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rapprochement. For example, a 2007 syndicalist union summit in Paris, France, drew 250 delegates from dozens of left-wing and independent unions worldwide, with African unions by far the largest continental presence.[10]

In its 150-year history, syndicalism has shown both a capacity for massive influence, vitality and creativity—and destructive purism and sectarianism. If ever, however, a time has come for it to show its mettle, it is in today's world, marked by capitalist crisis, rampant inequality and prejudice, massive disillusionment in party politics and the collapse of the old class compromises.

[10] On recent developments, see *Alternative Libertaire*, 'Espagne': *La CGT s'affirme Comme la Troisième Organisation Syndicale* (November 2004); I. Ness (Ed), *New Forms of Worker Organization: The Syndicalist and Autonomist Restoration of Class Struggle Unionism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014).

However, strategic and tactical decisions have also had profound consequences for movement survival and revival. This helps explain cases of renewed or continuous influence *despite* rivals and repression: a major (if short-lived) renaissance in 1940s France; ongoing FOL predominance in La Paz, syndicalist influence in Bolivia's state-run COB and FOF's survival into 1964; a major role in Cuban transport, catering, construction and electric unions into the 1960s; and ongoing influences in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, New Zealand and Uruguay. The 1960s struggles and New Left helped promote syndicalist themes, with, for example, the United States' Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) advocating 'student syndicalism'.

The 1960s struggles and New Left helped promote syndicalist themes, with, for example, the United States' Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) advocating 'student syndicalism'. The 1970s collapse of dictatorship in Spain led to a rapid CNT rebirth and IWA revival, followed by major fracturing. The 1980s and 1990s saw further revivals, notably in East Europe and Africa: for example, a large IWA affiliate in Nigeria, and an IWW miners' union in Sierra Leone, and strong groups in South Africa.

Initiatives exist in many countries today, but the main syndicalist unions currently are in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Siberia, and the United States. By far the largest is Spain's *Confederacion General del Trabajo* ('General Confederation of Workers', CGT) in Spain, in 2004 representing nearly two million workers through workplace elections, and with 60,000–100,000 members. Syndicalism has some influence on alternative unions like *Fédération des Syndicats Solidaires, Unitaires et Démocratiques* in France and Switzerland. There are also many individuals within orthodox unions who promote syndicalism.

Overall, the syndicalist movement is small and fragmented: most syndicalist unions are outside the IWA major splits; large formations, like those of in Nigeria and Serra Leone, have all but collapsed. However, there are encouraging signs of growth, and

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movements within orthodox unions, like the Workers' Committee movement in Britain and South Africa? Or on forming new ('dual') unions, something forced on the Italians who formed USI, but championed from the start by the IWW?

Militarily defending revolution was also contentious. Some believed in a peaceful revolution, hoping the state would be paralysed (or asphyxiated) by a revolutionary strike. Others believed armed clashes with the ousted ruling class would occur, but be swiftly and victoriously won. A third group envisaged the need for a sustained, coordinated war effort—a scenario outlined in the didactic 1909 novel by French CGT militants Emile Pouget and Emile Pataud, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth*.[9]

Syndicalism Today

Rather than decline rapidly after 1914 or 1917, as commonly argued in the literature, syndicalist unions and influences peaked after the First World War, including in Argentina, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, the United States and South Africa. There was also significant growth in some territories from the late 1920s, notably Bolivia, Poland and Spain. But the steady growth of Marxist-Leninist parties—notably during the Second World War—helped erode syndicalist influence, as did the rise of national-populist movements, like Bolivia's MNR, sustained social-democratic reforms in Western countries and dictatorships of the right and left. By the end of the 1930s, significant (legal) syndicalist unions only existed in Chile, Bolivia, Sweden and Uruguay; French, Polish and Spanish syndicalists, for example, went underground from 1939.

[9] E. Pouget & E. Pataud, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto, [1909] 1990).

a social revolution in 1936, involving massive factory and land occupations, and a 100,000-strong militia.

