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The Rodney King Uprising

On April 29th through May 1st 1992, the failure of the United States social system produced the largest mass rebellion since the coal miners uprising in the 1920s. The destruction of private property far out-stripped anything seen during the 1960s. The National Guard and federal troops were dispatched to Los Angeles and dusk to dawn curfews were imposed in LA and San Francisco. 44 people were killed in Los Angeles. Thousands were arrested across the country. Even mainstream journalists had to acknowledge the class war nature of the uprising. It was not a race riot. The rebellion was fought by people of all races. In San Francisco, most of the participants were white.

Considering the nature of the spark that lit the powder, racist attacks were at a minimum, although the few that occurred drew the undivided attention of the corporate media. The focus of the rage was instead directed at institutions of the current power structure: the police, government buildings, banks and stores. Mass expropriations of consumer goods took place in



both LA and SF. This was a grassroots initiative to reverse the "wealth-redistribution-to-the-rich" program instituted by the New Right.

What is to be learned from the Rodney King uprising? The weakness of the state in dealing with a mass insurrection is clear, despite the continuous platitudes of the non-violent left. The

city and county police forces of LA were quickly reduced to a defensive posture, this in the face of a largely unorganized and awkward enemy. By Thursday night the LAPD was content to march back in forth in front of city hall. Calls for assistance from the National Guard were issued, and the governor quickly ordered their intervention. Curiously, the commanders of the

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guard units deployed were reluctant to send their troops into the field. They claimed "lack of ammunition," a ridiculous excuse given that they had access to an entire air force (the Air National Guard) which could have picked up and delivered any quantity of ammunition within hours. There is some suspicion that the Guard commanders were **afraid** to give live ammunition to their multiethnic troops (a large number of whom are African-American economic draftees who would have been marching into their own neighborhoods). Could they have been afraid of a mutiny? Could they have imagined units not only unwilling to intervene, but perhaps even joining the uprising? A couple of thousand African American and Latin American men and women, fully armed and trained, could have perhaps transformed the LA Uprising into something altogether different. Never happen you say? Of course most people would've said Los Angeles would never again erupt into the kind of violent insurrection it experienced in the 1960s.

The governor, faced with the reluctance of the Guard commanders to commit their troops, was sent into a tizzy of rage. He was forced to call for federal troops just to get the National Guard to deploy!

In hindsight, despite its initial success, the lack of anything approaching a popular organization doomed the uprising to a quick defeat. The destruction of the militant African-American and Chicano organizations in the 1970s has left a void opportunistic politicians and business leaders have done their best to solder shut. The lack of sufficient organization and goals left many people to flail away at their own neighborhoods rather than taking the war to the wealthy and the elite.

What will be the results of the Rodney King Uprising? Immediately, racial tensions seem quite

high. But this will dissipate over time. Hopefully this uprising, like those of the 1960s, will give rise to militant organizations within the African American and Chicano communities, groups that don't buy into the self-serving passivity of the liberals (who judge the worth of a movement by its commitment to "non-violence" and not by the justice of its cause).

San Francisco Police State

The timing of events in San Francisco closely corresponded to those in Los Angeles, with the primary difference between the two cities being the presence of a more broad-based political opposition in SF. What this meant essentially was that expropriations were mostly confined to the posh shopping area around Union Square and chain outlets on Market Street.

The police crackdown in SF was, however, far more effective than similar attempts in LA. The SF police chief, who recently had run as a "liberal-progressive" mayoral candidate, imposed a virtual police state upon the entire city on April 29th. A massive police presence in the Fillmore District and the Bayview/Hunters Point area kept the minority community down. The organized protests quickly became guerrilla warfare with the police chasing groups of 50 to 100 demonstrators through the downtown streets. Quote of the day from police chief Hongisto: "The loss of a few civil rights is a small price to pay for order." Thank goodness he's a liberal! This at least should hammer home the idea that when you vote for a politician you are voting for a dictatorship waiting to happen. They are all authoritarians, no matter what their party affiliation or what they call themselves.

