property and to put measures in place for the capitalist economy to operate as smoothly as possible for the benefit of high ranking state officials and the rich. This is done through depriving workers of property, dominating them and exploiting them. It seems highly unlikely, therefore, that having Mine-Line nationalised by the state would have any benefit; on the contrary it would probably lead to the further domination and exploitation of the workers involved. As such, if anything is to be won from the state it has to be won through struggle, and through weakening the state and not strengthening it by having it take over ownership.

The point, therefore, is that even if the South African state was to nationalise Mine-Line – due to its neo-liberal character this in itself is highly unlikely – the consequences of such a step for the prospect of real worker self-management within that factory would be devastating. The fact that the state would have ownership over the factory would increase its power over the workers involved. If a conflict between the interests of the state and those of the workers arose, as would inevitably happen, the fact that the state owned Mine-Line would enable it to more easily suppress the demands of the workers involved – as its power as owner and would be immense. It, therefore, is tactically suicidal to have the state take ownership of a factory that workers recently gained control over through struggle. Doing so would further undermine the workers' power, place them undoubtedly in a position of subordination to a higher authority, and hamper the possibility of class independence. Far from strengthening the workers position; it would weaken it!

Even without having the state nationalise Mine-Line, the damage that the state can do, in terms of undermining genuine workers' control, is already evident. In seeking to legally register as a worker co-operative, and sourcing funding from the DTI, pressure from the state for Mine-Line to run on a purely capitalist basis is clearly apparent. The Mine-Line workers have been forced by the state into a process of proving, via financial statements, that the co-operative will be viable in capitalist terms. The state believes that co-operatives need to be competitive and contribute towards economic development – as such it is not concerned with the workers' or democratic control. Should Mine-Line workers receive funding from the state, they would also be required to provide reports on a regular basis. If the state is not satisfied with these reports or the progress of the company (as defined by the state

itself) it can at any stage withdraw funding.<sup>15</sup> Thus, embarking on the path of registering Mine-Line as a co-operative has already meant that the workers' control of the direction of the factory is, in reality, being undermined. Having the state nationalise a factory such as Mine-Line would only make this situation worse – it would hand the state even greater power over the workers. Considering that all states (even supposed workers' states) and genuine workers' control and democracy have proven to be irreconcilable, the consequences of such a move would, in all probability, be catastrophic.

In fact, there are ample examples from history that demonstrate that the interests of workers' self-management and state-ownership, including ownership under a so-called workers' state, are incompatible. States have shown to have almost no interest in allowing workers to run their own affairs or to allow democracy in the workplace. The Soviet Union was a prime example of this. It was the Soviet state, under the dictatorship of the Bolshevik Party, which crushed worker self-management. This happened shortly after the October revolution when the interests of the working class began to openly clash with those of the elite within the Bolshevik Party. As such, it was in 1918 that Lenin ended worker self-management within Russia through decreeing the implementation of one-man management.<sup>16</sup> This saw the Soviet state appoint these new managers, often from the ranks of the old elite, and forcefully end any of democracy in the workplace – often at the point of a gun. The fact that the Soviet state had nationalised most of the factories, which had originally been seized by workers from the capitalist class, contributed to this – it gave the Soviet state immense power which it then wielded against the workers. In fact, the Soviet state accepted no independent initiative from workers in factories and state rule proved itself incompatible with workers self-management and direct democracy.<sup>17</sup> As workers were not, and could never be the state (due to its oppressive and hierarchical nature it was designed for a minority to rule over a majority), state ownership never translated into the socialisation of property and wealth, it never led to an end to capitalism, and it smothered workers' control. As such, nationalisation also never broke the relations of production that defined capitalism; it rather re-instituted it and entrenched it. Therefore, the very logic of all states has proven to be centralist, authoritarian and elitist. This means states are incompatible with genuine grassroots democracy, self-management and participation. If workers' control was crushed by the state in a period of revolution in Russia – using its ownership of enterprises as one weapon – why would it be any different in South Africa? As such, nationalisation under workers' control has proved to be a historical oxymoron: a tactical and ideological dead end that undermines true workers' control and self-management.



## RATHER RAISE THE SLOGAN OF COLLECTIVIZATION OR SOCIALISATION

A far better strategy, than calling for nationalisation under workers' control, could be to try to use the example of the workers' direct actions at Mine-Line to begin to rebuild a sense of class independence, class pride and worker self-management more generally amongst the working class. Self-management and class pride are going to be vital in any broader struggle for genuine freedom. Mine-Line has the real potential to be a living example of class independence, class pride and self-management. In the hands of workers themselves it could become highly inspirational – as other occupations from places like Argentina have proven to be. It is these elements – of class pride, class independence and self-management – that need to be nurtured and fostered at Mine-Line. It is this that could be used to win concessions from the state, as would have to be done, from an independent class basis. Calling for nationalisation or even following a legal route does not do this. It rather fuzzes the fact that the state, along with the ex-owner, is an enemy of the workers. As such, the call for nationalisation has the potential to generate false hopes in the state and foster subordination to higher power, which could weaken independent action by workers.

Importantly, examples like Mine-Line could show that worker self-management in the workplace in South Africa is quite feasible and desirable as a means of working class fight back for social justice and liberation. It also has the real potential to act as an example for other workers to follow and adapt in the factories that are being shut during the crisis. Mine-Line, however, cannot – as has been pointed out – survive in a sea of capitalism by its own. Therefore, we should perhaps be using Mine-Line as an example to begin to try and build a campaign to generalise occupations and worker self-management; rather than seeing it as an isolated event or a path to legal co-operatives. If this could be done, through workers literally taking over factories, workers themselves would be beginning to take the first steps towards socialising property and wealth. From recent events in South Africa such an idea may not be that far fetched. Already, within the last 18 months there have been numerous occupations by workers in the mining industry, which were sadly crushed by the state due to their isolation.<sup>18</sup> There was also an occupation of a textile factory in the Eastern Cape last year by workers,<sup>19</sup> along with an occupation by NUMSA members of a recycling plant in Gauteng. Although the workers involved in these occupations were not staging them with the aim of embarking on self-management, with a potential example such as Mine-Line, this could have been different. It is highly likely, therefore, that other occupations are going to occur – but it's a matter of ensuring that they are not isolated. Of course, such a struggle will not be easy; but it could be a path for workers to regain their dignity, which bosses and the state are attacking, and it could be a launching pad for the struggle for true freedom.

If more factories are taken over by workers, links based on solidarity could also be fostered between them. For example, in Argentina worker self-managed factories have taken tentative steps towards linking up with one another in a bid to create a more sheltered 'market' for their goods, and thus some have attempted to become suppliers and customers of one another. Some have also created links to communities, which have been vital in their defense against the pressures of the market and attacks from the state.<sup>20</sup> If workers seize more factories in South Africa, such relations and experiments could be embarked upon to try to create some sort of buffer for these entities against some of the worst aspects of capitalist competition and the threat of the state. This, however, would still only be a stop gap measure – ultimately capitalism and the state need to be broken through revolutionary class struggle if genuine worker self-management is to become a widespread reality.

To ensure that future occupations are not isolated, however, will also require revolutionary unions, controlled by members themselves through direct democracy, which strive to expropriate the wealth of the exploiting classes, end the ruling classes' power, and create a society that is genuinely free. Without such unions, broadening factory occupations is going to be very difficult. Already the experience of South Africa demonstrates this. It has not only been Mine-Line where union bureaucrats have been a barrier. When occupations recently occurred in the mining sector in South Africa, most union officials were weary of these actions and, worse still, often tried to sabotage them.<sup>21</sup> They were partly able to do this because real power within these unions rested with these officials; not the members. Thus, if workers are going to emancipate themselves they are not only going to have to struggle against bosses and politicians, but also against union bureaucracies. However, if unions can be transformed into revolutionary movements once more, resources – currently controlled by officials – could be loosened up. In the context of South Africa, the largest unions have substantial investment arms, which are currently using members' money to speculate on stock markets.<sup>22</sup> Should workers succeed at transforming their unions into radical movements, these investment arms could be shut and the resources that have been following into them (like a large portion of members' dues) could be used for vastly different purposes, like defending the working class including defending occupied factories. As such, unions should cease the practice of forming investment arms; and instead focus on using union's resources to fight against capitalists and the state. Using such resources to bolster factory occupations, would also mean that workers occupying a factory would not be under an immense pressure to turn to the state for funding, and they would not have to simply accept the conditions that states place on such funding. It would, therefore, provide a much greater space for independent action.

Indeed, if factory or workplace occupations could become more generalised, and if the workers could hold onto these workplaces and begin to democratically run them, this could also be used as one element to build a sense of counter-power and a counter culture that could in the future fundamentally challenge capitalism and the state. True freedom will only exist once the state and capitalism (or any market system) have gone – it is only then that all oppression can be ended, imbalances of power eradicated, and the relations of production that exist in the current society ended. Only in a society based on economic planning from below through councils and assemblies, distribution by need, self-governance based on federated councils using direct democracy and worker self-management will freedom exist – which, by its very nature, is incompatible with state control and indeed the very notion of a state.

Mine-Line, and hopefully other future occupations and examples of self management, could act as training grounds – along with self-managed revolutionary movements – for such a future self-managed society. They could be places that generate and nurture practices of direct democracy, class independence and class pride – ingredients that will be necessary for any genuine revolution. In fact, it is high time that workers begin taking back the wealth they have produced from the bosses and politicians, and to do this factory occupations and embarking on worker self-management are some of the main keys. As part of this, workers need to also begin giving the middle finger back to the state; and not go on hands and knees begging for it to take ownership of what is actually rightfully theirs. In other words they need to begin building the elements of a future revolution now so they themselves will know how to run a future anarchist-communist society, without any reliance on some higher power like a state or 'revolutionary' elite.

**Footnotes:**

1. Thanks goes to Lucien van der Walt and comrades from Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF) for comments and feedback on the article.
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## ANDRIES TATANE: MURDERED BY THE RULING CLASSES

BY SHAWN HATTINGH (ZACF)

On the 13th April, people in South Africa were stunned. On the evening news the sight of six police force members brutally beating a man, Andries Tatane, to death was aired. The images of the police smashing his body with batons and repeatedly firing rubber bullets into his chest struck a cord; people were simply shocked and appalled. Literally hundreds of articles followed in the press, politicians of all stripes also hopped on the bandwagon and said they lamented his death; and most called for the police to receive appropriate training to deal with 'crowd control' - after all, elections are a month away.

Andries Tatane's death was the culmination of a protest march in the Free State town of Ficksburg. The march involved over 4,000 people, who undertook the action to demand the very basics of life - decent housing, access to water and electricity, and jobs. They had repeatedly written to the mayor and local government of Ficksburg pleading for these necessities. Like a group of modern day Marie Antoinettes, the local state officials brushed off these pleas; more important matters no doubt needed to be attended to - like shopping for luxury cars; banking the latest fat pay check; handing tenders out to Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) connections and talking shit in the municipal chambers. Therefore, when the township residents had the audacity to march, and call for a response, the police were promptly unleashed with water cannons and rubber bullets. If the impoverished black residents

of Ficksburg could not get the hint, in the form of silence; then the state and local politicians were going to ensure that they got the message beaten into them.

The reason why specifically Andries Tatane was murdered was because he had the cheek, in the eyes of the officials involved, to question police force members about why they were firing a water cannon at an elderly person - who clearly was not a threat to the burly brutes that make up South Africa's arm of the law. For that act of decency, he paid dearly: with his life. The message was clear - how dare anyone question the authority of the state and its right to use force wherever and whenever it deems necessary.

### A WAR ON PROTESTORS

The sad reality though is that Andries Tatane's murder at the hands of the state did not represent something new or even an isolated incident. For years, the South African state has been treating people that have embarked on protests with brute force and utter contempt. Activists from community based movements - such as the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), Abahlali baseMjondolo (ABM), Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) and Landless People's Movement (LPM) have routinely been harassed by the state, arrested and beaten. For instance, on the day of the elections in



2004, LPM members were tortured by the police in Soweto. Some activists have also been subjected to attacks by vigilante groupings; to which the state and the police have often turned a blind eye. In reality, the state views community based movements as enemies and when they protest the state often dishes out violence. The fact that the vast majority of community based protests are peaceful, usually involving little more than people blockading a road and burning old tires, does not deter them.

Andries Tatane's awful death, for standing up for what he believed, was also by no means the first at the hands of the South African state. Numerous people involved in community protests, much like the one in Ficksburg, have been murdered by police officials. As recently as February, protests erupted in the town of Ermelo; situated in one of South Africa's poorest provinces - Mpumalanga. The people involved were demanding the exact same basic necessities as the Ficksburg protestors. The state did not respond by listening or engaging the people, but rather sent 160 riot police, euphemistically named the Tactical Response Team (TRT), to end the protests. The country's Police Commissioner, General Cele; personally warned the Ermelo protestors and organizers that the TRT was going to restore 'order'. In the process, two people were shot dead by the police and 120 more were arrested. Raids were conducted throughout impoverished areas - due to the legacy of apartheid, residents in these areas are mainly or exclusively black - and, as

part of this, an 80 year old woman was detained. An illegal curfew was also implemented by the police and anyone on the street was automatically shot at with rubber bullets. Indiscriminate violence by the police reportedly became the order of the day. In one incident, captured on a cellphone camera, a teenager was called out of a shop by a group of policemen. When he approached their car, he was repeatedly shot at with rubber bullets and forced to roll down the street as 'punishment'. Other people were also reportedly whipped by the police with sjamboks - the imagery of colonial and apartheid style punishment no doubt being deliberate. People were literally driven off the streets by state organised terror. The bitter reality, however, is that Ermelo and Ficksburg were simply microcosms of how the state routinely dishes out violence towards those that it views as a threat: in 2010 alone 1,769 people died as a result of police action or in police custody. Sadly, Andries Tatane will become part of these statistics.

Sinister interrogation processes have also accompanied the outright violence that the state has directed towards protestors. In the case of the Ermelo protests, a person who the state accused of being one of the organisers, Bongani Phakathi, was interrogated for 14 hours by the crack Hawks unit. Amongst other things, he was questioned about whether there were funders behind the protest. The questions asked to Phakathi reveal the level of paranoia that the state has shown around the ever-growing community protests. In fact, the state has repeatedly claimed that there has been a sinister 'third force' behind the wave of protests. To supposedly uncover this 'third force' and to intimidate people, the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) has been unleashed on communities over the last few years. In the process, many people have been arrested, interrogated and some have even been charged with sedition. For example in 2006, 13 people were

charged with sedition in the small town of Harrismith because they were involved in a community protest. Almost all, however, have been released for a lack of real evidence and in the end the state was forced to drop the sedition charges. Nonetheless, the South African state's goal of intimidating people is clear. What has also become patently clear is that there is no 'third force'; the claims about a 'third force' are simply being used to 'legitimise' the use of intelligence agencies against people. The only 'third force' driving the protests are the conditions that people are being forced to live under - it is sadly not an exaggeration to say the dogs that guard the property of the rich, and that are used by the police, live under better conditions than the poor in South Africa.

It is also clear that police force members, who are the foot soldiers of the state, are taking their cue from leading state officials and politicians - whether tied to the Democratic Alliance (DA) or the African National Congress (ANC). The likes of General Cele has encouraged the police to "shoot to kill" if they feel threatened. The ANC, DA and Congress of the People (COPE) have more than once branded people embarking on protests as criminals that need to be dealt with. Even sections within the country's trade union leadership, and some 'leftists' associated with them, have at times called community protestors and activists thugs. Despite uttering regrets about Andries Tatane's murder, politicians have also continued to say that protestors need to be subjected to effective 'crowd control'. Like-



wise, police officials stated that anyone who "taunts" the police, despite the death of Tatane, must still be dealt with. The fact that those in the state believe that they have a right to 'control' people and 'deal with them' speaks volumes about their oppressive worldview. In response to a wave of protests in 2009, the Cabinet also released a wrath of statements including one saying:

*"The action that we will be taking is that those who organise these marches, those who openly perpetuate and promote violent action, the state will start acting against those individuals"*

The Cabinet's and the state's message was clear: it was saying to the poor: protest and the state will come for you, isolate you and crush you. Such thuggish statements have become common on the lips of South African state officials. It is in this context that Andries Tatane was killed.

The way the current state views and deals with community protestors also has remarkable similarity, and continuity, with the practices of the apartheid state - despite the state being in the hands of a supposed black nationalist liberation movement - the ANC. Besides apartheid-style brutality, the post-apartheid state still makes use of apartheid laws to deal with protests. Under these laws, anyone wanting to protest has to apply 7 days in advance. Linked to this, the state can refuse permission on a number of grounds. If permission is not granted then any protest involving more than 15 people is deemed illegal. The state is then 'free', according to its own laws, to arrest or take action - a euphemism for firing rubber bullets - against the people involved. Freedom of expression is hollow under such circumstances. With such practices it is also no wonder that the South African state is attempting

to pass laws that would allow it to classify vast amounts of information that would stop any public scrutiny of its practices, abuses and short-comings. The state is not an entity of the people; it is an entity of oppression.

## THE WIDER WAR

Of course, the suppression of protestors, such as Andries Tatane, is merely the outward sign of a larger and more intense war that the elite in South Africa have been waging on the majority of people. In fact, the elite, through capitalism, have been exploiting people through wage slavery; stripping people of their jobs to increase profits; turning houses into a commodity; stripping peoples' access to water to make profits; denying people without money access to food; and cutting people's electricity when they are too poor to pay. For years people have, therefore, been robbed by the rich and state officials. As such, the elite - made up of white capitalists but now joined by a small black elite centred mainly around the state and ANC - have forced the vast majority of people in South Africa to live in misery. Indeed, the elite in South Africa has created and entrenched a society that is defined by continued exploitation of the poor and workers; that is defined by continued racial oppression of the majority of workers and the poor, and that is defined by extreme sexism. The rich and state officials (the ruling classes) have grown rich and fat out of this situation - living off the blood, sweat and cheap labour of the, predominantly black, workers and the poor. It is for this reason that the rich and politicians have come to enjoy one of the highest living standards in the world. They enjoy lavish houses, serving staff, massive pay checks - lifestyles that even the royalty of old could only dream of. Thus, it should not be surprising that South Africa is statically the most unequal society in the world - it was and is designed by the ruling classes to be so: their wealth and power is based on it!

## THE STATE IS WAR

It is this extreme inequality and deprivation - and accompanying experience of exploitation, oppression and humiliation - that drives people, including Andries Tatane, to protest. While we should rightfully be appalled by the death of Andries Tatane, and other people embarking on protests, at the hands of the state; we should, however, not be surprised. The state is the ultimate protector of the unjust and unequal society we have. If the status quo is even remotely threatened or questioned, the purpose of the state is to neutralise the threat and/or silence or co-opt it.

In fact, anarchists have long pointed out that states, of whatever variety, are inherently oppressive and violent. States are centralising and hierarchical institutions, which exist to enforce a situation whereby a minority rules over a majority. The hierarchical structure of all states also inevitably concentrates power in the hands of the directing elite. States and the existence of an elite are, therefore, synonymous. States are the concentrated power of the ruling class - made up of both capitalists and high

ranking state officials - and are a central pillar of ruling class power. Thus, the state serves dominant minorities and by definition it has to be centralised, since a minority can only rule when power is concentrated in their hands and when decisions made by them flow down a chain of command. It is specifically this that allows minorities who seek to rule people (high ranking state officials) and exploit people (capitalists) to achieve their aims.

The fact that the state is an oppressive and hierarchical system, which operates to protect and entrench the privileged positions of the ruling class, has also resulted in the continuation of the racial oppression of the vast majority of the working class (workers and the poor) in South Africa. The anarchist Mikhail



Bakunin foresaw the possibility of such a situation arising in cases where national liberation was based upon the strategy of capturing state power - as has happened in South Africa. Indeed, Bakunin said that the "statist path" was "entirely ruinous for the great masses of the people" because it did not abolish class power but simply changed the make-up of the ruling class. Due to the centralised nature of states, only a few can rule - a majority of people can never be involved in decision making under a state system as it is hierarchical. As such, he stated that if the national liberation struggle was carried out with "ambitious intent to set up

a powerful state", or if "it is carried out without the people and must therefore depend for success on a privileged class" it would become a "retrogressive, disastrous, counter-revolutionary movement". Over and above this he stressed that national liberation and the end to all forms of oppression, including that of race, had to be achieved "as much in the economic as in the political interests of the masses". Through their position in the ruling class (based on their control of the state), the black elite have escaped the effects of racial oppression and have become oppressors themselves (their power over the state at times has even been used by them, for their own interests, against other sections of the ruling class like racist white capitalists), but racial oppression for the majority of the working class continues. The privileged position of the black ruling elite - like their white capitalist counterparts - is based on the continued oppression of black workers, who have been and are deliberately relegated by the state and capitalism in South Africa to the role of extremely cheap labour. Thus, although the working class in South Africa includes white people, the main source of wealth for the white and black ruling elite depends on the exploitation of the black working class as a source of super cheap labour. It is this combination of racial oppression and exploitation on which the wealth of the elite rests. Thus, when the state and capitalism remained intact in South Africa, after apartheid, the continued exploitation of the working class and racial oppression of the majority of impoverished people were assured. It is this situation that has created the conditions that have led to the protests in townships in places like Ficksburg and Ermelo, and it is this situation that has assured that they will continue.