Key Debates Within Syndicalism

Major debates within syndicalism do not correspond neatly to labels (e.g. anarcho-syndicalism, revolutionary industrial unionism etc.), periods, countries or internationals. Strategy and tactics around alliances were one area: notably, some aimed at alliances with peasants, others—including a strand within the IWW and SLP—dismissing the issue on the supposition that small farmers would be swept away by modern industry. Should syndicalism involve craft- or occupational unions, as some in FORA insisted? Organise by industry, as the IWW stressed, or territory, as CNT tended to do? Or a combination of industrial and territorial federations, as Rocker argued? Participation in statutory industrial relations systems and in state welfare was also heavily debated, and has been key to splits since the 1950s. Other debates, notably in the 1930s IWA, considered whether Fordist and Taylorist mass production should be abolished.

Dual organisationalism was another issue: did (revolutionary) unions suffice, or did they need to be complemented by specific 'political' organisations, like Bakunin's Alliance in FRE; IWPA in CLU; *La Social* in Mexico's *Congreso* (and *Luz* in *Casa*); the ISL, SLNA and SLP; or *Federación Anarquista Ibérica* (FAI, Iberian Anarchist Federation) in CNT? If so, how should these 'political' organisations, based on ideology, be structured, what were their functions, and the relationship with syndicalist unions? Could they use state elections for propaganda or disruption?

This raised whether efforts should be made at 'boring-from-within' existing unions, as happened successfully in France (CGT), Argentina (FORA), Spain (*Solidaridad Obrera*) and Poland (ZZZ). Or should the focus be building semi-autonomous oppositional

Abstract

Syndicalism is an anti-statist revolutionary strategy rooted in the anarchist tradition. It argues that revolutionary labour unions, built through daily struggles, radically democratic practices and popular education, provide an irreplaceable force for defending and extending gains and rights for the working class and crucial levers for social revolution. It involves prefigurative mass organising and immediate struggle, to build a revolutionary counter-power and counter-culture to abolish capitalism, the state and oppression. Direct action and solidarity, self-activity and the development of political and technical knowledge are means to enable the accumulation of individual and organisational capacities for a revolutionary general strike (or 'general lockout' of the capitalist class) in which working people occupy workplaces, take control of the means of production and construct a stateless, socialist order based upon self-management, planning through interlinked assemblies and councils, and production for need, rather than the profits or power of a ruling class minority.

Introduction

Syndicalism centres on the claim that labour unions, built through daily struggles, radically democratic practices and popular education, provide an irreplaceable force for defending and extending gains and rights for the working class and crucial levers for social revolution. Direct action and solidarity, self-activity and the development of political and technical knowledge are means to enable the accumulation of individual and organisational capacities for a revolutionary general strike (or 'general lockout' of the capitalist class) in which working people occupy workplaces, take control of the means of production and construct a free, socialist order based upon self-management, participatory

planning interlinked assemblies and councils and production for need, rather than the profits or power of a ruling minority.

Syndicalism envisages a radically democratic unionism, which aims to organise across and against economic and social inequalities and prejudices and sectionalism within the working class and across the borders of states. Syndicalism rejects bureaucratic and centralised styles of unionism, which view the membership as a passive group to be led, or provided with services; economistic business unionism, which focuses solely on wages, working conditions and orderly bargaining; and 'political unionism', in the sense of unions allying to political parties seeking state power.

Rather, it promotes a militant class struggle unionism that stresses the importance of autonomous, revolutionary action, based upon solidarity, internationalism and direct action, as inclusive as possible: one big union. It opposes divisions in the 'working class', normally understood as including all waged employees lacking power (not just industrial workers), urban and rural, including informal workers, workers' families and the unemployed. Syndicalism aims at popular unity across jobs, industries and countries. Instead it fosters polarisation between the working class and the 'ruling class'—normally taken to include both capitalists and top state officials—and solidarity with the peasantry, meaning small farmers subject to control and exploitation by other classes, including tenant farmers.

