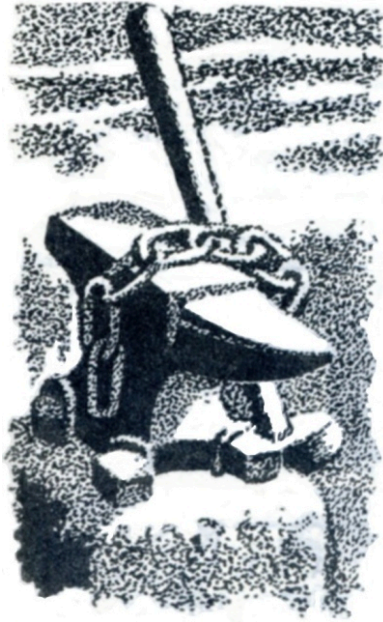


**Anarchism,
Trade
Unionism,
Councilism
and
Revolutionary
Syndicalism.**



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Libertarian Anthology III

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This third issue of Libertarian Anthology is devoted to the topic of trade unionism and the evolvment by one of the groupings within it to revolutionary ideals; whom ever has taken the patience to study both the economic and political development of society over the past two centuries will come to realise that the goals of anarcho-syndicalism did not evolve from unachievable utopic concepts conveyed by a few lunatic innovative goodhearted individuals, instead, these goals are the outcome of constant struggles within the maladjusted social conditions. As a result we have the pleasure in presenting the reader with a collection of articles which we hope will demystify the misunderstanding of anarcho-syndicalism.

There has always existed at every cross point within any defined period in history the continuous dilemma for anarchists whether to belong to a trade organisation or not. This dilemma can be traced back to the perpetual conflict within the anarchist ideology between the individualist and the collectivist and therefore it must be recognised that anarcho-syndicalism is not an accepted method of action by all anarchists.

There are many anarchists that agree with Edouard Dolleans' opinion that the ideal of anarcho-syndicalism evolved from two incompatible concepts: anarchism which is revolutionary and syndicalism which is reformist, subsequently many anarchists hold the belief such fusion will be as impossible as water and fire.

Nevertheless, wherever the human drive intervenes anything is possible. Even with the admission that many struggles have been lost, one cannot deny the historical revolutionary force anarcho-syndicalism has been in many countries and the revival it is currently experiencing.

The various trends of anarcho-sydicalisms, and we use this term because there has been different schools of anarcho-syndicalism both within Europe and America, have not always seen eye to eye and on many occasions there has existed severe disagreements amongst these revolutionary syndicalist organisations of equal anarchist aspirations. During the 1920's one could follow in the pages of "La Protesta" published in Buenos Aires (the journal of FORA -the Argentinean Regional Worker's Federation- edited by López Arango and Diego Abad de Santillán), a continuous critique against all the European anarcho-syndicalist organisations, including the spanish CNT as well as the revolutionary syndicalist IWW of the United States, because in the eyes of the Buenos-Airens these organisations failed to implement the puritan anarchist ideology.

When dealing with the topic of industrial unionism, the old anarchist militants can be neither apologetic of the past nor of a unionism that, if it had certain puritan glimpses has irretrievably lost them in the course of the last 80 years not only in Spain but in the entire world.

The Unions that anarchists have always proposed have no resemblance with the hierarchical structure of conventional trade unionism *-be it catholic or any*

other religious denomination, Communist, Socialist or ALP controlled- nor does the organisational structure that anarchists seek can really continue to be called trade unions taking into account what contemporary unions represent in today's social struggles. Anarchists nevertheless recognize the need to continue calling them as such, because what really matters is both its internal and external functioning as well as its purpose as an association of workers. The Union that anarchists propose to the workers of the world is a federalist self-managed union and one that exercises its right of direct action. The Union is the workers anti-hierarchical organisation through which workers can emancipate themselves, this is the reason why anarchists join a union. Anarchists do not join the union to build trade unions, to take over, to establish a career path or to participate in the union bureaucratic plans to conquer economic advances exclusively within the framework of the present State orientated society, *-and the reality is that they can not work within hierarchically structured unions-* instead, anarchists join the union with the project to destroy the State, to lay the foundations of a society with no bureaucracy, without privileges and without authority. Anarchists also realise that the economic demands -both social and materialistic- are requirements for the incorporation of the workers to fight for the defence of their interests. Knowing this, anarchists do not underestimate the mobilization that such a struggle generates; instead anarchists support these struggles with the added emphasis on the importance of a revolutionary action against both the State and Capital. Anarchists do not see the industrial struggle as a separate objective; quite the opposite, it is seen as a necessity of the anti-authoritarian struggle within this society against the exploitation of the workforce by the capitalists. There is no possible separation of industrial struggle and revolutionary struggle, an issue that anarchists have always clearly articulated.

Revolutionary syndicalism or anarcho-syndicalism evolves from the basic principles that the daily demands of labour against capital must be made revolutionarily, that is, with an emphasis on those contradictions that make both concepts an incompatible matter. To only propose the realization of economic benefits as the goal of any struggle or confrontation between workers and employers and negotiating on behalf of the workers without their direct participation, is in itself the tactic of "intermediary" trade unionism. It is not only economic benefits which workers require when taking into account the inflationary increases to the cost of living, but also the awareness and consciousness that workers themselves acquire and develop when resolving their own problems without the need to refer them to committees of specialists or arbitration commissions who miserably waste everyone's time arguing over a couple of dollars when in fact it is society that needs to be changed so that production, technology and the exchange of labour can be managed by the workers themselves, for they are the ones that perform the actual process of production on a daily basis.

Anarcho-syndicalism is neither an instrument nor an appendix of anarchism.

It neither functions nor depends upon the blessings of a “central committee”. It has undeniable and indestructible anarchist roots - which constitutes one of its most essential reasons for existing and therefore the best guarantee for its independence.

One of the characteristics and more significant virtues of anarcho-syndicalism is the absolute respect to the personality of the individual affiliate, whom, is constantly encouraged to participate on a voluntary basis in the life and in the progress of the Union, its sections, its federations, in other words the organization in general; to assume their own responsibilities; to freely expose their ideas and opinions, and to make choices and decisions in meetings; to participate directly in the activities and in the struggles; to put into practice those decisions agreed upon by general consensus.

In an anarcho-syndicalist union decisions are made at “grass root” level in an assembly. Positions of delegates or representatives are subject to a limited tenure (depending upon the position the period can vary between six to twelve months) and the holders of these positions can be recalled at any time; both bureaucracy and leadership are rejected.

Anarcho-syndicalism argues that neither freedom nor social justice can exist within a society based on classes, and that the fundamentals of such a society perpetuate and enshrine the division of people. Furthermore, any reform that does not destroy these foundations will not change the conditions for workers, who will continue to be oppressed and exploited. As a result it opposes; the collaboration of classes, the concept of co-management and rejects the political intervention in capitalist industry. There is an absolute incompatibility between anarcho-syndicalism and the state-capitalist system.

In accordance with its anti-authoritarian principles anarcho-syndicalism is anti-parliamentarian for it considers that such an institution will be absolutely ineffective in the emancipation of the working class. The historical reflection of achievements by these so called working-class political parties be they socialist, marxist or of democratic denomination who from almost the mid-19th century to the present day, have come to gain absolute majority and form Governments in certain periods and places, as we have thus seen in Germany, England, France, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Australia and in so many other Nations, have more than eloquently demonstrated the absurdity and the unproductiveness of their representation in defence of the working class.

Anarcho-syndicalism conveys the inevitable reality that once a political party assumes control of government, no matter how it may define itself, the mechanisms and forces prevailing both within it and the entity of government, diverts it to serve the interest of capitalism and the State, on behalf of the “national” interest and at the expense of the working class.

The basis of Trade Unionism

by Emile Pouget

DEFINITION OF TRADE UNIONISM [1]

Of late the term “trade unionism” has a far more far-reaching meaning than it used to have. The term continues to qualify “members of a trade union organisation.” Besides this nebulous and colourless definition, which, by stretching a point, might be a label for “Yellow” as well as for “Red” trade unions, the term has acquired a new and very precise meaning.

The term “trade unionism” has become a comprehensive term: the impulsive power of conscious workers towards progress. The workers who invoke this epithet have thrown aside unsound and deceptive notions, and are convinced that improvements, be they partial or extreme, can only result from popular force and will. On the ruins of their former sheeplike hopes and superstitious beliefs in miracles to be expected from State Providence as well as from Divine Providence, they have elaborated a healthy, truly human doctrine whose basis is explained and proved by social phenomena.

The trade unionist is evidently a partisan of grouping workers by means of trade unions, only he does not conceive a trade union as an agent for narrowing his vision to such a point that his sphere of action is restricted to daily debates and wrangles with his employers; and although at present he strives to get minor grievances redressed, he never puts aside the evils arising from the exploitation of the workers. Neither does he conceive the trade union to be, as some politi-

Emile Pouget was the author of numerous pamphlets amongst the better renown we find “The Party of Labour”, “In the Unions”, “The idea of the General Strike”, “Sabotage” and “The basis of trade unionism”, this last one being the article we have elected to incorporate within the pages of the 3^d issue of Libertarian Anthology due to the rich historical background it provides on the development of trade unionism. *The basis of trade unionism* first appeared as a “Voice of Labour” Pamphlet, Published in 1908 by Tom.H. Keell (editor of Freedom -*British Anarchist newspaper*- during the First World War), 127 Ossulston St., London, N.W.

cians do, an “elementary school of Socialism”, where men are recruited and trained to be aggressive fighters in a cause they consider effective and worthwhile - the conquest of governmental power.

For the trade unionist, the trade union is a perfect combination answering to all needs, to all aspirations, and therefore sufficient for all purposes. It is an association conceived by “reformers” affording opportunity for daily conflict with employers, for improvements, and for settling minor claims.

But it is not only this; it is a combination capable of bringing about the expropriation of capital and the reorganisation of society, which some Socialists, who are deceived by their confidence in the “State”, believe will be brought about by the seizure of political power.

Therefore, for the trade unionist the trade union is not a transient association, only suited to the needs of the hour, and whose usefulness could not be conceived apart from its present surroundings. For him the trade union is an initial and essential combination; it should arise spontaneously, independently of all preconceived theories, and develop in any surroundings.

In fact, what more reasonable than for the exploited of the same trade to come together, to agree to unite in defence of common advantages that are to be gained immediately?

On the other hand, supposing society to have been annihilated and a Communist or any other society to have blossomed forth on its ruins, it is evident that in these circumstances, in these new surroundings, the need of associations, bringing men employed in identical or similar work and duties in contact with one another, will be most urgent.

Thus the trade union, the corporate body, appears to be the organic cell of all society. At present, for the trade unionist the trade union is an organism of conflict and claim of worker against employer. In the future it will be the base on which normal society will be built, when freed from exploitation and oppression.

THE WORKING CLASS BATTLES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The conception of the forerunners of trade unionism is not the result of a hypothetical system sprung from some brain and not justified by practical tests; on the contrary, it proceeds from the examination of historical events and of their clear interpretation. We may say that it is the result of a whole century of conflict between the working classes and the middle classes.

During the whole of the nineteenth century the proletariat strove to separate its movement from that of the purely political action of middle-class parties. This was indeed a great effort, for the middle classes wanting to govern without hindrance, the assent or indifference of the proletariat was necessary, and politicians exerted themselves, not only to fight and massacre proletarians when they rose against their exploiters, but also to make them tractable by a sham education, designed to turn them on from the examination of economic questions, and to cause their energy to drift towards the deceptive hope of democracy.

We cannot make it too clear that the autonomous working-class movement has been, and is still, obstructed by all the forces of obscurantism and reaction, and also by the democratic forces that are, but under new and hypocritical disguises, the continuation of old societies in which a handful of parasites and maintained in plenty by the forced labour of plebeians.

The middle classes, through the State, whose function, independently of its form, consists in protecting capitalist privileges, have applied themselves to stifling and deviating working class aspirations. Thus, during attempts at emancipation proletarians have been compelled to realise that the Governments they were subjected to were all alike, no matter by what name they were labelled. They passed from one rule to another without deriving any result from change of scenery, mentioned by history as of great importance. All governments treated them with animosity and ill-will. When they obtained from their rulers a mitigation of their wretched fate, they owed it, not to feelings of justice or pity, but to the wholesome fear they were able to inspire. To government initiative they are indebted for Draconian legislation, arbitrary measures, and savage reprisals.

