



As
we
see
it
now

~~~~~  
CopyLeft : free reproduction except for profit

Posters from the 1968 general strike and factory occupation in France



# workers council socialism renews the old ideas of council communism which first emerged after the revolution in Russia in 1917.

# the council communists in 1920 disagreed and broke with the regime over their right to form their own policies and the domination of a Party over the workers organisations. They adopted some aspects of libertarian ideas and organisation, but retained elements of marxism

# later, in the Spanish revolution, the Friends of Durruti broke with the anarchist CNT party as the war against the fascist forces under General Franco was being defeated. They proposed a similar solution to the one reached by the original council communists.

# a booklet was published in 1967 was regularly reprinted by Solidarity for workers power and is still circulated today. An explanatory section, As we don't see it, was added to make clear the implications of the programme. It has been updated by Workers' Council Socialism to this new version.

# the ideas of WCS are seen by many as being in the tradition of the "libertarian marxism", as shown by Rosa Luxemburg, and anarcho syndicalism as practised in the pre-war period

# The leading figures in the original council communism were Herman Gorter and Anton Pannekoek.

**AWSIN[2]**

**Published in 2008 by Workers Council Socialist,  
PO Box 45155, Tottenham, London, N15 4WR  
alan@petew.org.uk**

~~~~~

As We See It Now

One

Our basic society changes little. Economic compulsion still forces most of us to work for a living, parliament mainly defends the property rights of the rich and pays a minimum regard to our threadbare legal rights and living standards. Business interests use their control of the state bodies to protect themselves while those of us who must work for a living suffer war, welfare cuts, poverty and ill health. For the retired, existence on pensions adds to the poverty and social isolation for the majority.

In our "democracy", we do not elect any of the tin pot tyrants or bureaucrats who run our lives at work, home and else-where. We do not live in a "democracy", just the shadow of a dream. The farce of "parliamentary representation" is increasingly ignored by voters as the private financial market intervenes more and more in our lives, employment, public health services, bookshops and even our football teams.

Two

Despite the raised living standards of working people and more consumer goods, the role of the worker in the production of the world's wealth remains basically the same. Workplaces are models of tyranny. Nor has progress given the bulk of mankind much freedom in other social institutions.

East and West, North and South, across the globe, capitalism remains an authoritarian type of society where the vast majority are bossed at work and manipulated in consumption and leisure. The conflict between labour and capital continues, albeit carefully camouflaged.

Propaganda and policemen, prisons and schools, traditional values and traditional morality all serve to reinforce the power of the few, and to convince or coerce the many into acceptance of a brutal, degrading and irrational system. The "Free" world is not free. All religions still repress rather than liberate. Remaining "Communist" states are not communist and the Third World features more military despots every year.

Three

The fantasy that workers and their families can be bought off with material goods from an ever expanding "market", and that people can only challenge on piecemeal issues anyway, ignore the long term economic instability within the system. Politicians and bosses also mistake acquiescence with acceptance. Capitalism always suffers financial crises, and slumps and depressions that sometimes follow, despite periods of expansion or stability.

On the contrary we believe that conditions of life and experiences in the workplace and in neighbourhoods, constantly drive the people -

- to adopt and adapt priorities and tactics,
- to dispute the established patterns of thought,
- and to find methods of organisation which challenge the established social order.

These responses are implicitly socialist and collective. One immediate job is to overcome the fragmentation of the working class movement which is dispossessed of the means of communication, and its various sections are at different levels of awareness.

Four

Unplanned and excessive use of modern technology, in the name of profit, has endangered the planet and its inhabitants. Such dangers grow yearly in the globe. Only mass direct action by those determined to protect both people and nature, can achieve a sustainable society. Real Green society and the capitalist markets are not compatible, despite the international Environmentalist industry and its cosmetic programme of minor reforms.

