

Unit 24

The spirit of anarcho-syndicalism

This Unit aims to

- Take anarcho-syndicalist history and project it forward into the first years of the 21st Century.
- Provide some ideas as to the choices on offer to us in changing society today.
- Provide a discussion of some of the ideas at the core of anarcho-syndicalism today.
- Present some notes and comments on 3 examples of types of struggles taking place today.
- Contribute to new and more effective action; from which we can collectively bring about a better society.

Introduction

This Unit is different from the previous 23 in that it builds directly upon Units 22 and 23, which trace the origins, motivations, ideas, aims and principles of anarcho-syndicalism in the 19th and 20th Centuries respectively. As this is a summary unit there are no key points, checklist, or discussion points. This unit is not a definition of anarcho-syndicalism in any sense. In fact, to attempt something like a manifesto would be both futile and contrary to the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism, which is characterised by independence of action around a basic set of core principles centred on freedom and solidarity.

Anarcho-syndicalism has grown and developed through people taking action, having experiences, and learning from them. To try to produce an all-encompassing theory to live or organise by would therefore be alien to anarcho-syndicalists. Instead, this Unit is a small group of people's feelings of what is the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism at the beginning of the 21st Century. That is the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism, and also the spirit of this Unit.

Life today and changing it

Anarcho-syndicalism is a response to oppression. Today, in Britain, oppression is a part of daily life, be it alienation, poverty, or any of a myriad of other sources of authority and suffering. Society is failing and our individual needs are not being met. The task of anarcho-syndicalism is to find a means of understanding what the source of our oppression is, what would overcome it, and how we can best steer our way towards this goal.

That is not to say that everything is oppressive right now. In reality, we do practise solidarity and mutual aid, we help people across the road, do odd jobs for each other as favours, give gifts to each other with no expectation of return, etc. Sixty percent of the productive economy (work) is unwaged; we do it voluntarily. Child rearing, housework, caring for and supporting family and friends, not to mention a wide range of voluntary work falls into this category. The point is, we do these things despite capitalism and the state, which constantly try to tell us that we are not like this, we are selfish, so we need their systems to regulate us and satisfy our in-built profit motive.

Our real motivations as social humans are demonstrated by why we decided to live together in the first place. Society is the result of the grouping together of humans for their mutual benefit. It is society that allows us the space, support, resources and freedom to develop as 'individuals'. The sense of individual self is therefore a result of society. Without society, we would each be alone, isolated, on the edge of existence. Through society, we have developed communication, pooling of resources, free time, culture, in short, individuality. This is not to say that social behaviour (society) marks the start of the human race, nor that it is unique to it - many animals have social networks too. The point is that society is the vehicle through which we have long realised that we can develop ourselves (our egos, if you like), obtain collective security, free time (and therefore, potentially, freedom) and become, above all, distinct individuals. We get all this through having the time to do our own thing. That is, until capitalism and the state come along and tell us we have to spend this time earning the right to survive, and that we should die fighting wars and live by unjust laws 'for our own good' (sic).

Society is not only the source of human individuality, it is also both oppressive and freeing to varying extents, depending upon how it is organised and structured. Modern society may not appear to be

very structured or regimented, but it is. There is no such thing as free trade, free votes, or free expression in today's highly organised society – it depends on money and power. This is apparent to anyone who has ever stepped outside the rules/law/social norms; they see, no matter how easy-going it seems on the surface, how regimented it is in reality.

'Freedom' in capitalism and New Labour terms is empty rhetoric; the word is used because it sounds good. Real freedom can only happen by removing the authority, oppression and inequality that these agencies stand for. Making society freer in this real sense is good for individual development. It is a source of social enrichment, and as society gets richer, so do we as individuals. Indeed, social freedom and individual freedom are directly related.

Freedom requires free time - the more non-coercive, self-directed time we have, the freer we can potentially be. But there is a lot more we need too - access to physical and social resources, including goods and services, and equality, are paramount. Anarcho-syndicalism seeks ever-greater freedom in society, since this will lead to more individual freedom, which in turn will produce more creative development, leading to more social development, and so more possibility for yet-greater freedom than before.

A world of rich and poor, far from encouraging 'healthy competition', must inevitably result in oppression, exploitation, bullying, a deep sense of injustice, guilt, insecurity, and inadequacy. To seek and drive for more inequality, as capitalism does, is to intensify these unhealthy, oppressive forces within society. The very opposite of this is to seek to intensify freedom instead. In a mutually free society, with equal and free access to our productive efforts, by definition, there can be no more 'rich and poor'. This is a basis, a starting point, from which we can seek more freedom. Anarcho-syndicalism is on this quest and, as such, it is the antithesis of capitalism and the state.

Alternatives

Having come to the conclusion that we are being conned by capitalists and politicians into accepting a raw deal, what are we going to do about it and how? Basically, there are three options.

Firstly, we can accept the ideas of inequality and leadership (and therefore the idea that we either cannot or will not be bothered to look after ourselves), but look to 'tame' the beasts of capitalism and the state so that they are less harsh on us. This notion is at the heart of so-called 'social democracy', various forms of which are practised across western Europe, and have been since the Second World War. This really began to fail obviously around the mid 1970s, when recession caused the cracks in the underlying economic theory to appear. Once this occurred, it became clear that, as labour was no longer in short supply, capitalism would go back on the offensive. This happened quite dramatically in Britain, where Thatcher's politically-motivated policies, though economically weak, were pursued vigorously, leaving millions out of work and free trade capitalism once more on the rampage. Unregulated capitalism is now once more established as the mechanism of choice for the ruling elite, as we are told there is 'no alternative' and 'the market must decide'. The result is more and more inequality and inhumanity, both locally and globally. The idea that capitalism can be tamed or made 'human' is now decisively discredited. No-one knows this more than the social democrat politicians themselves; the centre left parties across Europe have quickly and quietly dropped any idea of the socialist state and almost crushed each other in the stampede to embrace the free market god.