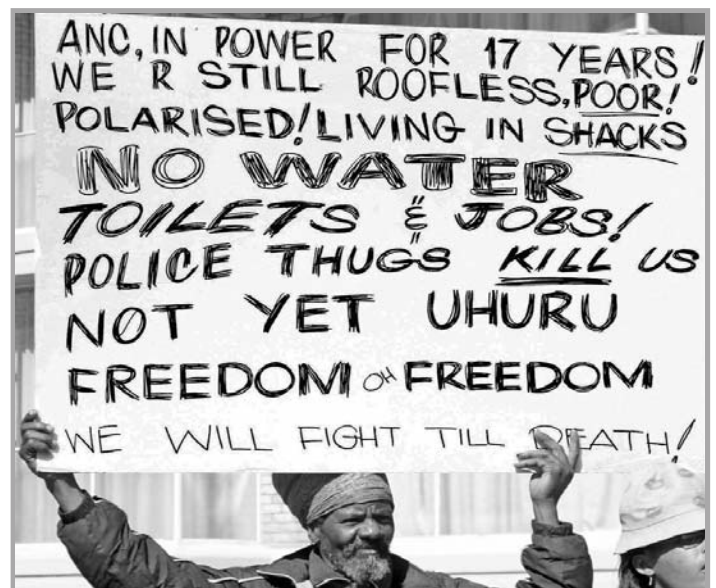
Indeed, the oppression and exploitation of the majority of people will, and does, happen even under a parliamentary system. This is because even in a parliamentary system a handful of people get to make decisions, instruct others what to do, and enforce these instructions through the state. When people don't obey these top-down instructions or disagree with them, the power of

the state is then used to coerce and/ or punish them. Thus, the state as a centralised mechanism of ruling class power also claims a monopoly of legitimate force within 'its' territory; and will use that force when it deems necessary - including against protestors raising issues like a lack of jobs, a lack of housing and a lack of basic services. It is this violent, oppressive and domineering nature of all states that have led anarchists, rightfully, to see them as the antithesis of freedom. The brutal reality is that protestors in South Africa, like Andries Tatane - demanding a decent life and greater democracy - have ended up victims of the mechanism of centralised minority rule: the state. In terms of trying to silence protestors - whether by baton, water cannon, rubber bullets or live ammunition - the South African state has also been carrying out one of the main tasks it was designed for: organised violence.

## CONCLUSION

The fact is that capitalism and the state systems are one of the key reasons why South Africa is the most unequal society in the world. The state entrenches and enforces this status quo: a status quo based on the exploitation and oppression of the vast majority of people; made up of the workers and the poor. Andries Tatane too was a victim of this system. Indeed, for as long as capitalism and the state exist; inequality will exist and people will be forced to live in misery. When they raise issues and protest; the state will try to silence them either by co-optation or violence or a combination of both. The fact also is that for as long as the state and capitalism continue to exist there will be thousands upon thousands of Andries Tatanes, Ernesto Nhamuaves, Steve Bikos and Hector Pieterse. The state and capitalism, to paraphrase Bakunin, are in combination a vast slaughterhouse and cemetery - sometimes killing workers and the poor suddenly and openly; sometimes killing them silently and slowly.

For as long as the state and capitalism are in place people will also be driven to protest against the oppression, exploitation and inequalities that are generated by, and that are part and parcel of, these systems. If people want a just, fair, equal, genuinely democratic, non-racist, non-sexist and decent society then capitalism and the state systems need to be ended. Certainly, people should demand and organise to win immediate gains like jobs, better wages, housing and services from the state and capitalists; but ultimately for as long as these systems of class rule exist; domination, inequality, and oppression will exist. Thus if genuine material equality is to be achieved, people are going to need to organise to take direct control of the economy, and run it democratically, for the benefit of all and to meet the needs of all. Only under such circumstances will the poverty, which has been driving people like Andries Tatane to protest, be ended. Only under such a system will racial oppression too be ended. Likewise, if people want a genuine democracy and a say over their lives, and not to have their concerns dismissed, then people are going to have to get rid of the state and replace it with a form of people's power based on structures of self-governance like federated community/worker assemblies and federated councils at regional, national and international levels. There have been historical experiments, although on a limited scale, with such structures of direct democracy including in South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle. We need to learn from these. In fact, if we want to ensure that there will be no Andries Tatanes in the future we need to revive the best practices of Peoples' Power and build towards achieving a free and egalitarian world: a world based on the principles that have become known, through a 150 year struggle for justice, as anarchist-communism.



# BUILD A BETTER WORKERS MOVEMENT: LEARNING FROM SOUTH AFRICA'S 2010 MASS STRIKE

BY LUCIEN VAN DER WALT  
AND IAN BEKKER

The biggest single strike since the 1994 parliamentary transition in South Africa showed the unions' power. It won some wage gains, but it threw away some precious opportunities. We need to celebrate the strike, while learning some lessons:

- ★ the need for more union democracy
- ★ the need to use strikes to link workers and communities
- ★ the need for working class autonomy
- ★ the need to act outside and against the state
- ★ the need to review our positions: against the Tripartite Alliance, anarcho-syndicalism

## INTRODUCTION

1.3 million State sector workers downed tools in August and September 2010, staying out for four weeks. It took place just weeks after government spent billions on the FIFA World Cup, in which the local ruling class used to transfer billions of Rands from basic services to private purses.

It was the biggest state sector strike in recent history, dwarfing the month-long mass strike of 2007, involving COSATU unions. By some estimates, it was the biggest single strike since the 1994 transition to parliamentary democracy.

Many state schools were closed, hospitals were affected; courts were disrupted because stenographers and interpreters were part of the strike action. The Police arrested dozens of strikers for "public violence", sixty-one strikers by the seventh day. A prominent feature of the strike was the relatively high degree of interracial co-operation, given South Africa's history.

The settlement secured a 7.5 percent wage increase, and a R800 allowance, but also demonstrated serious problems in the union movement.

## PROBLEMS TO FACE

The strike was called off from above, without due consultation. This centralisation is closely tied to the union leaders' being enmeshed in state-run industrial relations machinery, and party

politics. It weakens unions, and breeds a dangerous cynicism to the unions.

The strike was also a lost opportunity. Its demands and campaigns were resolutely centred on wage demands.

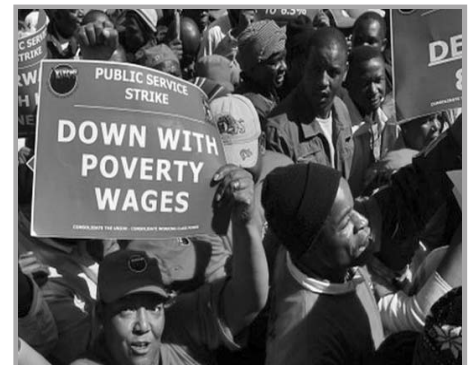
The demands of groups like teachers and nurses for improvements in their incomes should have been linked to demands by poor and black working class communities for more and better schools, hospitals and basic services. This would have strengthened the strike, and started to rebuild unity between unions and community organizations – a source of power that has been lost. Instead, the capitalist and state media were able to present the strikers as greedy thugs who ignored school kids, the sick and the pregnant.

## UNIONS ARE ESSENTIAL

South African unions – like all unions, no matter how bureaucratized or conservative – are a vital bulwark of proletarian power against the ruling class. For all their contradictions and limitations, unions reflect the fact that society is divided into classes, based on wealth and power. They also reflect the fact that the working class has never won anything without a fight.

As Rudolph Rocker argued in *Anarcho-syndicalism*, the political rights and economic gains of the people are owed to "their own strength" expressed in "relentless struggles."<sup>1</sup> Without unions, the average income of African workers in South Africa would be 20 percent lower than at present; that of white workers, 10 percent lower; non-union workers also gain significantly from negotiated wage settlements.<sup>2</sup>

But unless unions are democratized and decentralized, run from below, and independent of the state and its political parties, they will always be crippled. They also need to re-orientate towards other working class movements, outside and against the state, to fight for libertarian and socialist transformation from below. The ideas of anarcho-syndicalism (mentioned positively by Zweli Vavi at the 2009 COSATU Congress) provide a useful starting point; and also provide the theoretical framework for the following analysis.



## REMARKABLE UNITY

A key factor spurring the strike was the global financial crisis. 2009 saw world economic growth fall, and massive job losses. In South Africa, manufacturing shrunk by 22.1 percent and mining by 32,8 percent in the first quarter of 2009, with perhaps 770,000 jobs lost in the first eight months of the year.<sup>3</sup> Further pressure on wages came from a range of sources, such as state utility ESKOM drastically raising electricity prices.

The mass strike involved workers from a range of unions, political backgrounds and races. Besides the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) – the main federation – the strike drew in 11 non-COSATU unions, linked together in the loosely organised Independent Labour Caucus (ILC).

State sector trade unionism has grown while mining- and manufacturing-based unionism has been hard hit. With 220,000 members, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) is the second largest affiliate of 2 million-strong COSATU. It is closely followed at 210,000 members by the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), which organises in hospitals, schools, universities and elsewhere.

The ILC links other unions, which include a large proportion of the more skilled layers of white, Coloured and Indian workers. Notable is the Public Servants Association (PSA), affiliated to the moderate Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA). Another is the National Union of Public Service and Allied Workers (NUPSAW), affiliated to the centre-right Confederation of South African Workers' Unions (CONSAWU).

SADTU and NEHAWU demanded substantial real wage increases: with inflation running above 6 percent, unions aimed at increases of 8.6 percent, and housing allowances of R1,000, backdated to 1 April. Unions also wanted a number of issues dating back to the 2007 state sector strike resolved, especially around medical insurance.

The state, claiming resource constraints, offered 6.3 percent on wages, leading to a one day general strike on Tuesday 10 August. Subsequent standoffs led to the rapid escalation of the strike actions.

## THE “NO RESOURCES” MYTH

The state's hard-line was partly a result of its determination to impose the neo-liberal framework. It did not reflect a simple inability to pay, as state officials claimed.

With the largest economy and tax base in Africa, the state has potential fiscal resources unmatched in the continent. However, in line with the basic structure of the class system, resources are skewed to the ruling class.

South Africa's neo-liberal macro-economic policy of the ruling class – dating back to 1979, and accelerated from 1996- has seen state revenue shifted away from taxes on the rich and powerful.

In 1980, the share of income tax on individuals in total state revenue was only 18%; by 2000, it was 44%. Indirect tax – centrally, sales tax, introduced in 1981 – shot up to 27% of revenue.

This enabled company tax to fall to a mere 15% by 2000.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, income tax was restructured regressively, in that tax cuts were twice as generous for high-income, than low-income, earners eligible for this tax.<sup>5</sup>

This situation obviously limits state ability and willingness to meet wage demands.

It also reflects the way that existing social arrangements always prioritise the privileges of the rich and powerful.

## “STATE SECTOR” OR “PUBLIC SECTOR”?

This paper has spoken of a “state sector” strike, not a “public sector” strike. There is no “public sector” of the economy. There is a state sector, under the state managers, including politicians. There is a private sector, under the private capitalists.

To speak of a “public sector” suggests the state serves “public” interests. On the contrary, the state is an instrument of ruling

class power, which *cannot* serve the *working class* public. It can, as Rocker suggests, only be *forced* to make concessions through struggle from below.

When useful or necessary to the elite, resources are soon mobilised; the only constraints on the resources the elite can access are the rate of exploitation, the state of the economy, loan access, and the limits imposed by the resistance of the working class. The system is constrained by its very nature: in South Africa's highly unequal order, fewer than 6 million individuals pay 95 percent of income tax, and 90 percent

of company tax revenue comes from 2,000 companies.<sup>6</sup>

Spending on the FIFA World Cup, designed to promote nationalism and foreign investment, spiralled to half a trillion rands. This was far in excess of original targets, but the money flowed. Moreover, as COSATU's Pat Craven noted, the state spent “huge amounts of money on World Cup tickets for their senior managers, on five-star accommodation for government ministers”.<sup>7</sup>

While ANC leader and South African president Jacob Zuma earns over 2 million rand, many state sector nurses before the strike earned R57,000 annually plus a monthly housing allowance of R476; teachers' wages were at a similar level.<sup>8</sup>

It is not a question of whether resources exist; it is a question of how resources are controlled and allocated in an unjust class system shaped by struggles and other contradictions.

## POLITICAL TEMPERATURE

The strikers showed deep determination to win better wages in the face of high unemployment, serious recession and overt state hostility. It also raised the political temperature. Many participants openly criticized the wealth and corruption of state managers and the politicians of the ruling African National Congress (ANC). This sort of hostility is common from non-COSATU unions.

The situation is more complicated for COSATU. COSATU is in a formal Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP). In striking against the state-as-employer, the



union federation necessarily confronts the ANC-as-government. This gives strike action in the state sector a particularly charged character. The visibility of the corruption and cronyism of ANC leadership – a continual target of the private sector media – also means that the lavish lifestyles of top politicians are both well-known and widely resented.

It was clear during the strikes that many ordinary COSATU members were skeptical about the ANC politicians. Such distrust and anger is nothing new. It was very evident at the 2007 state sector strike when then-Minister of Public Service and Administration Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi had to be provided with armed protection from strikers.<sup>9</sup> It was also evident in the 2004 state sector strike. In 2010, it was notably expressed in the heckling of ANC secretary general Gwede Mantashe at the October SADTU congress.<sup>10</sup>

## WE WON, BUT LOST

The wage gains secured by workers amounted to a R6.2 billion increase in state spending – a remarkable gain.<sup>11</sup>

But more was probably possible. The strike was suspended on the 6th September, and officially terminated by COSATU on Wednesday October 13th *even though* no deal had been struck with government. The next day, a 51% mandate from striking unions was still not reached. But with COSATU withdrawing, the ILC had to follow suit.

The decision to suspend the strike was, in short, imposed from above. It was taken *despite* the power of the strike movement, and the likelihood of a dramatic victory. And it was taken without any mandate from below. Many ordinary workers declared the settlement a “sell-out,” a perception that lends itself to weak unions. Distrust means demobilisation.

SADTU did not sign the final agreement. Nor did the Health and Other Service Personnel Trade Union of South Africa (HOSPERSA) or FEDUSA. Meanwhile, SADTU’s Mtata branch wrote an open letter, “SADTU LEADERSHIP HAS SOLD OUT”, on 6th September which demanded an end to “the current confusion.”

## AUTONOMY OR CORPORATISM?

One reason for the centralisation that undermined the strike is that the unions’ are deeply enmeshed in the state-run industrial relations machinery.

The state is a pillar of ruling class power. Therefore extreme caution needs to be expressed in engaging with the law.

But rather than use labour law tactically – more specifically, using labour law only as a shield to build strong, autonomous unions – COSATU has committed itself to the official bargaining machinery, and to engagement in “social partnership” between classes. This is evident from its role in the National Economic De-

velopment and Labour Council (NEDLAC), as well as in various forms of workplace and industry-level co-operation.<sup>12</sup>

This reinforces the trend towards centralisation of power and resources in the hands of the leadership, increases the power of full-time officials, office bearers and head office policy experts.

It removes policy from real discussion at the grassroots; it makes negotiation above mass campaigning.

The tragedy is that these costs bring no benefits. COSATU has yet to decisively reverse a single element of the neo-liberal agenda via NEDLAC. Far more has been achieved from below – as the premature closure of the 2010 strike itself showed.

Mass struggles bring the people into action, shake off fear, raise political questions, and teach the vital lessons of “vital solidarity” between workers.<sup>13</sup>

## ANC ALLIANCE OR CLASS FRONT?

Also key to understanding the strike’s suspension was that COSATU’s central leaders wanted the strike suspended before the ANC’s September 2010 National General Council (NGC).

COSATU maintains the Tripartite Alliance for two main reasons: *loyalty*, dating back to the anti-*apartheid* struggle, and *strategy*: the hope that the ANC can be shifted towards COSATU’s social

democratic programme. (Doubtless some union leaders also view the Alliance as a route to senior government positions via the ANC).

All of this profoundly limits the willingness, and ability, of union leadership to adopt a course of confrontation with the ANC. The ANC’s NGC was set for 20th-24th September, and COSATU, convinced that the Jacob Zuma leadership was open to a serious engagement with labour’s social democratic policy positions, intended to participate fully.<sup>14</sup> To

maintain the strike during the NGC would have undercut this strategy, and potentially led to strikers protesting at the NGC.

Yet the events of the strike made it clear that the ANC is not pro-working class. It was the ANC government that forced the dispute into a protracted strike, that rejected strikers’ demands, and that, through the state TV and radio stations, unambiguously presented strikers as greedy, irresponsible, violent and unprofessional. It was also the ANC that set the police and army against the strike. In addition, the ANC imposed a no work-no pay rule i.e. it docked wages from strikers.

And COSATU’s alternative economic policy – centred on a mixture of Keynesianism, protectionism and union rights – was not even discussed at the 2010 NGC, despite initial ANC promises.

## MILITANT UNION AUTONOMY

Obviously the Alliance poses serious problems for COSATU’s role as a union. It can hardly wage successful campaigns against neo-liberalism and inequality while allied to the ANC.



The ANC is a champion of neo-liberal policies, a vehicle of personal enrichment and corrupt state activity, and active in using state power to repress community protests and open political debate. COSATU is formally committed to non-racial integrated unionism; the ANC includes a racist Africanist wing that is overtly hostile to the national minorities: Coloureds, Indians and whites.

Neo-liberalism and the ruling class mean the ANC state necessarily resists state sector unions' wage demands. These undermine the framework of fiscal austerity. They divert money from private capital through taxation, and they take money from the budgets that state managers use for salaries, perks, tenders and scams.

The 2010 strike illustrates the absurdity of the Alliance. COSATU helps fund and build ANC election campaigns. These enable people like Fraser-Moleketi to get into office. Then, once in office, COSATU ends up having to wage mass strikes *against* the very ANC politicians it helped elect. Those same politicians meanwhile play on COSATU's loyalty to the ANC (and the formidable networks of patronage they wield through the state) to manipulate the unions.

A strong COSATU should be an independent, anti-capitalist, COSATU. That means a COSATU unshackled from the Alliance.

Obviously COSATU's overt support for Zuma's rise to the head of the ANC has benefited Zuma, not COSATU. Many naively believed he would reverse the neo-liberal trend.

Workers' anger at the ANC shows workers see some of the problems here. But without serious political debate and education, workers' anger and frustration will go nowhere; the Alliance will not collapse because of hot words in a strike.

## STRIKING AGAINST WHOM?

Finally, we need to face even more awkward issues. As defenders of the strike, we stand by it. We celebrate its partial victory. But we cannot stand by it uncritically.

The union struggle was not linked to the struggles of other sectors of the working class.

On the contrary, the strike alienated many potential allies - unnecessarily, because an alternative set of tactics that linked the demands of groups like teachers and nurses to the demands of poor and black working class communities would have strengthened the strike, and started to rebuild unity.

The strike was strongest by far in the state hospitals, and in state schools in the townships. In other words, the main impact of the disruption of production was on *working class* communities. Private hospitals were barely affected; private schools and well-resourced government schools ran as usual.<sup>15</sup>

The disruption of health and education only affected the ruling class *indirectly* i.e. inasmuch as it generated public outrage, not least by those personally harmed by the strike. This was a recipe for driving a wedge between different sectors of the working class: between working and poor people-as-producers and working and poor people-as-consumers.



It was in not dealing with this impact that unions failed abysmally. A court interdict forcing essential workers back to work was ignored. In one case, a procession of strikers, mainly nurses and cleaners, paraded through Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital while patients were left unfed and unattended. In another, pregnant women were turned away from a Johannesburg clinic focussed on women's health.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, as year-end examinations loomed, the parents of school students fretted at the lost teaching time.

## WINNING WORKING CLASS OPINION

Such actions were widely publicised, of course forming the centre-piece of the state and commercial media's vilification of the strikers. They also enabled the state to present itself as the responsible guardian of the country, rather than as a miserly and hostile employer, that has also harmed larger sections of the African working class through bad health and education services.

Of course, it was hypocritical and self-serving of multi-millionaire ANC politicians to describe badly paid workers in run-down facilities as greedy and unreasonable. That does not, however, excuse a section of strikers for undertaking actions like barricading the entrances to hospitals.<sup>17</sup> Zuma's condemnation of the strike had resonance precisely because such actions are widely and understandably condemned *within the working class*.

## BETTER TACTICS

A more imaginative set of tactics may well have helped. For instance, if strike action was unavoidable, strikers should have raised demands that rallied the support of the broader working class. State hospitals and township schools are rundown and under-funded: if strikers had publicised these issues, and incorporated demands for improvements into their platforms, it would have been possible not only to capture proletarian public opinion but to draw parents, students and community groups into common campaigns.

