

Unit 13: Going Global - International Organisation, 1872-1922

This Unit aims to

- Review the attempts to organise a revolutionary international in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries
- Briefly examine the reformist internationals
- Examine the reasons behind the rejection by anarcho-syndicalists of the Bolsheviks 'Red International'
- Look at the founding of the IWA

Terms and abbreviations

SPD: Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands. German Social Democratic Party

ISNTUC: International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres, the reformist trade union international

NAS: Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat, Dutch syndicalist organisation

ISEL: Industrial Syndicalist Education League

IWW: Industrial Workers of the World

CGT: Confederation Generale du Travail, French anarcho-syndicalist union federation.

ISNTUC: International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres, the reformist union international prior to 1914.

CI: The Third International or Comintern

SAC: Sverige Arbtarens Centralorganisation, Swedish revolutionary syndicalist union federation.

FAUD: Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands, German anarcho-syndicalist union federation.

RILU: Red International of Labour Unions

USI: Unione Sindicale Italiana, Italian anarcho-syndicalist union federation.

Introduction

Some of the basic tenets of anarcho-syndicalism were developed within the First International, and it was here that the struggle for an anarcho-syndicalist international began (see Unit 3). After the anarchists were expelled through Marx's manoeuvrings at the 1872 Hague Conference, they moved quickly to organise a new conference. This duly took place in Switzerland and, although boycotted by Marx's supporters, the majority of sections affiliated to the First International supported the conference. Among these were the Spanish, Italian, French, Belgian, Dutch, English and part of the Swiss group.

The Swiss Conference unanimously overturned the Hague Conference decision to expel the anarchists, and rejected the moves made there to make the First International an organisation whose primary aim was the capture of political power. A resolution was passed stating that the aim of the International was not the seizure of political power, but to promote the overthrow of capitalism by workers, organised at the point of production, taking direct control of industry. This marked a return to the slogan of the First International - that the workers' emancipation is the task of the workers themselves. The centralisation that the Marxists had attempted to introduce was also overturned, and replaced with a decentralised structure under which each section could act autonomously within each country, as long as it complied with the basic aims and principles of the International.

The weakness of the Marxist faction within the International at the time is indicated by their attempts to organise an international conference the following year (1873) in Germany. This was a complete failure due to lack of support. Thereafter, the Marxists' attempt to create an international faded, as it became little more than an office in New York staffed by Marxist supporters. It was finally formally dissolved in 1876.

Anarchist International

The anarchist wing of the First International continued to function after 1872, building on its achievements prior to the split. With a paid up membership of 150,000 activists, it had influence that went beyond its numbers. The Russian anarchist Kropotkin, active in the International at the time, argued that its main achievement after the split was the resistance it organised to the reaction that swept through Europe after the crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871. Taking the initiative, the capitalists attempted to crush the workers' movement, and in Kropotkin's words, the International "saved Europe from a very dark period of reaction."

The Anarchist International was also at the forefront in organising uprisings in both Spain and Italy. This assisted in the creation of an enduring anarchist tradition within these countries, which in turn, was to lead to the emergence of mass anarcho-syndicalist movements there in the early 1900s.

Meanwhile, throughout the 1870s, the International continued to assist in the development of the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism, based on practical experience. To combat the increasing global centralisation of monopoly capitalism (the term globalisation has been around for a while), the International began to argue for the creation of industrial organisations at national and international level within individual sectors of the economy.

The idea was to build a strong, co-ordinated, organised International in two dimensions. Horizontally, there were the locals, or general workers' organisations, which were organised on the basis of locality. Then, vertically organised industrial organisations were envisaged, which would provide regional, national and global solidarity within industries faced with the same problems of organised international capital. This two-way structure was the forerunner of the basic structure that was to be adopted by the emerging anarcho-syndicalist unions some 25 years later.

The International also targeted the state, as the instrument of power over working people. It even mapped out an alternative vision for organisation of society, based on direct democratic control.

Kropotkin outlined how the International envisaged a future communist society functioning:

"... a new form of society is germinating, and must take the place of the old one: a society of equals, who will not be compelled to sell their

hands and brains to those who choose to employ them in a haphazard way, but who will be able to apply their knowledge and capacities to production, in an organism so constructed as to combine all the efforts for procuring the greatest sum possible of well-being for all, while full free scope will be left for every individual initiative. This society will be composed of a multitude of associations, federated for all purposes which require federation;

trade federations for production of all sorts, - agricultural, industrial, intellectual, artistic; communes for consumption, making provision for dwellings, gas works, supplies of food, sanitary arrangements etc.; federations of communes among themselves, and federations of communes with trade organisations, and wider groups covering the country or several countries... All will combine by means of free agreement between them...there will be full freedom for the development of new forms of production, invention and organisation; individual initiative will be encouraged, and the tendency towards uniformity and centralisation will be discouraged. Moreover, this society will continually modify its aspects, because it will be a living evolving organism; no need for government will be felt, because free agreement and federation takes its place in all those functions which government considers its own at the present time... conflicts which may still arise can be submitted to arbitration."

In 1877, the Congress of the International passed a motion warning that unions aimed solely at improving workers conditions "will never lead to the emancipation of the working class; their ultimate goal must be to expropriate the possessing classes, thereby suppressing wage slavery and delivering the means of production into the hands of the workers. It also endorsed the general strike, seeing it as "the means of paralysing capitalist society during the final revolutionary encounter with capitalism". Thus, the International provided a link between the idea developed within Chartism of the "grand national holiday" (see Unit 2), and the idea of the social general strike as a major revolutionary weapon, developed by later anarcho-syndicalists.

Sadly, the 1877 Congress was to be the last meeting of the Anarchist International. Soon after, state repression and an economic downturn forced the workers onto the defensive. With workers increasingly occupied with defending gains on a local or

national scale, the international movement went into deep decline, and lurched towards collapse.

