

On Syndicalism

Hatta Shūzō

1927

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Editor's Introduction

In Japan, as elsewhere, anarchists were active in the labour movement. In 1926, the All Japan Libertarian Federation of Labour Unions (Zenkoku jiren) was founded. It included both anarcho-syndicalist and anarchist communist elements. In its statement of principles the Federation declared:

We base our movement for the emancipation of the workers and tenant farmers on the class struggle.

We reject participation in politics and insist on economic action.

We advocate free federation organized by industry and forsake centralism.

We oppose imperialist invasion and advocate the international solidarity of the workers.

Hatta Shūzō (1886–1934) was an advocate of “pure anarchism,” a Japanese variant of anarchist communism, and an uncompromising critic of anarcho-syndicalism. He drew a distinction between class struggle and revolutionary transformation, writing that “it is a major mistake to declare, as the syndicalists do, that the revolution will be brought about by the class struggle. Even if a change in society came about by means of the class struggle, it would not mean that a genuine revolution had occurred.” This is because “in a society which is based on the division of labour, those engaged in vital production (since it forms the basis of production) would have more power over the machinery of coordination than those engaged in other lines of production. There would therefore be a real danger of the [reappearance of classes]” (as quoted by John Crump, *The Anarchist Movement in Japan*, London: Pirate Press, 1996). In the following excerpts from an article originally published in 1927, Hatta Shuzo sets forth his critique of anarcho-syndicalism and briefly describes the “pure anarchist” alternative. The translation by Yoshiharu Hashimoto, originally published in *A Short History of the Anarchist Movement in Japan* (Tokyo: Idea Publishing, 1979), has been modified by the editor for stylistic reasons.

On Syndicalism

THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF TRADE UNIONISM. One has as its object maintaining the livelihood of the worker. Another is organized as the agent of the Bolsheviks. The third is the syndicalist union that fights against capitalism face to face. The syndicalists have themselves gradually divided into two: one group seeks to advance the position of the workers; the other seeks to achieve communism. What we must determine is whether this is a corruption of syndicalism or an inherent defect in syndicalism itself ...

What is there to syndicalism? I am convinced both anarchism and Marxism ... By examining this point, we understand it is based on the conception of class struggle as declared in the Charter of Amiens ... As you know, the class struggle arose from modern capitalism. The industrial working class is pitted against the capitalist class in relation to the contradiction of profit. The rising working class becomes class conscious and begins the class struggle, expecting the complete emancipation of the working class through a final battle with the capitalists. This is the Marxist theory behind syndicalism ...

Secondly, syndicalism has adopted the notion of the “creative violence” of the minority. According to the revolutionary syndicalists, the true emancipation of the working class is achieved through a creative dynamic wherein a few convinced militants inspire the majority.

Thirdly, syndicalism has adopted the industrial factors that have historically arisen within capitalism and seeks to control the new social organization by means of a division of labour. Of course, syndicalism emphasizes knowledge of local demand, but it adopts the division of labour as a form of economic organization upon which to construct a society of producers. In this sense it contains Marx’s economic theory and that of socialism in general.

Thus, the theory of syndicalism adopts most of the Marxist theory and then adds from anarchism the notion of the creative violence of the minority...

Despite the enthusiasm of syndicalism and its abundance of activists, it gradually falls into reformism and cannot maintain concurrence with anarchism because syndicalism ... has two contradictory theories at its base (i.e. .. Marxism and anarchism). The class struggle requires a majority that does not agree with the violence of the minority; with enforced cohesion, the enthusiasm of the minority will decline and it will fall into reformism too ...

Syndicalism advocates the division of labour as the productive organization in the future society. It is without doubt that all production is carried out by division in society ... Its typical characteristics are, in the first place, the mechanization of labour; secondly, someone engaging in one kind of production has no responsibility for, understanding of or interest in other industries; thirdly, it needs a special coordinating body to preside over the divided work ... carried out by persons who do not engage in that work. Power will emerge from that group without fail. In contrast, in Kropotkin’s communal organization, coordinated production is performed autonomously on a human scale, so that people are able to take responsibility, to understand and to have an interest directly in other industries, even as they are engaged in one system of production. Because they can coordinate the work process themselves there is no superior body and there is no place of power. Where production is based on the division of labour with the people who work in the important industries acquiring power over the coordinating body, in contrast to those who work in less important industries, then there is the possibility of class division again emerging. Moreover, the division of labour does not imply that “man produces for himself with his own hands,” so production and consumption do not cohere at all. We cannot hope for true freedom where there is no freedom of production and consumption ... An anarchist society cannot be achieved unless it is a commune as proposed by Kropotkin, with inner coordination [of production] that does not depend on a division of labour... I hope the present labour unions will advance with the method and in the spirit of anarchism, not mere syndicalism, Bolshevism or reformism.

[Editor’s Note: Hatta argued that in an anarchist communist society, production would be based on consumption, instead of consumption being determined by the demands of production, as in a capitalist or even a syndicalist economy, which is a denial of the individual freedom to satisfy one’s desires]:

In a locally decentralized communist system, production springs from consumption. In place of consumption arising out of production, as in a system based on centralized power, consumption becomes the causal source of production in a system of decentralized production. (As quoted in John Crump, *Hatta Shuzo and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan*, New York: St. Martin’s, 1993)

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