

# Organisations for socialism

## – introducing a debate –

Since its birth, the working class movement has debated intensely, the question of organisations most appropriate to bring about socialism.

On one side has been the tendency that believed that unions through the general strike could end capitalism and bring about socialism. This is the essence of syndicalism. Those countering syndicalism put political parties and their role at the centre of socialist revolution. According to this view, unions, while important, cannot bring about socialism.

In many arguments, the limitations of unions have been backed up with reference to *What is to be done*, a pamphlet written by V.I Lenin.

In this edition's Socialist Theory column, *Numsa Bulletin* brings you two articles. The first is by Grigori Zinoviev. It is a report on the role of the communist party delivered at a world congress of the Com-

unist International (Comintern) in 1920 to 218 delegates from 37 countries. In the article, Zinoviev asserts the centrality of the party in a socialist revolution.

The second article is an anarchist critique of the Leninist model of organisation.

These are old debates within the working class movement. They manifested themselves in the First International (1864-1876), the first worldwide body of working class associations. The debate also reared its head at the turn of the last century, when Rosa Luxemburg in her 1904 pamphlet, *Organisational questions of Russian Social Democracy*, took issue with Lenin's "ultra-centralism".

By including the two articles, *Numsa Bulletin* takes forward the tradition of open debate within the working class movement. But more importantly, we

hope that the two articles will spark a debate on the forms of organisation appropriate for the current period and highlight the controversy around the following questions.

- What organisational vehicles are critical for the struggles for socialism?
- What is the role of unions in the struggle for socialism?
- What is the role of other working class structures, such as political parties, soviets, factory committees, co-operatives and civics in the road to socialism?
- Who makes the revolution – the working masses or the party?
- What should be the relationship of the working class organisations to the masses?

We also promise to publish a Marxist-Leninist critique of anarchism in the next edition of *Numsa Bulletin*.

school, parliament, church and the administrative apparatus, will all, or nearly all, workers begin to join the party.

3 Sharp distinction must be made between the concepts of 'class' and 'party'. In certain historical situations very considerable sections of the working class may hold reactionary positions. The Communists must not adapt themselves to these backward layers of the working class, on the contrary, they must raise the working class to the level of its communist vanguard.

4 The epoch of direct struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat gives birth to a new proletarian party – the communist party.

5 The Comintern firmly rejects the view that the proletariat can accomplish its revolution without an independent political party. The class struggle is always a political struggle. The goal of this struggle, which inevitably develops into a civil war, is the conquest of political power. However, political power can only be seized, organized and channeled by a political party. Only if the proletariat is led by an experienced party which has definite aims, and a worked-out program for immediate action, can the seizure of power be a starting-point for a long period of communist construction instead of a mere episode.

6 The class struggle requires the unification and centralization, under common leadership, of the various strands of the proletarian movement (trade unions, co-operatives, factory committees, cultural and educational work, elections, etc). Only a political party can provide the necessary unifying and guiding centre. The refusal to form and strengthen this party, subordinating all else to it, means the rejection of the prin-

ciple of unified leadership for the various militant sections of the proletariat acting in the various arenas of struggle. Finally, proletarian class struggle requires intense agitational work to clarify the common thread linking the various stages of the struggle and, to direct the attention of the proletariat to certain key issues, which are importance to the class as a whole. Such a task cannot be accomplished without a central political apparatus, i.e. without a political party.

7 The most important task of a genuine communist party is to maintain the closest possible contact with the widest sections of the proletariat. For this purpose communists must also work in associations, which are not attached to the party, but which have large numbers of working class members. Communists consider systematic organizational and educational work inside these broad organizations to be one of the most important aspects of their activity. In order to carry out this work successfully, and prevent the enemies of the revolutionary proletariat from winning control of these broad workers' organizations, the politically conscious communist workers must also create their own independent disciplined communist party – a party which acts in an organized fashion and is capable of defending the general interests of communism.

8 Communists do not shun the mass non-party workers' organizations even when, as is sometimes the case, these are clearly reactionary. The communist party constantly and tirelessly works inside these organizations to show the workers that the bourgeoisie and its bootlickers deliberately promote the principle of non-partisanship in order to divert the proletarians from organized struggle for socialism.

9 The working class needs the communist party not only before and during the seizure of power, but also after power has been transferred to the hands of the working class. In the period immediately after the seizure of power by the working class, the proletarian party reaches only a part of the working class, but precisely that part which has organized the victory. Only the existence of a united organization involving the best elements of the working class makes it possible to overcome all those difficulties which confront the workers' dictatorship in the period after its victory.

