

Freedom

LALIT's Program on Freedom was developed over our struggles against repression, since the *Muvman Solidarite Anti-Represyon* in 1978, the anti-repression movement, and over a number of Program Meetings held in Grand River North West.

All human beings love freedom. And freedom is the aspiration of each and every person on earth. Our love of liberty is part of our human nature. It's an instinct we have. And this instinct has helped us survive. We needed it in times of gathering fruit and honey, so that we could get food every day. We needed it in times of fishing and hunting for the same reason. This instinct for freedom is not something that only human beings have: many animals in the animal kingdom yearn for freedom. We all share a refusal of imprisonment.

But human beings have a special love of freedom. Particularly to be free to seek our daily bread, to say what's on our minds, to express ourselves in the especially human capacity of speech, to show love and affection, and to express our sexuality in a way linked to our emotions. It is freedom that help us create our social lives on earth and that protects us from dictatorial rule. It is what gives us the opportunity to co-operate with our neighbours on this earth.

Human beings resist being closed in or being under any yolk. We don't like external controls on our thinking, speaking or writing. We don't like it if people prevent us from socializing with other people. We like moving around our neighbourhood, our country and everywhere on the earth. Everywhere people rebel against attempts at locking them up, or sending them into exile. We hate being colonized or militarily occupied. And though we adore all kinds of creative work (from fishing and gardening, to cooking and creating things), we all hate forced labour.

We hate it when a *band of armed men* comes and replaces our age-old ways of keeping peace and harmony in our areas. These age-old methods relied a lot on womenfolk, and they were sufficient for the vast part of our history. What we are saying is that, in a certain sense, freedom means *freedom from State control*. And the State, in a certain sense, means the band of armed men that protects the class that rules. This means that, in the last analysis, freedom means *freedom from the ruling class's domination*, for it is the ruling classes that have an interest in dominating us. It is them who reap the benefit of our forced labour.

In the long run, people don't stand for repression. For a time, people do cower. People give the impression that they have given up or that they are used to domination. Sometimes, in times of despair, the broad masses of the people even develop a will for fascism. But in the long run, people refuse to accept repression. We tend to rise up against forced labour and exploitation. To rebel against domination of any kind. To mutiny in prisons. To hold revolutions against tyranny. And we are right in this.

We are born free. We were always born free. But everywhere our freedom is under threat. This means that humans have a constant quest for freedom. Although we are born with it. And if we have won freedom of association through past struggles, for example, and can form political parties of our choice, this freedom is constantly limited by laws and work contracts.

In the same way, we have won the freedom to form unions, but what does this mean when workers are still not yet free to decide collectively to withhold their labour under the conditions they are being obliged to work? Strikes are still illegal in Mauritius. You can lose your job and fetch up in jail.

We have won free expression as a right in the Constitution, and yet the space we have to express ourselves freely in is constantly diminishing. Walls are no longer free for a football team to put up a poster. Multinationals billboards pollute all open space. Newspapers are controlled to a heavy extent by those who pay the enormous rates for ads. Radio and TV are the same, if they are not also controlled by the State.

It's as though humans don't accept that some time back in history we were expropriated. We don't accept that it's normal that we have been separated from the land that feeds us. We find it difficult to believe that we have been banished from our mother earth. Or that a small minority of powerful men control the quasi-totality of the earth itself and all its resources, and well as the product of our labour. And we are correct in our refusal to accept this. Because it is this deprivation, this banishment, this exiling, this expropriation, that is the greatest attack on our freedom.

Our freedom is thus controlled in two interlinked ways:

Firstly, there is the small group of people who for the past 5,000 to 10,000 years have developed monopoly control over the earth's resources that we work. For these people to keep us in submission, there needs to be repression at our point of work, at the very point where we are making our physical living. Repression is the antithesis of freedom. And what repression could be more cruel than threatening to starve a worker's children?

Secondly, *The State* (in the broad sense of the word) has an arsenal of coercive and repressive forces to keep the unequal social relations in place. Some of these are ideological, like education systems, the patriarchal form of the family, religion, the use of constant debt in the consumer society, the advertising industry, the press, and then on to a more violent repression, through anti-democratic laws, the police, the army, the secret services, the judiciary, prison guards.

