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STRATEGY AND TACTICS



A mass rally by African workers in Johannesburg, South Africa, in June 1918.

Addressed by speakers from two local syndicalist groups, the Industrial Workers of Africa and the International Socialist League, in conjunction with the Transvaal Native Congress, the rally helped lead to the abortive general strike of 1 July 1918. Shortly afterward, South Africa underwent a spurt of syndicalist organising that saw the creation of the Indian Workers Industrial Union and the Industrial Workers of Africa—the impact of which would be felt as far away as Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).



Luigi Galleani (1861–1931) in Italy following his deportation from the United States.

Leading theorist of insurrectionist anarchism, Galleani believed all reforms including trade union and community organising were futile, and that “propaganda by the deed”—violent actions including assassination—was necessary to awaken the popular classes to the social revolution. This purist, catalytic position was rejected by the mass anarchists.

Roads to Revolution: Mass Anarchism versus Insurrectionist Anarchism

The broad anarchist position and its relationship to other socialist traditions have been outlined in previous chapters. It will also be recalled, of course, that we have dispensed with the commonly used categorisations of different types of anarchism, such as the notions of “philosophical anarchism,” “individualist anarchism,” and “spiritual anarchism,” stressing that anarchism is a coherent intellectual and political current dating back to the 1860s and the First International, and part of the labour and left tradition.

It is at the level of *strategy*, we would suggest, that distinctions between the types of anarchism should be drawn. In chapter 2, we identified the principles that frame anarchist strategy, but noted that this foundation still allows a range of strategic choices. Within these principles, there are different possibilities for strategy, and it is possible to identify two main anarchist ones.

The first strategy, insurrectionist anarchism, argues that reforms are illusory and organised mass movements are incompatible with anarchism, and emphasises armed action—propaganda by the deed—against the ruling class and its institutions as the primary means of evoking a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge. It is this strand of anarchism that has been imprinted on the public mind, not least as a result of the spectacular wave of assassinations carried out by insurrectionist anarchists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. “Placid and carefree sleeps the bourgeoisie, but the day of shuddering and fear, of ferocious tempests, of bloody revenge is approaching” declared an insurrectionist manifesto. “The savage, blinding light of explosions begins to light up its dreams, property trembles and cracks under the deafening blows of dynamite, the palaces of stone crack open, providing a breach through which will pour the wave of the poor and the starving”; here “is the hour of revenge, the bombs have sounded the charge—by Dynamite to Anarchy!”¹ The insurrectionist anarchists were generally people of action; their analysis left little space for possibilist action, but opened the door to dramatic and usually violent actions designed to rouse the masses from their slumber, including bank robberies to raise funds (“expropriation”) as well as retributive assassinations and bombings.

The second strategy—what we refer to, for lack of a better term, as mass anarchism—is rather different. This stresses the view that only mass movements can create a revolutionary change in society, that such movements are typically built through struggles around immediate issues and reforms (whether around wages, police brutality, or high prices, and so on), and that anarchists must participate in such movements to radicalise and transform them into levers of revolutionary change.

Insurrectionist anarchism disparages such struggles as futile and as perpetuating the current social order. Mass anarchism, however, underscores the importance of daily struggles, even around limited goals, as a means of strengthening popular movements, raising popular consciousness, and improving popular conditions; it is only thus that a genuine social revolution by the popular classes can be made possible. What is crucial is that reforms are won *from below*, rather than doled out from above, which can only lead to mass passivity as well as measures that undermine popular autonomy and struggle. As Malatesta put it, “It is not all that important that the workers should want more or less; what is important is that they should try to get what they want, by their own efforts, by their *direct action* against the capitalists and the government.” A “small improvement achieved by one’s own effort” is worth more than a “large-scale reform” granted from above.²

It can be fairly said that while insurrectionist anarchism is impossibilist, in that it views reforms, however won, as futile, mass anarchism is *possibilist*, believing that it is both possible and desirable to force concessions from the ruling classes. Most mass anarchists embraced syndicalism, with its view that union struggles could play a central role in destroying capitalism, landlordism, and the state. Contrary to the notion that the “record of the anarcho-syndicalist movement has been one of the most abysmal in the history of anarchism generally,” it was above all through syndicalism that anarchism had its greatest influence.³

Other mass anarchists were antisindicalists of two types: those who rejected workplace activity, emphasising community activity instead, and those who favoured workplace activity independent of the unions, which included a substantial body whose approach converged with the rank-and-file version of syndicalism, including work within orthodox unions. Unlike insurrectionist anarchists, these antisindicalists emphasised the importance of mass struggles, whether carried out in communities or at work, and were possibilists.

Anarchist Communism versus Anarcho-syndicalism?

We will explore the relationship between anarchism and syndicalism in more depth in subsequent chapters. First, though, we need to consider an alternative way of categorising the types of anarchism on the basis of the strategy that commonly appears in the literature. This is the idea that it is possible to organise the history of the broad anarchist tradition around a contrast between “anarchist communism ... perhaps the most influential anarchist doctrine,” and “another doctrine of comparable significance, anarcho-syndicalism.”⁴ We do not find this useful or accurate. The vast majority of people described in the literature as “anarchist communists” or “anarcho-communists” championed syndicalism, and the majority of syndicalists

endorsed anarchist communism: a stateless socialist society based on distribution according to need. There were national and local contexts in which the “anarcho-communist” label was used to distinguish particular positions among the anarchists and syndicalists, but there was no general distinction between “anarchist communists” and anarcho-syndicalists.

One of the basic problems with this purported distinction is that it is applied in an inconsistent and often incompatible manner. Paul Avrich, when exploring Russian anarchism, talked of an “Anarchist-Communism” that, inspired by Bakunin and Kropotkin, wanted a “free federation of communities,” looked back to a preindustrial Russia, had “little use for large-scale industry or bureaucratic labour organisations,” and embraced “expropriation” and armed actions. The Russian anarcho-syndicalists, however, embraced modern industry, “technological progress,” and the “cult of the machine,” and stressed workplace struggle, “a decentralised society of labour organisations,” and self-management.⁵

Bookchin distinguished between the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists, who controlled the labour movement, and the “anarchist communists.” The latter supposedly viewed syndicalists of all types “with disdain,” and as “deserters to reformism.”⁶ The “anarcho-communists” were radicals who wanted to form “an authentically revolutionary movement, however small its size and influence,” while the anarcho-syndicalists were pragmatic unionists.⁷ Many key “anarchist theorists,” he claimed, distrusted syndicalism as a “change in focus from the commune to the trade union, from all the oppressed to the industrial proletariat, from the streets to the factories, and, in emphasis at least, from insurrection to the general strike,” according to Bookchin.⁸ Almost all the major “anarchist communists,” including Goldman, Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Reclus, “initially opposed” syndicalism. If Avrich spoke of a distinction centred on technology, Bookchin posed it as a difference over the “authentic locus” of struggle.⁹

A third variant of the supposed distinction is provided by writers who define “anarcho-communism” primarily as a model of postcapitalist society, aimed at “ending exchange value” and “making this the immediate content of the revolutionary process.”¹⁰ Here, “anarcho-communism” is distinguished from the “anarchist collectivism” of Bakunin, and is presented as opposed to the “official workers’ movement” and struggles that “put forward wage or other claims, or which were organised by trade unions,” thereby reproducing the wage system.¹¹

By this account, “anarcho-communism” subsequently splintered into those who favoured unions, like Kropotkin, and those who did not, and it withered away by the 1930s, despite attempts at “practical” activity by Flores Magón, the Russians, and Hatta Shūzō (1886–1934) in Japan.¹² Born to an impoverished merchant family in the port town of Tsu, Hatta left school early and eventually trained as a Presbyterian minister.¹³ He became sympathetic to anarchism and held a memorial meeting for the murdered anarchist Ōsugi. Ōsugi was the key figure in Japanese anarchism after the death of Kōtoku; the son of an army officer and an accomplished linguist, he was an ardent syndicalist who played an important part in anarchist union work in Japan in the 1910s.¹⁴ Hatta’s increasing politicisation and scandalous personal life saw him leave the clergy, and from there he went to live in Tokyo and dedicated

himself to anarchism. An excellent orator, he also translated key anarchist works and wrote widely on anarchist theory, dying in 1934 of alcoholism and poverty.

Hatta elaborated his anarchist communism into a doctrine of "pure anarchism" that opposed syndicalism as reformist, hierarchical, and narrow, and wanted an anarchist society based on self-sufficient villages. Here, "anarcho-communism" is defined as a revolutionary objective.