The second option is state capitalism, sometimes called state communism. The Marxist idea that the state can take over from capitalism and run the economy through state control for the benefit of everyone, is, looking back on it, nothing more than a very, very nasty joke, or it would be, if millions of people across the world had not been killed in the process of proving beyond any doubt that any and every 'communist' leader is a potential, and likely actual, tyrant. To libertarians, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, the failure of Marxism is no surprise, since it is based on exactly the same pretext as the systems which existed before it appeared - that the state as an outside force could make life better. Within Marxism, however, the state acquires so much direct and pervasive control that it draws even more of the creativity and life out of people. This leads to inevitable

economic collapse, as incompetent bosses, unhindered by private competition and efficiency needs, dish out the wrong orders to a demoralised workforce. With China joining the rush for the market, only Cuba and North Korea remain as the last vestiges of the disastrous failure that is Marxism.

The third option is to oppose the state idea and the authority it stands for, and to oppose capitalism and the values of greed and inequality that it stands for too. However, where will the power vested in the state and capitalism go to, and how will those with vested interests in the current system be persuaded to participate in the process? Instead of replacing the state and capitalism with other power centres, other states, or attempting to temper their worst effects, anarcho-syndicalism is about devolving power to the individual, and going for freedom.

Power is only with the state and capital by force and persuasion through manipulation. To state the obvious, when a critical mass of people are no longer persuaded and are capable of opposing the force used against them, change can happen. Put another way; capitalists and statists will yield when they no longer have or can sustain their authority and power. The aim of anarcho-syndicalism is freedom; the means, methods and principles are all anti-state, pro-solidarity, anti-capitalist, pro-equality, anti-authority, pro-direct democracy. The self-made, bottom-up society is the only arrangement by which humans can benefit from social interaction, without the selfish interests of a few getting a hold through an external agency (e.g. the state) or systemised inequality (e.g. capitalism).

21st Century anarcho-syndicalism

As mentioned above, since society is the product of us grouping together, it is both a reflection and a determinant of ourselves. We constantly react to our surroundings - to our society. For example, one way in which we react to exploitation is by fighting back. Just as we recognise that by coming together in society we have greater potential for freedom, so we also recognise that if we come together to fight back against exploitation, we will be more effective than if we operate as individuals, alone. This is the basis of the libertarian organisation, the revolutionary union, the local activist group - it is more effective than the sum of its individuals.

The way society is structured determines how it is and how we will react to it. If we create a society, which assumes we are nasty, brutish and selfish, it is inevitable that, to a greater or lesser extent, we will be. The only way we are going to change this arrangement is by starting to create and live a new society with new social codes which are not oppressive, and from which we can become more free. We develop ourselves by coming together and collectively fighting against oppression and for a new society where the emphasis is on freedom. Beyond this, the detail of how best to fight at any one time or in any given situation is down to those involved in the immediate action. However, we can draw on our history and the resultant theory we have developed to help us rule out some options as being non-starters. For example, the reform model, that of seeking ever-greater concessions from capitalism until 'it' miraculously decides to call it a day, will not work. Any form of parliamentary-based action is futile - all we do by this is create a new leadership for us to be exploited by.

The Marxist idea that we can dream up (or 'scientifically' determine) a theory, from which a single strategy or 'recipe' for revolution can be determined, is also inherently flawed. Every situation is unique and demands a unique response, which must come from the people involved. This is not to say that many situations are not similar, or that the same tried and tested forms of struggle cannot be used over and over again. It is simply that these things do not necessarily follow or apply. How we respond to our oppression must not be pre-determined, but this does not mean we must start from zero every time, erase the past, and so make the same mistakes over and over. It also does not mean we should not have a theory or theories at various stages of development and testing, nor that we should not try out new or different ideas and

tactics in different situations in order to develop experience and be more effective in the future. All these things are necessary if we are to move forward as rapidly as possible. The basis of every action and every idea is not an over-arching 'king theory' as in Marxism; it is our basic aim of 'freedom by free means' and our inherent culture of resistance. This culture always exists in all of us - it is an automatic response within us to our exploitation. However, much of the time, it may be kept at bay by our need to 'make the best of a bad situation', to seek a basic minimum level of quality of life - security, satisfaction, etc. Nevertheless, inevitably, at some point, just as slaves will come together to resist their slavery, our vision of a better future will come to the fore and we will come together to try to move towards it.

One of the most disturbing things about our present capitalist, state-centred reality is how much we are all suffering. For a lot of us a lot of the time, this may just feel like a dull ache or vague feeling that something is not right. Undoubtedly, some suffer much more than others, but many of us are, directly or indirectly, oppressors at some point, as well as also (more often) being exploited. We indirectly damage the environment, others' livelihoods and maintain and tolerate oppression within society at global level. Even the greediest, richest, nastiest fat cat lives in an oppressive society - he (sic) may be a 'winner' in that society, but the fact is that it remains a detriment to his quality of life.

If we are all to see a better quality of life, we need to act collectively to change things. As we have already seen, putting faith in representatives, politicians, or whoever to lead the struggle on our behalf automatically dooms it to failure. Benevolent, impartial leaders do not exist, *per se*, and so reform, which means using some alternative 'better' form of authority, cannot work. Capitalist and statist structures (and those who climb up them) cannot lead us towards freedom, since they lie in opposite directions with opposite interests. Authority breeds authority, freedom breeds freedom. You cannot get either by using the means of the other.

Logically then, not only are we aiming for a society free of oppression, but we are also committed to using tactics in the struggle that are themselves free of authority and oppression. What we are about now, then, is building ourselves toolkits of non-oppressive forms of organisation, struggle and social relationships. Through constant use and experimentation, these can be improved, until we

Revolution

have a formidable knowledge of free organisational forms, and a massive array of tactics and methods. All of this means constant application - putting ideas about how we want to live into practice, now. In other words, we operate by building our new society in the shell of the old. In doing so, we demonstrate what works, and defend our new embryonic society against the inevitable onslaught from capitalism and the state, whose interests are directly opposed to the nucleus of freedom we are beginning to develop.