Large numbers of protesters were arrested in a police attack on a peaceful protest on Friday,

an occurrence which was repeated the next day at a different location. Many people were carted off to primitive holding pens in the East Bay where they were held incommunicado for up to 18 hours (without food, water or proper sanitation). Many people who were arrested weren't even involved in the rally, they just happened to be on the sidewalk when the sweep occurred. Several reporters were likewise rounded up. Stories of the brutalization and abuse of prisoners (gays were segregated in a cell marked "homos", racist insults were directed at many non-whites, several people were beaten bad enough to require treatment), showed up in the daily papers next to blustery editorials thanking the police for keeping the peace. Chief Hongisto, swelled to toad-like proportions by the intoxicating aroma of dictatorial power, even went so far as to order police officers to seize copies of a community weekly which ran a story highly critical of his authoritarian behavior. This proved the last straw for the liberals on the Police Commission and the Board of Supervisors. The chief was fired without ceremony. Currently the mayor is threatening to hire him back.

This is actually the first time I've been a city where a curfew and a state of emergency have been imposed, although somehow I suspect it won't be the last. Outside of a mass protest attacked by the police, I've never seen such obvious fear of the authorities displayed by so many people all at once. Shopkeepers hurriedly closing their doors, shoppers scrambling to get home before curfew, parents with their children walking quickly and fearfully home. Lights out. No one allowed on the streets. Immediate arrest. No assembly allowed. Shut up and take it. It has been a learning experience for many and, hopefully, a radicalization for them as well.

Mike Kolhoff

Letters

Dear WS:

I attended the International Clerical and Bank Workers Conference am responding to your criticisms of Chris Carlsson. Although I left long before Chris's speech (out of sheer boredom and disgust), it is obvious from the length of your article that it was the only part of that dreary conference to nudge the "labor movement" sleepers out of their torpor. I should mention that I am a member of the Processed World collective and as a clerical temp worker for the past six years, PW is the only work-related political project that comes anywhere near addressing the experience of overwhelming anomie and dehumanization that characterizes office work (and modern life generally).

What I find most offensive in these labor hacks is their patronizing attitude toward the workers who's interest they claim to have at heart. Thank god I have never met anybody who is "Proud to be an Office Worker" (as read the Hallmark-style posters that the conference organiz-

ers sought to entice us little lambs with). The conference's main priority seemed to be boosting workplace morale. I went in hopes of meeting other human souls who are locked in shitty jobs like mine (of which there were some) but they fled in droves from the Sunday school atmosphere and you self-contented hacks patting yourselves on the backs, making "good contacts" and "distributing literature" and "signing people up."

No matter what amount of perks and safeguards a union provides, I'm going to have a bad attitude about being coerced into doing something I hate and find useless (at best, since often what we do at work is socially and ecologically destructive). As long as the labor movement ignores the humiliation, social wastefulness, aesthetic impoverishment, sensual renunciation and creative denial implicit in the act of selling one's life ù i.e., wage slavery — it will condemn itself to the irrelevancy it deserves.

It is a sad commentary on the state of radical workerism that

even a discussion of the character (or usefulness) of work we perform is taboo. You consider this discussion "valid in only a limited abstract-futuristic sense!" Opposition to wage slavery is as old as capitalism itself and has roots far deeper than the reformist unionism you (in your own words) "have more in common with."

You write of PW: "his (sic) magazine now only shows a limited interest in the condition of clerical-technical workers, choosing

instead to focus on the 'uselessness of office work'." Besides being blatantly false, it shows an extremely narrow conception of what constitutes a worker's "conditions". Suppose I don't suffer from radiation sickness or RSI or have no supervisors and don't care that much about making more money ù do I have no grievance against work itself as a very sick institution?

I doubt that you even have reservations about the utility of office work. You claim that a discussion of the end result of our labor (its "uselessness") "ignores the fact that currently office work is extremely important to the capitalist system." No kidding — does that mean it has any importance to us? You actually say it does ("...and is certainly important to the people who make their living in the clerical technical field.") — how smarmily you speak on behalf of your robotized "workers."

