

# **Winning the Class War**

***An Anarcho-Syndicalist Strategy***

Direct Action Movement

# Contents

Throwing down the gauntlet . . . . .	3
The phoney war . . . . .	5
Class mobilisation . . . . .	10
On the offensive . . . . .	13
A call to arms . . . . .	16
The principles of revolutionary syndicalism . . . . .	17
Ends and objectives of the IWA . . . . .	19
DAM-IWA aims and principles . . . . .	20

”One must try to increase as much as possible the theoretical content of all our activities, but without the ’dry and shriveled doctrinalism’ which could destroy in part the great constructive action which our comrades are carrying forward in the relentless fight between the haves and the have nots. Our people stand for action on the march. It is while going forward that we overtake. Don’t hold them back, even to teach them ’the most beautiful theories’ ...”

Francisco Ascaso, from ’Durruti — the People Armed’

## Throwing down the gauntlet

Major social changes have taken place these last few years in Britain and throughout the world, and changes continue to take place at an increasing rate. ’Thatcherism’ has, over the past decade, made a decisive move away from the mixed economy and welfare state of the so-called post-war political consensus, stridently bearing the standard of free-market capitalism and anti-trades unionism. It is becoming increasingly apparent to everyone that our fate is very much tied in with international economics and politics. The events in eastern Europe will have major repercussions on the whole world, and the balance of power within it, as will the creation of the Single European Market in 1992.

The working class needs to take stock of the new situation in which it finds itself, and needs to organise itself as a class if it is to fight for its interests against the bosses.

The once all-powerful British trades unions have, faced with a hostile Tory Government and with employers not prepared to accept the gains made by workers over past decades, failed, and failed miserably. How many times since the steelworkers’ strike of 1980 have we seen sections of workers left to fight on their own with the TUC leaders merely mouthing words of support?

The trades unions are not going to fight for workers’ interests in the 1990s and beyond. In the past the unions paid lip-service to the emancipation of the working class and to Socialism (meaning Labourism). They don’t even pay lip-service now.

Originally, unions were an inevitable reaction by workers to the realities of life in a class society. The workers needed to defend themselves against the opposing interests of the bosses and organised themselves into combinations and trade unions in order to do this, realising that workers’ strength lay in the organisation of their large numbers.

The unions in this country accepted the legitimacy of the existence of social classes. They did not want to put an end to an exploitative social system but to get the best for workers within it, which, in practice, means collaborating with the bosses and the capitalist system. The class collaboration of the unions has led them to become more and more a part of the system. It now means that they not only fail to defend workers’ interests but often go firmly against them. Their priority is getting ’recognition’ at any price (recognition from the bosses, of course, not the workers). Getting back to the good old days of beer and sandwiches at Number 10 is what they are interested in, not fighting the class struggle.

All the time we hear workers and left-wingers accusing the trade union leaders of selling out and being bureaucratic. This is, of course, true, but we view this as inevitable in organisations that aim to collaborate with capitalism rather than to destroy it.

The reality is that if the working class doesn't take things to the heart of the matter and destroy the class system and take control of society, we are doomed to a perpetual struggle to live: we fight — they give a bit — they take it back — we fight ...

Workers' gains might last for some time (for example, the conditions won by printworkers, which have now largely gone out of the window) or only a short while (until management reinterpret the agreement they made the week before) but, sooner or later, the struggle starts all over again.

What is needed is a long-term perspective that goes beyond wages and conditions, that looks to winning a decisive victory in the class war.

Only workers through organisations they themselves run can gain that victory. For years, political solutions have been put, by trade unionism, in the hands of the Labour Party, supposedly fighting for us in the bastions of power and privilege. What have workers got to show for it all? Neil Kinnock? The answer is not to put our faith in more radical or 'revolutionary' political parties. The answer is having faith in ourselves, in our class to fight our own battles. The slogan of the First Workers' International has stood the test of time: "the emancipation of the workers is the task of the workers themselves". The workers themselves, not the 'professional revolutionaries' and the intellectuals who follow in the footsteps of the dictators Lenin and Trotsky.

We must recognise no power over the working class, and likewise we can allow no institution-alised power within our own organisations. The apathy and powerlessness the present unions create in their members cannot be allowed to continue. The decision-making process must be under the control of the workers. Real workers' organisations have no need for full-time officials. They become superfluous when we take our destinies into our own hands.

Working class organisations should seek to unite our class (and that includes those not in work) rather than fighting for petty sectional interests. Look at the trade unions: fighting each other to 'unionise' workplaces that haven't even been built, like they are bidding for a contract — lowest offer wins. Instead of this, SOLIDARITY must again become the morality of the workers' movement. An injury to one is an injury to all.

But the most important thing of all is that workers' unions should not only fight for immediate improvements in our lives but should have the aim of creating a free and classless society, based on workers' control and the satisfaction of human needs.

Since the trade unions are not in any way designed to carry out these aims and, indeed, are themselves an important part of capitalism, our objective cannot be to reform them (still less to elect 'better' leaders), but has to be to create a new and altogether independent workers' movement.

After years of dominance by social-democratic trade unions and Labour Party what we are advocating — revolutionary unionism — is certainly a bold step. However, what we want is not entirely new and untried. With the failure of trade unionism and the collapse of Marxism-Leninism the old traditions of revolutionary unionism and anarcho-syndicalism inspire and teach us as we build a new workers' movement.

Finally, this pamphlet is not a blue-print for the creation of such a movement. The precise directions of a living movement cannot and should not be laid down in advance in pillars of stone. It represents, rather, a first step in the process of bringing about a revolutionary workers' movement.

