

Syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism in Germany

An Introduction

Helge Döhring

2004

Contents

Foreword	3
1. What does “Workers’ Movement” mean?	4
2. The Emergence of Anarcho-Syndicalism and the Association of Free German Unions	5
3. The moulding of Anarcho-Syndicalism after the First World War	6
4. A clear alternative to authoritarian Communism: The Free Workers’ Union of Germany	7
4.1 The essential differences from the centralized Trade Unions	8
4.2 Reasons for the decline in membership of the Free Workers’ Union	9
4.2.1 The effects of declining membership on the workplace: factory councils and bargaining agreements	9
4.2.2 Tensions and conflict within the FAUD	9
4.3 Anarcho-syndicalism beyond the workplace	10
4.3.1 The Cultural Organizations	11
4.3.2 Aid Organizations [Hilfsorganisationen]	11
4.3.3 Alternative Movements to the FAUD	12
4.3.4 Auxiliary Organizations of the FAUD	13
4.4 The End of the FAUD	15
5. Syndicalism and its Significance	16

Foreword

The following text comprises an introduction to the development of German syndicalism from its beginnings in 1890 until the end of its organized form in the early 1960s. The emphasis of this introduction, however, centers on the period before and leading up to 1933, when the National Socialists under Adolf Hitler ascended to power. Syndicalism, and more specifically Anarcho-Syndicalism are movements that have been largely forgotten. This albeit superficial outline should, at its conclusion, show that this movement was not always so obscure and unknown. This piece aims not to comprehensively examine all the varied aspects of German Anarcho-syndicalism, but rather to pique the curiosity and interest of its readers.

1. What does “Workers’ Movement” mean?

The first thing that one learns in studying the history of the Workers’ Movement, in Germany and elsewhere, is that the workers were organized primarily into the so-called ‘Workers Parties.’ In Germany these took the form of the SPD [moderate Social Democrats] and the KPD [German Communist Party]. Upon further examination a number of other parties fall into view, for example Rosa Luxemburg’s “Independent Social-Democratic Party” (USPD), or the CP’s other incarnations, the KAPD and the Socialist Workers’ Party. And naturally the definition of the term “Workers’ Movement” places these political parties firmly in the foreground. The same is true of Germany’s General Association of Unions (ADGB).

Closer observation, however, reveals that these institutions have less to do with a movement in the truest sense of the word than with the regulation and disciplining of the Workers’ Movement to the benefit of private or state investors of capital. If we are to speak of a true movement of workers we can only speak of the grassroots initiatives of the proletariat, which tried to advance the class struggle. In some cases these efforts included Social-Democratic or Communist workers. Worth noting, however, is how quickly such activities elicited objections from their leaders in the parties and trade unions. In contrast to these institutions, we view the idea of a “workers’ movement” as something which develops in an organic fashion, not in response to orders from union or party leadership but rather as a product of the activities of organized wage workers fully conscious of their own responsibilities and avoiding centralized organizations. Considerable energy and strength is absorbed in the activities surrounding sectarian conflicts, “great leaders” and the production of specialized Marxist literature from Bernstein to Lenin. And all this just to come to the realization that the Workers’ Movement, as defined by these groups, is paralyzed. For those who would like to shorten the route to this revelation without missing any of the essential lessons, one need only look back at times when there actually were organized working-class movements that transcended Marxist dogma and electoral deceptions. Germany, during the interwar period, yields an example of a Workers’ Movement with independent, free-standing forms of organization, primarily among the Unionist/Council Communists and the (Anarcho-)Syndicalists. Here we will focus on the Anarcho-Syndicalists, which in Germany formed not only a remarkable “movement of ideas,” but also a recognized proletarian mass-movement, one that has been largely forgotten.

Those who attempt to find references or information relevant to this subject among less mainstream sources, from Wolfgang Abendroth or Karl-Heinz Roth, for example, will be disappointed. And yet, alongside standard works on the subject, authored by Hans Manfred Bock, Angela Vogel or Hartmut Rübner, to name a few, there appear a number of regional studies...concerning Anarcho-Syndicalism.

2. The Emergence of Anarcho-Syndicalism and the Association of Free German Unions

To get back to the central theme of this introduction, what was the FAUD? Its roots lie in the German social democracy that was formed under the Kaiser. The centralized organizational structure of the Party left it vulnerable to the restrictive measures of Bismarck's (anti-)Socialist Law, which easily dissolved executive organizations. After the Socialist Law was repealed some of the members of the various local social-democratic organizations were reluctant to maintain centralized organizations, and were termed "localists." The "localists" comprised a small minority within the social-democratic movement, but one that enjoyed considerable support in the capital, Berlin. At first they held fast to their party mentality and to their own Marxist interpretations, but the "revisionist" resolutions of the SPD's Erfurt Congress in 1891 strengthened localist aspirations for the formation of a separate organization. The very next year the General Commission of the SPD organized a Congress in Halberstadt, where calls were made for the extirpation of the localist faction. In 1897 this element responded by joining in the "centralization of German shop-stewards" and in 1901 reorganized itself into the "Free Association of German Unions" (FVDG).