Revolutions are stages in the wider process. Revolutions happen when people's expectations are much greater than the ruling elite are prepared to give in to. Unfulfilled promises and extreme exploitation spill over into full-scale class war. Absolute freedom is a goal for the new society, and one which will never be reached. Therefore, there is no simple recipe along the lines of 'struggle, *then* general strike, *then* revolution, *then* utopia, *then* end of the world'. Instead, the struggle for greater freedom starts now and it never ends. Along the way, there will be explosions into revolution, and periods of desperate defence against full scale attack from authoritarians. Revolutions are necessary battles in the wider war to overcome authority and reach ever-greater freedom. To state the obvious; if today's freedom is greater than yesterday's, we have moved forward, but if tomorrow's freedoms are to be greater still, we will always have some way to travel.

Marxists would argue that, if you create economic equality, then you will end oppression automatically, and a 'final' static post-revolutionary society will emerge. We know from the various disastrous experiments in the name of Marxism how dangerous this flawed theory is, and that there are many forms of oppression other than economic –that authority is actually the root of oppression. However, the idea of a static utopia is also neither attractive nor realistic. Who wants to live in a 'final' utopia? Even if we did, we would find that freedom is a relative concept - there are forms of freedom we do not yet understand or comprehend, waiting for us to discover and strive for them when we do.

The revolution, in the sense of an explosion of anger and action, is one battle in the wider class war. It is an outpouring of freedom. The state and capitalism may eventually regain overall control. The revolution hasn't failed it is simply another step. The larger the step, the less power is regained by the forces of oppression, the more is retained by the forces of freedom. The revolution, in the sense of the entire movement, is the culture of resistance; the pursuit of more freedom, forever.

State culture

The idea of the state is that we give away our freedom - the freedom to do as we like - in favour of the freedom to not be subject to other people's innate evil. The state has no function if we 'discover' that people are not innately evil or inherently nasty. In fact, people are not. Before the state, we came together and realised the benefits of living in groups. We voluntarily associated with each other, and realised we could mutually benefit from it. We wouldn't have done this if we were constantly selfish and brutish towards each other. We found we had enough spare time to develop communication, art, expression, culture, and individuality. Instead of being isolated beings continuously seeking survival, we became social beings capable of individuality. Instead of being chained to the constant need for food, water and warmth, we became free of these chores. Freedom and individuality can only appear within society.

If there is any 'innate' evil, if that serial killer next door really is 'innately' evil, pre-programmed to do such things, then neither the state nor capitalism will prevent that behaviour from taking place, as we all know only too well from reading the papers. In fact, we do not know whether such evil is innate or the result of our human environment; society. Nature or nurture is of no real significance here. What is significant is that the vast majority of anti-social behaviour is caused by the nature of our present society. People rob predominantly because they are poor or in need, or because they are brought up in a 'fuck you' society where such behaviour is tacitly encouraged by leaders and politicians, who do the same but on a bigger scale, and often, within their 'laws'. And so it goes on - authority, bullying, oppression and inequality leads to more authoritarian, bullying, and otherwise oppressive behaviour.

Under the state, we are all subject to authority. In 'agreeing' to this, we get individual 'freedom', except that this concept is nonsense. Freedom is not like money, something that can be stockpiled and handed out at will, it is a social phenomenon. Freedom can only exist within a group of people, or a society, where authority is removed or is not present. The freedom to do certain things (like not be killed) is promised by the state, but is not delivered. The simple reason is that creating a system based on the premise that we will kill given half the chance ensures that some of us will. Creating a system based on the premise that we are selfish and nasty ensures that many of us will be, at least some of the time.

We are promised by the state that, in exchange for our obedience, we will have security - a fundamental human desire. In reality, we can only be sure about one thing - that we will be ripped off. Crime is one of the biggest single examples of how the state delivers the opposite of the security it promises. The vast majority of crime is a direct product of the oppression and inequality that the state and capitalism dish out each day, and it causes stress and insecurity to millions.

Even if we do have an instinctive desire to 'free ride' (live off other people's endeavours) or to be selfish, or to be greedy, the fact is that we know that in the long run, this is not good for us and it is 'wrong'. This knowledge should be enough to want to create a society where this sort of behaviour is neither expected, encouraged, nor socially acceptable. Instead, we have, at best, an 'I' society - and more often than not, a 'fuck you' society. The reality is that we are expected to be like this, and so we are treated like this. Instead of telling people who act like this that they are out of order, our society says 'we knew you would do that, so that's OK, we have a control mechanism for that'. The control mechanism in question works differently depending on your background, status and connections. The very heart of the problem is that it is an external agency which is doing the regulating, not the people in the society themselves.

We are a product of society, and we have been social for a long time - since we realised that freedom and individuality were good things and attainable through society. Therefore, despite our present society, which treats us badly and makes us more selfish, we cannot help ourselves voluntarily helping each other. It is what worked when we first came together in society. Hence, we help each other all the time, we do things voluntarily with no expectation of direct return - only the knowledge of a greater return in the wider society. If you help someone across the road, you know they are unlikely to ever help you, but you know society is a better place for it. The gift society is alive and well, despite the best efforts and expectations of capitalism and the state.

Society and culture are the source of our freedom. Our physical instincts to survive did not disappear with the creation of society, they were simply added to, with the addition of social motivation - the possibility of higher and greater freedom and individuality. Our place in society becomes important once we are

Organisation

reasonably 'sure' of our survival. We could call social needs 'higher needs' because they come after the 'basic' needs. In any progressive global society, we should have assured each other of basic needs long ago - no-one should have to die of starvation, for example. We should be moving on to satisfying our 'higher' needs by voluntary co-operation - the way we know it works.

Since we have recognised the futility of the reform of capitalism and the state, we have to determine the best way to start creating our new, free society (within the shell of the old), based on voluntary co-operation. Clearly, our response must be co-ordinated and collective. This means we need organisation. But equally, it must be based on freedom, with anti-authoritarian structures and conducted by voluntary means. The society we seek will be self-regulating, self-managing, self-educating, self-reliant - in other words, without orders, or a higher authority. It will be fundamentally equal - based on equal access to products and resources.

What about motivation? What apparently drives capitalism and the state is greed, selfishness, desire to get above others, necessity to obey orders, and inequality (stimulating the desire to get above others). The motivation for our movement must be the same as the motivation for the society we seek - ever-greater individuality and freedom. So we must develop non-authoritative, voluntary organisations that are motivated towards individuality and freedom. The term organisation in this sense means organic bodies - networks of like-minded people doing co-ordinated things in a voluntary setting, identifying with and supporting each other. In other words, we need to come together in groups, where we can develop our activities and ideas, and practise mutual solidarity - the basis of our future society. These groups (solidarity groups if you like) must be without leaders or authority from above, so they must be based upon direct democracy, where decisions are made by all.