## The phoney war

Surely if nothing else the Thatcherite eighties have exposed the bankruptcy of reformist trade unions. In the very first year of the decade the planned attacks on the organised sections of the working class began with the brutal closure of steel mills resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs and the destruction of whole communities. It was to set a dreadful pattern repeated throughout the decade as groups of workers from miners, print workers through to ambulance workers were left, with honourable exceptions, isolated to slug it out with rampant management backed by the full force of the state. A by-product of these long hard disputes is the now common sight of groups of workers being forced on to the streets in order to collect money just to survive. Indeed, as the decade came to an end with the ambulance dispute, union leaders, having now dropped totally the idea of class struggle and the need to spread disputes to other groups of workers, came to see street collecting not as a weakness but part of the strategy for winning. The idea being that it is not collective strength that wins disputes but convincing the 'general public' via the media that you have a 'just' case, and of course large amounts of money collected can be offered up as a sign of so-called public support. The archetype of this new union thinking being the leader and main spokesman during the ambulance dispute, Mr Media himself Roger Poole, who even went so far as to employ a media consultant as an advisor. If as workers we are not going to be left to the mercy of these PR men masquerading as trade unionists it is essential that we start looking at why the struggles of the '80s were lost and at the very nature of reformist trade unions. We must look at what the unions' aims are, how do they function and what role do the cliched rank and file have within them? We also have to look at the 'lefts' traditional response to the unions and the role they play within them. In short we have to start by asking what lies behind the myth of British trade unions?

Let us start by looking at the basic building block of any union – the branch. The first thing to note is that the vast majority of branches exist and function away from the point of struggle, that is the workplace. The only contact with the workplace the branch has, and therefore the union, is through the workplace activists who attend and the workers who bring problems encountered in their daily working lives to the branch to solve. This they only do on rare occasions and it is safe to say that most workers only attend branch meetings on a handful of occasions throughout their working lives, if at all. Indeed, surveys show that at any given point only 5% of union members attend branch meetings. Nor is it necessarily the case that even those who attend on a regular basis have much in common. Many unions organise meetings on the basis of where members live, these meetings can consist of groups of people who may not work in the same workplace or even the same industry, the only thing in common being that they happen to belong to the same union. This type of meeting can even be reduced to members just turning up to pay dues. Even those in unions that do organise on an industrial basis union meetings are still dominated not by workplace matters but internal union business. The staple diet of such meetings being the endless correspondence, various motions and the countless elections and nominations to the various committees, conferences and union positions. Which may be all well and good if the views expressed at branches were treated for what they are – the views of the tiny number of activists. But they are not. What happens at union meetings is that you have tens of people acting for hundreds and occasionally hundreds acting for thousands. The culmination of this charade being the block vote where union leaders get up at various conferences casting votes on behalf

of hundreds of thousands of members on policies and for people that the overwhelming majority of members will never have heard of let alone voted for.

We should also dispel the idea that all branch activists are also involved in the workplace struggle against the bosses. For a start, in many unions branch secretaries are full-timers so never see the workplace. And even when they are not officially full-time they can become so through the back door method, by sitting on so many committees and holding so many positions they do not have the time for something as mundane as work. Then there are those who are active in the union but have no base in the workplace. These people can even be on the so-called 'left' of the union who will argue for all sorts of motions to be passed from 'troops out' to bringing down apartheid, all of which will be achieved by strongly worded letters from the union, but do little to organise in the workplace and would not dream of organising strike action in defence of basic rights. Indeed it could be argued that unions act as a check on militancy even at branch level. How often do angry workers turn to the branch for support and advice over incidents that have happened at work only to have all that anger deflected away from taking effective action by branch officials promising to 'get something done' by contacting head office or bringing in the full-timer. If then, branch meetings are hardly hives of activity where the mass of workers meet, argue and exchange ideas, it can be said that they so at least retain some links with mass of the membership.

Which is more than can be said about most union bodies above branch level. We now enter that strange world of the full-time union official whose working lives consist of endless meetings with other union officials, management and union activists. The only time these people come across ordinary union members is when they are called in, often by management to 'resolve' a problem. The higher up the union structure the more remote they became, ending with union leaders who only come across ordinary working class people on a day to day basis when they have a friendly chat with their chauffeur or the office cleaner.

It is safe to say then that the unions exist in the main outside the workplace with the bulk of union activity taking place above the members heads. The ordinary members commitment being limited by paying subs and perhaps seeing the need to 'support the union'. Looking to the union in return for help if trouble does arise as individuals or collectively.

Given that the unions organise away from the point of struggle, let us turn to their aims and how they set about achieving those aims. The main aim of any union is to maintain its power within as part of the wider trade union movement and also to exert pressure and maintain influence on the state, management and society as a whole. They seek to do this in various ways, one of the most important being maintaining as high a membership as possible. This is of prime importance not least in the TUC pecking order. This has now reached the point where it seems to matter little how remote it inactive that membership is or maybe just as long as the dues are coming in and membership figures are up. Getting to the bizarre stage where unions sign up members, in single union deals for factories that are not yet even built. As for their role within the state and government, this has all but been eliminated under Thatcher. But the desperation of the unions can be seen for instance in the willingness of the 'mighty' TUC, in return for being allowed some involvement with what was the Manpower Services Commission, helping to administer youth schemes like the YTS that not only pay slave wages but encouraged dangerous working conditions for thousands of working class young people. But of all the areas that the unions seek to have influence in by far the most important is its dealing with management, for it is from this area that all their power flows. They must retain the right to negotiate wages and

conditions with management. It is by having the power to negotiate on behalf of workers that they retain their influence within the workplace and ultimately attract and retain members.

In turn it is having that control and influence in the workplace that they are of use to the boss class. The unions offer stability in the workplace, they channel workers anger, shape and influence their demands and, if need be, act to police the workforce. Perhaps this is best summed up by a quote from the boss class themselves: a manager when asked by a reporter why his multi-national had recognised unions in South Africa replied "have you ever tried negotiating with a football field full of militant angry workers?" And it was this threat of an uncontrollable militant, if not revolutionary workforce, that first persuaded the capitalist of the need to accept reformist unions, seeing them as a way to control the workforce.