In the following years the social-democratic leadership struggled in vain to fully reintegrate the localist groups, which, according to Party functionary and future Chancellor Friedrich Ebert, were self-described social democrats and not to be compared with the anarchist milieu. Finally an ultimatum was set forth: the localists could accept the leadership of the central unions or be fully expelled from the SPD. The FVDG, which had by this time grown to about 16,000 members, lost half of them by 1908. For the remaining members this effectively cut the umbilical cord from the SPD. The localist movement now developed its own concepts of how to overthrow the present social system and construct a new one. During this process the localists were influenced in part by the "Bourses du travail" of the French syndicalist movement and by the worldview of Rapaël Friedeberts, who likewise rejected both state and party as centralized organizations. At the same time, the "Young Opposition" under Paul Kampffmeyer was pushing in the same direction within the SPD. In this way the term "syndicalist" came to replace "localist."

From this time until the First World War the FVDG maintained a rather insignificant membership of about 8,000 and published two organizational periodicals, "Einigkeit" [Unity] and "Pionier." Starting around this time the members of the FVDG were also exposed to the multifaceted antagonism of their former comrades, who even joined forces with company managers to force syndicalists from their jobs and nip the possibility of a "competing union" in the bud. As a result, the localist/syndicalists found themselves faced with yet another powerful opponent, in addition to the capitalists. While the central unions made great displays of patriotic readiness and commitment, the syndicalists were persecuted by state officials and opposed by social democrats for their vehement anti-war stance. Meanwhile, anarchist theory, personified by Proudhon, Kropotkin and Gustav Landauer, gained traction in Germany.

3. The moulding of Anarcho-Syndicalism after the First World War

Following the First World War the FVDG reconstituted itself. Large numbers of workers, disappointed by the SPD's support for the war, flocked to alternative organizations, among them the FVDG, which increased its numbers ten-fold within a year, reaching approximately 60,000. This organization offered a real form of worker self-management, which was perceived by the central trade unions as a threat to their aims of social partnership. Syndicalists, along with council communists, were the bogeymen of social democracy, not just because they attracted large numbers of new members (up to 150,000 by 1922), but also because they developed a more concrete concept of their organization and theory. This manifested itself in the "Prinzipienerklärung des Syndikalismus," [Declaration of the principles of syndicalism] written by the then up-and-coming theorist Rudolf Rocker and presented in 1919 to the 12th Congress of the FVDG, which adopted it with few alterations.

In contrast to social democracy, which imposed the mediating structure of the party upon the workplace organizations, the syndicalists recognized the dangers that could result from such dualism. Consequently, they put aside the theoretical division of economics and politics with the aim of enabling the proletariat to govern itself on all levels. In accordance with these claims the syndicalists had to organize themselves in all realms of life. Society was to both rule and carry all responsibility for itself, for "freedom exists only where it is carried forth with the spirit of personal responsibility," as Rudolf Rocker put it. In concurrence with Marxist theory, the syndicalists held that economics represented the essential foundation of social life, and that organizing efforts needed to concentrate on the two main actors within the economic sphere: producers and consumers.

4. A clear alternative to authoritarian Communism: The Free Workers' Union of Germany

As a result of its theoretical outlook, the FVDG was renamed the Free Workers' Union of Germany in 1919 and reorganized into Industrial Federations on one hand and Workers' Communities (Arbeitsbörsen) on the other. The Industrial Federations, in which all local workers in the same industry were organized, were responsible for matters relating to the workplace and the daily struggles that occurred there. The Workers' Communities represented the local organizations in the realm of popular education and cultural affairs and was responsible for defining and disseminating the Anarcho-syndicalist worldview. Here the fundamentally federalist principals of syndicalism were given full expression, as each local union had the right to participate equally in internal elections and enjoyed equal access to the economic resources of the organizations.

The means of struggle were largely economic in character, but the FAUD as a union was not content to lead struggles in this realm only to cede to the political and military force of the parties and the state. Once the proletariat had attained power through a general strike it was never again to give it up. Parliamentarianism and the use of state forms played no role in the considerations of the syndicalists—the existing political order was to be replaced with free associations of producers and consumers.

