

# Global Trade Unionism as the Vanguard of a Non-violent Marxist Revolution

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*WORKING MEN OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!*

--Karl Marx<sup>1</sup>

*The workers have the most tremendous power in their hands... they have only to cease work and to regard what they have produced by their labour as their property and enjoy it.*

--Max Stirner<sup>2</sup>

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx emphatically asserts that capitalism is not in the interest of the working class, and so this downtrodden class should unite and revolt against the capitalist superstructure, replacing it with a more humane and just economic system, namely socialism. This ideal of a revolution in the *Manifesto* is explicitly violent, an armed struggle of the working class against the ruling class. For Marx, the goal of proletarian emancipation could “be attained only by the *forcible* overthrow of all existing social conditions.”<sup>3</sup> I will argue that a working class revolution need not be violent, but rather that through an enhanced form of solidarity represented in a global trade union, the proletariat may in fact be able to bring about the radical structural changes required to bring an end to capitalism and begin to bring forth socialism. This of course is not as simple as it sounds. A lot of work has to be done before such a change can even be seen on the horizon. Solidarity has to be fostered amongst all of the proletariat, as well as massive amounts of planning and coordination to allow the newly unified workforce to communicate and come to a consensus on terms. Workers must seek to overcome the ideologies of race, gender, religion, nationalism, and even language to the degree that it allows for at least the majority to agree as to the purpose and goal of the revolution for the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*. ed. Frederic L. Bender. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988: p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology*, from *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions*. ed. Kenneth Lapides. New York: International Publishers, 1987: p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*: p. 86, my emphasis.

interests of all. And all this must be accomplished within a framework of non-violence. Is such a revolution even possible? Can capitalism ever truly be overcome?

Imagine all the workers of the world truly, actually uniting... and then striking. It would be a world-transforming action. The world as we know it would stop. No more products made or distributed. No services rendered. How would capitalism react? Could it survive? Would it be forced into concession after concession until it was no longer recognizable? Or, is capitalism's hold over the world just too strong? Would the workers then have to make concession after concession until all that remained was capitalism reborn? This is a difficult set of questions to answer satisfactorily, but if we can tease out what such a revolution might look like, we may just find the answers.

The idea of a global union as revolution<sup>4</sup> is certainly not new, but this version is arguably more commensurable with Marx's program for the proletariat. Others have touted proletarian internationalism, unionism, or a combination of the two, as the solution to the problem that is capitalism. Georges Sorel was an advocate of revolutionary syndicalism, the idea that labor unions represent the means of the proletarian revolution as well as the structure of post-revolutionary society. The Russian anarcho-communist Mikhail Bakunin promoted the idea of the general strike<sup>5</sup>, a universal work stoppage throughout an industry, city, or country aimed at economic, political, or class-related gains. Leon Trotsky was also in favor of an international proletarian movement rather than one rooted to one country or another, however without the emphasis on unionism. There have even been attempts to unite the various and disbursed groups of the left, such as the International Working Men's Association (the First International) and subsequent Internationals.<sup>6</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were a number of unions, such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), bent on organizing "One Big Union!"<sup>7</sup> Rather than allowing the potential for separate unions to compete against one another, the IWW wanted

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<sup>4</sup> Here I say "global union as revolution" because the formation of such a union is in fact the revolutionary act itself.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Engels has an elegant description of the Bakuninist general strike, which he criticizes by asserting that the proletariat do not have the funds necessary to sustain a strike, and if they did the employers would readily submit to them without a strike. Cf. Engels, *The Bakuninists at Work*, in *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions*: p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> There have been three subsequent 'Internationals' since the First International in 1864, the last founded in 1938.

<sup>7</sup> Slogan of the IWW, <http://www.iww.org>

workers to focus on curing the ills of capitalism as a united force. The union I propose is very much in this vein, emphasizing a wholly international group determined to bring an end to capitalism, ushering in socialism through an act of unity and the determination for human dignity and justice. It suggests a combination of proletarian internationalism and unionism within a socialist framework with the ultimate goal of revolutionary structural change away from capitalism.

