

# POPULAR ORGANISATION



"CAPITALISM, ANTI-CAPITALISM AND POPULAR ORGANISATION" PART TWO



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**International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG)**

Room 14, Community House, 41 Salt River Road,  
Salt River, Cape Town, South Africa.  
info@ilrig.org.za or +27 (0)21 447 6375  
www.ilrigsa.org.za

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**English translation and booklet layout:** Jonathan Payn

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# INTRODUCTION



In South Africa over the last few years we have seen many struggles within workplaces and communities. A feature of these struggles, however, has been the difficulty in maintaining and building organisations that are long-lasting and that are also inclusive and participatory.

In these struggles, new layers of activists have emerged. This booklet aims to introduce these new activists to what capitalism is, how it functions and in whose interests, how society is divided into different classes with differences in power and interests, what role the state plays, and how the state functions in the interests of capitalism and the ruling class. The booklet is a tool to help activists deepen their understanding of the system we live under, how a majority of people are exploited, and how and why a majority of people face forms of oppression. It can also be used as a basis for activists to analyse why they face the problems they do, and the deeper reasons for these problems. The second half of the booklet looks specifically at building a movement.


The booklet is a tool that both new and seasoned activists can use to think more deeply about the elements, values, principles and practices of movement building. We hope it will contribute to the long process of building participatory and directly democratic organisations that can one day become a counter-power to replace capitalism and the state, and thereby end class exploitation, patriarchy and racism in South Africa and internationally.

This booklet was originally written by Comrade Felipe Corrêa for anti-capitalist activists in Brazil. Some of the information regarding South Africa has been added by ILRIG to provide examples of the concepts covered that are South African based.



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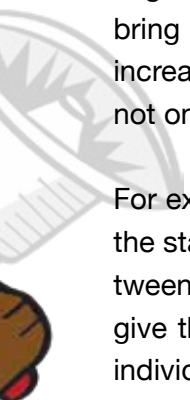


As we have seen, capitalism is a social regime of domination and exploitation. It is up to us to build an alternative, a form of resistance. To build the struggle against capitalism we have to think about organisation. There is a social force in the exploited classes, but for this social force to be able to combat capitalism it must be organised.

**To build the struggle against capitalism we must be organised.**

Capitalism is a system composed of habits, laws, political and economic institutions; this system is able to seriously limit anti-capitalist struggles. It is fundamental that the exploited must be able to counterpose their social force against the force of capitalism. When this force of the exploited is bigger than that of capitalism, a real social transformation – based on solidarity, mutual aid, freedom and equality – will be enabled. An effective opposition is vital.

**Only by organising will it be possible to transform this elementary and potential force into a real social force.**



Organisation is the coordination of forces with a common objective. It makes it possible to bring together those who defend the same interests and who, together, can permanently increase their social force. Organisation multiplies the forces of the exploited to represent not only the sum of individual forces, but a collective force, a social force.

For example, let's suppose you want to protest in front of a government building because the state wants to demolish the houses of a community. What would the difference be between going one resident at a time and going together? Going together, organised, would give the residents much more strength. Collective force is much greater than the sum of individual forces.

**The more social force the anti-capitalists have, the more capitalism will be threatened.**

This is the organisation of the exploited classes, the organisation of the people who are suffering the consequences of capitalism. The exploited classes must organise themselves and coordinate the forces of all the dominated and exploited individuals who are victims of

capitalism. Popular organisation has a class character and it works with a class perspective. Popular organisation seeks the unity of the exploited classes so that they struggle against the dominant class. As we have seen, class struggle is the constant struggle between domination and the will to be free from it. The organisation, therefore, must be that of the exploited classes who, through struggle, acquire the taste for freedom and, then, become more clearly anti-capitalist.

The conception of social transformation 'by the centre', from the central elements of power of a society – the intellectuals, the rich, the state, the party or the army – is an authoritarian concept that, instead of solving the problems of exploitation and domination, simply substitutes the oppressors with other oppressors. Whoever uses the centre to change society does not end up changing anything but the tyranny that is placed over society.

### **Social transformation must emanate from the exploited classes.**

Social transformation must come 'from the periphery', that is, from below, from the exploited classes. The periphery of the world can be broadly defined: indigenous cultures and societies, small producers, skilled workers, peasants, the unemployed, the poor, wage earners.

To build social transformation from the periphery is to seek popular organisation outside the centres of power such as intellectuals, the rich, the state, the party and the army. This means stimulating popular organisation and building an alternative for social struggle from the bottom up.

Popular organisation is anti-capitalist and struggles against the domination of the exploited classes. This domination is most evident in the economic sphere, but is not limited to it and includes sexism and racism.



## To struggle against domination

To say that 'social transformation must come from the periphery' means that the class struggle, translated into popular organisation, can take many different forms. It may be an organisation of indigenous people fighting against the destruction of their traditional values; or of peoples of a country who struggle against the exploitation of a state/government (either theirs or another); black workers and the unemployed struggling against racism; women workers and the unemployed struggling against patriarchy in the workplace and at home; peasants fighting for land or small rural workers who struggle to have a place to plant their crops. It may be an organisation of the unemployed who struggle against unemployment; of workers who have been marginalised by the system; or even of salaried workers. Ultimately, all of these sectors are the periphery of the capitalist system.



Popular organisation can incorporate other demands into its list of demands and struggles, such as issues of ecology, gender, communication, culture, race and sexual orientation.