In order to effect the transition in the economic sector as smoothly as possible following the revolutionary phase, the FAUD was to constitute these forms before the general strike, and thereby guarantee control of the factories for the workers. The Workers' Communities would be reformed into a type of “statistical office” for the purpose of coordinating this process. The syndicalists made this vision concrete and thereby offered a realistic prospect for a free, socialist society while other workers' organizations followed the ‘state capitalist’ example of the Soviet Union, sought peace with the private sector or presented no possibilities for a socialist society. This perspective alone justifies a closer examination of the syndicalist movement.

In contrast to council communists the syndicalists placed great importance on the political questions of the day rather than waiting for conditions favourable to a revolution. The self-administration of society required that the skills and abilities necessary to this task be rehearsed and exercised. The workers' participation in daily struggles was to keep them in shape for the class struggle at large. Moreover, small victories could raise the profile of the organization. In fact, after the ebbing of the revolutionary period of 1918-1923 council communist organizations dissolved, being unable to present a relevant perspective, and many groups turned to the FAUD.

In the struggles of the Weimar Republic's infancy the syndicalists played leading roles in some regions. The FAUD grew into a mass organization and its local unions spread to almost every corner of the country, encompassing cities and villages. People of all ages found representation [in the organization]. Of the 12 sectors of industry identified by the FAUD only 5 could be

covered by industrial federations, however: construction, mining, transportation, metal-working and textiles. In locales unable to gather together the mandatory 25 members for a branch organization a “Union of all Trades” was founded. The local unions were transparently and thoroughly structured: a chairperson, a representative, an auditor and two treasurers were elected to organize the tasks associated with the group’s finances, correspondence and agitational activities. The Geschäftskommission in Berlin under Fritz Kater remained the executive coordinating body and was elected approximately every two years at the FAUD Congress, which also took place in Berlin until 1933. This congress was the highest decision-making body in the organization, and comprised the delegates of all the local unions.

The primary periodical organ of the FAUD was *Der Syndikalist* [The Syndicalist], which was published every week and was subscribed to by every member as a matter of obligation, which tied its distribution very closely to the numerical level of membership. Alongside this newspaper existed other periodicals, which were either produced on a regional level or were the organs of the industrial federations.

The local unions of the FAUD were influential in only a few areas, among them Düsseldorf (chiefly tilers), Berlin (boxmakers), or in the Ruhr region (mining). Still, the central and ‘christian’ trade unions showed that they had the upper hand.

4.1 The essential differences from the centralized Trade Unions

From the programmatic foundation of the FVDG, consisting primarily of its theoretical points from 1911, one can see a clear contrast to the major trade unions. The latter comprised centralized, dependent organizations that administered funds and determined the legitimacy of strikes, at times hindering or breaking off such actions. The members of these unions were conditioned to obey and the strikes of these institutions were generally defensive actions. The central trade unions also represented business interests and relied on the system of representation that allowed them a voice in managing production. These organizations won over and held on to members through their benefits, which included healthcare, funds for the unemployed and disbursements for funeral costs. The central trade unions sought reform within the bounds of capitalistic economic forms, promoted comprehensive wage-contract policies, adhered to a praxis of small strikes and, along with the party, sought military reforms.

In contrast, the syndicalists were organized in a federal manner, where the local unions were self-sufficient and allowed independent action, even to the point of strikes and negotiations. Solidarity was the watchword of syndicalist workers, who represented class interests through aggressive strikes and direct action. Unlike workers in other unions, the syndicalists only paid money into strike and mutual assistance funds. These workers agitated for the overthrow of capitalism, seeking not peace but a struggle against the entrepreneurial class, advocating mass- and general-strikes and rejecting militarism out of hand.

But within two years [1923-1925] the FAUD suffered losses so severe that its membership stood at a fifth of its high-watermark. Of the remaining 20,000-30,000 members about half represented the ideologically committed core of the organization.

4.2 Reasons for the decline in membership of the Free Workers' Union

Alongside the integration of the working class into bourgeois society through the welfare state, internal strife over the course of the FAUD and competition from the much more powerful reformist trade unions, numerous other factors came into play that resulted in the decline of anarcho-syndicalist influence. The FAUD's agitation and propaganda was relatively limited in its reach while proletarian culture was progressively absorbed into the bourgeois milieu. State repression, most notably the banning of the FAUD in 1923, increasing unemployment and the inability of the union to ideologically and culturally integrate the large numbers of workers that joined during the revolutionary period of 1918-1923 also contributed to this reversal.