You say that Chris "refused to distinguish between bureaucratic business unions and member-controlled formations" when, in fact, he was giving the labor hacks the maximum benefit of the doubt. Even if all the employees of Bank of America and the Pacific Stock Exchange were card-carrying, dues-paying members of a radical UFCW run along the lines of the CNT or even modeled on a workers council — even if these workers experienced "workers empowerment" and "control" — would the B of A "wither away" or would it continue to pursue its own destructive interests? Who (to use your outdated and cliché metaphor) is "putting the wagon before the pony"?

We can get more than a "forty-hour week with benefits through a good contract." Just keep your head in the sand where it belongs.

Sincerely,
Geoff McDonald



Dear Geoff:

Yes, I freely admit that I have more in common with AFL-CIO union organizers than I do with pompous yuppie amateur sociologists. At least the people who organized the Clerical and Bank Workers Conference were trying to **build something** (even if I have serious problems with the structure and limited goals of what they are trying to build). In addition, many of them are **good people**, which you might have discovered if you'd been able to get beyond your own prejudicial views of unionism and unionists. Most were not paid officials or bureaucrats. Some were elected officers of local unions, many were just active members. All were working people trying to raise hell with the bosses.

I fully agree that wage slavery is humiliating, dehumanizing and destructive. But unlike you I am not content to merely theorize and complain. I believe we have to organize against it, confront the system which enforces it, and destroy that system as quickly as possible. To do this we will have to organize in the workplace where wage slavery is enforced. We will have to confront the bosses together, face-to-face. The kind of individual rebellion advocated by PW (disabling computers, stealing office supplies, calling in sick, etc.) has even less revolutionary potential than the bureaucratic business unions of the AFL-CIO. In terms of workplace "guerrilla warfare" (which I guess it is supposed to approximate), it even violates the basic idea of guerrilla warfare: the idea that you should be organizing and building toward a general insurrection. Individuals isolated and alone, hopping from job to job, even if they leave a trail of broken hard discs behind them, are not building a base. The random destruction of the bosses hardware and the breaking of meaningless rules becomes petty vandalism and "anomie".

Unarticulated rebellion is almost as bad as no rebellion at all. I think you had better get **your** head out of the sand. While you and the other folks at **PW** are supposedly trying to develop a form of workers struggle for the 21st century, the capitalist class is imposing working conditions more reminiscent of the 19th. By advocating against unions and for individual liberation you are well in line with current trends in the capitalist system, but that makes you trendy, it doesn't make you right.

The post-modern leftism which **PW** represents has proven to be as dismal a failure as the New Left from which it emerged. Like the New Left, the post-modern left parroted the rightists in their declaration of the "end of ideology", the abandonment of class-based organization and the mystification of emancipation. The secret police couldn't have done a better job of defanging an opposition movement. I believe that we must rediscover the unity of class struggle, develop our ideology so that it is solid enough to sustain us yet flexible enough to avoid atrophy, and realize that self-emancipation can only be really accomplished as a process of general emancipation.

All of us or none!

In solidarity,
Mike Kolhoff

Dear Fellow Workers:

Thank you for sending newsletters to our branch. We like hearing what other people are doing since it gives us ties on a national level.

We have an active group here in Pennsylvania. We work on a few different projects but the U.S./Guatemala Labor Education Project has been our focus for the last few months. This is a solidarity campaign for Guatemalan workers who slave for Phillips-Van Heusen. We organized the first national action and continue to picket and leaflet outside Van Heusen outlets on a regular basis. A few positive things have happened. We have been strong on the free trade issue and international labor solidarity. So now the project recognizes our contribution and does not shy away from making the connections about corporations pulling up stakes in this country and moving to low wage countries. It is not our intention to bash other countries, rather we are hoping that these efforts will enable Guatemalan workers to unionize.

If you can publicize this project in any way it would be much appreciated. Or if WSA groups would like to plan an action that would be even better. It is very simple and effective. Make up a leaflet, find a Van Heusen outlet or affiliate and pass out info. to shoppers. This whole thing is making PVH crazy!

Again, thanks for the newsletters and all the best!