The more contemporary anarchist movement provides a final variant of the distinction, in that contemporary advocates of organisational dualism use the term "anarchist communist" to distinguish their views. The Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) of Ireland argues that syndicalism ignores the need for a specific political group to champion anarchism: "They see the biggest problem in the structure of the existing unions rather than in the ideas that tie workers to authoritarian, capitalist views of the world."¹⁵ "We will not liquidate our specific politics and organisation into the a-politicism of syndicalism," but will organise on Platformist lines.¹⁶ The WSM calls for a style of unionism that is "essentially the same" as that of syndicalism, but does not regard itself as syndicalist. The FdCA of Italy contends that the "feature which best distinguishes Anarchist Communism from all other schools of thought within anarchism is ... 'organisational dualism.'"¹⁷ Here, "anarchist communism" is identified with Bakunin and the Alliance as well as organisational dualism, and Kropotkin is sometimes excluded.¹⁸

The problems with drawing a sharp distinction between "anarcho-communism" and anarcho-syndicalism should be clear from the above discussion. At the very least, these writers are talking about quite different tendencies when they refer to "anarcho-communism," and this alone suggests that the notion of a universal distinction between "anarcho-communists" and anarcho-syndicalists is not convincing. Kropotkin, for instance, produced a paper called *Kleb i Volya* (Bread and Liberty) for Russian distribution in order to combat the "Anarchist Communist" tendency by promoting syndicalism.¹⁹ He believed that revolutionary unions were "absolutely necessary."²⁰ Other major anarchist theorists, identified as "anarchist communists," also embraced syndicalism. Malatesta described the unions as "the best of all means" and "the greatest force for social transformation," and saw the general strike as the "starting" point of the revolution.²¹ He pioneered anarchist unionism in Argentina.²² Berkman was an unqualified supporter of syndicalism, claiming that the revolution "lies in the hands" of "the industrial worker ... the farm labourer," and the "intellectual proletariat" through a "real labour union" and the "General Strike."²³ Goldman held that "syndicalism is, in essence, the economic expression of Anarchism."²⁴ The choice was "between an Industrial State and anarcho-syndicalism," she noted.²⁵ Flores Magón was greatly admired by the Mexican syndicalist union, the CGT, formed in 1921, and the PLM was active in the labour movement.²⁶

Shifu of China, "an anarchist-communist, a self-acknowledged disciple of Kropotkin," and founder of the Society of Anarchist-Communist Comrades, was the pioneer of Chinese syndicalism.²⁷ Born in 1884 to the educated class and radicalised in Japan, Shifu joined Sun Yat-Sen's republican movement, was jailed, and became an anarchist soon after the May 1911 republican uprising. He formed groups in

Canton (now Guangzhou) and published *Hui-Ming-lu* ("The Voice of the People"). Shifu died of tuberculosis in 1915.²⁸

Most anarcho-syndicalists explicitly defined their goal as an anarchist and communist society, raising further questions about the usefulness of the distinction. The Russian anarcho-syndicalists declared their aim "the full realisation of the Anarchist-Communist ideal" of distribution according to needs.²⁹ The Mexican CGT adopted the goal of anarchist communism.³⁰ The syndicalist Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA), formed in 1901 and captured by anarchists in 1904, declared that it advocated the "economic and philosophical principles of anarchist-communism."³¹ FORA played a central role in the formation in 1929 of the American Continental Workingmen's Association (ACAT) within the IWA, which declared, "It recommends communism."³² The IWA also advocated a "free communist future."³³

The Bulgarian Anarchist Communist Federation (FAKB), which was formed in 1919, worked closely with the country's Anarcho-Syndicalist National Confederation of Labour. The British syndicalist Tom Brown, a former CPGB member active from the 1930s, argued that "as to distribution, the Syndicalist method of distribution is free; a system of common ownership and Workers' Control must have a system of free and common distribution to supplement it."³⁴ Even Bookchin admits that the Spanish CNT "unequivocally declared its belief in *comunismo anarquico*."³⁵ Hatta and his so-called "pure anarchists" found their main support within the National Libertarian Federation of Labour Unions (usually abbreviated as Zenkoku Jiren); formed as a syndicalist union federation in 1926, the Zenkoku Jiren split in 1928 when anarcho-syndicalists walked out to form the Nihon Jikyo. The Zenkoku Jiren was not a syndicalist federation but its daily activities included union work and strikes, and it had an ability to "enthuse significant numbers of rank and file unionists."³⁶ Hatta's own view that the unions should "advance with the method and in the spirit of anarchism" served as a caution against setting up too sharp a distinction between "pure anarchism" and syndicalism.³⁷

Nor were the key texts of Platformism hostile to syndicalism. The *Platform* itself, for example, stated that the "tendency to oppose" communist anarchism to syndicalism is "artificial, and devoid of all foundation and meaning."³⁸ The task of anarchists was to promote anarchism in an organised and systematic manner in the syndicalist unions as well as elsewhere, and to do so through an anarchist political group. In 1938, the Friends of Durruti (AD), a radical group in the Spanish anarchist movement, produced *Towards a Fresh Revolution*, regarded as the second core text of Platformism. The AD called for a "Revolutionary Junta" or "National Defence Council" to coordinate the revolution, which would be "elected by democratic vote in the union organisations," leaving the "economic affairs ... the exclusive preserve of the unions," and "the trade union assemblies will exercise control over the Junta's activities."³⁹ The Platformist advocacy of the need for a specific anarchist political group differentiates Platformism from some syndicalist positions, but there is no reason to set up an artificial divide between platformism and syndicalism—this is a matter to which we will return in chapter 8.

The Insurrectionist Tradition

It follows from our discussion that a new typology, which can be generally applied and can provide a guide in understanding the differences within the broad anarchist tradition, needs to be developed. We suggest that a more useful distinction can be drawn between insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism. The insurrectionist approach to anarchism has played a persistent, prominent, but decidedly minority part within the overall anarchist movement for most of its history. It bears examining before turning to the mass anarchist tradition for several reasons: first, because the insurrectionist tradition is a fair approximation of what many people have in mind when they think of anarchism; second, because it is a fairly monolithic approach and can therefore be dealt with relatively easily; and third, because the insurrectionist anarchist tradition offers a useful set of contrasts with the mass anarchist approach.

Galleani was one of the most articulate spokespeople for the insurrectionist tradition. Born in Italy, he initially studied law in Turin, but rejected it when he adopted anarchism.⁴⁰ He subsequently fled Italy, and was expelled from France and then Switzerland; returning to Italy he was soon jailed on charges of conspiracy on the island of Pantelleria, off the coast of Sicily, in 1898. Galleani escaped in 1900, spending nearly a year in Egypt until, threatened with extradition, he fled to the United States.

There Galleani settled in Paterson, New Jersey. Unable to speak English properly, his activities were focused on the Italian immigrant community, where insurrectionist views already had some influence. He assumed editorship of *La Questione Sociale* ("The Social Question"), perhaps the leading Italian anarchist periodical in the United States, fled to Canada after being charged with instigating riots in 1902, returned to Barre, Vermont, to found *Cronaca Sovversiva* ("Subversive Chronicles") in 1903, and relocated to Lynn, Massachusetts in 1912. In 1919, Galleani and a number of his supporters were deported as part of the general crackdown by the U.S. government on the Left from 1919 to 1920; he was forced to leave his wife and children behind. In Italy, he suffered continual harassment under the Mussolini regime, including repeated jailing and around-the-clock police surveillance, dying in 1931 in a small village.

Cronaca Sovversiva, which lasted until 1918 in the United States, and was revived briefly in Italy in 1920, was distributed among Italian speakers worldwide, including Australia, Latin America, and North Africa. It advocated violent retribution against the forces of capitalism and the state, and praised and venerated the anarchists who took the road of armed action—perspectives fervently adopted by Galleanist groups. One adherent, Gaetano Bresci, a silk weaver from Paterson, sailed to Italy, where he then assassinated King Umberto I in 1900; Galleanists were involved in attempts on the lives of industrialist John D. Rockefeller and other capitalists as well as Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and others, attacks on police stations, a wave of bombings in 1919, and in 1920, the Galleanist Mario Buda bombed Wall Street, leaving thirty dead and over two hundred seriously injured.

The famous anarchist militants Nicola Sacco (1891–1927), a shoemaker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti (1888–1927), a fishmonger, were both ardent Galleanists. Ar-

rested in 1919 for involvement in two violent robberies and tried on flimsy evidence by a hostile court, the two men became the centre of an international campaign involving millions, but were executed in 1927. It is understandable that much of the defence campaign tried to present the two as peaceful victims, yet it should be noted that "they belonged to a branch of the anarchist movement which preached insurrectionary violence and armed retaliation, including the use of dynamite and assassination."⁴¹ This is not to cast aspersions on their characters but to acknowledge their militancy and fervent commitment to the cause in which they believed, to see them as they saw themselves, as class warriors.