Bourgeois propaganda is so ubiquitous – in society and in our own minds – that our idea of freedom can be harmed by it. When, for example, there is generalized hysteria in the mass media about the drugs problem, many people can think it appropriate that a suspect be locked up, deprived of his freedom without even thinking about giving him bail. At a different level, people can begin to think that basic human rights like the right to food, to pensions, to health care, education and housing can instead be things that you have to “earn” or “merit”, so powerful is the ideology of “meritocracy”.

So, there is a constant battle against the bosses and the State.

And central to this ongoing struggle is the constant quest for freedom.

And, what we have learnt, especially over the past hundred years or so, is that the best way to watch over our freedom is through an increase in democracy. In particular gains we make through past struggles need to be codified, while we continue the quest for more rights and for wider and deeper democracy, and while we build parties independent from those who dominate us, fight for the right of recall at all levels, and try to win more democratic control over the whole of social life, the environment, political questions, and most important of all, over the economy itself. It is during the quest for genuinely democratic control of the economy itself that we best defend all our freedoms won through past struggles.

In LALIT, we have also noted that repression not only worsens the problem it is supposed to be “solving”, but it creates new, often much worse problems than the original one. Once again let us look at the example of drugs. The repression against drug-users and dealers often increases the strength of the mafia, itself. The worse the repression, the more vicious the mafia. This re-enforcement of the mafia then makes the drugs problem worse, because peddling becomes more cut-throat. And there is now the additional problem of police harassment and brutality against young men, with all the violence and torture, and this is then an even more serious problem than the drugs problem. We lose our very freedom.

The State must stop its incursions into matters that belong in the private sphere. When a woman has recourse to abortion, for example, the State should not arrest her and threaten her with a prison sentence. Her decision is a question of her own ethical judgment. Abortion should be regulated by the same law that regulates all medical practice.

The question of sodomy between consenting adults being illegal, is a private moral question, not an issue for the State to repress.

And the law making it supposedly “excusable” (meaning that it has a lower sentence) for a man to murder his wife and her lover if he finds them in the act, comes from an outdated feudal and patriarchal ideology left in the law. This law must be revoked.

In fact, the Mauritian State has been left with a heritage of the colonial State. The State is powerful enough to be able, to some extent, to regulate the class struggle, and certainly to be able to tax every single transaction. It is also very paternalist, as the Colonial State was. Labour law in Mauritius is a direct descendent of the labour law of indenture, and that of indenture, is a relic of slavery. The Registrar of Associations in Mauritius, a State bureaucracy has the legal right to study the annual returns prepared by an Executive of an Association, while it is not mentioned that members have this right. And in Mauritius, even the sale of a car or bicycle is subject to tax.

We demand freedom for each and every one:

Freedom

- So that freedom of expression is not just a phrase in the Constitution, there needs to be a new kind of system whereby newspapers, radio and television are under democratic control of some sort, free from the control of sponsors and from day-to-day control of the State (Like the BBC at its best, only more independent from the State.) The thinker, Raymond Williams made good suggestions for how this could be organized.
- Public space must be made available for peoples' posters: the invasion of public space by multinational commercial advertisements must be halted as a form of pollution.
- There must be a *Freedom of Information Act*, giving people the right to knowledge, amongst of other kinds, to knowledge as to what the State knows about them.
- Freedom means the right to hold public meetings without repressive rules like those of the *Public Gathering Act*, which must be revoked.
- Privacy relative to the State must be protected. This means refusing the introduction of all kinds of electronic cards with information that the State gathers about individuals
- The right for the public to speak freely on the new independent radios must be protected. Ministers must stop their threats against radio stations.
- Everyone must be free to use their maternal language in education and in all spheres of life.

Freedom at work

- The *Industrial Relations Act* must be revoked so as to prevent the continued bureaucratization of the trade union movement.
- The right to strike must be protected by the Constitution.
- In the future, work must be organized in a system of producers freely associating. This way, wage slavery and the "forced labour" it implies will be done away with.
- Each citizen must have the right to participate actively in all levels of politics, whether they are in the private or public sectors.