Likewise, it was essential that the settlement in the education sector include an agreement for rescheduling end-of-year examinations. This did not happen; as a result a large reservoir of popular support was wasted and, in general, the strike had a negative impact on vulnerable groups like the working class elderly, the unemployed and school students.

In essence, the focus of the strike was strictly economic, and left aside broader social and political issues. Despite a few fiery speeches from COSATU leaders like Vavi, the focus of the strike remained on incomes.

To have placed wider issues on the agenda - or to have actively fought the battle of ideas in public - would almost certainly have involved dealing with questions relating to the ANC and the Alliance, and would have increased the political temperature as a whole.

## BUILD BETTER

Precisely because the strike took place in the state sector – unlike private industry *relatively* unaffected by the global economic crisis – the strikers were in a very strong position. This strength also provided an opportunity to raise demands around job security in the *private* sector

The narrow economism of the strike meant, however, that wage increases for government workers were prioritised over demands that would have united workers across the state/ private divide *within* the larger COSATU, CONSAWU and FEDUSA federations as well. None of the federations have managed to mount a serious campaign, on the streets, against job losses; this was an opportunity lost.

In place of the Tripartite Alliance, COSATU needs an alternative alliance: not with the ANC, but with other unions, as well as with the post-*apartheid* community movements that fight around issues like housing and electricity. The state is already moving to using the strike settlement against the unions: refusing to budge from its budget and pro-rich policies, it seems set to fund the wage settlement by cutting on basic services to working class communities, like roads and schools.<sup>18</sup>

## DEMOCRACY AND LABOUR

COSATU is correct that the “massive national challenges” in South Africa will not be resolved within a neo-liberal capitalist framework.<sup>19</sup>

It is clearly mistaken, however, to place its hopes for an alternative in the government, or in the ANC, or in tripartite corporatist forums. The hope lies in those anarchist luminary Mikhail Bakunin called the the “great, beloved, common people”, the masses.<sup>20</sup>

South Africa’s unions play a key role in the protection of the working class. However, the unions face major challenges.

A lot of activism and work will be required to ensure trade unions focus the energy of the working class on the root causes of current social ills, and on the common links between the struggles of workers and the unemployed, unions and community movements, thus developing a broad front of oppressed classes to secure social and economic equality, as well as participatory democracy and social justice. This also means that unions need a clear vision of a libertarian and socialist transformation, and that the unions themselves remain under the strictest rank-and-file control.

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# EGYPT, "TRANSITION IN ORDER" AND A REVOLUTIONARY SITUATION STILL OPEN

Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians returned to take Tahrir Square on May 27 to protest against the persistence of figures of the Mubarak regime in the state, the repressive nature of the Military Council in power and the slowness of the "transitional government's" reforms - reminding us that the revolutionary situation opened in Egypt in January, which has left more than a thousand dead, is not yet closed.

Contrary to those who hold fatalistic positions that predicted that the Egyptian process is exhausted, the youth of the revolution have managed at rallying the support of significant popular sectors to demand the deepening of the rhythm and nature of the changes, demonstrating that the fall of Mubarak, far from being the end of the struggle, is only the beginning.

The fate of the Egyptian process has not been cast. There are a range of possibilities open in this increasingly bitter struggle between the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces. As positions become more defined, the undecided take sides and those that climbed onto the wagon of change late and reluctantly get off. Four actors have shaped events: the army, the technocrats, national-international capital, and the popular movements. The future of the Egyptian revolution, and with it a large part of the winds of change blowing across the Arab world, will depend on how the contradictions between these are resolved.

## THE TRANSITION'S GENDARME

Since the fall of Mubarak, power has rested with the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces (which we'll simply call the Military Council) headed by Mohammed Hussein Tantawi, who was Mubarak's Minister of Defence, and by Sami Hafiz Anan, a military man who has the sympathy of the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, since 1952, power in the country has rested with the Army, and in this sense we can say that what has been witnessed since the fall of Mubarak is nothing but the continuation of this pattern.

While the media presented the army as a neutral actor before the January-February protests and while popular sectors got excited about an army that, supposedly, would be on their side, it is necessary to read the refusal of the army to attack the people (as did the police) as a political calculation that allowed the Egyptian ruling class to maintain the central pillar of their power in a position key to becoming the guarantor of their interests in the post-

Mubarak Egypt.

The reality was soon cruelly exposed, shattering the illusions that some had about the "people in uniform": on March 24, amid a wave of protests and strikes, the Military Council declared a law that, in effect, would prohibit strikes and other manifestations and public protests with the elastic argument that "they are harmful to the national interest". Since then, Military Tribunals have tried more than 5,000 people, imposing extremely harsh fines and sentences of up to ten years in prison. As always, the first measure of the counter-revolutionaries is to "discipline" the working class, and to calm employers with draconian measures, clearly showing which side they are on.

Neither did the army's hand tremble at suppressing the one and a half million demonstrators that took Tahrir Square between the 8th and 9th of April to demand punishment against Mubarak, leaving two dead bodies in the streets. Along with the persistent State of Emergency, it is clear that the Army plays a role that can be described as anything but neutral.

The academic and leader of the new Socialist Party, Mamdouh Habashi, says in respect to the Army's intentions: "what they want is the transfer of power back to the old structures again, which are the networks established by Mubarak around the security apparatus". That these networks are alive is evidenced by the fact that, after the official dismantling of Mubarak's Political Police, it is estimated that a large part of the one and a half million officers that it had will be recycled into new security apparatus. The blogger and socialist militant Hossam el Hamalawy poses with absolute certainty that "if you do not end this power that the army holds, no regime can be radically different from what we already know". The challenge is no less given the popularity which the Army still has due to

the mysticism of its history of anti-colonial struggles - even when, since the Camp David Agreement,\* it has been nothing more than a submissive tentacle of the US, by which it has been directly financed with U\$1,3 billion annually. This popularity, in any case, is being increasingly eroded as its true face emerges with increasing clarity.

## THE TRANSITION'S GOVERNMENT

Like a screen for this Military Council there is a civic transition government, headed first by Ahmed Shafiq, a military man ap-



## Mubarak must go!

pointed prime minister by Mubarak a few days before he fell, who was forced to resign due to massive protests in early March. His replacement is Essam Sharaf, a former ally of Mubarak and ex-Minister of Transport, who positioned himself on the side of the “pro-democracy” movement during the February days, and leads a liberal minority faction within the government.

The character of this transitional government is defined by Hamalawy as “*technocratic, full of figures of the old regime. But in reality, it is under the control of Mubarak’s generals. They are the real power in Egypt today*”.

This does not mean that there are no contradictions between sections of the transitional government and the Military Council, as indicated by the Egyptian anarchist Tamer Mowafy:

*“We must draw attention to the fact that many of the key figures of the Egyptian bourgeoisie have argued, for some time now, that a more democratic regime would be more manageable and stable. Some sectors of power in the US have also thought this. I think both sides, while noticing the dangers of the current situation, think it can be viewed as an opportunity for rebuilding the regime in a new form that’s more stable and more attached to the West”.*

While the Army has shown itself to be more conservative, reticent to the most cosmetic of changes, we find in the transitional government people who, effectively, want a liberal bourgeois democracy, however rudimentary it may be, and believe it a precondition for developing the neoliberal model that has been imposed in Egypt since the mid-70s on a solid basis.

At present, political changes are taking place at a tremendously parsimonious pace: the 1971 Constitution still stands, although on the 19th of March a series of reforms were voted for – that some have adopted thinking it “better than nothing” – in elections in which only 41% of voters participated – which may be more than Mubarak’s rigged elections, but which certainly does not reflect too much enthusiasm from the population. Perhaps the most significant law that the government has passed, under the pres-

sure of strikes and mass struggles, is that of trade union freedom which has in large part broken state control over trade unions.

As things now stand, both the transitional government and the Military Council would facilitate elections in September, which would give power to a “democratic” government. Nobody has much expectation in the outcome of the process of “transition in order”, as Obama calls it. The left that still bets on the electoral path is reticent about what might happen in these elections, as

the new party law makes it virtually impossible for new alternatives to be formalised by this date – it requires 5,000 registered members, a massive quantity of money to pay the registration, and the publication of statutes in an official newspaper, which costs another penny. According to Habashi, the bloc in power is trying to accelerate the process as much as possible in order to ensure that only the supporters of Mubarak and the Muslim Brotherhood would be able to capitalise on it:

*“we can not accept that the new parliament is composed only of Islamists and representatives of the old regime, who are the only ones with the financial power to con-*

*test these elections. Time is a very important issue. The plan of the counter-revolutionaries is to rush the elections as much as possible, to have them in September. This new parliament would then start to organise the constituent assembly with the old regime and the Islamists”.*



Revolutionaries demonstrate on the streets of Cairo on Mayday (Photo by José Antonio Gutiérrez D.)

## THE TRANSITION’S BANKERS

It is said that when waters are troubled fishermen profit. And this is exactly what the hand of the US is doing at this moment in Egypt, where, hijacking popular demands for reforms and for greater freedom, it is pushing to deepen the neoliberal project that has been implemented over the last four decades, first with Sadat, then with Mubarak. While demonstrators returned to occupy Tahrir on the 27th of May, the G8 meeting in France was announcing a package of U\$20 billion in “aid” for Egypt and Tunisia. Egypt, it is estimated, would receive some U\$15 billion in investments, aid and loans from the G8 countries (above all the US), from the Gulf Emirates and from the International Financial Institutions. These funds will be used to “strengthen” the private sector and, in general, to promote a package of measures aimed at trade liberalisation and “institutional reform” in order to better adapt to the requirements of transnational capital.

Freedom, *mutas mutandi*, is converted into a question of the free market, in circumstances in which the people demanded freedom as an act of collective empowerment. In the same way, to strengthen the hijacking of the slogans and demands of the revolution in order to deepen the neoliberal economic agenda, the profoundness of the 25th of January movement is reduced to a mere protest against the “dictatorship”, leaving aside the social component and the economic demands of a people who rebelled hungry, and against Mubarak’s neoliberal ways.



Thus, the US is taking up the fall of Mubarak in order to deepen its economic policy counter to popular demands, for example, nationalisation and re-nationalisation of enterprises and sectors key to the economy (where there are already some significant gains), control of foreign capital, decent and quality public services, price controls, confiscation of money of illicit origin.

In order to boost economic reform, they can count on the pressure of the exorbitant Egyptian debt (U\$35 billion and an annual payment of U\$3 billion, which would make the debt a lucrative business for the international financial organisations), 85% of which was acquired by the Mubarak dictatorship. Obama offered to “pardon” U\$1 billion of the debt, in exchange for a package of economic reforms which would open Egypt up to the US even more. Both the World Bank and the IMF have committed to loans, as long as certain conditions are met regarding the modernisation of the economy (opening up, labour flexibilisation, etc.). Also, the EU, US and the medieval monarchies of the Gulf have made it clear that they have billions to invest in Egypt, particularly in privatisation.

## A PEOPLE IN MOVEMENT

On the other hand, people use the momentum gained with the movement of the 25th of January to push for the most basic demands as well as the higher ones. Popular Committees call for the pricing of basic food stuffs; independent trade unions appear everywhere with demands from better salaries to re-nationalisation of their workplaces; women’s groups are pushing to consolidate the advances that they have been denied after decades of organisation and struggle, based on the new confidence that they have gained on the barricades; student organisations ask for substantial reforms to the education system and the removal of the people appointed by the dictatorship, adding their voices to the popular protest. The youth in particular, but behind them all the popular sectors, have lost their fear and are not afraid to take the streets again if the situation warrants it.

What is clear with the protests of May 27 is that the struggle is not only still going on, but that it is also beginning to be clarified. The Muslim Brotherhood as an organisation have marginalised

themselves from these demonstrations and attacked them, saying that there were no reasons to protest, evidencing themselves as part of the bloc in power. As such, they have no role to play in the new Egypt.

The specific demands that the demonstrators are calling for, organised by the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution,\*\* are the acceleration of the trial of Mubarak and his collaborators, and for them to be prosecuted for political crimes and not only for corruption; a purge of the regime’s collaborators in the state; restructuring of the police and withdrawals of those responsible for repression; independence of judicial power and purges of corrupt judges; establishment of a minimum wage that would correspond to the poverty line; as well as the call to draft a new constitution.

The Egyptian people are clear that they cannot abandon popular pressure nor direct action in order to achieve their goals. As Hosam el Hamalawy said:



Unionised workers discussing on Tahrir Square

*“There have been changes, but it has always been due to pressure from below. For example, one of Mubarak’s trusted men, Ahmed Shafiq, had supported the Superior Council of the Army from the beginning, but it was the popular protests that toppled him. Also owing to popular pressure they were forced to restructure the State Security Police, Mubarak’s Political Police, but when the people tired of these insufficient measures and took the case up with an assault on the headquarters of the Political Police, they had to put it down”.*

So, we are seeing a malleable and fluid situation that can be tilted to one side or the other. The counter-revolutionary sector has the weapons, the money and the support of the “international community”. The revolutionaries, however, have the support of the masses, who became conscious of their power and who tried the taste of freedom in Tahrir and in the streets and squares of the major cities in Egypt. And they know, above all, there can no longer be an Egypt without them.

**José Antonio Gutiérrez D.**

3 June 2011



\* Agreements between Israel and Egypt in 1978 to normalise relations and agree on peace. As part of the agreement, Egypt has since collaborated with Israel against the Palestinian people and the Egyptian army has received billions of dollars in US military aid.

\*\* The Coalition consists of the main youth groups that were behind the protests, including the group “We Are All Khalid Said”, the “April 6th Movement” and the youth wing split from the Muslim Brotherhood.

**Translation:** Jonathan Payn (ZACF)

**Revision:** José Antonio Gutiérrez D.



# WITHOUT BOSSES: THE PROCESS OF RECOVERING COMPANIES BY THEIR WORKERS IN ARGENTINA, 2001-2009

BY RED LIBERTARIA DE BUENOS AIRES

## INTRODUCTION

From late 2001 and the beginning of 2002, sectors of the Argentine working class staged an extraordinary experience of struggle. The occupation of companies and the commencing of production without bosses. In the context of an economic crisis, high levels of unemployment, bankruptcy of companies and massive retrenchments, thousands of workers organised themselves to keep their jobs.

## ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISIS

Between 1997 and 2001 there was a severe economic crisis in Argentina that impacted heavily on the bloc in power. This crisis was surmounted by a popular rebellion on the 19th and 20th of December that, facing a state of siege, forced the resignation of President Fernando De la Rúa and the opening of a process of leaderlessness in the executive branch of the Republic [1], and an advancement of popular struggle. This rebellion put an end to a series of neoliberal governments in the country, while there was a breakthrough in popular struggle: neighborhood assemblies, movements of unemployed workers and the recovery of factories and businesses by workers.

During the '90s an economic model based on the "convertibility" of the currency was imposed in Argentina. This meant that 1 peso was equivalent to 1 U.S. dollar. Clearly, the only way of maintaining this parity was through external credit. When, from 1997, credit became more expensive, Argentina's economy went into a severe recession. While the economic model had generated a high rate of unemployment (over 10%), the crisis of unemployment now soared to over 25%. Many businesses went bankrupt, pushing more workers onto the streets. The government's response, following the advice of the IMF and World Bank, was to implement national budget cuts, which worsened the people's situation. By 2001, Argentina had ceased to be a haven for financial investments, with much capital having left the country. The government's response was to freeze savers' bank deposits, a situation that eventually constituted an expropriation of the workers and middle class to save the banking system.

Faced with this situation, the bourgeoisie was divided around two programmes to overcome the crisis. One side sought to abandon "convertibility", devaluing the currency, to make local pro-

duction more competitive at a global level. The other side wanted to adopt the dollar as legal tender, making the local economy more dependent on the U.S. economy.

The social situation became intolerable in December 2001. The freezing of bank deposits prevented workers from having access to their wages. The lack of money supply accelerated the process of bankruptcy and unemployment increased. It was in this way that, on the 15th, the looting of shops began in the slums of the big cities. The government responded by declaring a state of siege (state of emergency), suspending the population's constitutional rights on the night of 19th December. After transmission of the presidential message on national TV, the population of the large cities began to take to the streets, banging pots and pans, chanting "What jerks, what jerks! They can put the state of siege up their ass!" or "All of them must go - not one of them must remain!", demanding the resignation of the minister of finance, the president and all the politicians. Thus began the popular rebellion, of an insurrectional nature, that ended the presidency of Fernando De la Rúa.

## POPULAR MOBILISATION

In the months following the fall of De la Rúa, Argentina was submerged in a process which saw the development of popular organisations and their demands. Noteworthy are the emergence of the Neighbourhood Assemblies and the central role played by the *Piquetero* Movement (Unemployed Workers/Pickers Movement).

The Neighbourhood Assemblies emerged in the first weeks after the fall of De la Rúa. In almost all the public squares and important corners of the big cities, thousands of residents gathered for the first time in years. They discussed politics, organised street actions (demonstrations, *escraches* [a sort of sit-in aimed at shaming someone]) and sought, through mutual aid,

to meet the needs of the unemployed residents. They also managed to establish Inter-neighbourhood Assemblies that had weekly sessions to coordinate joint actions.

On the other hand, the *piquetero* movement that had emerged in 1997, organising workers dismissed after the privatisation of the state oil company in Patagonia and the northwest of the country, who were struggling to obtain jobs and subsidies that would provide some respite during their unemployment, spread to become a nationwide phenomenon. In 2001, the poor and unem-



ployed in the slums (townships) of the country's political center, the City of Buenos Aires, were also organised and mobilised. The transitional government of Eduardo Duhalde, elected by the Legislative Assembly (comprising the Lower House and Upper House) on January 2, 2002 should have increased unemployment subsidies to try and ease the minds of the millions of unemployed workers, but instead led to the growth of proletarian protest organisations. In addition, the unemployed workers set up their own, self-managed, co-operative projects in order to create work for themselves.

The *piquetero* organisations thus became an important political actor in those years, articulating themselves around popular demands from different sectors and demonstrating a high capacity for mobilisation and for pressuring the government. In the early months of 2002, a strong alliance was established between the assemblies of urban origin, comprised mostly of middle-class sectors, and those of the unemployed in the cities' neighbourhoods, as expressed in the slogan "picket and pan, the struggle is one alone".

## FACTORY OCCUPATIONS

It is in this context of economic crisis and popular mobilisation that one of the phenomena that has most attracted the attention of anti-capitalist militancy around the world was produced: the process of the occupation of factories and businesses and their being put into production by the workers, without bosses.

While this process was new in Argentina, it does have important links with the workers' traditions and methods of struggle. The tactic of occupying factories has a long history in the country. The most important precedent in this sense was promoted by the CGT (General Confederation of Workers) in 1964. In one day 10,000 of the most important manufacturing establishments in the country were occupied by workers with military precision. The conduct of this measure was bureaucratic and enacted with a hit-and-negotiate logic in order to accumulate corporate power within the system and not to generate a break with the system. But the move shocked both the bourgeoisie and the union bureaucrats themselves to such an extent that the plan of struggle, organised into distinct stages, was aborted midway.

The occupation of workplaces was also a means of resistance against dictatorships or attempts at privatisation. Some examples of this are the seizure of the Lisandro de la Torre refrigerator company (which was done to prevent its privatisation and produced a strong workers' uprising in the district in which it was located), the seizure of the Alpargatas textile company during the last military dictatorship, or that of the El Chocón Dam works, etc..

There are also intermediate measures which have their roots and history in the Argentine labour movement: the strike with a workplace presence, for example, is a moderate derivative of the plain and simple factory "occupation".

But after the crisis of 2001 a novelty appeared: workers occupying closed factories to keep their jobs and to re-start production without bosses.

Most of the time, the occupations began as preventative measures. By these means the workers sought to prevent the employers from removing the machinery, goods and commodities before declaring bankruptcy. If this happened, companies would be insolvent and could avoid paying the wages and severance pay that

were due, as they would not have property that could be auctioned to pay off their debts.

However, they soon began to recommence production at these plants. They had as an precedent the occupation of the Argentina Metallurgy and Plastic Company (Industria Metalúrgica y Plástica Argentina - IMPA), which had been occupied since 1996 and whose workers had begun to self-manage it, after resisting for weeks or even months, in what was a big political and legal struggle. At this point the solidarity given by local residents, the assemblies and *piqueteros* - which enabled massive mobilisation to obtain possession of the factories and the rights to operate them - was essential. In most cases, they did not win the support of bureaucratic, yellow (pro-employer) union leaders, although, in some specific cases, some union sectors also supported the occupation. The most prominent case, but not the only one, is that of Zanon (now called FaSinPat or *Fábrica Sin Patrón* - Factory Without a Boss), where workers managed to recover the union structures (first the grassroots, then the union) from the hands of the bureaucracy, turning it into a combative, class-struggle organisation.