Fundamentally, the insurrectionist anarchist tradition tended to dismiss any pursuit of immediate and partial gains by the working class and peasantry as futile. According to Galleani, the "anarchists believe that no effective conquest in the economic field is possible so long as the means of production remain the personal property of the capitalists."⁴² Galleani made recourse to a version of the "iron law of wages" argument common among many pre-Marxist socialists: any wage gains and reductions in working hours will necessarily result in an increase in the cost of living as the capitalists strive to recoup their losses. Therefore, "every conquest of such improvements is deceitful and inconsistent." Reforms can only benefit workers for a "short time," before the "high cost of living ... has re-established equilibrium to the exclusive advantage of the ... capitalist."⁴³

The anarchists, in Galleani's view, thus had no interest in promoting reforms and struggles for immediate gains; their aim was to promote the spirit of individual and collective revolt. They favoured the widespread adoption of "tactics of corrosion and continuous attack" through direct action by the working class. While these tactics might result in some reforms, this was merely incidental: the real aim was to foster an ever-increasing proletarian revolt against existing institutions, resulting in the forcible expropriation of the ruling class in the "violent social revolution." Galleani insisted that reforms are cunning attempts by the ruling class to sanitise its rule, for the "purpose of saving its bankrupt privileges." These attempts arise inevitably from the "violent pressure of the masses," but tend to create a "dangerous mirage" of illusions about the kindness of the ruling class that must be discredited.⁴⁴

Given such perspectives, Galleani predictably viewed union work with suspicion. The "anarchist movement and the labour movement follow two parallel lines," he argued, and "it has been geometrically proven that parallels never meet."⁴⁵ In general, unions were a positive danger to anarchist action; this rejection applied equally and explicitly to anarcho-syndicalist and revolutionary syndicalist unions. Unions existed primarily to win demands for "immediate and partial improvements," and in doing so, inevitably consented to "the existing economic system in all its manifestations and relations."⁴⁶

It also meant accommodating the reformist "crowd" that comprised the majority of the working class. No anarchist, asserted Galleani, could assume a position of responsibility in a union organisation. Anarchists must participate in unions only from a position of permanent opposition to their operations, programmes, and actions, "continually demonstrating" the "futility" of union work and its disappointing results: "correct and integral emancipation" required revolution. Revolution might, Galleani conceded, involve a general strike as part—but only part—of the broader

popular insurrection.⁴⁷ Yet it seems clear enough that this would take place *despite* the unions, not through them, and it would not follow from the patient construction of a syndicalist labour movement.

Over time, the insurrectionist distrust of unions that may be found in Galleani has evolved into a perspective of active hostility, according to which unions are regarded as bureaucratic bodies that always and everywhere sabotage working-class struggles, and that always and everywhere actively connive with capitalism and the state to prevent working-class struggles. Contemporary Italian insurrectionist anarchist Alfredo Bonanno represents the latter view in his 1975 *Critique of Syndicalist Methods*. He contended that all union struggles were futile, for even “in the best of cases everything concluded in a deal perked up with a few mere trifles and concessions that soon disappeared through increases in consumer prices,” that even the best union always disempowers the workers who make up its members, and that over time the unions have adopted the role of “guarantor and collaborator” with capitalism. This meant that the struggle had to be outside the unions, as “direct action by grassroots nuclei at the level of production is impossible within the dimension of trades union or syndical[ist] organisations,” according to Bonanno.⁴⁸

Once arguments are made that struggles for immediate gains are futile, participation in unions is possible only on the condition that it is resolutely opposed to actual union work, and that formal organisations as such are a brake on freedom, initiative, and revolt, there are few fields left for anarchist activity. One is the production of abstract propaganda for anarchism. But for many others, another path presented itself: the act of rebellion, often violent, by anarchist individuals and groups, known as “propaganda by the deed,” as opposed to the “propaganda by the word” of writings and speeches. Initially, the phrase “propaganda by the deed” referred to any attempt to demonstrate, in practice, the possibility and desirability of revolution. Since the mid-1880s, however, propaganda by the deed had come to be identified almost exclusively with acts of individual terrorism and assassination, or *attentats*, carried out by anarchists.

Some basic ideas underlay propaganda by the deed: the need to wreak vengeance on particularly reprehensible members of the ruling class, the belief that these actions undermined authority and expressed the individual, and the hope that such acts would inspire the working class and peasantry with the spirit of revolt to undertake similar acts of insurrection and disobedience, coalescing into a general insurrection and revolution. Propaganda by the deed could also encompass expropriations of funds and resources from the ruling class in order to subsidize the revolutionary cause; it could not, though, involve struggles for reforms or actions that could be seen as in any way compromising with the present social order.

In Galleani’s vision, propaganda by the deed plays an absolutely central role. It arises from the intolerable conditions of modern society: the “awful responsibility for the rebellious act” must be “thrown back in the face of the exploiters who squeeze out the last drop of sweat and blood from the common people, back into the face of the cops holding the bag open for the crooks,” and “the judiciary winking indulgently and conniving impunity for oppressors, exploiters, corrupters.”⁴⁹ It is not, in short, the individual rebellion that is immoral but the society that produced it. Such revolts are inevitable—“Of what value is repudiation?”—and justified—“the

bourgeoisie and its misfortunes do not move us one bit." The "individual act of rebellion" cannot be separated from the revolutionary process of which it is the initial phase: the "Ideal ... is embodied in the martyrdom of its first heralds and sustained by the blood of its believers." The individual revolt and sacrifice is the necessary and inevitable intermediary between the original ideal and the insurrectionary movement that culminates in revolution. The "sacrifice" is "raised as a sacred standard," inspiring further revolts until eventually there "are no jails big enough to sustain the expanding insurrection" and the torrent of revolution, "the final desperate conquest," overwhelms all.⁵⁰

Insurrectionist anarchism and propaganda by the deed had not really existed in the period of the First International, and did not form part of Bakunin's thought. It was after the dissolution of the anarchist First International in 1877 that these ideas came to the fore, enjoying a brief period of dominance in the 1880s. The shift toward violent acts of insurrection was not, it must be stressed, confined to the anarchists of the time. A section of the Russian narodnik movement in the 1870s adopted assassination and robbery for the cause as central planks of its strategy, leading to the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 by Ignatei Grinevitski.⁵¹ This approach was popularised and dramatised in Western Europe in books such as Stepniak's 1883 *Underground Russia*. Stepniak was the pseudonym of the Russian anarchist Sergei Kravchinski (1852–1895), who was involved in the assassination of General Nikolai Mezentsev, the czar's police chief. Terrorism of this sort would remain a defining feature of the narodniks' successors, the SRs, although most SRs were not anarchists.

Within the Marxist SDP of Germany, an extremist faction coalesced around the former SDP parliamentary deputy Johann Most (1846–1906), attracting even the young Kautsky, later a bastion of Marxist orthodoxy. Born in Bavaria, Most apprenticed as a bookbinder, associated with the First International in the late 1860s, and as a tireless and powerful agitator, helped organise the SDP. He was jailed repeatedly, elected to the German Reichstag twice, and driven out of Germany in 1878. Even before adopting anarchism, Most advocated armed action; it was only in 1880 that he moved toward insurrectionist anarchism in his London-based *Freiheit* ("Freedom"); he was then expelled from the SDP. An article titled "At Last!"—celebrating Alexander II's assassination and advocating similar actions—led to eighteen months of hard labour, following which Most moved to the United States, relocating *Freiheit* to New York.⁵²

There, he played a central role in founding the U.S. anarchist group the International Working People's Association in 1883 (IWPA, not to be confused with the First International or the syndicalist international formed in 1922), and continued to advocate insurrectionist positions well into the 1880s. Insurrectionist anarchism had an ongoing influence on the IWPA. Most, for example, issued a manual on *The Science of Revolutionary Warfare*, which contained details of preparing and using explosives, and the IWPA issued his bloodthirsty pamphlet *The Beast of Property*, which called for "massacres of the people's enemies."⁵³ The IWPA, however, was increasingly, and predominantly, influenced by syndicalism and the notion that the union was the vehicle of class struggle, a weapon for revolution, and "the embryonic group of the future 'free society,'" "the autonomous commune in the process

of incubation.”⁵⁴ The IWPA took over the Federative Union of Metal Workers of America, and in 1884 its Chicago section formed the Central Labour Union (CLU), the largest union centre in the city. Many IWPA publications also showed a definite fascination with insurrectionism, even though, as we shall see, the general thrust of the organisation was toward mass anarchism and particularly syndicalism.

