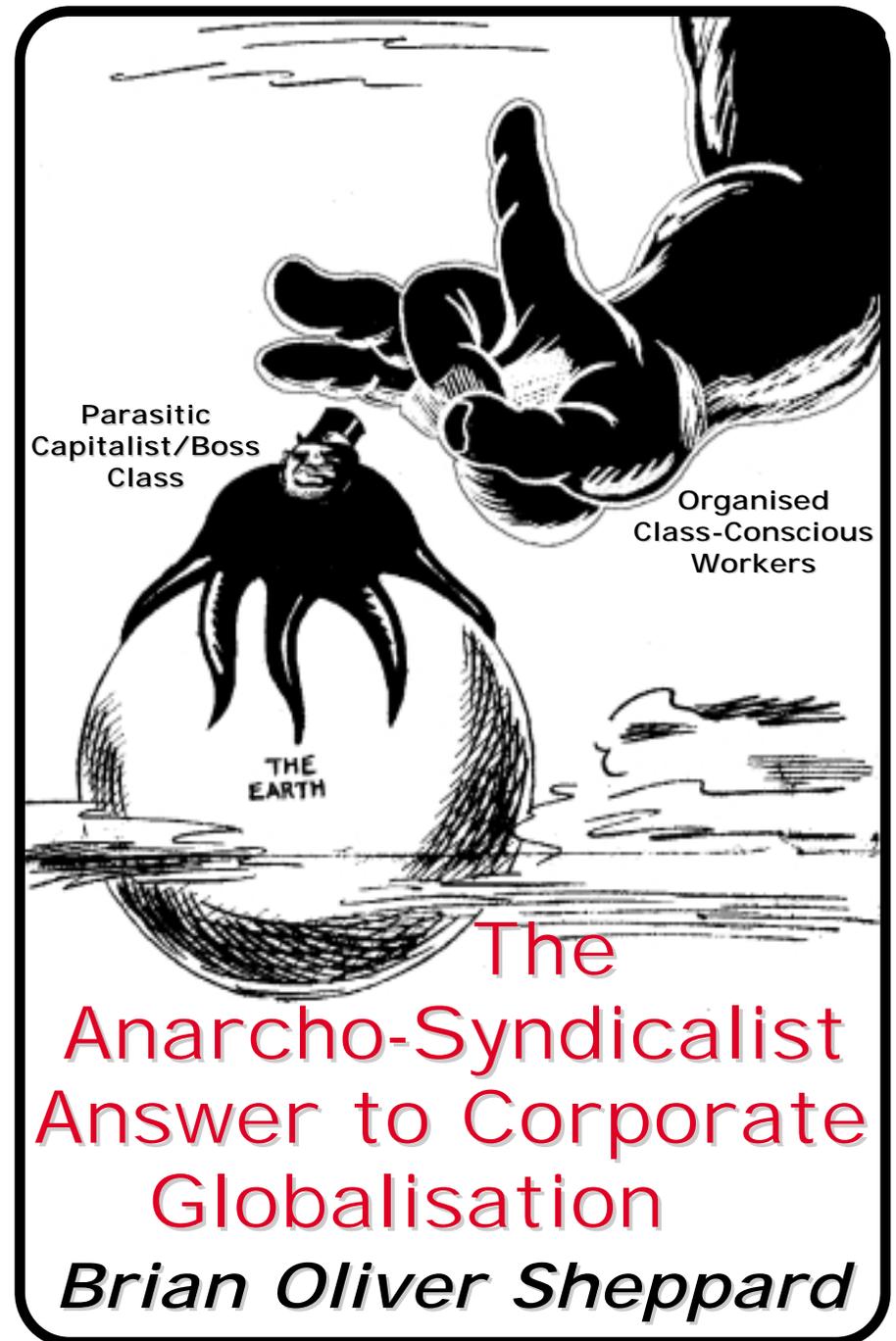


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their own. Let the poor, the workers, and disenfranchised of the world linger no more in their subjection and misery; let us instead claim what is rightfully ours, and transfer to the whole population of the earth what all the peoples of the earth have made.