**Popular organisation is a struggle against the domination of capitalism, but can include within it the fight against other forms of domination.**

To build a popular organisation, the will to fight is fundamental. A popular organisation will not be built spontaneously, 'out of the blue'. Even though many forms of class struggle happen spontaneously, it is useless to wait for an organised social force against capitalism to arise and to replace it without intention and effort. A lot of work will be necessary to transform society and end capitalism. The will to fight, as an exploited class, is the surest way to sustain popular organisation as a permanent tool of struggle.

If the exploited want to transform society, they, the most affected, need to be willing to fight. Without this, the system will never change.



The best way to build popular organisation is to create and stimulate what some people in the past have called 'mass movements'. Although many anti-capitalists use this term, authoritarians have ended up thinking that the mass movement should follow and obey a political party. Often, the people of the party who set the rules are far removed from social struggles. Against this kind of subordinated movement, the most suitable term for the group of people in the process of organisation, or already organised, is that of 'social movements'.

A social movement is a group of people and/or associated entities that have common interests for the defence or promotion of certain objectives in relation to society. These movements can be in the most different places and defend the most diverse banners of struggle. Almost always – and this is very clear in the programmes they defend – social movements are formed on the common basis of necessity. The country's economic reality, especially in a society with enormous injustices like Brazil or South Africa, serves to bring together individuals belonging to exploited groups.

**The condition of necessity, added to organisation and the will to fight, forms the tripod that supports the formation of social movements.**

In Brazil there are numerous social movements in existence today: the landless movements that struggle against the big landowners and demand a fair distribution of land; the homeless, struggling for the right to housing and against real estate speculation; unemployed workers, struggling for decent jobs and new labour relations; and those of the favelas suffering daily police violence where they live. There are others: community movements, movements for free public transport, recyclable waste pickers' cooperatives, indigenous movements, student movements, trade unions, movements of feminists, black people, gay people, popular councils, artistic and cultural movements and environmentalists.

Not all 'social movements', however, are looking to build popular organisation with the aim of fighting capitalism. Many of them support capitalism and its values and are pressure groups to obtain reforms within the capitalist system. We cannot call them social movements since social movements are anti-capitalist.

The struggle against domination appears in all spheres of society, its main form being the class struggle. A social movement gives body to this struggle against domination which, being so broad, causes social movements to have different flags of struggle. Since capitalism has different negative effects on the lives of populations, many social movements exist as a way of resisting these effects.

Social movements must grow increasingly stronger, with more people and more organisation. In order to obtain this strength it is essential that they are not 'ideologised'. A social movement should not be anarchist, social-democrat, Marxist or monarchist. It must not be subordinate to any ideology.

In a movement of the homeless there should be as many people as possible who want to struggle for housing. Everyone who wants to struggle for decent work should be in a movement of the unemployed. Everyone who wants to fight against machismo and patriarchy should be in a feminist movement. Everyone who wants to fight racism should be in an anti-racist movement.

One does not make a movement with a narrow and restricted ideological line, such as a Marxist student movement or anarchist homeless movement. A social movement is always organised around the issue for which it decided to struggle. Need is the great driving force.

However, this does not mean that among all the people inside a social movement there are not people with diverse ideologies. We cannot prohibit people who promote a certain ideology from being in the social movement, or prohibit them from carrying out propaganda. What must not happen is for one of these ideologies to dominate the social movement. A social movement is dominated (some say 'captured') when it no longer struggles around its issues, but only uses these issues to promote an ideology, a candidate, a party, an NGO. In this case, the movement is being used or captured.

## **Autonomy: A social movement must not be captured.**

It is essential for social movements to be autonomous. This means that social movements must be independent of the state, of political parties, of bureaucracy, of the church. It means that movements must be able to make decisions and act on their own accord.

## **The autonomy of the social movement is the possibility for it to deal with its own affairs, independent of institutions and mechanisms of exploitation and social domination.**

Social movements should not permit individuals, collectives, groups, organisations or parties to be in charge of them. People who want to capture a social movement do not want to help it – rather, they want the social movement to help them. It is essential that those who make up a social movement know how to distinguish between those who approach the movement with the aim of capturing it and those who approach it with the objective of taking part in the specific tasks decided in the deliberative forums. The social movement must be very attentive; people who want to help should be welcomed because they will be able to contribute to the growth of the struggle, the social movement and popular organisation itself. But how do you differentiate between a person who wants to help the social movement from another who wants to capture it?

Whoever wants to capture it does not aim to support the social movement but, rather, to be a boss, to command the movement and to make the movement serve their own ends.

A social movement should not be linked to a government politician or to any sector of the state. Parliamentarians, councillors and want-to-be politicians often get close to movements because they want support *from* them – support to sustain their policies, support to get more votes, support to have what they call a ‘social base’. The objective of the state is always to make a ‘social pact’; they want to placate the social movement, to make it fit into their system of representative democracy.

Political parties also seek to capture social movements. Firstly, there are those who are inside the system of ‘representative democracy’, who contest elections and who seek in the social movement only a source of votes. It is very common for these politicians to approach social movements during election times, make promises, and then disappear. But there are also ‘revolutionary’ parties that look to the social movement as the basis for their theories of revolution. They believe they are the enlightened vanguard that must direct and command the social movement because they think themselves superior. There are also other organisations that try to capture social movements: bureaucratised unions that want support for their actions and churches that seek flocks are examples. All of these people must be kept away from the social movement because they defend their own interests, not those of the social movement.



**A social movement does not need commanders, leaders or people who want to use it for their own ends. A social movement needs people who want to support it and struggle together with it.**

Unlike those people who want to capture social movements, there are those who want to support social movements, which is very different. These people are sympathetic to the social movement and consider its struggle to be just, and so they come to give support. These people should always be well received by the social movement. Even people who come from the middle classes or who are not directly involved in the struggles of the movement should receive this treatment: someone who has a job can support the struggle of the unemployed, someone who has a house can support the struggle of the homeless. This kind of solidarity is fundamental and must be welcomed by the social movement.