However, we cannot envisage having mass-meetings of, say, more than a few houses, streets, or a village or neighbourhood. Above a certain size, this mass-meeting idea will become unwieldy; distances will be such that not everyone can easily meet regularly together, and people will not know each other so well, will not have the time or confidence to express themselves, etc. Groups that are viable in size (whatever that may be) will have to federate together. This simply means that they will each elect a delegate to meet regularly at federal level to discuss matters and pass on their community's decisions, in particular, those which affect more than one group. A delegate is someone who carries out the wishes (and only the wishes) of the group they are from. This is different from a representative, leader, or whatever, who has the power to make decisions in the name of the group they come from. Under direct

Self-education

democracy, a delegate or officer is elected only to carry out or take forward specific tasks or views given to them - they are also not given any special allowances for doing this service, and they are subject to instant recall whenever the local solidarity group they represent wishes. They must also only serve a set time as a maximum, after which someone else has a turn, so that no 'specialist' clique can emerge within the group.

These are some of the basics of the organic relationships needed to successfully create a culture of resistance capable of building a new society. These solidarity groups, linked together into a solidarity federation, are only there to further our aims of creating more freedom and individuality. They do, however, provide us with the dual purpose organisations we need - capable of both creating and practising the basics of our newly emergent society starting now, and exercising community resistance to defend ourselves and our new society from the worst ravages of capitalism and the state.

There will inevitably be more detail required to ensure that our organic relationships remain free, voluntary and non-authoritarian in a future society. Also, we will constantly have to review how we act in them to ensure we are effective in what we are doing. Some of the groups we set up to fight capitalism may not be needed later on. New groups may be needed to meet new challenges. However, the organic form of relationship described above is basically it. Any idea of creating a large, monolithic, organised society in the future would be disastrous. We simply need a basic minimal structure to arrange the things we need to happen to ensure we can continue to be free, and spend the rest of our time on our own interests. Society will be the myriad of self-organised, voluntary groups of people, some transient, some more 'permanent', interlocking and overlapping in a patchwork of diversity. These will be people pursuing their own interests, their own personal development, in their own ways.

In order for people to be able to pursue their own 'development' in a free society, two main conditions need to be met. Firstly, how will people know that freedom is possible and what they can do to achieve it, and where will they gather the confidence to go for it? Secondly, we have already considered equality, and the need for everyone to have equal access to products, services and resources, but who will provide these and how will it be organised? The first is considered in the following section; the second is considered subsequently.

For many people, 'school' and 'education' are dirty words, and rightly so. The state and capitalist-sponsored education system is designed to fail most people and prepare them for a life of failure, inadequacy, poverty and down-trodden cheap labour. For the small minority, it is designed to tell them that if they comply with certain rules, they will do well; that they are 'better' than most people, and that, therefore, they have the 'right' to order them about and make decisions about their lives.

One of the main reasons we put up with our current bad deal is that we feel pretty powerless to do anything about it. Worse still, most of us have some lingering doubts from time to time; what if we *are* incapable of looking after ourselves? What if the world *does* descend into 'anarchy' (sic) if those who know better let go of the reins?

Inadequacy and low self-esteem are essential ingredients in oppression. However, any anarcho-syndicalist analysis of capability must necessarily be opposite to a Marxist analysis. For Marxists, the problem is that most people are ignorant, and they will stay that way until after the great event, the 'Revolution'. They therefore need leading to the 'promised land' by the party - composed of the few clever ones. This ludicrous idea is at least as alienating as any capitalist one. For anarcho-syndicalists, ignorance is a collective problem we must all overcome, and all respond to, and all encourage each other to respond to. Feelings of inadequacy and lack of confidence do not just die away miraculously; they only disappear when self-belief takes hold.

Passivity is not necessarily guilt. Though, if we accept authority, by giving in to the attraction of 'don't worry, I'll do it all for you', then, whether we are lazy or inadequate, the outcome is the same - we make a rod for our own back and we further accept our own oppression by giving in to the myth that managers have the right to manage us. We cannot afford to be passive, and therefore, we cannot afford to accept the myth that we are inadequate. No-one is 'inadequate'. We are all better or worse than each other at various things, but everyone has the same right to not be bossed around.

The struggle against capitalism and the state must therefore start with the struggle for self-confidence and ego - the realisation of self-belief. With self-reliance and co-operative sharing of ideas - self-education - we can start fighting back at the great myth of the stupid

working class. In our heart of hearts, we all know how stupid the boss is, and we all know we could organise our work far better without interference from management. Self-education and self-confidence are not all we need, but they are crucial, and a bit of both now makes the rest much easier.

Beyond work

Work - economic exploitation - is the mechanism used within capitalism to make a profit out of people. This is the driving force of capitalism. In the fight to replace capitalism with a better society taking on the mechanism, which is the source of profit, the exploitative economic system, is crucial. We must organise at work and fight back whenever we think it is worth it, to advance the struggle against our economic exploitation. But this is not enough - just as there is more to capitalism than profit, so there is more to replacing it than acting to change the economy. As we have already seen, the real focus of freedom is overthrowing oppression, the source of which is power.

Economic power is but one form; there are many other forms of power originating from politics and society. Also, this talk of fighting capitalism in the workplace begs a brief consideration of what work means today. Let us presume there are basically three types of work today, two within the 'economy' and one 'outside' it. Firstly, inside the economy we have paid, productive work. Everything from day care to digging foundations, from factory to farm and from cashier to call centre, waged work to make things or provide services is in this category. The other 'paid work' category is essentially creative, it may be productive too, but it involves creativity, to a greater or lesser extent. The boundary between these two in terms of job type is not clear, since many jobs involve both production and a creative element. Nevertheless, the distinction is made because the creativeness of the latter makes it essentially enjoyable. Thirdly, outside the economy, we have productive work, for example, daily chores to meet basic needs of our dependants and ourselves. This is

the same as productive work inside the economy, except that it is not waged. Non-productive unpaid work would be a fourth category, though this is usually called something like 'leisure'. There is non-productive, non-creative paid work, which currently exists but would automatically cease in a future society, so we can discount further consideration of it here.