Antagonisms between the state and the working classes dominate the whole of the nineteenth century. We see it most plainly when we observe that governments, by way of throwing their enemies a bone to gnaw, have readily conceded political rights to the people, while they have shown themselves intractable as far as regards economic liberties. In the latter case they have only given way to popular pressure.

The difference in behaviour on the part of the rulers is easily explained. Recognition of political rights to the people does the governments no harm, as these baubles do not imperil the principle of authority and do not undermine the class basis of society.

It is another story when economic liberties are in question. These are of real advantage to the people, and can only be acquired at the expense of the privileged. It is therefore evident that the State, the upholder of capitalism, refuses to

the last to grant a particle of economic improvement.

The demonstration of this permanent conflict of the working class with the State would lead us into writing a martyrology of the proletariat. To prove the truth and constancy of this antagonism a few historical landmarks will suffice.

Less than two years after the taking of the Bastille (June 1791), the bourgeoisie, by its mouthpiece, the Constituent Assembly, despoiled the working classes of their right to form associations, [2] a right they had just obtained by revolutionary means.

The workers believed the Revolution to be the dawn of economic freedom. They thought the burning gates of Paris where town dues were collected (June 12, 1789) would destroy all barriers. Let us add that two days after the burning of the gates of Paris, the Bastille was taken by assault, not because it was a political prison, but because it was a danger to rebellious Paris, as was the Mont Valérien in 1871.

Workers taken in by the enthusiastic strains of pamphleteers thought themselves freed from the trammels of the ancient régime, and began to come to an understanding with one another and to group themselves in order to resist exploitation. They formulated precise claims. The bourgeoisie soon proved to them that the Revolution was only political and not economic. It elaborated repressive laws, and as the workers lacked knowledge and experience, as their agitation was confused and still incoherent, it was not hard for the government to check this movement.

We should be mistaken in supposing that the Chapelier law was expedient, and that those who voted for it ignored its effect on social life. To make us swallow this fanciful interpretation, we are told that Revolutionists of that period raised no protest against it. Their silence only shows us that they ignored the social aspect of the Revolution they took part in, and that they were only pure Democrats. Moreover, there is nothing astonishing in their great want of foresight, and even today we see men pretending to be Socialists who are also merely simple Democrats.

As a proof that the parliamentarians of 1791 knew what they were about, some months later, in September 1791, the Constituent Assembly strengthened the Chapelier law prohibiting combinations among industrial workers, by enacting another law that made associations of agricultural labourers illegal.

The Constituent was not the only Assembly that manifested its hatred of the working masses. All Assemblies that followed strove to tighten the bounds enslaving the worker to his employer. More than this, seeing that passing laws

trying to make it impossible for workmen to discuss and defend their interests was insufficient, bourgeois Assemblies contrived to aggravate the wretched position of proletarians by putting them under absolute police control.

The Convention did not prove more sympathetic to the working classes. In the month of Nivôse of the year II, it legislated "against coalition of workmen, employed in different trades, who, by writing or by emissaries, incite to the cessation of work." This behaviour of the Convention, the revolutionarism of which meets with so much praise, clearly proves that political opinions have nothing to do with economic interests. A still better proof is that, in spite of the changes in governmental forms, starting from the Democracy of the Convention, the Autocracy of Napoleon I, the Monarchy of Charles X, to the Constitutionalism of Louis-Phillipe, never were the severity of the laws against workmen mitigated.

Under the consulate, in the year XI (1803), a new link to the slaves' chain was forged the Certificate Book, this made the working men a class of specifically registered individuals. Then, with their vile and crafty legal procedure, and their lawyers who drafted the Code we still suffer from, rulers tied down and gagged the proletariat so well that Louis XVIII and Charles X, heirs to this baggage, did not need to increase it.

Nevertheless, in spite of severe legislative prohibitions, the workers came to an understanding, grouped themselves under mild forms such as "mutualities", and constituted embryo trade unions for organising resistance. The combinations grew to such an extent that strikes multiplied, and the Liberal government of Louis-Phillipe inflicted greater penalties against associations (1834). But the impetus had been given! This recrudescence of legal severity did not stop the movement of the workers. In spite of the law, the Sociétés de Résistance multiplied, and was followed by a period of growing agitation and numerous strikes.

The Revolution of 1848 was the result of this movement. A proof of the economic scope of this Revolution is that economic questions took precedence over all others. Unfortunately, the corporate groups lacked experience. The urban workers ignored the peasants, and vice versa. Thus in 1848 the peasants did not stir, not understanding the working class movement; likewise in 1852 the town workers understood nothing of the peasants' attempt at insurrection. In spite of these failures -and there were many others- all improvements were due to working class energy. It was the will of the workers that was expressed in the Luxembourg Commission and was legally registered by the Provisional Government.

In the first hours of the Revolution the frightened middle classes showed

themselves conciliatory, and to save capitalism were disposed to sacrifice a few trifling privileges. They were, however, soon reassured, by the inoculation of the people with a political virus -universal suffrage- as much as by inconsistency on the part of the cooperative organisations, and their ferocity became as great as had been their fear. The massacres of June 1848 were for the middle classes the first instalment of satisfaction. Soon after, in 1849, the representatives of the people, proving themselves simply the representatives of the middle classes, legislated against associations. They were prohibited, and their members subjected to penalties decreed in the law of 1810.

As the reaction of Louis-Phillipe failed to check the working class movement, so did the Republican and Napoleonic governments fail. Without troubling themselves about the form of government, or with the prohibition to combine, the corporate groups continued to develop in number and in strength, so much so that by their pressure on public authorities they wrung from the government legal sanction for the ameliorations and liberties they had forcibly acquired, thanks to their revolutionary vigour.

It was by what we now call Direct Action that the right of combination was wrung from Caesarism in 1864. The workers of all associations grouped themselves, combined and went on strike without taking the least heed of the law. Beyond all others, the printers distinguished themselves by their revolutionary character, and in Paris (1862) one of their strikes was the determining event that brought about the recognition of the right to combine. The government, blind like all others, thought to kill the movement by striking a great blow and wholesale arrests took place. All the members of the strike committee were imprisoned, as well as the most active amongst the strikers.

This arbitrary abuse of power, far from terrorising, excited public opinion, and such a current of indignation resulted from it that the government was obliged to capitulate, and to recognise the workers' right to combination. This was due only to pressure from without. It would be difficult to attribute this success to Socialist deputies, for the excellent reason that there were none in Parliament.

The conquest of the right to combine so stimulated trade union organisation, it grew so rapidly irresistible, that the state was compelled to put a good face on a bad matter. In 1863 trade union liberty was recognised by an Imperial circular, which said, "As to the organisation of working class association, the Administration must leave to those interested in them full liberty."

Meanwhile, the International Workers' Association, definitively constituted in 1864, after several earlier fruitless attempts, shed its rays on Western Europe and opened up new horizons to the working class, horizons that were to be obscured

by the great crisis of 1871.

Let us now stop, so as not to be lured on too far by this retrospective summary, and let us draw logical conclusions from it.

From the landmarks of history that we have mentioned, it follows that at the dawn of the present régime, in 1791, the government, as defender of the privileges of the middle classes, denied and refused all economic rights to working men, and ground them down until they were like particles of dust, having no cohesion with one another, so that they were at the mercy of exploitation.

Later on the workers emerged from chaos, on which the middle classes would like to keep them. They grouped themselves on economic ground apart from any politics. The government, whatever name it is labelled with, tries to arrest the proletarian movement, and not succeeding, makes up its mind to sanction the improvements or liberties obtained by the workers. The most salient point in all these agitations and these social shocks is that exploited and exploiters, governors and governed, have interested, not only distinct, but opposed; and that between them a class war in the truest sense of the term.

In the short summary given we see the drift of the trade union movement, untrammelled by parliamentary contamination, and the wisdom of working men's associations on solid economic ground, which is the base of all true progress.

AGREEMENT IN ORDER TO LIVE

Basis of Social Harmony

Having demonstrated that, from a historical point of view, the trade union movement of the 20th century is the normal consequence of the working class efforts of the 19th century, we must now examine the value of this movement from a philosophical and social point of view. To begin with, let us set down the premises in a few lines. Man is a sociable animal. He cannot, and has never been able to, live isolated in the world. It is impossible to conceive the life of men who do not form a social group. However rudimentary primitive human agglomerations were, men always gathered together in associations. It is not true, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, theorist of democratic servitude, taught - that before they formed societies men lived in a "state of Nature", and were only able to emerge from it when they relinquished some of their natural rights by means of a "social contract".

This idle nonsense, now out of date, was much in vogue at the end of the

18th century. It inspired the revolutionary middle class in 1789-93, and it continues to be the basis of law and of institutions that hamper us.

However erroneous Jean-Jacques Rousseau's sophisms may be, they have the advantage of giving a philosophical varnish to the principle of authority, and of being the theoretical expression of middle class interests. For this reason the middle class made them its own. It drew them up in the "Declaration of the Rights of Man", as well as in articles of the "Code" of laws, so as to set up for itself a complete compendium of exploitation and domination.

Neither is it true, as proclaimed by Darwinists, that society is but a battlefield where the struggle for existence alone regulates the action of human beings. This theory, as monstrous as it is erroneous, gives a false hypocritical and scientific varnish to the worst forms of exploitation. By these means the middle classes construe that the exploiter is the strong being produced by natural selection, whereas the exploited is a weak being, the victim of an invincible necessity (also natural); and that the weak are compelled to vegetate or disappear as the strong derives profit from one or another of these solutions.

Such a theory could only take root by an arbitrary and erroneous interpretation of Darwin's ideas. If it were true, it could only apply to different species anyway. War among one species is an accidental monstrosity, among different species, living in association, it is also unnatural, for harmony is an unquestionable necessity.

The agreement in order to live, far from causing a diminution of individuality in man, is a means of accruing and multiplying his power of well-being. The examination of the real conditions of life that prevail in human species ends in the negation of theories circulated by the dominant classes, theories that only aim at facilitating and justifying exploitation of the masses.

Indeed, although both doctrines -*the democratism of JJ Rousseau of the 18th century and the middle-class Darwinism of the 19th-* have theoretical distinctions, they come to the same conclusions: they proclaim the spirit of renunciation, and teach that "the liberty of each is limited by the liberty of others". By means of these doctrines, the spirit of sacrifice that went out of fashion and was discredited in its religious aspect has again risen and become a social principle. These doctrines teach that as soon as man agrees to live in society, he of necessity agrees to renounce some of his natural rights. This renunciation he makes on the altar of authority and property, and in exchange he acquires the hope of enjoying the rights that have survived his sacrifice.

Modern nations led away by metaphysics, now wearing a scientific, now a democratic mask, have bent their backs and sacrificed their rights; for these

doctrines have been so drilled into them that today even citizens who pride themselves on being so intellectually emancipated accept as an unquestionable axiom that the liberty of each is limited by the liberty of others.

This lying formula will not bear examination; it means nothing more and nothing less than a constant and perpetual antagonism between human beings. If it had any truth in it, progress would have been impossible, for life would have been a continual struggle of enraged wild beasts. As the human animal could have only satisfied his wants by injuring his fellow human beings, it would have meant never-ending struggles, wars and unlimited ferocity.

But in spite of all criminal theories that represent society as a battlefield, and men as beings only able to exist if they injure one another, tear one another to pieces and devour one another, we have progressed, and the idea of solidarity has flourished because the instinct of social harmony is more powerful than the theories of the struggle for existence.

This deduction may be objected to by some, who say that the state has been an agent of progress, and that its intervention has been moralising and pacifying. This allegation completes the sophisms quoted above. The “order” created by the state has consisted only of repressing and oppressing the masses in order that a privileged minority might profit, the masses being made malleable by the belief they have been impregnated with, consisting in the admission that the renunciation of part of their “natural rights” is necessary when they agree to a “social contract”.