 This article by Brian Oliver Sheppard is taken from edition #33, Winter 2001/02 issue of the *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* (formerly *Libertarian Labor Review*) from the U.S.A. and so naturally reflects the authours perspective/s.

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# *The Anarcho-Syndicalist Answer to Corporate Globalisation*

Brian Oliver Sheppard

Recently the local Industrial Workers of the World branch distributed a flyer saying: "Globalise worker self-management, not corporate rule!" In a nutshell, this is precisely the anarcho-syndicalist answer to corporate globalisation.

The internationalisation of the Western capitalist economic model is nothing new, however. Colonialism, which one socialist writer of the past described as a cousin to the stock exchange, was one era's "globalisation" problem. Capitalism thrived in an environment consisting of subordinate nation-states that could serve, in effect, as gigantic supply depots of natural resources and labour for ruling classes in colonial master states.

Today, capitalist globalisation is being painted in a decidedly more liberal fashion: world unity, eliminating borders, and overcoming age-old cultural prejudices are all key aspects of the new age of global oneness, corporate spin doctors tell us. A liberal vision of transcontinental harmony accompanies a neoliberal program of market expansion, in which opponents of global market rule are painted as backwards isolationists who selfishly want to keep all the good things in life in their own country. When the Coca Cola Company launched a commercial in the '70s that showed people of all colours and sexes gathered on a hilltop, united and moved to song by their love of a commodity, corporate PR revealed to what extent it could wed itself to leftist sentiment while bolstering capitalist agendas. In this same spirit, telecom giant Verizon now runs a commercial that shows people of various nationalities flashing peace signs to TV viewers, while a woman sings that "people everywhere just wanna be free."

Anarchists have always believed in eliminating borders of nation states, and have always opposed cultural prejudice. Now corporations are claiming that they do too. Before Verizon's advertisement campaign, anarchists also suspected that "people everywhere just wanna be free" - but anarcho-syndicalists, unlike corporate elites, actually took pains to develop methods by which popular freedom might be secured. The "freedom" that corporate planners speak of is a false freedom; those who strive for real freedom

realise this when they run up against a wall of state repression that feel-good advertisements fail to mention.

In fact, by "freedom," corporate planners mean the freedom to do as they wish to whomever they wish, whenever they wish, so long as it maximises profit and secures their class interests. Nation states fit soundly into that scheme. The traditional anarchist struggle for a borderless world does not.

## ★ An Earlier Form of Globalisation

By the middle of the 19th century, anarchists, socialists, and working people in general were recoiling at the devastation capitalism brought wherever it settled, and many critiques of the globalisation of the capitalist economic model began to appear. Marx and Engels, for example, noted in *The Communist Manifesto* that the "need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe." They claimed - not untruthfully - that "modern industry has established the world market" and that this global market "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst..." Kropotkin observed that "capitalists, by means of the ease with which they exploit countries which themselves have no developed industry, ... control the labour of hundreds of millions of those people in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa." Unfortunately, Kropotkin noted, "force is necessary to continually bring new 'uncivilised nations' under the same conditions [of wage labour]."

In *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, Rudolf Rocker, for his part, lamented "the unrestrained exploitation of colonial peoples" by capitalists in industrialised lands, and warned workers in privileged countries that as long as bourgeois rule was global, they would have to be "ready to fight the wars of the possessing classes for the retention and extension of their markets, and to defend any injustice they may perpetrate on other people."

Mikhail Bakunin, in "The Immorality of the State," traced this problem of global rule to the nature of nation states, which he saw necessitating an ever-outward expansion of authoritarianism:

*Nation-states have proved enormously useful to corporations seeking to internationalise their markets.*

*Among other things, States serve as economic arrangements that ensure the viability of an exploitative system that benefits elites*

dicates]." Such a society is realisable because its points of germination already exist. The organisations that would carry these things out, that is, already exist, if only in nascent form: labour unions, collectives, and co-operatives of various kinds. Incidentally, these are the sorts of organisations corporations are always trying to eliminate.