The outlook is internationalist and solidaristic, stressing common class interests globally, the necessity of uniting the vast majority of humanity—the working class and peasantry—and opposing all forms of oppression. This is captured by the slogan 'An Injury to One is an Injury to All', coined by syndicalists in the United States. Capitalism and states help generate and reinforce a wide range of oppressions, for example, war and national oppression. The creation of a new, egalitarian social system based upon a massive redistribution of power and wealth is essential to uprooting various oppressions and their legacies.

while, elements of the radical right have tried to appropriate elements of syndicalism, notably in France and Italy.

It must be emphasised here that such influences do not mean the persons or groups thus influenced can be categorised as 'syndicalist'; they were part of a larger mixture, and not always predominant. De los Reyes was a small capitalist and religious leader, not a fiery anarchist. Ghadar melded anarchist, Indian nationalist and other ideas. Mariátegui and Gramsci were impressed by Sorel, but became leading Communists, not syndicalists. ICU ideas were eclectic, including large doses of Christianity, Garveyism and liberalism. FOSATU was not a syndicalist union, its 'workerism' a complex and unique mix. The radical right-wing nationalists that emerged in the USI (and in the Italian Socialist Party) rejected foundational syndicalist principles: pushed out during a fierce struggle in the First World War, they linked up with fascists, clashing with Italian anarchists and syndicalists, including USI, who played a heroic role in anti-fascist struggle.

Syndicalist participation in Italy's anti-fascist *Arditi del Popolo* militias formed part of a larger pattern. The IWPA organised militias in the 1880s, two of them affiliated to CLU unions; ITGWU organised an Irish Citizens' Army during the 1913 Dublin Lockout, which joined Connolly in the 1916 Easter Rising; Mexico's *Casa* formed Red Battalions in 1916; FORA demonstrations in 1919 had armed guards; in Upper Silesia (now Poland), syndicalists formed the anti-fascist *Schwarze Schar* (Black Cohort); Spain's CNT established a network of clandestine 'defence committees' in the 1930s; Polish ZZZ syndicalists fielded units against the Nazis in the occupation.

Rather than shy away from insurrection, syndicalist unions were involved in general strikes of insurrectionary character: Mexico 1916, Spain 1917 and 1919, Brazil and Portugal 1918, Argentina 1919 and 1922, and Italy 1920. Following a cycle of anarchist/syndicalist insurrections from 1932, Spain's CNT led

of the syndicalist union. France's CGT formed a peasant wing, Portugal's syndicalist *Confederação Geral do Trabalho* (General Confederation of Labour, CGT, 1919) included tenants' groups and cooperatives, and sections for artists and academics. Bolivia's FOF organised street traders, and a *Unión Feminina de Floristas* (Flower Vendors' Union). Syndicalists also proved remarkably flexible in forming alliances with non-syndicalist (or non-anarchist) forces around specific issues, including with Marxists, social Catholics, social-democrats and nationalists.

It is important to reiterate here that syndicalists campaigned, organised and supported struggles that went well beyond workplace issues: the American and Canadian IWWs organised unemployed demonstrations; the Clyde Workers Committee was central to Glasgow's 1915 rent strike; the *Federación Obrera Regional Peru* (Workers' Regional Federation of Peru, 1919) championed Indian rights; the *Zenkoku Rodo Kumiai Jiyu Rengokai* (Free General Association of Trade Unions, formed 1926) opposed Japan's 1927 invasion of Manchuria; Spain's CNT initiated rent strikes in Barcelona.

Other impacts are less obvious. Filipino anti-colonialist Isabelo de los Reyes founded the islands' first union in 1902: the *Unión Obrera Democratica* (Democratic Workers' Union), influenced by both anarchism and Marxism, reached 150,000 members. The Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU, 1908) was influenced by syndicalism and led by syndicalists, but was not syndicalist. Har Dayal (1884–1939), Indian radical (and IWW leader) based in California, founded the Ghadar Party in 1913, which organised armed revolt in British India in 1915. The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU, formed 1919, Cape Town), a mass movement that spread from South Africa into Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, was influenced by IWW-style syndicalism (among other currents). Syndicalism influenced Sorel, and Sorel influenced figures like José Carlos Mariátegui of Peru and the young Gramsci in Italy—the latter, in turn, influenced the 'workerist' Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU, 1979) decades later. Mean-