How will we organise work in the future society? Firstly, we can note that what is currently paid creative work is enjoyable, so it will take place voluntarily. This leaves currently unpaid work, and paid productive work. The former, it would appear, however much of a chore, also takes place voluntarily already, so can be expected to continue in a future society. The main question which remains then, is that after wages are abolished and free access to goods and services is established, who and why will people do this work, and will it be voluntary? The easiest part is the last part - all work will be voluntary, otherwise society will not be free and we will all suffer as a result.

The question of why will people work if they do not have to is also easily addressed. They will not have to, but it will be obvious that without it, no-one will have products and services they want/need. Therefore, work will be a social service, and most people will want to do their bit in order to ensure their stake in society. We must not forget here that all work will be completely transformed by the lack of orders and bosses. All workplaces will be run by the workers themselves, making all work, whatever it is, inherently more interesting, creative and responsible. Work which is currently tedious or unpleasant will, in the main, become interesting and creative, and therefore will be done voluntarily.

Nevertheless, if there remain two nagging doubts, they must be that (a) the odd person may not respond to social 'duty' and may not turn up for work reliably or at all, and (b) some work, such as cleaning sewers, cannot be creative and will be understaffed as a result, given a voluntary workforce. Firstly, shirkers will be allowed to shirk. Unlike the New Labour rhetoric of today, however, they will have a real stake in society, and they will have real options to do any sort of work they like. There will be no reason for them to not recognise that society and they will be better off if they do their bit. Secondly, any work that is not done voluntarily will not be done at all. Again, however, it must be pointed out that people will want sewers

Products and consumers

maintained and working. If, for whatever reason, people fail to organise this initially, then they will soon realise that it is important enough to warrant doing - at the expense of some other, less essential work, if necessary. Thus, even if the work is seen as a chore, like the washing-up and other non-waged chores today, it will invariably be done.

Work will be transformed by being self-organised and voluntary. Each workplace will have complete control over what they produce and when. They will receive numerous requests and support from various users of their products, to help them decide how to go about their work and what to produce, but the decision as to what goes on in the workplace will be that of the workers themselves. Communities or interest groups may sit down and decide what they want or need – health services, housing, access to self-education resources, consumer goods, and so on. Requests will go to the workplaces, or new workplaces may be set up if none are found.

As we have seen, the co-operative, democratic workplace could include any size or sort of industry. Always, the ground rules will be the same, based on freedom - no compulsion, free opt-in and opt-out, and direct decision making based on mass meetings of workers. Shirkers would be tolerated, though not expected, since work will be creative, so any shirker would be missing out on creativity. Like anything else in society, non-participants would inevitably find themselves not in the centre of things, and so marginalised from social life. Information about work will be available; perhaps it would be beneficial to produce guidelines on how many hours people are working, so that people may adjust their inputs to an approximate norm (though, again, no compulsion would be used). Basic needs - housing, health, educational resources, access to media and information, communal resources, etc., will all be available free at the point of use. Potentially, some groups may decide to also develop 'luxury' or non-needed goods themselves, which may have more limited availability. There may even be a recognisable 'economy', consisting of a market, democratically controlled, with consumers exercising choice over what they wish to consume (and by inference, what is produced, although no direction will be exercised over the production process). Again, it will always be the producers themselves who decide what goes on in their workplace.

A democratic market place would transmit information rapidly. Supply and demand under capitalism only creates problems because of the need to create profit from the process, via labour. As a means of establishing a balance between needs and goods, it is both efficient and useful as a concept. Whereas under capitalism, for example, high demand increases prices and leads to undersupply until the production process can react, in a future society, high demand would simply lead to undersupply until the production process could react. With free information and high quality goods, unlike under capitalism, where information is profit and quality of goods is only inefficiently related to value, the goods and the information about them will be much better.

The main mechanism for providing 'market information' will be people discussing their needs socially and then transmitting these to producers or setting up their own production units to meet these needs. Also, through this process, society as a whole will reach a

consensus over how many resources to put into what sorts of activities, how much work we want to do, what our needs and wants really are.

By contrast, there is a world of difference between capitalist theory and practice, what it purports to achieve and what actually happens. Under capitalism, there is no miraculous match-up between production and consumption through supply and demand. Consumption is only confirmed after production, when the goods reach the market place, by which time it is too late - they have already been produced, hence the gambling and wasting aspects of capitalist production. There is then the added problem that market theory assumes that each consumer is prepared to put up with failure and shoddy goods - that they are prepared to try an infinite number of goods before selecting the one they want to consume (which, like many assumptions of market theory, is illogical and unworkable).

The 'free' market is theoretically at a state of rest. It works because there is demand and this is magically and automatically catered for. However, in reality, capitalists realised long ago that, by manipulating people's desires to 'create' demand, they could then plan their production process to meet this false demand in advance. Hence, the 'free' market is actually a planned economy - every product is planned by capitalists, who have gambled that they have 'created' a demand for it. By contrast, a system of demand planned directly by consumers, and met voluntarily by consensus between producers, will avoid these inevitable failures and falsities of the current market system. The production process will be truly dynamic, and there will be a wide range of choice of quality goods and services. The 'profit motive' will be replaced by the 'consumption motive', that is, people will influence the planning of production by their desire to consume. This sounds somewhat clumsy dressed up in the phraseology of capitalism. What it really means is that people will have no motive to hide information (as now), so information will be freely available about how good and bad products are in their design, effects on the environment, likely use and so on.

Then they will come to consensus in groups over what products they need, and then this information will be passed to the production process, where people will apply their experience and make up their own minds as to how and what to make/do and when. Since ideas and creativity will be the heart of society, wants and needs will flow

from these, ensuring that patterns of consumption, development of good technology, and the broad patchwork production process are dynamic and continuously improving.

Note that in market theory, there is a largely false distinction drawn between producers and consumers, since we all are both. In a future society, the distinction would become much more blurred, given that work would be voluntary and consumption would not be organised on the selective basis of whether you can afford it, but according to need and equality of access. Also, with no more armies of con-merchants, and no need for office blocks of financial service providers, no more armies and police, no more middle and upper management, and no more human resources, etc., to name a few, there will be a lot less work and a lot more done.