In 1881, an attempt to breathe new life into the international movement was made with the re-launch of an International Association of Working People. Dominated by anarchists, it quickly became known as the "Black International". However, with the workers' movement on the defensive in Europe, it only really made its mark in North America, where it contributed to the growth of anarchism in the bitter struggle for the 8-hour day, which included the Haymarket Tragedy, and thus left its mark on generations of US activists (see Unit 8).

Second International

The next real move towards developing an international organisation was made in 1889, with the launch of the Second International. This time, the impetus came not from trade union organisations but political parties. Chief among these was the German Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD), which, strongly influenced by Marx, was a proponent of the idea of the "conquest of power within existing states". In line with Marxist theory, they argued for the creation of the "popular state", under which the state would take control of industry and manage it on the workers' behalf, as the first stage in the transition to socialism.

The SPD had concentrated increasingly on the peaceful transition to socialism, arguing that the workers only needed to vote to power a socialist party, which would then take control of the state and begin the seamless transition to socialism. As a contemporary described at the time, the SPD developed so that "gradually, the life of the German Social Democratic Party was subordinate to electoral considerations. Trade unions were treated with contempt and strikes were met with disapproval, because both diverted the attention of workers from electoral struggle. Every popular outbreak, every revolutionary agitation in any country in Europe, was received by social democratic leaders with even more animosity than by the capitalist press". With this platform, the SDP built up a popular following in Germany and was successful in getting a number of

deputies elected to the German Reichstag. This aroused great hopes amongst socialists that, by the turn of the century, the social democrats would form a majority within the German parliament. Socialist parties across Europe copied popular 'Erfurt programme' of the SPD. As Lenin later wrote, it became "the model of socialist organisation for the whole world for 50 years or more".

The German SPD had been instrumental in launching the Second International and was to remain the dominant force within it, first through the predominance of Engels and, after his death, the Marxist theorist Klaus Kautsky. Kautsky had produced the Erfurt programme and, under him, any idea of the violent overthrow of capitalism was expunged from the Second International, while great emphasis was placed on his writings, stressing the peaceful transition to socialism through the electoral process.

Despite the domination by political parties, the anarchists attempted to influence the proceedings. At the founding conference, they tabled a motion calling for the general strike to be adopted as the main weapon of workers' struggle. After a long and bitter debate, the motion was overwhelmingly rejected. Instead, the conference endorsed political action aimed at securing state power. Securing a parliamentary majority was to be the main focus of the Second International.

The limited anarchist presence within the Second International came to an abrupt end at the 1896 Congress in London, when they were banned. A motion was passed stating that membership of the International would now only be allowed to groups that recognised "the participation in legislative and parliamentary activity as a necessary means" in the realisation of socialism. The resolution went on to declare, "that therefore anarchists are consequently excluded."

Anarchism was on the wane in the closing decade of the 19th Century, coinciding with the growth in the tactic of "propaganda by deed", which alienated many sections of the working class. In such conditions, reformism began to make steady progress across Europe. The political parties gained partial electoral success, and increasingly viewed strike action and revolutionary agitation as a diversion. Increasingly, extension of the vote became not a means to move forwards, but the number one priority, and the best way to secure better conditions for the working class.

By the turn of the century, Rosa Luxemburg and other activists

Syndicalists regroup

on the left within the International were fighting a rearguard action against reformism, while the Bolsheviks were now present as an obscure minor party from Russia. State ownership of industry was a distant prospect, while the fight for parliamentary seats became paramount. When electoral success did come, for example in France and Germany, the resultant socialist MPs typically succumbed to the trappings of office and furnished their egos and personal ambitions. The French socialist Millerand accepted a post in the capitalist government (see Unit 4). Despite storms of protest from the left, the International duly passed a resolution allowing socialists to take cabinet positions within capitalist governments.

In 1903, Bernstein put forward a resolution stating, *“that the final aim of socialism meant nothing, the day to day movement everything... (and)... capitalism only needed to be developed”* rather than overthrown. The motion was only defeated after bitter argument. In the build-up to the war, electoral politics so dominated the parties of the Second International that success was measured only in the number of votes gained.

The growing reformism of the socialist parties in the Second International assisted the growth of syndicalism in the first years of the 20th Century. Workers who had helped trusted socialist representatives win elections at both local and national level saw them time and again get sucked into the trappings of office, and they felt increasingly betrayed. In office, these socialists argued for the toning down of their party's demands so as not to alienate voters/capitalists, and meanwhile, those expecting the promised improvements to working and living conditions always seemed to be told to wait for just a little longer.

Originating in France (see Unit 4), by 1906, revolutionary syndicalism had exploded onto the scene, driven by growing working class discontent. Often, these new workers' organisations faced bitter opposition from political parties and reformist unions backed by the Second International, and the reformist trade union international, the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC). Soon, the revolutionary syndicalists began to raise the possibility of organising a new revolutionary international to end their organisational isolation.

At the 1907 International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam, delegates from revolutionary syndicalist organisations in 8 countries held concurrent sessions to discuss the establishment of closer international links. The outcome was the Bulletin International du Mouvement Sydicaliste, financed by syndicalist organisations from the Netherlands, Germany, Bohemia, Sweden and France.

Over the next few years, revolutionary syndicalism made rapid headway throughout the world. Ever-greater links were established between the various syndicalist groups, both formal and informal, and the calls for the establishment of an international revolutionary syndicalist movement became more numerous. Simultaneous calls were sent out from the Manchester Conference of the Industrial Syndicalist Education League ISEL and the Dutch, Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat (NAS) in February 1912. Both lamented the lack of a syndicalist International and condemned the existing international organisations.

One invitation declared that, as workers;

“We cannot be rendered impotent by having our international relations conducted through a body that exacts pledges of parliamentarianism and is composed of glib-tongued politicians who promise to do things for us, but do nothing. We must meet as Syndicalists and Direct Actionists to prepare our movement for economic emancipation free from the tutelage of all politicians”.