We must oppose the middle class definition of liberty that sanctions slavery and misery with a contrary formula that which is the real expression of social truth, arising from the fundamental principle of “harmony in order to struggle” - that is, the liberty of each grows when in touch with the liberty of others.

The unquestionable evidence of this definition explains the progressive development of human societies. The power of harmony in order to live has a dynamic force superior to the forces of division, repression and suppression exercised by parasitical minorities. That is why societies have progressed. That is why they have not consisted solely of butchery, ruins and mourning.

It is to our advantage to become impregnated with this notion of liberty, in order to be proofed against the inculcation of middle class sophisms, so as to be able to understand what the word “society” means. It means that the chief propelling power is humanity, harmony and association.

Let us also understand that “society” is the agglomeration of those individuals that constitute it, and that it has no individual life of its own apart from

them; consequently there can be no question of aiming at happiness other than that of the individual happiness of the human beings composing society.

UNION FOR PRODUCTION - THE EMBRYO OF SOCIETY

Civic and Democratic Derivatives

Harmony and concord in the battle of life being recognised as the social pivot, it follows that society's method of aggregation will consist of groups; and in order that individual growth may not be stunted and that it should ever continue developing, it is necessary for the group to be in complete accord with economic functions.

For human beings these functions have two irreducible actions:

- (1) Consumption;
- (2) Production.

We are born consumers, and we become producers. Such is the normal process.

The Consumer

As a consumer, a human being should follow his own inclination, and in fulfilling this role only think of his needs, the satisfaction of which will perforce be limited by possibilities. Consumption is the measure of social development: the greater it is for each, the higher is the level of well-being. Present society works in no way along these lines. Far from being free, the individual is subject to prohibitions and obstacles that can only be removed by means of money. Now, as the money is seized by the governing class, this class, thanks to the privileges it enjoys, consumes according to its will and pleasure. On the other hand, the workers, who have made natural products consumable, and who besides this have benefited the capitalist from whom they receive wages, are placed in a position in which it is impossible for them to consume according to their needs.

Such an inequity is intolerable. It is monstrous that individuals, save children, invalids and old people, should be able to consume without producing. It is also monstrous that the real producers should be deprived of the possibility of consuming.

Consumption takes precedence over production, for we consume long before we are capable of producing. Yet in social organisation it is necessary to invert these terms and make production the starting point.

The Producer

The producer is the basis of everything. She or he fulfils the essential organic function that preserves society from extinction. They are also the first cell of economic life. It is their union and good understanding with other producers who work with the same purpose in mind that is to say, at the same industry, the same trade, with similar efforts - that creates the bonds of solidarity which, like a net, stretches over the human collectivity.

This enforced and logical harmony causes *union for production*, which is the foundation of society. No other form of association is so necessary. All others are of a secondary nature. It alone is the social nucleus, the centre of economic activity. But for the productive group to perform its function normally, it must raise the individual, and it must never tend to diminish their autonomy under any pretext whatsoever.

Most assuredly, the awareness of the fundamental part played by the producer in society, and the group of which they have the right to be an integral part, is relatively new. The identity of interests and communion of aspirations amongst producers, coordinated according to their needs, their professional activities and their tendencies, have not always been as tangible as now. The understanding of social phenomena was impeded by ignorance, even without taking into account the fact that economic development had not then acquired the acuteness of our times. Another cause impeding comprehension sprung from the survival of the dominant part formerly played by family groups. At a given moment, when humanity was mostly composed of hunting and pastoral tribes, the family fulfilled the function of social nucleus, a phenomenon explained by the fact that in those far-off ages production, both industrial and agricultural, hardly went beyond the family circle, so that this form of association being enough for basic needs, barter had not begun to modify existing conditions.

Today these conditions have been subjected to such a transformation that it is impossible to consider the family as an organic nucleus. It would indeed be equivalent to legitimising all forms of slavery, for all slavery follows as a consequence of an authority that the head of the family appropriates, by virtue of his supposed strength and ancestry.

Besides, nobody dreams of such regression. In quite another direction did the middle class at the dawn of its revolution in 1789 try to guide the tendencies of the people towards sociability. The middle class, needing men who would work, who would be flexible, malleable and deprived of all power of resistance, destroyed the bonds of true solidarity, the class - under pretext of uprooting trade privileges formerly looked upon with favour by the old regime. Then, to fill the empty space left in the popular consciousness, and to hinder the idea of

association with an economic basis, the reappearance of which it dreaded, the middle class manoeuvred to substitute in the place of true bonds of solidarity resulting from identical interests fictitious and deceptive bonds of citizenship and democracy.

Religion, which until then had served the powerful of the earth to check and restrain the tendency towards improvement of their lot that impelled the people, was relegated to the background. Not that the middle class distained the brutalising power of this “curb”, but it considered religion out of date and as having done its work. The middle class professed Voltairianism, and although it attacked priests, it suggested to the working classes superstitions just as debasing as those of Christianity. Sovereignty of the people! Home and country! These became the fashionable idols.

The Patriotic Curb

In a civic direction the middle class glorified patriotic sentimentality. The ideological lines that unite men born by chance between variable frontiers surrounding a certain territory were glorified as sacred. They earnestly taught that the most glorious day in the life of a patriot is the one in which they have the pleasure of being butchered for their country.

They deceived the people with such nonsense and hindered them from reflecting on the philosophical value of the moral virus they were being infected with. Thanks to the sound of trumpet and drum, warlike songs and jingoistic bluster, they were trained to defend what they had not got: their inheritance. Patriotism can only be explained by the fact that all patriots without distinction own a part of social property, and nothing is more absurd than a patriot without patrimony. Notwithstanding the absurdity, proletarians have reached the point at which they do not possess a clod of the national soil; it follows that there is absolutely no reason for their patriotism, which is just a disease.

Under the old system the military career was a profession like any other, only more barbarous; and the army, in which the patriotic big drum was not beaten, was a medley of mercenaries “marching” for pay. After the Revolution the middle classes devised a blood tax conscription for the people, a natural deduction from the hypothesis that in future the Fatherland was to be “everybody's property”; but it has continued to be “the property of a few”, and these few have, thanks to the new system, solved the problem of causing their privileges to be protected by others, by those despoiled of their inheritance.

Here, indeed, appears a formidable contradiction. The bonds of nationality, of which militarism is a tangible form, and which we are told tends to the defence of common interests, has a diametrically opposite result - it checks working-class

aspirations.

It is not the ideological frontier that separates nations into English, French, Germans, etc., that the army watches over, but principally the frontier of riches in order to keep the poor chained up in poverty.

The Democratic Curb

The middle class has itself as crafty in a democratic direction. Having conquered political power and secured for itself economic domination, it took care not to destroy the mechanism that had been of use to the aristocracy. It confined itself to replastering the State frontage enough to change its appearance, and to get it accepted as a new power by the people.

Now in society there is nothing real, except for economic functions, which are completely sufficient for individuals and useful to groups. Consequently, all exterior crystallisation and all political superfluity are parasitic and oppressive excrescences, and therefore noxious.

But of this the people had no consciousness, and so it was easy to fool them.

The middle class, with the intention of impeding the blossoming of economic sovereignty which was germinating in the freedom of association they had just stifled, taught the people to turn to the mirage of political sovereignty, the powerless manifestations of which would not disturb capitalist exploitation. The fraud succeeded so well that the belief in political equality -that great hoax- has done a good service in keeping the masses down during the last century.

Only a small amount of wisdom is required to understand that the capitalist and the worker, the landowner and the dispossessed, are not equals. Equality is not a fact because both rich and poor are in the possession of a voting ticket.

And yet the fraud goes on. It goes on to such an extent that even today there are, amongst well-meaning people, those who still have confidence in these idle fancies.

They are victims of a superficial logic; they sum up the influence of the popular masses and compare it to the numerical weakness of the governing minority, and suppose that the education of the masses is enough to ensure that they will triumph by means of the normal action of majorities.

They do not see that the democratic grouping, with universal suffrage as a basis, is not a homogenous or lasting association, and that it is impossible to regulate it with a view to persistent action.

This group brings together temporary citizens whose interests are not identical, such as employers and employed, and when it unites them, it only confers on them the right to decide about abstractions or illusions.

The want of coherence in Parliaments, their ignorance of popular aspirations and also their powerlessness, are facts that have been sifted through so carefully that it is useless to dwell on them. The result is no better when we examine the consequences of universal suffrage in municipal districts. A few briefly-described examples will demonstrate this.

During the last quarter of a century rural municipalities have been, for the most part, in the hands of peasants. Wealthy landowners were not opposed to this conquest, knowing that, owing to the invincible necessities of present society and the obstacles put in the way by a central authority, nothing effectual could be attempted against them.

By Socialist push, the same conquest of municipalities has been realised in working-class districts; the benefit to the workers has been small. The municipalities annihilated by the government have not been able to realise their programme, and disillusion has been the consequence. Yet another danger. Workers have turned from their union to political efforts, all their energy has gone in this direction and they have neglected economic organisation, so that bad employers, whose exploiting ferocity has no limits, have benefited by not finding an active and vigorous trade union group to oppose them.

In the north of France -Roubaix, Armentières, etc.- where municipalities are or have been Socialistic, wages are frightfully low. In the Ardennes the same goes. There, numerous trade unions had been formed, but the members having allowed themselves to be completely absorbed by politics, the unions have lost the power of opposing their employers.

To all these defects Democracy adds, if possible, yet a greater mistake. Progress, as demonstrated by the whole of our historic past, is the consequence of the revolutionary efforts of conscious minorities. Now Democracy organises the stifling of minorities to the profit of sheepish and conservative majorities [or to their mutual fleecing? - transcribers' note].

The work of deviating the economic movement attempted by the middle class could only be momentary. The corporative group is not the result of artificial growth. It springs up and develops spontaneously and inevitably in all surroundings. It is to be found in ancient times, in the Middle Ages, and today, and we can show that at all times its development has been obstructed by the possessor of privileges, who, fearing the expansive power of this method of organisation,

took up the cudgels against it - without, however, succeeding in destroying it.

It is not astonishing that corporative groups have such an intense vitality. Their absolute annihilation is impossible to realise. In order to succeed it would be necessary to destroy society itself. Indeed, the corporate group has its roots in the existing form of production, and normally proceeds from it. Now, as association for production is an inevitable necessity, how could it be possible for workers gathered together for this purpose to limit their cooperation to matters only useful to their employers, who benefit by exploitation in common? In order to satisfy capitalist interests, producers were brought together in economic groups, and they would have had the intelligence of molluscs had they not enough judgement to overstep the boundaries imposed on them by their exploiters.

Workers possessing a bit of common sense were inevitably brought to see the flagrant antagonism that makes them, the producers, the irreconcilable enemies of their employers; they are the robbed, their employers are the robbers. Therefore, for them the discord is so radical that only politicians or employers' flunkeys can spout garbage about "harmony between capital and labour".

Besides, it would not take long for wage-earners to recognise that the employers' rapacity is the more exacting and the weaker one is the working class resistance. Now it is easy to prove that the isolation of the wage-earner constitutes their maximum of weakness. Consequently, cooperation for production having already taught the exploited to appreciate the benefits of association, they only needed will and initiative to create a group for workers' self-defence.

They soon learned its value. The middle classes, who had no fear of the "People as electors", were compelled by the people as a "trade union" to recognise the right of combination and trade union freedom.

In consideration of these first results, repeated attempts have been made to divert the working class from the trade union. In spite of such manoeuvres, the part played by the trade union has grown clearer and more precise, so much so that in future it can be thus defined.

In the present, the permanent mission of the trade union is to defend itself against any reduction of vitality - that is to say, against any reduction of wages and increase in working hours. Besides resisting attack, it must play a pro-active part and strive to increase the wellbeing of the union, which can only be realised by trespassing on capitalist privileges, and constitutes a sort of partial expropriation.

Besides this talk of incessant skirmishes, the union is engaged in the work of

integral emancipation, of which it will effectively be the agent. It will consist of taking possession of social wealth, now in the hands of the middle class, and in reorganising society on a Libertarian Communist basis, so that the maximum amount of social well-being will be achieved with a minimum of productive effort.