For syndicalism, such transformation is inconceivable without organising what Karl Marx called the 'hidden abode of capitalist production', for the direct takeover of means of production, meaning union struggle is *irreplaceable*. Class is not the only form of oppression, and sometimes not the worst in terms of suffering, but class struggle and unity are essential to defeating all forms of oppression. The syndicalist stress on class struggle does not, therefore, mean a narrow 'economistic' or 'workerist' focus but a revolutionary project of solidarity and globalisation from below.

Syndicalism adopts a possibilist approach to revolutionary work: it views immediate reforms as possible, and actively struggles to improve the daily conditions and fighting capacities of workers; it is *not* reformist, as it does not confine itself to reforms. While reforms—economic *and* political *and* social—are valuable in themselves, fighting for reforms is a means of systematically accumulating power and capacity for a class war. Reforms are important, but always limited and continually eroded, unable to end the exploitation, domination and inequities inherent in capitalist society.

The structures of the syndicalist union, developed in conflict with capitalism and the state, are to form the core of the new society: local union structures of the union provide the means for workers' assemblies to govern democratically, and to mandate committees of delegates; the larger structures of the union, which link local workplaces across territories, and within and across industries, provide the means of coordinating workplace operations into a larger, bottom-up economic plan, linked through delegate systems.

Prefiguration, Solidarity and Politics

The syndicalist conception of revolution is, therefore, a prefigurative one: syndicalist unions build a revolutionary counter-power, opposed to the institutions of the ruling class and counter-culture,

both forged in daily struggles, that is able to engage in resistance in the present, then carry out a revolutionary overthrow of the ruling class and constitute the nexus of a new social system.

Rather than rest hopes on, for example, the more-or-less spontaneous emergence of workers' councils or factory committees to carry out a revolution, syndicalism deliberately constructs similar structures in its daily union work. In the formulation of the 1906 Charter of Amiens, adopted by the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT), ('General Confederation of Labour', formed 1895), 'the trade union, today an organisation of resistance, will in the future be the organisation of production and distribution, the basis of social reorganisation'.[1]

In the final revolutionary assault, there is rupture—forcible expropriation of the ruling class—and continuity; the revolutionary unions already embody the basic framework of the new society. Revolution involves their radically democratic structures expanding their scope from workers' control in the union and of elements of daily life, to workers' control of the workplace and the larger economy. The moral, political and organisational infrastructure and daily practices developed in the daily life of the revolutionary unions under capitalism foreshadow the new order.

Since means must match ends, syndicalism cannot involve bureaucratic and centralised unionism, business unionism, or 'political unionism'. There is a basic contradiction between using the state—which is hierarchical and run by political elites closely allied to economic elites, the ruling classes—and the syndicalist project of a bottom-up, autonomous, revolutionary and internationalist working-class movement.

While some syndicalists have participated in state elections, syndicalism is anti-statist and anti-electoral: statist political parties

[1] W. Thorpe, *'The Workers Themselves': Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913–23* (Dordrecht, Boston, London/Amsterdam: Kulwer/IISG), 319–320.

demned French colonialism, and campaigned against the 1930 celebrations of the centenary of the conquest of Algeria.

The United States' IWW rejected racial segregation and Asian exclusion, building powerful interracial unions in agriculture, waterfronts and shipping. Australia's IWW opposed the White Australia policy and racist unionism, also promoting the rights of immigrants and Aboriginals. In Egypt, syndicalists formed 'international' unions across racial and cultural lines. In South Africa, syndicalists pioneered socialism and unionism amongst workers of colour, fought racist laws and practices, and generated a cadre of people of colour like Johnny Gomas (1901–1979) and T.W. Thibedi (1888–1960)—also influencing anti-colonial nationalists.

