



WORKS

the trade unions used to be. Although the unions are far from dead.

We also see a resurrection of more libertarian socialism, in particular, anarchism. Now anarchism globally is still in a process of not necessarily defining itself, but of redefinition and rediscovery, of linking back to its historical roots, and recapturing parts of anarchist theory and history that have been lost or distorted. For example, from after the Second World War, writing about anarchist history has been focused on Northern Europe and America, relying on perspectives that discount the majority of anarchism that existed and exists globally and historically.

And we see that many of the struggles today, for example, the Occupy movements, also reflect the influence of more libertarian ideas and anarchist ideas without necessarily being purely anarchist. Many of those ideas are starting to find more space in the world.

However, there is a long way to go to reclaim the space that working class movements used to have a few decades ago, when they used to influence society, and also reclaiming the space for revolutionary left ideas, especially anarchism, which can radically change society.

The fact of the matter is that it is the radical right – in religious, fascist, populist and anti- foreigner variants – that is capturing the space opened by massive popular dissatisfaction with ruling elites.

LM: South Africa also has long tradition of left-wing and working class politics: where does anarchism fit here?

WM: Anarchism globally had its golden age in terms of influence from around 1870 to into the 1930s, and remained important after that, but less so than statist movements like anti- colonial nationalism and classical Marxism. But before that anarchism was certainly the most dominant socialist idea in the world, and its trade unionism, also known as “syndicalism,” had a very big influence. It played a key role in the colonial and postcolonial world, including in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles.

This included an important influence on South African black and white worker formations in the early part of the 1900s. But it's only in the latter part of the 1990s that we have a rekindling of an anarchist presence in South Africa, and an organised attempt to get re-involved in working class struggles. This all means that anarchism here is still quite a small force, first of all in the left, and secondly, even smaller in terms of influence among the working class and poor.