In a 1979 interview, Noam Chomsky reaffirmed that "for advanced industrial countries at least, an organisation in the manner that has been developed in anarcho-syndicalist theories is exactly correct; it would be the best form of organisation for an industrial society and possibly for any society." Chomsky went on to say that "a very reasonable position to take is that all forms of centralised domination [should be eliminated], including the highly concentrated centers of corporate power, which with state power forms the two major functioning, closely related centers of power in Western capitalism. Both of these things are, in my view, historical anachronisms, inconsistent with any fundamental commitment to democracy." "The true aim of a social revolution," he continues, "should be to dissolve these centers of power leading to a social organisation based on such principles as workers' control of industry, local control of communities, federal interaction, interchange, and so on."

The hard, day-to-day work of anarcho-syndicalists is simply this: to organise workplaces along radically democratic, non-hierarchical lines to wrest control of industry from its managers. There can be no single act by any single person that will bring about an anarcho-syndicalist society. It is dependent upon the massive co-ordination of labouring people the world over to resist capitalist encroachments internationally, and to strike back to expropriate the expropriators. No true revolutionary has ever claimed such a monumental feat was easy, or that results would come swiftly. The basic building blocks of a society worth living in can only be created by the persistent, hard work of dedicated activists willing to organise in their industries, so that industry may ultimately be seized and operated in accord with the workers' wishes.

As Thomas Skidmore wrote of various new inventions in the 1830s, "the steam engine is not injurious to the poor when they can have the benefit of it ... instead of being looked on as a curse, it could be hailed as a blessing ... Let the poor lay hold of it and make it their own ... let them also in the same way appropriate the iron foundries, the cotton factories, the rolling mills, houses, churches, ships, goods, steamboats, trades of agriculture: as is their right."

So it is that the global poor should lay hold of all the wealth, all the equipment and all the productive apparatus of the globally privileged, and make it

A. Phillip Randolph, an African-American socialist in the early part of the 20th century, saw direct action as the only viable means for black workers in the U.S. to take their lives back:

“The Negro must engage in direct action. He is forced to do this by the government. When the whites speak of direct action, they are told to use their political power. But with the Negro it is different. He has no political power. Therefore the only recourse the Negro has is industrial action, and since he must combine with those forces which draw no line against him, it is simply logical for him to draw his lot with the Industrial Workers of the World. The IWW is the closest thing to a large anarcho-syndicalist organisation that the U.S. has ever had.”

The capitalist class, through corporate globalisation, can disempower workers, and settle in areas where workers have no political voice to affect change. Already the WTO held its most recent meeting in the remote desert nation of Qatar, which is ruled by a monarchy, and where rival political factions and freedom of speech are illegal. In the United States, corporations increasingly rely on the easily exploitable labour of illegal aliens and prison work forces, two segments of the labour force that have no real rights. Direct action is their only recourse. Likewise, oppressed workers in other lands often have no political say. What else can they do but act directly upon what is oppressing them?

As to what it is that direct action should achieve, Rudolf Rocker spoke clearly on the subject when he stated:

“Anarcho-Syndicalists are convinced that a socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of a government, but only by the solidaric collaboration of the workers with hand or brain in each special branch of production; that is, through the taking over of the management of all plants by the [workers] themselves under such form that the separate groups, plants and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products in the interest of the community on the basis of free mutual agreements.”

Rocker saw that this would have to be characterised by three things: **1.** Organisation of the plants by the producers [workers] themselves and direction of the work by labour councils elected by them. **2.** Organisation of the total production of the country by the industrial and agricultural alliances. **3.** Organisation of consumption by the Labour Cartels [affiliated workers' syn-

“Every state, whether it is of a federative or non-federative character, must seek, under the penalty of utter ruin, to become the most powerful of states. It has to devour others in order not to be devoured in turn, to conquer in order not to be conquered, to enslave in order not to be enslaved - for two similar and at the same time alien powers cannot co-exist without destroying each other.”

Commenting on this same phenomenon, MIT Professor Noam Chomsky observes that the "state system is a very artificial system. In its modern form it developed in Europe, and you can see how artificial it is just by looking at European history for the last hundreds of years, a history of massacre, violence, terror, destruction, most of which has to do with trying to impose a system on a society to which it has very little relation."