There were important syndicalist unions amongst women, and notable strikes, like the 1912 Lawrence textiles strike in the United States, the famed 'bread and roses' strike by the IWW. Syndicalist general strikes brought the unwaged, including housewives, as well as the unemployed, into mass protests, as in the United States and Spain. Local union centres, workers' halls and schools also provided important spaces for women's participation.

Syndicalism sought to unite men and women in the same unions, but there were examples of women's sections within syndicalist unions, or even unions for women. A notable example was the Bolivian FOL's *Federación Obrera Femenina* (FOF, Federation of Women Workers): with 60 unions at its peak, it organised child care, literacy and cultural events. Key women syndicalists include Goldman, Petronila Infantes (1920–, Bolivia's FOL), Lucy Parsons (c.1853–1942, United States' IWPA and IWW), María Hernandez Zarco (1889–1967, Mexican *Casa*), and Violet Clarke Wilkins (Australian IWW).

Syndicalism was relatively successful in organising waged workers but faced challenges dealing with other popular sectors. One solution was to establish alliances. Spain's CNT developed links to large anarchist youth, women's and peasant movements. Another solution was to expand the organising scope

chist strength, also supporting 35-plus periodicals (including two dailies), radio and film.

Syndicalist unions were hardly 'economistic,' being involved in struggles well beyond wages and working conditions. Industrial action often raised issues around control, rather than income. For example, in the 1880s, Cuba's *Alianza Obrera* opposed racial discrimination at the workplace; in the 1900s and 1910s, Argentina's FORA and the United States' IWW sought union control over dockside hiring; British syndicalists in mining and railway unions championed workers' control, in place of nationalisation—getting this position adopted by the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in 1912.

Active efforts were made to fight, not just prejudices in the working class, but oppression on the lines of race, nationality and gender generally. Cuba's *Círculo* and *Alianza* and their associated press, for example, fought racial discrimination by employers, officials and shopkeepers and the oppression of women. The IWPA demanded 'equal rights for all without distinction of race and sex'.[8] Bolivian and Peruvian syndicalists worked with the Indian movement and organised Indian peasants.

Almost all syndicalist formations—bar the French CGT, which had however previously struggled against imperialism and militarism—opposed the First World War, in sharp contrast to most Second International Marxists. This was part of a larger tradition of opposing militarism and imperialism. For example, in Mexico, the syndicalist *Casa del Obrero Mundial* (House of the World Worker, 1912), and its successor, the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (General Confederation of Labour, 1921), opposed United States' domination. France's *Confédération Générale du Travail-Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire* (CGT-SR, formed 1926) con-

[8] 1883 Pittsburgh Manifesto, in P. Avrich (Ed), *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 75.

are criticised for being elite-dominated, multi-class organisations that treat workers and unions as passive voters, that hoist politicians into the ruling class, and entangle the labour movement in the (hostile) capitalist state. Syndicalism thus rejects 'political unionism' and building workers' or socialists' parties, to capture state power. Some syndicalist unions have had friendly relations with socialist parties, but all have rejected the statism of classical Marxism, anti-imperialist nationalism and social-democracy, and the subordination to parties built into 'political unionism'.

Marxist, including Leninist, discussions have generally misunderstood syndicalist anti-statism, presenting syndicalism as a militant but narrow economism that ignores struggles beyond the workplace, and pays no attention to the state. This is profoundly inaccurate.

The project of syndicalism is revolutionary, expansive and counter-hegemonic. Rather than ignoring the state, syndicalist anti-statism is based on a profound class analysis. Rather than refusing to engage in politics, syndicalism insists that revolutionary unions raise questions of power and rights at the workplace, and in the larger economy and society; they reject notions that politics is the preserve of parties, or of any neat division between economics and politics.

Thus, Rudolph Rocker (1873–1958) insisted that syndicalism fights for 'political rights and liberties', and against prejudice, imperialism and oppression; however, it does so *outside* of, and *against*, the state, on the terrain where revolutionary unions, 'toughened by daily combat and permeated by Socialist spirit' can bring to bear workers' structural power.[2] Its methods of 'warfare by the workers against their economic and political oppressors' include, in revolutionary situations, 'armed resistance'. Likewise, the 'principles' of the syndicalist International Workers' Association

[2] R. Rocker, *Anarcho-syndicalism* (London: Pluto Press, [1938] 1989), 88–89, 111–113.