Within Italy, shifts to insurrectionism were also afoot. In 1877, the young Malatesta and an armed group of about twenty-five other anarchists attempted to spark a rural uprising, meeting with little success; Stepniak had been involved in the preparations for the planned uprising. A second key moment in the anarchist shift to propaganda by the deed was the founding of the Anti-Authoritarian International—better known as the Black International—in London on July 14, 1881, at an International Social-Revolutionary Congress organised by prominent figures such as Kropotkin, Most, and Malatesta. Unlike the First International, which was characterised by political diversity and a focus on the immediate struggles of the working class, the Black International was to be “anarchist, communist, anti-religious, anti-parliamentary, and revolutionary, all at the same time.”⁵⁵ It proved particularly attractive to insurrectionist anarchists, and its manifesto declared, “A deed performed against the existing institutions appeals to the masses much more than thousands of leaflets and torrents of words.”⁵⁶

While its largest affiliates—the IWPA in the United States, and the Mexican Workers’ General Congress (CGOM) formed in 1876—were heavily influenced by syndicalism, the Black International is best known for its role in popularising propaganda by the deed. Many anarchists switched over to the new approach, if only for a time. Kropotkin proclaimed in 1880, “Permanent revolt in speech, writing, by the dagger and the gun, or by dynamite,” and added, “Anything suits us that is alien to legality.”⁵⁷ The young Berkman, influenced by Most and aided by Goldman, was jailed in 1892 in the United States for fifteen years after he attempted to assassinate strikebreaking industrialist Henry Clay Frick, who was responsible for the deaths of several strikers at the Homestead steel mills. Malatesta helped pioneer the basic ideas of the propaganda by the deed approach, although he disapproved of its evolution into mere assassination.

The period of insurrectionist hegemony in the anarchist movement was over by the 1890s, but not before anarchism had become widely associated with terrorism; a wave of attempted and successful assassinations of heads of state and bombings also continued into the twentieth century. The ideas of this tradition would be preserved by the Galleanists, elements linked to the *Tierra y Libertad* (“Land and Liberty”) faction in Spain, the *La Battaglia* (“The Battle”) group in Brazil, the “anti-organisationalists” in Argentina associated with *La Antorcha* (“The Torch”), and the *Culmine* group, and lingered in East Asia as well. The goals and methods of Shifu’s Society of Anarchist-Communist Comrades, formed in China in 1914, included mass actions like strikes but left the door open to “disturbances, including assassination, violence and the like” in its tactical repertoire.⁵⁸

Mass Anarchism, Possibilism, and Syndicalism

By the late 1880s, there was a widespread reaction against propaganda by the deed in anarchist circles, and many of those who had advocated it in the past, including Berkman, Goldman, Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Most, began to point to its disadvantages. For most anarchists, propaganda by the deed had proved ineffective and an outright danger to anarchism. It brought down immense repression, thereby crippling attempts at forming an anarchist mass movement. Insurrectionism did not demonstrably weaken capitalism and the state either. As Malatesta commented, "We know that *these attentats*, with the people insufficiently prepared for them, are *sterile*, and often, by provoking reactions which one is unable to control, produce much sorrow, and *harm the very cause they were intended to serve*." What was essential and useful was "*not just to kill a king, the man, but to kill all kings*—those of the Courts, of parliaments and of the factories *in the hearts and minds of the people*; that is, to *uproot faith* in the *principle of authority* to which most people owe allegiance."⁵⁹ Kropotkin had been sympathetic to the syndicalism of the First International, but fairly hostile to the unions in the period of the Black International.⁶⁰ By the 1890s, however, he was calling for a return to the syndicalism of Bakunin and the First International, although "ten times stronger": "Monster unions embracing millions of proletarians."⁶¹ By the late 1880s, Michel (of whom, more later) saw in the revolutionary general strike the road to revolution, even if she retained some sympathy for propaganda by the deed.⁶²

The very nature of the insurrectional act was increasingly seen as elitist; rather than inspiring the working class and peasantry to action, at best it reinforced the passive reliance of the masses on leaders and saviors from above, substituting a self-elected vanguard for the popular classes. This was mirrored by the dismissal of immediate concerns, such as higher wages. Anarchism became the creed of a select elite, untroubled by the daily concerns of the popular classes, dismissive of unions, and in practice, destructive of popular movements. Propaganda by the deed did little to spread the anarchist idea, unless it was to link anarchism in the public mind with violence and bombings, and divorce anarchism from the masses. By the 1890s, insurrectionist anarchism was very much a minority current.

These criticisms drew on the traditions of the First International anarchists, who had embraced what we term mass anarchism. For Bakunin and the Alliance, the key strategy was to implant anarchism *within* popular social movements in order to radicalise them, spread anarchist ideas and aims, and foster a culture of self-management and direct action, with the hope that such movements would help with the social revolution. In their time, of course, it was the First International itself that they wished to influence. Integral to this outlook was the possibilist view that real reforms *could* be won from below, and that these reforms, rather than cripple popular social movements, could, if won *from below*, aid them, increasing the confidence of the masses and improving the conditions of their lives.

Syndicalism: Prefiguring the Future in the Present

The syndicalist idea was an excellent expression of this general outlook, and quite different from the impossibilist approach, which distrusted immediate gains,

large-scale organisation, and political programmes, with a general hostility toward unions and dreams of sparking revolt from outside the workers' movements. It was, indeed, within the First International that syndicalist ideas first emerged—as reflected in Bakunin's writings.⁶³ Most anarchists of this era, including Bakunin, embraced syndicalism—an issue to which we will return in chapter 5.

The syndicalist position that existed within mass anarchism centred on two positions: the view that reforms and immediate gains were positive conquests for the popular classes, and played a central role in improving the lives of ordinary people, building mass organisations, and developing the confidence of the popular classes in their abilities; and the notion that the unions could take the lead in the struggle for revolution and form the nucleus of the new society. In criticising insurrectionist anarchism, then, anarchists like Kropotkin returned to the view that it was necessary to form “revolutionary” unions, a “*revolutionary workers' movement* ... the milieu which, alone, will take arms and make the revolution.”⁶⁴

It is thus not surprising that the majority of the mass anarchists placed great stress on the view that unions could potentially be central components of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. It must be noted that not all mass anarchists accepted syndicalism, although the vast majority certainly did. Some, like Bakunin, were unreserved syndicalists. Others, like Kropotkin, saw syndicalism as essential but had some doubts about the “embryo hypothesis,” that the syndicalist unions were the kernel of the new society. There were also the antisyndicalist mass anarchists: some accepted workplace struggles but rejected unions as such; some, like Hatta, worked with unions but did not see them as potentially revolutionary; and some rejected the workplace as a site of struggle as such.⁶⁵ By contrast, the insurrectionist approach stressed that reforms were illusory, movements like unions were the bulwarks of the existing order, and formal organisations were authoritarian. Insurrectionist anarchism consequently stressed armed action—propaganda by the deed—as *the* means of evoking a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge, in conjunction with ordinary propaganda of the word, which emphasised the need for revolution.

For those anarchists who actively embraced syndicalism, wide vistas were opened. The young French activist Pelloutier provided an excellent statement of the case for mass anarchism of the syndicalist type in an 1895 polemic, “Anarchism and the Workers' Union.” Born in 1867 to a professional family, Pelloutier embarked at an early age on a career in journalism and became involved in the French union movement in the early 1890s, initially as a Marxist, but from 1893 onward as an anarchist. In 1895, he was appointed secretary of the federation of the Bourses du Travail, which were local labour centres that initially served as hiring halls and labour exchanges, but developed into places for union organising. Pelloutier sought to use them as centres for anarchist education and worker mobilisation, and transform them into the cells of a revolutionary unionism. He died in 1901 of tuberculosis, by which time his “dedication, his mixture of practical gifts with moral enthusiasm,” and “his devotion to the ideal of education and self-improvement among the workers” had “made him a legendary figure.”⁶⁶

Pelloutier's polemic argued that anarchists must enter the unions to promote both workers' struggles and spread anarchist ideas, and thereby detach the working class from the parties of political socialism. He took a swipe at propaganda by

the deed, noting that many workers had become “loath to confess their libertarian socialism” because “as they see it, anarchy boils down to the individual recourse to dynamite.” Even those who “venerate Ravachol,” a famed French anarchist bomber, did not dare declare themselves anarchists for fear that they “might appear to be turning away from working towards collective rebellion and opting for isolated rebellion in its place.” The anarchist doctrine, maintained Pelloutier, could therefore only “make headway” if it managed without the “individual dynamiter.”⁶⁷