As Europe expanded over the rest of the world, pretty much the same thing happened - you look at Africa, India, Asia, any place you go, they've got these boundaries which are the result of colouring different colours on the map that usually have to do with European colonisation. They cut across all kinds of communities and interests and they bring people together who have nothing to do with each other. The result is constant warfare and struggle and oppression and so on. Furthermore, within each of these artificial systems, imposed usually by force, you have some kind of usually very sharply skewed distribution of power internally.

The system of nation-states "cut[s] across all kinds of communities and interests and ... bring[s] people together who have nothing to do with each other," creating the perfect pre-condition for global corporate rule. Markets can be laid across dissimilar cultures and traditions under a uniform system of laws and regulation. The groundwork laid by the globalisation of nation-states has made corporate globalisation possible.

## ★ Early Forms of International Resistance

The increasingly global nature of capitalist exploitation led to the creation of the International Workingmen's Association. The professed purpose of the international was to co-ordinate global working class resistance against a system that was replicating itself across the planet at a frightening pace. The market system threatened to swallow whole continents, like a cancer. This process threatened to overtake workers and their communities before

they could organise to resist.

Even after the famous split of the International, when Marx in effect excised Bakunin, anarchists still attempted to organise internationally, as necessitated by the globalisation of capitalist rule. In 1907, the International Anarchist Congress in France declared "unions both as combat units in the class struggle for better working conditions, and as associations of producers which can serve to transform capitalist society into an anarcho-communist society." The French syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier asked if a federation of unions organised along non-hierarchical lines "would ... not be an almost libertarian organisation, ready to succeed the existing order, thus effectively abolishing all political authority; each of its parts controlling the means of production, managing its own affairs, sovereign over itself by the free consent of its members?"

According to the anarchist historian Daniel Guerin, Bakunin had foreseen "that self-management would open perspectives for [economic] planning on a world-wide scale." To be precise, Bakunin and other anarchists felt that capitalist exploitation would become so globally unbearable that an international class of subject-workers would arise, forging the shape of a new global society through organisations rooted in necessity and practicality. The new international class of workers would not have the luxury of making distinctions based on nationality or culture; they would all be thrust into the same lot through the tyranny of capital. Workers would then collectively organise to expel the bosses from the factories, establish lines of supply and production across borders, and render the authority of leaders, politicians, and company owners moot.

*Bakunin wrote:*

"Workers' co-operative associations are a new historical phenomenon; today as we witness their birth we cannot foresee their future, but only guess at the immense development which surely awaits them and the new political and social conditions they will generate. It is not only possible but probable that they will, in time, outgrow the limits of today's countries, provinces, and even states to transform the whole structure of human society, which will no longer be divided into nations but into industrial units."

It was a given that capitalism tended to globalise, and that, in turn, resistance would also have to become globalised. In light of this, it only made sense to anarchists and syndicalists that the post-revolutionary society would be a global society, having transcended the limitations of nation-states and the constraints of competition.

to free trade, as unfair competitive advantages that do not allow the greatest product to come forth, etc. The IMF ministers are right: it isn't consistent free trade to demand free, unfettered competition for others while maintaining tariffs and other protective measures for oneself. But corporate elites have never wanted consistent free market capitalism for themselves. They have wanted an ensemble of market advantages and state protectionism that benefits their class, or the integrity of the system in general. This is part of the reason that states exist and are important to their globalisation process.

## ★ The Anarcho-Syndicalist Alternative

Anarcho-syndicalism draws from the toolbox of radical labour and anarchist organising, and applies these tools to contemporary bourgeois society. Capital - by which anarcho-syndicalists mean workplaces, factories, equipment, and the wealth used to buy these things - must be wrested mercilessly from the control of their owners, who constitute the ruling class of our era. It is the private ownership of these things, sanctioned and guaranteed with the violence of the state, that has led to the current inequality of wealth and living conditions across the globe.

Anarcho-syndicalism exists at the point where the labour and anarchist movements intersect. Workers who hate the system, who recognise that they are exploited, bossed around, regimented and treated as drones, only to be used up, disposed, thrown away like garbage, and treated as inferiors every day of their working lives, constitute the strength of the anarcho-syndicalist movement. The wealthy men who push for the globalisation of corporate power depend upon these workers to generate their wealth for them. The burden of revolutionary change is thus thrust upon the modern wage slave.