4.2.1 The effects of declining membership on the workplace: factory councils and bargaining agreements

The dilemma posed by such a dramatic decline in membership provoked debate within the organization, raising the question of whether or not locals should participate in factory councils and enter into contractual negotiations. Such activities were rejected as incompatible with the union's principals, which adhered to "direct action" and opposed any form of cooperation with management through representative policies. Still, the syndicalists exercised tolerance in regards to this question in areas where they maintained influence, such as the Ruhrgebiet or the Rheinland, a policy that continued until 1933. When the smaller local unions of the FAUD actually did make contractual agreements they were not recognized under the law, a matter that was eventually brought before the Reichsarbeitsgericht [National Labour Court], which ruled that an organization whose principles advocated class struggle and revolution could not bargain under the protection of labor laws, since it refuted the legitimacy of the legal system as such. With this ruling the effort to win the union both time and room to maneuver came to nothing.

In terms of mandates to the legally-recognized factory councils the other workers' organizations of the FAUD had long since been pushed to the periphery. Nevertheless, the question of how to attract the attention of more workers and increase the influence of the syndicalists pushed the active members to look for new avenues and methods. However, the integration of the workers into the newly-moulded "social state" had been more or less completed and the central trade unions jealously guarded their gains. Finally the syndicalists set their sights on the agricultural sector, a surprising development in an industrial workers' organization. And yet, despite a agriculturally-centered publication, "Free the Land", this initiative achieved no results worth mentioning.

4.2.2 Tensions and conflict within the FAUD

The cultural sector of the organization was strengthened by tolerating views that deviated from the FAUD's declared principals, and an attempt was made to restructure the organization in a way that would correspond to these changes. The FAUD's center of gravity moved away from the industrial federations, which dated from the time of the FVDG, and rested now on the workers' communities, which resulted in greater engagement in the cultural sphere. Since changes in economic and political conditions in Germany occurred at different rates and to differing de-

grees, tensions within the FAUD intensified, primarily around the question of how to regulate the national organization. One side of this conflict grasped the effects of the new conditions and socio-economic framework with which they were faced and sought reorganization in the form of “unity organizations,” which would take over the task of large-scale coordination. The other, affected more adversely by the conditions of the post-war period, wanted to maintain the older structure of strong and independent industrial federations. In the end it was the question of how to regulate and carry out the collection of strike funds that caused the tensions to boil over.

According to a decision at the FAUD’s congress the workers’ communities were to arrange and organize the collection of these funds. For the supporters of the industrial federations this was a decisive attack on the independence of the entire federal structure. This issue had to be resolved with all possible speed so that meaningful support could be extended to those members that were suffering most acutely from the marginalization of the FAUD. This sense of immediacy led to a hardening of feelings on both sides, which eventually resulted in a split in the construction workers’ federation, one of the organization’s bedrock unions.

By 1927 the FAUD had crossed over from being a union that claimed to be an anarchist organization to being an anarchist organization that claimed to be a union. The union no longer had at its disposal the agitational force necessary to stymie the decline in membership. Other council communist and anarchist organizations, like the German Federation of Anarchist Communists (FKAD), had failed before in this respect. In contrast, the trade unions recovered, partly as a result of the hyper-inflation of the early 1920’s, partly as a consequence of the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, which drove many workers to these influential and legally recognized organizations.

4.3 Anarcho-syndicalism beyond the workplace

Rudolf Rocker, at this time the leading figure of both the German and international syndicalist movement, emphasized in the FAUD’s *Prinzipienerklärung* [Declaration of the principles of Syndicalism] that Socialism was, in the end, a cultural question. Accordingly, Anarcho-syndicalists did not confine themselves to organizing at the workplace, but took part in a number of significant movements, in order to promote their ideas and tackle economic and cultural tasks with their method of self-organization and self-management. [In the following sections] the various auxiliary organizations of the FAUD, as well as associated alternative movements, will be discussed. Of additional importance are the efforts on the part of the Anarcho-syndicalists to bolster their declining numbers through greater participation in cultural activities. Deserving particular mention is the active role played by Syndicalists in the “Free Thinkers’ Movement” and the “Guild of libertarian Friends of Books” (*Gilde freiheitlicher Bücherfreunde*), which was closely aligned with the FAUD. The influence of Anarcho-syndicalism on the various proletarian singing organizations has yet to be more fully researched, and in this work it will have to suffice to say that a number of Syndicalists were actively engaged in Singers’ Associations and Glee Clubs.

4.3.1 The Cultural Organizations

4.3.1.1 The Society of Proletarian Free Thinkers

The Freidenkerbewegung [Free Thinkers' Movement], with over a million members, was split in numerous different directions because in most cases the political parties were able to make their influence felt. However, the Free Thinkers' Movement united the proletariat across all party lines against the powerful influence of the church, and from 1927/1928 onwards syndicalists were increasingly engaged in opposition to the machinations of the church through the Society of Proletarian Free Thinkers (GpF). In place of Confirmations they organized a school graduation course, where questions of global importance were introduced and discussed, and which ended with a ceremony and celebration meant to send off the participants into the world. The central feature of this course was the encouragement of congregation members to leave the church.