However, the individual candidacy to support the social movement must be conditioned to the attitudes of those who intend to act. The supporter, or even the organisationally legitimised militant, must demonstrate that they are willing to listen much more than to speak. They must familiarise themselves with the circumstances in which live the natural members of the particular social movement. As part of the whole, they must grow with it and not define its direction and form in an authoritarian and vertical way. It is important to remember that a process of collective construction is always, and above all, a process of self-development. Over time, if the group's proper code of conduct is followed, the supporter or militant will realise that the most important thing is to contrast their ideology with the reality of the group, and not try to reduce the social movement to their ideological certainties.

**A social movement should welcome people who do not come to give orders, who do not want to be commanders or leaders. People who want to support the social movement, to struggle shoulder-to-shoulder, to discuss the issues of the struggle, offer their solidarity, help in times of crisis, help with organisation, must always have their strength added to that of the social movement.**

For a social movement to point towards popular organisation it must be combative. In its struggles against domination, it cannot always obey the rules of the capitalist system. Let us remember that capitalism, through the state, is obliged to 'guarantee the legitimacy' of the system. Therefore, one of the strategies that the state uses is to draw social movements into itself and make themselves heard through their support of a mayor or a councillor. The state wants to establish what is called a 'social pact'.

A social movement, however, must always incorporate class struggle, and the class struggle does not take place within the state, but outside it. As the state is an arm of capitalism, when the state absorbs or co-opts a social movement, the movement no longer serves anti-capitalism. It serves capitalism. This recourse is very common, especially when 'left' governments come to power.

A social movement must always remain combative; it must uphold its banner of struggle (for work, for housing, for land) outside the state. Staying combative also means not going into other bureaucratic schemes or discussing everything with politicians, or with the union bureaucracy. A combative movement is one that wins by imposing its social force, and does not humiliatingly beg for crumbs from governments and bureaucrats. It demands and conquers with organisation and struggle. It must know when to carry out a peaceful action or one with more energy, but a social movement must always be combative to confront the injustices and the system of domination and exploitation head-on, without falling into the traps of capitalism.

### **A social movement must always be combative.**

A social movement should engage in direct action, a form of political action that takes place outside the electoral system. Social movements should not entrust their action to politicians who will be elected to later defend the interests of the social movement. Sometimes honest politicians, even well-intentioned ones, appear at crucial moments and assist social movements, but despite these exceptions the political class as a whole forms a cohesive and unified bloc for defending the interests of capitalism. Even those who enter the structures of state power with the aim of 'helping the people' end up mixing the means with the ends and confuse more than they clarify the social movements. The terrain of party politics, within the framework of the state, presents some immediate advantage – and even so this is rare – but generally it doubles the danger. The efforts of the 'parliamentary left' in favour of the working class do not benefit social movements. Direct action, on the contrary, is expressed when the social movement carries out its politics on its own, when workers themselves carry out their own actions of struggle against domination and exploitation without relying on the bureaucratic and corrupt system of advisers, councillors, parliamentarians or mayors.

**A social movement that uses direct action acts outside the electoral system, and represents the interests of the exploited who comprise it.**



A social movement that uses direct action can carry out an occupation, a street demonstration, a strike or a street blockade. There are many forms of direct action which put the exploited classes at the forefront of the process of change and the demands that are made.

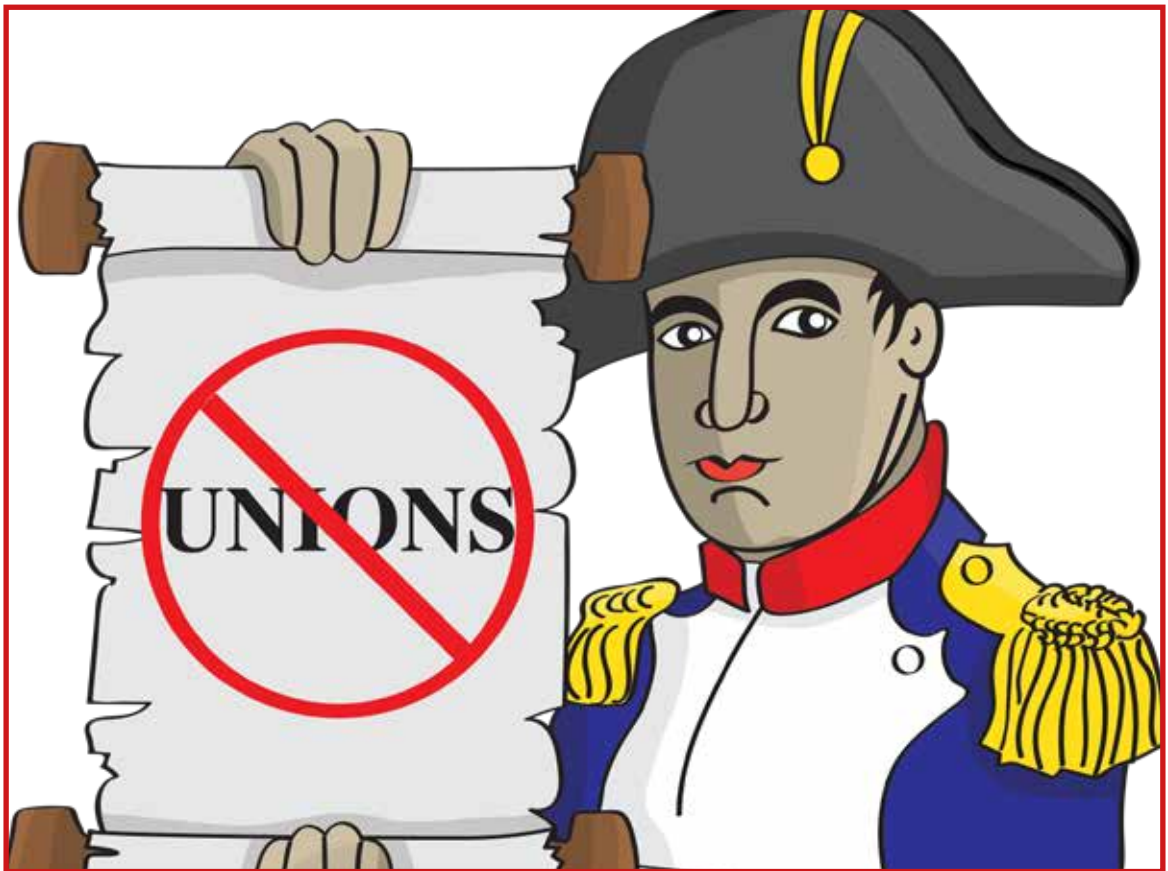
The responsibility for the movement's victories must lie with the movement itself. It should not be given to politicians. Politicians defend their own interests and not the interests of social movements. The emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves.