There are many different aspects we will need to investigate en route to constructing our revolution. We must briefly explicate Marx's formulation of revolution, as well as his views on trade unions, exploring their possible roles in such a revolution. We must determine what conditions are necessary for a nonviolent unionist revolution to take root. We will also need to examine the form of the capitalist reaction, both before and after the strike. In the process, we will need to take stock of issues such as class-consciousness, solidarity, globalization, vanguardism, factionalism, and nonviolent action, to determine how they affect the possibility of a unionist revolution. In turn, we will need to look at how technological advances might help or hinder the union's socialist agenda. Through doing this, we can determine such a revolution's possibility as well as its probability of success. "[Trade unions] must convince the world at large that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions."<sup>8</sup>

### **Marx on Revolution**

Marx's view on revolution varied throughout his life. It evolved from the necessity of bloody revolution to a more peaceful political reform and was dependant on each country's economic and political conditions. Yet the basic structure and goal remained the same: the overthrow of the privileged classes by the working class. It is essentially the abolition of class distinction through the appropriation of the means of production and distribution by the workers. The only way for the proletariat to rid itself of oppression and inequality is to forcibly, or politically, usurp the economic power that the bourgeoisie<sup>9</sup> hold over them. Socialist political theory postulates that capitalism is in the interest of the few, but socialism is in the interest of all.

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx. *Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council*, in *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions*: p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> The upper and middle classes of capitalist society.

It argues that for the good of the world and humanity, the structures of capitalism should be dismantled and replaced by the more humane and harmonious structures of socialism.

Marx typically endorsed a violent form of revolution because it was his opinion that many places lacked the necessary conditions for socialist political reform to occur. In later writings, however, he acknowledged that some countries were stable enough to allow for peaceful reform, rather than requiring a violent revolution.

[W]e do not deny that there are countries like America, England [and perhaps Holland], where the workers can achieve their aims by peaceful means. However true that may be, we ought also to recognize that, in most of the countries on the continent, it is force that must be the lever of our revolutions; it is to force that it will be necessary to appeal for a time in order to establish the reign of labour.<sup>10</sup>

He argued that in places without technological advances, such as regions or nation states still practicing farming without machinery, or those ruled through military despotism,<sup>11</sup> could not use peaceful means to instate socialism. In many cases, such states did not have the capacity to do so at all. In the case of the poor, agricultural communities, they simply could not fulfill the material conditions necessary to support socialism. If you cannot produce enough to support everyone, then scarcity will lead to competition or simply death. Consequently, such a shift to socialism would undoubtedly be short-lived. In the case of military despotism, Marx believed the only way to overthrow such a regime would be to use its own forceful techniques against it—to fight fire with fire. The despot will not simply give his power over to the people. Rather, he will fight tooth and nail to preserve his sense of dominance. Marx believed that all the different nations of the world required their own unique approaches in the push for global socialism. There was no single overarching strategy applying to every situation. Revolution can take many forms.

For an earlier Marx, in a world built upon and dominated by class antagonisms, violent revolution sometimes seems like the only route to social and political change:

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx. “Speech in Amsterdam, 1872,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. ed. David McClellan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000: p. 643.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx. “Marx to Hyndman, 8 Dec. 1880,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*: p. 643.

Indeed, is it at all surprising that a society founded on the opposition of classes should culminate in brutal contradiction, the shock of body against body, as its final *dénouement*?

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It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political evolutions. Till then, on the eve of every general reshuffling of society, the last word of social science will always be: 'Struggle or death; bloody war or nothing. It is thus that the question is inevitably posed.'<sup>12</sup>

Here his fervent endorsement of violent revolution is much less apologetic than that of his later period. Over time, Marx's opinion on the means of revolution changed slightly but he felt it was still dependent on the economic and political stability of the nation in question. He eventually agreed, however, that such a revolution need not *necessarily* be violent. If we were to extend his later ideal and apply it to all nations across the globe, would Marx be satisfied with the growing stability of an international economic and political community in terms of its readiness for universal revolution? Need this revolution be bloody to attain its goals, might not the world simply be prepared for a peaceful yet dynamic shift?