Nevertheless, members of the KPD were dominant here and used their possession of leading positions to agitate against the syndicalists. The cooperation with authoritarian communists was the subject of considerable debate within the FAUD, but the majority felt it was necessary to actively support the Free Thinkers' Movement, in whatever form, and not leave the communists unchallenged. Still, syndicalist influence dwindled, primarily due to discord between the individual chapters, the dominance of the social-democratic functionaries and the internecine conflicts between "party-line" KPD members and the Communist Opposition. All told, the Society of Proletarian Free Thinkers' offered syndicalists only limited opportunities for expansion.

4.3.1.2 The "Friends of Free Books" [GfB]

The Friends of Free Books (GfB), in contrast, was founded by the FAUD in 1927 in association with the union's own cultural organization. One year later the GfB-Leipzig constituted itself as the first "Guild Group," and in 1929 came the national organization that comprised the wider network. Dues paying members were provided with syndicalist literature and could order books. The local chapters of the Guild organized readings, theatre productions and concerts with important figures like Erich Mühsam, Rudolf Rocker, Emma Goldman, Helene Stöcker, Bruno Vogel and Theodor Plivier. The organ of the GfB was the monthly, and later quarterly, magazine "Besinnung und Aufbruch" [Reflection and Beginning], in which Rudolf Rocker published the first excerpts of his work "The Decision of the West."

Membership climbed rapidly after 1928 to a national total of 1,250 members in 1931. Simultaneous membership in the FAUD was not obligatory and all-in-all the GfB was the most successful attempt to slow the decline of the union. The Göppinger Guild in Württemberg, for example, reached 80 members within six months of its foundation and was the largest group of its kind. The success of this chapter can also be measured by the fact that following the war's end it was reconstituted under the same name.

4.3.2 Aid Organizations [Hilfsorganisationen]

4.3.2.1 The Association for Birth Control and Sexual Hygiene (RVfG)

An aid organization founded in 1928 for the benefit of young women, workers and poor working-class families, the Association for Birth Control and Sexual Hygiene took on as its task

the counselling of individuals and families in the use of contraception and abortion and the explanation of legal issues. Activists distributed contraceptive devices and aided in the arrangement of abortion procedures. In carrying out its mission, the RVfG was supposed to remain politically and religiously neutral and to avoid association with trade unions, although its chairman, Franz Gampe, was a FAUD member in Nürnberg. By 1930 the organization included 200 local chapters, in which the over 15,000 members participated.

4.3.2.2 The “Schwarzen Scharen”

In the face of increasing political violence and the rising number of attacks on Anarcho-syndicalists at meetings and demonstrations by extremists of the right and left, an additional organization was formed as a response. At the end of the 1920s militant fighting organizations were formed, primarily by youths in Berlin and Upper Silesia, that generally carried the name “Schwarze Scharen” [Black Troop] and were several hundred in number nationwide.

These groups were to defend public events of the FAUD or allied organizations from disruption by Communists or Nazis. The Schwarzen Scharen can be viewed as the anarcho-syndicalist counterpart to the “Reichsbanner” of the SPD or the “Red Fighting Front” of the KPD. The members of the group wore all black clothing, some possessed firearms and were often involved in physical conflict.

The Schwarzen Scharen were not officially associated with the FAUD, due to protests within the union against the militarization of the organization. Since the FAUD was however not at its root a pacifistic movement these militant formations were tolerated and used as a defensive force in many areas.

4.3.2.3 The Movement of the Unemployed

Since companies laid off primarily anticapitalist workers, the out-of-work quickly organized en masse in Unemployed Councils. The shifting of power within the FAUD from the Industrial Federations to the Workers’ Communities [Arbeitsbörsen] helped make possible the union’s participation in this movement, since it also occupied itself with the new conditions of the labor market after turning away from the trade union movement.

At the last Congress in 1932 the question of the Unemployed Movement gained a place among the central themes of the Anarcho-syndicalists. In many places the FAUD was already actively participating in demonstrations of the unemployed and organized mutual aid and counselling. Thus, out of the original trade union movement, whose chief weapon was the strike, came a consumption-oriented organization armed with the threat of the boycott.

4.3.3 Alternative Movements to the FAUD

4.3.3.1 The Communal Settlements

Held in lower esteem within the ranks of the FAUD were the activities of the “Settlers Movement,” although there were individuals like the writer Theodor Plivier and Helmut Klose who enjoyed the respect of union members. [According to the FAUD], revolutionary class struggle could not be carried out through separation from the working class, but rather through class-aligned workplace organizations: the power of industrial monopolies could only be broken from

within by the workers. Settlements or communal associations were in contrast dependent on the goodwill of their capitalist competitors and thereby destined for failure.