THE RIGHT OF TRADE UNIONISM

We will now examine how trade unionism is constituted. Forming part of a certain class, an infinitesimal minority of bold individuals, possessing enough character, create a group in order to resist and to fight capitalists.

What will the attitude taken by this handful of militants be? Will they wait until they have won over, if not the whole, at least the majority of their Fellow Workers belonging to the class, to state their claims? They would act in this way if into the economic struggle they introduced the political prejudices held by the majority.

But as the everyday practical demands of the struggle are more urgent than democratic sophisms, the logic of life impels them into action, towards new ideas opposed to the political formulas with which they have been saturated. To obtain this result, it is not necessary for the combatants to possess a great quantity of judgement, but only if they not be paralysed by formulas and abstractions.

We have witnessed, in a very important circumstance, the politician Basly respect trade union principles and demand that they be put into practise. It is almost superfluous to add that this manoeuvre on his part was unadulterated cunning, in order to discredit revolutionary tendencies. It was at the Miners' Conference held at Lens in 1901 when the question of a general strike was being discussed, that Basly endeavoured to impede the movement by proposing a referendum; and, contrary to democratic theories, he caused the Congress to decide that the number of non-voters should be added to the total of the majority.

This politician, who thought himself so cunning, would have been very astonished if it had been pointed out to him that, instead of having tricked the congress, he had acted as a revolutionary and had been inspired by trade union principles. Indeed, in this particular instance, Basly paid no attention to the opinion of men without judgement; he looked down on them as human zeros, only fit to be added to thinking units, as inert beings whose latent powers could only be put into motion by contact with energetic and bold men. This way of looking at things is the negation of democratic theories that proclaim equality of rights for all, and teach that the sovereign will of the people is fully carried out

by means of universal suffrage. Basly was not clear on this point, and for a while, forgetting his political theories, he was easily influenced by the economic doctrines of his surroundings.

Let us also remark that democracy has never been in vogue amongst corporate groups. Face to face with social needs, combatants in the ranks of trade unions solved problems as their common sense taught them. Their deeds, therefore, preceded the declaration of trade union principles.

Trade unionists have never believed that they must consult the entire working class according to rule, and suit their action to please the majority. As many as were of one mind formed a group, and presented their claims without taking heed of non-thinkers.

Could anything be more natural? Let us distinguish between the theoretical and abstract right that democracy dangles before our eyes, and the true and tangible right that represents the whole of our interests, and the starting point of which is an act of conscious individuality.

The right of every individual to rise against oppression and exploitation cannot be denied. The right of a man who stands alone to protest and rebel against all remains inalienable. Should it please the masses to bend their backs beneath the yoke and lick the boots of the masters, what matters it to him? The man who abhors cringing, and, unwilling to submit, rises and rebels, such as man has right on his side against all. His right is clear and unquestionable. The right of downtrodden masses, as long as it is restricted to the right of slavery, is unworthy of notice and cannot be compared to it. The right of these masses will only take shape and be worthy of respect when men, tired of obedience and working for others, dream of rebellion.

Therefore, when a group is formed within which men of judgement come into contact with one another, they need not take the apathy of the masses into account. It is enough for trade unionists to regret that non-thinkers lay aside their rights; they cannot allow them the strange privilege of impeding the proclamation and realisation of the right of a thinking minority.

Without any theory having been elaborated beforehand, trade unionists were inspired and guided by these ideas when they formed groups. They acted, and still act, in harmony with them.

From this we gather that trade union right has nothing in common with democratic right.

The one is the expression of unthinking majorities who form a compact mass

that would stifle thinking minorities. By virtue of the dogma "Sovereignty of the people", this teaches that all men are brothers and equals, unfortunately such democratic right ends with the sanctioning of economic slavery and oppressing men of initiative, progress, science and liberty.

Trade union right is the exact opposite. Starting from individual sovereignty and the autonomy of human beings, it ends in agreement in order to live in solidarity, so that its logical, unquestionable consequence is the realisation of social liberty and equality,

Thus we can understand that by virtue of their individual sovereignty trade unionists have grown strong by coming into contact with other identical sovereignties; they do not wait until the nation agrees to manifest their will; they think and they act in the name of all, as if their group were really composed of the masses as a whole. Logic leads them to think and act as if they were those whole of the working class -- in fact, the entire nation.

Besides, what proves to us that militant trade unionists are justified in considering themselves exponents of the aspirations and the will of all is that when circumstances require it -for example, in a case of strife with their employers- non-unionists follow the trade union lead and spontaneously group themselves, fighting side by side with their comrades who have organised the movement with patience and energy.

The non-unionists, the unthinking, need therefore not be offended by this sort of moral guardianship assumed by those with judgement. Militant trade unionists refuse none who come with goodwill and those who are hurt at being treated as unworthy of notice need only withdraw from their inferior position, shake off their inertia, and enter a trade union.

More than this, laggards have no right to complain, as they profit by results gained by their comrades who think and fight, and benefit without having had to suffer in the struggle.

Thus the benefits gained by a few are extended to all, which proves the superiority of the trade union over democratic right. How far trade union principles are removed from middle class platitudes, which teach that every worker is the master of their own destiny! In the working class, every worker has the conviction that when fighting for themselves they are fighting for all, and it never enters their heads to find in this a motive for recrimination or inaction.

The workers despise the narrowness and pettiness of middle class egoism that under the cloak of individual expansion, breeds poverty and disease, and dries up

the springs of life. Convinced that mutual aid in order to live is the precondition of all social progress, trade unionists identify their interests with the common interest. That is why when they do act, it is not in their own name, but in the name of the people whose destiny they shape. By further logic they do not limit their activity to their Association, but, stating general claims, they extend it to the whole of the working class. This, when they have wrung an improvement from capitalism, they expect all to benefit by it - all! Non-unionists! The unthinking, even scabs!

This feeling of broadminded fraternity, this profoundly human understanding of social harmony, raises trade unionism to a plane of excellence. Its superiority to democratic principles, which only breed shabby tricks, fratricidal struggles and social conflict, is unquestionable. Therefore, trade union right is the expression of the new, profoundly human right that rouses the conscience and opposes ancient dogmas by preparing social regeneration; a society in which the oppressive system of law will be replaced by a system of free contracts consented to by all parties concerned, improvable or revocable at will, in which capitalist production will give way to economic federation, brought about the cohesion of producing groups, whose members will assure to human beings the maximum of well-being and liberty.

Conclusion

It would be more to the point to say, "Introduction," In these articles I have endeavoured to define the ideas that guide trade unions. The most important is still to follow. It is to show the harmony of trade union action with trade union theories, and by an accumulation of facts and examples prove that, even sometimes unconsciously, trade unions are inspired by these ideas.

They demonstrate that the application of these guiding ideas greatly influences present society, and that face to face with ancient organisms overtaken by old age, there are being developed germs of a new society in which human beings will evolve without hindrance in the midst of autonomous groups.

Footnotes:

1. The French word "Syndicat" has been rendered into English as its nearest equivalent. The French organisations, however, differ from the English in inculcating a revolutionary spirit and ignoring political action.
2. La loi Chapelier, passed on June 17, 1791.

The origins of anarcho-syndicalism

by Rudolf Rocker

It is impossible to sum up in a few lines the valuable contribution made by Rudolf Rocker in propagating the anarchist ideal, although regretfully a minimal amount of his works have been translated into the English language. Rocker came to the attention of the English speaking anarchist world during the Spanish Revolution with firstly *The truth about Spain* (1936) and thereafter *The tragedy of Spain* (1937), and in the same year, his monumental work *Nationalism and Culture* was

published in the United States. In 1938 Rocker's book *Anarcho-Syndicalism Theory and Practice*, was published in London by Secker & Warburg and re-printed in 1945 by Modern Publishers, Indore - India. The article reproduced in the following pages is an extract of an essay first published in the American publication "European Ideologies" and in 1960 was included in the Freedom Press and Libertarian Book Club (N.Y.) editions of Eltzbacher's Anarchism.

Many anarchists spent a great part of their activities in the labour movement, especially in the Latin countries, where in later years the movement of Anarcho-Syndicalism was born. Its theoretical assumptions were based on the teachings of libertarian or anarchist Socialism, while its form of organization was taken from the movement of revolutionary Syndicalism which in the years from 1895 to 1910 experienced a marked upswing, particularly in France, Italy and Spain. Its ideas and methods, however, were not new. They had already found a deep resonance in the ranks of the First International when the great association had reached the zenith of its intellectual development. This was plainly revealed in the debates at its fourth congress in Basel (1869) concerning the importance of the economic organizations of the workers. In his report upon this question which Eugene Hins laid before the congress in the name of the Belgian Federation, there was presented for the first time a wholly new point of view which had an unmistakable resemblance to certain ideas of Robert Owen and the English labour movement of the 1830s.

In order to make a correct estimate of this, one must remember that at that time the various schools of state-socialism attributed no, or at best, only little

importance, to the trade unions. The French Blanquists saw in these organizations merely a reform movement, with a socialist dictatorship as their immediate aim. Ferdinand Lassalle and his followers directed all their activities towards welding the workers into a political party and were outspoken opponents of all trade union endeavours in which they saw only a hindrance to the political evolution of the working class. Marx and his adherents of that period recognized, it is true, the necessity of trade unions for the achievement of certain betterments within the capitalist system, but they believed that their role would be exhausted with this, and that they would disappear along with capitalism, since the transition to Socialism could be guided only by a proletarian dictatorship.

In Basel this idea underwent for the first time a thorough critical examination. The views expressed in the Belgian report presented by Hins which were shared by the delegates from Spain, the Swiss Jura and the larger part of the French sections, were based on the premise that the present economic associations of the workers are not only a necessity within the present society, but were even more to be regarded as the social nucleus of a coming socialist economy, and it was, therefore, the duty of the International to educate the workers for this task. In accordance with this the congress adopted the following resolution:

“The congress declares that all workers should strive to establish associations for resistance in their various trades. As soon as a trade union is formed the unions in the same trade are to be notified so that the formation of national alliances in the industries may begin. These alliances shall be charged with the duty of collecting all material relating to their industry, of advising about measures to be executed in common, and of seeing that they are carried out, to the end that the present wage system may be replaced by the federation of free producers. The congress directs the General Council to provide for the alliance of the trade unions of all countries.”

In his argument for the resolution proposed by the committee, Hins explained that “by this dual form of organization of local workers' associations and general alliances for each industry on the one hand and the political administration of labour councils on the other, the general representation of labour, regional, national and international, will be provided for. *The councils of the trades and industrial organizations will take the place of the present government, and this representation of labour will do away, once and forever, with the governments of the past*”.

This new idea grew out of the recognition that every new economic form of society must be accompanied by a new political form of the social organism and could only attain practical expression in this. Its followers saw in the present national state only the political agent and defender of the possessing classes, and did, therefore, not strive for the conquest of power, but for the elimination of every system of power within society, in which they saw the requisite prelimi-

nary condition for all tyranny and exploitation. They understood that along with the monopoly of property, the monopoly of power must also disappear. Proceeding from their recognition that the lordship of man over man had had its day, they sought to familiarize themselves with the administration of things. Or, as Bakunin, one of the great forerunners of modern Anarcho-syndicalism, put it:

“Since the organization of the International has as its goal, not the setting up of new states or despots, but the radical elimination of every separate sovereignty, it must have an essentially different character from the organization of the state. To just the degree that the latter is authoritarian, artificial and violent, alien and hostile to the natural development of the interests and the instincts of the people, to the same degree must the organization of the International be free, natural and in every respect in accord with those interests and instincts. But what is the natural organization of the masses? It is one based on the different occupations of their actual daily life, on their various kinds of work, organization according to their occupations, trade organizations. When all industries, including the various branches of agriculture, are represented in the International, its organization, the organization of the toiling masses of the people, will be finished.”