Not that this position between workforce and management has been easy to maintain for the unions. On the one hand they have struggled to control workplace oriented strikes at times of workers militancy, often refusing to make strikes 'official'. They have even lowered themselves to issuing threats of the removal of union cards in the days of the close shop, thus endangering workers' jobs, if the workers refused to go back to work. On the other hand, in times of recession and reduced workers militancy, union bosses are face with a management freed from the need to control the workforce, to a degree anyway, so the union has a reduced or no role at all, leaving them with no option but to call strikes to defend their position. No better example of this can be found than in the 1989 railworkers strike. British Rail having virtually ignored the union for years decided to go the whole hog and withdraw national pay bargaining. The panic-stricken NUR leaders had no choice than to call a national strike, for only the first time since 1926, apart from the one-day fiasco in 1962.

Because of the union weakness in the workplace, they had to lump a number of issues together, call for the most acceptable action possible, and organise tours of workplaces to try to get the message across. Needless to say, even with a highly successful strike the action was soon called off and all other issues dropped once management conceded national pay bargaining.

But then strikes have always been the last resort for unions and then only for short-term gains. In the long term they seek the election of Labour governments, under which the leadership could sit down with capitalists and the state to administer society for the supposed benefit of all. The control over the workforce would be their guarantee of power. However, the Thatcher years have meant that the unions have had to redefine how they maintain their position. Whereas in the past their power has been based on their ability to both control and at times promote workers militancy, now much more emphasis is being placed on the old enemy, the law, to guarantee their position. Under a Labour government's so-called 'positive workers right' not only will the unions right to recruit workers be made law, but a new system, guaranteeing negotiating rights, based on the European-style Workers Councils, will be introduced. There is no doubt as we enter the '90s that the trade unions are looking for the Northern European style of unions, with their emphasis on individual rights, as opposed to the collective rights with binding arbitration, and co-operation as opposed to strike action as the way forward. To quote that rising star of the TUC and assistant to Willis, John Monks: "We still represent 40% of the workforce. Social partnership is the norm in Europe. It is Britain that is out of step." And even without a Labour government, with 1992 and the European Social Charter, Mr Monks may still have his way.

As the movement in the unions away from strikes gathers pace, we must consider how little trade unions have used the strike weapon in any case. To do this it is important to distinguish between two types of strike: the first are those organised by the union which may or may not

have the backing of the workforce; and secondly those organised in the workplace by the workers themselves and which are not supported by or made official by the union. It is the latter which forms the bulk of strikes and which have in fact been the mainstay and backbone of workers militancy in Britain. The Donovan Report, which came out of the Royal Commission into the unions and was set up by a Labour government, found that no less than 95% of post-war strikes were unofficial. The people often at the centre of these strikes were shop stewards who, being based in the workplace and having the support of the people they worked with daily, were in a position to organise quick and effective strikes which resolved problems and made gains.

But by acting as the focal point of workers struggles, not only did shop stewards come into conflict with management, they also came into conflict with the unions who did everything they could, in the main unsuccessfully, to contain them. To quote Bill Jordan of the AEU, commenting on why the unions 'social contract' with the Labour government went wrong, states: "We reverted to type, as if fighting a 19th century class war. We failed to respond because of the rise and rise of the power of the shop stewards. The power of the full-time officials was passed into the factory ... when national officials were asked to deliver their side of the social contract they couldn't." In other words the unions could not keep their side of the bargain with the state because workers were ignoring the unions' call for class collaboration and had taken matters into their own hands.

The question must be asked, why after decades of militancy, workers were unable to organise a general fight back against Tory government attacks? And with hindsight it is not hard to see some of the fundamental faults which existed. One of the most basic being that workers still restricted themselves, through the unions, to economic struggles. No wider political perspective was put forward linking the day-to-day struggles with the need for an alternative to capitalism. This was not so much a problem in the post-war boom, but come the recession in the late '70s where management were opening their empty order books to workers and blaming the international slump for redundancies, then there was a crying need for an organisation committed to putting forward an alternative to capitalism. A role the reformist trade unions were unwilling and unable to take on.

Again we had workers in conflict with and feeling betrayed by the unions whilst no alternative was put forward. Few national workplace organisations were built where workers could come together to discuss problems and plan actions. This left them dependent on the unions for an overall view of their industries. Whilst direct links with workers in other industries were not made, meaning that relations with other groups of workers was conducted through inter-union bodies and the TUC. These factors tended to leave groups of workers isolated with their efforts concentrated on the immediate day-to-day issues. As the Donovan Report found, the vast majority of strikes were over local issues only lasting for a few days.

The above problems were to prove fatal when Thatcher came to power. For what the '80s have shown was not that workers were not prepared to fight, after all group after group of workers have attempted to take on the state, but that workers have no organisation that could co-ordinate and plan a class-wide offensive. Having few direct links with workplaces outside of their own industries, strikers were forced to appeal for support through other unions and the TUC. These bodies, in the majority of cases, did not even try to mobilise support. On the few occasions when unions did back workers from other unions, links with their own members had become so weak that they were unable to get them to take action. No better example of this is the miners' strike



of 1984-85, when the TGWU ordered its members to boycott coal, only to be ignored by the vast majority of members.

On the other hand, when workers did take solidarity action, it was often the case that because of the nature of their jobs that they had strong links with the people they were supporting. For example, some of the most effective solidarity action during the '80s was taken by railway workers during both the steel and miners strikes, it cannot be mere coincidence that the railworkers gave such tremendous support to two groups of workers with whom they had strong historical links, by working together on a daily basis.

That is not to say that the 'left' has not tried to get over the problems posed by the dominance of the reformist trade unions. Since the war they have attempted to organise 'rank and file' groups in the unions. These have taken various forms, for example Flashlight and Building Workers Charter have set up around the National Rank and File Movement of the '70s, and of course there is the broad left. But the very nature of these groups, and of the politics of those who have tried to organise them, has meant that these groups were also doomed to failure.

Since the war this has taken the form of trying to build rank and file groups within the unions. This task has been undertaken by various political groups from those set up by the CP in the 1950's and 60's, eg Flashlight and Building Workers Charter through to the SWP-dominated rank and files of the 70's and of course the militant-dominated Broad Lefts. Needless to say, such Marxist groups were not slow to manipulate rank and files for their own ends, even if this was to the detriment of those rank and files and the workers involved.