10 The need for a proletarian political party ceases only with the complete abolition of classes. The communist party will dissolve completely into the working class only when communism has ceased to be the object of the struggle and the entire working class has become communist.

11 The Comintern considers that, particularly in the epoch of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the communist party must be built according to the principle of iron proletarian centralism. The communist party must be organized on the basis of democratic centralism. The main principles of democratic centralism are that higher bodies are elected by lower bodies, all directives of higher bodies are absolutely binding on subordinates and a powerful party centre exists whose authority between congresses is unquestioned by all the leaders of the party.

12 A whole number of parties have to exist illegally as a result of the siege declared by the bourgeoisie. It is essential to remember that in such a situation the principle of holding elections cannot always be observed, and the leading party bodies

## The role of the communist party in the proletarian revolution

– a report to the 2nd world congress of the Comintern –

Grigori Zinoviev (1883 – 1936) delivered this report on 23 July 1920 at the 2nd world congress of the Communist International (Comintern). The Comintern was a world body of communist parties formed in 1919. As one of the leaders of the Bolshevik Party and for his role in the 1917 Russian revolution, Zinoviev served as the head of the Comintern between 1919 and 1926.

1 The communist party is a part of the working class. It is the most advanced, politically conscious and revolutionary part. The communist party is composed of the best, most politically conscious, most dedicated and farsighted workers. The communist party has no interests other than those of the working class. It differs from the general mass of workers in that it surveys the whole historical path of the working class its totality, and tries at each stage of the struggle

to defend the interests of the working class as whole, rather than of individual groups or trades. The communist party is the organizational and political lever, which assists the more advanced part of the working class. It directs the mass of the proletariat and semi-proletariat onto the right path.

2 Until the proletariat has captured state power and has finally consolidated its rule against bourgeois

restoration, the communist party will, as a rule, have only a minority of workers organized in its ranks. At the time of the seizure of power and during the transition period, the party can exercise unquestioned ideological and political influence on all the proletarian and semi-proletarian layers of the populations, while remaining unable to draw them organizationally into its ranks. Only after the proletarian dictatorship has deprived the bourgeoisie of such powerful weapons as press,

must have the right to co-opt members. The communist party must allow the leading centre to make decisions on behalf of all party members when necessary.

**13** Communist parties must learn skillfully to combine legal with illegal work. Legal work must always be under the control of the illegal party. Parliamentary communist fractions in central and local government institutions must be completely and absolutely subordinate to the communist party as a whole, regardless of whether the party is at that time a legal or illegal organization. Those

deputies (MP's) who, whatever the issue, refuse to subordinate themselves to the party must be driven out of the communist ranks.

**14** The basis of all the organizational work of the party and its members must be the creation of the communist cells, wherever there is a small number of the proletarians or semi-proletarians. All communist cells working in the non-party organizations must accept the unconditional control of the party organization as a whole irrespective of whether or not the party is legal or illegal at the time. Communist cells of all kinds must be subordinate to

one another in as strict and precise a hierarchy as possible.

**15** The communist party almost always begins as an urban party, a party of industrial workers living mainly in the towns. To ease and hasten victory for the working class, it is essential that the communist party become not only the party of the towns, but of the villages as well. The communist party must carry out its propaganda and organizational work among the agricultural workers and the small and middle peasants. The communist party must take particular care to organize communist cells in the villages.

## Why do anarchists oppose the Leninist "revolutionary party"?

**(This is an extract from "Reply to errors and distortions in the SWP's 'Marxism & Anarchism'" – <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1931/append34.html>)**

**G**iven that the "revolutionary socialist ideas" of Marx have been proven wrong on numerous occasions while Bakunin's predictions were proven right, anarchists humbly suggest that anarchism is a valid alternative to Marxism. For example, Bakunin correctly predicted that when "the workers send common workers to legislative assemblies, the workers-deputies transplanted into a bourgeois environment, into an atmosphere of purely bourgeois ideas, will in fact cease to be statesmen, they will become bourgeois."

The history of the Marxist social democratic parties across the world proved Bakunin right.

Similarly, Bakunin predicted that Marx's "dictatorship of the proletariat"

would become the "dictatorship over the proletariat". The experience of the Russian revolution proved him correct. Once the Bolshevik party had become the government, power became centralised at the top. The workers' Soviets quickly became a cog in the state machinery rubber-stamping the decrees of the Bolshevik government. Workers' control of production by factory committees was replaced by state appointed managers and so on. The "socialist" state quickly became a bureaucratic monster without real control from below. The Bolsheviks actually disbanded the Soviets when opposition parties won majorities in them in the start of 1918.