And at another occasion: “All this practical and vital study of social science by the workers themselves in their trades sections and their chambers of labour will -and already has- engender in them the unanimous, well-considered, theoretically and practically demonstrable conviction that the *serious, final complete liberation of the workers is possible only on one condition: that of the appropriation of capital, that is, of raw materials and all the tools of labour, including land, by the whole body of the workers . . .* The organization of the trade sections, their federation in the International, and their representation by the Labour Chambers, not only create a great academy in which the workers of the International, combining theory and practice, can and must study economic science; they also bear in themselves the living germs of the new social order, which is to replace the bourgeois world. They are creating not only the ideas but also the facts of the future itself ...”

After the decline of the International and the Franco-German War, by which the focal point of the socialist labour movement was transferred to Germany, whose workers had neither revolutionary traditions nor that rich experience possessed by the Socialists in the Western countries, those ideas were gradually forgotten. After the defeat of the Paris Commune and the revolutionary upheavals in Spain and Italy the sections of the International in these countries were compelled for many years to carry on only an underground existence. Only with the awakening of revolutionary Syndicalism in France were the ideas of the First International rescued from oblivion and inspired once more larger sections of the labour movement.

Fernand Pelloutier and the dilemma of revolutionary syndicalism

by Alan Spitzer

Advancing under socialist banners, the labour movement in Western Europe won such success by the end of the nineteenth century as to produce a deep moral and intellectual crisis in European socialism. Internecine quarrels over revisionism, participationism, and anti-political syndicalism reflected the malaise of a “revolutionary” movement that each year bound itself more closely to the system it had vowed to destroy. For socialist theoreticians, the crisis was cognitive or “scientific”-it had to do with issues of adequate historical analysis and prediction- but for the theorists of French revolutionary syndicalism it was essentially a moral crisis. In their eyes the socialist parties had already failed because they were the instruments for manipulation and betrayal of the workers by leaders whose ambitions could be gratified through the capitalist establishment. They identified a practical and moral alternative to political socialism in the revolutionary general strike prepared and carried out by autonomous proletarian organisations. Such organisations were necessary to the idealists of the general strike if their programmes were not to degenerate into a strictly verbal revolutionary Couéism and they therefore put great stock in the development of militant working-class associations. Among these, the Bourses du Travail, which flourished from 1895 to 1901 under the dedicated direction of the anarchist intellectual, Fernand Pelloutier, seemed the most promising.

Fernand Pelloutier came to revolutionary syndicalism out of a background of provincial republican politics. As a youthful journalist at Nantes he moved left from the radical republicans into the camp of the orthodox Marxists, and then, with his close friend Aristide Briand, broke with the Guesdists over the issue of the general strike and

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turned toward the commitment to anarcho-syndicalism that was to define the rest of his short career. During the 1890s he played a leading part in the growth and consolidation of the French trade union movement; and in the successful struggle to separate it from political socialism. He was one of those middle class martyrs to the ideal of proletarian freedom and self-respect, dying of a tubercular condition in his early thirties, after some ten years of tremendous labours in agitation, pamphleteering, journalism and most of all in consolidating the Bourses du Travail into an effective national movement. When Pelloutier became secretary of the national Federation of the Bourses du Travail in 1895 there were 34 Bourses made up of 606 syndicates, five years later shortly before his death there were 57 Bourses with 1065 syndicates.

During Pelloutier's tenure the Bourses expanded their range of action far beyond that of the labour exchange which was their original function. Each Bourse was a federation of all the trade unions in a locality willing to co-operate across craft or industrial lines. The heart of each Bourse was, wherever possible, some permanent location - a union hall which was to be the centre of working class existence, and to provide a great variety of services including a mutual benefit society, a job information and placement bureau, a system of financial assistance for travelling workers, a strike chest, a programme of propaganda for organising the unorganised, a sort of bureau of labour statistics, and education courses, periodic conferences, and a library.

The growth and vitality of the Bourses du Travail aroused the enthusiasm of the various theorists of revolutionary syndicalism not only because they were self-directed working class organisations more or less uncorrupted by socialist factions and ambitions, but because they seemed to provide the institutional nucleus for the construction of a new order out of the ruins of the old. Georges Sorel thought that Pelloutier, recognising that socialism could only be based on "an absolute separation of classes and on the abandonment of all hope for political reconstruction of the old order," had helped to establish the means for the final break "with the imitations of the bourgeois tradition" through the organisation of autonomous proletarian institutions: the Bourses du Travail.

Pelloutier's place in the history of the French labour movement is secured by his practical contributions to the development of the Bourses rather than by the enthusiasm he aroused in the armchair ideologists of the general strike or by his own contributions to anarcho-syndicalist doctrine. However an examination of the doctrinal foundations of his brand of syndicalism helps to situate it in French social history and illuminates the ambiguities of his commitment to the self-emancipation of the workers. Pelloutier was a middle class intellectual who believed that for the workers to shatter and transcend the capitalist order, they had to liberate themselves from the iron vice of bourgeois culture. His radical critique of this culture owed a great deal to its nineteenth-century French critics including the tendency to draw upon the intellectual stock of the culture for the rationale that condemned it.

Pelloutier, of course, was not interested in formulating some completely new

revolutionary ideology and explicitly placed himself in the cranky and paradoxical tradition of moralistic radicalism, articulated in the writings of Proudhon and carried on, with reference to the practical example of Pelloutier himself, by the school of Sorel. He once described Proudhon as the least Utopian of all the socialists precisely because he established morality as the criterion, not only for social action, but for any science or metaphysics, whereas “so-called scientific socialism” had to contrive sophistic arguments that would permit it to arrive at its Utopian ideals by induction.

Pelloutier's own refusal to separate theoretical from moral considerations was at the base of his repudiation of socialist political alternatives. He perceived parliamentary socialism as an ignoble avenue of social mobility, and revolutionary socialism as either a rhetorical facade for unrevolutionary ambitions or an academy for future authoritarians. The answer to these corrupting alternatives lay nowhere but in the working class itself - in its solidarity and its revolutionary will. He left Proudhonian channels, at the point where he accepted for the working class the moral obligation to be revolutionary in a literal as well as a metaphysical sense - where he asserted the liberating role of “that violence which in the end, alone, can curb violence, and which is the natural weapon of every proud and dignified creature.”

The voluntarism of the idea of progress as moral change is obvious, particularly when the regeneration is not to be confined to the hearts of individual men but realised through the very process of collective revolutionary action. However, Pelloutier did not conceive of the liberation of humanity as completely contingent upon the revolutionary will of the oppressed. Like most contemporary revolutionaries he mingled exhortations to bring down the capitalist system with predictions of its inevitable demise. Notwithstanding occasional expressions of contempt for “economic laws” so often wrong in the event, he was convinced that the inner contradictions of capitalism inexorably pointed to its extinction.

The economic theories which provided Pelloutier with this conviction were out of the common stock of a century of French radicalism. Although he occasionally borrowed the Marxian terminology of contemporary socialism, his essential conception of the nature and direction of capitalist development was that of the perversion of the exchange function through the illegitimate transformation of money from neutral standard of value to a valued commodity: “The standard of exchange gives scope for monopoly and to capitalisation because instead of remaining a standard, i.e. the fiduciary and exact equivalent of products, it becomes at the same time a value, i.e. a commodity, an object of commerce, and an indispensable instrument of labour.”

The subordination of production to the accumulation of the perverted value represented by money enables those who possess it to exchange it for a “greater quantity of labour (hence surplus value, surplus labour, usury in all its forms.)” So the surplus value of labour is conceived as that portion of created wealth siphoned off by the possessors and manipulators of the medium of exchange whose successful machinations have

guaranteed “The inversely proportionate and over-growing increase in wealth and poverty, and in their consequences: authority and servitude.”

This venerable notion of the illegitimate use of money as the original economic sin was the commonplace of nineteenth-century French anti-capitalist polemic. It reflected lower-class preoccupations in a pre-industrial society where not only the peasants and petty proprietors but the town workers longed for easy credit as the crucial economic reform and where the usurer remained the popular personification of capitalist rapacity. Although social and economic changes during Pelloutier's lifetime made these doctrines increasingly archaic they continued to serve him as the theoretical foundation for his polemic against all economic reforms within the framework of the capitalist state. He argued that all apparent benefits granted to the workers by opportunistic governments or wrested from the capitalist by direct action were wiped out by prices that inevitably rose to compensate for any diminution of profits. Indeed whatever augments, “for whatever cause, purchasing power, immediately augments, in the same proportion, the value of the products bought.” Since money is the counter in the endless competitive bidding for the fruits of labour, those who have more of it will always be able to bid up the price of goods for their advantage. And this is the way that “Money permits those who possess it to pass on to others the burden of unpleasant reforms,” and that is why genuine social equality waits upon the liquidation of the money economy and why “... instead of attempting to modify existing society... the only thing to do is to destroy it.”

Thus his analysis of the economic process reinforces his voluntarist political ethic: “exploitation . . . will continue to dominate as long as we do not strike at its heart, and consequently it is not enough to aim at restraining its evil instincts; they will only be suppressed by suppressing capitalism itself.”

The demand for the root and branch destruction of the source of evil was of course a common plank in the orthodox platforms of Pelloutier's peaceable socialist contemporaries. The logic of capitalist economic development could only be confuted by the elimination of capitalism. Yet even such an activist as Pelloutier realised that the immediate regeneration of the victims of capitalism would not be guaranteed by its destruction. He once remarked that he was not so foolish as to believe that a “moral transformation would proceed at the same pace as the social transformation”, - evil would not disappear overnight but better institutions would provide the conditions for its disappearance. The unarticulated but truly painful question for Pelloutier was not so much will the proletarian revolution guarantee the moral transformation of the workers, as, can they sufficiently transform themselves in the debasing present to will the regenerating future?

This was a question of more than tactical significance. Pelloutier was well aware of the practical difficulties in organising the workers against the system that devoted huge resources to deluding them as to their true interests and their real enemies. Nor were all radical solutions acceptable to an anarchist deeply committed to the self-emancipation

of the proletariat. Even if the working class found the resolution to rise out of slavery this was no guarantee that it would rise to freedom. Pelloutier is often praised for recognising that revolution was not enough - that the promise of the new order would depend upon the quality of the men who constructed it. In the very speech in which he admitted that institutional change might proceed more swiftly than moral change, he also said: "And as long as there remains in the spirit of men the shadow of prejudice, we can make insurrections, modify the useless machinery of politics, change the course of empires even; but the hour of the social revolution will not have struck!"

One might argue that "prejudice" could only be eliminated after a political revolution had destroyed its institutional context, but for Pelloutier the moral and intellectual preparation for the genuine social revolution could not be postponed until the present iniquitous political order had been destroyed. The working class has to begin in the present to make itself worthy of the future despite the efforts of its exploiters to deepen the ignorance and reinforce the prejudices which were the condition of their survival. The answer to this dilemma lay at hand in the French antecedents of Pelloutier's social thought and was in essence, the self-education of the working class outside of, and against, the deadening and manipulating culture of capitalist society.

When Pelloutier identified the sources of Proudhon's socialism in the "revolutionary metaphysic of 1789", he was referring to the tradition that supplied the premises for his own brand of anarcho-syndicalism. Like so many French ostensible materialists or even "orthodox" Marxists he did not really believe that ideas were epiphenomenal but that they were the motors of social progress. He confidently asserted "mankind's inevitable tendency towards innovation in ideas and in opinions, the source of all progress." Therefore, the education of the masses as the very condition of their revolutionary consciousness was always his central concern. Even the meagre education doled out to the workers to date had produced that fund of aspirations labelled socialism. However, public education under the aegis of the State could only become another method of conditioning the masses to their servitude because the State in all of its manifestations was the classic instrument of social and economic exploitations.

To some extent Pelloutier would perceive the revolutionary education of the proletariat in the very conditions of its existence. With the Marxists, he was confident that the logic of capitalist development would reveal to the workers the outlines of their plight and their genuine interests: "Unfortunately for the capitalists, the proletariat opens its eyes sooner than might have been expected. Through the force of disastrous experience, it discovered one day that the remedy for social ills is neither born out of political revolution nor in the necessary but incoherent struggle against day-to-day injustices ... it begins to perceive the necessity of a social revolution, that is to say, a complete economic and social transformation."