Nevertheless, settlement projects were started throughout the territory of the Weimar Republic with the participation and help of syndicalists and anarchists. In the debate surrounding the “settlement question” one member of the editorial board of “Der Syndikalist” was even removed from his position, a result of his decision to publish further articles on the issue after it had been agreed that the paper would concentrate on workplace struggles. It was feared that the FAUD, as a fighting organization of the proletariat, would degenerate into a sect isolated from the general population. A number of these settlements were, in fact, founded by anarcho-syndicalists and were influenced by syndicalist ideas, among them the “Free Earth” communes in Düsseldorf and Stuttgart, and Barkenhoff, founded with the support of Heinrich Vogeler in Worpswede.

4.3.3.2 The Vagabond Movement

The Vagabond Movement exerted some influence on organized Anarcho-syndicalism, albeit limited. This movement expanded greatly at the end of the 1920s and was organized under the so-called “Vagabond King” Gregor Gog into the “International Fraternity of the Vagabonds” in 1927. Gog arranged for the first “World Congress of the Vagabonds” in Stuttgart in 1929, an event that won international attention. A number of Hunger Marches were also organized.

Gog and his wife Anni Geiger-Gog were closely associated with the FAUD and agitated for their cause in the union’s publications. ... As a result of his offensive performances and behaviour, Gog was the target of several court proceedings, blasphemy being among the charges. In direct contradiction to the majority view in the anarcho-syndicalist movement, Gog elevated laziness to a revolutionary act. He sharply criticized authoritarian Communism in all its forms until a tour of the Soviet Union in 1930 caused him to make a 180 degree adjustment to his views.

In the months following his return to Germany, the “Vagabond King” made a number of polemical speeches against Anarchism and Syndicalism at events across the country, even those of erstwhile friends, denouncing them as “petit bourgeois” movements. These were received with sneers and personal attacks in the syndicalist press.

4.3.4 Auxiliary Organizations of the FAUD

4.3.4.1 The “Anarcho-Syndicalist Youth of Germany” (SAJD)

Two auxiliary organizations within the FAUD were formed for the benefit of specific groups. The youth constituted themselves from 1921 onwards in the “Anarcho-Syndicalist Youth of Germany” (SAJD). This group’s chief activities were the organization of events, hiking trips and agitating for the anarcho-syndicalist cause. The SAJD had a nationwide membership of several thousand youths, distributed all across Germany. It was technically independent of the FAUD, but was closely aligned with the union following its formation, the SAJD itself being a product of the internal conflicts of the earlier “Free Youth,” which was split among “Syndicalists” and “Individualists...”

The SAJD’s official organ, “Young Humanity,” was distributed as an extra section of the FAUD’s Der Syndikalist. An additional monthly publication, “Young Anarchists,” catalyzed a new round of sectarian conflicts between individualistic/anti-organizational factions and partisans of organized class struggle, the latter eventually excluding the others from the SAJD.

The SAJD aligned itself even more closely to the FAUD as a result of this development and recognized the union's "Declaration of Principles" as guidelines for its own membership. The youth organization also modelled its organizational structure on that of the FAUD, setting up regional and national "Information Offices" that corresponded roughly to the Agitational Committee and executive Geschäftskommission of the FAUD.

Out of this youth organization came numerous leading members of the FAUD in the late 20s and early 30s, the so-called "Second Generation" of the FAUD, which followed that of the pre-war generation. This earlier group, which was more strongly oriented towards industrial and workplace organizing, lost influence within the organization as time went on, while the successor generation better embodied the sought-after synthesis of Syndicalism and Anarchism.

4.3.4.2 The "Syndicalist Women's Group" (SFB)

Women also demanded a special organization and laid out a programmatic basis at the start of the 1920s, calling for the nationwide establishment of Syndicalist Women's Group in cooperation with the Geschäftskommission. However, the majority of the local Women's Groups were short-lived.

The question of whether or not the Women's Groups represented a separate sector of production or should be organized in relation to the realm of consumption was a source of discussion in both the Women's Groups themselves and the Union at large. The Syndicalist Women's Group, as constituted, concerned itself with sexual hygiene, abortion and viewed itself as a support for the striking (male) worker, organizing boycotts to this end. Those that wanted the Women's Groups to operate as a separate sector of production were unable to realize their demands.

The SFB also produced a periodical, "Der Frauenbund," [The League of Women] which appeared regularly as a supplementary section of Der Syndikalist. In contrast to other women's organizations of the time, the women of the SFB were generally proud of their roles as mothers and housewives. For most syndicalist women equality between the sexes did not mean equal placement in the "Moloch of the Factory," but the recognition and elevation of household work and child-rearing to an equal place alongside other forms of employment. According to the SFB itself, it was founded to deal with women-specific issues and employed women should organize themselves within the existing Industrial Federations.