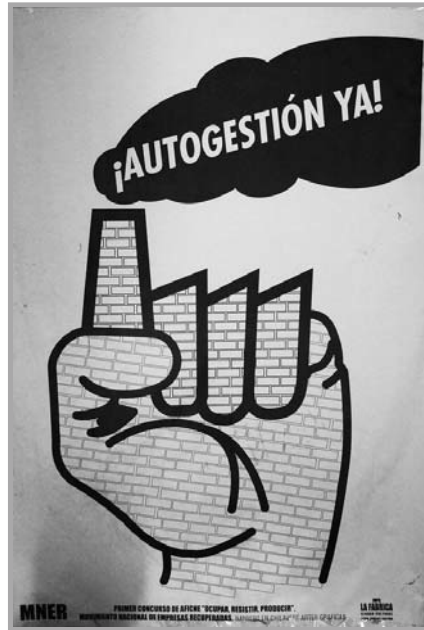
The usual mechanisms of company recovery can be outlined as follows. First, the company is occupied to avoid the depletion of stocks of products and capital goods, to confront a lock-out or to claim payment of outstanding wages. It is then decided to put the plant into production as a way of covering the employer's debts. For this, workers formed themselves into workers co-operatives and undertook a legal battle to be awarded the right to operate the company. Most of the time they initially obtained temporary rights of operation (2 years or more), but not the property rights. So they had to undertake further struggles to obtain the expropriation of the businesses and only then

were they awarded the property. These struggles have come to last years, as in the case of the Zanon ceramics producer.

But this path of struggle was very long and hard. The context of popular mobilisation and the political crisis of bourgeois and state rule were the conditions that allowed these demands to be achieved. The government was greatly weakened and could not prevent the occupation of factories.

However, we should not believe that once the legal framework for the operating of factories has been obtained the problems have been overcome. You now have to face problems as profound as the others, but of a commercial nature. The recovered factories have often been empty. They had no stocks of prime materials or finished products. Often the bosses had already removed a large part of the machinery. In other cases, the fact of having been closed for months had caused damage to machinery. This happened in several glass or metal factories, where the ovens were ruined by remaining turned off. Moreover, due to the large debts, they had their supply channels and energy or water supplies cut off, and had lost important clients due to inactivity. For these companies access to credit was zero.

Nor should we forget that this is about companies that had folded due to their inability to compete in the capitalist market. Many of the companies had outdated technology and were undercapitalised. Thus, in most cases, the start of activity was based on a strong dose of self-exploitation in order to begin the process of capitalisation. Often, workers had to work long hours without being able to make any withdrawal of money to buy new goods, and because they could not use their machines, they had to produce in an almost artisanal way.



## CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPANIES WITHOUT BOSSES

According to a study by the collective of journalists from *lavaca.org*, there were 163 companies operating without bosses in 2007 [2]. The categories of businesses involved are varied, to say the least. Basically, there are both service companies (information technology, supermarkets, newspapers, schools and nursery schools, etc.) as well as productive enterprises (construction, auto parts, food, oil, plastic, glass, etc.). They are generally small and medium-sized enterprises, with the majority of companies having around 50 shareholders, although extremes range from 10 members in the case of the smallest to 500 in the largest. Thus we're talking about the occupation of a minority fraction of Argentine companies.

As to the forms of organisation, all have taken the legal form of co-operatives. In this sense, the law governing co-operatives is very restrictive with regard to organisational aspects, as it imposes the existence of an administrative committee and a president. Presidents have almost full powers at their disposal, but have to give an account for the financial year to the shareholders at ordinary assemblies once a year. However, over and beyond this legal coverage, most co-operatives have indeed adopted other forms of organisation, that ensure the full participation of the associates in many different aspects of the life of the company.

On the other hand, in most cases an attempt is made to ensure that the distribution of profits is equal among all workers. In cases where there are wage differences they are much smaller than in other companies of the same sector.

In cases where companies without bosses have had to take on new partners, in many cases this was done among activists who had supported the occupation from the outset. This is the case of the FaSinPat ceramists, which in the early years of workers management experienced a strong growth in production, having to introduce new partners. Many of them were members of the Unemployed Workers Movement (MTD), which accompanied the workers during the occupation, in clashes with security forces and in the demonstrations demanding the expropriation of the plant.

One last point of note is that many of the recovered companies began to diversify their activities, seeking to go beyond being mere production centers for commodities. Thus, in many recovered companies there are also cultural centers, libraries, primary healthcare wards, schools, etc. This diversification was a very useful tactic in gaining support in the communities, as well as a way of showing gratitude for that support. In this way, the recovered companies experienced a major transformation, occupying themselves with different aspects of social life in the neighborhoods.

## THE DEBATE: CO-OPERATIVES OR WORKERS' CONTROL?

An important debate of a strategic nature arose within the left and the movement of recovered companies. The problem to be solved was how these companies should be organised in the

framework of the capitalist system. The most widespread solution has been the creation of co-operatives. This form, which has a precise legal character, has enabled these self-managed companies to operate legally and carry on their activities.

However, as we have already said, the Argentine State does interfere to quite an extent in the organisational life of the co-operatives. While during the initial struggle, all workers were on an equal footing, deciding how to move the struggle forward through assemblies, the law on co-operatives in Argentina sets in place an organisational mechanism that is based on representation, one which alienates the entire membership from the daily management of the company. This first obstacle was in fact overcome by many businesses without bosses, as they adopted the formal status of co-operative but gave themselves democratic management mechanisms.

But under capitalism, co-operatives must face more important problems. The process of competition between businesses compels the bosses to introduce changes in the forms of production, to increase work rates, incorporate machinery, fire workers, etc.. As you can see, production for the market conflicts with the interests of the workers. Not just with regard to what is produced, but also to how you work in order to produce. For this reason, workers

from some recovered companies have developed another model of organisation known as "workers' control." This mode implies the control by all of the workers of the entire production process. It is accompanied by an organisational form that emanates from the grassroots assemblies of each section of the company, the direct and democratic election of representatives to councils or other organisms, the revocability of those mandated by the assembly, the permanent control between

the worker base and its representatives, encouraging all stakeholders to be prepared to work as managers and the projection of the practice of control at the factory to the domain of society. This mode is also accompanied by the demand for the nationalisation of the companies [3].

However, the predominant form is the co-operative (over 90% of recovered enterprises), while 4.7% have taken the form of Corporation or Limited Liability Company and only 2.3% with workers' control.

## KIRCHNERISM AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF BOURGEOIS HEGEMONY

The election of interim President Duhalde in early 2002 marked the beginning of the reconstruction of bourgeois rule following the crisis. The devaluation of the currency ended the 10-year convertibility policy, and the faction of the upper bourgeoisie that sought to create better conditions to compete in the global market imposed itself. The other faction of the bourgeoisie, which sought the adoption of the dollar and was represented mainly by financial capital and public services privatised during the nineties, was defeated.

All that remained was to discipline the people who were continuing to struggle, mobilise and organise themselves. For this, the government used a double tactic: on the one hand, repression, on



the other, the nullification of social movements through co-optation or political annihilation. The repression was brutal and claimed the lives of two young people (Maximiliano Kosteki and Dario Santillan) from the *piquetero* movement on June 26, 2002, when unemployed workers launched a battle plan that sought to cut off the main accesses to the city of Buenos Aires.

While the repression caused the hasty call for Presidential elections, it also meant the beginning of the decline of the *piquetero* movement. The assemblies, which had been so active during the summer of 2002, began to languish. The lack of concrete objectives, the lack of experience and an economic situation that had begun to normalise, were some of the factors that led to this retreat.

It was Nestor Kirchner, who became president of the country on 25 May 2003, who had the task of rebuilding the State's power. This former governor of a province in the far south of the country, was unknown to many. In a context of widespread rejection of political parties, he presented himself as being opposed to neoliberalism and to the human rights violations during the military dictatorship (1976-1983). Thanks also to his revolutionary political background as a militant in the seventies, he drew strong popular support, particularly from the human rights organisations (including the Mothers and Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), the social movements, intellectuals, etc.

The recovery in the economy (in recent years, the economy has grown at a rate of between 7% and 9% annually), the creation of new jobs - most of which are of a precarious nature with long working hours - and the implementation of social plans against unemployment and poverty, have also served to quench much of the rebelliousness of the days of 2001. Little remains of that movement that, banging pots and confronting the police, sang "all of them must go, not even one must remain!" in the streets.

This does not mean to say that popular mobilisation has been exhausted. But it has been transformed. The vast majority now takes place through institutional channels, and although the bipartisan system that was characteristic of Argentina has not yet been rebuilt, the political parties of the regime have regained much of their importance. On the other hand, most of the *piquetero* organisations have aligned with the government. Those that did not do so have lost much of their influence and presence in national politics. These organisations depend on State resources in order to function, and the government, once again strong, only gives these funds to movements which share common interests with it.

## THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS OF 2008 AND NEW OCCUPATIONS

In mid-2008, in this political context of the strengthening of the state and its government, the international financial crisis was

produced. At the time it was responsible for new business failures, though they were not as widespread as before. The State had sufficient reserves to face the economic crisis. Thus, in 2009 there was a reduction in economic growth, but not a recession.

Some companies went bankrupt, while others were declared to be in a critical situation. The workers occupied these plants but

this time, not only did the government not allow company recoveries to be made, it actually bailed companies out by means of loans or intervened in order to reorganise their finances and then return them to their owners. This is what happened with the larger companies, while some small companies declared bankruptcy (in many cases fraudulently, deliberately caused by the owners) and their workers occupied them with the intention of putting them to work without a boss. In these cases, the recovery of businesses was more difficult. If in 2002-2003 the recoveries had to face a weakened government, busy trying to regain its authority, and the judicial power seemed overwhelmed by popular mobilisation, they now faced a strengthened enemy in conditions of greater isolation. Moreover, the possibility of getting new jobs meant that many workers did not stay in the struggle. The strength of the State allowed the bourgeoisie to better control the situation, preventing it from spreading.



## CONCLUSIONS: AN ANARCHIST ASSESSMENT OF COMPANIES WITHOUT BOSSES.

Much has been written about the factory occupations in Argentina in 2001-2003. A great many anti-capitalist militants all over the world focused on this experience in their search for a path towards a socialist society. However, ten years after the rebellion of 2001, we believe it is necessary to conduct a deeper assessment of the experience.

In the first place, we would like to summarise some aspects that we believe are central when analysing the process. They can briefly be summarised as follows:

- ★ The occupations and recoveries are expressions of the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Furthermore, they are an integral part of the Argentine labor movement, they are produced by workers or unemployed workers and they are a return to long-held fighting tactics.
- ★ The particular features of these processes are not the result of being outside the labor movement and the class struggle, but of the different stages in Argentina's economic and social development over recent decades. The workers' response arose as a response to the policies of the bourgeoisie.
- ★ The occupations and recoveries were not the work of communist or anarchist political groups (minorities). Indeed, they were not planned by anyone. They are legitimate expressions

of class struggle. The defeat and division of the working class and its bureaucratic leaderships have often led to the occupations and recoveries being seen as a juvenile phenomenon or of leftist parties, as these were their main defenders in the absence of an organised labor movement.

In this sense, we believe that in assessing the experience it is possible for us to draw lessons for other regions and times.

We cannot fail, therefore, to highlight the most salient points of the experience. While we must keep in mind that these experiences were defensive in nature and were mainly focused on small and medium businesses, with low levels of technology, and for that reason vulnerable to capitalist competition, they are valuable experiences of self-management that demonstrate the potential to produce without bosses. The recovered companies were able to demonstrate the possibility of self-management to the majority of the population. The existence of hundreds of companies working without bosses, where it is the workers who decide the course of action in production, expanding their concerns to the other problems of life in their communities. In this sense, the example of Zanon perhaps best demonstrates the possibilities of self-management, of production guided by social interest, not private gain. Furthermore, between 2002 and 2005, the company managed to greatly increase production and in the same period doubled the number of jobs at the plant. Perhaps more importantly, in the same period, without the employer's monitoring and pressure, work "accidents" fell dramatically. Under employer management there were 300 accidents per year, whereas in the period 2002-2005 there were only 33, all of a minor nature, without recording a single death [4] - evidently a clear improvement in working conditions.

However, we should also examine the limits that capitalism imposes on recovered enterprises. To do this, we must clarify what our objectives are as anarchists and what we understand by self-management.

As we noted above, most of these companies had to return to production under very adverse conditions: a lack of supplies and access to credit, obsolescent technology, marketing chains destroyed. They therefore had to base their production on high rates of worker self-exploitation. Many of the recovered companies, desperate for access to credit and subsidies, ended up

handing over management of the business to people with political ties, who then ended up calling in a new boss to manage the companies. Thus, many workers renounced self-management in order to keep their jobs. On the other hand, the need to maintain competitiveness led to the workers in many of these companies having lower incomes to those of workers performing the same tasks in private companies. Zanon itself (perhaps one of the most typical companies and that which has often achieved most) has been facing economic difficulties in recent years. Unlike its private competitors, they can not count on any kind of subsidy for the energy they consume, which means their production costs are higher.

That is why we should ask ourselves about the feasibility of self-management on small scale. If it is possible to generate islands of self-management within the framework of the capitalist system or whether capitalism has mechanisms that can neutralise these experiences. The reality of many recovered companies is that in reality they are self-managing misery: economic sectors that the capitalist system has rejected as non-viable. For this reason, we should aim to self-manage the totality of production and of social life. And for this it is necessary to expropriate the bourgeoisie on a massive scale and build a libertarian, socialist society. There can be no oasis of socialism in the framework of capitalist society and you cannot build it outside the system and live there: you

have to destroy

the system. No coexistence is possible. As they say in Zanon: "If you do not make the revolution, Zanon will be left on its own and will be destroyed."

In the process of the occupation of factories, anarchists have a lot to contribute as well as to learn. We must contribute our political perspective while providing our moral and militant support and our technical and economic assistance. Always looking for the solution to the conflict in the interests of those involved: preserving work. As part of that struggle advances in consciousness can be achieved. Advances that may accumulate in the construction of a class-struggle labor movement if these experiences remain linked to workers' organisations, participating in their struggles side by side.



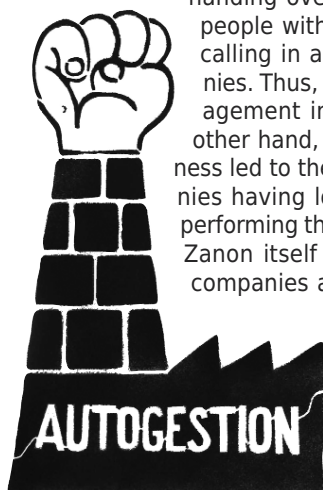
*Zanon workers assembly. The Zanon factory has since been renamed FaSinPat - Fábrica Sin Patrones, which means "Factory Without Bosses".*

### Footnotes:

1. The leaderlessness came as the vice president had resigned after having been reported for paying bribes in parliament before the treatment of a labour flexibility law.
2. Colectivo lavaca, *Sin Patrón*, Buenos Aires, 2007. More information (in Spanish) at: [www.lavaca.org](http://www.lavaca.org).
3. Aiziczon, Fernando, "Teoría y práctica del Control Obrero: el caso de Cerámica Zanon, Neuquén, 2002-2005"; in *Revista Herramientas*.
4. Aiziczin, Fernando, op. cit.

\* This article was written specifically for *Zabalaza: A Journal of Southern African Revolutionary Anarchism* by Red Libertaria de Buenos Aires, a specific anarchist political organisation based in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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# PICKING UP THE SLACK IN WASTE COLLECTION AND ECOLOGICAL PROTECTION: THE STRUGGLE OF RECYCLABLE WASTE PICKERS IN URUGUAY AND BRAZIL



BY JONATHAN PAYN (ZACF)

Across South America there is a growing movement – assuming different forms and characteristics, but with similar origins, demands and objectives – that, despite it being located at a strategically important intersection between two critical social issues – class struggle and ecology – seems to me to have received little attention in South African academic and activist circles. And this is true despite the fact that the social and economic conditions that gave rise to this movement prevail in South Africa, as they did – and continue to – in many South American countries. Perhaps this is due to the fact that this movement concerns people largely marginalised by industrial society and so-called ‘brown’ ecological issues – such as the pollution and contamination of rivers and dams surrounding poor communities, most acutely effecting the workers and poor – as opposed to the much more sanitary ‘green’ ecological issues – such as conservation and animal welfare – often associated, in South Africa at least, with liberal white activists from the middle and upper classes.<sup>1</sup>

This is the movement of the *catadores*, as they are known in Brazil, and *clasificadores* in Uruguay; the recyclable waste pickers and sorters who, similarly to South Africa, constitute a growing informal sector in the industrial production cycle. This includes all people – not formally employed by public or private waste management services – who collect, transport, classify and sell recyclable waste for a living – or ‘work with scrap’ – thus “reducing demand for natural resources and reducing greenhouse gas emissions”.<sup>2</sup> A category of work which, according to the World Bank, is performed by 15 million people globally – or one percent of the world population<sup>3</sup> – and has become increasingly common in South Africa in recent years.

Brought about by an increasing loss of employment opportunities and growing precarity of work caused by the deindustrialisation associated with the implementation of a neoliberal economic model, and their subsequent displacement from the productive cycle, an ever-growing number of the unemployed, often re-trenched workers, are turning to the category of recyclable waste pickers and sorters to earn a living and sustain themselves and their families. In so doing they play an important, if neglected role – often very consciously – in the struggle to combat the ecologically and socially disastrous effects of the capitalist mode of production and distribution, and put a halt to climate change.

In their refusal to be completely marginalised from the global economy, and the subsequent struggle to reclaim their place in the productive cycle, unemployed workers in the category of recyclable waste pickers and sorters have and continue to wage important and courageous struggles – from which we can learn in South Africa – in order to defend their rights and interests; thus reclaiming their dignity as productive workers actively contributing both to their communities and the broader struggle for positive social change and ecological sustainability. In Brazil this struggle has led to the formation of the *Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis* (MNCR - National Movement of Recyclable Material Collectors) and, in Uruguay, the *Unión de*

*Clasificadores de Residuos Urbanos Sólidos* (Solid Urban-Waste Classifiers Union), or Ucurus.

Founded in Brazil’s capital city, Brasília, in June 2001, the MNCR is a popular social movement of national dimension united by a set of common demands, such as fair payment for their services, control over the production chain of recyclable materials, access to housing, health care and education for their families and other (unorganised) *catadores*; and common principles, such as mutual aid, self-management, direct democracy, direct action, class solidarity and class independence (independence of working class organisations and struggles from political parties and electoral politics).<sup>4</sup>

Ucurus was founded in April 2002 in Montevideo, Uruguay. It was the product of a series of struggles and demonstrations waged by *clasificadores* struggling to be recognised as organised workers (with access to the same rights and benefits as formally employed workers), and for the role they play in the productive cycle and their contribution to the ecological struggle. Ucurus – unlike MNCR – is a trade union, affiliated to the National Confederation of Labour (*Confederación Nacional del Trabajo - CNT*). Much like the MNCR, Ucurus struggles to improve the working conditions, hygiene and living standards of its members; for the recognition, on the part of society, of *clasificadores* in their role as primary ecological agents; to move from the informal to the formal category of labour, and thus to be protected by the same social laws; and for access to housing, health care (including clinics for horses used to draw the wagons on which recyclable waste is often transported) and education, amongst others.

Both organisations are made up of a number of grassroots associations, workers’ co-operatives and groups that are comprised and driven by recyclable waste pickers and sorters – united to defend their collective interests. United by material necessity as they may be, however, many of these workers are very aware of the devastating effects of industrial capitalism on the environment. Indeed, it is very often marginalised poor communities, like those from which *catadores* often come, that are most affected by the pollution and environmental degradation caused by surrounding industry; and this has led to a recognition of the important role that they as *catadores* play in struggling to develop sustainable industrial and economic practices, and combat environmental degradation and climate change.

A look at some of the documents produced by these two movements gives us a clear understanding of the role *clasificadores* and *catadores* see themselves as playing both as agents of social transformation and as ‘primary ecological agents’ in the production cycle, and are worth quoting at some length:

*“Strugglers of the people as we are, and part of the population that is increasingly poorer, more marginalised and excluded, we have nothing to lose and could want nothing less than to radically modify the structure of society [...] our elders [...] with their living testament of suffering, injustice and much*

hard work, contributed in the streets and in the dumps of Brazil to the true preservation of the environment. Very differently to the inflamed discourses of some practice-less ecologists, but with life, legs, arms and hands they recovered thousands of tons of recyclable raw materials and destined them for recycling, keeping thousands of cubic meters of nature clean. This is land that was left to be polluted, land that our indian ancestors, in the past, free, lived from by 'gathering' that which this same nature we are preserving offered in abundance for all. Today, consciously or instinctively we continue reproducing that which is oldest in our culture; picking. Indians, blacks, poor immigrants and a mixture of all races, cultures and experiences of struggle; we make the MNCR the meeting space of all, for the construction of our utopia [...] We have as our objective the construction of a 'realisable utopia', that is, 'a new way of being and living in the world in collectivity', free from all oppression and exploitation of capitalist society." <sup>5</sup>



This reference to indigenous 'gatherer' lifestyles should not be confused with a desire to return to a romanticised notion of a pre-industrial past, and it is safe to say that social development and access to things like housing, sanitation and so on – for which the MNCR is struggling now – would be realised in their utopia. Indeed, one of the MNCR's objectives is to "develop solidarity practices, incentivising the exchange of experiences relating to forms of production (...), technology, etc. [...]" (my emphasis).