For instance, Building Workers Charter, which had widespread support in the building industry failed to appear in the massive and bitter building workers' strike in the early 70's due to the manoeuvring of the CP. Thus they not only failed to provide an alternative lead to the reformist unions in a crucial strike but so demoralised supporters of Building Workers Charter that it led to its eventual collapse.

Again in 1973 when the IS (now the SWP) tried to set up a national rank and file movement, the CP-dominated rank and files boycotted the conference organised to launch the movement with the Morning Star denouncing the whole event as an IS plot.

The conference itself was so bogged down with the manoeuvring of various sects that the movement never got off the ground. The manoeuvring of the Marxists should come as no surprise because they all saw rank and files not only as recruiting grounds but also as a way of increasing their influence in the unions. This followed from their political theory, that the unions were the place where workers organise at an economic level, whilst the 'more advanced' would wish to organise on a political level and join their organisation. With this outlook the Marxists deliberately set out to limit the rank and files to the basic day-to-day economic struggle. Though there were variations between rank and file groups, with some making vague references to the nationalisation of industry, they were, in the main, devoid of revolutionary politics. You will search in vain for any attempt to link the day-to-day struggles with the need to transform society. The links between the Labour Party and the unions were never challenged, in fact attacks on the Labour Party were restricted to the 'right wing'. Their aims were limited to reforming the unions and defending pay and conditions through the use of industrial action.

It would be a mistake, however, to put down the lack of politics simply to the Marxist influence. Instead we should look at the nature of rank and file groups themselves. They were not made up of masses of ordinary workers but trade union activists who were members of political groups with axes to grind, sinking their political differences to the lowest common denominator, that

is militant trade unionism. Perhaps a quote from the paper of one of the more successful rank and files of the 70's, the NALGO Action Group, will illustrate this. An editorial stated: 'the future development of NALGO Action Group remains as it always has, in the hands of its supporters whose political persuasions are less important than their common desire to work for greater democracy and militancy within NALGO and larger trade union movement'.

Indeed as rank and files were made up of activists, often of different political persuasions, it was vital that differences did not surface. Where faction fighting did occur there were all sorts of problems. For instance a number of attempts to start a rank and file in the rail industry in the 70's failed due to political in-fighting. Again, in Building Worker (at the time of writing, still a functioning rank and file) progress has been hindered by differences. To use just one issue of their paper as an example, the 3 main articles consisted of one arguing for the need for a revolutionary party; one for the need to support reform of the Labour Party; and the other for the need for building workers to join the T&G.

The attitude of the post-war rank and files towards the trade unions, all without exception never sought to challenge the reformist nature of the unions. Instead of developing a revolutionary alternative in the workplace they concentrated on trying to reform union structures, often seeking to do little more than making unions more democratic and accountable to 'ordinary members', which in reality, as we have seen above meant little more than the tiny minority that attended branch meetings. This meant that much time and energy was spent working within the union structures outside the workplace. This ranged from caucuses before union meetings; building support for motions to national conferences; and standing for positions at branch level right up to national level. Some even put forward people for TUC elections.

It is true to say that rank and files did some excellent work around various disputes, but by acting as a group standing somewhere between the union and the workplace they also played a negative role. By constantly arguing for changes to the union structure; the need to make branches more democratic; the need for the leadership to be more accountable etc, they not only offered false hope but channeled energy and discontent away from the real problem – the social democratic nature of reformist trade unions.

## **Class mobilisation**

At the turn of the twentieth century, Britain had a large revolutionary (syndicalist) union current. It was still widely believed that the trade unions were, to some extent, malleable; that they were still reformable to a revolutionary position. But following the Russian Revolution, this current was largely seduced by Bolshevism and so became irrelevant to the growth of any real mass working class organisation. Many activists were busy trying to build the Communist Party, rather than a revolutionary class organisation.

Internationally this was not necessarily the case. Anarcho-syndicalist unions were fighting to destroy capitalism and the state either as the majority workers organisations in that particular country, i.e. Argentinean FORA and Spanish CNT; or as minorities, i.e. the Italian USI and the SAC in Sweden.

But eventually revolutionary unionism lost out everywhere to repression from democratic, fascist or Stalinist states, and to the charms of consumer and welfare capitalism.

The economic crisis which has developed since the 1960s, and the failure of reformist unions to fight anti-working class legislation, has led to a regeneration to revolutionary unionism in many parts of the world.

Groups have developed to promote the ideas in Britain, Japan, most of Europe, and in places such as Spain there has been the re-formation and growth of the older established anarcho-syndicalist unions.

Elsewhere we have seen the development of 'independent' unions, for instance in Poland, South Africa and the Philippines. But these lack, have lacked, a clear revolutionary perspective which consequently leads to problems.

In Poland workers are now governed harshly by 'Solidarity'; in South Africa unions are being taken over by middle class politicians of the ANC. Independent unions are not in themselves revolutionary. Clear revolutionary political goals are also vital for any real change to develop.

So, what does constitute revolutionary unionism? How is such a union organised? What does it do? What does it believe in?

First and foremost, a revolutionary union has to be more than purely economic in its outlook. It has to be political. Not in a party political sense, but in the knowledge that it is aiming for a completely different kind of society. No doubt members of liberal-social democratic unions will claim that they want something completely different. Well, perhaps they do want something different to Thatcherite freedom and collectivist self-management. They simply want an arena in which they can be involved with the bosses in the running of welfare, pseudo democracy, where they will get the chance to govern come election day with their soul-mates in the Labour Party.

A political outlook cannot develop merely out of the election of politicians. It develops out of an involvement in political decision making. This is a learning experience. Politics and economics are not to be artificially divided. Social democratic unions are bankrupt of any credibility because of their insistence on this divide. When we take economic action through strikes and boycotts, for instance, we should also be learning self-management and solidarity. There is also the opportunity of becoming internationally aware – for instance, the miners strike saw for the first time workers meeting fellow workers and learning from each other, instead of from the pages of some tatty newspaper, or through stereotypes of Spaniards and Germans.

What we want is a libertarian communist society, built by organising in the workplace and the community. What we want is nothing less than the complete overthrow of capitalism, in whatever malign or benign guise it may adopt.