Solidarity,

J. Kelly Lehigh Valley IWW

PO Box 4133

Bethlehem, PA 18018

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WSA Holds 9th Convention

Workers Solidarity Alliance held its ninth annual National Convention in New York City May 23rd and 24th. This was one of the largest WSA conventions in recent years, with around 30 people attending, including the new General Secretary of the IWA from Valencia, Spain.

International observers attended the convention from the Brazilian Workers Confederation (COB), the Workers Solidarity Movement of Ireland, the Budapest Anarchist Union. Observers from the United States included friends from the New Jersey Anarchist League, the Love and Rage Network, the Libertarian Bookclub, the Network of Black Organizers, and the Industrial Workers of the World. Greetings were received from many IWA Sections and from comrades in Canada.

This year, in addition to the usual mundane decisions that must be made to keep an organization running, WSA had some interesting and sometimes controversial ideas to discuss. First among was the proposal to begin the formation of industrial networks. These networks will be made up of workers in a specific field or sector (such as education) and could form the basis for unions in the future. This proposal was seen by some as a way for WSA to begin transforming itself from a propaganda group into a functioning union. There was a very lively debate about this issue because forming these networks would require organizational changes in WSA as well as a lot of work and commitment. While there was no doubt that WSA supports workers creating their own non-bureaucratic organizations, the proposal raised many questions for WSA members. Question such as: Should the networks be affiliated to WSA or completely

independent (as in the DAM)? What preparations does WSA need to make before initiating a project such as this? Needless to say, these questions could not be resolved in the time we had, but the discussion laid the groundwork for future debate. Most who attended the convention seemed excited by the possibilities and a committee was formed to further explore the industrial network idea.

This convention also spent a lot of time discussing new written project. A new sexism statement to be included our statement of principles was approved for referendum. This statement is slightly longer than previous versions and includes more information on the effects of sexism on gays and lesbians. Work continues on a workplace organizing manual which should be completed this year. A new pamphlet on racism is also planned for the coming year. A discussion of this topic was one of the more informative parts of the convention.

With all of the projects currently underway, fundraising has become a major concern for WSA. It has become increasingly apparent that an organization as active as WSA needs a solid plan for funding its work. In order to solve the funding problem, the convention organized a fundraising committee which will coordinate the fundraising efforts of WSA.

Altogether, this years convention must be regarded as a success. Enthusiasm was high and there was a general feeling that WSA is moving forward and growing. We embraced new projects and worked to solve old problems. We even added some new members who were so impressed by what they saw and heard that they signed up on the spot! If the convention is any indication of what is in store for WSA, then there is every reason to expect a productive, active year.

Ginger Hutton

WSA National Secretary

International Workers Association Holds 19th Congress

The world federation of anarcho-syndicalist organizations held its XIX Congress this April in Cologne, Germany. This Congress occurred exactly 70 years after the founding of the IWA in Berlin in 1922. The theme of the congress was: "IWA: Here to Stay", and with the fall of Marxist socialism everywhere, there is little doubt that the IWA is here to stay. IWA Sections from around the world sent delegates to the congress, including a two person delegation from Workers Solidarity Alliance. Observers from the former USSR, Bolivia and Mongolia also attended.

The delegates and observers met to discuss a wide variety of

items and to develop plans and strategies for dealing with the "New World Order" with its increasing attacks on the working class. The delegates dealt with many topics over the span of three days. It became obvious to this delegate that three days was not enough time to deal with the immense problems and matters that currently face the working class, but a good effort was made by all.

The IWA holds regular congresses every four years, with topical conferences held in between. During the time between congresses a Secretariat carries out the coordination of activities. Matters discussed during

the congress dealt with the situation in each Section's lands (there are 16 IWA Sections in Europe, Asia and the Americas).

Discussion also took place on the circumstances unfolding in Latin America and Eastern Europe. The situations unfolding in those areas are difficult, to say the least. In Eastern Europe the situation changes from day to day and there is much confusion and misinformation concerning life in the western capitalist countries. Despite this, revolutionary unionists and Anarchists are pushing ahead in their attempts to clarify issues and policies for action. In Latin America, increasing poverty seems to be the number one issue and concern. Repression

against revolutionary unionists continues unabated.