### **Marx on Trade Unions and Their Role in Revolution**

Marx had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with trade unions. On the one hand, he felt that they were a perfect representation of what the proletariat can do to fight capitalism, but on the other, he worried about seemingly shortsighted and narrow goals of most trade unions. He endorsed the idea of a united conglomeration of smaller unions leading the way to the revolution, but not if their main goals were simply to increase wages and improve working conditions. These battles were for short-term goals, and for Marx: "The real fruit of their battle lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers."<sup>13</sup> The idea was rather to abolish the wage system entirely and improve working conditions through the simple fact that the workers would ultimately be in charge. Unions, for Marx, could be seen as a

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx. From *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*: p. 232-233

<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*: p. 63.

model for both the potential successes and potential failures of a working-class revolution. Both Marx and Engels wrote a great deal on trade union activity across the globe, finding inspiration and trepidation in their observation of the labor movement. Still, trade unions were at least a factor in the proletarian revolution. So what role did Marx find for unionism in the socialist movement?

Marx felt that trade unions should be seen as an exercise in the solidarity that is required in socialism. A group of individuals united for the common good, not for the good of the membership of each particular union, but of all of humanity. Unions help to fertilize class-consciousness amongst the workers. Workers in a factory form a combination that then unites with other combinations within the same trade to form a union. Similar unions form a collective of trade unions, eventually resulting in a massive ‘union of all unions.’ This is the model for socialist solidarity. Everyone united and working together as one large group for the good of all.

The problem for Marx was that too often unions fought for shortsighted concessions within capitalism rather than for long-term solutions to move away from it. This often led to competition between unions, a dynamic obviously against the ideals of socialism. It also led capitalists to make temporary concessions in order for them to then either replace the workers with machines or pick up shop and move someplace where labor was cheaper. And the push for higher wages kept the workers within the wage system, where Marx felt that system was the problem in the first place and it needed to be abolished. “Instead of the conservative motto, ‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!’ they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘Abolition of the wages system!’”<sup>14</sup> For Marx, unions tended to be too dependent on the capitalist system, rather than pushing for a systemic overhaul. They were not revolutionary enough:

Trade unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using

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<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx. “Wages, Price and Profit,” in *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions*: p. 95.

their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say, the ultimate abolition of the wage system.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, labor unions tended to only seek to treat the symptoms of their condition rather than cure the overall affliction of capitalism.

According to Marx, labor unions had the ability to lead the way for the workers of all countries to become masters of their own destinies, by overturning the capitalist structure by taking power over the means of production and distribution, i.e., their own livelihoods. However, unions also held the dangerous potential to maintain the ideological reflex of capitalist competition. This would occur if they made a concerted effort to hold steadfastly to the wage system. They also needed to focus on long-term goals rather than settling for short-term concessions. As long as unions appealed for profound systemic change, they represented a positive model for the revolution. If not, they would simply be a detrimental remnant of capitalism. So, union activity had the potential to actually hurt workers rather than help them by remaining within the wage system and all of its trappings. Capitalists could sedate the workers by giving certain concessions without having to resign to structural changes, allowing them to continually exploit labor for profit. In essence giving the workers enough to make them think that if their lives can get better under capitalism, why fight it? Instead of seeing that the more unions proliferate the more difficult it is for capitalism to find a safe haven for exploitation, workers are seduced into thinking that their conditions can improve under capitalism. If the labor theory of value is correct, then it is the workers, rather than the products of their labor, that hold the value, and the capitalists cannot thrive without them.

### **The Roots of Revolution**

Marx noted that there were economic and material conditions that necessary at any given time for a revolution to occur, whether globally or locally. This is also the case for unionization. As Marx noted, the places with the strongest union activity, England and America, were financially and politically secure, as well as the most technologically advanced. These were countries for which the possibility for successful systemic change was most practical. They could handle the needs of millions. The benefits for highly industrialized nations stem from the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid: p. 95.

innovations of industry. Agriculture is now highly efficient, and, in countries like America, even leads to overproduction. Due to selective farming and genetic modification, produce grows faster and larger, and due to storage and transportation innovations, lasts much longer. We now have the technology to produce and store food in great surplus along with the waste technology to deal with what we do not use. Our medical industry has the capability to assist us in living longer, healthier lives. But of course this all comes at a price. Those who can afford to pay benefit, those who cannot must go without.

Places like China and Russia, where we have witnessed the occurrence of nominally Marxist revolutions, were too poor and widespread to handle fulfilling the needs of their people. For Marx, capitalism needed to be in full swing before a successful revolution could take place. Capitalism was barely off the ground in Russia before the Bolshevik revolution.<sup>16</sup> Capitalism, according to Marx, creates its own demise, sowing the seeds of its own destruction. It was through the advances of capitalism that socialism would gain its strength. While revolutions might have proven successful in pockets of the globe, the goal was for it to be universal. This did not seem possible in Marx's day, but that was nearly a century and a half ago. Could the technological advances and unrelenting progression of capitalism today be a glimmer of hope for a Marxist revolution?