Veteran anarcho-syndicalist organiser Sam Dolgoff stated that "the revolutionary libertarian concepts of class-struggle, federalism, direct economic action, local autonomy and mutual aid - are all deeply rooted in American labour traditions." Historically, direct action was the only choice of workers who had no say in the affairs of society through political means. Direct action is the only refuge, and the most anti-authoritarian expression, of powerless workers to enact change over the material conditions of their own lives.

economic arrangements that ensure the viability of an exploitative system that benefits elites. The state is the guarantor of the capitalist system; as guarantors - as institutions that subsidise the exploitative processes that the public is subjected to - nation-states cannot be eliminated by corporations, but are needed now more than ever. States have helped corporations craft enormous economic blocs like NAFTA, the European Union, the FTAA, and others. These economic blocs do not usurp the power of states; rather, they subject states to market rule, and make the still-necessary states subject to the dictates of bodies of foreign investors who will continue to need states to carry out their will.

The international economic bodies through which corporate capitalism engineers its globalisation - the WTO, World Bank, and others - do insist upon pruning the state apparatus of programs that were previously public. The Organisation of American States lauded in its final report of 1998 the "progress [that] has been made in the modernisation and pruning of the state apparatus, with the transfer of many of its activities to the private sector." (The report further recommended "[e]fforts to modernise the government apparatus ... with a view to reducing its size, [and] transferring activities to the private sector.")

Under the compulsion of the IMF, countries either turn social programs into private, capitalist schemes - as in replacing public pensions or retirement insurance with for-profit corporate insurance plans - or it eliminates them altogether, as when it eliminates environmental regulations that might prevent logging or anything else. But this is not eliminating the state. The armies of these states, the police forces, the jails, the property laws that protect corporate assets, the hierarchical system of governance that allows corporations to make deals with a minority of "leaders" that ostensibly represent the entire nation - these integral functions of the state are still useful. The most violent aspects of nation-states are retained as corporate power becomes globalised; the ones that get in the way are eliminated.

Many of the corporations that are seeking globalised markets were themselves benefactors of highly protectionist states, such as those corporations that reside and were founded in the United States. The U.S. has a highly protective system of patents, tariffs, and regulations that shield domestic industry from the competition of foreigners. The state itself even gives outright subsidy to various segments of industry and to the productive process. This is surely a violation of free market principles - but it is a violation that benefits corporations, so it is acceptable.

However, the same protectionist luxuries are out of the question for foreign countries. Protectionist laws are assailed by IMF ministers as barriers

## ★ Corporate Globalisation Today

The contemporary impetus towards "globalisation" is but the newest phase of this continuing phenomenon. However, unlike the helter skelter, unplanned globalisation trend of the past, the modern era of globalisation is planned and managed consciously. What Chomsky calls "the de facto world government" - namely, institutions like the WTO, the G8, the OECD, the World Bank and others - enforce the globalisation of Western corporate power through a legal, rational process that nonetheless wreaks devastation upon working people everywhere.

Bakunin, Pelloutier, and other anarchists might not have ever imagined a world in which companies were more financially powerful than entire nation-states, as many are now. The large "transnational" corporations of today, structured internally according to what could only be called fascist lines, rely upon a continuing supply of human labour to produce wealth for them, as even liberal bourgeois economists admit. Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith acknowledged as a "basic fact" that "the poor in our economy are needed to do the work that the more fortunate do not do" and that "from this comes the need for their resupply or, less agreeably, for keeping some part of the underclass in continued and deferential subjection."

The wealth that the underclass generates is immediately put back into play to expand corporations somewhere else, preferably where workers can be paid less to do the work of their higher paid counterparts, thus replacing them. These corporations mercilessly crush attempts by their own workers to collectively organise, which is something that workers are often compelled to do as a defence against the tendency of bosses to lower wages and submit employees to undesirable working conditions. When workers become too uppity, the shop doors are simply closed and reopened where workers aren't such a nuisance; they are re-opened where workers might accept subhuman conditions in exchange for wages barely able to sustain human life.

