

Anti-Imperialist Struggles

Workers' Solidarity Federation

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Bakunin

Mikhail Bakunin, the founder of Anarcho-syndicalism, entered politics partly as an activist in East European anti-colonial struggles. As a result he was imprisoned and internally exiled within Russia. After escaping in 1861, he abandoned nationalism for Anarcho-syndicalism but maintained his anti-imperialism. For Bakunin Third World revolt was inevitable and desirable, but a successful struggle required an internationalist anti-authoritarian social revolution against the State and the class system.

Cuba

The Anarchist/Syndicalist movement took up the challenge. In Cuba, the Anarcho-syndicalists, who had a massive working class base, took part in the struggle for independence from Spain. They were active in the Ten Year War (1868–78) and later aided famous anti-colonial fighter, Jose Marti, after assurances that independence would bring social reforms. But their politics remained those of social revolution, not nationalism. When the war of independence advocated by Marti exploded in 1895 Anarcho-syndicalists in Cuba and in exile were in the forefront of this struggle.

Although the war ended with Spain's defeat in 1898, Marti's promised reforms died with him in battle in 1895. Mass struggle thus continued under the independent government which, of course, did not meet the workers' demands. Instead, the local elite which hijacked the anti-colonial struggle regularly repressed the workers and Anarcho-syndicalists who had sacrificed themselves for independence.

Latin America

Anarchists/Syndicalists were active in Central American struggles against USA imperialism. In Mexico, the Anarchist-led PLM, and the mass Anarcho-syndicalist trade unions, consistently challenged American imperialism and anti-Mexican discrimination in Mexico and the US, both before, during and after the Mexican Revolution (1910–22).

In 1909 the USA occupied Nicaragua. This led to a number of failed bourgeois-led revolts. The last of these revolts ended in 1926 when negotiations led to the installation of the liberal leader, Moncada, as president of this US semi-colony. This settlement was opposed by Augustino Sandino, another revolt leader, and an Anarcho-syndicalist. He launched a seven-year peasant guerrilla war against the US occupation in 1927.

Despite political weaknesses, Sandino's movement, the EDSNN, moved steadily leftwards as Sandino realised that "only the workers and the peasants will go all the way to the end" in the struggle. There was thus increasing emphasis on organising peasant co-operatives in the liberated territories. The US forces were withdrawn in 1933 and the EDSNN largely demobilised. But in 1934 Sandino was murdered and the collectives smashed on the orders of General Somoza, the new, pro-imperialist ruler of the State. Sandino is remembered today as a Nicaraguan national hero.

Europe

In East Europe, Anarchist/syndicalists were active in 1873 uprisings in Bosnia and Herzegovina against Austro-Hungarian imperialism. They also took part in the “National Revolutionary Movement” in Macedonia (against the Ottoman empire). At least 60 gave their lives in this struggle, particularly in the great 1903 revolt. In the Ukraine, the (Anarchist) Makhnovist movement organised a titanic peasant revolt (1918–21) that only smashed the German occupation but redistributed the land, established worker-peasant self-management in many areas, and created a Revolutionary Insurgent Army under worker-peasant control.

In Ireland, James Connolly is remembered as a martyr of the 1916 Easter Rebellion against British imperialism. Connolly was basically a Syndicalist who believed in class struggle and in building revolutionary trade unions to smash capitalism. This is true despite his illusions in nationalism’s revolutionary potential and elections.

Asia

Anarchists played a key part in the Korean struggle against Japanese imperialism. They were active in the 1919 uprising, and in 1924 formed the Korean Anarchist Federation (KAF) on a militant anti-imperialist platform that argued for international social revolution. In 1928 the KAF organised an Eastern Anarchist Federation in 1928 with affiliates in China, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and other countries. Inside Korea, the Anarchists organised a country-wide underground network that engaged in guerrilla activity, propaganda work and trade union organising. In 1929, the Anarchists established a two million-strong armed zone of voluntary farming co-operatives in Manchuria. Although this zone was defeated some years later, resistance continued throughout the 1930s and joint Chinese – Korean operations were organised after Japan’s 1937 invasion of China. Anarcho-syndicalists were active after independence in the 1940s despite repressive governments and internal divisions.

Western Solidarity

Finally, we should point out that Anarcho-syndicalists in the imperialist countries also supported the anti-imperialist struggle. For example, the prominent Japanese Anarchist Kotoku Shushi was framed and executed in 1910 after campaigning against Japanese expansionism. In Italy, the movement opposed Italian expansionism into Eritrea and Ethiopia in the 1880s and 1890s, and organised a massive anti-war movement against the 1911 invasion of Libya. In 1909, the Spanish Anarchists organised a mass strike against intervention in Morocco.

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