### **Globalization and Technology**

Capitalism's power over the economies of the world has grown exponentially since Marx wrote the *Manifesto* and *Capital*. We are in the midst of a global economy. Increasingly, emphasis is being placed on an international community, rather than the community, the nation, or even a community of nations. We see movements such as the push for a European Union. National governments are being outranked and out-muscled by multinational corporations. Nations themselves are increasingly seen as obsolete. We are slowly being encouraged to think of ourselves as citizens of the world, rather than pledging allegiance to any one particular nation.

Technology and infrastructure have advanced to the point that goods are easily, quickly, and inexpensively shipped to and from all corners of the globe. Communication systems are efficient and widespread. In highly industrialized areas, you can get virtually anything at the

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<sup>16</sup> Tsar Alexander II abolished Russian serfdom in 1861. The Bolshevik revolution began in 1917.

touch of a button and have it delivered directly to your door. Production methods exceed the efficiency and capacity seen during the Industrial Revolution many times over. More and more workers are being replaced by machines, while corporations move from place to place to find the most welcoming area (i.e., lowest wages, regulations, and taxes) to set up shop.

Does this mean that technology can allow for the sustenance of 6 billion people, and do so easily? Certainly not in our current state of affairs. We are still too reliant on unsustainable and scarce resources to be able to provide for all in a harmonious fashion. We must first move to sustainable practices and products before we would be able even to attempt to assert the sustainability of humanity. If not, we will simply continue to compete for resources, and as they continue to grow scarcer, the competition will only become more vigorous and exclusionary.

If we move towards more sustainable practices (as we are seeing many industrialized countries do), those practices alongside our advanced technologies create increasingly ideal conditions for revolution. Could capitalism be sounding its own death knell? An increasing sense of global citizenry and enhanced technology and methods of communication are potentially perfect breeding grounds for the union. “This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another.”<sup>17</sup> Such a sense of solidarity with all people is required for the socialist program to work. If the people of the world are not fully united, then competition, and therefore capitalism, has the potential to creep back in. It is when the proletariat breaks into factions to fight their own ideological battles that capitalism will certainly have a home. Capitalism thrives on competition and disunity, not harmony and cooperation.

Solidarity can in fact be aided by global communication. The Internet, wireless phones, and ease of transportation help people to stay in touch, even with those halfway across the planet. If all workers can get and stay on the same page through thorough, instantaneous, and constant communication, it will be much more difficult for some workers to be left in the dark. And of course, the more people that know what is going on, the better the chances of success. What good would it really do to, say, unite the workers of Europe and the Americas and leave the workers of Asia, Africa, and Australia to fend for themselves? (Unless of course we had it in

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<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*: p. 63.

mind to get a strong foothold before tackling the rest of the world.) Leaving the proletariat divided is just what capitalism needs to remain a power in the world. But how do we get, and keep, the workers together?

### **Pre-Socialist Socialism as a Necessary Precondition for the Revolution**

The solidarity necessary for socialism to flourish must start before the actual idea of the revolution has come to be. In essence, the workers must already have a socialist mindset before they begin their push for socialism. They need to have a sense of global community with the aim of the fulfillment of human need and the desire for social justice. Without this sense of unity, the revolution has a strong possibility of failure. This is the reason that globalization is actually important for socialism. We need to feel a strong kinship to our fellow humans and realize that we all share the same basic needs. We should support each other in fulfilling those needs rather than compete against one another for survival. We need to share a class-consciousness that stems from the realization that capitalism is not in the best interest of meeting our basic needs and letting us lead fulfilling lives. Our enhanced methods of communication can be used to disburse information regarding working conditions to workers across the globe. We have the ability to look at the world and assess its faults and assets to determine how to best go about making human existence as fulfilling as possible. With a broadened sense of unity and the ability to communicate with anyone across the globe, the ideal of socialism becomes more and more attainable. However, as long as we remain sectarian along political, educational, racial, gender, or national lines, socialism will remain elusive. And it is in sectarianism where capitalism takes root. It pits one nation against another for sources of wealth. So, if one nation supports its laborers then capitalists can just go to one that does not. Capitalists will just continue to seek the best deal for them. If the majority of value is from labor, then the capitalist will find the cheapest sources of labor to increase surplus value and profit. Therefore, their concern is not for the workers, but for the work.