Syndicalist unions in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Spain and the USA endorsed the calls but they were not welcomed by the CGT in France (see Unit 4). The CGT opposed the setting up of a revolutionary International for reasons peculiar to the way in which the syndicalist movement had developed in France. Being the first union organisation there, the CGT was attempting to

1913 Conference

organise all workers, including those who supported reformism. Some of the French anarcho-syndicalists had responded to this by advocating the idea of a 'conscious' group of revolutionaries organising within CGT, to convince workers of the need for revolutionary change, and thus protect the organisation from becoming reformist. Importantly, they did not envisage a revolutionary 'leadership', separate from the mass organisation. Rather, the revolutionary workers would convince workers by the strength of their argument, conducted through the democratic life of the union.

The CGT revolutionaries then extended their ideas to the reformist International, the ISNTUC (International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres). As a revolutionary organisation, the CGT would work within the reformist International to convince it of the need for revolution. Pointing out that most trade unions were affiliated to the ISNTUC, it called on syndicalist organisations to agitate for revolutionary politics within ISNTUC, rather than establish a separate organisation. In this call, the CGT was alone. Most revolutionary syndicalists were overtly hostile to the ISNTUC. Their experience was typically one of long-term struggle within their countries' respective reformist unions - many had been separated or expelled from them.

With only the CGT in opposition, a conference to set up a new revolutionary international duly took place in London in September 1913. In attendance were delegates from Britain, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Poland, Spain, Cuba, Brazil and Argentina, representing a combined union membership of some 300,000 workers. Also present were observers from a number of IWW affiliates as well as delegates from propaganda organisations such as the ISEL and various anarchist organisations.

Though chaotic at times, the conference discussed a wide range of topics, from anarchist morality to organising international solidarity. It also attempted to codify the basic principles of revolutionary syndicalism. Nowhere was this clearer than on the issue of political neutrality. While in the 1906 Charter of Amiens (often considered the founding document of revolutionary syndicalism - see Unit 4) the CGT had not explicitly stated its opposition to political parties, only the need for independence from them, the 1913 conference was vehemently opposed to party politics.

Many delegates were explicit about their opposition to the state and parliamentary democracy. Duly, the conference adopted a statement that voiced total opposition to the state, capitalism and political parties of all forms - whose very existence is geared to capturing state power. However, the 1913 conference did not create a new international revolutionary syndicalist organisation. The French CGT was held in great esteem, and others were reluctant to set up a new organisation without them. There was also a degree of cynicism and 'wait and see' among many delegates, who felt that the CGT would inevitably split into reformists and revolutionaries, from which the latter would form a specific revolutionary syndicalist organisation and join a newly formed revolutionary International at a later date.

So, instead of forming an International Secretariat to co-ordinate a new International, the Conference established the Syndicalist Information Bureau in Amsterdam, to co-ordinate solidarity, exchange information, and organise a further international conference the following year. The Bureau was seen as a temporary measure - the idea of setting up an International was to be carried over to the next conference.

Though virtually ignored by historians of both left and right, the 1913 conference represents the birth of anarcho-syndicalism as an

The First World War

international movement. It also represents the first attempt to bring the various strands of anarcho-syndicalist thinking into one overarching set of basic principles. Also, given the reformist nature of the Marxist-dominated Second International, the conference marks a major step in the development of the revolutionary international labour movement. While the conference drew fierce criticism from both the capitalist press and the reformist organisations, delegates left it charged up by its success and looking forward to the establishment of an international organisation as the first stage in the world-wide overthrow of capitalism.

Little did they realise that within a year, workers would be slaughtering each other in the carnage of the First World War. The extent to which the socialist parties of the Second International had dropped even the semblance of revolutionary pretensions can be gauged by the stampede to support the First World War. To their credit, the small Bolshevik group was almost alone in the Second International in opposing it. In August 1914, the SPD parliamentary group of 110 MPs announced their unanimous support in favour of war credits. The day before, 14 of the 110 had voted against this, but the dissenting voices agreed to the announcement of a unanimous decision in order to ensure party unity.

In contrast to the Marxists of the Second International, revolutionary syndicalism survived the outbreak of war with its revolutionary credentials intact - the CGT was alone in declaring its support for war. However, the war itself shattered attempts to build an International, and the individual syndicalist organisations were left to organise opposition to the war within their own countries. This was dangerous work, and both in America and Europe, numerous syndicalists were imprisoned and many murdered by the state, due to their opposition to the war.

Throughout the war, the Syndicalist Bureau in Holland did its best to function. In 1915, it attempted to organise a further international conference to combat “nationalism, militarism, capitalism and imperialism”, recognising that the task of opposing the war “fell to the syndicalists”. However, the call was not circulated widely due to the war conditions, and reached no further than the German and Scandinavian radical press.

It was not until 1918, and the end of the war, that an international syndicalist meeting could be convened. Held in Holland, delegates attended it from Norway, Sweden and Denmark, but the German delegation was refused entry into the country. The meeting decided to organise a new international conference, for which invitations to all revolutionary syndicalist organisations would be made. However, attempts to organise this new conference were frustrated when the Dutch government banned it. Attempts to reorganise it in Denmark, and then Sweden, were similarly opposed by the respective governments.

By this time, events in Russia were beginning to cast a long shadow over international syndicalism. The Bolshevik revolution caused major splits within the ranks of the syndicalists in many countries (see Units 11 and 12). It also disrupted the moves towards setting up a revolutionary syndicalist International.

Rise of Bolshevism

It is hard to overemphasise the contempt that revolutionary syndicalists had for reformism. By 1918, they had experienced years of harsh repression for standing up for their beliefs, while the socialist parties had rushed to embrace and organise the national chauvinism that accompanied the war. In the labour movement, many reformist unions had used the war to eradicate the growing 'threat' of syndicalist unions, by signing no-strike agreements in return for being granted sole negotiation rights.

Then came the Russian revolution. Apart from the obvious attraction, and lack of knowledge about the real nature of the Bolshevik party, even those anarcho-syndicalists who harboured misgivings saw in the Bolsheviks an organisation that had constantly opposed the war and called for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. So, when Lenin's Bolsheviks called for an international conference in 1918, many anarcho-syndicalists welcomed it on the grounds that it was seeking to form a revolutionary International. With both workers unrest and syndicalist organisations growing at a phenomenal rate, many syndicalists reasoned that a world revolution could take place shortly, and that a united revolutionary organisation was of urgent necessity to co-ordinate action. One syndicalist summoned up the mood in 1918:

"We knew no fear in those days. Hope overpowered everything".

