TRADE UNIONS

AND

THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM TODAY!!!

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NOTE:

- **BALANCE BETWEEN THEORY & PRACTICAL**
- **DRAWING FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCES**

AS A SACTU OPERATIVE!!!

WHAT ARE THE BASIC TENETS OF THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM?

The basic tenets of the struggle for socialism are rooted in the critique of capitalism and the assertion that a fundamental transformation of society is necessary to achieve justice, equality, and human liberation.

While interpretations vary across different socialist traditions, several core principles are commonly upheld.

CORE TENETS OF THE SOCIALIST STRUGGLE

- **Class Struggle and the Role of the Proletariat**: At its heart, the struggle for socialism is a **class struggle** between the working class (proletariat) and the capitalist class (bourgeoisie).
- **Revolutionary Overthrow of Capitalism**: The core argument that the bourgeoisie will never voluntarily give up its power and profits.
- **The Vanguard Party and Revolutionary Theory**: A key tenet, particularly in Marxist-Leninist thought, is the necessity of a **revolutionary political party** (a communist party) to lead the working class.
- **The Dictatorship of the Proletariat**: Following the revolution, it is argued that a **"dictatorship of the proletariat"** must be established.
- **Social Ownership of the Means of Production**: A foundational goal is the abolition of capitalist private property and the establishment of **social or public ownership** of the major means of production
- **A Planned Economy**: Replacing the "anarchy" of the capitalist market with a **planned economy** is a central tenet.
- **The Principle of Distribution**: A core principle for organizing work and reward in a socialist society is **"from each according to his ability, to each according to his work"**.
- **The Abolition of Exploitation and Oppression**

A NOTE ON DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

- It is important to recognize that the "struggle for socialism" is not a monolithic concept.
- **Marxist-Leninist** traditions emphasize the revolutionary overthrow of the state, the leading role of a vanguard party, and the dictatorship of the proletariat.
- **Democratic socialist** and other currents may place greater emphasis on achieving socialism through democratic means, political reform, and the expansion of the welfare state, while still often advocating for public ownership and a more egalitarian society.

WHAT ARE THE MOTIVE FORCES FOR THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM?

The motive forces of the socialist struggle form an organic whole:

- **The high development of the productive forces** is its **fundamental motive force**, **class struggle** is its **direct motive force**, and
- The **proletariat** is the **main subject force and material weapon** for achieving the goals of this struggle.
- These motive forces interact with one another, collectively driving history forward in the direction of socialism.

WHERE AND HOW DO WE LOCATE TRADE UNIONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM?

THE ORGANISATIONAL RELATIONSHIP: PARTY, UNIONS, & MASSES

This process of unification is mediated through specific

organisations.

The relationship is dialectical, meaning it involves constant

interaction and a "unity of separation and integration".

The Vanguard Party:

The Communist Party is the most conscious element of the working class.

Its role is to provide leadership, revolutionary theory, and strategic direction.

The party does not exist separately from the working class but is a product of its highest development, acting as its "general staff" in the struggle for power.

Trade Unions:

- These are the broadest organisations of the working class, uniting workers for economic struggles.
- The party's role within them is to win workers to a revolutionary, rather than a merely reformist, perspective.
- The goal is to transform trade unions from instruments of "trade union consciousness" (bargaining within capitalism) into revolutionary class consiousness which becomes a weapon for abolishing capitalism itself.

WHAT IS THE RATIONALE OF & WHY IS IT VITAL FOR WORKERS TO ORGANISE THEMSELVES INTO TRADE UNIONS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM?

- From a Marxist-Leninist perspective, trade unions are far more than mere economic bargaining organisations.
- They are viewed as the **primary mass organisations of the proletariat—** the foundational school (**SACTU!)**, shield, and transmission belt through which the working class develops its collective power.
- To understand their rationale and vitality in the struggle for socialism, one must distinguish between their **immediate economic functions** and their **ultimate political purpose**.

THE RATIONALE: WHY MUST WORKERS ORGANISE THEMSELVES?