Five

Our alternative is socialism - the common ownership and control of the means of production and distribution. It means practical equality, real freedom, the end of oppression based on discrimination, and a radical transformation in all human relationships. Workers council socialism is people's understanding of their environment and of themselves, their control over their work and over such social institutions as they may need to create. In any replacement society, these changes must be worked for, as the only guarantee that a genuine social transformation has taken place and no backward subversion is allowed

Six

A socialist society can therefore only be built from below, and that for us means workers councils. Regarding the production of society's resources, decisions concerning the workplace will be taken by workers' councils composed of elected and recallable delegates. Wider interests also have representation here. Above the base level, federated liaison committees will ensure people's control, through computer aided collective planning, not centralised bodies.

Similar council organisation will be applied as communes to all social services, bodies and enterprises thus ensuring popular control from assemblies upwards in both production and substitute "state" institutions. All councils or communes should comprise delegates from the body concerned, plus those representing social interests. This democratisation of society down to its very roots is what we mean by 'workers' power', and we support effective action to promote this.

Seven

Effective action, for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, autonomy, initiative, participation, solidarity, equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of people. Sterile and harmful action is whatever reinforces passivity, apathy, cynicism, differentiation through hierarchy, alienation, reliance on representatives to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others - even by those allegedly acting on their behalf. This applies before, and after, any "change over" in the way our society is run.

Eight

The national trade unions and their Labour Parties started life to change society radically. But they have come to terms with the existing patterns of exploitation. In fact they are now essential for repressive society we live in to continue working smoothly. The unions act as middlemen in the labour market. The political parties use the struggles and hopes of the working class for their own ends. The degeneration of working class organisations, itself the result of the failure of the revolutionary movement, has been a major factor in creating working class apathy, which in turn has led to the further degeneration of both parties and unions. Racism in society is a frequent secondary consequence.

Nine

By their convoluted ideas, rigid hierarchical structure, and destructive activities, bolshevik and similar types of political Parties have discouraged this kind of socialist understanding and prevented mass participation. The idea that socialism can somehow be achieved by an elite party (however apparently 'revolutionary') acting "on behalf of" the working class, is both absurd and reactionary. "Party" led action has been shown repeatedly to end in defeat or political corruption. In modern society, libertarian organisation is the remaining hope.

Ten

The primary role of socialists who want to promote workers council socialism is to work for the

- ☐ formation,
- ☐ development,
- ☐ unity, and
- ☐ co-ordination

of working class resistance to capitalism on a day to day basis.

The trade unions and political parties cannot be reformed, 'captured', or converted into instruments of liberation. We don't call however for the proclamation of new unions or parties, which, without a solid base, would suffer a similar fate to the old ones. Nor do we call for militants to tear up their union cards, but to work with the rank and file in workplaces, unions and action alliances

Eleven

No ruling class in history has ever relinquished its power without a struggle and our present rulers are unlikely to be an exception. In any move to a fairer society, power will only be taken from them through the conscious, autonomous action of the vast majority of the people themselves. Building up for this, Workers Council Socialism advocates forceful direct action.

We see the right to vote as one weapon in the overall strategy and do not propose abstention as other libertarians do. However it is largely a negative power to prevent the worst option, as parliamentary majorities will achieve very little within that limited framework.

Instead we propose the popular form of society outlined above. In the meanwhile we could accept the idea of voting for issues, rather than political parties.

Twelve

Socialists are most able to promote their aims by being active and unionised members of a workplace, and standing as delegates in that capacity. This is a primary agitational function, even for those who chose to become politically active, and one that cannot be neglected.

Outside this, and rank and file bodies, workers council socialists may be active in -

- ☐ organisations fighting racism and discrimination against asylum seekers;
- ☐ the defence of the welfare state against privatisation, closure and cuts.
- ☐ anti-war campaigns, and other fields including, in specific circumstances, possible electoral work at this stage,

Activity in such bodies assumes the positive acceptance of organisational responsibility rather than the blatant use of "interventions" in public meetings to recruit membership. People will become politically active on the basis of the performance of existing socialists, rather than lectures and rehearsed speeches.

WCS is not yet another leadership party, and we decline to build such a leadership. In its place, we propose working towards a party or organisation – the wording does not matter – that develops our own memberships' skill, knowledge and initiative, for an organisation that guides those engaged in the job in hand.



DEBUT D'UNE
LUTTE



SOLIDARITE
AVEC LES
MARINS
PECHEURS