For his part Lenin, shattered by the news that the SPD supported the war, had long argued and campaigned for the setting up of a new International. Lenin and the Bolsheviks, like the syndicalists, calculated that world revolution was imminent. In 1918, with the international communist movement still weak, Lenin needed the support of the syndicalist organisations (ironically, while many syndicalist groups initially supported the Russian revolution, many Marxist Parties at first did not recognise it as a communist revolution, on the grounds that Marxist theory said this could not take place in backward Russia). The only syndicalist organisation not to receive an invitation was the Russian syndicalists, whose attempt to organise the third All Russian Conference of Anarcho-syndicalists was prevented from going ahead by the Bolshevik party only months before the 1919 conference.

Third International

The international conference duly took place in March 1919 in Moscow. It was badly attended, mainly due to the problems of travelling to the still-isolated Russia. Few delegates arrived from outside the soviet borders, and the meeting did little more than announce the founding of the Third International or Comintern (CI), and call for the immediate seizure of power by the proletariat under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Nothing was said about the Bolsheviks' belief in the need for political centralism under their control. Lenin calculated (not unwisely) that this would lead to the syndicalists withdrawing their support for the new International.

After the conference, the attitudes of the syndicalists towards the communists began to change. With the civil war coming to an end, many anarcho-syndicalists in Russia, who had refused to speak out against the Bolsheviks while the revolution was under threat from the civil war, now began to do so. Information as to the true nature of the Bolsheviks began to circulate. This led to growing doubts about entering an International with the Bolsheviks. Most notably, the Swedish revolutionary union (SAC) and the German Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (FAUD) both opposed the CI and called for a syndicalist International. Hence, the second meeting of the CI in the summer of 1920 took place in very changed circumstances. Several attempts at revolution in central Europe had now tried and failed and the Bolsheviks saw their hopes of imminent world revolution fading. Realising a long-term struggle would be needed, the Bolsheviks changed tactics. Now, just as they had directed the revolution in Russia, they believed that through the CI, they would assume the political leadership of the international revolution.

The various syndicalist delegations setting out for the conference were blissfully unaware of the Bolsheviks' tactical about-turn. The measure of the esteem in which the Russian revolution was still held can be gauged from the elation felt by those few who managed to get through to Russia (the majority were either turned back or arrested on the way). Many later recalled the sense of euphoria of stepping onto Russian soil; this was soon to abruptly evaporate.

Before the CI conference opened, the newly arrived syndicalist delegates were invited to attend a CI Executive Committee. Here, the Bolsheviks announced they were to launch a new international trade union organisation, the Red International of Labour Unions,

ostensibly to counter the reformist International Federation of Trade Unions, recently launched in Amsterdam. The syndicalists were handed a document entitled "To Syndicalists of all Nations". This was presented as a *fait accompli* manifesto. It had been written by Lozovsky, proposed leader of the new trade union International, who was aided by the British syndicalist Murphy, in consultation with Lenin. It contained a clear message; the world syndicalist movement was to become subordinate to the communist political leadership in Moscow. It argued for a "close indestructible alliance between the communist party and the trade unions" and claimed that the aim of the new International should be to set up "communist cells" within reformist unions in order to capture the leadership. The syndicalists rejected the document out of hand.

The CI conference itself provided further controversy. The syndicalists hope for a loose alliance of co-existing groups of disparate ideology, united mainly by their revolutionary commitment, was not to be. On the opening day, the Bolsheviks presented a document stating that the proletariat cannot accomplish its revolution without a political party leading it. They argued that the aim of the revolution was the capture of state power under the leadership of the communist party. Thus, the Bolshevik proposals explicitly repudiated the basic principles of revolutionary syndicalism. They claimed that the syndicalists' rejection of political parties;

"helps only to support the bourgeoisie and counter revolutionaries...They fail to grasp that, without an independent political party, the working class is a body without a head (and, in comparison to revolutionary Marxism)...syndicalism and industrialism are a step backward".

The syndicalist delegates listened in stunned silence before rising spontaneously, one after another, to present their passionate and powerful defences of syndicalism. It is interesting to note the differences in emphasis of these speeches, which reflect the differences within their own countries. Jack Tanner was from the Shop Stewards' Movement in Britain, which placed great emphasis on the importance of factory committees (see Unit 14). While he agreed with the idea of a conscious revolutionary minority he pointed out that, if this formed into a party, it would become detached from the workers' struggle, and a slave to its own power interests.

Another syndicalist, Souchy, stressed an idea dating back to the First International, that revolutions can only be made by the workers themselves. Rather than starting with preconceived notions; *"revolutionary theory should derive from the conscious development of the tendencies and means embedded in the workers' actual struggle with the bourgeoisie"*. To be successful, an International must encompass *"the living spirit of working class movement...found not in the heads of theoreticians but in the heart of workers"*. Replying to the Bolshevik view that workers could not organise the economy, Souchy asked;

"Who is to organise the economy? Some bourgeois elements which we organise into parties, who are not in touch with...economic life, or rather those...near the source of production and consumption?"

Perhaps the most telling speech was from Pestana, from the Spanish CNT (see Units 15-18). Ironically, he was constrained by the mandate he had brought with him from the CNT to support the setting up of the CI. The greatest vision he brought to his speech was about the way revolutions happen. He ridiculed the idea that political parties organise revolutions, and argued convincingly that they blossom out of complex evolutionary processes. For Pestana, the revolution would emerge when there was *"a spiritual condition favourable to change in the norms that govern the life of the people"*. This would be brought about when there was a critical difference between "the people and their aspirations and the organisations that govern them". He openly mocked the idea that the Bolsheviks had made and organised the Russian Revolution, calling their seizure of power a "coup d'etat" (which it clearly was - see Units 11 and 12). As he put it, the Russian revolution was one thing and the Bolshevik seizure of power quite another.