Anarchists should drop their “lingering mistrust” of collective organisation and join the unions, where some anarchists had already gained a “moral authority” for their work, and where “libertarian propaganda” was gaining ground. According to Pelloutier, the workers were losing faith in the state and its labour reforms, and along with these, their faith in the socialist parties, which faced “ruination” from their association with the failed reforms and for the divisions that their sectarian infighting had caused in the unions. Anarchists must enter the unions and show the workers what their organisations might become. The union, Pelloutier declared, “governing itself on anarchic lines,” disdaining elections, and relying on economic action, could be “simultaneously revolutionary and libertarian,” and with the outbreak of revolution, could suppress the state and provide an organisation that could govern production: “Would this not amount to the ‘free association of free producers?’” In his view, it was up to the anarchists “to commit all of their efforts” to this goal.⁶⁸

The basic idea was that unions had the potential to perform a dual role: defending and improving workers’ rights, incomes, and conditions in the present day; and acting as the key instrument in the destruction of the old order as well as the basic framework for worker self-management of the means of production in the new one. The classic statement of this approach is provided by Rocker’s *Anarcho-Syndicalism*:

The trade union ... is the unified organisation of labour and has for its purpose the defence of the interests of the producers within existing society and the preparing for and the practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life after the pattern of Socialism. It has, therefore, a double purpose:

1. As the fighting organisation of the workers against the employers to enforce the demands of the workers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living;
2. As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with the technical management of production and economic life in general, so that when a revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principles.⁶⁹

When the time was ripe, the revolutionary union movement would launch a revolutionary general strike (or in the De Leonist phrase, a “general lockout of the capitalist class”).⁷⁰ Rather than picket outside the workplace gates, stay at home, or attend marches, the workers would *occupy* the factories, mines, farms, offices, and so forth, and place them under self-management. The revolutionary occupation undertaken, the union structure would provide the model through which self-man-

agement was exercised, with local assemblies, mandated committees, and coordination between and within industries through the larger union federation.

With the means of production under workers' self-management, the working class would now literally rule society; the workers, "when they are powerful enough," would "shut the factories against the present employers and commence production for use."⁷¹ The unions themselves, Rocker stressed, would provide the basis for "taking over the management of all plants by the producers themselves." The "socialist economic order" would thus not "be created by the decrees and statutes of any government" but only "by the unqualified collaboration of the workers, technicians and peasants to carry on production and distribution by their own administration in the interest of the community and on the basis of mutual agreements."⁷²

The IWA, in line with this sort of thinking, defined its tasks as twofold: "the daily revolutionary struggle," and the "assumption of the administration of every individual operation by the producers themselves."⁷³ The IWA's Latin American umbrella body, ACAT, likewise, staked "all its hopes on organising labour" to "assume possession of the means of production, distribution and transport."⁷⁴ The Uruguayan Regional Workers' Federation (FORU), formed in 1905, argued that "all its efforts should be geared towards bringing about the complete emancipation of the proletariat" through a universal union federation.⁷⁵

The same idea was central to the IWW as well, including its De Leonist wing. William Trautmann, a founder of the IWW—and in the 1910s a De Leonist—expressed the idea succinctly. The One Big Union would organise the workers with the ultimate purpose that every worker have equal rights and duties in managing industry: "With the construction of the industrial organisation perfected for their [*sic*] future functions in a workers' republic the political state will collapse completely, and in its place will be ushered in the industrial-political administration for a further advanced social system."⁷⁶

In other words, syndicalism envisages the revolutionary union *prefiguring* the organs of the postcapitalist society. "Our class struggle," wrote Kubo, "is to achieve the radical transformation of economic and political institutions by means of the workers' organisations based on the ideal of free federation."⁷⁷ Not every anarchist who supported syndicalism was entirely comfortable with this specific aspect of its strategy. Kropotkin championed syndicalism, but unlike Bakunin, had reservations that the union structure would necessarily form an adequate basis for a postcapitalist society, i.e. with the embryo hypothesis.⁷⁸

Obviously the syndicalist approach implied anarchist involvement in the immediate struggles of the working class. As Rocker argued, the work of a "fighting organisation of the workers against the employers" aimed at "safeguarding and raising" workers' "standard of living."⁷⁹ In order for an anarchist union to survive, it *had* to engage with day-to-day struggles for reforms, yet know that none of these minor reforms, however bitterly won, meant that capitalism had been overthrown.

Anarchists who supported union work explicitly denied that this involvement in winning immediate gains was in any sense harmful to the prospects for making a revolution. Rocker stressed that if workers were unable to fight for minor reforms that improved their everyday lives—such as higher wages or shorter hours—then they were certainly highly unlikely to undertake the revolutionary reconstruction of

the world.⁸⁰ On the other hand, in Rocker's view, basic material improvements laid the basis for ever-greater aspirations by the workers:

It may also be taken as true that as long as the worker has to sell hands and brain to an employer, he will in the long run never earn more than is required to provide the most indispensable necessities of life. But these necessities of life are not always the same, but are constantly changing with the demands which the worker makes on life....

By the intellectual elaboration of their life experiences there are developed in individuals new needs and the urge for different fields of intellectual life....

True intellectual culture and the demand for higher interests in life does not become possible until man has achieved a certain material standard of living, which makes him capable of these.... [M]en who are constantly threatened by direst misery can hardly have much understanding of the higher cultural values. Only after the workers, by decades of struggle, had conquered for themselves a better standard of living could there be any talk of intellectual and cultural development among them.⁸¹

For Kubo, likewise, "raising wages and improving working conditions are not our goals *per se*" but a "means" to "rouse direct action and cultivate a bud of anarchism through daily struggle, which I believe will be the preparation for revolution."⁸² Rather than the insurrectionist anarchist notion that immediate gains were "mere trifles and concessions that soon disappeared," syndicalists argued that such gains, which improved conditions, raised aspirations, and created the space for the rise of a large anarchist movement.

These sorts of ideas were subsequently adopted by the mainstream French unions. Beginning in 1890, mass anarchists had entered into the two main components of the French union movement: the federation of Bourses du Travail, and the National Federation of Unions. Besides Pelloutier, mention must be made of Emile Pouget (1860–1931), an anarchist shop worker who was jailed for three years after leading a demonstration of the unemployed in 1883 with Michel. An excellent radical journalist, Pouget played a key role in the rise of French syndicalism, wrote many of its classic texts, and served as assistant secretary of the CGT from 1900 to 1908, retiring from political activism in 1914.⁸³ In 1895, the National Federation of Unions was renamed the CGT, and declared itself independent of all political parties; that same year, Pelloutier became secretary of the Federation of Chambers of Labour. In 1902, the CGT and the Federation of Chambers of Labour merged into one CGT, with Pouget as assistant secretary and head of the national union sections. In 1906, the French CGT adopted the famous *Charter of Amiens*:

The Confederal Congress of Amiens confirms article 2 of the constitution of the CGT constitution. The CGT unites, outside all political schools, all workers conscious of the struggle to be waged for the disappearance of the wage-earning and employing classes....

The Congress considers this declaration to be a recognition of the class struggle which, on the economic plane, puts the workers in revolt against all forms of exploitation and oppression, material as well as moral, exercised by the capitalist against the working class;

The Congress clarifies this theoretical affirmation by the following points: In its day-to-day efforts, syndicalism seeks the coordination of

workers' efforts, the increase of workers' well-being by the achievement of immediate improvements.... But this task is only one aspect of the work of syndicalism: it prepares for complete emancipation, which can be realized only by expropriating the capitalist class; it sanctions the general strike as its means of action and it maintains that the trade union, today an organisation of resistance, will in the future be the organisation of production and distribution, the basis of social reorganisation.⁸⁴

Against Economism: Direct Action versus "Political Action"

Winning immediate gains was, in short, vital to sustaining a popular social movement. Anarchists who favoured the creation of a revolutionary union movement stressed that the manner in which immediate gains were won and the way in which the unions operated were both of great importance in building revolutionary momentum. They emphasised the use of direct action, ongoing political education, and the creation of a radically democratic, decentralised, and participatory form of unionism as vital components of a union movement able to overthrow capitalism and the state. If insurrectionist anarchists saw struggles for immediate gains as futile and such reforms as poison to the revolution, mass anarchists regarded small victories as the sustenance of a revolutionary movement and in no way preventing the final revolutionary struggle.