The rationale for forming trade unions is rooted in the objective realities of capitalist production and the strategic needs of the class struggle:

OVERCOMING INDIVIDUAL WEAKNESS:

Under capitalism, the worker owns nothing but their labour power and sells it individually to a capitalist.

The capitalist, owning the means of production, holds overwhelming power over any single worker. **"Union is strength"**—by uniting, workers negate their individual weakness and confront capital on a collective, organized basis.

ECONOMIC DEFENCE (THE "SAFETY VALVE"):

- Capitalism inevitably drives down wages and degrades working conditions to maximize profit.
- The immediate rationale of the union is to serve as a **defensive organ**—a "safety valve" that fights against the **absolute** deterioration of workers' living standards, securing higher wages, shorter hours, and safer conditions through collective bargaining and strikes.

THE CRUCIBLE OF CLASS SOLIDARITY:

- Capitalism deliberately fragments workers by skill, industry, gender, and race.
- The union acts as an **organising hub** that brings workers from different backgrounds together in a common struggle.
- This daily interaction fosters mutual aid, solidarity, and the practical experience of collective action, breaking down the divisive illusions fostered by the bourgeoisie.

THE STARTING POINT FOR POLITICAL STRUGGLE:

- Lenin emphasised that the economic struggle of the unions is vital because it is the most accessible entry point for workers to engage in activism.

- It is within the (**RED**) trade union that workers first realise their interests are antagonistic to their employers, moving them from a passive "class in itself" to an active, organizing "class for itself."

Advanced Workers:

- A key link in the process is the development of "advanced workers".
- These are workers who have developed revolutionary class consciousness through their experiences in struggle and study.
- They act as a bridge between the party and the broader working class.

WHAT ABOUT WORKPLACE MOBILISATION?

WHY IS IT ONE OF THE VITAL STRATEGIES?

WHAT ABOUT THE DYNAMIC RELATION BETWEEN TRADE UNION CONSCIOUSNESS & REVOLUTIONARY CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM?

In essence, the dynamic relation between trade union consciousness and revolutionary consciousness is the **engine and the steering wheel** of the socialist struggle.

- **Trade union consciousness** is the engine—it provides the raw, explosive energy, the mass mobilisations, and the daily experience of collective resistance.
- **Revolutionary consciousness** is the steering wheel—it provides the scientific map, the political goal, and the determination to drive off the capitalist cliff rather than just circling the block.

The vitality of the struggle depends on the **constant, conscious effort** to prevent the engine from running in circles (reformism) and to ensure it follows the steering wheel toward the only final destination: the revolutionary seizure of state power and the construction of socialism. Without this dynamic friction, unions become graveyards of revolution; with it, they become its launchpad.

DIALECTICAL INTERPLAY (THE VITAL TENSION):

- Class consciousness needs the mass base provided by the trade union movement to have material force.
- Trade union consciousness needs class consciousness to have a direction/goal, otherwise it degenerates into reformism.
- Warning against the pitfalls:

➢ Letting the party succumb to trade union consciousness (economism)

vs.

➢ Letting the unions become sectarian without the masses.

SYNTHESIS:

- Trade union consciousness is the *raw material;*
- Class consciousness is the *finished product;*
- The struggle for socialism is the process of **continuously transforming the raw material into the finished product through practice, leadership, and political education**.

WHY IS CONSCIOUSNESS SO VITAL IN THE TRADE UNIONISM ESPECIALLY WHEN THE INTENTION IS TO WAGE A STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM?

- Consciousness is the **absolute, non-negotiable differentiator** between trade unionism that *stabilizes* capitalism and trade unionism that *destroys* it.
- Without a deliberate, scientific, and unwavering cultivation of consciousness, trade unions—even when packed with millions of workers—become blind, reactive, and ultimately counter-revolutionary tools.
- When the *intention* is to wage a struggle for socialism, consciousness is vital for six interconnected, life-or-death reasons:

1. Overcoming Spontaneity: Turning Reaction into Strategy

- Workers spontaneously resist when wages are cut or conditions worsen—this is a reflex, not a revolution.
- **Spontaneous struggle is reactive**; it only responds to capitalism's attacks.
- **Conscious struggle is proactive**; it anticipates capitalism's crises and plans the *offensive*. Without consciousness, the union merely runs around patching the leaks in a sinking capitalist ship. With consciousness, the union builds a fleet to abandon that ship entirely and seize the helm of the entire economy.
- As Lenin famously argued, **spontaneity leads to subordination to bourgeois ideology**; only conscious effort leads to socialism.