Solidarity ethics

The idea of 'common humanity' is based on the premise that we are better off working together, in other words, in society. Therefore, rather than standing for a race, a nation state, or whatever, our social ethic is based on the idea that solidarity is our morality. We are ethical socialist, not state socialist. The central test of our society and of those acting within it is "how free or oppressive is this?"

We have a right to defend our ethical and moral fabric. If a group or individual threatens our moral code, we can rightly act to defend it. For example, if someone commits burglary, this interferes with free association and the right to security. We must act to stop it. However, our reaction would be completely different to the statist one, because we have a completely different view of humanity and society. Thieves are themselves not free, as they must accept that others may rob them. The basis of robbery is unfulfilled 'need' for goods (the 'enjoyable risk' aspect is not robbery but boredom and could not happen in a future society based on leisure). In a just and equal society, robbery would not therefore take place. However, let us accept the notion that there may be isolated cases of people wanting to take 'more than their share' for some reason. First, it is important to state that we can act to stop robbery. One way would be to give the robber whatever they wanted, another would be to physically protect the store against pilfering in order to protect the need for equality, another would be to sit with the robber and discuss the implications of their actions for society. The choice would depend on the circumstances.

Collective action would be far more effective than the police can ever be today, for they are protecting other people's property and an obviously spurious set of 'rights' and 'laws', hence, not surprisingly, they get little or no support from the people they are trying to 'control'. Today, it is blatantly obvious that things are unfair, and we are urged to take whatever we can get away with. Inevitably, some of us rip each other off. In a future society, confronting a robber personally with their crimes would in all likelihood be enough. Anyway, in a just society, no-one will be there to buy knocked off gear, since people will have a stake in society and believe that it must work through everyone taking responsibility for living by solidarity ethics. Faced with a moral majority, a robber will have nothing to gain by robbing.

Bullying, as with robbery, would be eliminated. Bullying is a complex form of oppression since it involves some form of direct

relationship between bully and bullied. Some people are both to different people. Some people are forced to give tacit consent to allow themselves to be bullied. They may be shocked at first, but then they grow to endure it, and sometimes it becomes a long term pattern of behaviour. At its core, bullying depends upon lack of belief in one's self - fear. In a confident, free, self-educated society, such a classic bullying relationship could not appear or survive.

Like robbery and bullying, in the absence of oppressive relationships, physical offences such as rape, murder, paedophilia, etc. would not happen, since they are directly related to the oppression in authoritarian capitalist, statist society (this is not an excuse for the perpetrators, merely an explanation - virtually everyone is conscious and therefore responsible for their actions). However, what about the 'motiveless murderer' or 'uncontrolled, unexplained paedophile'? If a case did occur, as a last resort, force would be used against the paedophile. The rationale for this is that such ongoing behaviour would make the perpetrator, by their actions, less human than their victims. Basic solidarity ethics would indicate that freedom is reduced by allowing continuation of such behaviour - justifying force being used to curtail the perpetrator's freedom to perform paedophilia against people. Nevertheless, such a contemplation of force in an extreme and highly unlikely circumstance does not alter the fact that, in a society based on freedom, the crime we know today would automatically shrink and eventually disappear, for it is inequality and oppression which causes it. In other words, 'prevention is better than cure' would certainly apply to dealing with the prospect of crime in such a society.

So, in the most serious case of offences against our collective society, we will use force. Such force would be collective, organised through setting up a democratically controlled and accountable militia. A militia is a solidarity organisation like any other, based on the same structures and organisation principles discussed above. However, its purpose is physical defence of the collective society from attack by forces of authority. If people act oppressively, they can and will be stopped - authoritarians would be stopped, physically if necessary, from being authoritarian - abusing people. This does not make the militia a sort of 'people's police force' - far from it. Being of and from the local community, it would be instructed by mass-meetings and would act according to solidarity principles.

Some notes on resistance today

The idea of some sort of detention as an option for 'treating' or 'punishing' anti-social people or groups is rejected on the basis of solidarity principles. Prisons (for, in essence, this is what forced detention means) are fundamentally inhuman and oppressive. They dehumanise all those involved, both detainees and guards, and in so doing, they dehumanise society. Current society supports oppression and it is therefore rife with robbery, bullying, fear, physical abuse, etc. It is literally hopeless in dealing with oppression, since the dominant ideology preaches that oppressive nature is innate. The tools for apparently 'dealing' with crime, prisons and punishment, inevitably spread oppressive behaviour further, and make the problem worse.

The real solution to anti-social behaviour is strengthening solidarity ethics, not undermining them. Who is going to want to associate with someone who is actively damaging society? In other words, such a person would effectively exclude themselves from the collective. The most likely course of action in a severe case of anti-social behaviour would be some sort of persuasion, where the person, excluded themselves from friendship and social interaction by being anti-social, is encouraged to change their ways and so integrate themselves fully back into the community. The person is therefore 'self-sanctioned'. A mixture of support and waning friendship in local society may be a key stimulus for the individual to educate themselves and re-integrate.

Therefore, we can see some ideas for how 'crime' may be dealt with in the unlikely event that it took place at all in the future society. These ideas are not prescriptive, nor are they the basis for some sort of new criminal justice system. No such system would be needed. Decisions about what to do, like in every other walk of life, will be made by the community at the time, based on solidarity ethics.

Below, we take a brief look at three examples of modern day struggles, and assess their value in assisting the struggle towards building the society we want. We could just as easily have looked at the on going struggles for gender equality, sexual liberation, children's rights, peace/anti-militarism, anti-poverty, decent housing and health, etc. In each, we would find people committed to what they believe in, some of whom are aware of the likely outcome of their actions, some of whom may even be misguided about what can be achieved from their particular strategy and methods of struggle. The vast majority have as their goal a basically similar world, without oppression, enslavement, and misery, and characterised by freedom, equality, mutual respect and the celebration of individuality, culture and diversity.