Kate Bronfenbrenner, director of labour education research at Cornell's School of Industrial and Labour Relations, writes, "[T]he majority of employers consistently, pervasively and extremely effectively tell workers either directly or indirectly that if they ask for too much, or don't give concessions, or try to organise, strike or fight for good jobs with good benefits, the company will close, move out of state or move across the border, just as so many other plants have done before." This is what corporate globalisation achieves: a system of easy capital flight where unionisation drives are coun-

tered with threats of plant closure. Workers globally race to the bottom to compete for jobs.

## ★ The Effects of Modern Corporate Globalisation

In "Brave New World Bank: 50 Years is Enough," Juliette Majot writes that from 1982 to 1990 alone "debt service remittances ... from poor countries to rich countries totaled \$1,345 billion, while at the same time *total resource flows* from rich to poor countries totaled \$927 billion." Low-paid workers often find themselves producing for export, with the chief beneficiaries of the resources exported being those large corporations based in the wealthier West.

As their resources deplete, workers' living conditions grow worse - but, they can say to themselves, at least they are getting a paycheck. However, even that runs out, and they are finally laid off when their living standards become too high for the corporation to continue to support, or when workers willing to accept less are found elsewhere. The government of the country that hosts the corporation promises to slash minimum wage laws, hand over schools and hospitals in a frenzy of privatisation, whatever the companies want - so long as they stay and continue to give business and job opportunities to citizens. This process creates a situation where market forces deprive workers of rights in the name of competition. Workers work for the betterment of their companies, ensuring their own continued subjugation, and their own eventual undoing.

Corporations have succeeded in using the World Bank and IMF to strong-arm foreign nations into letting them onto their soil, to take advantage of depressed labour markets and harvest whatever resources might be available. As the London *Financial Times* reported in a supplement on the IMF, "Wise governments realise that the only intelligent response to the challenge of globalisation is to make their economies more acceptable."

The deals that the World Bank makes to allow this to happen may be with corrupt governments, despotic and unelected, or they may be with elected, popularly chosen officials. Either way, once the decision is made by these elites to borrow money or to eliminate laws unfriendly to corporations, the entire population pays the costs and accepts the consequences. If people try to resist the fate their leaders have consigned them to, intervention by foreign armies and repression by their own armed forces have generally

been their due.

Often, a country's elite will borrow excessively from the World Bank Group and make poor investments with the money, or simply use the money to prepare agricultural or industrial sectors for foreign investment and ownership. When the country is called to repay the loan, the debt is shifted to the public, who must be taxed to pay it off. As the interest becomes unbearable, more publicly owned assets are sold off to foreign interests to meet the payment schedules of the Western financiers. Social services, health care, welfare programs - all shift to the private sector, as advised by Western bankers. Soon the country is unstable, with pervasive job insecurity, massive inflation, and perpetually poor citizens. Perpetually poor citizens mean perpetually cheap labour, which is what corporations prefer.

In February 2001, South Korean autoworkers employed by Daewoo, and represented by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), occupied factories near Seoul and engaged in physical skirmishes with police. Due to corporate globalisation pressures, many workers were laid off; the entire workforce would be laid off unless the company could be put into foreign (U.S.) hands. Dan Byung-ho, president of the KCTU, claimed, "Two years of structural adjustment programs of the government, guided by the IMF, saw a senseless bargain sale of national assets to foreign concerns. In the process, the rich have taken over most of the benefits, becoming even richer."

With no jobs, no resources that remain in the public domain or not owned by groups of foreign investors, workers everywhere are often not even guaranteed the means with which they might try to survive.

## ★ States Serve Corporate Globalisation

The nature of the current phase of the globalisation of capitalist power is not to be framed as a competition between private sector and public sector power, as has often been mistakenly done. Some articles have suggested that the nation-state is shrinking in significance to the power of "transnational" corporations, or that these corporations want to do away with nation-states altogether, in the drive to globalise their power. The corporation is jealous of the power of the nation-state, such writers say, and seeks to replace it.

But nation-states have proved enormously useful to corporations seeking to internationalise their markets. Among other things, states serve as