Our union must be based on mutual aid and solidarity. Such fundamental principles are not negotiable. They involve fighting the class war. A phrase so out of fashion with chic, middle class lefties. We know that the class war is ceaseless. We defend our immediate and future needs, whether as part of the union or not. For instance, health and safety at work is vital for all workers as is the wage struggle. Where we differ from the liberals is that we fight for our gains and take them. We totally reject collaboration with the exploiting class. What they deign to give us, they may take back. What we take is ours, and we will not allow them to steal from us again.

So, whilst fighting the class war for immediate gains, we never lose sight that without an end to capitalism, gains are only transitory. We only have to look at how improvements in the conditions of mineworkers and printers were savagely destroyed in the '80s to be aware of this. Even the 'right to strike' is being taken away by Tory legislation, and the Labour Party intends to maintain much of such legislation. What we call for is not the 'right to strike', it is our duty to take industrial action. The end of welfare is evidence that we cannot, and should not, depend on

the state for our -well being. Welfare has been used as a weapon against our class, by threats of its withdrawal, and not only threats, so lulling us into servile acquiescence.

Our union must be a combative, pro-active revolutionary organisation, which uses direct action to achieve its goals.

Its structure is totally different to any reformist or existing working class organisation. However the difference of structure is in itself not enough. The activity and involvement of the union members is still the most important part of any anarcho-syndicalist union. The difference between anarcho-syndicalist and present unions is this basic point: the structure of an anarcho-syndicalist union with its power and decision making at its base, its system of federation and networking means that it can fully utilise what is actually the real power of any working class organisation – vitality and initiative and the day to day involvement of the members.

Current unions squander this vitality. As any active member will show, activity is not based on workplace matters, but wastes time at meetings, futile campaigns, electioneering, and matters arising outside the workplace.

The decision making base of an anarcho-syndicalist union is the workplace. There is only one branch of the union in any workplace as trade divisions are just that – divisive. So anarcho-syndicalism is based on industrial rather than trade divisions. These then link together with other workplaces of the same industry.

This in turn links to a national industrial federation. Workplace unions may link with other unions of any trade in local and area federations for greater local and cross-union solidarity. This would also help create community bases and ties. The locals form the backbone of the union. Together with industrial federations they form the Confederated Union.

An anarcho-syndicalist union has no permanent full time paid officials. Decision making is done via delegates, whilst the running of the union is done by recallable elected people with limited terms. If, as has been known at various times, the workload is so great, a wage may be agreed but only at the holder's previous wage. The practice of an anarcho-syndicalist union, though, is to be as non-bureaucratic and decentralised as possible.

This structure enables effective tactics to be discussed and worked out in the workplace. But the tactics themselves are based on the principles of Anarcho-Syndicalism. Such tactics would then become relevant with co-ordination for maximum solidarity within the Confederation.

How often have we heard the irrelevant cries from the left to ask the TUC to call a General Strike whenever a group of workers is in struggle. And conversely, how pathetic is the TUC in its tokenistic posturing, calling for 15 minutes 'dignified' stoppages, days of action, birthday parties for the NHS.

People taking industrial action know what is best for their workplace. There are classic examples of effective action, from work to rules to go slows, sabotage, selective and all-out strikes, sabotage.

During the 1989 local government workers' strike there were instance of computers being sabotaged and essential files being locked away to stop any scabs doing the work. French railway workers sabotaging tracks, ambulance workers occupying stations, miners blocking motorways, solidarity actions where, for instance, miners supported nurses, railway workers refused to carry scab coal, and so it goes on. The best methods are those suited to the prevailing situation, and no-one knows that better than the workers involved.

Faced with a violently hostile government, prepared to spend a fortune to win industrial disputes, the all-out and stay-out approach is as archaic as the reformist trade union movement

itself. As shown by the miners, P&O Seafarers and the News International printers, holding out month after month was no substitute for class solidarity. Glorious defeats will not change society or overthrow capitalism. We have to use our experience and imaginations to do whatever is necessary to win. To allow the imagination to flourish, workers must be in control of our own destinies, not pawns in some union leader's power game.

So what is required is the imagination of the workforce coupled with a flexible approach, workforce control and immovable principles, if we are to ensure effective activity.

We also recognise that concerns at work do not end at the factory gates, there have to be links with the communities in which we live. Toxic emissions concern not only workers, but the people living downwind from such plants; poisoned food is eaten by everyone including the workers who produce it; housing matters concern workers and tenants and the homeless; we cannot leave concerns to a few individuals and small sections of workers, or we end up with such debacles as Sellafield, where people have been dying for years whilst government experts say there is nothing wrong, and workers choose to hide their heads in the sand rather than confront the bosses.

This also extends into our international approach. All workers suffer the yoke of capitalism. The environment, multinationals, maldistribution of food, the third world debt, militarism, concerns every one of us and calls for international working class action.

We can no longer, nor could we ever, depend on political leaders to improve our society or our world. The time has come for a radical form of organisation based on internationalism, solidarity and the class war. We can live without the bureaucrats of whatever persuasion.

It is our struggle, it is up to us to organise to win the war now.

## **On the offensive**

Having stated how we perceive an anarcho-syndicalist union and why we see such a development as necessary, the union cannot be built out of thin air or with paper membership, nor can it be linked by economic militancy alone. An anarcho-syndicalist union is not just an economic fighting force, but also an organisation with a political context. To build such a union requires a lot of work and experience. As a step in this direction the DAM is initiating what it calls Industrial Networks.

The idea of an industrial network is a break from the past where rank and file efforts to organise have been within the constraints of the existing social democratic organisations and practices. There have been others that have grown up mainly out of struggle and displayed healthy methods of organisation but as a consequence of their purely reactive nature and limited political content have faded away once the focus of struggle has moved.

An industrial network would initially be a political grouping in the economic sphere, aiming to build a less reactive but positive organisation within the industry. The long term aim of industrial networks is, obviously, the creation of an anarcho-syndicalist union.