Although men were called upon by the Geschäftskommission and the FAUD-Congress to ensure the establishment of Women's Groups in their locale, many refused to actively participate. The women raised numerous complaints, even pointing to veritable boycotts from their male comrades. Nevertheless, there were numerous areas where mutual respect and solidarity characterized the cooperation between the SFB and the other syndicalist organizations. The SFB reached at its height a nationwide membership of 800 to 1000 women.

4.3.4.3 The Children's Movement

An additional area of activity for the FAUD was the internal "Children's Movement," which was often supervised by the Women's Groups. From 1928 until 1930 a separate periodical, "Kinderwille" [The Childrens' Will], was published, reaching a distribution level of about 600 issues per publication period.

The aim was to raise children to be self-aware, socially capable individuals who had internalized the spirit of mutual aid and solidarity. The anarcho-syndicalist Children's Organizations underline once again the syndicalist's desire to tie together all realms of social life into a unified, organic unit. These organizations were, however, also short-lived.

4.4 The End of the FAUD

The FAUD recognized the danger posed by National Socialism at a very early point and responded by preparing for illegal, underground activity. At the last Congress of the FAUD in Easter of 1932 concrete plans were laid down. The Geschäftskommission would be removed to Erfurt and the local associations would, if at all possible, dissolve themselves before any ban was enacted. Small, trusted circles [of FAUD members] were to set up a network to enable further nationwide operations.

In 1933 the FAUD was banned and in March of that year the Berlin office of the Geschäftskommission was searched and a number of functionaries taken into police custody. The union members either joined underground organizations or emigrated. The underground leadership of the FAUD was eventually moved from Erfurt to Leipzig. In 1936-37 the FAUD launched its resistance efforts while those who had emigrated to Spain came together to form the Gruppe DAS (German Anarcho-Syndicalists), which was an active participant in the Spanish Revolution.

Following the Second World War those Anarcho-syndicalists that had stayed in Germany established the "Federation of Libertarian Socialists" (FFS), which discarded industrial organizing in favour of operating as an "organization of ideas" that attempted to spread libertarian concepts in city and factory councils, as well as in cultural organizations. The FFS published a magazine called "The Free Society," which reflected the maturity and experience of the movement's best members. Most of the FFS-Groups dissolved themselves in the 1950s owing to their inability to attract younger members. Those that remained, such as Augustin Souchy and Will Paul, still held interviews and publicized valuable memoirs. In the final years a number of biographies were published, among them those of Helmut Kirschey, Hans Schmitz and Kurt Wafner, who were youths at the start of the 1930s.

5. Syndicalism and its Significance

While I hope that I have adequately demonstrated the significance of Anarcho-syndicalism and its content, I would like to add the following points and observations.

If we evaluate German Anarcho-syndicalism purely on the basis of its numerical strength we can state that the FAUD had a mass-base for a brief period, claiming some 150,000 members. If we compare this number with other contemporary workers' organizations, however, we are forced to concede that even in its heyday it was far behind its opponents. Union organizations, like the Hirsch-Dunckerist Workers' Associations counted several hundred-thousand members among their ranks, the christian unions comprised over a million workers and Germany's General Association of Workers (ADGB) came within reach of the 10 million-mark. By its own admission the FAUD never played a major, nationwide role at the factory-level.

So why should anyone bother with this subject? In a number of historical works and research projects it is apparent that Syndicalism, in contrast to the present, was well-known among the contemporary working class. This seems perplexing, given the small size of the FAUD and the fact that it lacked access to anything resembling present-day mass-media.

This was a consequence of syndicalists' consistent anti-militarism and untiring agitation prior to the First World War, which were remembered by many disappointed social-democrats and contributed to the first wave of new members in the months following the war's end. The papers of workers' parties and centralized unions from this period are filled with warnings and disparaging remarks about syndicalist organizations. The functionaries of these reform-oriented groups were haunted by the specter of Syndicalism, the "french tumor." These functionaries firmly held their ranks in their campaign against any form of worker self-organization, which resulted in a merciless fight at the level of the workplace, and can only mean that Syndicalism, in their eyes, was a competing influence that posed a real threat. Mainstream trade unionists even went so far as to call for the firing of striking syndicalist colleagues.

The syndicalist movement was also known to the „Organ of the Worker and Soldier Councils of Germany," the „Workers' Council," in the revolutionary period from 1919-1920. Indeed, the social-democratic workers' councils felt the need to declare "the Workers' Unions" a "new abscess of the Workers' Movement" in their national paper.

