

Anarcho-Syndicalism Outlined

Workers' Solidarity Federation

Briefly stated, Anarcho-Syndicalism is a working-class political ideology that opposes all forms of exploitation and domination. We think that all people are fundamentally equal, and should have the freedom to live their lives as they see fit, as long as they do not harm the freedom of other people. We oppose capitalism because it is a vicious profit system that is based on the exploitation of the workers and the poor to the benefit of a small class of bosses and top government figures. We do not think that the government (courts, army, bureaucracy) is there to look after everyone, instead its role is to keep the ruling class in power. Racism and other forms of special oppression are primarily the product of capitalism and the State. In South Africa, racism was created to “justify”, strengthen and deepen the exploitation of the Black working class in the mines, farms and factories.

This unjust social system, which impoverishes and oppresses the majority of the world's population, must be resisted and defeated. It cannot be reformed away. As long as this system exists, there will be poverty, repression and racism. The only people who can fight and overthrow capitalism, the State and all forms of oppression, are the working and poor people. Only these people — the working class and working peasants — can manage the job because only they have no vested interest in the system, because they have power in their ability to organise (particularly in the workplace), and because they produce all the wealth of the world. Only a productive class can make a free, anti-authoritarian society because only such a class is not based on exploitation.

In place of capitalism we want a free socialistic economic system in which the workers and peasants directly control the land and factories, and use these resources to produce for the benefit of all. In place of the State, we want to manage our own affairs through grassroots workplace and community councils, united at the local, regional, national and international levels. We call this system “anarchism” or “stateless socialism” or “libertarian socialism”.

We do not think that the State can be made to help ordinary people. The only language the bosses understand is the language of mass struggle from below. This is the only way to win any gains in the here and now, and definitely the only way to smash the system in the long run. Relying on the State to make the revolution is a recipe for disaster, in every country where a “revolutionary government” got into power the result was a social system at least as oppressive as the one that got overthrown. Russia was not socialist, it was a one-party State in which a Communist Party — bureaucratic elite ran a “State-capitalist” system.

Instead of using the State, we believe that the struggle and the revolution must come about through mass democratic movements of the workers and the poor. In particular, we emphasise the revolutionary potential of trade unions. The trade unions can organise the workers to fight the bosses in the here and now, we all know that. The unions can also provide the vehicle for the workers to take-over, and directly manage, the factories, mines, farms and offices. The role of an organisation such as the Workers Solidarity Federation is not to make the revolution “for” the masses. It is to help to organise and educate the masses to march to freedom in their own name. We are opposed to all forms of oppression and support all everyday struggles to improve the conditions under which we live. We promote the self-activity and revolutionary awareness of the masses.

This set of ideas is not something invented by a few philosophers. Instead, Anarcho-syndicalism was created by the working class itself in the course of its struggles. It first emerged in the 1870s in the First International Workers Association, an international federation of trade unions and workers societies. Since then, it has had a magnificent, proud fighting history as a mass movement of the working and poor people in all continents of the world. Our movement has historically attracted millions of workers and peasants because it serves their needs, not the needs of power-seekers and exploiters.

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