Further discussions occurred concerning building and coordinating revolutionary unionism on the European level. This comes in light of the formation of a "united" Europe in 1993. Such a "united" Europe will consist mainly of the industrialized western countries and will result in an integrated European economy.

All in all the congress was a great success. In addition to all of the formal discussions there were countless informal discussions and a lot of socializing, all of which helped to build our solidarity, camaraderie and resolve. The final matter of business was the election of a new

Secretariat. The outgoing Secretariat was based in Cologne, Germany. It was unanimously agreed that they had done a tremendous job during their four year term. Communication, participation and contacts have increased. The IWA is better off because of their hard work and we owe them many thanks. The new Secretariat, which will be based in Valencia, Spain, vowed to continue the excellent work of the German comrades.

The future is clouded with many problems for the working class, yet it has been confirmed that "The IWA is here to stay!". Our determination to build a free and self-managed world is stronger than those who would maintain our slavery.

Mike Harris

What Is Anarcho-Syndicalism?

Part One: History

There are at least three areas of discussion that are implied by the question: "What is Anarcho-Syndicalism?" These are: history, methods and goals. We will limit our discussion of history to the history of Anarcho-Syndicalism in the U.S.

Anarcho-Syndicalism in the United States

The first organization in the U.S. which could be called Anarcho-Syndicalist was the U.S. Section of the International Working Peoples Association (IWPA) which existed from 1883 to 1887. The IWPA, also called the "Black International", was the anarchist organization formed after the breakup of the International Working Men's Association (the First International). The founding congress of the IWPA was held in London in 1881, and among those present were such luminaries as Louise Michel, Errico Malatesta and Peter Kropotkin.

Only the U.S. Section engaged in syndicalist activities, and this primarily in Chicago (although

IWPA members also did some organizing in Cincinnati and St. Louis). They organized unions among cigar makers, cabinet makers, metalworkers and other skilled and semi-skilled trades. By doing this, the U.S. Section developed a membership much larger than most other IWPA groups (estimated at around 5000) and was able to play a significant role in the workers struggles of the 1880s. All of the Haymarket martyrs were members of the IWPA.

The Industrial Workers of the World, founded in 1905, included significant anarchist and syndicalist participation, but the majority of the delegates to the founding convention were members or sympathizers of the Socialist Party or the Socialist Labor Party of Daniel DeLeon. Due to this influence the founding convention passed a clause in its constitution encouraging political (as in electoral) action. This caused the largest union in the IWW, the Western Federation of Miners (which was openly syndicalist), to withdraw from the organization. The clause was not removed until 1908 when

two leaders of the miners union who had remained in the IWW, Vincent St. John and Bill Haywood, were successful in defeating DeLeon.

The IWW remained small in comparison to the dominant American Federation of Labor, but like the IWPA before them they were able to exert influence far beyond their numbers. The presence of gifted songwriters and inspired activists served to make the IWW an eternal part of American folklore and labor history.

The Syndicalist League of North America (SLNA) was founded in 1912 by many former members of the IWW. These included Lucy Parsons, Earl Ford and William Z. Foster. They rejected the "dual unionism" of the IWW (the attempt to create a competing labor federation) in favor of "boring from within" the larger AFL.

The membership of the SLNA never exceeded 2000, but again they were able to exert significant influence during the struggles of the era. Foster (who like other former IWW members

Bill Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn later joined the Communist Party) and other SLNA organizers led militant strikes in the steel and meat packing industries.

With the rise of Leninism on the political front and the CIO on the labor front, both the IWW and the SLNA lost many of their best organizers. Although syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists played some role in the growth of the labor movement during the 1930s, and the IWW still had at least 20,000 members at the beginning of the decade, it was the Communist Party (with former syndicalist William Z. Foster as chairman after 1932) which grabbed the limelight and took the initiative. During this period there was a lively debate within the labor movement as to which direction it should follow. This debate included syndicalists, anarcho-syndicalists and libertarian Marxists, as well as the authoritarians of the CP and pro-capitalist opportunists. Dur-

ing the wartime strikes of the 1940s (which were opposed by the union bureaucrats, the state and the Communist Party), it seems that a syndicalist spirit (if not an organized presence) briefly reemerged.