In accordance with this aim, and in keeping with the principles of anarcho-syndicalism we must build a framework from which such a union can be built. To do this the industrial networks must be organised at the grassroots and work through mutual federation with other networks in the same industry to create a national federation within that industry. Also to federate on a local level with networks in other industries to create a locally based organisation. Federation is

basically very simple, but because of its flexibility it would be unwise to lay down rigid guidelines as to how to put them into practice. Solidarity and mutual support are the essence of federalism.

It would be a futile leftist prank, of the kind the working class has seen far too much of in the past, if an industrial network was merely a network of contacts. We see no point in industrial networks unless they provide a framework for militant workers to begin to be able to set their own agenda and independence of action. By this we mean that we should be able to choose our own issues and set of demands. Anything short of outright revolution can only negotiate temporary gains under capitalism. The boss class is forever changing the rules, changing its demands, taking away hard fought for benefits. We believe that we should adopt a reciprocal attitude to the bosses. One day we might fight for National Pay Agreements, the next for local ones, the contradiction doesn't bother us. We should fight for what we want, when we want it and not allow the bosses or reformist unions to decide for us what is and is not permissible. This is what we mean by setting our own agenda, even though it may include, from time to time, fighting for the same things as the reformists.

Initially industrial networks are likely to be groupings not necessarily based within the same workplace as this would limit activity, but the issues may be able to be generalised. Local and industry wide issues can be tackled, and being based locally and within the workplace, the members of a Network are ideally positioned to stimulate debate. Network members are also in an excellent position to help break the isolation felt in many workplaces as to the situation in the rest of the industry. The reformist unions maintain an iron grip on information which, especially during disputes, is vital. Workers need an overall view and reliable sources other than the media or union if they are to take effective action. This, along with encouraging workplace organisation, holding local meetings and trying to stimulate solidarity, independence and flexibility of action gives industrial networks a key role to play during disputes.

Networks will always be seeking to grow through activity and action, based upon our principles. Not for its own sake, nor as a mere opposition force to the social-democratic union structures –but as an independent force aiming to become an anarcho-syndicalist union. This obviously brings us on to how we see the relationship an industrial network and its militants have with the existing trade unions.

We make no bones about our attitude to the trade unions. We may be members of them, we may fight for union rights, but we are totally against the present unions, not just their leadership, but also their structures and aims. We intend to use the unions to suit our own interests, so we defend union rights solely to fight for the rights of the workers. We do not intend to fight for positions within the unions, nor should networks be pushed through branches. To become absorbed within the union, particularly within its hierarchy, is to nullify militancy and flexible thought, with endless meetings that bear no relevance to the workplace or to the members of the union. To us the only organisation capable of representing the workers' interests, has to be workplace and industrially based, especially if it is syndicalist in its outlook. That is, it sees workers' organisations as the only legitimate bodies of expressing the opinions and interests of workers, that bureaucrats and intermediaries are surplus to the requirements of workers as they only serve to control militancy and their own dubious positions.

We have no intention of isolating ourselves from the many workers who make up the rest of the rank and file membership of the unions. We recognise that a large proportion of trade union members are only nominally so as the main activity of the social democratic unions is outside the workplace. Though the industrial networks are fairly specific in so far as they are

anarcho-syndicalist and aim to create an anarcho-syndicalist union, they aim, in accordance with anarcho-syndicalist principles, to encourage general workplace activity ie workplace meetings, strike committees, etc, outside of the sphere of influence of the unions and other 'interested' bodies, like political parties.

We would see these activities as broad based, and whilst obviously respecting the consensus, industrial networks would maintain their independence and identity. But it is part of our political/ economic outlook to fight vigorously for these kinds of bodies outside of the TU control. We aim to unite and not divide workers.

It has been argued that social democratic unions will not tolerate this kind of activity, and that we would be all expelled and thus isolated. So be it. We, however, don't think that this will happen until there is a threat to the TUs themselves. To present such a threat would imply a degree of success in stimulating workplace activity and building of anarcho-syndicalist networks of militant workers. This in turn would imply that workplace militants had found a voice independent of the TUs and so they become less useful to us anyway. Our aim is not to support social democracy, but to show it up as irrelevant to the working class.

We have claimed that the idea of industrial networks and their combined economic / political outlook are new. And in the history of the last few decades they are. But to be honest, these are only reconstructed ideas from the days when the working class had a bit of clout, before social democracy entwined itself around and strangled our ideas and organisations. They were effective then and can be more so now that social democracy has shown itself for the bankrupt system that it is.

The ambulance workers dispute of 89/90 showed how fully social democracy is willing to sell out workers for short term gains. The trade union was willing to sacrifice the right of workers to strike in return for a settlement. Roger Poole, the union's stitch up man was forever claiming each deal that he got was the best that could be expected, and the final sell out was so far removed from the workers' demands that Poole had to actively go out and try to sell it to the workers. To us this is utterly absurd.

The railway workers' dispute of 89 was another example of trade unions placing their own interests above those of the workers to protect the positions and egos of the leaders. Knapp gloried in the media attention whilst controlling the effectiveness of the actions taken so that he could settle for an extra 0.1% without a deal on conditions. This kind of increase on the original offer without fulfilling the demands on conditions, some of which were basic demands, shows the ineptitude of the unions' powerbroking and the self inflated importance of the leadership.

Contrast this with the London Underground workers who took action on their own accord and did very well until the trade unions kidnapped the dispute. The workers never really regained the initiative and were thus forced to accept the unions negotiated sellout. A further example of unions nullifying militancy. The last decade or so has been full of similar examples of unions selling deals to its members, counteracting any militancy, total inflexibility and the complete abdication of class interests as they wrangle and cajole to get their feet under the bosses table.

Rank and filism which we have experienced in the recent past is no longer acceptable to us as it entails either political subordination to its inventors, who act as external influences on the organisation, the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party and Workers Revolutionary Party being particularly noteworthy examples of external manipulators, or else the Rank and File Groups lack any political outlook and ends up as a permanent critic of the leadership, and nothing more.