Anarchists argue that the revolutionary organisation must also reflect the type

of society we want. Hence the anarchists' federation must be self-organised from below, rejecting hierarchy and embracing self-organisation. For anarchists an organisation is not democratic because it debates. It is democratic only if membership actually decides the policy of the organisation.

Centralisation is when the centre decides everything and the membership follows those orders. That the membership may be in a position to elect those at the centre does not change the fact the membership is simply expected to follow orders. It is the organisational principles of the army or the police, not a free society.

In *What is to be done*, Lenin discussed "the confusion of idea concern-

ing the meaning of democracy." He dismissed the idea of self-management as "primitive democracy". He used the example of early British unions, where workers "thought that it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions decided by the vote of all members, but all official duties were fulfilled by all members in turn." Lenin considered "such a conception of democracy" as "absurd" and saw it as historically necessary that it was replaced by "representative institutions" and full-time officials". [*Essential Works of Lenin*, pp.162 – 3]

In other words, the Leninist tradition rejects self-management in favour of hierarchical structures in which power is centralised in the hands of "full-time officials" and "representative institutions".

In contrast Bakunin argued that trade unions which ended "primitive democracy" and replaced it with representative institutions became bureaucratic and "simply left all decision-making to their committees. In this manner power gravitated to the committees, and by a species of fiction characteristic of all government the committees substituted their own will and their own ideas for that of membership."

At best Leninism reduces "democracy" to mean that the majority designates its rulers, copied from the model of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. In practice it is drained of any real meaning and quickly becomes a veil thrown over the unlimited power of the rulers. The base does not run the organisation just because once a year it elects delegates who designate the central committee, no more than the people are sovereign in a parliamentary-type republic because they periodically elect deputies who designate the government. That the central committee is designated by a "democratically elected" congress makes no difference

once it is elected, it is *de facto* and *de jure* the absolute ruler of the organisation. It has complete statutory control over the body of the party. It can dissolve the base organisations and kick out militants.

In reality, while the anarchist reject the "revolutionary" party, they do not reject the need for an anarchist federation to spread anarchist ideas. We reject the Bolshevik style "revolutionary party" simply because it is organised in a centralised, bourgeois fashion and so produces all the problems of capitalist society within the so-called revolutionary organisations.

"In reality, a Leninist party simply reproduces and institutionalises existing capitalist power relations inside the supposedly "revolutionary organisation: between leaders and led; orders givers and orders takers; between specialists and the acquiescent and largely powerless party workers. And that elitist power relation is extended to include the relationship between party and class."

Such an organisation can never create a socialist society. In contrast, anarchists argue that socialist organisations should reflect as much as possible the future society we are aiming to create. To build organisations that are statist/capitalistic in structure cannot do other than reproduce the very problems of capitalism/statism into them and so undermine their liberatory potential.

Anarchism derives from the Greek for "without authority" or "without rulers" and this informs the anarchist theory and vision of a better world. This means that anarchism is against the domination of man by man or woman by woman or woman by man. Anarchists stress the need for self-government (often called self-management) of both individuals and groups. Self-management within free associations and decision making from the bottom-up is the only way domina-

tion can be eliminated. This is because, by making our own decisions ourselves, we automatically end the division of society into governors and governed. In other words, those affected by a decision make that decision. Anarchism clearly means support for freedom and equality. So all forms of hierarchical organisation such as the state and the capitalist workplace and the authoritarian social relationships (such as sexism, racism, homophobia and wage labour) must be abolished. This means that anarchist organisations must be self-managed, decentralised and based on federalism. Only this form of organisation can end the division of society into rulers and ruled, oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited and create a society of free and equal individuals.

This is why anarchists stress such things as decision making by mass assemblies and the co-ordination of decisions by mandated and recallable delegates. The federal structure, which unites the basic assemblies, would allow local affairs to be decided upon locally and directly, with wider issues discussed and decided upon at their appropriate level by all involved. This would allow those affected by a decision to have a say in it, so allowing them to manage their own affairs directly and without hierarchy. This in turn would encourage the self-reliance, self-confidence and initiative of those involved. As a necessary complement of our opposition to the authority, is support for "direct action". This means that people rather than looking to leaders or politicians to act for them, look to themselves and the own individual and collective strength to solve their own problems. This also encourages self-liberation, self-reliance and self-confidence as the prevailing culture would be: "if we want something sorted out, we have to do it ourselves" – in other words, a "do it yourself" mentality. ■