### **Unionism in the Face of Factionalism: Union Busting**

Capitalism necessarily fosters sectarianism and factionalism. If no one competes for resources, capital, power, and the like, capitalism cannot exist. So what are the methods capitalists use to disrupt socialist activity? Divide and conquer. Could a global union fend off

the capitalist disruption and remain united? Or would it fall victim, as many unions have, to infighting and division?

In capitalism, the value is placed on the individual rather than the society. The role of the society is to provide a place in which individuals buy and sell goods. Otherwise, people are to fend for themselves. In libertarian capitalism people are seen as having negative rights; rights *from* harm and obstruction. You can do what you like as long as it does not infringe on another's rights. Whereas in socialism, people are seen as having positive rights: rights *to* food, shelter, medicine, education, etc. The capitalist mindset is one of unceasing competition and individualism, while the socialist mindset is one of uncompromising respect for humanity. Capitalists want you to buy more and more so you can keep up with your neighbor, so programs such as engineered obsolescence are introduced; the next big thing is always just around the corner. Everything is commodified and then marketed and sold to us, including healthcare and education. We have to *buy in* to the system. Once people get together to assist one another with their daily needs, they are often labeled as 'socialists' or 'communists.' Capitalism requires you to worry more about your own needs rather than those of your fellow humans. These sorts of ideas are deeply ingrained in contemporary society.

Marx claimed that the "proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win."<sup>18</sup> But is this really the case? Revolution and even union activity can be risky business. You can end up losing your livelihood or even your life with no guarantee that things will be better afterwards. Capitalists want to make certain that the proletariat know this, so they use techniques to ensure that workers will not be inclined to disrupt the interests of capitalism by asserting that they are in fact the interests of the workers.

Union busting is a tactic capitalists have used to keep workers from uniting against them and raising themselves up.

In order to prevent the working class from emerging from its so-called *social inferiority*, the boss condemns the associations formed by the working class which make it a class antagonistic to the respectable *category of the bosses*,

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*: p. 85.

*entrepreneurs and bourgeois* who certainly prefer... *the State police to class antagonisms*.<sup>19</sup>

Capitalists have used both violence and coercion to disrupt labor organizations. They have been known to employ outside agencies such as the Pinkertons<sup>20</sup> to disrupt union activities and organizations through intimidation or even murder. They have also simply moved to places where organization is illegal or unlikely. This often leaves the proletariat with no choice but to concede to the will of the capitalist in order to survive. If she does not she will either be a victim of violence or lose her job. Union busters also attempt to offer deals like cash incentives or non-union, short-term contracts in attempts to prove to workers that unions are not necessary to improve their conditions. In any regard, workers are shown that unionizing is not in their best interest, while working for the capitalist is. The founders of the IWW felt that factionalized labor unions were also a part of the problem;

The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.<sup>21</sup>

How will globalization affect this process? It could be that another aspect of globalization could fall in favor of global unionism. If through globalization there were no more national interests but rather global interests, capitalists would have no shelter nations to turn to if the workers were to unite against them. Currently, if workers organize in the United Kingdom or America, the company has the option to move to places like Bangladesh or India where labor restrictions are far more lax and wages much, much lower. If these companies had nowhere to turn, they would be forced to face the demands of their workers. And if the demands of workers were the same across the globe, they would either have to concede or close up shop for good. This is the power of the global trade union. Capitalism could potentially dig its own grave

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<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx. *Almanacco Repubblicano per l'anno 1874*, in *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions*: p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> The Pinkerton National Detective Agency was a private security firm founded in 1850 that was involved in many violent labor disputes in the United States.

<sup>21</sup> From the preamble of the constitution of the IWW, <http://www.iww.org/culture/official/preamble.shtml>

through creating a global community. Of course, if capitalists can manage to keep the workers of the globe competing for wealth and resources, then socialism does not stand a chance.

Governments also play a role by enacting labor laws that are unfavorable for union organization. Companies now hire ‘union avoidance firms’ that specialize in deterring workers from forming or joining unions. This, along with the dissolution of large union associations has weakened the power and draw of unions in general. In America, this has led to the reduction of union membership from 24% in 1973 to 12.5% in 2004.<sup>22</sup> If capitalists continue to succeed in decreasing union power, then there is little hope for a unionist revolution. What are the workers to do? Where can they look for help?

