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Workers' Solidarity Federation

After the Collapse of Marxism: Is There an Alternative to Capitalism Today?

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Anarcho-Syndicalist Alternative

We need to recognise that much of what passed for socialism in the last 70 years was nothing of the sort. Rather than see socialism as “dead”, we need to see these versions of socialism as flawed.

There is an alternative to capitalism and the State: anarcho-syndicalism — the mass-based tradition of revolutionary anti-authoritarian socialism.

We have always rejected Social Democratic reformism and Communist dictatorship. Rather than see socialism as something handed out from on high by a small minority using State power, we argue that socialism must come from the ground up.

Socialism can only be created by the mass organisations of the working-class and the poor — the trade unions and democratic civics — taking over the land and factories and creating a democratic society. Not by elections and leaders.

This revolution must remove both capitalism and the State. Anything less will just pass power from one set of bosses to another. The State is must be replaced by workers democracy organised in the community and the workplace, defended by a democratic workers army.

The WSF

The collapse of the traditional left points to the need for this alternative. As a result, our movement is growing across the world.

We need to build an Anarcho-Syndicalist organisation with clear politics and internal democracy, that will

- support all struggles against oppression
- win the working class and poor to the Anarcho-Syndicalist idea
- transform our unions into revolutionary fighting units.
- consistently fight against capitalism and its State

The WSF aims to build such an organisation. If you agree with what we have said here then you should consider joining us.

Capitalism and the State continue to fail the masses. Yet at the same time, key elements of the socialist tradition are in irrevocable crisis. What we need to do is to reclaim and identify with the tradition of anti-authoritarian, anti-State, socialism from below: anarcho-syndicalism.

Exploiters

Capitalism and the State have failed the majority of the world’s population: the workers, poor and peasants. According to recent reports

- 358 billionaires have more assets than the combined incomes of countries home to 45% of the world’s people.
- the richest 20% of the world’s population gets 85% of the world’s income.

Capitalism and the State are based on the rich exploiting the poor. They cause poverty, unemployment, homelessness and landlessness. They are also the key cause of racism. Racism was created to divide workers, and “justify” genocide, colonialism, and the super-exploitation of Black workers under apartheid-capitalism.

Crisis of the Left

Yet at the same time, we find the broad socialist movement in a crisis both in the West and the East. Two key tendencies in the socialist movement have entered a deep crisis : the reformist socialists/ Social-Democrats/ Labour Parties the various sorts of Marxists/ Communists/ Trotskyists.

They are paying for their betrayal of socialism in this century. What they conceived socialism to be has been totally discredited. As convinced socialists we need to identify with the revolutionary, anti-authoritarian socialist tradition: anarcho-syndicalism.

Social-Democratic Failure

Reformist socialists/ Social Democrats (like the Labour Party in England) believe you get to socialism by slowly reforming the capitalist system through voting in elections, making small reforms (such as unemployment payments) and by getting trade unions to work with the bosses to “promote” economic growth.

Many of these policies were put in place after 1945 in Europe – the so-called “welfare states”. These reforms were more due to workers struggles than elections. Although progressive in that they provided some material gains, these policies never challenged capitalism or ended inequality and poverty. And they weakened the trade unions by trying to get them to work with the bosses: this held back struggle and undermined union democracy by promoting the development of a full-time leadership.

Social-Democratic policies (the “welfare state”) were only possible while capitalism was going through an economic boom. Once the boom ended in the 1970s, the bosses tried to keep up profits by lowering taxes, privatising companies, and pushing down wages. And it was the Social-Democrats who led this “free market” attack on workers – in Britain, France, Australia and elsewhere.

Why? What the Social-Democrats did not realise (or chose to ignore) was that the State apparatus – parliament, the police, the government bureaucracy – is not the friend of the workers and the poor. It is the tool of the bosses. Real power does not lie in parliament, but in the big companies, the army and the top officials. Therefore it will always act against the working class, no matter who is elected. There can be no parliamentary road to socialism.

Since this time, the Social-Democrats have been in retreat from progressive policies- for example, the “New” Labour party in Britain no longer calls for nationalisation. And workers do not vote for them because of all their broken promises.

Marxism? Why?

Revolutionary Marxism is another failed socialist strategy. The main example of this tendency were the various Communist Parties. There were also various small Trotskyite groups without a mass base.

Basing themselves on Marx, Lenin and sometimes Trotsky, these groups believed that a revolutionary socialist party of “advanced militants” (the so-called “vanguard party”) should introduce socialism by forcefully seizing State power. The masses would be led into socialism which would come from above through the party and the State: by nationalising the economy, by introducing central planning, by suppressing forces seen as anti-revolutionary.

The model for this strategy was the Russian Revolution of 1917, where the Communist Party of Lenin and Trotsky took State power and introduced what they saw as socialism. This model of fighting for socialism was applied in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba.

But these countries were never truly socialist. Power was in the hands of a one-party State and elite led by the Communist party which exploited the workers and peasants. We call this “State-capitalism”.

This outcome was the direct result of Lenin and Trotsky’s authoritarian policies of suppressing worker control of factories, repressing leftists, building a dictatorial State. This laid the basis for Stalin’s brutal rule in later years.

These regimes mostly collapsed in the late 1980s. One reason was an economic crisis which resulted from the poor co-ordination of the highly bureaucratic centrally planned economies, and short-ages, particularly of high technology and basic consumer goods.

The other reason was mass discontent: millions of workers mobilised to overthrow these governments because they were sick of regular shortages, bad conditions and undemocratic regimes that banned trade unions, used forced labour, suppressed freedom of speech and political association, and conquered nearby countries such as Afghanistan and Tibet.

The failure of the Communist parties was that they thought socialism must come from above through a powerful State dominated by one party.