On their role as primary ecological agents and the importance of waste classification and recycling Ucrus says,

*"Our work of waste classification is of singular importance since this work of recovering raw material from the garbage, and the recycling process represent something important and necessary, not only because it generates jobs, but because it acts in defense of the environment as this process helps to avoid over-exploitation of natural resources...."*

*Garbage pollutes the environment and harms human health. So when garbage is buried it contaminates the groundwater that goes directly into the rivers and oceans, and when burned in incinerators it pollutes the air. Thus our task reduces the amount of garbage and prevents materials that could be recycled from being buried or incinerated. Thus avoiding disease and environmental pollution...."*

*We are Clasificadores, who must be recognised as the main link in this chain of the sorting, recycling and reuse of recyclable materials. That is why we demand a policy of comprehensive waste management."* <sup>6</sup>

It is precisely this demand – for recognition of the important role they play and to be fully integrated into the production chain and

waste management process, coupled with the need to defend their collective material interests – that led *clasificadores* and *catadores* to begin to organise themselves, as workers, and to mobilise in struggle.

One such mobilisation was in Montevideo, on February 13, 2008 where, in response to ongoing police harassment of *clasificadores* and the illegal confiscation of their carts and horses in order to deprive them of their tools to work, and in response to attempts by the government to completely privatise municipal waste management services, over 2 000 people went out in protest in the biggest demonstration of *clasificadores* in Uruguayan history. It was becoming increasingly clear to the *clasificadores* that, in order to win a permanent and integral place in the chain of production and in the waste management process, they needed to be organised as a sector, and to formalise their work and the way it was managed.

To this end, Ucrus undertook to consolidate the union by means of strengthening the groupings that make up its base;

*"It is clear that, starting with the demonstration of 13 February, a new stage has been opening for Ucrus in the struggle we have been developing. A stage in which, while discussing proposals for vehicle regulation, the criteria for movement in the streets, and alternatives to requisition (this time at the hands of the Ministry of the Interior), we have undertaken the organisation of our base (grassroots), starting with the strengthening of cantons and co-operatives where they are, and to create them where none exist. Present in this struggle is Ucrus, which today consists of several co-operative centers [...]"* <sup>7</sup>

In the context of the Mineline <sup>8</sup> struggle and the ten year anniversary of the 2001 uprising in Argentina <sup>9</sup> – which contributed towards popularising the concept of workers co-operatives <sup>10</sup> – these co-operatives, which make up the base of Ucrus, perhaps warrant further attention.

Across South America, rather than work alone, many of the people working in the category of recyclable waste pickers and sorters have formed or joined workers' associations and co-operatives in order to enable them to collect more recyclable waste than they would otherwise be able to, and sell it in larger quantities directly to the industrial mouth, thus receiving a better price per kilogram. Amongst the many co-operatives and workers groups that make up Ucrus is the biggest workers co-operative in Uruguay; *Co-operativa 'Felipe Cardozo'* from La Cruz.

Through struggle, Ucrus workers co-operatives have gained access to municipal waste dumps and recycling depots where – sometimes under the collective self-management of the different co-operatives, in conjunction with municipal workers – workers are able to earn a living sorting and recycling waste in far safer and more hygienic conditions, with better opportunities to sell it directly to industry without having to go through middlemen.

However, these co-operatives should not be seen as an end in themselves, as islands of worker self-management in a capitalist economy. Instead, united in struggle by collective interests as they are, they should be understood as but one tool to be used towards a desired end. While being organised in one of these workers co-operatives brings direct immediate material benefits to the *clasificadores*, many workers in this sector are also aware of the fact that this is not enough: that there is an ongoing struggle against attacks from the state, police harassment, attempts to privatise the sector, challenges arising from a surge in the number of people doing this work due to increasing poverty and unemployment etc. And, as such – and as previously highlighted – there is awareness of the fact that the very structure of society needs to change in order to defend their livelihood, prevent further marginalisation of the poor, combat ecological destruction and climate change etc. Indeed, this ecological class consciousness – of some of those

most marginalised by capitalist society – and the role of social protagonist some of these comrades see for themselves is evident in the names of some of the *clasificadores*' co-operatives, such as *Co-operativa 'La Resistencia'* (the Resistance Co-operative), and *Co-operativa 'La Lucha'* (the Struggle Co-operative).

Whether or not they see their role as protagonists of social transformation, as do *La Lucha* and *La Resistencia*, or simply one of material necessity, the example of these co-operatives is important in the sense that they enable workers to improve their working conditions and earning capacity, and to manage their work in a more democratic way. In this sense they could even be considered small-scale training grounds in workers self-management. It is important to stress, however, that due to the very nature and structure of capitalist society they are continually under threat of losing the gains, independence and, indeed, the very existence for which they fought; or of being 'corrupted' by the need to be competitive on the capitalist market. As such it is necessary for these co-operatives to unite, in struggle, in order to defend and advance their collective interests; recognising also that, ultimately, this struggle necessitates the complete restructuring and reorganisation of society, its relations of production, distribution, power etc.

Through the struggle for their rightful place in the production cycle, under the collective self-management of workers co-operatives, the case of the Ucrus *clasificadores* already points towards an alternative way in which the relations of power and production – in this case in the waste management and recycling sector – could, potentially, be organised: through the federation of directly democratic, worker run associations which could form the basis for a federation of workers' committees across sectors. Imagine the implications of self-managed waste picking and recycling co-operatives supplying recyclable materials directly to worker-run industry.

In conclusion we can say that recyclable waste pickers and sorters represent a socially important – yet extremely exploited, oppressed and marginalised – sector of the working class, that "as well as its ecological contribution, contributes to local economies, both individually and socially, generating large amounts of employment". In addition to combatting poverty, unemployment and climate change etc., by physically contributing to recycling waste – instead of it being buried or incinerated as discussed above – waste picking also carries other social benefits, such as combatting the spread of respiratory and skin diseases, for example, common among children in poor communities – caused by their exposure to toxic chemicals that contaminate the ground, air and water due to inadequate waste management systems. By doing this they are, in effect, pointing towards the opportunity for developing a working class counter-power; by the popular classes relying on themselves to carry out preventative health measures, as one aspect, instead of waiting for the state or local government to intervene.

Working class militants, socialist revolutionaries and climate justice activists should be working with waste pickers and sorters in South Africa – bring together and drawing from the experiences of any initiatives to organise waste pickers already underway – with the objective of building a regional movement of waste pickers and their allies to articulate and mobilise around a set of demands to defend their social and economic rights, improve their working conditions and demand respect and recognition for the important work they do. In so doing, it would be instructive to remember the guiding principles of our Brazilian comrades; mutual aid, self-management, direct democracy, direct action, class solidarity and class independence; as well as their goal of the "construction of a 'realisable utopia', that is, 'a new way of being and living in the world in collectivity', free from all oppression and exploitation of capitalist society."

What is also important to remember is that the conquests *catadores* and *clasificadores* have won, such as the formal recognition of Ucrus as a workers union, did not come through voting for in-



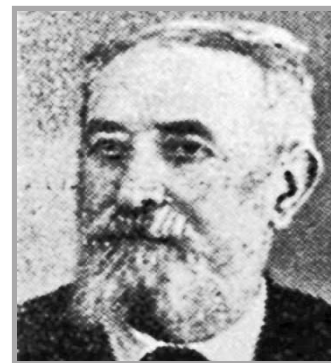
"Here, the Catador is in charge!", mural by Coletivo Muralha Rubro Negra, Brazil

dependent candidates nor for a green or left government, but through struggle. Similarly, the important contribution *catadores* make to fighting climate change and poverty and reducing ecological degradation, and the examples they provide as to possible alternative models of waste management are not the result of policies implemented by eco-socialists in local government. They are the result of the intense hard work – and blood, sweat and tears – of thousands of people physically transporting and sorting through millions of tons of recyclable waste and reintegrating it into the production cycle, thus countering over-exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation, while struggling to claim their rightful place in the management of this process. The conquests that the *clasificadores* and *catadores* have won, however limited, are the result of nothing other than an accumulation of collective struggles by the *clasificadores* and *catadores* themselves – with the support of their allies who do not perform this work themselves, but recognise the importance of this struggle. Similarly, in South Africa, any conquests for recyclable waste pickers – and the struggle against climate change and the destruction of working class and poor communities, through the capitalist mode of production and distribution – can come from nothing but struggle and organisation – independent and from below.

### Footnotes:

1. For more on the distinction between 'brown' and 'green' ecological issues see: 'Class Struggle and the Environmental Crisis', ZACF, <http://zabnew.wordpress.com/2010/11/28/class-struggle-and-the-environmental-crisis-zacf/>
2. <http://frontlineagainstclimatechange.inclusivecities.org/2010/12/global-alliance-of-waste-pickers-and.html>
3. [http://www.mnccr.org.br/box\\_2/noticias-regionais/catadores-celebram-o-dia-mundial-da-categoria-e-lembram-seu-trabalho-como-solucao-para-o-ambiente](http://www.mnccr.org.br/box_2/noticias-regionais/catadores-celebram-o-dia-mundial-da-categoria-e-lembram-seu-trabalho-como-solucao-para-o-ambiente)
4. Declaração de Princípios e Objectivos do MNCR, in *Cartilha de Formação*, MNCR
5. *Cartilha de Formação*, MNCR
6. La Necesidad de la Clasificación de Residuos y el Reciclaje, in *Compendio 2010*, Ucrus
7. Se Logra Frenar la Requisa y Abrir Negociación, in *Compendio 2010*, Ucrus
8. See page 3
9. See page 19
10. See page 39

# ANARCHISM IN TUNISIA: NICOLÒ (NICOLANTONIO) CONVERTI, 1855-1939



*This bibliographical entry is a contribution to the recovery of the history of anarchism in Tunisia. It tells only part of a larger story.*

Born in Roseto Capo Spulico (in the province of Cosenza, Calabria) on 18 March 1855, his parents were Leonardo and Elisabetta Aletta, both from well-off families. He attended primary school in Calabria and moved to Naples to attend high school, where his teacher for the final year was Giovanni Bovio. He went on to university to study medicine, though he did not graduate - as he said to A[ndrea]Costa (with whom he would always remain friends) - until several years later in 1909 when, after a long spell in Tunis, the city he was to choose as his principal residence, he returned to Italy for the first time.

Becoming attracted to the ideas of libertarian socialism, which were widely known in Naples thanks to the influence of Bakunin who had lived in the town, he became friends with E[milio] Covelli and other Neapolitan militants. He joined the International, quickly becoming the most active member of the Neapolitan group, and carried on intense propaganda activity, both with contributions to the existing press at the time and with the creation of new bulletins. In 1878 he joined the editorial board of the periodical "Il Masaniello" a fortnightly which, in seeking to fill the gap left by the move of the weekly "L'Anarchia" to Florence, favoured an alliance with the authoritarian socialists. The newspaper, however, was short-lived and after nine issues, each systematically impounded by the police, it suspended publication.

Relations between Converti and the other Internationals, however, did not come to an end, and led to the founding of the "Pisacane" circle, with Converti as secretary and Merlino as treasurer; there were also several projects, such as one to print a Neapolitan anarchist newspaper (entitled "La Campana"), reviving the previous newspaper and founding a newspaper to counter the positions of Costa. Both plans went awry, partly as a result of clashes amongst the workers among the members, who favoured policies linked to the particular problems of labour but who often lacked the ability to think in wider terms, and the "intransigently" anarchist intellectuals, who were all given to utopistic dreaming and were often unable to reconcile "final goals and intermediate objectives".

In May 1885, Converti published "Il Piccone" in brochure format (as it lacked the necessary authorization). It was an anarchist communist newspaper that was quite rigorous with both the legalitarian socialists and Costa, and with the Republicans, who were in those years of irredentism, held to be the most dangerous elements to the anarchist cause. But his forced departure for France meant that he left the Neapolitan anarchist movement in

difficulty (and indeed the movement would henceforth become indistinguishable from the socialist movement and radical democracy in general), halting publication of the newspaper for a month and only succeeding in recommencing, until November, thanks to an editorial team composed entirely of students.

Though by now out of Italy, C. also supported "Il Demolitore", the newspaper of the Neapolitan "Il Lavoratore" Circle, in which he published a letter written together with G(aetano?) Grassi where the two anarchists took a strong position in favour of a modern revolutionary organization. He contributed to the Milan magazine, "Rivista internazionale del socialismo" (in which he published an article entitled "La proprietà" ["Property"]), to the Pesaro weekly "In Marcia" and to other anarchist-inspired periodicals, including "Il Proletario" from Palermo, in which he published an article entitled Anarchia ["Anarchy"] that concluded by saying "anarchy without communism is impossible". A turning point in his life came in 1885 when, having been sentenced to 22 months

in prison for signing "a manifesto by the International (the last to be published in Italy) signed by over 300 delegates of branches and federations", for which "only about fifteen were tried" and "appeals were lodged just to give enough time for the accused to flee the country" ("L'Adunata dei refrattari", 28 Oct. 1939, p.5), he took the decision to leave Italy.

Embarking at Livorno, he took refuge in Corsica and then moved to southern France, first at Nice, where he shifted the editorial line of the newspaper "Lo Schiavo" to one of revolutionary anarchism, and then in Marseilles. Here he would once again begin to engage in revolutionary propaganda and with the help of some Italian and

French anarchists, he founded the "L'Internationale anarchiste", which eventually came out on the 16 October 1886 after struggling to find funding. The newspaper, containing articles in both French and Italian, had a run of four issues and was quite an important novelty for the anarchist press.

As he wrote in the editorial, the paper set itself the task of "bringing an end to the hatred created and sustained by the bourgeois press between French and Italian workers", and also the goal engaging in quality criticism of Republican institutions and doctrine.

These positions were later set out in the pamphlet "Repubblica ed Anarchia" (Tunis, 1889), which is the most important theoretical contribution by Converti and were also republished in the Italian press at the time. The programmatic elements of the pamphlet



were rejected however, in particular by E. Matteucci in the Rome newspaper "L'Emancipazione", and it was impounded by the authorities. Having failed to conclude an arrangement to contribute regularly to two medical journals in Paris, C. moved definitively to Tunis with his friend Grassi on 10 January 1887, once again leaving the Italian anarchist movement in southern France in difficulty.

Since the earliest period of the liberal movement during the years of the Risorgimento, the African city had become a place of refuge for numerous Italians (particularly Sicilians) suffering from political persecution, and was home to a community of bourgeois and illiterate proletarians who mixed readily with the locals and consisted of over 100,000 individuals by 1912. In this community, considered at the time to be a sort of African appendix to Italy's territory and which was predominantly Italian-speaking, and thanks to the circle of friends he soon made (through his uncle, a bishop, according to some sources), Converti was to live the rest of his life, working with great dedication as a doctor in the local hospitals.

A note by the Prefect of Cosenza indicates that Converti graduated in medicine in Tunis thanks to favourable intervention by a cardinal. But having obtained his degree, his sterling work contributed to the extension of the Tunisian healthcare system - in his opinion far from being acceptable - and setting up the "Green Cross" Relief Society [Società di soccorso "Croce Verde"], to the approval even of Muslims, an organization which he presided over for several decades.

Apart from his work as a doctor to the indigent, C. soon became one of the fathers of the Maghrebi workers movement, continuing his journalistic battles, remaining in contact with international libertarian circles, contributing to several Italian and foreign anarchist papers and publishing "L'Operaio" in 1887, a weekly that described itself as the mouthpiece of the anarchists of Tunis and Sicily. With simple language and a style which avoided emphasis and rhetoric, this "rag" - produced at the newspapers own press - attacked the two main Christian groups of the local bourgeoisie, the French and Italian, thus seeking to "shake the workers and the grey mass of the indifferent out of their apathy" about the exploitation being carried out by the larger companies. Later there followed a syndicalist newspaper, "La Voix de l'Ouvrier", in which Converti busied himself by studying the causes of misery and possible cures for this curse.

At the same time, C. formed an active anarchist propaganda group, a real hive of conspiracy which was also set up in order to organize and aid Italian anarchists who had fled to Tunisia in order to escape forced residence [translator's note: used as punishment for political crimes, but also as a preventive measure; it was not imprisonment or confinement, but one was forced to live in a certain place, usually an inaccessible spot or island and weren't free to move away] in the various islands of Sicily (mainly Favignana and Pantelleria).

In 1896 he started the theoretical magazine "La Protesta umana", whose contributors included well-known libertarian writers of the time such as A[ugustin] Hamon, L[ui]gi Fabbri, A[milcare] Cipriani and P. Ravaggi. Converti published some of his own writings too, including a three-part essay, "Idee generali" ("General Ideas"), in which he polemicized with the German theoreticians of naturalism about the concept of the State, seen as the "brain" of the social body. There was also an important and vibrant protest in defence of some Italian anarchists who had fled their forced residence, landed on the shores of Tunisia and been handed over to the French and Italian authorities. After an interval of some time due to tax reasons, the magazine was moved for one issue (June 1897) to Macerata, qualifying it as the only anarchist publication [in Italy] at the time.

In order to spread his theories, C. did not disdain from writing for certain bourgeois democratic news-sheets in the years between 1894 and 1913; many French and Italian newspapers, anarchist or otherwise, published his articles concerning the debate

on the political and economic organization of the working masses. These papers included: "La Petite Tunisie" from Tunis, "L'Avenir social" and "Le Courier", both from Tunis, "L'Emancipateur" from Algiers, "Il Progresso" from Palermo, "Il Picconiere" from Marseille, "L'Avvenire sociale" from Messina, all of which were anarchist papers; "Il Secolo" and "La Gazzetta" from Milan, "Il Momento" from Paris and also the "Unione" from Tunis, the official mouthpiece of the Italian community, founded by the Livornese.

In the early 1900s, there was a partial evolution in his revolutionary propaganda, partly due to the conditions of the Tunisian working class, who were the target of great attention from democratic circles, and this led to the creation of benevolent societies as well as a move towards the ideas and the parliamentarianism of Costa, who visited Tunis in December 1907 and who indicated in a letter his intention to see Converti after so many years. The meeting, if it did come about, was certainly decisive in the decision he made in 1913 when in Calabria to allow himself to be carried along by a vast popular movement that started in the Upper Ionian region of Cosenza province in order to bring attention to the need for certain types of infrastructure in the zone.

All this led him into toying with the idea of driving the masses into forms of direct political action and he created uproar in Italian and European anarchist circles by standing as a candidate in the Cassano Ionio constituency for the 26 October elections, on an anarchist-communist platform. His attempt naturally failed, despite a vigorous election campaign, and remained as a purely theoretical protest against the centralizing State.

Having returned once again to Tunis after a further journey of several weeks in November of that year to his own country, he dedicated himself to his work and family. He continued to work until the early 1930s as a doctor on the night shift at the Italian colonial hospital G. Garibaldi, which he had also helped to found. During the Fascist period he continued his activities, maintaining constant links with C[amillo] Berneri and anarchist and anti-fascist circles in France and America, and "in his few remaining writings, he returned to the volcanic phraseology of his early youth" ([A.] Riggio, ["Un libertario calabrese in Tunisia: N.C.", in "Archivio storico per la Calabria e la Lucania," nn. 1-4, 1947 ] p.87).

While noting that Converti was a die-hard, militant anarchist and "a declared adversary of the regime against which he speaks and writes quite frequently", in March 1933 the Italian consul in Tunis (who had him closely watched in case he were to organize a mission to Italy "for unknown reasons") rejected the possibility that "he [had it] in mind to come to Italy for any criminal intent", even though he could be considered as an individual who was capable of providing aid of any kind to elements who may well commit criminal acts. On 14 August 1936 - according to the consul - he participated in a demonstration in support of the Spanish Popular Front and spoke out to declare his faith "in a better future for a regenerated, more fraternal humanity and to send his greetings to his comrades in Spain who are fighting for the triumph of liberty".

He died in Tunis on 14 September 1939 and at his funeral, where he was eulogized by the anarchist Sapelli, the entire anti-fascist community of Tunisia turned out to salute him as one.

**SOURCES:** see original article in Italian

From entry by G.Masi, in G. Berti, M. Antonioli, P. Juso e S. Fedele (eds.), "Dizionario biografico degli anarchici italiani," vol. 1 (Pisa: Biblioteca Franco Serantini, 2003), pp. 439-442.

**English translation:** Nestor McNab, 2011.



## AMERICAN MILITANTS

IWPA anarchists led Chicago's Central Labour Union (CLU). Most IWPA supporters insisted trade unions could become workers councils and assemblies, and that they could democratically run workplaces. They believed unions should fight today and make revolution tomorrow. This 'Chicago idea' was later called anarcho-syndicalism and it was integral to the global anarchist movement.