However Pelloutier did not believe that the working class would attain the appropriate knowledge and resolution to undertake the necessary revolution merely through a

passive assimilation of the objective facts of life under moribund capitalism. Because the system which degrades and brutalises the worker will never afford him the institutional means of a genuine education he must himself construct organisations through which "he can reflect on his condition, disentangle the elements of the economic problem, fortify himself in knowledge and in energy, to make himself capable of the self-liberation to which he has a right." Such institutions would not only help the worker to understand what sort of future he should desire but could help him to "elaborate, here in the present, the elements of a new society", - they would not only show him how to shape his destinies but train him to be worthy of them. And these institutions already existed - as the Bourses du Travail, for Pelloutier the chosen instrument for the work "of moral, administrative and technical education, necessary to make a society of free men viable."

Under Pelloutier's aegis, the educational possibilities of the Bourses were given an emphasis never repeated by his successors. The various technical and educational courses, the periodic conferences, the statistical services, the libraries, the never to be realised projects of labour museums were not for Pelloutier peripheral, but essential functions of the Bourses. Libraries he felt were particularly promising agencies for introducing the workers to the discoveries of the human spirit so long denied to them. He proudly described the intelligent eclecticism of the *bibliothèques* of the Bourses where volumes by Marx, Saint-Simon, Darwin and Kropotkin were found side by side in a fraternity of genius with those of Chateaubriand, de Maistre, and Lammenais. Not all of the militants were ready for this rich diet but even those whose literary interests had to be "artificially aroused" could benefit from the novelists closest to them in age and social orientation.

Pelloutier, who was the product of a classical French education, conceived of a cultural heritage that transcended class boundaries as well as the narrow limits of propaganda and indoctrination. The aesthetic quality of the worker's existence had both moral and practical relevance. His present cultural possibilities were crucial conditions of his political and social future: "Just as bourgeois art does more to maintain the capitalist regime than all the other social forces - government, army, police and judges-together; so a social and revolutionary art would do more to advance the coming of free communism than all those agents of revolution to which man has been led by his sufferings."

The ruling groups bitterly resist any measure to enlighten or purify the tastes of the masses because they know that the appetite for liberty and the development of the intellect proceeds together, and that resignation is bred from ignorance. Not only have they enlisted priests, mystics and obscurantists to persuade the worker that his salvation is not to be found on this earth, but they have bribed venal artists and writers to supply him with debased and salacious entertainment that inspires rut instead of reflection. And how much more dangerous than capitalist exploitation itself is the work of its cultural accomplices: "Deprived in the daytime by his work, brutalised at night by impure

alcohol, by ribald shows, the masses have neither the time nor the freedom of spirit necessary to reflect on their lot, and from this arises the indifference, the cowardice with which the people, the same people who revolted in 1848 and 1871, undergo worse outrages today. The insults they receive are washed away by absinthe; the uncertainty of their future is forgotten in the music hall; their revolutionary virility is dissipated in the brothel.”

In this very depressing picture one can discern Pelloutier's concern, not merely to enlighten the masses, but also to combat the debasing and cheapening of the very fabric of working-class through the effects of a pervasive commercialised culture. Of course I may be guilty of projecting backward present concerns. We are still far, in turn of the century France, from the erosion of working class culture “in favour of the mass opinion, the mass recreational product and the generalised emotional response.” But the contemporary French worker's consumption of recreation, entertainment and culture in general was scarcely calculated to provide him with those nobler perceptions which were the conditions for a truly free society.

The reluctance of the masses to absorb the culture appropriate to their historical destinies posed not only a practical problem for a revolutionary moralist such as Pelloutier but also a profound dilemma. As what the French call a libertarian, devoted to the emancipation of the workers by themselves, he could not conjure away unfortunate proletarian dispositions with reference to inadequate class consciousness in a given historical situation. As George Orwell once observed, the desire to “level up” the culture of the working class often includes an element of snobbish presumption as to what it should, but doesn't want. Pelloutier's efforts to level up the French working man certainly did not stem from some genteel condescension. Nothing would have been more repugnant to him than what Raymond Williams calls the “Fabian tone in culture . . . leading the unenlightened to the particular kind of light which the leaders find satisfactory for themselves”, yet his assumption of a cultural “general will”, not necessarily equivalent to the sum of proletarian tastes, reflects the deeper dilemma of his anarchist political morality. That is to say - either the products of collective freedom of choice are not necessarily the True, the Beautiful and the Good, or, the worker was not actually free to make the correct moral decisions under capitalism. But if these decisions were the prerequisites for some genuine future freedom, was it necessary for some one, if not to impose, at least to urge them on the workers? Pelloutier hoped that the answer lay in a gradual voluntary assimilation of the cultural and educational possibilities of the Bourses du Travail, yet the affirmation of these possibilities had somehow to precede the workers' recognition of them.

None of these remarks are meant to denigrate the purity of Pelloutier's motives or the remarkable self-effacement of his devotion to the workers cause. But there is a final irony in the very dimensions of his contribution to the development of autonomous proletarian institutions. With his passing the Bourse movement seemed to lose its momentum and there were many who testified to the words of the militant syndicalist

Pierre Monatte: “After the death of Pelloutier in 1901, the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail* was nothing more than a great wounded tree, from which every year a withered branch fell to the ground.”

Comment by the editors of Libertarian Anthology:

Readers should be aware that there existed constant dissensions amongst the various socialist factions of France in the 1890's which naturally carried over into the labour unions, and it happened quite frequently that when the unions of one faction went on strike the unions of the other factions walked in on them as strike breakers. This untenable situation gradually awakened the consciousness of the workers. As a result the trade union congress in Nantes (1894) charged a special committee with the task of devising means for bringing about an understanding among all the trade union alliances. The result was the founding in 1895 of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* at the congress in Limoges, which declared itself independent of all political parties adopting the theories and tactics of revolutionary syndicalism. From this date right up to 1902 there existed in France only two large union groups, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* and the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail* and at the C.G.T.'s Montpellier congress in 1902 the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail* joined the C.G.T.



Councilism and Syndicalism: A historical perspective

by Andrew Giles-Peters

It was in early 1977 that both Andrew Giles-Peters and Vicente Ruiz (hijo) agreed that they would travel together to Spain in order to obtain first hand experience of the so called rebirth of the “CNT” within the Spanish State as well as the anarchist movement. A transitional period that was anticipated would lead to the eventual dismantling of the “Spanish Libertarian Movement in Exile” (which embraced the CNT, FAI and Juventudes Libertarias in Exile, three exiled entities that also existed in Australia).

Needless to say that what they encountered within the Spanish territory was not just disillusionment but complete disarray when compared to the aspirations of the exiled militants. (Although one must take into consideration the fact that the Spanish territory had just come out of one of the longest and most brutal dictatorships and that the libertarian movement within the territory had suffered continuous atrocious persecution over a period of 40 years.) In addition the desire to hijack the revolutionary

history of the CNT by many different aspiring radical marxist groupings with the intention of making it their own, contributed to the confusionism confronted by the new anarcho-syndicalist and libertarian orientated generation who was constantly bombarded with propaganda from the differing syndicalist factions that had evolved within the CNT since its re-emergence.

This article was consequently written in mid 1977 by Andrew Giles-Peters with the intention of intervening in the debate within the reconstructed CNT over “councilism and syndicalism” and appeared in opposition journals due to the difficulty of publication in official CNT periodicals at the time. It was written with the intention of attacking what was then the current misunderstanding in both anarchist and radical marxists circles of the historical relations of anarcho-syndicalism and council communism and also, of course, with the intention of pointing out that anarcho-syndicalism was in fact the more viable option. It might

also be pointed out that council communism was not in the final analysis a more modern doctrine than anarcho-syndicalism because the anarcho-syndicalism of the 1920's -in Germany as in Spain- had absorbed all the new importations of the pre-war and war-time movement. In the end council communism came to represent

a more primitive form of politics recalling anarcho-communism in its organisation and strategy. In all these things the CNT of the late 1970's stood rather closer to its younger elements to the General Workers Union than to the Free Workers Union and was in considerable danger of entering a similar process of decomposition.

1.

Council communism only can be understood as the younger brother of German anarcho-syndicalism, with all that such a difference of age might imply. But these two children of German social-democracy, born in rather different circumstances developed along different paths and -separated- met a common defeat.

2.

When German social-democracy emerged from clandestinity after the expiry of the anti-socialist law, two internal oppositions likewise emerged, one inside the party and one inside the unions.

The less important, that of the so called "Jungen" inside the party demanded the refusal of parliamentarism and a revolutionary line. Expelled from the party they dispersed; some passing to the right and others to anarchism. Of the anarchists some would be important later -Gustav Landauer murdered by the army when the federal social democratic government attacked the socialist Council Republic in the state of Bavaria, and Rudolf Rocker, active in the jewish population of London before the First World War and after his return to Germany intellectual leader of the German anarcho-syndicalists- but the movement had little to do at the time with the development of a revolutionary worker's movement in Germany. That was the achievement of the other opposition.

The polemic inside the union movement was between the "centralists" and the "localists". The centralists wanted strong national trade unions with professional leaders and strike funds and, whilst they were social democrats, they

wanted purely economic trade unions. In contrast the localists wanted unions of a socialist character, without professional leaders or strike funds, organised by a delegate structure and united in local all-trades federations without a central bureaucracy. The majority of the trade union congress supported the centralist thesis and thus were born the so called "Free Trade Unions", fathers of the German trade union movement of today. Some years later the minority created its own organization -the 'Free Association of German Trade Unions'- but this remained very small whilst the Free Trade Unions developed into the largest working-class organization in Germany.

In 1904-05 this era of Free development of the purely economic trade unions ended with the formation of two great associations of German employers which possessed, and applied, sufficient economic resources for the aid of any firm with a strike or a lockout. In 1905, a very conflictive year, with the example of the revolution in Russia and the general strike in Moscow, the Free Trade Unions had to spend a third of their accumulated strike funds. As a consequence the trade unions leaders saw the debate inside the social democratic Party on the mass strike as a matter of life or death for their organisation (and for their jobs too). They demanded that the Party leaders not permit the inner-party discussion on the general strike and that they expel all the localists, who, with an organisation of some 10,000 workers, were the most important influence for the mass strike in working class circles, if they would not dissolve their organisation into the Free Trade Unions. The majority of the congress of localist trade unions refused to do this and expelled from the Social-Democratic Party brought to a conclusion their evolution towards revolutionary and later anarchist syndicalism. In 1914, in another very conflictive economic and political situation in Germany, the localist organisations had grown to some 20,000 workers and a new "localist" opposition was forming inside the Free Trade Unions.

3.

The origin of council communism is not to be found in a such unitary development of a section of the socialist workers but rather in the confluence of an extreme left tendency inside the German Social-Democratic Party with the revolutionary tendencies in the working class in the first years after the First World War.

The so called "left radicals" emerged in the SDP in the years 1905-10 with the aid of the left wing Marxists of Holland (including the scientist and future theorist of the workers councils, Anton Pannekoek) who already had created their own party before the war. They, the "left radicals", saw imperialism as the central problem of internal and external politics, they demanded a new tactic for the party based on the political mass strike, and they denounced the dictatorship of the trade union bureaucracy over the party. However they remained a small

group separated from the localists who were already anarcho-syndicalists.

During the war two distinct tendencies developed inside the left radicals (if we leave aside those who passed to the extreme right during the war). The first, and better known, was that of Luxemburg and the Spartacist League. This was the true continuation of the German social-democratic left. The second was already something different and with the dutch left supported the Leninist theses on the war and revolution. It was inside the second group that there developed during the war the new idea of the so called “workers unions” denounced by Lenin in “Left wing Communism: an infantile disorder”. This idea which directed itself in the first place against the reformist and purely economic trade unions was able to be directed also against the political parties. According to all the left radicals the time of purely economic trade union practice and purely parliamentary parties had ended in the new era (since 1905 and 1914) of direct class struggle. According to the non-luxemburgist tendency, this implied that a new type of unitary organisation, neither party nor trade union, was necessary. This thesis of unitary organisation was developed by the left radicals in the most proletarian zones of Germany -saxony and the northern ports- in the years before the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the German November Revolution of 1918 popularised the concept of workers councils.

4.