Is direct action necessarily violent? No, direct action can be peaceful or violent and we should always reflect on what is the best way to act. Often, having a peaceful street demonstration on an issue that you want to expose is the best way to achieve the desired end such as sensitising the population to a certain issue. At other times, it becomes inevitable to use violence in response to the violence of capitalism. But workers' energy is always used for their defence, in favour of their survival, and is therefore self-defence. In this way it is also a right, provided for even in the civil codes of the bourgeoisie.

Capitalism is a system based on violence, and sometimes it becomes inevitable to use a certain degree of violence for self-defence. For example, when the homeless are occupying a place and the police come to evict them, the use of force as a response, a direct action of resistance, is legitimate and valid. It is enough – and this is a fundamental question – that the collective affected by this state violence is fully convinced of the value of the action. For this decision, the political development of those in the social movement contributes a lot.

Because the state is part of capitalist society its laws are made so that capitalism continues to function. Almost anything that threatens capitalism is considered outside the law. A clear historical example was the first explicitly bourgeois civil code, approved by Napoleon Bonaparte in the early nineteenth century in France. He had articles banning the organisation of unions and even workers' demonstrations by means of strikes. This set of laws served as a model for many others from then on. Even today, the codes defend the authoritarian nature of the state and choose property as a guarantee of order.



We see this in South Africa around the right to strike. There is a long process that must be followed to be able to strike. The law must be respected, the CCMA must give permission and bosses must be informed well before it happens. This allows bosses time to prepare and hire replacement workers to carry on production. Although this form of strike is 'protected' it is often ineffective, as bosses have time to prepare. Wildcat strikes, when workers don't inform bosses they are going to strike, are very effective and hit the workings of capitalism hard. For this reason, the South African state has legislated that they are unprotected and workers can be legally fired for undertaking them. Once something threatens capitalism, states pass laws to ban or limit such actions, which can include criminalising them, so many movements that aim to combat capitalism have to undertake actions that are considered illegal. An action to occupy a property that doesn't have a social function is a combative action of a homeless movement, and considered outside the law by the capitalists. Sometimes, the police attack and even arrest those who are mobilised for shutting down a street in a demonstration demanding employment.

The question is: why is having a property and not using it for anything allowed, but when people who have nowhere to live occupy it, it is not allowed? Why is it allowed to have high unemployment, but when the unemployed mobilise and close a street, it is not allowed?

What is more ethical and fair is almost never considered within the law. Movements must pursue ideals of ethics and justice, regardless of whether they are inside the law or not. Let us remember that those who make the laws are the capitalists and, except for conquests imposed by the class, they will work in the service of capitalism. Fighting for ethics and justice often involves doing something that is outside the law.

Under the current system, elected politicians, after being sworn in, make whatever decisions they want. The voters who elect the politician only 'participate' in the process every five years. Politics must be done by the people, properly organised, effectively deciding on everything that concerns them. The politics that social movements defend is one that is practised today as a workers' struggle, organised from the bottom up, against the exploitation and domination of which they are victims. The prospects of significant social transformations in society lie in the popular mobilisations.

## **Politics in social movements is done by means of direct democracy.**

Direct democracy is a form of organisation in which all those involved participate directly in the decision-making process. In direct democracy, it is the people themselves who, gathered in an assembly, make their decisions. There are no leaders who command – all members of the social movement discuss and make their own decisions. In short, everyone is a leader at the same time.

## **A social movement that uses direct democracy has permanent assemblies, has no chiefs and does not base its action on the election of politicians.**

Its assemblies are horizontal (egalitarian and non-hierarchical), have the participation of everyone in the movement and are the place where all decisions are made. Consensus is always sought, but in case of differing views, voting can be accepted. In a social movement that works with direct democracy, it is the members themselves who decide their demands, their forms of action, how they will deal with supportive people who want to help, and so on. Within the movement, everything is decided in an egalitarian way: everyone has the same decision-making power. There may be various decision-making criteria, but they must always be established collectively.