On Monday, May 3, workers who had been on strike since February fought with scabs. The police attacked the strikers, killing two. Then an IWPA mass protest at the Haymarket Square was charged by police. A bomb was thrown, hitting the police. Who threw the bomb was never known. The police opened fire, killing an unknown number.

The local state then arrested eight leading Chicago anarchists. After a biased trial, where evidence in favour of the accused was suppressed, they were convicted of murder and blamed for the bombing. Some of the defendants had not even been at Haymarket, and some not even in Chicago.

Five of the accused, August Spies, Albert Parsons, George Engel and Adolph Fischer were hanged in 1887. A sixth man, Louis Lingg, took his own life in a final act of defiance against the state. The remaining three, Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe and Michael Schwab received life sentences, but were pardoned six years later.

In 1889, anarchists and other socialists formed a new Labour and Socialist International (the Second International). At its founding congress, it proclaimed May 1 as Workers Day which should become a global general strike to commemorate the Haymarket Martyrs, to fight for an 8-hour day, and to build global labour unity.

So May Day began as an example of globalisation-from-below.

## MAY DAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, May Day was shaped by its emergence in a capitalist order built on colonial relations.

May Day 1892 saw the launch of the first Johannesburg 'Trades Council' (or cross-industry local). But the early Witwatersrand unions were whites-only affairs, which usually endorsed racial segregation. Even so, they fought many bitter class battles.

The government felt no racial loyalty to whites. The mass strikes of 1907, 1914 and 1922 by white workers were defeated by scabs, the police, martial law and the army. The 1913 strike succeeded in forcing the state to consider a 'Workers Charter', but over 25 workers were shot dead in Johannesburg (the Charter was never implemented).

Meanwhile, an anarchist/syndicalist current emerged locally. The first May Day in Cape Town was in 1904. It was organised by the city's unions and the local Social Democratic Federation (SDF), and it included coloured workers: some Cape unions were integrated. Despite its name, the SDF was usually led by anarchists. The SDF helped form the first racially integrated general union and mass demonstrations by unemployed Africans, coloureds and whites.

The syndicalist International Socialist League (ISL), formed in 1915 in Johannesburg, aimed to create One Big Union of all workers, regardless of race, to overthrow capitalism and the state and end the national oppression of people of colour. It formed the Industrial Workers of Africa which was the first union for Africans in Britain's African empire and included the Africans T.W. Thibedi, Fred Cetiwe and Hamilton Kraai. Thus, the Chicago Idea took root in Johannesburg.

The ISL declared at its first congress in 1916 that 'the emancipation of the working class required the abolition of all forms of native indenture, compound and passport systems and the lifting of the native worker to the political and industrial status of the white.' It organised syndicalist unions amongst people of colour, in Durban, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Kimberley, and worked with the SA Native National Congress (later the ANC) and the African People's Organisation.

In 1917 the ISL organised a joint May Day rally in Johannesburg with the Transvaal Native Congress. This was the first local May Day that included African speakers, among them Horatio Mbele. In 1918, the ISL's May Day was in Ferreirastown, Johannesburg which was the first local May Day focusing on people of colour.



## COMMUNISTS AND MAY DAY

In 1921, the SDF and ISL helped form the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), and the early CPSA had a syndicalist faction.

The CPSA continued the SDF and ISL tradition of using May Day to organise large multi-racial events where demands around class exploitation and national oppression were raised.

In 1922, the CPSA demanded that May Day become a paid public holiday. This demand was taken up by the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (ICU), which was heavily influenced by syndicalism. The ICU advocated in its 1925 constitution for a general strike and 'abolishing the Capitalist Class'.

The state was reluctant to legalise May Day despite in 1928, African workers marching in their thousands, inspired by the CPSA.

In the 1930s, conservative registered unions, based amongst whites, Coloureds and Indians, held May Day but ignored the oppressed African majority. However, the CPSA and other unions held numerous integrated rallies, often showing support for the Soviet Union (repression in the USSR was not well known at the time).

In 1937, a massive May Day by the South African Trades and Labour Council and the Cape Federation of Labour Unions supported the struggle against fascism, against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and for the Spanish Revolution led by anarchists.

In the 1940s, the CPSA led major unions, and held large May Day events. The ANC was then far smaller than the CPSA.

## MAY DAY UNDER APARTHEID

May Day was closely linked to the struggle against apartheid. The Nationalist government banned the CPSA in July 1950 and the

last mass May Day under apartheid in 1950, was a general strike by the ANC and CPSA. In Cape Town, workers protesting the pass system were attacked by the police and in Johannesburg, police killed 18 marchers.

The SA Congress of Trade Unions (Sactu) was formed in 1955 and resolved to continue to organise May Days. Sactu however had collapsed under the pressure of state harassment by 1964.

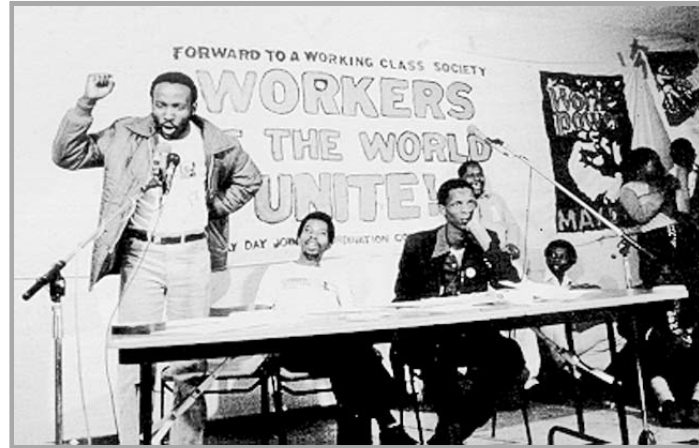
The new unions of the 1970s brought May Day back. In 1985, some unions won the day off, and those that didn't, simply took it off. May Day as a paid holiday formed part of Cosatu's (Congress of South African Trade Unions) Living Wage Campaign demands and workers set May Day 1986, the 100th anniversary of the Chicago strikes as their target. This was hugely supported and the state was finally forced to declare May Day as a holiday in 1990.

## MAY DAY TODAY

The events of the Haymarket tragedy are defining moments for workers around the world, a symbol of countless struggles against capitalism, the state and oppression. No victories are possible without the struggles of those that came before. Freedoms won

in recent times rest on the sacrifices of selfless martyrs like the IWPA anarchists.

May Day is a symbol of working class solidarity and unity, of remembrance and commemoration.



It is also a celebration of the unshakable power of the working class united, and the culture of resistance that it has carved out for itself in the long history of its existence. May Day must again serve as a rallying point for a new anti-capitalist, participatory-democratic left resistance. In our own country, even the 8-hour day is not a reality for the majority. We need to defend and extend the legacy of the Haymarket affair.

### Credit:

Sian Byrne researches FOSATU at the University of the Witwatersrand; Warren McGregor is an activist and postgraduate student at the University of the Witwatersrand; Lucien van der Walt lectures in sociology and labour history at the University of the Witwatersrand.



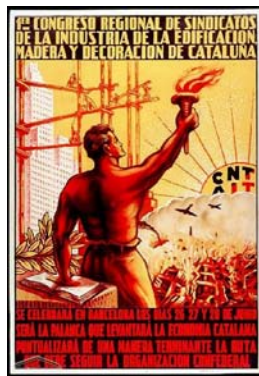
## THE SPANISH REVOLUTION: A NEW WORLD IN THEIR HEARTS

*This article is reprinted from Workers Solidarity, issue #122 of July 2011. Workers Solidarity is the newspaper of the Workers Solidarity Movement of Ireland. See [www.wsm.ie](http://www.wsm.ie)*

*The 19th of July marked the 75th anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish Revolution. For a brief time, capitalism and the State were replaced by solidarity, mutual aid and respect for others. Workers and peasants, who were deeply influenced by anarchist ideas, ran society collectively and gained control over their lives, industry and land. A central part of the revolution was the struggle against a fascist attempt to take over Spain. We remember both the magnificent triumphs and tragedies of the Spanish revolution and attempt to learn from our comrades' mistakes.*

Anarchist and syndicalist ideas had deep roots among Spanish peasants and workers. In 1911, a massive revolutionary trade union federation, the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) was formed. It had two aims; first, to fight the bosses with mass action in the daily struggle and, second, to make an anarchist revolution by organising the workers and the poor to seize back the land, factories and mines.





The CNT led many militant and successful struggles against the bosses and the government. By 1936 it was the biggest union in Spain, with nearly two million members. But the CNT was always democratic and, despite its giant size, never had more than one paid official.

The Anarchists did not restrict themselves to the workplace. They also organised an anarchist political group to work within the unions (the FAI) and organised rent boycotts in poor areas. The CNT itself included working peasants, farm workers and the unemployed. It even organised workers' schools!

In July 1936, fascists led by General Franco, and backed by the rich and the Church, tried to seize power in Spain. The elected government (the Popular Front coalition of left-wing parties) was unable and unwilling to deal with the fascists. It even tried to strike a deal with the fascists by appointing a right-winger as Prime Minister. Why? Because they would rather compromise with the right wing and protect their wealth and power than arm the workers and the poor for self-defence.

Fortunately, the workers and the peasants did not wait around for the government to act. The CNT declared a general strike and organised armed resistance to the attempted take-over. Other unions and left wing groups followed the CNT's lead.

In this way the people were able to stop the fascists in two-thirds of Spain. It soon became apparent to these workers and peasants that this was not just a war against fascists, but the beginning of a revolution! Anarchist influence was everywhere, workers' militias were set up independently from the State, workers seized control of their workplaces and peasants seized the land.

There were many triumphs of the revolution, although we are only able to consider a few of the Spanish workers' and peasants' victories here. These included the general take over of the land and factories.

Small peasants and farm workers faced extremely harsh conditions in Spain. Starvation and repression were a part of their daily lives and, as a result, anarchism was particularly strong in the countryside. During the revolution, as many as 7 million peasants and farm workers set up voluntary collectives in the anti-fascist regions. After landowners fled, a village assembly was held. If a decision to collectivise was taken, all the land, tools and animals were pooled together for the use of the entire collective. Teams were formed to look after the various areas of work, while a committee was elected to co-ordinate the overall running of the collective. Each collective had regular general meetings in which all members participated. Individuals who did not want to join the collectives were not forced to. They were given enough land to farm on, but were forbidden to hire labourers to work this land. Most "individualists" eventually joined the collectives when they saw how successful they were.

Anarchism inspired massive transformations in industry. Workers seized control over their workplaces, and directly controlled production by themselves and for the benefit of the Spanish workers and peasants. The tram system in Barcelona provided a shining example of just how much better things can be done under direct workers' control. On July 24th 1936, the tram crews got together and decided to run the whole system themselves. Within five days, 700 trams were in service instead of the usual 600. Wages were equalised and working conditions improved, with free medical care provided for workers.

Everyone benefited from the trams being under workers' control. Fares were reduced and an extra 50 million passengers were transported. Surplus income was used to improve transport services and produce weapons for defence of the revolution. With the capitalist profit motive gone, safety became much more important and the number of accidents were reduced.

In the early stages of the revolution, the armed forces of the state had effectively collapsed. In their place, the trade unions and left-wing organisations set about organising the armed workers and peasants into militias.

Overall, there were 150,000 volunteers willing to fight where they were needed. The vast majority were members of the CNT. All officers were elected by the rank-and-file and had no special privileges.

The revolution showed that workers, peasants and the poor could create a new world without bosses or a government. It showed that anarchist ideas and methods (such as building revolutionary unions) could work. Yet despite all this, the revolution was defeated. By 1939, the fascists had won the civil war and crushed the working-class and peasants with a brutal dictatorship.

Why did this happen? The revolution was defeated partly because of the strength of the fascists. They were backed by the rich, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

The CNT also made mistakes. It aimed for maximum anti-fascist unity and joined the Popular Front alliance, which included political parties from government and pro-capitalist forces. This required the CNT to make many compromises in its revolutionary programme. It also gave the Popular Front government an opportunity to undermine and destroy the anarchist collectives and the workers militias, with the Communist Party playing a leading role in these attacks at the behest of Stalinist Russia.

Nevertheless, anarchists had proved that ideas, which look good in the pages of theory books, look even better on the canvas of life.

Read more about the Spanish Revolution online at: <http://www.wsm.ie/spanish-revolution>

75 ANNIVERSARY of the SPANISH REVOLUTION



# Rampant Robbery or... ...how Mr. Capital gets his daily bread



# WHAT ANARCHISM AND SYNDICALISM OFFER THE SOUTH AFRICAN LEFT

LUCIEN VAN DER WALT

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of both despair and hope: despair at the evils of contemporary society, hope that a new world is possible.

The ideas of the broad anarchist tradition can contribute greatly to this new world. They are integrally tied to an inspiring body of practice in working class, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and civil rights struggles, back to the 1860s. And they are relevant to South Africa today.

## AIMS

Anarchism's basic aim is the most complete realisation of a revolutionary democratic vision, abolishing hierarchy and exploitation:

- ★ ending social and economic inequality, including by race, nation and gender, to create a society based on free, co-operating individuals;
- ★ revolutionary reconstruction of the family as a site of freedom and co-operation;
- ★ participatory-democratic control of the means of production, coercion and administration, through multi-tendency worker/community councils, not corporations and states; and,
- ★ self-management at work, global economic participatory planning, and distribution on the basis of need, not markets.

## STRATEGY: COUNTERPOWER

Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin –two anarchist luminaries– were clear that the “new social order” must be constructed “from the bottom up” by the “organisation and power of the working masses,”<sup>1</sup> by revolutionary *counterpower* and *counterculture*, *outside and against* the ruling class, state and capital.

“Anarchist communism” must be created *from below*, through *self-managed* struggles, by participatory-democratic movements of the broad working class and peasantry. The movements must embody in the *present* the forms and values they seek—they must *prefigure* the future; to use hierarchy is to reproduce it.

Secondly, without a radical vision, Bakunin insisted, the popular classes will instead just see ruler replace ruler, exploiter replace exploiter. Thus, the need for anarchism's “new social philosophy”<sup>2</sup> becoming the *leading idea*—as opposed to the *leading party*—of the movement.

## REFORM, REVOLUTION?

For most anarchists, this meant “mass anarchism”: only mass movements can create revolutionary change; these are built through struggles around immediate issues, economic and political; anarchists participate to *transform* the movements into levers of revolutionary change, not “civil society” pressure groups.

Reforms must be won *from below*: reforms-from-above breed passivity, patronage and state control. This is not a strategy of socialism through incremental gains. Every gain is valuable. But no reforms can alter the basic structure of contemporary society. So, struggles for reforms must help build a *revolutionary* movement.

## AGAINST ELECTIONS, CORPORATISM

Rather than seeking state power, anarchists favour a powerful, pluralistic, mass movement, forged in struggles and freely won to anarchism, as the new society emerging in the old, eventually overwhelming it. Power is *not* abolished, but held by everyone.

The alternative to neo-liberalism is neither Keynesian nor nationalisation, but *autonomous* counterpower and counterculture.

Participation in parliaments, municipalities and corporatism bureaucratise, weakens, and coopts movements. And in the neo-liberal era, even the best of the statist systems—the Nordic welfare states—are failed and fading.<sup>3</sup>

The state is a centralised organisation whereby a ruling minority oppresses the popular classes. For anarchists, class centres upon *both* ownership/ control of the means of production *and* the means of coercion/ administration. This is expressed through two interlocking centralised bodies, states and corporations—centralised *so that* a minority can rule.

The state-based ruling class segment has an *autonomous* power base in coercion/ administration. It promotes capitalism, *not* as capital's servant, but because state managers' and private capitalists' interests largely *converge*.

Every elected politician is *part of the ruling class*. A new state leadership is a personnel change. Thus, the broken promises of Chiluba, Ebert, Lula, Mandela and Obama. As Bakunin said, the “iron logic” of position makes them “enemies of the people.”<sup>4</sup>

Many still believe *their party* will be different. But it is *not* parties that change the state: *it is the state that changes parties*.



## FROM UDF TO ANC

There is a fundamental incompatibility between state power and popular self-management. 1980s South Africa saw the formation of structures of “people’s power” and “workers control” that even aspired to replace the *apartheid* state and corporations with an alternative, participatory, socialist democracy.<sup>5</sup>

The 1990s deal—besides critically changing the personnel and form of the class system—also entailed popular demobilisation as politics moved “from the people to the state.”<sup>6</sup> The ANC’s role as nexus of the post-colonial elite was matched by its promotion of passivity and unaccountability.<sup>7</sup>

## BAKUNIN Vs. MARX

No state can break this mould. Historical Marxism—the *mainstream* Marxist tradition, as opposed to could-have-beens—bears this out.

There *are* elements in Marxist thought with a democratic and emancipatory component, and anarchism is indebted to Marxist economics.<sup>8</sup>

However, the overwhelming tendency in Marxism is statist, centralist, and vanguardist, with rivals seen as necessarily anti-proletarian. Marxist theory is strikingly thin on human rights, participatory democracy, self-management—issues which define anarchism. Every single Marxist regime has been a brutal dictatorship.

Bakunin praised Marx’s learning and commitment, but rejected Marx’s outlook: capturing state power through revolutionary party; claiming that this party alone will “always and everywhere” represent the proletariat; advocating state control of labour and the economy.<sup>9</sup>

## THE EAST BLOC

This would lead, Bakunin said, to a dictatorial “barracks” regime of “centralised state-capitalism.”<sup>10</sup> This claim, central to the Marx/ Bakunin debate, is vindicated by history.

The Soviet Union cannot be blamed on external forces, wartime conditions etc.<sup>11</sup> At every step, the Bolsheviks followed the statist, centralist, one-party logic Marx outlined. V.I. Lenin’s and Leon Trotsky’s repression of rivals, closure of *soviet* and military democracy, party-run secret police, Taylorism and one-man management, started before the May 1918–November 1920 war and economic collapse.

Repression *increased* in 1921 and 1922, against Petrograd’s general strike, Kronstadt’s revolt, peasant struggles, the Ukrainians, Georgians and Armenians, reinforcing the pattern; the *gulags*, running since 1918, were full long before J.V. Stalin.

Lenin insisted “the dictatorship of the proletariat *cannot* be exercised through an organization embracing the whole of that class ... *only* by a vanguard.”<sup>12</sup> In socialism, Trotsky said, the “working masses” must “be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded,” with “deserters” “formed into punitive battalions” or “concentration camps.”<sup>13</sup> In the Trotsky/ Stalin debate, both *agreed* on the need for forced industrialisation by a one-party state.<sup>14</sup>

Genuine popular democracy cannot be suspended to “save” the revolution, anarchism argues, since this is an *essential* part of revolutionary *means and ends*.

## STRATEGY: SYNDICALISM

Syndicalism—a much abused term—does *not* mean narrow bread-and-butter unionism, a narrow workplace focus.

It is an *anarchist* strategy, maintaining that unions are *potentially* revolutionary. Through coordinated occupation of workplaces, working people can take over production through union structures.

Not all unions can do this! Workplace councils must be prefigured in daily struggles, radically democratic practice, anarchist education, and an explicit *counter-power* project. Syndicalism promotes global solidarity, not national competitiveness; global wage minimum wages and rights, not protectionism; and struggle, not corporatist pacting.

Many such unions have existed (below), embedded in larger popular movements, central in community and political struggles, revolutionary propaganda and revolutionary risings.

## RECORD: STRUGGLE, JUSTICE

The movement was not Marxism’s poor cousin.

Into the 1920s, Benedict Anderson says, anarchism and syndicalism were “the main vehicle of global opposition to industrial capitalism, autocracy, latifundism, and imperialism.”<sup>15</sup>

Anarchists/syndicalists have led the main unions in many countries, with powerful union minorities elsewhere, including Egypt, Mozambique and South Africa (where key activists included Bernard Sigamoney, T.W. Thibedi and S.P. Bunting).

They played an important role in national liberation struggles into the 1950s, led many insurrectionary risings, and three anarchist revolutions: Ukraine (1917–1921), Shinmin (Manchuria) (1929–1931) and Spain (1936–1939).

Strong into the 1950s, they entered dark decades, partly due to severe repression by states, right and “left.” Even then, they remained important in unions, armed struggles and undergrounds in Asia, Latin America and Europe into the 1980s.

Now, with the 1990s resurgence, anarchists are the main pole of attraction for many “anti-globalisation” militants.<sup>16</sup> There is a global spread of anarchist values: bottom-up organising and direct action outside the official political system.<sup>17</sup>

Anarchists played a key role in events like the 1999 Battle of Seattle, the 2008/9 Greek uprising, the 2010 Spanish general strike, and today’s North African revolts. In Spain, the anarcho-syndicalist General Confederation of Workers (CGT) represents nearly two million workers.<sup>18</sup>

## UNFINISHED NATIONAL LIBERATION

And locally?

