

## ANARCHISM AND CLASS STRUGGLE

# WHY ANARCHISTS OPPOSE CAPITALISM, THE STATE, WITH THE POPULAR CLASSES



## ANARCHIST POLITICAL SCHOOL



Module 1

**WHAT IS CAPITALISM?**

We live in a capitalist society. By capitalism we mean a system in which different firms compete with each other in the market to make profits.

Under capitalism the means of production - the land, factories, mines, offices and so on - are owned and controlled by a small section of society: senior managers, bosses, employers, and top government officials (elected and unelected). These people - **the ruling class** - live off the profits and dividends and taxes and salaries they make through their business activities and top government posts. To put it another way, the ruling class is the economic and political elite of society, resting on two main bodies of centralized power: the corporation (private as well as state-owned) and the state machinery.

Most people can only make a living by working for a wage or by growing cash crops to sell. Those who are dependent on earning a wage are the **working class** (blue collar workers, white collar workers, workers in the service sector, farm workers, the poor, the unemployed, the marginalised youth, rank-and-file soldiers). Those who make a living through farming with family labour, and who don't employ others, are called the working **peasantry**. Systems like plantation slavery were also part of capitalism because they were organised around making profit for a few rich men.

In capitalism there is also a so-called "**middle class**" made up of professionals, middle level management and small capitalists. This is not really a class with a shared interest, but more a borderland of quite different groups, between the ruling class and the exploited and oppressed classes: the working class and peasants. So we can speak of a "middle class" but it's not the same as the ruling class (at the top) and the **popular (oppressed) classes** below.

**TASK**

Put the different professions/ groups of people into the class you think they belong to.

*workers in the service sector / senior managers / white collar workers / bosses / professionals / employers / middle level managers / rank-and-file soldiers / top government officials / the poor / farm workers / small capitalists / the marginalised youth / blue collar workers / the unemployed /*

Working Class	Middle Class	Ruling Class

We are opposed to the capitalist system. Capitalism is based on exploitation. Because the bosses own the factories, banks, mines, etc. we, the workers, have to sell our labour to the boss for a wage. The boss is interested in squeezing as much work out of us for as little wages as possible so that he/she can maintain high profits. Thus the more wages we get, the less profit the bosses make.

As a rule, workers never get the full value of our labour back in wages. The same goes

for the working peasants. The lower prices the bosses and state marketing boards can pay the peasants for the crops, the more profits they make. The ruling class lives off these profits - and uses them to get richer by setting up more and bigger firms. Practically all productive work is done by the workers and working peasants (the only exceptions to this general rule are some sections of the middle class who do useful productive work e.g. doctors, teachers). The ruling class is parasitic and lives off the working and poor people.

**Discussion:**

- *What is productive work?*
- *Do capitalists do productive work? Who does?*

Clearly, the interests of the ruling class, on the one hand, and the working class and working peasantry, on the other, are in total opposition to each other: capitalism systematically produces, and is based on, inequalities in wealth, power and opportunity. It is almost impossible for an ordinary person to make enough money to set up in business. Instead, the rich get richer at the expense of the poor: in 1960 the richest 20% of the world's population got 70% of the world's income - by the 1990s, the elite 20% got a massive 85% of the world's income (United Nations Human Development Report, 1996).

Capitalism is also an authoritarian and undemocratic system. At the workplace level, capitalist enterprises are run by unelected managers and owners, who make all key decisions on the basis of profit. The vast majority of people in a workplace - the workers - have no real say at all. At the social level, class inequality systematically excludes most people from active and equal involvement in political activity e.g. lack of time, education.

Simply put, capitalists are only a minority of people in capitalism. Most people in capitalism are from *the popular classes*. But they have no ownership or control. So a large corporation like Coca Cola or ESKOM is mostly staffed by workers, who do everything from filing papers to driving trucks to fixing wires to recording who comes into the plant, to actually making the cold drink, or power. They are exploited and dominated, making goods or services to the primary benefit of the ruling class.

In this way, the class divide cuts across private and state corporations.

This same class inequality also exists in every part of the state – not just in state-owned corporations. (see below).

Capitalism puts profit and power before human needs. Production under capitalism is not based on the needs of ordinary people. Therefore although there is enough food in the world to feed everyone, people starve because profits come first. Food is not given out on the basis of hunger, but on the basis of ready cash. The bosses let food rot rather than give it away for free. Similarly, trillions are spent on guns, prisons, surveillance and weapons of mass destruction, to be used by ruling classes in wars against each other – or to suppress the popular classes. Meanwhile, billions are hungry, poor and insecure.