According to detailed sources, more than 40% of the participants in the March Revolution were syndicalists, whose struggle is described by Erhard Lucas and Hans Marchwitza, among others. The Political Police of the Weimar Republic did not list syndicalists under communist organizations, as do many historians and "social scientists," but gave them an independent status. In the fotografic information collected by the police at the beginning of the Weimar Republic a number of syndicalists appear alongside "celebrities" like writer Kurt Tucholsky and the future East German head-of-state Walter Ulbricht.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the syndicalist movement, or at least parts of it, were not only recognized in prominent circles, but was even considered worthy of support. The well-known women's rights activists Helene Stöcker and Anita Augspurg made donations to the

FAUD's fund for the Munich Landauer Memorial, and Stöcker both spoke at events organized by the Friends of Free Books and published articles in the organ of the Syndicalist Women's Group. Syndicalists in turn lauded her as "a sympathetic fighter, one whose views are close to our own." No less a personality than actor Alexander Granach provided Erich Mühsam and Rudolf Rocker with money to aid the Spanish revolutionaries Durruti and Ascaso in their flight. The legendary Ukrainian revolutionary Nestor Machno likewise found refuge with Rudolf Rocker as a refugee. In an essay solicited by the German military, Max Weber identified syndicalists as the most forceful opponents of militarism. Even Lenin mentioned the German syndicalist movement in his work "State and Revolution," holding leading figures of the workers' movement like Karl Legien responsible for the growth of this "blood relation of opportunism." It goes without saying that Syndicalism was known among Bohemian circles, whose prominent figures included Ernst Toller, Oskar Maria Graf and Erich Mühsam, and the latter, a close friend of Rudolf Rocker, joined the FAUD in 1933. Heinrich Vogeler, painter and founder of the "Barkenhoff" art colony in Worpswede near Bremen, was associated with the anarchist and syndicalist movements and provided them with a homestead. It is also no wonder that the "Herodotus" of Anarchism, Max Nettlau, was also in close contact with the movement and provided the famed author Ricarda Huch with material for her biography of Bakunin. The German expressionist writer Carl Einstein did not encounter Syndicalism until later, but fought with German Anarcho-syndicalists in the Spanish Civil War as part of the Columna Durruti and produced an excellent account of his experiences. Albert Einstein (no relation) and Thomas Mann also recognized the true promise of Rudolf Rocker's "The Decision of the West," and Einstein and Rocker piled praise upon one another. Leading Anarcho-syndicalists like Rocker and Souchy were also particularly popular speakers at universities following the Second World War.

It is also worth noting that long before the philosopher Hannah Arendt first tasted the air of academia the syndicalist movement had already developed a "Theory of Totalitarianism," the product of experience and an international network of correspondents, chief among them Emma Goldman, Rudolf Rocker and Alexander Schapiro. Political careerists, including later mayors and legislators, also began their political lives in the syndicalist movement, the best known being Herbert Wehner, who eventually became the party chairman of the SPD.

German syndicalists also played a deciding role in the reorganization of the international syndicalist movement after the First World War. Reacting quickly to the communist foundation of a workers' international under Moscow's leadership, the partisans of syndicalism founded the International Workers' Association in 1922 as a conscious continuation of the First International's Bakuninist tradition. Rudolf Rocker, Augustin Souchy and the Russian-born Alexander Schapiro were the first to chair the organization, whose central office was based in Berlin until 1933. At its foundation the IWA had over a million members—in 1936 the number of Spanish members alone rose to some 1.5 million. For large numbers of workers Rudolf Rocker's "Prinzipienerklärung des Syndikalismus" was considered the authoritative text of the movement.

Those German Anarcho-syndicalists who successfully fled to Spain following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War organized themselves into the Gruppe DAS (German Anarcho-Syndicalists) in Catalonia. The Gruppe DAS managed the correspondence of the underground resistance in Germany and put German fascist groups in Catalonia out of commission. Members of the group also fought against Franco's armies at the front, and although much smaller than the communist International Brigades in terms of raw numbers, were of equal importance to the revolution and its participants. Meanwhile, the fascist authorities in Germany, anticipating the pull that the

Spanish Revolution could exert upon the population, placed the remaining Anarcho-syndicalists in Germany under special observation.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Helge Döhring
Syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism in Germany
An Introduction
2004

libcom.org/history/syndicalism-anarcho-syndicalism-germany

Translated by John Carroll from "Syndikalismus und Anarcho-Syndikalismus in Deutschland: Eine Einführung" in *Anarchosyndikalismus an der Fulda: Die FAUD in Kassel und im Widerstand gegen Nationalsozialismus und Faschismus*, edited by Jürgen Mümken, published by Verlag Edition AV, Frankfurt. Pamphlet published by Institut für Syndikalismusforschung, Bremen.
First edition, 2006 (PDF: libcom.org). Second edition, 2012 (PDF: libcom.org).

theanarchistlibrary.org