### **Vanguardism**

There is a history in populist movements for the formation of a vanguard party to organize and lead the revolution. This can easily be seen in the communist regimes of the USSR and China. In the case of the Bolshevik revolution it was essentially a group of bourgeois intellectuals entrusted with preserving the party’s ideology. That vanguard was meant to protect the continuity of the revolution’s agendas from outside corruption and to teach them to the workers. They were the organizers and leaders of the revolution.

While some revolutionaries saw the vanguard as intellectuals, others saw them as the underclass, the lumpenproletariat. The lumpenproletariat was seen as the outcasts of society: the thieves, gamblers, prostitutes, unemployed, etc. Marx viewed them as dangerous to the revolution as they were too dependent upon the capitalist system to be serious about its upheaval. Others such as Frantz Fanon and Huey P. Newton promoted the lumpenproletariat as the vanguard class.<sup>23</sup> Their contention was that the lumpenproletariat were not part of the capitalist system and in fact could not be, so they should have no problem with its overthrow. In some ways they had more to gain, as they could, through socialism, become equal and productive members of society.

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<sup>22</sup> Shaan K. Hathiramani and Amanda Shapiro. “Busting the Busters.” Harvard Political Review. <http://hprsite.squarespace.com/busting-the-busters-12006/>

<sup>23</sup> [http://socialjustice.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/index.php/Huey\\_P.\\_Newton::\\_Philosophy::\\_Lumpenproletariat](http://socialjustice.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/index.php/Huey_P._Newton::_Philosophy::_Lumpenproletariat)

Some see the idea of a vanguard party as non-Marxist as it keeps the power in the hands of a few members of a party, rather than giving all power to the people. For Marx, the proletariat should take matters into their own hands and fight for self-rule, anything else would be settling for authoritarianism. If the goal is to abolish the class structure, why would we want to maintain categorical social divisions? The idea is not for one class to rule over another, but the abolition of class distinction itself. We can see that for Marx, if there were to be a vanguard party, it would consist of the entire proletariat, not a particular group of workers, and especially not an outside class. The problem I see with a vanguard party that does not consist entirely of the workers is that it presents the danger of a small group delegating what is in the best interest of the whole. The workers should be the ones making their own decisions. The global trade union would fit such a description for Marx. The proletariat should take it upon itself to organize and lead the revolution. Anything less might lead to more division than unity.

### **Nonviolence?**

We have seen that unity and solidarity are among the main constituents of a strong movement for the change from capitalism to socialism. We have also noted the relevance trade unions have for a Marxist revolution. We have discovered ways in which capitalism could be writing its own obituary. But how would such an action maintain nonviolence, and why should we want it to?<sup>24</sup> Engels, later in his life, became a staunch supporter of nonviolent structural change, whether through political reform or simply nonviolent revolution.

[W]hile he expected a ‘decisive conflict’ in the form of a seizure of power by the working class, he believed that this might be a bloodless act owing to the latter’s strength, its highly developed consciousness, and its ability to enlist the support of the lower middle classes. He did not reject the idea of a revolution as necessary in principle and inevitable in practice, but he believed that it might be a non-violent one.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> By nonviolence here I mean the refrain from aggressive violent action. I am not saying that those attacked should not defend themselves for their own survival and to protect others.

<sup>25</sup> Leslek Kolakowski. *Main Currents of Marxism*. Trans. P.S. Falla. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005: p. 297.

We have already noted that Marx promoted violent insurrection as the method best suited for revolution. This was because of the insight that those in power want to remain in power, and they will not give it up without a fight. I argue that this is more suited to localized actions against capitalist forces rather than a united global action. From looking at sheer numbers alone, we can see that the capitalists are hopelessly outnumbered. Even if they were to launch a military attack, if the workers held steadfast and united they would most certainly hold out in the long run. Would capitalists be forced to hire mercenary forces such as the Pinkertons or Blackwater from outside the proletariat?<sup>26</sup> And if the capitalists did attack, what message would that send to the workers that were left? Come work for us or die? With solidarity the workers certainly outnumber the capitalists, but with holdouts and factions, the capitalists could potentially acquire more and more numbers on their side.