Anti-Repression

- The *Public Security Act*, if it is not already a dead letter, must be revoked, because it is a law that brings insecurity not security for the people.
- The *Prevention of Terrorism Act* must be revoked because it brings the danger of State terror.
- The *National Security Service* must be closed down.
- All bugging and mail-checking and e-mail surveillance by the State must be stopped.
- All remand prisoners not involved in crimes of violence, must qualify for bail until their cases come up, and lack of money should not be a reason for keeping pre-trial people in prison. This has already been proposed by the National Human Rights Commission, and the Prime Minister has announced that it will be implemented in certain cases.
- Police and other officers of the State who act violently, speak brutally and mistreat people in their custody, must be made to face formal charges in Court. Deaths in detention must be investigated by a real "Judicial Enquiry", because the existing form of judicial enquiry has degenerated into a mere police enquiry, in practice. So we have the police investigating the police. This explains, in part, why charges are never laid.
- A Department independent from the Police must be set up for the purposes of conducting autopsies. Post mortem reports must be given to the family of the deceased within a fixed time limit.
- The death penalty, at present suspended, must be abolished formally by a Constitutional amendment.

Social and economic freedoms

- Economic and social rights and freedoms must be put into the Constitution. These must include democratic control over the land, sea, waters, and air of the country. The private sector's invasion of land must be halted.
- Abortion must be removed from the criminal code as an offence. It is part of morals and ethics not a matter for police to intervene in.
- There should never be prison, or other punishments meted out against a man who is not respecting his financial engagements in relation to his family. This new law in Mauritius tends to bring violence back into a woman's home, after it may have ended. Society must have a fund, based on generalized income tax and company tax, to help all children, and their mothers, when they are in financial straits.
- Everyone should be free to choose who they choose to live with. Young girls must be free from forced marriage; the way to ensure this freedom is to make the legal age for marriage coincide with the age of becoming adult.
- The State must change its strategy on the drugs issue. The State's present strategy is both useless and repressive. It is important to focus on the issue as to why people have recourse to drugs, instead of punishing those who do.
- There should never, under any circumstances, be prison for debt.

Public space must be freed

- Huge public spaces must be made free for people to experience free movement in, safe from cars, lorries and heavy vehicles. Pedestrians and cyclists must be cared for, not just the minority of people in private cars.
- Children need vast public spaces to play in, again free from the danger of vehicles, and stress-free for the people, usually women, in charge of children.
- Freedom of movement also involves a good, cheap public transport.

Freedom from War and Occupation, and from Imperialism

- The Chagossians and Mauritians must be free from the military occupation of Diego Garcia and Chagos. Britain and the US must close their base, the country must be re-united, and those displaced fully compensated for the suffering they have been through, and freedom to return, and freedom of movement put in action again.
- Everyone must be free to move from place to place on the globe, to visit and to seek work, without visa restrictions.
- Everyone must be able to live in freedom from conditions imposed from above by organizations like the International Monetary Fund, The World Bank and the World Trade Organization, and other imperialist organisms.

Freedom relies on increasing democracy constantly

- Instead of Government decreasing democracy through their new *Local Government Act*, which abolishes Village-level democracy, we need Village Councils with more resources and more power and more autonomy. In towns, elected Ward-level councils should be set up, to allow proper decentralization.
- Instead of decreasing democracy by following the recommendations of the Albie Sachs Report, political parties should remain free from State control, and guaranteed no money deposits for candidates. Candidates need to be free from language and literacy restraints.
- Political leaders that take corruption money from the bosses, like those who took from Air Mauritius bosses or any others, should be charged, so as to liberate parties from the stranglehold that capital has on them.
- The basic democratic principle of recall must be established at all levels: whoever elects someone can revoke the person too. The means of revocation need to be agreed upon.
- The communal Best Loser system must be abolished. This way we will be free from compulsory classification or auto-classification by the State.

- All judicial procedures must be made more equal, more accessible, and more transparent.
- *National Human Rights Commission* must be democratized.

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