Rise of anarcho-syndicalism

The showdown between the developing ideas of anarcho-syndicalism and the Bolshevik version of Marxism was bound to happen. The fact that it took until 1920 for the differences to turn into open opposition on the international scene is due to a combination of poor communication, misplaced trust in the Bolsheviks, and Lenin's careful attempts to 'manage' international syndicalism. Some of the ideas of anarchism lying at the root of the split with Marxism are outlined in Unit 3, but they are worth airing again here in the international context.

Anarchists have a specific view of human history, and of its role in how we organise and interact. In this view, humans emerged from a pre-historic past dominated by individual struggle, and developed co-operation in order to ensure their group survival. Thus, they were able to maintain themselves against the physical superiority of other species. As a result, the central tenet of humanity emerges, rooted in social solidarity and mutual aid. In the modern world, humans continue to inherit, from their ancestors, the social instinct necessary to maintain a society based on co-operation. Despite capitalism, co-operation over the basics of life is still the norm. We still live largely by a set of social laws, based on common morality, which is itself based on common humanity.

Fundamental to the anarchist view of humanity is the notion of freedom. Without freedom, co-operation becomes coercion. Humans can be forced into 'co-operating' but, at some point, the fundamental desire to act freely will ensure human rebellion. Since co-operation is the essence of human development and progress, the greater the freedom, the greater the growth in human development. Closely linked to freedom, is the concept of equality. If a minority or majority receives more power or material wealth than the remainder of society, then some form of coercion must have arisen in order to maintain inequality. To stay rich, you have to find a way of keeping everyone else poor.

Historically, the main tool of coercion to preserve inequality is the state. This is not directly part of society, but above it, so as to exercise control over it. The state has to get stronger, as more power/wealth inequality is sought. In other words, more inequality needs more coercion, which reduces co-operation and therefore stifles human development. History is full of examples where inequality and coercion have undermined basic humanity. To cite just one, a

commentator in France noted that, due to industrialisation, a large part of the French rural population "stood almost on the level of beast, having lost every trace of humanity as a result of horrible poverty". The individualist within us still exists, and reappears when we are backed into a deep corner. However, even in such dire circumstances, the desire to co-operate persists and will soon re-emerge. Humans seek each other out to ensure basic survival. Once they do this, a common morality will automatically emerge to underpin social relations.

And so the huddled masses, driven off the land and forced to work as slaves in the emerging French capitalist factory system, soon came together to fight their economic destitution. The act of co-operating inevitably brought them into conflict with capitalism. The result was two opposing forces in society; those who sought to maintain power in a society based on coercion and inequality, and those who sought a society based on co-operation, freedom and equality. For the anarchist, the latter is the necessary pre-requisite to the evolution of further human social development, and a new humanity.

The struggle against capitalism is only part of the long struggle for a new and better, more co-operative humanity. Human progress is the result of free co-operation and equality and therefore, it can only occur when inequality and coercion are overcome. In essence, the anarchist view of human history is one of struggle for freedom and an end to the dominance of one human being over another. Revolutions have a distinct (but not exclusive) role in this struggle for freedom. To quote an anarchist far more articulate than the writer, revolutions are;

"only a special phase of the evolutionary process, which appears when social aspirations are so restricted in their natural development by authority, that they have to shatter the old shell by violence before they can function as new factors in human life".

Revolutions are spontaneous. They represent that point in history when the desire for change can no longer be constrained by coercion. Crucially, they are made by masses of people acting together socially in solidarity, co-operation, and free expression. It was on this basis that Pestana attacked the Bolshevik concept of revolution, which Lenin said, "could be planned down to the last

detail” by a small political elite. History demonstrates that revolutions are not planned, but erupt when rulers can no longer contain the desire for freedom and equality. As Pestana argued;

“revolution is the manifestation, more or less violent, of a condition of the spirit favourable to change in the norms governing the life of a people, which by constant labour of several generations...emerges from the shadows at a given moment and destroys without pity all obstacles standing in the way of its goal”.

The crucial point Pestana makes here is that, though revolutions are spontaneous, they do not suddenly appear, but are the end result of a long period of struggle, during which opposition to the rulers and their oppression evolves. This clearly throws out the Marxist argument that revolutions come about as a result of some inevitable law of history, where some indifferent process makes workers automatically into revolutionaries. Revolutions are not automatic. They are not caused by abstract economic laws, but by the subjective desire for freedom.

Anarcho-syndicalism has taken this anarchist view of history and gave it organisational form. It made anarchist ideas a potential reality, by producing a basic structure within which people could co-operate and organise for revolution. While anarchism had identified the basis of humanity and struggle through human history, anarcho-syndicalism took anarchist principles and used them to shape a basic form of organisation that was not only a vision of a new, free society, but would also help create the embryo of such a society, within the shell of the old. Anarcho-syndicalism thus made a hitherto well founded, but disjointed, struggle for a greater humanity and gave it coherence, direction and continuity. In making its starting point the common struggle against capitalism, anarcho-syndicalism sought to encourage a new culture of resistance within the working class - a culture based on solidarity, freedom and equality.

Anarcho-syndicalism also started to develop a sophisticated dynamic - a view of how culture, struggle, revolution, and the new society would develop together. Basically, as people began consciously co-operating in the struggle for equality, the new culture of resistance would develop. As working people gained experience in running their own struggle, they would develop their understanding and ability to run their own workplaces, communities and society. As

they realised the benefits of greater co-operation and its deep link with equality of wealth and power, the new culture would evolve further and mature, until the point when capitalism and its coercive arm the state could no longer contain it. The result would be revolution, centred on the social general strike, that would sweep away the old world based on capitalist oppression and herald the new world based on co-operative organisation and equality.