### **Ethics: a principle, a way of conduct**

Social movement activists must behave ethically. This means that our conduct must be based on life principles that oppose capitalism and are based on cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid. Being an ethical person means not contributing to the individual and political injury of comrades of the struggle, supporting other activists, not having attitudes that create splits and unfair internal dispute. Being ethical is also being responsible. To a large extent, ethics is an everyday practice, more evident in concrete actions than in activists' sometimes very carefully chosen words. Ethics and responsibility are basic values and are radically opposed to the values of capitalism.



A responsible activist takes initiative, assumes responsibility before the social movement and fulfils it, completes the tasks for which they were responsible to the collective and has attitudes consistent with the spirit of struggle– in short, someone who contributes to the social movement in the best way possible. Responsibility in a social movement is one of the most evident forms of activist ethics; by fulfilling the task for which they volunteered or were mandated, the individual does not overburden others, but collaborates with the social movement as a whole, facilitating the achievement of the objectives determined by everyone.

A responsible activist does not have selfish attitudes that compromise the collective, or do things that harm the struggle, fail to carry out important activities for the movement or miss gatherings. The choice of activists for certain tasks is also a collective responsibility. Sometimes, however, individuals may be blamed for incomplete tasks, and are stigmatised by the rest of the comrades. This happens in social movements, and not infrequently. If the organisation is poorly organised one activist might be blamed for the non-functioning of a whole structure. This is also an ethical deviation.

It is essential that values opposed to the values of capitalism are maintained within the social movement. Ethics and responsibility, besides being pillars of the social movement, must oppose the whole culture of capitalism that has created a society of unethical and irresponsible people. The struggle for ethics and responsibility is a struggle against the values and culture of capitalism.

In opposition to the individualistic values of capitalism, a social movement promotes solidarity and mutual aid which stimulate association with other members of the exploited classes. When an individual joins with other people who want to build a more just and egalitarian world, they are actually building class solidarity. This solidarity becomes real, first, when one person associates with another to build a social movement; then, when one social movement associates with another for a broader struggle. The exploited groups are very different, and solidarity means uniting with other sectors, seeking for one to support the other, through a practice called 'mutual aid'.

### **The struggle is internationalist.**

When we affirm that the state is part of capitalism it also means that nationalist sentiment must be rejected (nationalism is the preference for, or strong defence of, everything that belongs to the country from which one comes). Throughout history, defenders of the capitalist system have always wanted to create a sense of unity around the country. For this, they use popular festivals and sports, such as the World Cup, to create what can be called 'national identity'.

### **The real factor of identity is not the country one belongs to but the class one belongs to.**

There is nothing wrong with cheering for the national team of someone's home country, but the problem is when one forgets that a worker's identity must be a class identity, not national identity. When nationalism overcomes classism, regimes such as fascism appear, in which even the exploited classes become capable of supporting regimes of domination and exploitation in the name of a national ideal.

Alliances must always be made with the exploited classes, whether they are in South Africa or abroad. Just as when South African capitalism exploits the South African people, it is necessary to be on the side of the South African people, when South African capitalism exploits the people of another country it is necessary to be with the people of that other country. If it is inevitable to have to choose who to make an alliance with, or what positions to defend, it is essential always to join together around class and not around country. National identity is part of capitalism and, since the people's struggle is anti-capitalist, the affirmation of internationalism is more consistent.

An internationalist struggle occurs when the barriers of the state are disregarded and the solidarity of the social movements is established for all the struggles of other members of the exploited classes in the world. There is no reason to prevent 'foreign' workers. If the foreigners are from the exploited classes they are also comrades. If they are from the ruling class they are quite probably enemies.

### **The social movement must be the preferred terrain for the development of a popular culture.**

Capitalism is embedded in all the spaces of society and its culture is spread in various ways such as through the media. The social movement must produce and develop a popular culture to support the values of opposition to capitalism. This culture can be stimulated with music, theatre, lectures, debates, meetings, exhibitions and social gatherings. A new popular culture rooted in social change will complement popular education.

Is it better to build a social movement or to join one that already exists? Sometimes, people are in doubt. When there is no social movement close to a person who wants to fight for a particular cause, they can look for other people who have an interest in this struggle and form a new social movement. However, if there is already a social movement that fights for something this person wants to fight for, there is no reason to create another movement.

### **The most important thing is to be mobilised. Forming a movement or joining a movement that already exists, and causing it to have the correct characteristics, are possible and important. The key is to know that struggle, social mobilisation, is the way to demand something.**

The struggle's objectives should be established in the short-term and medium-term. A movement without objectives goes in circles and has no focus – that is why it seldom achieves anything. The objectives of struggle will vary. For example, a movement against an increase in tuition fees may have as its main objective to prevent the increase from happening. In this case there is only one objective, but there could also be more than one objective. When a union goes on strike and develops a 'list of demands', the demands are the objectives of the struggle. They could be winning a ten percent increase for the whole sector, solving the problem of wage losses for the last three years, paid overtime, and so on. For a land occupation movement, they could be carrying out an urban occupation and getting housing. For a movement of the unemployed, they could be pressurising the



government and winning an aid programme that creates some alternative income for the unemployed.

The fundamental thing when the social movement is going to undertake any struggle is to clearly set the short- and medium-term objectives. The short term is what the movement is going to seek right away and the medium term can range from six months to a few years ahead. To outline the objectives it is enough to answer the question: what do we want to achieve with our movement in a certain period of time?

### Create a strategic plan.

The strategic plan must be developed by establishing stages, with one objective (or more) of struggle per stage, and by establishing the actions that will be taken to achieve each objective. At the end of each stage, the movement should always stop, do a self-assessment and see if it has progressed well. If all is well the movement continues with the plan. If something is wrong it makes the necessary modifications so that the path is right.