The concern about nonviolence is also relevant to what kind of society might emerge if created through solidarity and nonviolence in comparison to one created through violence and the competition of one class against another. I would argue that the violent competition of class versus class is just a remnant of our capitalist mindset. Marx might argue that revolution is the last use for such competition, and thereafter harmony will be the rule. However, constructing a society based on solidarity requires the fostering of such solidarity amongst all. This way, class antagonisms will be lessened on all sides, and the urge for violence reduced. If the capitalists see that the push for change is not about their violent removal but rather about the struggle for human solidarity and dignity, socialism may find more acceptance from the ruling class. But of course if the capitalists have virtually no other choice but to concede to the demands of the proletariat, they will have to learn to live differently.

## **Conclusion**

What happens after the strike? Who would be in charge? The strike would be a display of the solidarity of the proletariat against the wrongs committed against them under capitalism. The demands would certainly be the conversion of the capitalist structures to socialism. The proletariat would take charge of the means of production and distribution. Social services such as education and healthcare would become socialized. Wealth would be centralized and

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<sup>26</sup> Taking into account the fact that there would be no workers to produce munitions and the potentiality of soldiers asserting their working-class-consciousness and solidarity by not attacking fellow workers.

distributed equally. Workers would receive equal opportunity and compensation for their labor. Ideally, the people would rule themselves in a democratic fashion. This is where the solidarity that was fostered previous to the revolution would show its strength. The people would feel actively involved in deciding what is best for everyone. Without the sense of solidarity informed by human interests such as equal and easy access to food, shelter, healthcare, education and fulfillment for all, people would most likely separate into different factions according to self-interest.

We can see that the key to a unionist movement is solidarity in the form of an organized group of every worker from across the globe. I think Marx would have supported such a movement but would have had understandable reservations about the ability for such a union to hold up to the divisive forces of capitalism. Capitalism does indeed have a strong hold upon the world, and it appears to only be getting stronger. But it could just be that the advancement of capitalism is in fact leading to its ultimate demise. The opening up of the global market has led to a global economy and with it a growing global community. If this sense of community is fostered along with knowledge of the adverse conditions the workers find themselves in, a global unionist movement doesn't seem all that implausible.

The most predominant factor against the possibility and success of a unionist revolution is that of capitalism itself and the factionalism that comes with it. If capitalism remains successful in fostering a sense of self-interest and competition, in addition to a sense of security, then global solidarity is doomed. And as solidarity is the main ingredient to overcoming capitalism, the hope of positive structural change fades with it. Capitalism has been very good at staving off what seems like the infection that is human unity. The competition for, and accumulation of, resources and wealth are the main goals in a capitalist society. The whole world seems caught in the endless game that is capitalism. If we cannot overcome capitalist practices, it seems as though we are condemned to continue until nothing is left. Unions might be able to slow the domination of capitalism, but perhaps a union of unions could end it.

If the urge for competition can be quelled and the desire for unity and solidarity promoted, then the revolution has a fighting chance. Globalization and technology are in the process of sowing the seeds of the possibility for mass organization. Capitalism is beginning to create an atmosphere of doubt as to its capabilities for human happiness and at the same time that

it is fostering a sense of global community. If the members of this community come to realize the shortcomings of capitalism, they will see that it has little to offer them. Such a union would realize it possessed the power to leave the capitalists with nowhere to turn for cheap labor and lenient labor restrictions. The capitalist system would collapse. For Marx: "The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent of the immense majority, in the interests of the immense majority."<sup>27</sup> Of course, the proletariat must first be convinced that socialism is in fact in their best interest. Just how this can happen is an entirely different yet deeply important issue for investigation. Any hesitation the workers show in their faith in the socialist cause could open the door for capitalism to maintain its position of domination upon the world. Only as a global union, the workers of the world could incite the change to socialism. While we may not be in the position for such an action now, the potential dwells in the future. And with such a potential comes hope.

*Trade unions are the schools of socialism. It is in trade unions that workers educate themselves and become socialists, because under their very eyes and every day the struggle with capital is taking place... The great mass of workers, whatever party they belong to, have at last understood that their material situation must become better.*

*--Karl Marx<sup>28</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx. *The Communist Manifesto*: p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx. From a speech to a German trade union delegation, Oct. 27, 1869, Hanover, in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*: p. 583.

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