With the German Revolution the Spartacist League separated from the independent Social-Democratic Party (a split from the SDP that grouped the left and centre-left of the old party with some pacifist “revisionists” such as Eduard Bernstein and Kurt Eisner, the later leader of the November Revolution in Bavaria and murdered by the right a little later) and with the other more radical groups of left radicalism formed the Communist Party of Germany. Still in spite of this came the left theses of the refusal of parliament and the Free Trade Unions won out over the opposed theses of Luxemburg. At the same time the localists were reorganising, calling their members to a common revolutionary work with the socialists of a revolutionary tendency, and commenced a development that, in December 1919, resulted in the formation of the Free Workers Unions of Germany with 120,000 affiliates. In the course of 1919 there also developed many regional workers union of a revolutionary tendency, some linked to the radical tendency inside the communist party, others close to the localists, some linked to both and some to neither. In October 1919 the luxemburgist leadership of the Communist Party (Luxemburg had already been murdered by the German army of the social-democratic government) expelled all the so called “syndicalists” (that is anarchists, left radicals and revolutionary syndicalists) and the majority of the party left to construct the anarcho-syndicalist union (Free Workers Union), the General Workers Union of Germany (of marxist-left radical tendency) and the Communist Workers Party of Germany.

5.

The revolutionary organisations, Free Workers Union and General Workers Union of Germany (the Communist Workers Party was the anti-parliamentary and revolutionary marxist “FAI” of the General Workers Union) came to affiliate some 200,000 workers each in 1920, the year of the political general strike of the Free Trade Unions against the military coup d'état of Kapp and the workers insurrection in the mining and industrial zones of the Ruhr in the “Red Army” of which the militants of both organisations played a principal role. But with year began the process of differentiation between and inside the two. Both opposed parliamentarism, both attacked the reformist trade unionism of the social-democratic Free Trade Unions, both wanted the proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat as, and only as, the power of the workers councils (although the anarcho-syndicalists didn't like to use the word “dictatorship” in general); given these common points the differences between “marxism” and “Anarcho-syndicalism” were not important in reality (and the old anarcho-syndicalist workers had been marxist socialists before the members of the General Workers Union were born.)

The real problem was different. It was that whilst both called themselves “unions”, the anarcho-syndicalists had an organic tradition of political and trade union struggle since the clandestinity of the workers movement in the 1880's and trade union militants formed in the years before the war. On the other hand the members of the General Workers Union lacked both this experience and seasoned militants. Their experiences, except for the few intellectuals of the left radical tendency of the pre-war Social-Democratic Party, were solely of the political and evolutionary struggles during and after the war. Thus whilst the Free Workers Union followed an anarcho-syndicalist policy, the General Workers Union (and particularly its “FAI”, the Communist Workers Party) inclined to a line of revolutionary preparation and armed struggle. (After the defeat of the “Red Army” in the Ruhr a quasi-pacifist tendency won out in the national committee of the Free Workers Union which came to be another important difference between the viewpoints of the two organisations.) The other difference was in the question of the legal factory committees established in 1920. Neither organisation wanted them but the refusal by the councilists of the General Workers Union was absolute whilst the anarcho-syndicalists of the Free Workers Union refused to participate in them as an organisation but recognised that in particular localities syndicalists might participate. (In 1923, another very conflictive year, the syndicalists and the communist union that split away from them secured more than a third of the factory committee delegates in the Ruhr mining zone)

6.

For all that the tensions within the organisations were more important than

their differences. In the General Workers Union the “unitary organisation” tendency of Rühle (formerly an SPD deputy from Saxony) refused all relations with political parties and in particular the relation of the Communist Workers Party with the General Workers Union. They also refused any relation with bolshevick regime in Russia, denouncing it as a state capitalist dictatorship. In other ways however this tendency which counted with a half of the membership of the organisation was before its decomposition into three or four different directions even less syndicalist than the other given that it refused to participate in any partial strikes. In reality then whilst the organisation formed by Rühle and his tendency (the General Workers Union unitary organisation) did not participate in the Communist Party's armed insurrections in 1921 and 1923, its ideological posture was more radical than those of all the remaining groups of the german left. This posture however was not realistic in Germany after 1920 and in 1923 a whole regional of the organisation passed to the anarcho-syndicalists. Later after the exit (1921) of the Communists Workers Party from the Communist International a new split occurred in the General Workers Union between a somewhat more syndicalist majority, which wanted an orientation towards economic struggle and the revolutionary political line of the leaders of the Communist Workers Party who wanted a Fourth International (founded in 1922 to be confused with the trotskyist 'Fourth International') and still believed in immediate revolution. This less radical tendency worked at a factory level with the anarcho-syndicalists whilst guarding its independence. After 1923 all these organisations of the council communists left were much reduced and suffered a number of further splits and attempted reorganisations which left them completely insignificant by the 1930s.

In contrast to the General Workers Union the Free Workers Union suffered only one important split (if we accept a pure anarchist opposition in the Ruhr valley). This split, that of the Free Workers Union (Gelsenluchen tendency a city in the Ruhr) grouped those who did not support the exit of the Free Workers Union from the Red Trade Union International and the creation of a new syndicalist international. Together with other smaller workers unions this tendency formed the Union of Head and Hand Workers which was, until 1924, the majority organisation of revolutionary syndicalism although linked to the Communist Party. More than the anarcho-syndicalist organisation this union worked inside the legal factory committees but like all the other “workers unions” attacked the Free Trade Unions. In 1924 the Communist International demanded its dissolution in the social democratic unions and the Communist Party expelled all those who opposed this decision. Those expelled then formed various “Industrial Associations” (Leagues of Industrial Unions) of a revolutionary type but these as did the other organisations remained very small. In 1930 some 500 of their members in Berlin passed once again back to the anarcho-syndicalist organisation.

The strategy of the majoritarian reformist unions marginalised all these revolutionary organisations in collective bargaining (until they could no longer participate) and factional struggles between and inside them provoked their further decline. In 1930 the Free Workers Union was the same size again as in 1914 and the others much smaller. When Hitler came to power the anarcho-syndicalists were growing again, to some 30,000 but they, as the old militants of the Communist Workers Party in the League of Red Fighters, were destroyed by the national-socialist repression.

7.

In this history what impresses one is that all these groups were born in the refusal of a political and trade union practice of social democracy (be it that of the SPD or of the so called Communist Party). Further for all what was fundamental was the question of the so called "Free" Trade Unions. For this the "localists" were expelled from the SPD in 1907; the "syndicalists" (left radicals included) from the Communist Party (Spartacus League) in 1919 and the "industrialists" (previously the communist syndicalists of the Union of Head and Hand Workers) from the Communist Party in 1924. This is why now a days councilist so strongly criticise the trade unions. What they and others forget is that the councilist criticism of yellow and reformist trade unionism was originally the localist criticism of the german "Free Trade Unions". That is to say; the councilist criticism is equally anarcho-syndicalist; it is the criticism of the german left. It is for this reason that they all called their organisations "unions" (in german a totally different word from that for trade union); they were totally different from the Free Trade Unions in structure, tactics, politics and aim. What the council communists did was to extent the localist criticism of the trade unions to a criticism of political parties.

It is true that the council communists of the General Workers Union made a criticism of german anarcho-syndicalism but this was totally different from the one they made of reformist trade unionism. Upon reading this criticism one discovers that it doesn't contain any point of principle. Originally the councilists said that they would oppose syndicalism to the degree that the latter opposed the council concept. Until 1920 the localists syndicalists were not organised in industrial and factory sections but from 1920 the Free Workers Union was a councilist union in both structure and aim. Later they opposed the "pacifism" of the Free Workers Union for not recognising that the revolution required armed struggle. In this they were right for it is clear that the social-revolutionary general strike cannot be pacific if the army does not depend on railways. But it is also clear that this pacifism was not essential to revolutionary syndicalism although being common to both the german anarcho-syndicalists and the non anarchist revolutionary syndicalists of the American IWW. Clearly neither criticism would apply to the Spanish CNT in 1920.

The CNT contained in one organisation all the tendencies that dispersed themselves in many different organisations in Germany. The tensions between anarchism and syndicalism in the CNT were the same as those between the councilists and anarcho-syndicalists unions in Germany; the argument over the Communist Workers Party repeated itself in Spain in the polemics over the FAI with the difference that in Spain it was the more rightist tendency that attacked it and not the more leftist as in Germany. But even in this example we see the true difference; the split of the "trentistas" was only for five years and was the only important one in the history of the revolutionary and libertarian left in Spain. The force of a true syndicalism results from the union of many working class political tendencies in one organisation (something that does not mean that there cannot be distinct union organisations for sufficiently different political options; revolutionary, social democratic and perhaps others). The force of an anarcho-syndicalist organisation can only result from the union of all the revolutionary and libertarian tendencies in one organisation. The CNT knew this well in advance - the Germans because of their different history never came to know it. It remains to be seen if the CNT today is an organisation "German style" or the continuation and perhaps a development, of the historical CNT.



Anarchism and Trade Unionism

by Gaston Gerard

The question of the position anarchists should take in relation to Trade Unions has been the subject of perennial debate within the anarchist movement. It is not, however, a question which admits of a permanent or definitive answer. Because of differing circumstances and changing conditions, each generation of anarchists must think out its position afresh in the light of existing tendencies within its own national trade union movement. The present time seems an opportune one for a re-assessment of the anarchist position in relation to the British trade union movement and what follows is to be taken as a tentative contribution towards this end.

I

A useful starting point for discussion is provided in the two articles by Errico Malatesta on the subject published in 1907 and 1925 respectively. (*"Anarchism and the Labour Movement"*, originally published in *freedom*, Nov. 1907 and republished in the same journal 23.2.1946; *"Syndicalism and Anarchism"* published in *Pensiero e Volonta*, April-May, 1925 and republished in *freedom*, 11.10.1952.)

The first was written at a time when the movement of revolutionary syndicalism was making great strides on the Continent. In France, where the classic revolutionary syndicalist movement found its most complete expression in the days before the First World War, this movement was very much a product of anarchist activity. Largely in reaction against the notorious policy of "propaganda by deed", many of the younger anarchists, led by the redoubtable Fernand

Gaston Gerard was a lecturer in political science whose valuable discussion of an anarchist approach to trade unionism first appeared in the *University Libertarian* in 1957. Taking into account that this article was written nearly 60 years ago and mainly reflected the British situation, it is extremely relevant and fresh to the current developments and on goings in Australia.

Pelloutier, joined the syndicates with the object of developing their revolutionary potentialities. Such work seemed to them to offer a constructive alternative to a policy of negation and destruction which, however, justifiable it might be in theory, had done much to discredit the anarchist movement in the sight of the world at large. In their enthusiasm for the new policy, however, many of the anarchists abandoned any purely anarchist activity on the ground that the syndicate in its various forms was not only the most effective means of overthrowing capitalism but also contained in itself all the essentials of a free society.

Such an attitude amounted in effect to an identification of anarchism and syndicalism and it was against this attitude that Malatesta directed his attack. He was not opposed; it should be noted, to anarchists participating as individuals in labour organisations. On the contrary, he thought that such participation was necessary; but he insisted that it should be participation and not identification. This position, which he reiterated in his second article, he supported on two main grounds. First, that anarchism was not equivalent to syndicalism. If it were, he argued, then syndicalism was merely a new and confusing term. In fact, however, it was not; only certain syndicalist ideas were genuinely anarchistic; others were only authoritarian ideas under a new guise. Experience had shown, he argued, that labour organisations, however, revolutionary they might be in their initial phases, had a twin tendency to degenerate into reformist and bureaucratic bodies. And this tendency was owing, not so much to personal factors, such as the corrupting influence of power, as to certain institutional factors.

It was and is, a fundamental article of syndicalist theory that syndicates or unions perform a dual role; a negative role of defending the workers' interests under capitalism and a positive role of acting as the nuclei of the future society. Malatesta's point, as I interpret it, was that the first role -the defensive role, and in the short run from the ordinary worker's point of view, the most important role- inevitably dominates the second role, and in so doing paves the way for reformism. To fulfil their defensive role, the unions have, for example, to submit to an element of legal control. In addition, they are compelled to widen their membership as far as possible with the object of achieving a 100% organisation in their trade or industry. In doing this, however, the conscious militant minority becomes swamped by the non-militant majority, with the result that, even if the leadership remains in the hands of the militants, the revolutionary ideas one started with have to be toned down. The revolutionary programme becomes nothing but an empty formula.