## **A practical example:**

A homeless movement organises itself to fight for housing. People have nowhere to live and decide to occupy properties with no social function. The short-term objective of the struggle is to occupy a property, providing housing to the movement's activists. The strategic plan is to set up four commissions:

- one to talk to the families that will be part of the occupation and establish a programme to integrate these families
- another to identify and evaluate possible properties to be occupied
- another to discuss how and when the occupation action will take place
- and another one that will try to create the whole working structure for the future occupation.

It will be necessary to reflect on how many and which people will be able to assist in the tasks; which of these activities will be confidential and which will be treated in open assemblies; what will be the maximum number of families that can occupy the property; what will be the terms to add new people interested in the occupation. These are organisational issues that, if not well thought out and executed, will compromise the short-term objective of obtaining housing for the movement's families.

## Details of the strategic plan:

The first commission will establish a plan to define which families the commission will talk with, stipulating in a transparent way the criteria for each family to join the occupation. It will also think about organising gatherings so that the families can get to know each other and establish bonds of solidarity between them, which will be very important in the future.

The second commission will go around the city looking for property that could be occupied. It will think about whether to occupy a government or a private building; it will check the building's condition and facilities, see how it is closed off and how people can enter. It will present two or more choices so that it can be decided which is best.

The third commission, with the information from the second and knowing the movement, will think about what the occupation will be like. It will discuss the best time to occupy, during the day or at night, a weekday or a weekend; what the occupiers will do; how they will enter the building; how they will see if there are no lights.

The fourth commission will organise groups of occupants who can make the occupation successful, in the first and most complicated moments and after the immediate threat of eviction passes (if that happens). It will set up a structure of people able to solve the place's electrical and water problems; another one responsible for a collective kitchen (if this is the case); the creation of a security commission; the allocation of rooms between the families, and so on.

The strategic plan could be broader and include medium-term objectives, and the actions that will be taken to achieve them. Planning is absolutely essential.

All social movements that use direct democracy as an organisational method must hold assemblies or meetings.

**Meetings are the movement's deliberative instances, the collective space for decision making.**

A non-hierarchical social movement does not have a head that decides things and a body that obeys, so all issues of the movement must be discussed and resolved in assemblies or meetings which are horizontal, with equal and non-hierarchical participation; that is, everyone's opinion is equal. Movements that allow the existence of an authoritarian leader or leadership are not sufficiently organised. A Mexican revolutionary used to say that the stronger the people, the less the need for leaders.

The social movement's discussion and decision-making spaces must be a means and not an end in themselves. Some people think that the purpose of a social movement is just to hold meetings and horizontal assemblies, but meetings and assemblies are only a means for the movement to discuss its issues and make decisions. Meetings have to be effective. They have to allow for the participation of everyone, a good understanding of the issues to be discussed, different positions on the issues and, especially, the making of decisions.

There must be a concern for things to really be resolved and for the social movement not to get stuck in endless debate, so the agenda has to be well defined; opinions are given in the shortest possible time. Consensus must be sought, but if there is no consensus there must be a vote, and everyone must follow the positions that win. There should be an appropriate method for each type of decision. Less important decisions should be settled without wasting time. There may be different criteria for each decision: the simplest can be voted on with a simple majority winning; those of medium importance with two-thirds of the votes winning; extremely important decisions can follow the consensus method. It is essential to establish a ceiling, a maximum period of time for each discussion and for the meetings themselves (no one likes to spend all their time in meetings).

### **Democratic participation.**

Since the social movement advocates direct democracy, decision-making should be as democratic as possible; it should facilitate an environment in which everyone's opinions and suggestions are heard, everyone has a similar level of information in order to be able to give their opinion, and decisions are not made through coercion or fear.

Everyone should participate in the discussions and decision-making. For this, it is essential that everyone knows in advance the dates and times of the meetings and the agenda that will be discussed.

### **Set the agenda in advance.**

For decision-making to flow well, priorities must be established. More time must be spent on what is more important, and less time on what is less important – it is often best to put the most important issues at the beginning, when more people are present.

### **Establish priorities.**

It is important to have someone to facilitate the meeting. The facilitator has no standing over others, but helps to guide the issues and discussions, stimulates the meeting, facilitates decision-making and ensures that the objectives of the meeting are achieved.

### **Appoint a facilitator.**

Minutes should be taken to record all decisions taken, to allocate responsibilities for pending tasks and to set dates for the completion of those tasks. The resolutions of meetings and assemblies (decisions, activities to be carried out) must always be monitored and undertaken by the social movement; obviously in a non-authoritarian way and observing the social movement's ethical criteria.

### **Take minutes.**



Personal relationships must always strive for an environment of cooperation and mutual aid in which members of the social movement see themselves as comrades in the struggle and treat each other as such. The working climate must be pleasant and there must be mutual respect. Conflicts must be resolved in a non-violent way and there must be trust between the activists. This will make the struggle stronger and ensure that the personal side does not interfere with the political side. We are not obliged to be friends with everyone, but we have an obligation to respect everyone who is a comrade in the struggle.

A social movement must have a sector or commission that will be in charge of the communication and media and responsible for ensuring that the movement's demands are made known to society. A large part of the media is committed to capitalism, but there are good people in this field who can help. The communication and media comrades should seek to establish a relationship with journalists, broadcasters and editors who are sympathetic to the movement's cause, and should always keep them informed of the complaints that the movement makes, of the actions taken, of victories, police repression, and so on.

The social movement must communicate with society and seek support directly, through independent media vehicles such as free/community radio stations, with the publication of posters and pamphlets, with open publication websites and all the communication structures that are not integrated into mainstream media.