Answer the following questions true (T) or false (F).

1. In capitalism, the rich get richer through hard work? T / F
2. It is easy for working class people to escape poverty and become rich if they work hard? T / F
3. Capitalism is an undemocratic system that does not respect people's rights or needs. T / F
4. Capitalism is a system of exploitation and domination. T / F
5. At the workplace, workers under capitalism have a say in how production is run and for what. T / F
6. There is not enough food in the world for everyone. T / F
7. Under capitalism, production is for need and not profit. T / F
8. Capitalism is a man-made system, and can therefore be changed. T / F
9. Anybody can own land and the means of production under capitalism. T / F
10. Capitalism is a system that gives rise to opposing social classes. T / F

This is why capitalism is also an inefficient and wasteful economic system: there is no planning beforehand to make sure that enough goods are made to meet needs - instead, the bosses have goods made, and then try to sell them. If not enough people have money to buy the goods, they are just thrown away. There is no match between what is actually needed and what is actually produced. Poverty, bad working conditions etc. all take a back seat to the goal of money. Instead of values like mutual aid, and solidarity, capitalism promotes ruling class values like greed, aggression, and hunger for power.

Finally, as we show later, capitalism is also a primary cause of racism and other forms of oppression. Racism was developed to justify slavery, colonialism and apartheid-capitalism, enable extreme forms of exploitation, and divide the popular classes (see next module).

**Discussion:** Which of the following do you associate with capitalism, and why/why not?

mutual aid / greed / aggression / solidarity / thirst for power / respect for others / individualism / community

## THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Capitalism must be fought and ultimately overthrown. The only people who can successfully accomplish these tasks are the masses of the people - the workers, the poor, and the working peasants. Because the workers produce all wealth, we have a powerful weapon in our hands: our ability to hit the bosses to disrupt the profit system through workplace action like strikes, go-slows, occupations etc. This ability to hit the bosses where it hurts most - the pocket - is the most powerful weapon in the hands of the people. Workers resistance is aided by the concentration of workers in large factories, which makes it easier to develop the resistance organisations that we call the trade unions.

But this does not mean that only workers can fight back - working class neighbourhoods and schools also bring people together in large numbers in a way that facilitates action. And peasants have proved themselves again and again as capable of massive fightbacks against the exploiters. Overall, then, we believe the class struggle is the most effective way for ordinary people to fight back.

The ruling class will never get rid of capitalism. They will fight to defend capitalism because they benefit from it. The middle class is generally too privileged to support radical change. So there is little point in trying to involve the rich and powerful in a movement against capitalism. They live in different conditions to ordinary people, and have different interests. The ruling class can only be kept in a coalition with ordinary people if that coalition does not do anything too "threatening" (like opposing capitalism). Only productive classes like the workers and peasants can build a free, non-authoritarian society because only we do not exploit - we do not live off other people's backs.

**Discussion:**

Who do anarchists think are the only people that can fight and overthrow capitalism?  
 Why do anarchists believe this?  
 What powerful weapons do the workers have to hit the bosses where it hurts most?

Class struggle is also the way to defeat forms of oppression like racism. Because these forms of oppression are rooted in capitalism and the State, they can only be defeated by an anti-capitalist struggle. Such a struggle can only be made by the workers, the poor and the working peasants.

Rich blacks may not like racism but they do like capitalism and so they will, when push comes to shove, defend the profit system against the Black working class. Their privileged class position shields them from the worst effects of racism. They can go to fancy schools and live in the suburbs - we can't.

The fight against racism and other oppressions is not something separate to the class struggle: these are working class issues. We say this for the following reasons. Firstly, these oppressions are rooted in capitalism and the State, and can therefore only be finally defeated by a class struggle and a revolution by the workers and the poor. Secondly, the majority of people who are affected by these forms of oppression are obviously working and poor people. In fact, working and poor people suffer far more from the effects of these forms of oppression because we are not shielded by our class status. Thirdly, a united struggle by the working class, working peasants and the poor can only take place if people are mobilised on the basis of opposing all oppression and all exploitation, on the basis of a programme that addresses all of the ordinary people's concerns: that programme is Anarchism.

Answer the following questions true (T) or false (F).