We want to encourage genuine grassroots activity, on its own initiative and with its own aims and agenda. But we also want a politically conscious and motivated network of militants both to encourage this and to learn and develop its own independence. Not all members of an anarcho-syndicalist organisation have to be anarcho-syndicalists, they have only to accept the organisational framework and principles. For us this is the only way forward for the class. We must stop the dependence on the petrified corpse of Trade Unionism and stop abdicating political responsibility to the middle class in its Labour Party garb.

## **A call to arms**

The 1990's herald a new decade, we are told that this will be a decade of hope for the future, for freedom and democracy. How easily these assumptions are pulled out of a public relations stock phrase book.

It is difficult to predict the future particularly with the world of capital realigning itself and the very market-hungry forces within it all set to capitalise on the political realignment in Eastern Europe. With the submerging of competing nations to form economic blocks, about to become more formalised in 1992 and the apparent elimination of socialism from the political arena, it is obvious that the world is changing rapidly. But this changing world is the world of capital readjusting itself in its time honoured fashion of averting perpetual crisis by carving more profit for itself. The avaricious tentacles of capitalism ingesting power and capital and excreting an homogenous culture of coca cola, big macs and prime time TV so destroying working class identity cultures and language in its pursuit of total world capital. Now it seems that this relentless devastation of the planet and the people that live on it can continue unchecked.

The much hailed collapse of socialism, or rather the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of socialism, has added further fuel to the fire of those who see the sole aim of the trade unions and the Labour Party is to accommodate the working class within capitalism rather than destroying capitalism itself. We see nothing in the Marxist-Leninist interpretations of socialism and revolution that is of benefit to the working class. Its combination of historical determinism and elitism led it on an inevitable course of centralisation and rigidity and unashamed dictatorship. The effects of this on the working class of the countries that came under its influence is well documented. We want revolution but not the false idea of some mythical homogenous mass rising to fulfill its historical destiny. This is pure fatalism of the kind that destroys any chance of a genuinely creative force capable of destroying capitalism once and for all. We seek and desire a revolution of the individual and community in harmony, where every member of society feels a part of that society and so plays an active part in it, rather than being a mere cog in a vast machine outside of their control. Capitalism needs to be totally eradicated. To allow ourselves to be accommodated within it as the likes of Kinnock and Willis would have is to destroy our humanity and lose all social responsibility.

The 'Social Charter' advocated by our so-called representatives within the EEC is part of that process of assimilation which highlights their lack of understanding of the needs of the working class. It is solely a tool to enhance the all-powerful super-state and economy of Europe, and as usual leaves us with as little as possible in the attempt to buy us off and accept capitalism. It displays the absolute bankruptcy of the trade unions and the so-called parties of the working class. They no longer have any connection with the day-to-day needs of the working class let



alone any desire for revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. A cosy seat on the boardrooms of Europe would seem to be the height of ambition for our brave trade union leaders, the 'fighting organisations of our class'.

The need for an organisation capable of fighting the bosses and of furthering revolution is so starkly obvious that its absence can only further demoralise any rebellious spirit. We want to see a workers' organisation that is both political, economic and internationalist. Any divisions between these are totally artificial. We want the organisation to be controlled by its members, and for it to be a creative force in society.

The idea of class and revolution are deemed antiquated by those in power, particularly those on the left as they have most to lose. The left wing middle class cosy in their homes discussing socialism over quiche and perrier, keeping it for themselves as a nice academic exercise whilst maintaining their control over our class within their positions as union or political leaders or in their university trained occupations.

But we see revolution and class analysis as being more valid than ever. The time has come for the working class to fight back. As the field seems to have been cleared of opponents to capitalism – the trade unions, the Labour Party, and the Marxist-Leninists have all shown their cowardice and inadequacies, so now anarcho-syndicalism will be the potent force for fighting back. It contains all the strengths needed to defeat capitalism and bring about a libertarian communist world.

As we said earlier, the 90's have been heralded as the decade of caring, of hope, of freedom and democracy, but these must be on our terms and we'll have them – BUT NOT WITHOUT A FIGHT.

## **The principles of revolutionary syndicalism**

- Revolutionary syndicalism is based on the class struggle and holds that all workers must unite in economic combative organisations. These organisations must fight for liberation from the double yoke of capital and the state. Its goal is the reorganisation of social life on the basis of libertarian communism, which will be achieved by the revolutionary action of the working class. Considering that only the economic organisations of the proletariat are capable of reaching this objective, revolutionary syndicalism addresses itself to workers in their capacity as producers, as creators of social wealth, so that it will take root and develop among them in opposition to the modern workers' parties, which it declares inept for the economic reorganisation of society.
- Revolutionary syndicalism is the pronounced enemy of all economic and social monopoly. It aims at the abolition of privilege by the establishing of economic communes and administrative organs run by the workers in the fields and factories, forming a system of free councils without subordination to any power or political party. Revolutionary syndicalism poses as an alternative to the politics of states and parties, the economic reorganisation of production. It is opposed to the governing of people by others and poses self-management as an alternative. Consequently, the goal of revolutionary syndicalism is not the conquest of political power, but the abolition of all state functions in the life of society. Revolutionary syndicalism considers that the disappearance of the monopoly of property must also be accompanied by the disappearance of all forms of domination. Statism, however camou-

flaged, can never be an instrument for human liberation and, on the contrary, will always be the creator of new monopolies and privileges.