Ecology

Many areas of the so-called 'ecology' or environmental movement are striving to use the same tried, tested and failed statist, social democratic means to a better environment. However, let us here turn to the more progressive, direct action inspired elements of the ecology movement, who have managed to organise and successfully counterpoise the dominant apathy and desperation in the face of capital power. In the best examples, such groups have increasingly begun to broaden their direct action basis into self-organisations capable of confronting capitalism as a whole. This stems from recognition that capitalism and the state are the root cause of current wanton environmental destruction.

The process of experience and refining of ideas and struggles is immediately recognisable from our examination of the emergence of anarcho-syndicalism from libertarian socialism and anarchism in the 19th and 20th Centuries. It is experience that informs development, not abstract, unworkable theories, characterised by failed projects such as Marxism. The realisation that global corporations require a global response, and the subsequent co-ordination of the global G-M resistance struggle is another example of

such development.

One problem, which has plagued small elements of the ecology movement, is an underlying technophobia and work-phobia. This arises from a short-sighted view of technology and work as being the perpetrators of environmental destruction, rather than the reality of capitalism and the state. There has also been an occasional tendency towards a 'middle-class' view that work is unnecessary or that workers are inferior. This neo-Marxist perspective is dangerous, since it works against class solidarity and inadvertently supports the idea of leadership and authority.

Nevertheless, there are plenty of examples of the more progressive elements of the ecology movement broadening and strengthening themselves as a result of their experience, and moving closer to the progressive elements of other struggles against capitalism and the state ('progressive' in this case simply meaning based upon the principles of solidarity and for the aim of a free society). Indeed, recent struggles initiated by the ecology movement and trade unions acting in concert against global capitalism stand as a shining example of the 'coming of age' of a potentially major force for real change.

Another issue is how environmental impacts will be planned for, dealt with and how 'development', production and interference by people in the environment will be decided. Sustainable futures depend upon sustainable thinking and action. We have the technology to ruin the planet at a moment's notice and we will never 'uninvent' that technology. Instead, the production process and the environment need to be brought into harmony. We will thrash out, through our meetings in free association, whether a certain action, which will affect the environment, must go ahead or not, based on information we have about the costs, risks and benefits involved.

Instead of capitalism 'owning' the environment, we will all exercise our discretion over what we do with it. What about the rights of rocks, plants, animals, ecosystems? They have rights, in as much as we think they have intrinsic rights to exist and flourish. Therefore, we must incorporate the values of these rights into our values and opinions over whether to destroy or damage them for our own gain or not. So, in a future society, we will value the environment for our economic gain (its productive value), our pleasure (its aesthetic and leisure value), and for itself (its existence value). These values will be

discussed whenever natural resources are to be impinged upon. The issue of sustainability will not be reduced to time, discounted futures and utility theory; it will be central to the continual values debate, which people will participate in as part of their desire to make the world a freer and better place, not a degraded but 'profitable' one, as now.

Unions

A union is a group of people acting together in their mutual interest. More specifically, today, it means a workplace organisation. A trade union is a workplace organisation of people with a similar trade or group of trades. The trade unions in Britain originated as economic working class organisations. In other words, they sought to win gains from the owners of capitalism, to improve their pay and conditions. In reality, many started off much more militant than this, with a clear aim of a future, socialist society, which they would play a part in bringing about, by eventually withdrawing their labour - their co-operation with capitalism. After this, the early expectation was that capitalism would sink to its knees and be replaced by the socialist society, where work would be controlled by the workers themselves.

Two questions arise here: Why did these early militant unions become the sad, obedient tools of capitalism that they are today? If the union idea is worth pursuing, how can we avoid the latter and ensure solidarity ethics are maintained at the core of the 'revolutionary' union?

Firstly, trade unions were and are not solely workplace (economic) based; they have always had a high social-political content. People in the same union share ideas and discuss issues way beyond pay and conditions. However, the bogus distinction between politics and economics, supported by capitalism and Marxism, is flawed, and the trade unions have, over the years, become increasingly damaged by imitating this distinction. The false idea that the union is for better pay, and the party is for a better

future, is one reason why unions have declined. At its core, this stems from the underlying assumption most people in unions need leading to their 'promised land'. The election of union leaders to negotiate with capitalists and the state is fatal for the militant, revolutionary union. These leaders quickly acquire different interests from the workers they are supposed to represent. In protecting these interests, they become corrupt. The undermining process is not simple. Capitalists and the government are well versed in the skills of offering bits and pieces now in return for broader compliance, and the temptations are always there.

The initial mistake, however, is belief in the false idea that participation in capitalism or the state can ever serve the interests of working people. Since these very same institutions attack unions whenever the defences are down or when they realise the unions are no longer needed (for example, when labour is plentiful), it may seem surprising on the face of it that people in unions have 'fallen for it'. In the main, they haven't - it is their leaders, with their own interests, who act as the middlemen in this process and cajole, force and betray their members into co-operation with the elite.

This brings us to the second question, whether and how the union idea can be pursued. Unions unite people initially around the issue of control of the economy, but they must also necessarily be both community-linked and involved with political and social issues too. After all, workers live in communities and politics and society affect work and vice versa. They also need to share the anarcho-syndicalist idea that the future society should ensure the management of *things* not people, free access to which are a pre-requisite to freedom. In workplaces, people come together to make things/ provide services. A union today should emulate as far as possible how the collective, productive process will be like in the future. In other words, they must be self-organised, based on direct democracy, avoid co-operation with the state and capitalism, and use direct action in confronting capitalism. Such methods ensure both that the struggle is effective and that further confidence and self-reliance can be gathered along the way.

At present in Britain, the Solidarity Federation includes Networks, which are affinity groups based around types of workplaces (industries). For example, the Public Service Workers' Network exists to address issues specific to public services, in much the same way

as an anarcho-syndicalist women's group might exist to address the needs and issues raised by its members. The crucial factors are aims and means. So, not only must the aim of the network, and the future anarcho-syndicalist 'union', be a future society based on the pursuit of freedom, its methods must also reflect this aim. The statist, reformist and social democratic trade unions of the past 50 years bear no resemblance on either of these counts. They have comprehensively failed due to their structural weakness of power by proxy (voting leaders) and support for party politics. The idea of people taking responsibility for their struggle and pursuing it through direct action is anarcho-syndicalism and, without it, unions cannot assist us towards the society we want. On the contrary, unions today are a barrier to this aim, since they seek to build organisations based on authority.