Malatesta's conclusion, therefore, was that whilst anarchists should remain in the unions, combating as fiercely as possible these degenerative tendencies, they should not identify themselves too closely with syndicalism. "Let us beware of

ourselves," he said. "The error of having abandoned the Labour movement has done an immense injury to anarchism, but at least it leaves unaltered the distinctive character. The error of confounding the anarchist movement with Trade Unionism would be still graver. That will happen to us which happened to the Social Democrats as soon as they went into the Parliamentary struggle. They gained in numerical force, but by becoming each day less Socialistic. We also would become more numerous, but we should cease to be anarchist".

II

How far Malatesta's argument is applicable to the British trade union movement (or any other) and how valid is his conclusion today?

A review of the history of British trade unionism shows that there is ample evidence to support the view that labour organisations tend to degenerate into reformist bodies. Contrary to popular belief, trade unionism in this country has not always been reformist; it has in fact passed through several revolutionary, or potentially revolutionary, phases. It was in the early days of the movement that syndicalist ideas first saw the light of day. The Grand National of 1834 was the first expression of the One Big Union idea, and it was William Benbow who first elaborated the theory of the general strike - or Grand National holiday, as he called it. In its beginnings at least British trade unionism was as revolutionary as one might wish. After the collapse of the first revolutionary movement, the trade unions settled down to win reforms within the existing system - reforms which in the hey-day of its 19th century prosperity British capitalism could well afford. Then in the 1880s with the onset of the Great Depression and the rise of competitors like Germany who challenged British capitalism's industrial supremacy, revolutionary ideas once again came to the fore in trade union circles. These ideas were associated particularly with the rise of what was called the new Unionism - the attempt to organise the unskilled workers. Many British anarchists of the day considered that this New Unionism offered great scope for anarchist influence. William Morris' Socialist League, for example, addressed one of its first manifestos to the trade unions urging them "to direct all their energies towards confederating and federating with the distinct end of constituting themselves the nucleus of the socialist commonwealth" and making clear that the aim of socialism was the abolition of "that great bogey," the State. Similarly a writer in *Freedom* in 1892 urged that "Unions are free spontaneous associations of working men waiting to do anarchistic work". In point of fact, however, the New Unionists, despite their more militant policy, their vague talk of workers' control and a general strike, and their disavowal of the friendly society functions of the old union of skilled workers, proved to be less and not more anarchistic than the old unions. It was the New Unions which were the first to become infected with Fabian State Socialism and it was the New Unions which forced

the pace in the movement towards the creation of a political Labour Party.

The reason for this apparent paradox is illuminating. *Just because* the workers they enlisted in their ranks could not afford to finance “coffin club” activities, and did not possess a monopoly of any particular skill, the New Unions were predisposed towards political action. Too weak to secure their defensive objects themselves, they turned to the State to do the job for them - to introduce a legislative 8-hour day, old age pensions, unemployment benefits and the like. At its birth the Labour Party was largely a means of achieving the defensive objects of the trade unions - and this, despite its “Socialist” programme, remains its primary function today. To tell trade unionists therefore to renounce political action is to ask them to renounce what they have found to be a powerful defensive weapon and to rely on their own unaided efforts - and to risk the possible loss of reforms that have already been won. The third and to date last revolutionary phase of British trade unionism was the period roughly 1910-1926 when syndicalist ideas were again in the ascendant. British syndicalism was born partly of disillusionment with Labour Party policies and was partly the result of Continental and American influence. The movement achieved some success in spreading the idea of workers' control among the rank-and-file trade unionists and, in fact, to the extent that this idea is alive today in the British working-class movement, it is largely owing to the syndicalists of this period and their middle-class counterparts, the guild socialists. But the syndicalist movement proper collapsed partly through internal dissensions consequent on the creation of the Communist Party and partly through lack of success. The savage counter-attack of the British ruling class during the General Strike of 1926 dealt a body blow to British trade unionism. Syndicalist ideas were discredited -most unjustly since the General Strike was certainly not syndicalist-inspired- and after 1926 the policy of political action once again began to dominate trade union thought. Nothing that has happened since has seemed to justify to the majority of trade unions a return to the policy of relying on direct action in the industrial sphere. In terms of their own practical objects, trade union leaders have no incentive to revert to direct action methods. The political ruling class is now agreed on the maintenance of the Welfare State which represents the limit of the Utopian aspirations of the average trade unionist. As a guarantee of its maintenance the official trade union movement has been granted a secure niche in the organisation of the State and in return for this concession it throws its weight against “irresponsible” and unofficial strikes.

It is possible that if the Welfare State were threatened either by a reactionary government or by a new slump, this might provide the necessary stimulus for a new revolutionary phase in the history of British trade unionism. But there are no signs that a real slump is likely to occur in the foreseeable future or that our ruling class is so inept as to allow a repetition of mass unemployment on the scale experienced in the 1930s. And what is more important, there is no reason

to believe that, if trade unionism did take a revolutionary turn, this would be anything more than a passing phase. There is nothing in the history of British trade unionism to suggest that in the long run it is ever likely to be more than a reformist institution. Looked at historically, revolutionary methods and policies on the part of British trade unionism have been no more than one way of winning reformist concessions from the ruling class. Trade unionists have, in effect, been saying to their masters: "If you don't grant us our modest demands, just look what we'll do!"

III

The other tendency -the tendency towards bureaucratisation- which Malatesta discerned is also amply illustrated in British trade unionism. "Every institution," he wrote, "has a tendency to extend its functions, to perpetuate itself, and to become an end in itself". When this tendency becomes dominant, bureaucracy, the *de facto* rule of officials, is the result. This stage in the life of an organisation is marked by the emergence of a new type of leader - the organiser, who replaces the more demagogic type: the Morrisons replace the Keir Hardies, the Bevens and Deakins replace the Ben Tilletts and the Tom Manns. In theory the officials remain responsible to their members but in practice it is the officials who run the show.

This tendency which Malatesta noted has since been elaborated into a sociological hypothesis, known as the law of oligarchy. First formulated by Robert Michels in his exhaustive study of "Political Parties" (1915), it has a general application. Put in its most general form, the hypothesis states that in any organisation, however democratic it may be, once it has reached a certain size and degree of complexity, there is an invariable tendency for the officials to gain effective control. The ostensibly democratic constitution thus merely serves to mask what is in fact the rule of a narrow oligarchy. It needs no great knowledge of European trade unionism to appreciate the fact that the movement has reached the oligarchical stage. The facts published in Dr. Goldstein's book on the T.G.W.U. confirm the view that Michels' "iron law of oligarchy", as he called it, holds within the trade union world that we know today.

IV

Increasing awareness of the twin tendency in trade unionism towards reformism and bureaucracy has suggested to many contemporary anarchists that participation in trade unions is value-less and that instead attention should be concentrated in building up a new trade union movement on avowedly syndicalist lines. This, as I understand it, is the policy of those who call

themselves anarcho-syndicalists. Such anarchists propose that the new movement should adopt principles of organisation which would ensure that it would not develop in the way the "official" trade union movement has developed. The new unions or syndicates are to be based on industries rather than on crafts, thus avoiding sectional conflicts between the workers themselves. There is to be no political action; instead, reliance is to be placed exclusively on direct action. By this means it is hoped to avoid mere reformisms and the danger of unions being used for the ulterior ends of political opportunists and careerists. Special measures are to be taken to avoid the danger of bureaucratisation. There will be a minimum of organisers; no organiser will be regarded as permanent; and no organiser will be paid more than a rank-and-file worker. By these means, it is hoped that control will remain with the rank-and-file: the danger of control falling into the hand of a hierarchy of officials will be avoided because there will be no officials in the sense understood by ordinary trade unionists today.

In theory all this is perfectly correct but nevertheless the policy of seeking to create anarchist organisations -for this is what it amounts to- is, I believe, mistaken. In the first place, the time is not propitious.

Such a policy is likely to bear fruit only in a period of revolutionary crisis and after the ground has been well fertilized by years of propaganda in favour of such general objects as workers' control. In this respect, it will take years of intensive effort before the climate in the world of labour is as favourable towards revolutionary activity as it was in, say, the early 1920s. In the second place, the theory of anarcho-syndicalist organisation fails to show how it can counteract the institutional factor noted by Malatesta. The means proposed for ensuring rank-and-file control can only be successful if membership is confined to workers who are more or less conscious anarchists. But if this was done, the numbers at the present time and in the foreseeable future would necessarily be small and the unions so organised would find themselves unable to fulfil satisfactorily their first role - that of defending the interests of their members under the existing regime. If on the other hand, membership was not limited - the unions would soon become swamped by reformists and the anarcho-syndicalist principles of organisation would cease to operate. The reformists might allow the organisation to keep its revolutionary programme but it would be more than a paper programme. In this connection it should be noted that many existing unions still have the revolutionary object of workers' control written into their constitutions. In short, the anarcho-syndicalist is faced with an inescapable dilemma at the present time: he can either choose to keep his organisation revolutionary, in which case it will be small and ineffective in defence; or he can choose to make it large and effective for defensive purposes at the sacrifice of its revolutionary potentialities. In addition, a policy of creating separate organisations would divide and confuse the workers even more than they are divided and confused at the present time and this in itself would be

used as a strong propaganda point by the existing union hierarchy. And, finally, there is the undeniable fact that the efforts expended by anarcho-syndicalists in propagandising their policy has had little effect. The hopes placed by the anarcho-syndicalists in the unofficial workers' committees that have sprung up since the war have not been fulfilled.

V

In the present circumstances, therefore, it seems to me that Malatesta's main contentions still hold good that those anarchists who are prepared to act in the industrial sphere should work within the existing unions rather than propagate the idea of a new union movement. This is not to say that the time will never come when the workers should be encouraged to form new and revolutionary unions but that time will be in the future after the ground has been well prepared in the present unions. In short, the position anarchists should take in relation to trade unionism today is to participate in them as rank-and-file members with the two-fold object of:

- (i) making anarchists by spreading anarchist ideas and explaining to their fellow-workers the root causes of their disillusionment with the trade union leadership and policies and
- (ii) acting as a prophylactic against reformist and bureaucratic tendencies.

The first object is fundamental in the sense that it is now clearer than ever that an anarchist society can be brought about, not by mass movements, however "revolutionary", but only by individuals who have consciously adopted an anarchist philosophy and faith. As William Morris was never tired of asserting in the days when "socialism" was still an honourable word, the only way to make socialism is to make socialists - a truth which his Fabian opponents never began to understand.

The second object, if less fundamental, is of the utmost importance in the immediate future. The unions began as free associations of workers to promote their economic interests. Increasingly since the war, however, they are being incorporated in the mechanism of the State. Such incorporation means in practice that instead of defending their members' interests they are tending more and more to act as disciplinary bodies and as agencies for restraining the workers. The insistence on greater productivity at all costs -with no questioning of what is

produced and to what end- and the present talk of regulating strikes are significant pointers to the fact that British trade unionism is treading the same road as its Soviet counterpart. Unless the present tendency is halted soon, the much vaunted independence of trade unionism will be no more; and one further step will be taken towards the totalitarian state. In a situation such as this and granted that the most desirable course of action is not practicable -in this case, the speedy building up of genuinely anarchist unions- there is only one sensible alternative for the revolutionary: to do his utmost to reverse the present tendency. For it is obvious that independence of the State is a prior condition for any further development of labour organisations along anarchist lines. By opposing the reformism and bureaucratic control of the existing trade union leadership and asserting the independence of the unions, anarchists could play their part in stopping the drift towards totalitarianism. Such a role is less heroic than attempting to foster anarcho-syndicalist unions, but in the long run is likely to be more fruitful.

In an age like our own when all the major currents are running towards “the closed society”, the revolutionary might well be satisfied if he can achieve the limited object of keeping open the door to freedom.