The anarcho-syndicalists were far from being unsophisticated and disorganised, as both the state and the Marxists would have us believe (as does anyone who wants to be leaders of others). In fact, they were more sophisticated than the Marxists, since they accommodated subjective relations into their model of revolution, and they certainly believed in the primacy of organisation. The local anarcho-syndicalist organisations were both economic and social, centred on day-to-day life both in the community and workplace. They were the basic core of the new society, and they ensured that working people could direct their own struggle both before, during and, if a coup was prevented, after the revolution. Resistance would be organised until the point was reached at which it could no longer be contained. Then, the conscious masses themselves would make the revolution. It would be spontaneous, but planned for. After it, the local organisations would be the starting point from which new democratic structures would emerge to form the basis of a new society.

Demise of the CI

For their part, the Bolsheviks had not broken free from Marxist determinism, as the anarcho-syndicalists attending the CI Conference in 1920 had apparently hoped. They still maintained that all inequality was rooted in economic inequality, and that society was little more than a social superstructure built on the edifice of economic production. All that was needed was to change the nature of production via state control and the very nature of society would automatically change with it.

The only difference between the Bolsheviks and the Marxists of the Second International was that they rejected the idea that state

Founding of the IWA

control could be ultimately achieved through the ballot box. Instead, they favoured seizing state power through an insurrection planned, organised and controlled by a small political elite in the form of the communist party.

Once the syndicalists realised the Bolsheviks' strategy of controlling the CI through a rigged voting system, they took very little part in the proceedings of the 1920 CI Conference. It ended with the passing of 21 conditions that must be met before being accepted into the Comintern, aimed at ensuring that only communist parties could join. Furthermore, these "would be purified, highly centralised, disciplined, resolute and wholly reliable organs of the international staff of the proletarian revolution." Only those unions who supported the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' through the conquest of political power made admittance to the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU).

It was to take a further meeting of the RILU before the syndicalists finally abandoned the idea of uniting the world's revolutionary unions. In late December 1920, a syndicalist conference was held in order to formulate an approach to the next RILU conference. The Berlin syndicalists adopted 7 points that would have to be accepted by the RILU so that syndicalists could join. The most important were that the RILU must be completely independent of political parties and that the socialist reorganisation of society could only be carried out by the economic organisations of the working class. The Bolshevik-controlled RILU meeting duly rejected all 7 points, and the RILU was made completely subordinate to the Comintern.

The final breach between revolutionary syndicalism and Bolshevism had occurred. At the 1921 FAUD Congress in October, syndicalist delegates from Germany, Sweden, Holland, Czechoslovakia and the US section of the IWW met and decided to hold a new international congress in Berlin in 1922, with the aim of forming a new International of revolutionary syndicalists.

In December 1922, the International Congress of Syndicalists met in Berlin, with delegates from the Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA), the Chilean IWW, the Danish Union for Syndicalist Propaganda, the German FAUD, the Dutch NAS, the Italian Unione Sindicale Italiana (USI), the Mexican Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT), the Norwegian Norsk Syndikalistik Federation (NSF), the Portuguese Confederaçao General do Trabalho (CGT), and the Swedish Sverige Arbtares Centralorganisation (SAC).

The Spanish CNT, engaged in a bitter struggle with the Spanish state, sent messages of support to the Congress after their delegation was arrested on the way to the conference. Though many of the organisations represented had already endured bitter state repression, they still totalled several millions of workers.

The Congress adopted the name of the First International, the International Working Men's Association, which was later changed to the International Workers' Association (IWA). It also adopted a programme, which for the first time, codified anarcho-syndicalism into a number of basic principles. In general, this was based on ideas from the 1913 conference but it also took into account the lessons learned from the Russian revolution. For instance, earlier advocates of the general strike had argued that workers' economic power was such that a largely peaceful orderly transfer of power could take place. The Russian revolution had dispelled any such notions.

The conference still recognised the social general strike as the highest expression of direct action, but they now saw it as merely the prelude to social revolution, which would probably have to be defended by violent means. While recognising that violence may be necessary, they stipulated that defence of the revolution should be completely in the hands of the workers themselves, organised in workers' militias, accountable and controlled by the wider workers' movement.

Centralism, political parties, parliamentarianism and the state, including the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, were all emphatically rejected. The Congress also rejected the Marxist concept that liberation would, as one delegate put it, come about;

"by virtue of some inevitable fatalism of rigid natural laws which admit no deviation; its realisation will depend above all upon the conscious will and the force of revolutionary action of the workers and will be

Postscript

determined by them”.

The programme also made clear that syndicalism opposed, not only economic inequality, but also all forms of inequality and dominance. It also stated its total opposition to war and militarism. In terms of post-capitalist organisation, the programme envisages a system of economic communes and administrative organs, based within a system of free councils federated locally, regionally and up to the global level. These would form the basis of a self-managed society, in which workers in every branch of industry and at every level would regulate the production and distribution process according to the needs and interests of the community, by mutual agreement, according to a pre-determined plan. The revolutionary aim was stipulated as seeking to replace the government of people by the management of things.

The 1922 IWA founding conference marked a watershed in the development of anarcho-syndicalism. Ideas and tactics developed through practical direct action and self-organisation across the world were brought together and distilled into a clear set of aims and principles. What is more, workers from different parts of the world, facing widely varying problems and conditions, agreed upon these aims and principles. They described the fundamental core of anarcho-syndicalism, and they remain fundamentally in place and just as relevant today (even if the syntax and grammar seems a little dated!) In 1922, for the first time, anarcho-syndicalism was defined as an international movement.

In the years following the founding Congress, unions and propaganda groups from France, Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Poland and Rumania affiliated to the new anarcho-syndicalist International. Later, the Asociación Continental Americana de los Trabajadores (ACAT - American Continental Association of Workers) affiliated *en bloc*, including unions and propaganda groups from Chile, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Cuba, Costa Rica and El Salvador. At one time or another in the period 1923-39, the IWA had affiliates in 15 countries in Europe, 14 in Latin America and one in Japan, while maintaining sympathetic contact with labour organisations in India.