1. Only organised workers can fight back against capitalism. T / F
2. Only the working class can build a free, non-authoritarian society? T / F
3. Working class Blacks can rely on the support of rich Blacks to overthrow capitalism  
T / F
4. Rich Blacks suffer less from racism because of their class position. T / F
5. During the course of the revolution, the whole middle class will side with the workers. T / F
6. The class struggle is the only way to effectively fight other forms of oppression such as racism, sexism etc. T / F

We believe that capitalism and all forms of oppression can only be ended for once and for all when the workers, the poor and the working peasants overthrow the ruling class and create a democratic stateless socialistic society based on grassroots democracy. That is to say, an Anarchist society. In the course of this social revolution, the middle class will probably also split, with part of it siding with the bosses and part of it siding with the revolutionary masses.

This revolution cannot come through, and must not preserve, the State.

**Discussion:** In groups, discuss the following statements. A member from each group to make a short presentation to the class on their findings.

1. Why do anarchists believe that oppressions like racism are working class issues?
2. How do anarchists believe these oppressions can be overcome?

## WHAT IS THE STATE?

For the needs of the workers, the poor and the working peasantry to be fully met we must get rid of the bosses and rulers, that is, the ruling class. But this is no easy task. The bosses are organised. They have the mainstream newspapers, TV, and magazines on their side, as well as social media.

They also have the State (army, police, government departments, Parliament) and the forces of repression that go with it. We only have to look at the struggles and repression of the 1980s in South Africa to see how the forces of the state can be used against workers and poor.

The State (i.e. governments, armies, courts, police, etc.) is a direct result of the fact that we live in a class society. A society where only 5% of the people own 85% of the wealth, 120,000 capitalist farmers own almost all land in the historically "White areas", and 5 big companies control 80% of all shares on the Stock Exchange (South African figures ca. 1994).

The State is there to protect the interests of this minority, the ruling class, if not by persuasion, then by force. Laws are made not to protect us but to protect those who own the property and have the power.

For the state to work, it has to have a large workforce. Within the state itself, therefore, there is also then class divided – between those who actually run and control the state – the top officials, generals, Mayors, MPs, ministers, heads of department, MECs, head of state corporations, VCs – and those under them. The state needs soldiers and police; it needs people to keep records; it needs people to carry out whatever other activities the state has undertaken. In most countries, this means the state also has to employ teachers, gardeners, scientists and academics, cleaners, road builders, journalists and many others.

It is impossible for the small minority – top state officials and politicians –which actually runs the state to do what the state needs to do – the state only works when this elite can instruct and control the labour of millions of others.

This means class struggle takes place across the state. Just like a private corporation, the state is centralized, exploitative and dominating, it does not change because you change the personnel, at the top. Just like the private corporations, which compete with each other, the states compete with each other. Just like the private firms are funded by exploitation, so is the state – either directly (by exploiting its own workers) or indirectly e.g. by getting taxes on corporate profits which are in fact all derived from exploited work (surplus value), as well as from other sources, like tax.

And just like the corporation must be abolished, to be replaced by a democratic system, so must the state.

The state is built in a way that allows the minority to rule the majority: it is a very centralised, bureaucratic, hierarchical (top-down) structure of rule over a territory that concentrates power in the hands of the few at the top. There is absolutely no way that ordinary people can participate in the running of this apparatus. These features - authoritarianism, violence, centralisation, bureaucracy, hierarchy, territory, class rule - are the defining characteristics of all States, including the so-called socialist states such as Russian/the Soviet Union (see below for more on Russia).

**Discussion:**

What is the function of the State?  
 What means does it make use of to achieve this?

**Discussion:**

In groups, list and discuss the seven defining features of all States.

The State pretends to be a neutral governing body, ruling in the interests of all. The reality is very different. When workers go on strike we are met by police dogs and rubber bullets, as well as media hostility and the threat of dismissal. But the bosses who exploit workers and throw people out of work, their homes, or off the land and into more misery never face punishment. Who has ever heard of the bosses being assaulted and arrested by the police during a strike? No. The bosses are called “investors” and treated to all sorts of perks and government support.

If you think that the State is here to protect you, think about the fact that most tax in South Africa is collected from ordinary people through VAT, rents and rates. The companies pay under 25% of all tax (SA figures).

Answer the following questions true (T) or false (F).

1. The needs of the working class can only be met with the help of the bosses and rulers. T / F
2. The role of the State is to protect private property and minority rule, and to maintain

- the capitalist system. T / F
3. The State is a neutral body, which can be used by either the working class or the ruling class in pursuit and defence of their interests. T / F
  4. Ordinary people can participate in the running of the state apparatus through elections etc. T / F
  5. The State concentrates power in the hands of a few, and can never be used for the liberation of the masses. T / F