What was crucial was the *manner* in which the immediate improvements were won. Emphasis was placed on the use of direct action in working-class struggles. For Rocker, direct action meant "every form of immediate warfare by the workers against their economic and political oppressors," including strikes, workplace sabotage, boycotts, antimilitarist activity, and the "armed resistance of the people."⁸⁵ For syndicalists, this could take place *within and through* unions.

Mass anarchists, including syndicalists, regarded direct action as the most *effective* method of combating employers and the state. Direct action was contrasted favourably with "political action," which was defined as the strategy of using political parties and the state apparatus to emancipate labour. "Political action," in this sense, was not the same as *political struggle*, and the rejection of political action did not therefore imply any rejection of political struggles more broadly. As we discuss elsewhere in this volume, political struggles—around state policy as well as civil and political freedoms—were absolutely central to the syndicalist project; however, political action, understood as *using* the state machinery, was not; this point applies to the De Leonist tradition as well.

Direct action was also regarded as essential to the process of creating a revolutionary working-class movement and counterculture. For syndicalists, as Wayne Thorpe notes, unions mobilised workers as a class at the point of production on the basis of their class interests, and against capitalism and the state, while political parties (even those of the Left) were typically multiclass institutions led by outsiders, and generally used workers as passive voters in a futile quest to use the capitalist government for socialist transformation.⁸⁶ Socialist parties were not only "unnecessary for the emancipation of the proletariat" but "a positive hindrance to it."⁸⁷ Rather, it was through union struggles against *both* capitalists and the state that workers could be drawn into anarchism, and consequently, as Kubo wrote, "We urge

grabbing every chance and utilising any moment ... to shake the foundations of society.”⁸⁸

This argument is also lucidly presented in *Syndicalism*, written in 1912 by Earl C. Ford (n.d.) and William Z. Foster (1881–1961) of the Syndicalist League of North America (SLNA).⁸⁹ Foster (the main author) was born to a poor immigrant family in a Philadelphia slum.⁹⁰ He left school at a young age to seek employment, and worked at jobs ranging from a deep-sea sailor to a miner to a locomotive fire-fighter. Disillusioned with the SP and influenced by the veteran anarchist Jay Fox, who published the *Agitator*, he joined the IWW in 1909, travelled around Europe from 1910 to 1911 to learn from its labour movements, and spent much of his time with militants of the French CGT. On his return, Foster wrote *Syndicalism*, formed the SLNA in 1912, and left the IWW a year later to try and conquer the moderate American Federation of Labour (AFL) from within. The SLNA lasted until 1914, grew to about two thousand members, and had a substantial influence in Chicago, Kansas City, and Saint Louis. Former SLNA members played a central role in strikes and union drives in later years, most notably the great 1919 Chicago steel strike. Foster himself, however, was later won over to Bolshevism, joined the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA), and served as the party’s national chair from 1932 to 1957.⁹¹

According to Ford and Foster, “Working class political parties” (meaning here parties aiming to “capture the State”), “in spite of the great efforts spent on them, have proven distinct failures, while on the other hand, labour unions, though often despised and considered as interlopers by revolutionists, have been pronounced successes.” This was largely because the parties were “composed of individuals of all classes,” controlled by the “non-working class elements” and caught up in the state machinery, which was inherently anti-working class.⁹²

For Ford and Foster, political action—in the sense of participation in the state machinery through such means as elections—was “merely an expression of public sentiment,” but direct action by the working class was a “demonstration of real power.” It had the great merit of bringing the masses of the working class into action: “It is evident that if the workers are to become free it must be through their own efforts and directly against those of the capitalists.”⁹³ Direct action, as Rocker contended, would win “substantial concessions,” unlike electioneering, which had “achieved practically nothing for the working class” in either economic or political terms. It was far better to struggle outside of and against the state, than try to capture it. Even positive reforms by the state were often “caused by the influence of direct action tactics”; for Rocker, this was not an argument for “political action” but “simply a registration of direct action,” and proof of its superiority. Syndicalists have “proven time and again that they can solve the many so-called political questions by direct action,” including “old age pensions, minimum wages, militarism, international relations, child labour, sanitation of workshops, mines, etc., and many other questions.”⁹⁴

Rocker also complained bitterly about the view that syndicalists were economic, that is, narrowly concerned with wages and working conditions:

It has often been charged against Anarcho-syndicalism that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and conse-

quently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts....

For just as the worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country. Both in the struggle for his daily bread and for every kind of propaganda looking toward his social liberation he needs political rights and liberties, and he must fight for these himself in every situation where they are denied him, and must defend them with all his strength whenever the attempt is made to wrest them from him.⁹⁵

What distinguished the syndicalist position on the struggle for political rights from that of the political parties "was the form of this struggle" for political rights and "the aims which it has in view." Fundamentally, contended Rocker, the "peoples owe all the political rights and privileges" that they enjoy "not to the good will of their governments, but to their own strength." As he emphasised, "*What is important is not that governments have decided to concede certain rights to the people, but the reason why they have had to do this.*"⁹⁶ It was popular struggle, rather than the goodwill of the powerful or the skillful interventions of the left-wing politicians, that secured the rights and privileges in the first place. The best vehicle for both the economic and political struggles of the modern working class was the union, and specifically, the syndicalist union:

The lance head of the labour movement is ... not the political party but the trade union, toughened by daily combat and permeated by Socialist spirit. Only in the realm of the economy are the workers able to display their full social strength, for it is their activity as producers which holds together the whole social structure, and guarantees the existence of society at all. In any other field they are fighting on alien soil.... This direct and unceasing warfare with the supporters of the present system develops at the same time ethical concepts without which any social transformation is impossible: vital solidarity with their fellows-in-destiny and moral responsibility for their own actions.⁹⁷

For the International Socialist League—established in 1915 in Johannesburg, and the single most important syndicalist formation in South Africa—the One Big Union would champion *both* economic and political freedom:

The workers' only weapon are [*sic*] their labour.... All ... activities should have this one design, how to give the workers greater control of industry.... With greater and greater insistence comes ... the need for men to forego the cushion and slipper of parliamentary ease, and recognise the Industrial Union as the root of all the activities of Labour, whether political, social or otherwise.⁹⁸

South African capitalism used a wide range of coercive measures against the Africans who formed the majority of the local working class: an internal passport system, racial segregation along with other discriminatory laws and practices, housing for migrant workers in closely controlled compounds, and a system of contracts that effectively indentured Africans. The International Socialist League saw direct action through One Big Union as the key to defeating this system of national oppression, advising mass action and resistance: "Once organised, these workers can

bust-up any tyrannical law. Unorganised, these laws are iron bands. Organise industrially, they become worth no more than the paper rags they are written on.”⁹⁹

For Pouget of the French CGT, likewise, “political changes are merely a consequence of amendments made to the system of production,” the method of attack was “direct action,” “the symbol of syndicalism in action,” part of the “combined battle against exploitation and oppression” by the working class “in its relentless attack upon capitalism.”¹⁰⁰ For Berkman, revolutionary unions must

relate not only to the daily battle for material betterment, but equally so to everything pertaining to the worker and his existence, and particularly to matters where justice and liberty are involved.... It is one of the most inspiring things to see the masses roused on behalf of social justice, whomever the case at issue may concern. For, it is the concern of all of us, in the truest and deepest sense. The more labour becomes enlightened and aware of its larger interests, the broader and more universal grow its sympathies, the more world-wide its defence of justice and liberty ... the tremendous power of the proletariat ... has ... on numerous occasions ... prevented planned legal outrages.¹⁰¹

In short, while classical Marxism tended to pose a strict dichotomy between a “political field” (centred on the state, and engaged by the revolutionary party through political action) and an “economic field” (dealing with wages and working conditions, and relegated to the unions, but led by the party) the syndicalists saw the revolutionary union as *simultaneously* undertaking both political and economic functions. Some, like De Leon, still used the language of two fields—his “Socialist Industrial Unionism” would organise on both fields, and even make a limited use of electoral activity—but stressed the centrality of the One Big Union in developing a revolutionary movement and shaping both fields: “the political movement is absolutely the reflex of the economic organisation.”¹⁰² Others rejected the very concept of a political field, some doing so explicitly.¹⁰³ And others, like the U.S. IWW, rejected the concept implicitly:

The IWW is not anti-political. Nor is it non-political. It is ultra-political. Its industrial activities have affected the political institutions of the country in a manner favourable to labour.... Following the Wheatland strike, the housing commission of California used its authority to clean up labour conditions on all the ranches in the state.... The political results of the IWW are undoubtedly many, and to its credit.¹⁰⁴

What all of these approaches shared was the view that the revolutionary union transcended any attempt to develop a socialist strategy based on the identification of two distinct fields of working-class activity, and the notion that politics should be left to a party, with the union confining itself to economic concerns. As the Italian syndicalist Enrico Leone commented in 1906,

Syndicalism is to put an end to the dualism of the labour movement by substituting for the party, whose functions are politico-electoral, and for the trade union, whose functions are economic, a completer organism which shall represent a synthesis of the political and the economic function.¹⁰⁵

The view that syndicalism was a form of “left’ economism” without a revolutionary strategy, that it lacked a serious analysis of the state which appreciated

“the need for politics” and “the role of the state in maintaining the domination of capital,”¹⁰⁶ and that it was also unable “to adequately confront the issue of state power”¹⁰⁷ is simply not defensible.