South Africa’s transition was a *massive victory* against national oppression, won from below. The most “imperfect republic” is a “thousand times better,” said Bakunin, than the most “enlightened monarchy.”<sup>19</sup>





It is non-sensical to speak of the current situation as “white supremacy.” There have been huge gains in legal and social rights; many routine *apartheid* practices are illegal, while affirmative action etc. is mandatory; there has been the rapid expansion of the African ruling class segment, centred on the state.

Yet the national liberation struggle was left *incomplete*.

Said Bakunin: an “exclusively political revolution” that did not “aim at the immediate and real political and economic emancipation of the people” will end “a false revolution,” controlled by elites.<sup>20</sup>

The country has dangerous levels of racial and national divisions. The ruling class itself is split along African/ white lines, corresponding to the state manager/ private capitalist division.

The majority of the working class historically suffered capitalist exploitation *and national oppression*. The ruling class can hardly abolish the former. It can end the legacy of national oppression for the African ruling class, not the *working class*; a redistribution of incomes and power cannot be resolved in the context of a crisis-ridden semi-industrial economy.

The working class majority’s national liberation struggle needs a class-based, African-centred, yet multi-national, movement of counterpower and counterculture. This movement’s fight includes an end to the *racialised* division of labour, wealth and power, and to the racialised state, and a break with *colonial* culture and attitudes, as part of the anarchist project.

This cannot be waged through the ANC, a ruling class party that fosters racism and anti-immigrant sentiment, that breaks township risings, while its leading cadre enriches themselves.



## RED AND BLACK

It is increasingly accepted that socialism requires participatory democracy. Anarchism / syndicalism have historically been the core repository of these ideals; mistakes have been made, but they have no history of statist tyranny or betrayal. That is why this praxis is being rebuilt by people across the world today.

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# ORGANISATIONAL DUALISM, ACTIVE MINORITY AND THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN PARTY AND MASS MOVEMENT

BY ANARCHIST FEDERATION OF RIO DE JANEIRO - FARJ (BRAZIL)



Nestor Makhno

tradition has its roots in (Mikhail) Bakunin, (Errico) Malatesta, Dielo Truda (*Workers Cause*), Federación Anarquista Uruguaya - FAU (*Anarchist Federation of Uruguay*) and other militants/organisations that have defended this distinction between levels of organisation. That is, a broad level that we call the “social level”, composed of popular movements, and that which we call the “political level”, composed of anarchist militants that are grouped around a defined political and ideological basis.

This model is based on a few positions: that popular movements cannot be confined to a defined ideological camp – and, in this respect, we distinguish ourselves from the anarcho-syndicalists, for example – because they should organise themselves around needs (land, shelter, jobs, etc.), grouping together large sectors of the people. This is the social level or the mass movement, as it has been called historically. The model also contends that, to work in movements, it is not enough to be dissolved – or inserted – in them, even while recognising ourselves as anarchists. It is necessary that we be organised, constituting a significant social force that will facilitate in the promotion of our programme and also in defence against attacks from adversaries that have other programmes. However, one must bear in mind that we do not promote participation in one or other level; anarchists are also workers and are part of this broad group that we call the exploited classes and, therefore, they organise themselves, as a class, in the social movements. Even so, as this level of organisation has its limitations, the anarchists also organise themselves on the political level, as anarchists, as a way to articulate their work and ideas.

What is called the specific anarchist organisation is nothing new in the anarchist movement. Its origins are in the militancy of Bakunin himself, within the First International, with the formation of the Alliance of Socialist Democracy in 1868. Malatesta, developing Bakunin’s thesis of active minority, also thought of something similar. As, in the same way, did the exiled Russians of Dielo Truda and the FAU, amongst so many others. This specific grouping of anti-authoritarian revolutionaries is based on common po-

sitions on the horizon (objectives), strategies and tactics. That is, the specific anarchist organisation is not a recent “invention”, but has its trajectory in the consolidation of anarchism itself as a revolutionary tool, tracing itself to the actions of Bakunin.

sitions on the horizon (objectives), strategies and tactics. That is, the specific anarchist organisation is not a recent “invention”, but has its trajectory in the consolidation of anarchism itself as a revolutionary tool, tracing itself to the actions of Bakunin.

In the historical development of the anarchist movement, this position was neglected in diverse countries in detriment to a position that said that “syndicalism/ trade unionism” (that accumulated set of social movements) was enough. Not for us. We believe that the duty of the specific anarchist organisation, what Malatesta called the anarchist “party”, is to articulate the force of the anarchists around a common proposal and to stimulate the social movements that they advance more and more beyond their demands, being able to forge the basis of a revolutionary transformation.

It is important to emphasise that organisational dualism does not presuppose a relation of subordination or hierarchy between the two instances mentioned. In our understanding of anarchism the specific anarchist organisation and the social movements are complimentary. The relation of the specific anarchist organisation presupposes ethical and horizontal relations, that imply the absence of relations of hierarchy or domination over the instances that participate.

The role of the specific anarchist organisation is to act as a catalyst of social struggles. We don’t believe that political organisations must guide or direct the struggles, as the Marxist-Leninist primer says. Bakunin’s conception of active minority is very useful for us in this regard. The active minority does not impose, dominate, establish hierarchical relations or control within the social movements.

The role of the specific anarchist organisation in the social movements is also not to group everybody to the positions of the movements that it joins, but to spread out and to influence the movements with libertarian practices (direct action, autonomy, self-management, etc.), without “doctrinisms”.

This implies enormous responsibility and presupposes an ethical relationship with these movements. This also leads us to the inevitable role of contributing to the struggle against any type of harnessing of the social movements, combating bureaucracy, stimulating the internal organisation of the movement, and working to ensure that these movements always stand on their own feet.

As we put it in our programme: “social work is the activity that the anarchist organisation realises amidst the class struggle, making anarchism interact with the exploited classes”; social insertion is “the process of influencing social movements by anarchist practice. Thus, the anarchist organisation does social work when it creates or develops work with social movements and has social insertion when it manages to influence these social movements with anarchist practices”.

Let’s see how we can better explain this in practical terms. For us, the most important work of the anarchist organisation is to

function as a motor/ tool of the struggles of the social movements, trade unions etc. and, in this sense, we always have as an objective to create movements or to participate in movements that already exist.

Well then, we say that we do social work when we participate in or create movements and when they do not work with the strategy that we defend. When we enter into a movement like that of the homeless, for example, and we develop work without managing to conclude a proper project that is a practical application of our programme, we are doing social work. Social work is, therefore, to participate in a movement, but without managing to implement our programme, this proper project of which we speak. Generally, the first steps of an anarchist organisation are always of social work, but it is indispensable to seek social insertion, according to the moment.

In agreement with the definition made above, social insertion occurs when, starting with its social work, the anarchist organisation manages to make its strategy function in practical terms in the popular movements. In reality, for us it is not enough to simply be in the social movements and to kowtow to them; it is necessary to be there with a programme and struggle so that it is implemented as much as possible in practice.

In our programme we propose a determined strategy for the movements: in sum, broad movements without religious or ideological criteria as a basis for association; a class characteristic in this association, that is, movements forged by sectors of the exploited classes; combativeness aiming at conquests by means of struggles and not by cross-class collaborationism or cabinet agreements; autonomy in relation to individuals, organisations and institutions such as authoritarian parties, the State etc.; direct action as a form of guaranteeing class conquests in the struggles of the class itself, without participating in instances of bourgeois democracy; decision making by means of direct democracy, that is, movements that are organised horizontally, with decisions being made by all those involved in the process of struggle without leaderships detached from the ground and in favour of self-management and federalism; finally, a long term perspective that can impel day-to-day conquests and also impel struggles with a socialist and revolutionary objective.

In short, the more we manage to promote this strategy within movements, and the more they function in this way, the more social insertion we have.

Therefore, an easy distinction is: social work is to participate and social insertion is to manage to implement a programme.

Work must always be the beginning and social insertion the desired objective in the movements.

We emphasise social movements, thus social work is not made at random and even less can we consider any act of rebellion, however admirable when directed against the oppressors, as social work. First there is the question of terrain; what is the terrain of the class struggle and of the possibilities offered for popular organisation? If we understand the group of exploited classes as the protagonists of the revolution, there is nothing more

obvious than to work with movements constituted by those oppressed by capitalism.

These movements either already exist, or they need to be created - this last task can come from the specific anarchist organisation or not. Social work necessitates a certain systematicness. That is, it needs to be regular and be developed on more or less solid bases and have, or intend to have, the aforementioned class character. It is necessary to reflect on your objectives, under

threat of falling into activism for activism's sake or of wasting energies necessary for the advancing of struggles.

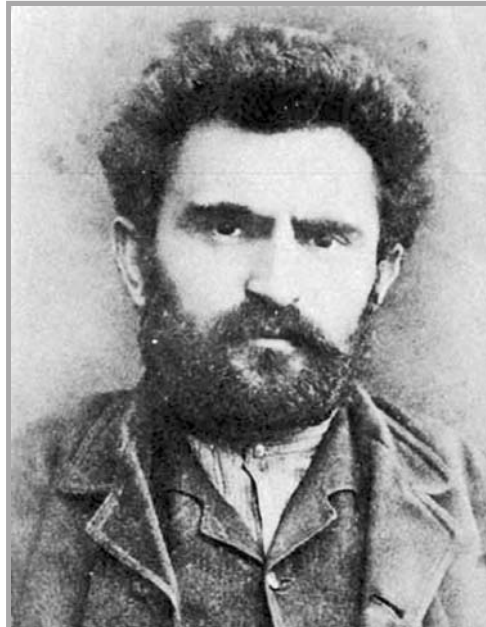
We must stress that social work requires a lot of patience and perseverance. Therefore a certain posture is needed. Something that the FAU calls *estilo militante* (militant style), a term which is completely adequate for us and is something on which we have started to reflect more recently. There is no militancy which gives results when there is significant discordance between the postures of militants. Nor do we wish that everyone act and behave in a homogeneous way or they be annulled in detriment to the collective. There are various personalities and temperaments within the organisation.

What we think is that you must have certain parameters

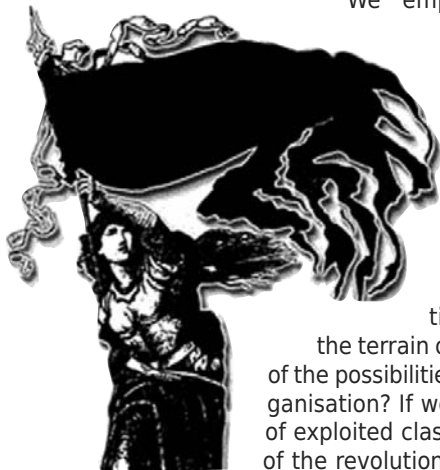
of social work that must be stimulated within the specific anarchist organisation. Our statement of principles already defines the backbone of our organisation, but the daily experience of social work presupposes problems that will not be resolved by abstractions only. For this it is indispensable that the militant is not an exotic or exogenous "foreign body" to the movements in which they intend to (or do) participate. It is necessary to know how to listen, to know how to hear. It is necessary to be patient, and above all, to be very authentic and sincere in the work realised. To give body to the values that we defend not by verbosity or pure indoctrination, but by walking together shoulder-to-shoulder, by the fraternity and solidarity of struggle that unfolds in the daily experience of social work. It is not possible to develop social work, if I only manage to interact, converse and socialise with my "revolutionary" equals.

Obviously, no militant combines all the qualities that we expect, but it is from collective considerations that we sharpen the tone.

The more this militant posture exists, the greater the possibility of having social insertion. It is not about ideologising the movements, nor about transforming them into anarchist social movements, but about doing such that they manage to go as far as possible en route to revolutionary horizons.



Errico Malatesta



This text is an extract from an interview with the Anarchist Federation of Rio de Janeiro (Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro - FARJ) - an anarchist political organisation from the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - conducted by the ZACF between August and October 2010. The full interview can be read online at: <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/19343>

**English translation:** Jonathan Payn (ZACF)

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# WORKER CO-OPERATIVES, MARKETS AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN STATE: AN ANALYSIS FROM AN ANARCHIST PERSPECTIVE

BY OLIVER NATHAN (ZACF)

## INTRODUCTION

Worker co-operatives in post apartheid South Africa have all too often been championed by certain sections of the labour movement and some on the left as part of the solution to the 'structural unemployment' facing the popular classes in the current dispensation. Moreover, and often framed in purely ideological, often Proudhonist terms (in particular from the SACP and from various ex SACP members); worker co-operatives are understood as an equitable way of organizing production so that workers have control over the labour process, on the one hand, and ownership of the means of production, on the other.

Certain 'enabling' legislation and policy such as the Co-operatives Act of 2005, the National Co-operatives Policy of 2007 and the national Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) stepping in as the 'custodian' of co-operative development South Africa has, at least on paper, meant that co-operatives are part of the national development agenda currently embodied by the New Growth Plan (NGP) policy framework.<sup>1</sup> However, if one does some research into how various co-operative development projects, including trade union, state initiated, and community initiated and worker occupation-type co-operatives have fared in the post-apartheid era, one would see the dismal performance of these co-operatives in relation to their original objectives. These are, in particular, providing sustainable employment for their members while at the same time maintaining member control and popular participation in administration and production.

This article seeks to tease out some of the pitfalls of organizing worker co-operatives trying to compete in the market and often with the 'assistance' of the state. The benefits and limitations of co-operatives have long been the topic of discussion amongst anarchists and other libertarian socialists. This paper draws on the ideas of Bakunin (as against Proudhon) around the question of how co-operatives relate to and are affected by the state and the market in capitalist society. It subsequently evaluates the realities faced by co-operatives operating in the market through an analysis of 'worker control' and 'social ownership' in the former Yugoslavian co-operatives and 'degeneration of worker control' in the Mondragon Co-operative Complex in Spain. We then move onto the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality's state sponsored co-operative development project as the South African case study.



*"The various forms of co-operation are incontestably one of the most equitable and rational ways of organizing the future system of production. But before it can realize its aim of emancipating the laboring masses so that they will receive the full product of their labor, the land and all forms of capital must be converted into collective property. As long as this is not accomplished, the co-operatives will be overwhelmed by the all-powerful competition of monopoly capital and vast landed property; ... and even in the unlikely event that a small group of co-operatives should somehow surmount the competition, their success would only beget a new class of prosperous cooperators in the midst of a poverty-stricken mass of proletarians".<sup>2</sup>*

Thus, in Bakunin's characterization of the relationship between co-operatives, the market and the state in pre revolutionary Russian society, he suggests that co-operatives existing in the context of a market economy will be swallowed up by monopoly capital

because they are unable to become as competitive as large firms in the long run. But Bakunin also situates the limitations of the co-operative (here he refers to the Russian peasant commune [the Mir] which is in essence analogous to a worker co-operative) in three traits symptomatic of co-operatives which he argues place limits on the autonomy of the co-operative:

*"1) paternalism, 2) the absorption of the individual by the Mir, 3) confidence in the tsar... the only masters he recognises are the tsar and the Mir".<sup>3</sup>*

For Bakunin, the co-operative (or here Mir) is parochially and patrimonially tied to the tsar and in turn the state; based upon the belief that the state is the ultimate guarantor of the Mir's survival. He also argues that the relationship between individual workers and the co-operative (or Mir) is such that the co-operator is dependent on the Mir for his or her own survival, that is, the co-operative provides for the material needs of the peasantry. This is also true too for worker co-operatives in the market, competing with capitalist firms, and of co-operatives who receive funding in the form of start up capital from the state, as will be shown in the case studies.

Pierre Proudhon (1809-1865), on the other hand, championed self-management of the means of production in the productive sphere and mutualism in the sphere of allocation, distribution and consumption, as the key constituents of the future socialist society, but that these ought to be peacefully built under capitalism. In Proudhon's reckoning, mutualism, and indeed the development of a non-capitalist 'third' sector- the co-operative sector - are not at odds with the market. In fact, the market is understood as the principle means by which the non-capitalist sector, that is, the co-operative sector (or free federation, in Proudhon's words) can

## THE THEORETICAL DEBATE

In looking at the state of Russian society, Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) suggested that:



gradually chip away at the edifice of capitalism; that is private property and individual ownership of the means of production.<sup>4</sup>

Mutualism disregarded the necessity for doing away with private property and private profits, so long as distribution occurred according to effort, and within the free federation of co-operatives. This is not to suggest, however that the market is unable to do this, rather, the market is the chief mechanism ensuring that goods and services are distributed and allocated along 'mutualistic' lines.

While co-operatives are understood by Bakunin as providing valuable practical experience of self-management, he insisted, however, that worker co-operatives would never be able to compete with big business and the "oligarchic monopoly" of industrial and commercial bankers.<sup>5</sup> This is due to the fact that co-operatives set up by workers, due to their limited access to resources, would never be able to develop or maintain the necessary economy of scale in production to ever be able to compete successfully in the long run with capitalist firms. Even if enough capital resources were somehow raised by workers, or if the state or a trade union stepped in to help, and a co-operative was 'successfully' competing in the market, participation and worker control would disintegrate toward hierarchy and managerialism- the hallmarks of the capitalist enterprise.

Although Proudhon was necessarily suspicious of the state, and argued that the state should not interfere in the free federation, Proudhon's critique, and indeed critical understanding of capitalism, ignored the prospect of monopoly capital overrunning and deforming the free federation and the vested interests of the state in maintaining the capitalist class structure. This was in turn a critical weakness in Proudhon's understanding of social change: that capitalists and those holding onto state power would give up their gains easily, even if overrun by the co-operatives.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, Bakunin suggested that the capitalist sector would overrun the non-capitalist one, forcing the co-operatives through the pressures of competition to employ wage labour, leading to exploitation.<sup>7</sup> The necessity to foment social and socialist revolution from below, rather than chipping away at capitalism and the state through developing the co-operative sector became the principle goal of anarchism.

## THE INTERNATIONAL CASE STUDIES

### Mondragon

The producer co-operatives of Mondragon are essentially structured as to ensure 'worker control'. Worker members exercise highly limited control within each co-operative through the principle of one-member-one-vote, to a board which is elected from the membership and runs the co-operative on behalf of the members. However, it must be emphasized that it is the board that makes major production decisions *on behalf* of the membership meaning that members have little control over the day to day running of a co-operative in the complex. The board is thus accountable to the membership only on the basis of mandate and recall in the annual election of board members. It could be argued that there is an efficiency imperative, particularly in terms of 'parsimonious' or 'pragmatic' decision-making by the board that is necessary for a co-operative to become economically efficient in relation to the market. Therefore the imperatives of the market (technical efficiency) dictate that the board *ought to* make major production and administrative decisions without consulting the membership *in order* for the co-operative to be successful in the market.

With Mondragon co-operatives being subject to fierce international competition by the mid 1980s, differing conceptions of co-operative efficiency have intensified within the co-operatives.<sup>8</sup> These different conceptions of efficiency began to be reflected in

a tension between the stated social objectives (democracy, participation and accountability of management) of the co-operative, and the business-like (technical efficiency, productivity, profitability) approach to management adopted as the Mondragon co-operatives started to encounter the effects of global market instability.<sup>9</sup>

The implications of the large scale emphasis on business-like rhetoric were threefold. Firstly, emphasis was placed on the employment of wage labourers, rather than more worker-owners. Secondly, policy-making began to occur further away from the shop floor - in specialized bodies (which was not always the case in the pre 1970s period), which left worker-owners with a choice between pre-designed business-like policy 'alternatives'. Thirdly, an increase in joint ventures with private firms was experienced, including in some cases buyouts by the private sector and international investment in non co-operative firms.<sup>10</sup> Market pressures have engendered a situation in which direct democracy has been sacrificed for market efficiency, and the range of possible policy alternatives has been limited at the highest level of the complex to exclude any prescriptions that are not in line with the profitability and efficiency imperatives of the complex as a whole.

### Reflecting on the Theory

In Proudhon's understanding, it could be suggested that the Mondragon co-operatives could have formed part of the 'non-capitalist' sector in Spain. They therefore could be seen to be chipping away at the capitalist sector by building on year-on-year market successes from the late 1940's onward. However, the theory falls short of understanding how the co-operatives complex has come under real pressure from the relatively re-integrated global market competition from the 1980's. Facing the spectre of monopoly capital and neoliberal restructuring on the part of the state, internal restructuring and 'rationalisation' of co-operative management toward market incentives (i.e. hierarchical decision making, profitability at all costs), means that the complex began to resemble more 'traditional' capitalist firms, echoing Bakunin's warning of the pitfalls of developing an alleged non capitalist sector within capitalism.

