

INTRODUCTION: ANARCHIST POLITICAL SCHOOL



WHAT IS ANARCHISM?

Anarchism: What is really means

INTRODUCTION

Anarchism was born out of the class struggle of the workers, poor and peasants (the popular classes) to overthrow capitalism

It first arose within the trade unions associated with the First International in the 1860s and 1870s

Many of these trade unions were openly anarchist, and based their struggles on the goal of attaining stateless socialism, and the ending of all forms of oppression, through revolution

As such, a number of prominent activists in the First International became associated with anarchism, including Mikhail Bakunin (Marx's great rival)

Anarchism, therefore, should not be seen as some abstract idea – invented in the isolated minds of intellectuals – but rather an idea – and set of strategies and tactics – that arose in revolutionary working class struggles against capitalism and the state

Anarchism, therefore, was forged in struggle

Anarchism at times has played a leading role not only in the fight against the state and capitalism, but also in the fight that the working class has waged against racism, sexism, and imperialism

By the 1900s anarchism had spread across the world, and many mass movements and trade unions in Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, and North America were anarchist between the 1870s and the 1930s and fought against local and imperialist ruling classes

At its height, anarchism was identified as the most dangerous movement by the ruling classes

Due to this, it faced mass repression and for much of the latter half of the 20th Century it was overshadowed by Marxism

But because anarchism was born in the struggles of the popular classes it never disappeared and it remains relevant to the struggles of the popular classes today, including in South Africa

In recent years, anarchism has experienced a revival within working class struggles, and in some cases – although sadly not all yet – it has come once again to play a leading role

ANARCHISM

Anarchism has always argued that the statist path to socialism, which was practiced in many parts of the world including Africa, was and is inherently flawed

Thus, along with fighting capitalism, anarchists believe that all states need to be smashed, along with all forms of oppression such as racism, imperialism and sexism

To do this, anarchists believe in fighting for a future society, through revolution, in which there are no bosses or state managers; where oppression whether based on race, class or sex doesn't exist; where workers manage themselves; where the economy is democratically planned through community and worker assemblies and councils, where society is democratically run from the bottom up by people themselves using federated assemblies and councils; where the entire economy is socialised; and where the goal is to meet peoples' needs and to not make profits

Anarchists developed this vision of a new society through being involved in past revolutions where people themselves started to build such self-managed and self-organised structures based on direct democracy; which only ended because they were crushed either by states, capitalists or Communist Parties

THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

To build towards revolution, anarchists work within and are involved in building working class movements

While anarchists don't seek to impose their will on these movements, they do work to promote the ideas of anarchism in them and to win over activists in these movements to anarchism

In fact, the basis of anarchism is that only workers and the poor can free themselves through their own movements – freedom will not come via political parties or a state – this is one of the main differences between anarchism and Marxism/African socialism

Within working class movements and trade unions, anarchists promote the idea that these movements should be prefigurative – in other words they should work towards becoming the basis on which a future free society could be built

This means that if we want a society based on direct democracy and freedom, then movements need to also be based on direct democracy

Indeed, movements or political parties that are not democratic, or in which leaders make the decisions and instruct followers what to do, are not going to be able to win a world where everyone is free

All top-down movements, like the ANC, Marxist or Pan-African parties can do is replace one set of rulers for another

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So if we want freedom and equality in the future, then our movements need to be as free and equal as possible in the present

To do this, anarchists promote the idea that working class movements should be based on the following principles: these are **direct action, self-organisation, direct democracy, self-discipline, and mutual aid**

The reason why anarchists promote these principles is because they allow for members to be in control of movements and they form the basis of a free society of the future

Anarchists believe that the best way for activists and movements to fight capitalism and the state is through their own direct actions like protests, strikes, and occupations

Throughout history it has been direct action that has won gains for workers and the poor

The 8 hour working day was won through strikes and protests by anarchist trade unions, and not because bosses, socialist parties or any state wanted to reduce working hours

In South Africa the apartheid state was ended because people fought and protested – they used direct action and ended it themselves; and not because of the ANC or Mandela

The effectiveness of direct action partly explains why anarchists promote it

Fortunately, many of the post-apartheid movements, like the ABM, have also come to adopt direct action as the most effective tactic in struggle

It is through direct action that people can also win things in the present and these victories for reforms can be used to build the confidence of workers and the poor, so that they will eventually have the confidence themselves to overthrow the state, capitalism and the ruling class through revolution

In fact, it is vital today that the popular classes win reforms that extend their power and improve their lives – while being weary of reforms granted from above that are aimed at blunting struggles

Indeed, direct action is the opposite of political action, like voting for leaders to go into parliaments or municipalities (often promoted by Marxists and Pan-Africanists), which involves workers and the poor giving away their power to 'officials' and politicians

Through direct action, workers and the poor learn to manage their own struggles and build their own structures, which is going to be vital for any genuine revolution and why anarchists support and promote it