2. Shifting the Target: From the "Boss" to the "State"

- A trade union lacking revolutionary consciousness sees the enemy as a *specific* employer. It fights for a better contract within the existing system.
- A union armed with class consciousness understands that **the individual capitalist is merely a local manager of a global system**. The real enemy is the *capitalist state*—the laws, courts, police, and military that enforce private property.
- Consciousness is vital because it forces the union to ask the ultimate political question: *"Why does the state always side with capital?"* It transforms a strike over wages into a political battle for state power.
- **Without this conscious shift, the union will exhaust itself fighting symptoms while the disease of capitalism rages on.**

3. The Primacy of Revolutionary Theory (The "Engine" of Action)

- Marxism-Leninism holds that **without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement**.
  Consciousness is not innate; it is *imported* into the union through Marxist science. This theory provides the union with:
- **Historical understanding**: Knowing that capitalism is not eternal, but a transient stage in history.
- **Strategic clarity**: Knowing that the path to socialism requires the *dictatorship of the proletariat*, not gradual reform.
- **Analytical power**: Deconstructing capitalist propaganda, fake news, and the lies of reformist leaders.
- A union without this theoretical consciousness is like an army entering a battlefield without a map—it will stumble, fracture, and ultimately be routed by the well-organized bourgeoisie.

4. Forging Unity and Destroying "False Consciousness"

- Capitalism deliberately fragments workers by skill, industry, gender, race, and nationality to keep them fighting each other rather than the ruling class.
- A white-collar worker is pitted against a blue-collar one; a native-born worker against an immigrant.
- **Consciousness is the only force that annihilates these divisions.** It reveals that *all* workers—regardless of superficial differences—share the same fundamental relation to capital: they are all sellers of labor power, all exploited, and all have the same historical enemy.
- Revolutionary consciousness replaces narrow "guild" loyalties with universal **class solidarity**.
- Without this, the union is a fractured collection of cliques; with it, it is an unstoppable unified army.

5. Guarding Against the "Reformist Trap" (Co-optation)

- This is arguably the most practical, vital reason. The bourgeoisie is not stupid—they know they cannot crush all unions, so they buy them off. They offer minor wage increases, shorter hours, and welfare-state crumbs.
- **Trade union consciousness treats these crumbs as victories.** It settles, declares success, and goes home, thereby stabilizing capitalism.
- **Revolutionary consciousness treats these crumbs as ammunition.** It says: *"We fought and won a 10% raise. Now let us use this momentum to ask: why do we need a boss at all? Let us fight for 100% of the value we create.“*
- Consciousness is the **only antidote to reformism**. Without it, the union becomes a "graveyard of revolution," where working-class energy is safely channeled into parliamentary petitions and collective bargaining, permanently divorcing the workers from their revolutionary mission.

6. Preparing for the "Day After" (The Construction of Socialism)

- The struggle for socialism is not just about *destroying* capitalism; it is about *building* a new society.
- Consciousness is vital because the working class must learn to **run the state and manage production** before they actually seize power.
- **Trade unions, when infused with revolutionary consciousness, become "Schools of Communism“** — places where workers learn discipline, administration, accounting, and democratic centralism.

THE DILEMMA OF

RED AND YELLOW

TRADE UNIONS

IS IT NOT VITAL TO ENSURE THAT THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF TRADE UNION MEMBERS IS NOT STAGNATED IN TRADE UNION CONSCIOUSNESS IF THE INTENTION IS TO WAGE A STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM?

NOTE: WORKPLACE MOBILISATION!!!

LEST WE FORGET TRADE UNIONS – IRRESPECTIVE OF IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION – HAVE ALLIES! BUT WHO ARE THEY IN NOWADAYS – LOCALLY, REGIONALLY, CONTINENTALLY AND GLOBALLY?

FORWARD WITH SOCIALISM!!!