### Yugoslavia under Marshal Tito

Yugoslavia took a very different route towards 'actually existing' socialism as practiced in the Soviet Union. Marshal Tito, the leader of the Yugoslavian Communist Party, broke with the Cominform in 1949.<sup>11</sup> This break manifested itself in the deliberate weakening, (as opposed to a Soviet-style strengthening) of the state, in which 'development' and the 'emancipation of the masses' was envisaged, by decentralising economic and political power.<sup>12</sup>

Economically, decentralisation meant a retreat from strict social planning toward a market economy with worker self-management in the factories through co-operatives. Worker self-management was to be achieved through 'indicative' rather than the sort of top-down, directive planning of the Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Indicative planning consisted of drawing up national economic plans from reports of local self-managed institutions, established on the basis of worker council delegate's consensus.<sup>14</sup> The role of the state was to support the development of industrial firms through the provision of funding.<sup>15</sup> In terms of ownership then, all firms allegedly were 'owned' under the ideal of *de jure* 'community ownership', though *de facto*, ownership in fact occurred



through the state. Under 'community ownership', worker self-management was premised on the idea that the producers themselves should have genuine control over the means of production, meaning that they should have genuine control over the surplus that they generate.

Webster goes on to highlight some of the contradictions of worker self-management in Yugoslavia. Firstly, he suggests that because income distribution occurred on the principle of each according to his work, more skilled and harder working workers earned up to five times higher than the lowest paid factory worker. Secondly, because the council decided how to distribute the firm's profit, it usually went toward members' wages, which led to overall inflation as money was borrowed - rather than surplus being reinvested into the firm. Thirdly, the workers did not have any long-term interest in the survival of the company because they were not shareholders. Fourth, workers did not all have a desire to participate in time-consuming decision-making processes of the councils. Fifth, and very importantly, high levels of unemployment (30% in the 1960s) were experienced - caused primarily by a lack of incentive on the part of the firm to distribute a *fixed amount* of profit in the short-term among larger pool of workers, thus meaning that the incentive to absorb as much labour as possible was non-existent.<sup>16</sup>

The implication of these contradictions for efficiency and democracy was that neither were genuinely achieved, leading to a situation in the 70s in which mass unemployment, massive international debt, declining real wages, triple digit inflation and ethnic conflict were rife.<sup>17</sup> Coupled with a reintegration of the Yugoslavian economy into the global economy following the period of *glasnost*,<sup>18</sup> the imperatives of 'democratic' (read technically inefficient) production was necessarily unable to compete internationally, leading eventually to a neoliberal transformation *from above* in Yugoslavia.

### Reflecting on the Theory

In Yugoslavia, the state's provision of funding for the co-operatives, and indirect control of production through state representatives under the guise of indicative planning on the part of the state, had the effect of tying the co-operatives to the state. In Bakunin's schema, the tying of the *mir* to the *tsar* that occurred in practice on the one hand (that is, the forming a relationship of dependency between the co-operatives and the state as the ultimate guarantor of success and essentially existence), and its being controlled through indicative planning by the state on the other, essentially played out in the co-operative production process in Yugoslavia as well. The concern over the tendency for the state to be understood as the ultimate guarantor for the existence and success of the co-operative - as described by Bakunin - is therefore real and important. When the spectre of neoliberal restructuring arose in the 1980's, funding for the co-operatives in Yugoslavia dried up, and, facing international competition, the co-operatives could not cope, leading to their eventual privatisation or closure.

## THE SOUTH AFRICAN CASE

In both pre- and post-Apartheid South Africa there have been noteworthy attempts by laid-off workers to establish worker co-operatives - which must be appreciated as important experiments in self-management and worker control. In the 1980's for example, after the dismissal of thousands of MAWU workers in the wake of a strike for recognition at BRT-Sarmcol in Howick in May 1985, workers formed a number of co-operatives, one of which was the Sarmcol Workers Co-operative (SAWCO), the central activities of which included shirt silk-screening and vegetable farming, although it also envisaged a bulk food-buying project, which could be utilized to aid striking workers.<sup>19</sup> More recently, a courageous attempt was made by workers at the Mineline-TAP factory near Krugersdorp to transform the newly-liquidated and long-occupied factory into a worker-controlled co-operative (See Zabalaza Journal No. 11 for more on this). However the most co-operatives in the post-Apartheid era have been state-initiated, such as those brought into existence as part of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality's 'Industrial Hives Programme', just east of Johannesburg, an initiative designed to provide support for and promote the development of co-operatives and other SMEs.

Most worker co-operatives in post-apartheid South Africa, however dedicated the co-operative members and stakeholders in co-operative development processes (Trade unions, NGOs, communities and the state), have been unable to become successful in terms of the market and simultaneously maintain radically democratic member control. Most co-operatives then have faced high levels of degeneration from their initial goals, those of market success-paying their membership a living wage- and internal democracy. Worker co-operatives in the post apartheid dispensation should be understood to be survivalist in that they are often only able to pay their members a marginal wage at irregular intervals, due to their often marginal presence in the market. Members often have to find alternative sources of employment or rely on family and community networks to support themselves.

The worker co-operatives set up by the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality in 2003 are no exception to the survivalist impulse. Although funding and training has been provided to these co-operatives by the local and provincial state, the survivalist tendency existing within Ekurhuleni co-operatives puts economic survival issues ahead of any other considerations, in particular those of democratic decision-making and worker control.<sup>20</sup> This is not to suggest that these 'democratic' considerations are not important issues in the co-operatives (strong democratic tendencies exist in some cases), but the co-operatives have generally been unable to successfully sustain their presence in the market, or, in other cases, where managerial prerogative has emerged to make decisions expediently. Rather, the survivalist mode of existence, that is, how members

were going to pay themselves a wage (and, hopefully, enter the market in a sustained way) is of chief importance, being ranked as a much more pressing issue in the co-operatives, above those of maintaining a stable membership and democratically controlling the management and labour processes. Above all, however,



*The Sarmcol Workers T-shirt Printing Co-op, set up by NUMSA in Howick in the 1980's*

Source: Philip, 2003

asking the state for production contracts has become the chief concern for the Ekurhuleni co-operatives that are still in existence.<sup>21</sup>

### Reflecting on the Theory

Bakunin's observation-based theoretical position on the relationship between co-operatives and the state and co-operatives and co-operators in Russia has much synergy with the possible relationship, based on receiving and handing out contracts, between the local (provincial and/or national) state and the state sponsored worker co-operatives under study here. This can be shown in three main ways. Firstly, the co-operatives under study have not been able to penetrate their respective local economies in any sustained or meaningful way because of competition from smaller producers and retailers, and brand and price sensitivity; hence the desire for state contracts as a way out of the current state of unprofitability. Secondly, the handing out of contracts to these state sponsored co-operatives on a continuous basis would set up a relationship of dependency and patronage of the co-operative to the state, with the co-operative understanding the state to be its ultimate guarantor of success- co-operators already believe they are dependent on the state, it was the state that set up the co-operatives in the first place.

There is no reason to believe that if the co-operatives under study were to build up enough surpluses to begin production with a view to competing in the market, that this would be successful in the long run. It may be that the co-operative would ask the state for more contracts in order to survive. Thirdly, the individual co-operators that have remained with the co-operative are essen-

tially tied to the co-operative because, a) it is able to pay them a meagre wage very sporadically (often their only source of income), and they feel obliged to see the project through to success, and b) in the context of structural unemployment in Ekurhuleni, co-operators have no choice other than to remain with the co-operative: they are dependent on it for their own survival.



*Chairperson of Buthina Borona Household Co-operative, located in Ekurhuleni*

Source: [www.gep.co.za](http://www.gep.co.za)

### CONCLUSION

Worker co-operatives are not free from the pressures of competition with monopoly capital, in fact, contra Proudhon and his followers, worker co-operatives are even more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of competition, often due to their lack of access to resources with which to build competitive advantages to capitalist enterprises. Co-operatives sponsored by the state, as was the case in the former Yugoslavia and indeed in Ekurhuleni currently, while offering the possibility of startup capital and relative protection from the market, engender dependency on the state, and subject the co-operative's autonomy to the whims of state managers.

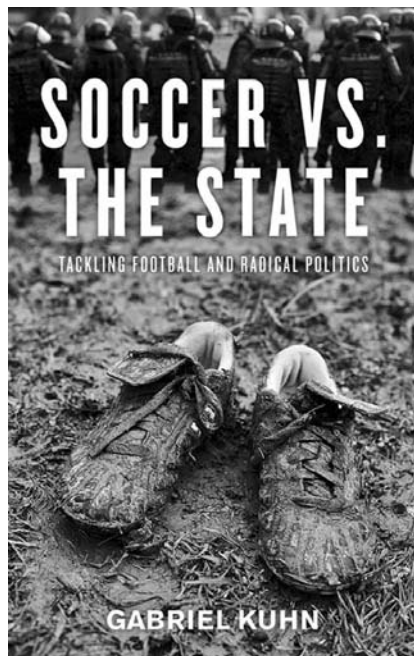
Although one might argue that in the future anarchist co-operative production would form the basis of all production, this cannot be meaningfully built in the context of the state, capitalism and the market. While the co-operative form might provide a prefigurative example of how production ought to be run in an anarchist society, this cannot make a meaningful and sustained contribution to the emancipation of the popular classes now.

### Footnotes:

- 1 Nattrass N. (2011) *The New Growth Path: Game Changing Vision or Cop-out in South African Journal of Science*. 107 (3-4), p.3
2. Dolgoff, S. (2002), *Bakunin on Anarchism*. Montreal, New York, London: Black Rose Books
3. *ibid*
4. Van der Walt, L and M. Schmidt. (2009). *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*. Edinburgh: AK Press, p. 84
5. *ibid*
6. *ibid*
7. *ibid*, p. 84
8. Taylor, P. L. (1994), *The Rhetorical Construction of Efficiency: Restructuring and Industrial Democracy in Mondragon, Spain in Sociological Forum*, 9 (3), p. 466
9. *ibid*, p 472
10. *ibid*, p. 483-484
11. The intended purpose of Cominform was to co-ordinate actions between Communist parties under Soviet direction. The Cominform thus encouraged unity of Communist parties, communist party rule and the ideas and imperatives emanation from the Russian Communist Party.
12. Webster, E. (1990) *Self-Management in Yugoslavia: A Failed Experiment in Democratic Socialism?* in *South African Labour Bulletin*, 15(1), p. 63
13. *ibid*
14. *ibid*, p. 64
15. *ibid*
16. *ibid*, p. 66
17. *ibid*, p. 67
18. Official Soviet policy introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, intended (it was claimed) to increase transparency and openness in government. It involved increasing freedom of the press, but was part of a greater process of transformation and was used in tandem with economic liberalization and the introduction of neoliberal reforms.
19. *Work in Progress*. (1987). *Sarmcol Strikers Co-operative: worker controlled production*, No. 46
20. Nathan, O. (2011), *What is the relationship between state sponsored worker co-operatives and the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality? Case studies of two worker co-operatives*. Research report submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg toward the fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts, p. 120
21. *ibid*, p. 121

# KICKER CONSPIRACY: HOW FOOTBALL FELL FOUL OF THE STATE

Interview with anarchist footballer and author about the beautiful game



*Where the beautiful game meets the Beautiful idea!*

*Soccer has turned into a multi-billion dollar industry. Professionalism and commercialization dominate its global image. Yet the game retains a rebellious side, maybe more so than any other sport co-opted by money makers and corrupt politicians. From its roots in working-class England to political protests by players and fans, and a current radical soccer underground, the notion of football as the “people’s game” has been kept alive by numerous individuals, teams, and communities.*

*The Austrian-born anarchist author and former semi-professional football player, Gabriel Kuhn, recently released his newest book with PM Press, Soccer vs. the State: Tackling Football and Radical Politics. Freedom Press recently talked to Kuhn about football, anarchism, and sports in a better world.*

*This article originally appeared in Freedom #7208 on April 23, 2011*

**FP: Is there anything intrinsically ‘anarchistic’ about football?**

**GK:** I’m tempted to say that there isn’t any-

thing intrinsically anarchistic about anything. If anarchy was that easy, we’d have more of it. However, I think that almost everything has anarchistic potential, and it is this potential that anarchists have to tease out. This is also true in football. If you are able to tame the game’s competitive character, football can be a wonderful exercise in community building. If you focus on football’s role as the game of the masses, it can serve as a vehicle to challenge the powerful. If you embrace the beauty and the joy of the game, you reject it as an industry. I would say that it is in this sense that Soccer vs. the State is trying to strengthen the radical – or anarchistic – dimensions of the sport.

**FP: How was football received by anarchism? How could we characterize the relationship between the two historically?**

**GK:** Early on, there was a lot of scepticism within the anarchist movement. The opium-for-the-masses argument was strong, both in Europe and in Latin America. It remained that way well into the 1930s. There is a text in Soccer vs. the State that was published in the 1920s by German anarcho-syndicalists. It basically blames football for distracting the workers from political organizing. Things were never that clear-cut, though. One of the pioneers of soccer in the United States was a Dutch-born IWW activist by the name of Nicolaas Steelink. And during the Spanish Revolution, soccer games were regularly arranged by anarchists in Barcelona. Today, soccer might still be eyed sceptically in some anarchist circles, but overall I think the reception has changed. Particularly in North America, soccer has become really popular among anarchists. I guess it is mainly the internationalism that is appealing. We must not forget that conservative U.S. talk show hosts like Glenn Beck still blasted soccer as un-American during the 2010 Men’s World Cup. Also in Europe and Latin America, increasing numbers of closet anarchist football fans have come out into the open. The FC St. Pauli phenomenon certainly had a huge impact. Since a bunch of squatting punks and anarchists took over the St.

Pauli stands in the mid-1990s it has become significantly easier for anarchists worldwide to relate positively to the game. I welcome this development, of course. Football plays a huge role in communities across the world, and it’s important that anarchist voices have a presence.

**FP: Where did the perception of football as twenty-two cretins chasing a lump of leather come from? Was it always thus? How did it become the preserve of the working class?**

**GK:** Since football has always been popular with the masses, it has always had to endure the ridicule of the cultural elite. This is true for every pop cultural phenomenon. There also exists an intellectual arrogance, often expressed in the form of a general disdain for physical exercise and play. Needless to say, such attitudes are rather silly. We must not let them bother us. Who cares what self-appointed cultural and intellectual elites think? The reason why football is so popular with the working class is probably simple. Football is a straightforward game that doesn’t require much equipment. It can practically be played anywhere and under all circumstances. This also gives it a distinctively democratic character. For more than a hundred years, football has been one of the few social fields in which class differences haven’t necessarily translated into a disadvantage for the poor and underprivileged. The development of a football player is far less dependent on economic resources than the development of, say, a tennis player or a golfer. Nor does a lack of formal education give you less authority in discussing the line-up and the tactics of, say, the English national team. It is largely these aspects that give football its unrivalled global role as the people’s game.

**FP: How did capitalism take over football... was it inevitable?**

**GK:** Perhaps it was inevitable in the sense that capitalism is taking over everything that promises profit. However, capitalism has never been completely distinguished from football. If we look at the origins of many of the leading clubs in the late nineteenth century, they were already exploited by companies and factory owners, at least for prestige. So the ever increasing commercialization we have witnessed in the twentieth century was not the result of an outside force but of an intrinsic logic, if you will.

Over the last twenty years, the commercialization has taken on a particular momentum. Football has turned into a spectacle that people could have hardly foreseen when World Cup Willie was sold as the first official World Cup mascot in England in 1966. Champions Leagues, a 32-team Men's World Cup roster, multi-billion dollar TV contracts, celebrity players, and a ruthless merchandise industry that doesn't even stop short of selling corporate-sponsored jerseys to the average football supporter are all expressions of this. Hardly any of it can be encouraging for a radical football fan.

For me, the response has to be two-fold. Within the professional game, we have to campaign against the exploitation of both spectators and players – and I'm not talking about the obscenely rich top 0.5% of professional players, but about the tens of thousands of football professionals who live under precarious conditions, particularly migrant players from Africa. Within the world of football in general, it is important to support grassroots initiatives that do not only promise all the fun in a politically sound and non-commercial environment but also create opportunities for effective community organizing and everyday political activism.



**FP: Can you give examples?**

**GK:** I think you find one of the best in the UK with the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls Sports Club hailing from Bristol. The Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls have managed to form local alliances that many political organizations can only dream of and to establish worldwide connections that translate directly into international solidarity work. There is an excellent article about the Easton Cowboys and Cowgirls included in Soccer vs. the State, written by Roger Wilson – I really encourage everyone to read it!

**FP: Why did football become so macho...was it always so?**

**GK:** Especially in the UK, women's football became really popular during World War I. In 1920, the best women's team at the time, the Dick, Kerr's Ladies, played their main rivals, St. Helen's Ladies, at a legendary game at Liverpool's Goodison Park in front of a crowd of 53,000. Soon after, the English FA officially banned women's football. Many other national FA's followed suit. A great number of these bans weren't lifted before the 1970s. This halted the development of the women's game for fifty years and effectively turned football into a men's only affair. These bans marked perhaps the single most scandalous chapter of football history and reflected the deeply rooted patriarchal structures that have haunted the game from its beginnings. Luckily, things have changed in the last twenty years – slowly but steadily. There remains a lot to be done, though, both in strengthening the women's game and in erasing sexist attitudes from the men's game. In terms of hetero-normativity, the struggle has only just begun. It will be a long but terribly important fight to rid football of homophobia!

**FP: Where have the changes come from?**

**GK:** Social movements have been a big factor, as always. Groups that had long been excluded from football started demanding their place: women, people of colour, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and others. Another factor is that forms of oppression have become more flexible. Traditionally ex-

cluded social groups are increasingly wooed as consumers. The trend to turn football stadiums into shopping malls reflects this. It is a development that does have certain progressive dimensions as it allows a number of people to feel comfortable in a space that didn't feel very welcoming before. However, these forms of increased inclusion are offset by new forms of exclusion, mainly economic ones. What we really need is social change apart from corporate interest.

**FP: Are there any major 'left-wing' teams today?**

**GK:** The way professional football works today, I don't think you can be major and left-wing at the same time. There are some big clubs – the FC Barcelona probably being the most prominent example – that stand for values such as independence, social awareness, and participatory democracy. However, the money and the power involved, the demands of success, the unsettling notions of loyalty and rivalry – none of this sits well with what I

see as the core values of left-wing politics, namely justice and solidarity. But this doesn't make the progressive elements less valuable, nor does it mean that anarchists can't enjoy football on the highest level. The challenge is to bolster the left-wing dimensions that exist and to oppose those that reflect and perpetuate an unjust political and economic system.

**FP: How can we as anarchists develop football?**

**GK:** On the professional level, we can campaign for more democracy within the football associations, for more supporter influence, for a more inclusive environment, for less corporate control, for players' unions, and for a just division of resources, including equitable salaries. On the grassroots level, we can strengthen the communal aspect of the game, keep the competitiveness at bay, and meet all players with respect. At the risk of sounding moralistic, I also believe that notions of fair play are important: so-called tactical fouls, diving, trash talking, etc. have no place in radical football, no matter the level.

**FP: Which team do you support? How do you justify it?**

**GK:** I guess I'm in the lucky position that the Nick Hornby model of never-ending devotion to your childhood team doesn't apply to me. There really isn't any particular team I support; it's more of a game-to-game decision. This also means that I'm fairly flexible with my justifications. As for many people, rooting for the underdog is a common choice. Other choices are supporting a team that represents a community I sympathize with or that has players, managers, or fans I like. The only irrational obsessions I keep concern teams I have always disliked: Bayern Munich and the German national team. I seem to have a hard time getting over that.



# BLACK FLAME: THE REVOLUTIONARY CLASS POLITICS OF ANARCHISM AND SYNDICALISM

by Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt



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## WHERE WE STAND

We, the working class, produce the world's wealth. We ought to enjoy the benefits. We want to abolish the system of capitalism that places wealth and power in the hands of a few, and replace it with workers self-management and socialism. We do not mean the lie called 'socialism' practised in Russia, China, and other police states - the system in those countries was/is no more than another form of capitalism - state capitalism.

We stand for a new society where there will be no bosses or bureaucrats. A society that will be run in a truly democratic way by working people, through federations of community and workplace committees. We want to abolish authoritarian relationships and replace them with control from the bottom up - not the top down.

All the industries, all the means of production and distribution will be commonly owned, and placed under the management of those working in them. Production will be co-ordinated, organised and planned by the federation of elected and recallable workplace and community committees, not for profit but to meet our needs. The guiding principle will be "from each according to ability, to each according to need".

We are opposed to all coercive authority; we believe that the only limit on the freedom of the individual is that their freedom does not interfere with the freedom of others.

We do not ask to be made rulers nor do we intend to seize power "on behalf of the working class". Instead, we hold that socialism can only be created by the mass of ordinary people. Anything less is bound to lead to no more than replacing one set of bosses with another.

We are opposed to the state because it is not neutral, it cannot be made to serve our interests. The structures of the state are only necessary when a minority seeks to rule over the majority. We can create our own structures, which will be open and democratic, to ensure the efficient running of everyday life. We are proud to be part of the tradition of libertarian socialism, of anarchism. The anarchist movement has taken root in the working class of many countries because it serves our interests - not the interests of the power seekers and professional politicians.

In short we fight for the immediate needs and interests of our class under the existing set up, while seeking to encourage the necessary understanding and activity to overthrow capitalism and its state, and lead to the birth of a free and equal (anarchist) society.



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