Anarcho-syndicalism, Revolutionary Syndicalism, and De Leonism

We have spoken so far of both anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism. These share the same basic strategy: using union activities as a basis for revolution. What these approaches have in common, and what distinguishes them from other militant forms of unionism, is a stress on the workers’ self-management of the means of production, a position of antistatism as well as a hostility toward political parties and parliament, and a commitment to a social revolution in which unions play the key role and the union structures provide the basis for postcapitalist self-management. At this level, the terms anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism may be used interchangeably.

It should also be noted, however, that there is a basis for retaining a distinction between the two terms. While fundamentally the same, the terms are useful as indicators of two main *variants* of the revolutionary and libertarian union approach. This basic distinction is generally implicit in anarchist writings, but should be set out clearly.

Anarcho-syndicalism is a term best reserved for the revolutionary unionism that is openly and consciously anarchist in origins, orientation, and aims. The classical example would be Spain’s CNT, which traced its roots back to the anarchist Spanish section of the First International—the Spanish Regional Workers’ Federation (FORE)—and the ideas of Bakunin. In a situation where anarchists were deeply implanted in the working class and peasantry, and where there was no force that could seriously challenge the anarchist grip on the CNT from within, the union had no problem in declaring itself anarchist and identifying explicitly with the anarchist tradition. Thus, in the 1936 Spanish Revolution, the main CNT military base in Barcelona was named the Bakunin Barracks.

Revolutionary syndicalism, on the other hand, is a term best reserved for the syndicalist variant that for a range of reasons, did not explicitly link to the anarchist tradition, and was unaware of, ignored, or downplayed its anarchist ancestry. It is typical of revolutionary syndicalist currents to deny any alignment to particular political groupings or philosophies—to claim to be “apolitical,” notwithstanding the radical politics that they embody. The French CGT after 1895 is a classic example of a revolutionary union that downplayed its links to anarchism. The CGT’s leaders claimed that the federation was “outside of all political schools” at the very time that they declared that the federation united all workers “conscious of the struggle to be waged for the disappearance of the wage-earning and employing classes” by “expropriating the capitalist class”—a position that can scarcely be regarded as apolitical.¹⁰⁸

Like Bakunin’s envisaged “antipolitical” First International, which would recruit on the basis of a “realistic understanding” of the workers’ “daily concerns,” revolutionary syndicalist unions like the French CGT presented themselves as apo-

litical or antipolitical, and thus independent of all political parties.¹⁰⁹ This had the advantage of opening the unions to workers who would never even consider joining a socialist party. In addition, the claim of neutrality helped prevent political party affiliations from dividing the membership of revolutionary syndicalist unions, and defended these unions from capture by socialist parties and factions.¹¹⁰

The IWW is a slightly different case, largely characterised by a general ignorance of the anarchist roots of its syndicalist approach. Indeed, it is not at all uncommon to find IWW literature that describes the union's views as Marxist or "Marxian." This tendency was particularly marked in the Detroit IWW, the De Leonists. The De Leonists argued that only "trade union action could transfer property from individual to social ownership."¹¹¹ In their view, the "*Industrial Unions will furnish the administrative machinery for directing industry in the socialist commonwealth*" after the "general lock out of the capitalist class" and the "razing" of the state to the ground.¹¹² However much De Leon believed he worked "with Marx for text," called his doctrine "Socialist Industrial Unionism" rather than syndicalism, and remained overtly hostile to anarchism because of the propaganda by the deed, his basic approach was syndicalist.¹¹³ In short, De Leon has a better claim to inclusion in an anarchist canon than, say, Godwin, Stirner, or Tolstoy.

In Conclusion: Building Tomorrow Today

In this chapter, we have argued that the main division within the broad anarchist tradition was not between "anarcho-communism" and anarcho-syndicalism but between insurrectionist anarchism and mass anarchism, with the latter category including syndicalism. It is important to stress at this point that the difference between the two does *not* centre around the issue of violence as such: mass anarchist formations like the Spanish CNT, for example, operated armed reprisal squads in the 1920s and organised an armed militia in the 1930s. The difference is the role that violence plays in the strategy: for insurrectionist anarchism, propaganda by the deed, carried out by conscious anarchists, is seen as a means of *generating* a mass movement; for mass anarchism, violence operates as a means of self-defence for an *existing* mass movement. For syndicalism, the immediate struggle prefigures the revolutionary struggle and the union prefigures the society of tomorrow; we have here an organ of revolutionary counterpower emerging from the daily struggle.

We have also emphasised the essential identity of anarcho-syndicalism, revolutionary syndicalism, and De Leonism, suggesting that the differences between these types of syndicalism are secondary. For now, for the purposes of clarity, let us note that we use the term syndicalism without any prefixes or qualifications, referring to all varieties of syndicalism. We have posited that a self-identification with the anarchist tradition is not a necessary condition for inclusion in the broad anarchist tradition. We understand the broad anarchist tradition as including insurrectionist and mass anarchism, and *all* varieties of syndicalism.

It is, in short, quite possible for people to accept and act on the basic ideas of Bakunin in the absence of any conscious link to the anarchist tradition; it is equally possible for a self-described Marxist to be part of the broad anarchist tradition, and for a self-identified anarchist to be outside that tradition. What is critical is that the

basic ideas are derived from anarchism, with anarchism understood—as we have contended at some length—as a revolutionary form of libertarian socialism that harkens back to the First International, Bakunin, and the Alliance. These points do require some more substantiation, and it is to this task that we turn in the following chapter, which deals with various issues that arise, such as the origins of syndicalism, its history before the French CGT, the relationship between anarchism, syndicalism, and the IWW, and the ideas of De Leonism.

Notes

1. Quoted in C. Harper, *Anarchy: A Graphic Guide* (London: Camden Press, 1987), 65.
2. Malatesta in Richards, *Errico Malatesta*, 126.
3. Bookchin, “Deep Ecology, Anarchosyndicalism, and the Future of Anarchist Thought,” 50.
4. Graham, preface, xiii; see also Pengam, “Anarcho-Communism,” 60, 75–76.
5. P. Avrigh, introduction to *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. P. Avrigh (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 10–12.
6. Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 145–46.
7. Bookchin, *To Remember Spain*, 21–22.
8. Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 137; Bookchin, *To Remember Spain*, 20–21.
9. Bookchin, “Deep Ecology, Anarchosyndicalism, and the Future of Anarchist Thought,” 51.
10. Pengam, “Anarcho-Communism,” 60; see also J. Crump, *Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), chapter 2.
11. Pengam, “Anarcho-Communism,” 74–75.
12. Crump, *Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan*.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, chapter 2.
15. Workers Solidarity Movement, *Position Paper: The Trade Unions* (Dublin: Workers Solidarity Movement, 2005), sections 5.1, 5.9.
16. N. Makhno, et. al., *The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*.
17. Craparo, *Anarchist Communists*, 65.
18. “The Kropotkinist Anarcho-Communists (not for nothing known as anti-organisation-alists) believe that any work among the masses apart from pure and simple propaganda of the ‘right’ ideas, is useless. This is the origin of their lack of interest in the daily struggles of the working class which are seen as pointless and counterproductive”; *ibid.*, 65.
19. Avrigh, *The Russian Anarchists*, 54, 61, 63, 84, 107; see also Avrigh, *Anarchist Portraits*, 68.
20. Quoted in Crump, *Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan*, 10. It is no illusion to speak of a syndicalist Kropotkin, contrary to Pengam, “Anarcho-Communism,” 249.
21. Malatesta, “Syndicalism,” 220–25.
22. See R. Munck, *Argentina: From Anarchism to Peronism: Workers, Unions, and Politics, 1855–1985* (London: Zed Books, 1987); R. A. Yoast, “The Development of Argentine Anarchism: A Socio-ideological Analysis” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1975), 155–56.
23. Berkman, *The ABC of Anarchism*, 46–49, 53–62.
24. E. Goldman, *Syndicalism: The Modern Menace to Capitalism* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1913), 7.
25. Goldman, “The Failure of the Russian Revolution,” 155.
26. Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 161–62.
27. On his pioneering role, see Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, 128. “Our principles are communism, anti-militarism, syndicalism, anti-religion, anti-family, vegetarianism, an

international language and universal harmony"; quoted in Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 521.