After the war, as the bureaucracies at the top of the AFL and CIO solidified their power, political debate within the unions was stifled as the second Red Scare began. Even before "McCarthyism" was even heard of, a purge of radicals took place in the labor unions. Those who would not be silent were expelled, and the rabidly pro-capitalist business unionism we know today was born.

Since McCarthyism, the role of syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists in the U.S. labor movement has been almost nonexistent. The domination of the combined AFL-CIO and the authoritarianism of the top leadership has kept political debate out of the unions. Syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists within

the AFL-CIO unions have found themselves walking a thin line between the bosses and the union officials, subject to attack by either or both.

The political group and the propaganda group has been the method of anarcho-syndicalist organization since the 1950s. Currently, with the seemingly irreversible decline of AFL-CIO business unionism, the opportunity for the reemergence of anarcho-syndicalism is possible. Amongst the largest unions of the AFL-CIO (the UAW, UFCW and the Teamsters) there is a growing demand for union democracy. The aggressive anti-union attacks by the state, which have made unionism basically illegal, has opened a door. It is through this door that anarcho-syndicalism may reenter the labor movement.

Mike Kolhoff

Next:

Anarcho-Syndicalist Methods

The Toll of Anti-Union Repression: 200 Killed, 2000 Detained, 50,000 Fired

Geneva, June 19, 1992 (ICFTU Info.). This year's Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights published by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) puts at 200 the number of people killed as a result of anti-union repression worldwide and rates Colombia, China, Guatemala, El Salvador, Iran, Peru, Sudan, and South Africa as the world's most dangerous place for unionists.

The survey cites a total of 85 countries. The United States was included among these countries and charged with "serious violations of basic union rights". A new trend also emerges from this year's survey which shows an increasing number of corporations, many multinational, resorting to mass firings as a response to workers basic demands. More than 50,000 work-

ers have been sacked during the period March 1991 to March 1992, for activities considered legitimate under international conventions.

Another feature appearing in this survey is evidence of a growing connivance in many countries between bosses, landlords and local police or armed forces in suppressing organizing attempts. Yet the survey bears witness to the fact that even under the most harsh repression or despite legal obstacles, workers still consider unions as vital. Hence the creation of independent unions in Cuba, China, Gabon, Indonesia and Burma. According to ICFTU General Secretary Enzo Friso, the "inevitable conclusion" of this year's survey is that "rumors of the end of history have been greatly ex-

aggerated." The ICFTU leader points to the collapse of communism, the fall of one party systems in most of Africa and the end of military dictatorships in Latin America as "causes for rejoicing." But he warned that "the regrettable fact is that in too many instances, the Marxist dictators have been replaced by market dictators and the generals by general managers."

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Ed Elhauge, Mike Kolhoff,

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Workers Solidarity Alliance

WSA is an Anarcho-Syndicalist organization with groups and contacts in all regions of the United States. We seek to build working class organizations based on the principles of direct democracy and direct action, both in the workplace and in the community. We place ourselves in opposition to the bureaucratic, authoritarian structures which have come to dominate our society and our daily lives. We seek to build living organizational forms which are com-

pletely under the control of working people. WSA activists are involved in a wide variety of projects (see contact list below) involving work-place organizing, international solidarity, and addressing specific social concerns that effect us all as working people. If you are interested in joining with us in these efforts or would like more information, contact this newsletter or the WSA group nearest you.

WSA Working Groups:

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c/o NY Area WSA
339 Lafayette St. Rm 202
New York, NY 10012

**Latin American Solidarity
Working Group**
c/o WSA
PO Box 1197
San Antonio, TX 78294

**Working Group on
Sexism and Feminism
- Mujeres Libres**

c/o WSA
347 W. Suttentfield St.
Fort Wayne, IN 46807-1339

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PO Box 40400
San Francisco, CA 94140

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