However, despite the size and early growth of the IWA, it had formed against a background of mounting repression. Even at the 1922 founding Congress, the delegates from USI warned of the rising danger of fascism and reported that already, a number of USI members had been murdered by marauding groups of fascists. In the 1920s, the USI was an astoundingly large organisation of some 600,000 members but, within a few years of Mussolini coming to power, the fascists had annihilated it. This was soon followed by the merciless destruction of the German FAUD by the Nazis. The CNT in Spain, which became the biggest affiliate to IWA in the 1930s, was executed out of existence by the Franco regime during and following the tragedy of the 1936-9 Spanish revolution (Units 15-18). By the end of the Second World War, repression had wiped out much of the pre-war anarcho-syndicalist movement, leaving only a handful of much smaller organisations struggling to keep the ideas of anarcho-syndicalism alive.

In Britain, it was not repression that undermined anarcho-syndicalism, but the attraction of communism. However, not before the syndicalist movement left its mark on the British labour movement. In Unit 14, we will focus on the British syndicalist movement, before going on to study the Spanish CNT and the Spanish Revolution and Civil War, which provides an able demonstration of how a society run on the principles of anarcho-syndicalism worked in practice.

Key points

- The anarchist wing of the First International continued to function in the 1870s. It developed within it the basic principles of anarcho-syndicalism.
- The anarchists attempted to exert some influence on the Second International but were unable to steer it from its reformist pro-parliamentary path and were soon excluded.
- As syndicalist organisations developed across the world prior to WW1, links were established but no international set up due to reluctance of the French CGT to take part at that time.
- After the Russian Revolution the Bolsheviks established the Third International (Comintern) and attempted to recruit the existing syndicalist unions. These overtures were rejected as the Bolshevik tactics became clear.
- The anarcho-syndicalist international was finally established in December 1922 in Berlin.

Checklist

1. In what way did the anarchist wing of First International seek to organise after the split of 1872?
2. On what basis was the Second International established?
3. What were the main reasons for the opposition of the French CGT to the forming of an anarcho-syndicalist international in 1913?
4. Why did the syndicalist unions reject Bolshevik attempts to enlist them in the Comintern?
5. What were the main points of the programme adopted by anarcho-syndicalists at the founding of the IWA in 1922?

Answer suggestions

1. *In what way did the anarchist wing of First International seek to organise after the split of 1872?*

The International was to be organised in two dimensions. Horizontally, there were to be the general workers' organisations, which were organised on the basis of locality. Then, vertically organised industrial organisations were envisaged, which would provide regional, national and global solidarity within industries faced with the same problems of organised international capital. This two-way structure was the forerunner of the basic structure that was to be adopted by the emerging anarcho-syndicalist unions some 25 years later.

2. *On what basis was the Second International established?*

The impetus for the Second International came not from political parties, chiefly the German Marxist SPD, which was an advocate of the idea of the "conquest of power within existing states". The Second International concentrated on the peaceful transition to socialism through the creation of the "popular state", created by the voting into power of socialist parties. The state would take control of industry and manage it on the workers' behalf, as the first stage in a seamless transition to socialism.

3. *What were the main reasons for the opposition of the French CGT to the forming of an anarcho-syndicalist international in 1913?*

It was due to the way in which the syndicalist movement had developed in France the CGT opposed the setting up of a revolutionary International. Being the first union organisation in France, the CGT was attempting to organise all workers, including those who supported reformism. The CGT wanted to work within the ISNTUC, the reformist International, to convince it of the need for revolution. It argued that as most trade unions were affiliated to the ISNTUC other syndicalist organisations should also agitate for revolutionary politics within ISNTUC, rather than establish a separate organisation.

4. *Why did the syndicalist unions reject Bolshevik attempts to enlist them in the Comintern?*

With the establishing of the Comintern it was proposed that syndicalist unions were to become subordinate to Bolshevik political leadership. The aim of the International was to capture the leadership of the reformist unions by setting up communist cells within them. The syndicalists had hoped for a loose alliance of co-existing groups of disparate ideology, united mainly by their revolutionary commitment. The Bolsheviks stated that the proletariat cannot accomplish its revolution without a political party leading it and that the aim of the revolution was the capture of state power under the leadership of the communist party.

5. *What were the main points of the programme adopted by anarcho-syndicalists at the founding of the IWA in 1922?*

It adopted a programme codifying anarcho-syndicalism into a number of basic principles. These were based on ideas from the 1913 conference but it also took into account the lessons learned from the Russian revolution. The conference recognised the social general strike as the highest expression of direct action seeing it as the prelude to social revolution. They stipulated that defence of the revolution should be completely in the hands of the workers themselves, organised in workers' militias, accountable and controlled by the wider workers' movement.

Centralism, political parties, parliamentarianism and the state, including the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, were all categorically rejected. The programme also made clear that syndicalism opposed, not only economic, but all forms of inequality and dominance. It also stated its total opposition to war and militarism. In terms of post-capitalist organisation, the programme envisages a system of economic communes and administrative organs, based within a system of free councils federated locally, regionally and globally. These would form the basis of a self-managed society, in which workers in every branch of industry and at every level would regulate the production and distribution process according to the needs and interests of the community, by mutual agreement, according to a pre-determined plan. The revolutionary aim was stipulated as seeking to replace the government of people by the management of things.

Suggested discussion points

- Should the establishment of the IWA be seen only as a direct response to the Bolshevik-dominated Third International?
- Prior to 1914 the French CGT argued that anarcho-syndicalists should attempt to work within reformist union internationals. How relevant is this argument today?

Appendix

Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism as adopted by the First International Convention of the International Workers' Association (IWA) in Berlin, 1922.

1. Revolutionary Syndicalism, basing itself on the class war, aims at the union of all manual and intellectual workers in economic fighting organisations struggling for their emancipation from the yoke of wage-slavery and the oppression of the State. Its goal is the re-organisation of social life on the basis of Free Communism, by means of the revolutionary action of the working class itself. It considers that the economic organisations of the of the proletariat are alone capable of realising this aim, and in consequence, its appeal is addressed to workers in their capacity as producers and creators of social riches, in opposition to the modern political labour parties which can never be considered at all from the point of view of economic re-organisation.