28. See Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, 124–33.

29. Petrograd Union of Anarcho-syndicalist Propaganda, "Declaration of the Petrograd Union of Anarcho-syndicalist Propaganda," in *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. P. Avrigh (June 4, 1917; repr., London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 71; see also I. Makalsky, "To the Worker," in *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. P. Avrigh (December 19, 1917; repr., London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 78.

30. Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class*, 161–62, 174–76.

31. Quoted in R. Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume I: From Anarchy to Anarchism, 300 CE to 1939* (Montréal: Black Rose, 2005), 199; and Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, 505.

32. American Continental Workers' Association, "American Continental Workers' Association," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume I: From Anarchy to Anarchism, 300 CE to 1939*, ed. R. Graham (1929; repr., Montréal: Black Rose, 2005), 331.

33. Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," 324, appendix D.

34. T. Brown, *The Social General Strike* (Durban: Zabalaza Books, n.d.), 9.

35. Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 182, 289–96; see also National Confederation of Labour, *Resolution on Libertarian Communism as adopted by the Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo, Zaragoza, 1 May 1936*.

36. Crump, *Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan*, 87–91.

37. Hatta Shuzo, "On Syndicalism," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume I: From Anarchy to Anarchism, 300 CE to 1939*, ed. R. Graham (1927; repr., Montréal: Black Rose, 2005), 378.

38. N. Makhno, et. al., *The Organisational Platform of the Libertarian Communists*, 6–7.

39. The Friends of Durruti, *Towards a Fresh Revolution* (1938; repr., Durban: Zabalaza Books, 1978), 25.

40. See G. W. Carey, "The Vessel, the Deed, and the Idea: Anarchists in Paterson, 1895–1908" *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 10, no. 3 and 11, no. 1 (1979); Introduction to Galleani, *The End of Anarchism?*

41. P. Avrigh, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 56–57; see also Avrigh, *Anarchist Portraits*, chapter 12.

42. Galleani, *The End of Anarchism?* 11.

43. *Ibid.*, 11–13.

44. *Ibid.*, 11.

45. *Ibid.*, 47.

46. *Ibid.*, 49.

47. *Ibid.*, 49, 11.

48. A. M. Bonanno, *A Critique of Syndicalist Methods*, 1975, available at http://www.geocities.com/kk_abacus/ioaa/critsynd.html (accessed March 25, 2005).

49. Galleani, *The End of Anarchism?* 55.

50. *Ibid.*, 51–53, 57.

51. For a fascinating account of the narodniks, see D. Foot, *Red Prelude: A Life of A. I. Zhelyabov* (London: Cresset Press, 1968).

52. See P. Avrigh, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

53. J. Most, *The Beast of Property*, IWPA, Group New Haven, reprinted in J. J. Most, *Revolution-are Kriegswissenschaft, Together with the Beast of Property* (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1983), 12.

54. See Avrigh, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, 73–75. Also important is J. Bekken, "The First Daily Anarchist Newspaper: The *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*," *Anarchist Studies*, no. 3 (1995): 13–14.

55. Guérin, *Anarchism*, 74.
56. Quoted in Bookchin, *The Spanish Anarchists*, 115.
57. Quoted in Guérin, *Anarchism*, 74, 78.
58. Graham, *Anarchism*, 351.
59. Quoted in Carey, "The Vessel, the Deed, and the Idea," 52.
60. Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism*, 231–69.
61. Quoted in Guérin, *Anarchism*, 78.
62. B. Lowry and E. E. Gunter, epilogue to *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel*, ed. B. Lowry and E. E. Gunter (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1981), 199.
63. Notably in Bakunin, "The Policy of the International"; Bakunin, "The Programme of the Alliance."
64. Kropotkin, "Letter to Nettlau," 304–5.
65. For these people, the union struggle "for everyday interests" was "petty, worthless and even harmful ... a penny-wise policy which serves only to deflect the attention of the workers from their main task, the destruction of capital and the state"; G. P. Maximoff, *Constructive Anarchism* (1930; repr., Sydney: Monty Miller, 1988), 6.
66. Joll, *The Anarchists*, 200.
67. F. Pelloutier, "Anarchism and the Workers' Union," in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism, Book Two*, ed. D. Guérin (1895; repr., Edinburgh: AK Press, 1998), 51–57.
68. *Ibid.*, 52–56.
69. R. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), chapter 4, also available at http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/rocker/sp001495/rocker_as4.html (accessed November 12, 2000).
70. D. De Leon, *The Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World, Address Delivered at Union Temple, Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 10, 1905* (1905; repr., Edinburgh: Socialist Labour Press, n.d.), 23–24, 25, 27–28.
71. W. E. Trautmann, *One Great Union* (Detroit: Literature Bureau of the Workers' International Industrial Union, 1915), 32.
72. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, chapter 4.
73. Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," 323, appendix D.
74. American Continental Workers' Association, "American Continental Workers' Association," 331–32.
75. Uruguayan Regional Workers' Federation, "Declarations from the Third Congress," in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas, Volume 1: From Anarchy to Anarchism, 300 CE to 1939*, ed. R. Graham (1911; repr., Montréal: Black Rose, 2005), 200–1.
76. Trautmann, *One Great Union*, 8.
77. Kubo, "On Class Struggle and the Daily Struggle," 380.
78. Nettlau, *A Short History of Anarchism*, 277–78.
79. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, chapter 4.
80. See also Maximoff, *Constructive Anarchism*, 6.
81. R. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), chapter 5, also available at http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/rocker/sp001495/rocker_as5.html (accessed November 12, 2000).
82. Kubo, "On Class Struggle and the Daily Struggle," 380–81.
83. G. Brown, introduction to *How We Shall Bring about the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth*, ed. E. Pataud and E. Pouget (London: Pluto Press, 1990), xiii–xvi.
84. Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," 319–20, appendix A.
85. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, chapter 5.
86. See Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," chapter 1.

87. Brown, introduction, xvi.
88. Kubo, "On Class Struggle and the Daily Struggle," 381.
89. E. C. Ford and W. Z. Foster, *Syndicalism*, facsimile copy (1912; repr., Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1990).
90. See J. R. Barrett, "Introduction to the 1990 Edition," in *Syndicalism*, by E. C. Ford and W. Z. Foster, facsimile copy (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1990); E. P. Johanningsmeier, "William Z. Foster and the Syndicalist League of North America," *Labour History* 30, no. 3 (1985); A. Zipser, *Working Class Giant: The Life of William Z. Foster* (New York: International Publishers, 1981).
91. See W. Z. Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1936).
92. Ford and Foster, *Syndicalism*, 4, 21–22, 26.
93. *Ibid.*, 20, 3.
94. Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, chapter 5.
95. *Ibid.*
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*
98. "What's Wrong with Ireland," *The International*, May 5, 1916.
99. "The Pass Laws: Organise for Their Abolition," *The International*, October 19, 1917.
100. E. Pouget, *Direct Action* (London: Fresnes-Antony Group of the French Anarchist Federation, n.d.), n.p. (English translation by the Kate Sharpley Library).
101. Berkman, *The ABC of Anarchism*, 55–56.
102. De Leon, *The Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World*, 21, 23–24, 25, 27–28.
103. Notably Ford and Foster, *Syndicalism*.
104. Industrial Workers of the World, *The IWW in Theory and Practice*, 5th rev. and abridged ed. (Chicago: IWW Publishing Bureau, 1937), available at http://www.workerseducation.org/crutch/pamphlets/ebert/ebert_5th.html (accessed July 20, 2004).
105. As summarised in Michels, *Political Parties*, 317.
106. Holton, "Syndicalist Theories of the State," 5; J. Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards Movement* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973), 276, 280.
107. R. V. Lambert, "Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955–1965" (PhD diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 1988), 45.
108. Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," 319, appendix A.
109. Bakunin, "The Programme of the Alliance," 250.
110. Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," 18–19.
111. D. K. McKee, "The Influence of Syndicalism upon Daniel De Leon," *Historian*, no. 20 (1958): 277.
112. Socialist Labour Party [De Leon], *The Socialist Labour Party*, 23; De Leon, *The Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World*, 23, 27.
113. See, for example, D. De Leon, "With Marx for Text," *Daily People*, June 29, 1907; D. De Leon, "Syndicalism," *Daily People*, August 3, 1909. Kropotkin was extremely hostile to De Leon for his intemperate attacks on anarchism; see Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits*, 98.