The social movement's struggle generally implies repression. One of the ways the capitalist system is maintained is through the state, which is in charge of maintaining class society and its privileges – therefore, the greater the social movement's social force, and the more it questions the roots of the capitalist system, the greater the likelihood of repression.

As the movement's activities and struggle increase, so does the state's response. This can happen in different ways: by the repression of street demonstrations by the police, by the arrest of activists, by lawsuits. It is fundamental that every social movement has well-established contacts with a body including lawyers, that will provide support on legal matters.

Lawyers can help in many ways. Firstly, they can help as ‘consultants’ to the movement, for example, by assisting a homeless movement to identify vacant government buildings or even helping to identify private properties with family disputes in court. This is in a situation that is not one of repression. When repression occurs, lawyers will be able to help the movement forward public complaints, which may prevent activists from being arrested, help to get activists released (in case of arrest), or even defend them in a possible action.

When there is mobilisation, the social movement invariably ends up interfering with the privileges of bourgeois society and generally, the more these privileges are questioned, the greater the repression. Legal support will be essential for the social movement, especially in situations of repression but it must never guide the political strategies or objectives of the struggle, or demobilise people by believing in a lawyer who will solve everything for everyone. The law is a bourgeois institution, and therefore legal support is secondary to the organisation of the struggle.



Care must be taken not to let values of capitalist society engender the social movement. Positions that must be fought on a daily basis are hierarchy and authoritarian positions; laziness to continue the struggle; nationalism and the state’s defences; competition and individualism; slander and personal disagreements; racism, macho culture, homophobia and other prejudices of society; the drugs and alcoholism that alienate people and distance them from struggle; the paternalism and charity of people who ‘feel sorry’ but who are not prepared, in reality, to join the social movement in its struggle.

The struggle of the social movement is invariably for something concrete. There could be a movement of unemployed people struggling for income generation; or a group of the landless fighting for land; or a union fighting for a wage increase; or even a community raising awareness of the counter-cultural message of hip-hop. These are a social movement's short- and medium-term objectives, and these are the ones that will bring achievements that will make the activists' lives less painful. It is not wrong to fight for jobs, land, housing or better wages. In fact, the search for these gains must always be present, as they are what motivates and mobilises the exploited classes. A movement that promises a good life 50 years from now does not attract people. It must always have the prospect of immediate victories.

It has been argued so far in this booklet that the objective of the social movement is to build popular organisation that aims to defeat capitalism: an anti-capitalist organisational model. How can an anti-capitalist movement fight for gains within capitalism? Isn't this what is generally called 'reformism'? No. What characterises reformism is the political project and the perspective of struggle that a person, a group or a movement has.

**A reformist is someone who believes that capitalism can be improved.**





A person who thinks there is a solution to the problems of society within capitalism is a reformist person, and this is radically different from someone who, mobilised around short- and medium-term struggles, has a political project and a long-term perspective of struggle. A reformist argues that the desired end result of the struggle is within capitalism. A movement of unemployed people who think that after getting a job everything will be solved is a reformist movement; a movement of homeless people who think that when they get housing the struggle will be over is a reformist movement; even an informal settlement movement that aims to be recognised and accepted by its exploiters (sometimes the state) can be a reformist movement because capitalism will continue to exist and generate new excluded people. Exploitation and domination will continue. So, even if it is mobilised around short- and medium-term issues, the movement must have a long-term perspective.

A long-term perspective exists when the movement thinks its short- and medium-term struggle is not the end. The end, for a movement that wants to fight against exploitation and domination, is to end capitalism. The short- and medium-term struggle and the long-term perspective are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

It is essential, always, to sustain this long-term perspective of combating and overthrowing the capitalist system for the construction of a new society. The short- and medium-term struggles will serve the day-to-day gains and alleviate daily suffering. They will also be a school, because one only truly learns through the struggle. The memory of social struggles is important, as it forms the accumulation of experiences acquired by social movements over time.

**A movement that is organised around a short- and medium-term struggle and uses it as a means to a greater objective, against capitalism, is a revolutionary movement.**

The project of a revolutionary movement is linked to a conception of mobilised and stabilised grassroots organisation with the revolutionary perspective of overcoming the capitalist system.

**A revolutionary is someone who argues that capitalism must be replaced by a new system based on equality and freedom.**

Does this mean ‘taking power’? The concept of ‘taking power’ is outdated and misguided. When fighting a system of exploitation and domination, the objective is not the creation of a new system that exploits and dominates. The concept of taking power starts from the assumption that the problem is who is in power and not power itself – like changing the king without ending the monarchy. In reality, the problem is not who occupies the state, but the state itself, and it is useless to think by taking the power of the state we can make the necessary change in society. The state must be destroyed because it facilitates the domination of those exploited by the ruling class.

### **The state is an effective tool in favour of the bourgeoisie.**

Things are not changed by handing all the achievements of the class over to the state with its centralised power because centralisation tends to eliminate all other forms of democratic organisation. Even when unionists and activists, including Nelson Mandela, entered into the state in South Africa, exploitation and domination did not end. The black working class remained a pool of potential cheap labour, as it had under apartheid. The leaders joined the ruling class and benefited from the domination and exploitation of the majority – but for the majority freedom was not achieved by taking state power.

### **Many social movements speak of the creation of ‘people’s power’, a very broad concept.**

There are people who support people’s power, and who have good ideas and concepts that are very close to those defined in this booklet as ‘popular organisation’ – but many others who promote people’s power are thinking of it in an authoritarian way with dictatorial, exploitative and domineering forms. There are also those who promote people’s power by building movements that support vanguards detached from the grassroots, hierarchical relationships in movements, parties that overlap with social movements, people who seek to liberate society through the state, tyrannies and bureaucracies of all kinds. In such instances, people’s power has absolutely nothing to do with what we call popular organisation.