The task of building a new movement founded on direct action, which will struggle on economic, political and social issues, and unite people against their capitalist and state leaders, is therefore extremely necessary. They may fight for better pay and conditions, but the methods and process of this fight are more important than the short-term outcome. In other words, using direct action and self-organisation instead of negotiation and leadership elections is paramount to success. The struggle must be based on solidarity - there are no short-cuts. "Unity is strength" is central to every struggle and every action, and only through this can we hope to progress. Any critique of current trade unions, which does not have this as its starting point, is doomed to failure, to being sucked into an endless cycle of erosion by the state and capitalism. It is the loss of solidarity and self-reliance, not a few corrupt union officials, that is at the core of the failure of unions today.

National liberation

Nationalism is manifested in two basic forms. Firstly, the notion of supremacy; that one group is superior to another and so can rightly oppress it. This is most effectively embodied in fascism and is the antithesis of solidarity, and therefore it is utterly abominable and directly opposed by anarcho-syndicalism. The second form is a response to national oppression. Typically, an identifiable linguistic or geographic group seeks to 'liberate' itself from a larger or more powerful group that is controlling and oppressing it. There are numerous active examples, and many have arisen out of imperial colonialism, a particularly nasty chunk of capitalist legacy.

The principle problem of national liberation struggle for the anti-statist anarcho-syndicalist form of organisation is that it is inherently statist. Advocating a more local form of state, the national liberation movement bows to the idea that the state is a desirable institution – just not in the current form. As such, it has the fundamental flaw that, if successful, it will generate a new state - which may or may not be 'worse' than the current oppressor, but it will nevertheless be an oppressive mechanism.

The fact is that the state idea involves a higher authority, which inevitably protects the interests of those within it, who have controlling power. National liberation struggles are therefore really a battle over the 'right to oppress', between the current state and the would-be new state. To support a state, even one that does not yet exist, is to support oppression. Even if it may appear that the liberation struggle involves lesser oppression (at present) than the current oppressor, as numerous cases show, the newly empowered 'liberated' state can often be even more vindictive, power-crazed and oppressive to 'its' people than the previous regime.

The essence of the nation state is antagonistic; power blocks faced up to one another. States have vested interests, and any other state is a potential threat to these. Since these 'threats' can also easily be made to look like threats to people within the states involved, the state idea leads to people being opposed to each other in different states. This degrades the solidarity idea. It also leads states to gain support in co-ordinating barbarous acts between people. The alternative to the state is common humanity. No-one's interests are higher than others', so humanity is equal everywhere; a self-regulating world based on collective, bottom-up solidarity, supporting and celebrating diverse cultural identities, skills and mutual

interests. Equal, but very different.

Solidarity is the only way to reinforce humanity. There is no inherent problem with culture and identity, with seeing ourselves as from a distinct background or place. Just as individualism arose out of social interaction, so culturalism can only develop from being in a wider society of different cultures. When 'others' are enemies, they are not part of your culture; when 'they' become part of our common humanity, they are another aspect of our mutual society.

So the problem only arises when a culture or group sets its interests apart from and above others'. It then becomes an oppressive force – the embodiment of the nation state. By its nature, such a form of organisation will always undermine global equilibrium and global solidarity, by seeking to lead us back into oppressive isolation.

Thus, the anarcho-syndicalist alternative to the national liberation struggle is to build a global association based on global solidarity, against capitalism and the very idea of the nation state. This global organisation is not about crushing or deleting differences or cultures - quite the opposite; the more diversity of culture, the richer the global society. There are also, inevitably, things in this package which must be stated. The conditions faced by some people at present are the negation of humanity - we are far from being on a level playing field. We, especially those of us in the western world, must accept our complicity in benefiting from the ripping-off of people and the environment (however consumer-aware we may try to be). Massive wealth transfer and power transfer has to take place as we move towards global solidarity. We need to be ready to embrace equality, and this will not necessarily be pain-free. Nevertheless, redistribution of wealth and power can only cause minor, short term discomfort, which will pale into insignificance alongside the inevitable and unquestionable benefits everyone will get from adopting global solidarity as the cornerstone for a future free of the nation state.

Solidarity forever

Mutual freedom through solidarity is the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism. Only with this can we be creative and develop ourselves to our fullest potential, in our own vision - in other words, only then can we maximise our individuality. The way we organise our society and production processes will always be the key. We will need certain products and services, as we decide through our local organisations. In fact, ensuring equal access to the products and services we need is the only 'management' task we have. We must not manage each other, for this is contrary to freedom; we will, instead, simply organise 'things'. We can only make real progress towards the society we want by practising and developing our self-reliance and self-organisation now; by building the new society in the shell of the old.

To varying extents, many struggles against capitalism and the state share the ethical aims of anarcho-syndicalism and its methods. Anarcho-syndicalism is not a dogmatic prescription, but a living, breathing, and dynamic range of methods and ideas, all stemming from the culture of resistance and the spirit of freedom. The methods and tactics anarcho-syndicalists adopt in any given situation are those that arise organically from the collective efforts and experience of those involved. Hence, anarcho-syndicalism is ever changing, in response to the ever-changing circumstances we are in, and the ever-changing experiences we have. A rich history, some of which has hopefully been illuminated in Units 1-23, provides a backdrop for clear yet sophisticated strategy rooted in basic principles.

Anarcho-syndicalism moves forward repeatedly, by experience, assessment, theory and testing. It is flexible but uncompromising in methods and aims, driven by a single endpoint - mutual freedom.

Further Reading

This Unit draws on ideas introduced in Units 1-23, so these are a starting point for tracing the origins of anarcho-syndicalism. To find out more, you can always contact us at SelfEd, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW (da@directa.force9.co.uk). Alternatively, try the Internet; the Direct Action website is one starting point for links to SF and other organisations and their ideas (www.directa.force9.co.uk), or libraries and second-hand bookshops. To mail order further reading, try the AK catalogue, from AK Distribution, PO Box 12766, Edinburgh, EH8 9YE (Course Member discount scheme applies if you order through SelfEd).