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This is an impressive addition to anarchist history. The reports, debates and motions of the International Anarchist Congress held between August 24th and 31st 1907 are available for the first time in English. This meeting, held in Amsterdam, attracted the leading lights of the international libertarian movement – Errico Malatesta, Emma Goldman, Pierre Ramus, Christiaan Cornelissen and a host of others (Peter Kropotkin being an notable absentee). A long list of subjects was to be discussed: syndicalism, anti-militarism, the 1905 Russian Revolution, organisation, co-operatives and much more. Most of this is still relevant and so this book is not just for those interested in anarchist history, it is of interest to modern activists.

There is a useful, if at times cryptic, introduction by the editor which puts the congress into context. This is followed by the reports to, discussions in and motions to the Congress in chronological order. This is followed by an account of two syn-

dicalist meetings and an appendix on the recent Russian Revolution. All are of interest. The reports to the congress on the state the anarchist movement in various countries makes interesting reading (not least the lengthy account of the USA anarchist and labour scenes by Max Baginsky and Emma Goldman). Some of these will appear familiar to militants today, for better or worse!

It is a shame, however, that Luigi Fabbri's report on the Italian anarchist movement is not included. While excited to here that there is "a forthcoming collection of Fabbri's writings" in which it will be included, its exclusion detracts from claims this book is the full report of the congress.

Then the discussions get going. The one on organisation seems somewhat redundant, as everyone agreed it was necessary ("On this point all the anarchists – Proudhon, Bakunin, those of the Jura Federation, Kropotkin – are in agreement" noted Amédée Dunois (pp. 84–5)). However, while much was discussed (and translated into many languages!), this congress is best remembered for the debate between leading French union militant Pierre Monatte (pp. 108–16) and veteran Italian anarchist militant Errico Malatesta (pp. 121–6) on libertarian attitudes to revolutionary syndicalism.

Monatte used the experience of the French *Conféderation Générale du Travail* (CGT) to expound the virtues of revolutionary unionism. Malatesta took a much more critical perspective. Although he stressed that "anarchists must enter the workers' syndicates" Malatesta did not think unions, by themselves, were inherently revolutionary. Thus the need for anarchists to organise both as workers ***and*** as anarchists in order "to incite the syndicates to the ideal, guiding them little by little towards the social revolution." (p. 124)

Suffice to say, it is over 100 years since this debate and it fair to say that Malatesta was correct in his critique of syndicalism. For example, few syndicalists today would disagree with Malatesta on the need to turn a general strike into an insur-

***The International Anarchist Congress Amsterdam (1907)***

Edited by Maurizio Antonioli

Translation and English edition by Nestor McNab

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rection and the descent of the CGT and other revolutionary unions into reformism confirmed his fears that unionism "is and always will be a legalitarian, conservative movement with no other goal – at best – than the improvement of working conditions." (p. 122)

Which raises a translation issue. Syndicalism is just the French for (trade) unionism – hence the "revolutionary" qualifier used by CGT militants like Monatte. This became simply syndicalism in other languages. This raises issue of whether syndicalism is better translated as "unionism" in certain places in these debates as at times it appears that Malatesta is discussing unionism rather than syndicalism. Malatesta, to prove an example, proclaims that "even if it is reinforced by the pointless use of the adjective revolutionary, syndicalism" is "a conservative movement" before pointing to "the great North American unions." (p. 122) Surely "unionism" would be more appropriate in that context and others like it? Still, regardless of this quibble, his meaning is clear from the context.

It must also be noted that Malatesta's talk has been used by both liberal libertarians and Leninists to draw a distinction between syndicalism and anarchism. Previously this exchange was only available in George Woodcock's *The Anarchist Reader*, which did not include Malatesta's first paragraph which proclaimed "I will only deal here with those areas in which I am in disagreement with" in order to eliminate "pointless repetition." As becomes clear seeing the whole debate and Malatesta's resolution at the congress, he was ***not*** denying the need for unions, class struggle and anarchist participation within the labour movement. Far from it! He was simply critical of the "overly simplistic" conceptions (p. 123) expounded by certain syndicalists and combating those libertarians who were letting themselves "be absorbed by" the labour movement, so replacing the end (anarchism) by the "*means*" (class struggle). (p126)

As his joint resolution with Cornelissen and Vohryzek to the Congress put it:

"the Syndicates [are] organisation fighting in the class war for amelioration of the conditions of labour, and as unions of productive workers which can help in the transformation of capitalist society into Anarchist Communist society… But [it] is the duty of Anarchists to constitute the revolutionary element in those organisations… the Syndicalist movement [is] a powerful means of revolution, but not… a substitute for revolution… [that is] armed insurrection and expropriation by force…" (pp. 132–2)

In short, Malatesta's position was not anti-syndicalism but rather syndicalism-plus. His opposition to certain elements of syndicalism cannot be used, as has been by Leninists, to suggest a difference between the two. This is confirmed by the debate itself, with Monette stating that syndicalism had "reminded anarchism of its worker origins" while anarchists have "contributed in no small way to dragging" the unions "along the revolutionary path." (p. 108) He also linked syndicalism with the "idea of the proletariat, organised into 'resistance societies', being the agent of the social revolution that lay at the heart of the great International Working Men's Association" [IWMA] along with the "ideas of autonomy and federation" expounded by those who "took sides with Bakunin" and "rose up against the abuse of power by the general council" (p. 110). Malatesta, for his part, stated he had "never stopped… pushing comrades to the path that syndicalists, forgetting a glorious past, call *new*, but the first anarchists had already established and followed within the international." (p. 122) In this, this vision of anarchist organisations working within the labour movement, he followed his old mentor Bakunin's lead when argued that the *Alliance of Socialist Democracy* should be active within the IWMA.

After the discussions at the Congress, the book summarises two private meetings of syndicalist attendees, via an article



by Dunois, on international relations between revolutionary unionists. Finally, there is the appendix on the Russian Revolution that gives important accounts of both the Russian Anarchist movement and the events of 1905. Strangely, the last article does not appear to have been written by an anarchist given that it ends by stating "a new form of government will arise" based on "the cooperative, democratic spirit of eighty million peasants, it will doubtless be a government of natural justice and equality"! (p. 270) Still, the accounts of 1905 and the rise of Russian anarchism and debates within it are of interest.

Indeed, some of the accounts of the Russian Anarchist movement have to be read to be believed. Clearly, a very brutal regime provoked extreme resistance and the account is full of comrades assassinating particularly abusive bosses/officials or committing expropriations from the bourgeoisie (for workers on strikes, propaganda, etc.) then getting into gun-battles with the police. More often than not, these are ended by the anarchists shooting themselves to escape capture.

While all very heroic, it does seem a counter-productive approach to producing a revolutionary libertarian workers movement. It goes strike the reader to ask whether the 1917 revolution would not have benefited if those comrades had still been around and had spent the intervening years building a movement. Simply put, Peter Arshinov and Nestor Makhno were imprisoned but after being released from prison both helped deepen the Ukrainian revolution. I cannot help feeling there may be lessons there for those who prefer the glamour of the Black Bloc to the more boring activities of getting our ideas across and organising.

All in all, all those involved in getting this account 1907 Congress available in English should be congratulated. It is an extremely valuable addition to both our understanding of early 20$^{th}$ century anarchism and its debates but it also gives valuable lessons which can enrich our activity now.