### **It is necessary to build a new society.**

Popular organisation points, as we have seen, to a long-term objective, the replacement of capitalism. This means creating a new social regime, another form of organisation of social life. As this is a long-term project, it is impossible to have absolutely everything thought out, but these are some thoughts on the subject.

### **Unlike capitalism, the new society will be classless.**

There will not be those who dominate, who exploit, and those who are dominated, who are exploited. This new society will be based on solidarity and mutual aid, and people will no longer consider themselves competitors but, rather, comrades.

In this way, solidarity will replace mutual mistrust and cooperation will eventually triumph over competition. Private property, now the source of so many divisions in society, and the power factor of the bourgeoisie, will give way to collective ownership of the means of production. Domination and exploitation must have been eliminated, and although there will inevitably be conflict, the most important thing is to have a system that does not allow for a few to live well at the expense of so many others who live poorly.

### **Without private property and with self-management.**



For this new society to be founded on solidarity and mutual aid, it must not support the institutions of capitalism: private property and the state. In its place, as a form of social re-organisation, the system of economic self-management and political federalism should be implemented. Private property must have been extinguished and no one will be able to employ other people and steal part of what they produce (surplus value) through the wage system. In this model no person owns the means of production – machines, tools, land, sources of energy – because they are all collective.

**To say that something is collective means that it no longer belongs to one person but to everyone involved with it.**

A practical example: consider a chair factory. In the future society, the factory and everything that belongs to it – machines, tools, land – is collective property. A person cannot sell the factory, cannot be the boss of others, cannot exploit others. Everything in the factory is collective, and all workers are equal in decision-making power. Everything that is resolved must be by agreement between the collective of workers that will decide what to do with everything that concerns their work environment. This is called self-management, and it happens when decisions are taken out of the hands of the ruling class and go to councils of workers who make their own decisions about everything that concerns them.



This is not a dream, but has happened in some moments in history. In the Paris Commune, in 1871, the workers, besides taking over the factories, voted for their representatives according to areas of production. There were no higher wages and everyone had a rotating function – they took on each other’s tasks in different periods of the production process. It was also like this in the Spanish Revolution of 1936–1939, a scene of innumerable experiences of self-management which, in certain regions, achieved results far superior to those verified in the previous conservative models.

### **Without the state and with federalism.**

Since capitalism must have been abolished, the state must no longer exist either. Instead of national states the future society must be based on the free association between people, and this can happen in any territory, which is why the new society is internationalist.

**There is no longer representative democracy. People meet in councils and make their own decisions. When there is a need for coordination, a delegate is chosen who represents the council’s positions. All political functions are rotational and recallable (if the base of the council desires it the representative can be removed from office at any time). This is federalism.**



Federalism also has a historical memory. During the early years of the Russian Revolution, which began in October 1917, the workers and soldiers of the people decided everything in so-called soviets, or councils, which were the highest decision-making bodies. Subsequently, with the bureaucratisation of the revolution and the rigging of the soviets by a political party, this experience lost its original content. Today, there is a revolution in Rojava in the north-east of Syria. In 2012, the state in the area was overthrown through mass protests. Instead of a state, people govern society themselves through confederated communes, street level assemblies involving 20 to 400 households. Through commune meetings people run all affairs at a street level, including the economy, safety, education, housing and water. The communes are confederated through neighbourhood councils, city assemblies, provincial councils and a national council. Mandated delegates, based on direct democracy, are sent to these councils from the communes to ensure mutual aid so that society can function without a state (more information can be found on this in two ILRIG Booklets –*The Rojava Revolution and Democratic Confederalism* and *Lessons for Movement Building in South Africa*).

This society of self-management and federalism promotes true democracy, true government by the people. In it, it is not the capitalists and politicians who govern, but the organised people themselves.



**In a true democracy, the people govern themselves. They are sovereign, make their own decisions and are neither dominated nor exploited. The two basic values to be promoted in the future society are freedom and equality.**

Freedom is the possibility for all people to develop their abilities and creativity without being dominated or exploited. Equality is the possibility for everyone to choose which path to follow. Thus, there is no longer this gap between rich and poor and everyone is more or less at the same level because they have the same opportunities. This doesn't mean trying to standardise everyone, but that in such a system there is no inequality, no hierarchy.

To conclude the material on popular organisation, an important reflection: All the means by which popular organisation is exercised must agree with the new society that must be built. That is why the day-to-day struggles, in addition to bringing about gains, already highlight the ethical values of the new society. The whole process of struggle allows us to conclude that it is essential to use the appropriate means to achieve the desired ends. In reality, the ends are in the means. Freedom cannot be achieved by restricting people's participation, nor equality by maintaining certain privileges; everything must already be transformed into the methods used in the struggle. The struggle itself is an enormous source of learning. It is what educates the class.

**It is of absolute importance to defend the coherence between means and ends. In the model of popular organisation, the entire process of struggle – the means – is consistent with the ends that are to be achieved: the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of a new society. It is by struggling that one learns to struggle. In day-to-day mobilisation we learn things that no school can teach us. In practice, theory gets much better. So, get to work – let's leave the theory and start the practice!**

*\* This publication was translated and adapted from a notebook designed and written by Universidad Popular. The first part was based to a large extent on the book *Anticapitalismo para Principiantes* by Ezequiel Adamovsky, edited in Argentina.*



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