- Revolutionary syndicalism has a twofold function. It carries on the revolutionary struggle in all countries for the economic, social and intellectual improvement of the working class within the limits of present day society. It also seeks to educate the masses so that they will be able to competently manage the processes of production and distribution through the socialisation of all wealth. Revolutionary syndicalism does not accept the idea that the organisation of a social system based exclusively on the producing class can be ordered by simple governmental decrees. It affirms that it can only be obtained through the common action of all manual and intellectual workers, in every branch of industry, by self-management, in such a way that every region, factory or branch of industry is an autonomous member of the economic organism and systematically regulates, on a determined plan and on the basis of mutual agreement, the production and distribution processes according to the interests of the community.
- Revolutionary syndicalism is opposed to all organisational tendencies inspired by the centralism of the state and church. These can only prolong the survival of the state and authority and they systematically stifle the spirit of initiative and any independence of thought. Centralism is the artificial organisation which subjects the so-called lower classes to those which claim to be superior. Centralism leaves the affairs of the whole community in the hands of a few – the individual being turned into a robot with regulated movements and gestures. In the centralised organisation, the necessities of society are subordinated to the interests of a few, variety is replaced by uniformity and personal responsibility is replaced by unanimous discipline. It is for this reason that revolutionary syndicalism founds its social conception on a wide federalist organisation, an organisation which works from the bottom to the top by uniting all forces in the defence of common ideas and interests.
- Revolutionary syndicalism rejects all parliamentary activity and all collaboration with legislative bodies. It holds that even the freest voting system cannot bring about the disappearance of the clear contradictions at the centre of present day society. The parliamentary system has only one goal: to lend a pretence of legitimacy to the reign of falsehood and social injustice.
- Revolutionary syndicalism rejects all arbitrarily created political and national frontiers and declares that what is called nationalism is the religion of the modern state, behind which is concealed the material interests of the ruling classes. Revolutionary syndicalism recognises only economic and regional differences and demands for all groups the right to self-determination without exception.
- It is for these reasons that revolutionary syndicalism fights against militarism and war. Revolutionary syndicalism advocates anti-war propaganda and the substitution of permanent armies which are only the instruments of counter-revolution at the service of capitalism, by workers' militias which, during the revolution, will be controlled by the workers' syndicates; it demands, as well, the boycott and embargo of all raw materials and products necessary to war, with the exception of a country where the workers are in the midst of a social revolution, in which case it is necessary to help them defend the revolution. Finally,

revolutionary syndicalism advocates the preventive and revolutionary general strike as a means of opposing war and militarism.

- Revolutionary syndicalism supports direct action and supports and encourages all struggles which are not in contradiction to its own ends. The means of struggle are: occupations, strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc. Direct action is best expressed through the general strike. The general strike must, at the same time, from the point of view of revolutionary syndicalism, be the prelude to the social revolution.
- While revolutionary syndicalism is opposed to all organised violence of the state, it realises that there will be extremely violent clashes during the decisive struggles between the capitalism of today and the free communism of tomorrow. Consequently, it recognises as valid that violence which can be used as a means of defence against the violent methods used by the ruling class during the social revolution. As expropriations of the land and the means of production can only be carried out and brought to a successful conclusion by the direct intervention of the workers' revolutionary economic organisations, defence of the revolution must also be the task of the economic organisations. Defence of the revolution is not the task of a military or quasi-military body developing independently of these economic organisations.
- It is only through the economic and revolutionary organisations of the working class that it will be possible to bring about the liberation and necessary creative energy for the reorganisation of society on the basis of libertarian communism.
- The international bond of struggle and solidarity which unites the revolutionary syndicalist organisations of the world is called the International Workers' Association (IWA).

## **Ends and objectives of the IWA**

The IWA has as its aims:

- To organise and press for revolutionary struggle in all countries with the aim of destroying once and for all the present political and economic regimes and to establish a libertarian communist society.
- To give a regional and industrial base to the economic syndicalist organisations and, where that already exists, to strengthen those organisations which are determined to fight for the destruction of capitalism and the state.
- To prevent the infiltration of any political party into the economic syndicalist organisations and to combat with resolution every attempt at political domination within the unions.
- Where circumstances demand it, to establish through a given program which is not in contradiction with the above, provisional alliances with other revolutionary and working class organisations, with the objective of planning and carrying out common international actions in the interest of the working class. Such alliances must never be with political parties and with organisations that accept the state as a system of social organisation.

- To unmask and combat the arbitrary violence of all governments against revolutionaries dedicated to the cause of social revolution.
- To examine all problems concerning the world proletariat in order to consolidate and develop movements which defend the rights and new conquests of the working class the world over.
- To undertake shows of solidarity in the event of important economic struggles against the declared or concealed enemies of the working class.
- To give moral and material support to the working class movements whose management is in the hands of the workers themselves.

The International only intervenes in the affairs of a union when its affiliated organisation requests it or when this submits to the general decision of the International.

## **DAM-IWA aims and principles**

1. The Direct Action Movement is a working class organisation.
2. Our aim is the creation of a free and classless society.
3. We are fighting to abolish the state, capitalism and wage slavery in all their forms and replace them by self-managed production for need, not profit.
4. In order to bring about the new social order, the workers must take over the means of production and distribution. We are the sworn enemies of those who would take over on behalf of the workers.
5. We believe that the only way for the working class to achieve this is by independent organisation in the workplace and the community and federation with others in the same industry and locality, independent of and opposed to all political parties and trade union bureaucracies. All such workers' organisations must be controlled by the workers themselves and must unite rather than divide the workers movement. Any and all delegates of such workers' organisations must be subject to immediate recall by the workers.
6. We are opposed to all states and state institutions. The working class has no country. The class struggle is worldwide - and recognises no artificial boundaries. The armies and police of all states do not exist to protect the workers of those states, they exist only as the repressive arm of the ruling class.
7. We oppose racism, sexism, militarism and all attitudes and institutions that stand in the way of equality and the right of all people everywhere to control their own lives and environment.
8. The Direct Action Movement is resolved to initiate, encourage and wholeheartedly support the creation of independent workers' unions based on the principles anarcho-syndicalism.

9. The Direct Action Movement is a federation of groups and individuals who believe in the principles of anarcho-syndicalism: a system where the workers alone control industry and the community without the dictates of politicians, bureaucrats, bosses and so-called experts.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Direct Action Movement  
Winning the Class War  
An Anarcho-Syndicalist Strategy  
1991

Retrieved on 06.01.23 from

<https://libcom.org/article/winning-class-war-anarcho-syndicalist-strategy>

At the end of the document, the 'Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism' and the 'Ends and Objectives of the IWA' were reproduced from the Statutes of the International Workers' Association, to which DAM was affiliated. The Direct Action Movement became the Solidarity Federation in 1994.

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**