2. Revolutionary Syndicalism is the confirmed enemy of every form of economic and social monopoly, and aims at their abolition by means of economic communes and administrative organs of factory and field workers on the basis of a free system of councils entirely liberated from subordination to any Government or political party. Against the politics of the State and of parties it erects the economic organisation of labour; against the Government of people, it sets up the management of things. Consequently, it has not for its object the conquest of political power, but the abolition of every State function in social life. It considers that, along with the monopoly of property, should disappear also the monopoly of domination, and that any form the "dictatorship of the proletariat" will always be the creator of new monopolies and new privileges. It could never be an instrument of liberation.

3. The double task of Revolutionary Syndicalism is as follows: on the one hand it pursues the daily revolutionary struggle for the economic, social and intellectual improvement of the working class within the framework of existing society; on the other hand its ultimate goal is to raise the masses to the independent management of production and distribution, as well as to transfer into their own hands all of the ramifications of social life. It is convinced that the organisation of an economic system, resting on the producer and built up from below upwards, can never be regulated by Governmental decrees, but only by the common action of all manual and intellectual workers in every branch of industry, by the conduct of factories by the producers themselves in such a way that each group, workshop or branch of industry is an autonomous section of the general economic organisation, systematically developing production and distribution in the interests of the entire community in accordance with a well-determined plan and on the basis of mutual agreements.

4. Revolutionary Syndicalism is opposed to every centralist tendency and organisation, which is but borrowed from the State and the Church, and which stifles methodically every spirit of initiative and every independent thought. Centralism is an artificial organisation from top to bottom, which hands over en bloc to a handful of people, the regulation of the affairs of a whole community. The individual becomes, therefore, nothing but an automaton directed and moved from above. The interests of the community yield place to the privileges of a few; personal responsibility by a soul-less

discipline; real education by a veneer. It is for this reason that Revolutionary Syndicalism advocates federalist organisation; that is to say, an organisation, from below upwards, of a free union of all forces on the basis of common ideas and interests.

5. Revolutionary Syndicalism rejects all parliamentary activity and all co-operation with legislative bodies. Universal Suffrage, on however wide a basis, cannot bring about the disappearance of the flagrant contradictions existing in the very bosom of modern society; the parliamentary system has but one object, viz., to lend the appearance of legal right to the reign of lies and social injustice, to persuade slaves to fix the seal of the law onto their own enslavement.

6. Revolutionary Syndicalism rejects all arbitrarily fixed political and national frontiers, and it sees in nationalism nothing else but the religion of the modern State, behind which are concealed the material interests of the possessing classes. It recognises only regional differences, and demands for every group the right of self-determination in harmonious solidarity with all other associations of an economic, territorial or national order.

7. It is for these same reasons that Revolutionary Syndicalism opposes militarism in all its forms, and considers anti-militarist propaganda one of its most important tasks in the struggle against the present system. In the first instance, it urges individual refusal of military service, and especially, organised boycotting of the manufacture of war materials.

8. Revolutionary Syndicalism stands on the platform of direct action, and supports all struggles which are not in contradiction with its aims, viz., the abolition of economic monopoly and of the domination of the State. The methods of struggle are the strike, the boycott, sabotage etc. Direct action finds its most pronounced expression in the general strike which, at the same time, from the point of view of Revolutionary Syndicalism, ought to be the prelude to the social revolution.

9. Although enemies of all forms of organised violence in the hands of any Government, the Syndicalists do not forget that the decisive struggle between the Capitalism of today and the Free Communism of tomorrow will not take place without serious collisions. They recognise violence therefore, as a means of defence against the methods of violence of the ruling classes, in the struggle of the revolutionary people for the expropriation of the means of production and of land. Just as this expropriation cannot be commenced and carried to a successful issue except by the revolutionary economic organisations of the workers, so also the defence of the revolution should be in the hands of these economic organisations, and not in those of any military or other organisations operating outside the economic organs.

10. It is only in the revolutionary economic organisations of the working class that is to be found the power apt to carry out its emancipation, as well as the creative energy necessary for the re-organisation of society on the basis of Free Communism.

Further Reading

Anarcho-syndicalism. Rudolph Rocker. Phoenix Press. ISBN 0948 984058. £4.50. -AK- -BS- -LI-

Covers the period of the creation of the IWA by someone who was directly involved. A widely acclaimed classic.

Memoirs of a Revolutionist. Peter Kropotkin. Black Rose Books. ISBN 0921 689187. £11.99. -AK- -BS- -LI-

Another first-hand contemporary account of the setting up of the IWA, this time in Kropotkin's remarkable autobiography. Invaluable.

The Workers Themselves: Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour. Wayne Thorpe. Kluwer Academic Publ. -LI-

Academic perspective, but nevertheless an extremely good chronology of the events leading up to the creation of the IWA and the Bolshevik International. One of the best specific texts on the period.

The CNT in the Russian Revolution. Ignacio DeLlorens. KSL Pamphlets. £1. -AK-

Cheap and cheerful pamphlet specifically on the Bolshevik's moves to woo the CNT into the Red International and the CNT finding out what they were really about.

The Revolutionary Left in Spain 1914-1923. Gerald H Meaker. Stanford University Press, 1974. ISBN 0-8047-0845-2 -LI-

In-depth academic historian account of the early years of the CNT in Spain, including their decision to join the IWA.

History of the Three Internationals. William Z Foster. International Publishers Co., 1955. -LI-

Dry but revealing account of the revolutionary internationals.

Notes: The Further Reading outlined is not designed to be an exhaustive bibliography or a prescriptive list. It is always worth consulting your local library.

To assist Course Members, an indication is given alongside each reference as to how best to obtain it. The codes are as follows: -LI- try libraries (from local to university), -AK- available from AK Distribution (Course Member discount scheme applies if you order through SelfEd, PO Box 29, SW PDO, Manchester M15 5HW), -BS- try good bookshops, -SE- ask SelfEd about loans or offprints).