An important part of anarchist principles is that working class movements should be based on direct democracy

This means that decisions in working class movements should be made in a way where everyone has an equal say and power stays at the base with all members, and not officials at the top

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The aim of this is to build democratic structures, in working class movements, so that these structures could one day replace the state through revolution

So anarchists believe that direct democracy in our movements today sets the basis for direct democracy in the future; once we know how to practice direct democracy we don't need directors

By building structures of direct democracy we set the basis for extending these during a revolutionary period, and we can then be in a position to replace the state immediately with structures of self-governance - like federated worker and community councils based around the structures of our movements - through which the popular classes (workers, peasants and the poor) could run society without the need for rulers

Anarchists argue that as a central part of any revolution, workers need to seize all factories, socialise them and run them democratically without bosses to meet the needs of everyone

Within unions in South Africa, anarchists have been promoting these ideas – although they are very much still in a minority

However, the vision that workers can take over and run factories themselves is going to be needed if unions are to once again become revolutionary organisations

Added to this, a struggle is going to have to be waged inside the unions to transform them into fighting militant organisations, based on direct democracy – so that workers at the base control them

If workers, through their unions, seize factories, the economy could be run and co-ordinated democratically, using councils, the trade unions and assemblies, to meet everyone's needs

In past revolutions, like in Spain in 1936, workers built such structures and took over the economy through their unions

Likewise, in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s unions like those in FOSATU were based on workers' power and also championed the idea that workers should seize factories directly, and it is this we need to return to

BUILDING A COUNTER-POWER

It is, therefore, vital that through direct action, direct democracy and a revolutionary vision we build our working class movements and trade unions into a counter-power that can end all forms of oppression and exploitation

Fighting against racism, homophobia and sexism needs to be a central aspect of this drive to build a counter-power – it is racism, sexism, nationalism and homophobia which has divided working class struggles and these divisions in the working class need to be overcome if we are to challenge the ruling class

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Within South Africa, the black working class has been oppressed both in terms of race and as workers

As such, central to building a counter-power in South Africa is the struggle to end the system whereby the black working class is super-exploited

Indeed, in building a counter-power we need to build relations of solidarity and mutual aid within our movements, and this includes challenging any sexist or racist ideas within our own movements

As such, to build a counter-power, we need to be building a counter-culture in our movements that breaks, as far as possible, with capitalist and hierarchical ideologies – we need popular education in our movements

IN DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION

Like Marxists and African socialists, anarchists believe that any revolution will have to be defended

Unlike Marxists and African socialists, anarchists argue a state can't be used to do this

Rather anarchists argue that to defend revolutions, instead of a state, structures of direct democracy are needed, like armed militia made up of workers and the poor and controlled by workers and the poor

Co-ordination of the defence of the revolution could be achieved through councils, elected and accountable by workers and the poor

Indeed, in the Ukraine between 1917 and 1921 a democratic militia – co-ordinated via a council and elected officers – proved to be a highly effective fighting force capable of defending a revolution

CONCLUSION

The reality is that the popular classes are capable of building their movements and trade unions into a counter-power

In the past, working class movements – based on anarchism – have won major battles against the ruling class and have been a power that could not be ignored

For example, some of the biggest trade unions in Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Cuba, Japan, China, France, Egypt, Italy, Portugal, Korea, and Spain were anarchist from the 1870s to the 1930s and in many cases they won major improvements for workers

Anarchism too is not a foreign idea to South Africa

The first black trade union in South Africa was the Industrial Workers of Africa, which was formed in 1918, was an anarchist influenced union

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Anarchist ideas and working class counter-power also played key roles in revolutions like in Mexico in 1910, Ukraine in 1917, Korea in the 1930s, Italy in 1920 and Spain in 1936, but they were eventually smothered by capitalists, the state and Communist Parties

In recent years anarchism has started to grow again in working class movements

This has once again opened up the possibility that such movements could be built into a counter-power to challenge the ruling classes

Today, in Spain the anarchist union, CGT, has over 70 000 members

Some of the biggest social movements today, like sections of the Piqueteros in Argentina and the APPO in Mexico are organised around anarchist influenced principles and are beginning once again to challenge the ruling classes

Currently, anarchists are also at the front of protests in countries like Greece

In different parts of Africa, anarchist movements have also been formed in recent years, like the Uhuru Network in Zimbabwe and Zabalaza in South Africa who work within working class movements and trade unions

Hopefully, through movements and trade unions that take up anarchism, we will come to build a massive counter-power that is able to defeat capitalism and states, and we will replace these with a society where workers run factories without bosses; where people use direct democracy and their own structures like assemblies and councils to run their own cities, neighbourhoods and regions; and where the aim of the economy is to meet people's needs

Indeed, hopefully through revolution we will create a world where everyone is truly free and equal – an anarchist-communist world