(IWA), an international federation in 1922, recognised 'violence … as a means of defence against the methods of violence of the ruling classes, in the struggle of the revolutionary people for the expropriation of the means of production and of the land'.[3] This would be undertaken by democratic and popular armed forces controlled by unions, not outsourced to a state dubbing itself the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Democracy and Oligarchy in Unions

Syndicalists emphatically do not claim that all unions can, or will, carry such monumental tasks: centralised and bureaucratic unions throttle workers' capacities and self-activity; business unions narrow workers' horizons and accept the basic features of an exploitative status quo; and 'political unionism' leads to confusion, co-option and goal displacement.

Syndicalism evidently rejects the claim—popularised by Robert Michels, a former syndicalist sympathiser—of an 'iron law of oligarchy'. This holds that mass organisations require full-time specialist leadership, which then uses them for its own sectional interests. It also rejects the related notion that unions are basically instruments for negotiating the sale of labour power and cannot therefore end capitalism—and that union bureaucracy always emerges as the brokers.

Syndicalists view such claims as excessively pessimistic and deterministic. Union oligarchies are generated by hierarchical models of organising, entanglement with statist parties, and the deliberate construction of bureaucracies, in place of members' self-activity. As bulwarks against union oligarchies and bureaucracies, syndicalists have championed decentralised and democratic structures, based on strict mandating and report-backs; entrenchment of democratic culture and self-activity amongst the rank-and-file;

[3] W. Thorpe, '*The Workers Themselves*', 324.

ist leaders and ordinary syndicalist workers. The evidence is, however, clear that the syndicalist base comprised casual and seasonal labourers, including construction workers, dockworkers and farmworkers; workers in light, mass and heavy industry, such as factory workers, miners and railway workers; and drew in, to a lesser degree, white-collar workers, plus professionals like doctors, nurses and teachers.

Most syndicalist ideologues and militants were working class. People with more middle-class backgrounds certainly played an important role in organising or promoting the movement—examples include Emma Goldman (1869–1940), France's Fernand Pelloutier (1867–1901) and Japan's Ōsugi Sakae (1885–1923)—but no more than their Marxist counterparts like Engels, Gramsci, Lenin, Marx or Trotsky. Peasant anarchism was significant, notably in China, Korea, Mexico, Spain and Ukraine, but syndicalist organising amongst farmworkers was as crucial in rural areas, if not more so: notable examples include Bolivia, Cuba, France, Italy, Peru, Spain and the United States.

Influence, Politics, Alliances and Uprisings

Syndicalism—and through it, anarchism—had a diffuse impact in other ways. The importance of the United States' IWW, for example, lay less in numbers and formal structures, than in developing a radical working-class counter-culture through imagery, music, union halls and propaganda.[7] It published thousands of pamphlets, dozens of periodicals and operated innumerable local halls, libraries and classes, mass meetings and tours. The Spanish CNT, similarly, was immersed in a rich, dense network of community centres, schools, and libraries in every district and village of anar-

[7] S. Salerno, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: SUNY, 1989), 6.

Workers' Committee movement), and South Africa (including in the ISL).

Syndicalist unions were amongst the largest non-Russian affiliates of the early Comintern, something has been obscured by their sequestration in the Comintern's union wing, the Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern, 1921). At the time, few Marxist parties linked to the Comintern were anywhere near the credibility, experience, numbers and *élan* of movements like the CNT, FORA and IWW. Disaffection with Bolshevik manipulation of the Comintern to silence syndicalists led to the IWA.

Class Composition

Syndicalism has played an enormous role in the history of workers and the larger working class. Syndicalist unions were the largest formal organisations in the history of anarchism. This has posed serious problems for orthodox Marxist analyses, which present anarchism as a minority current generated by declining petty bourgeois (including peasant) and/or ruined *déclassé* elements. One Marxist approach breaks with this orthodoxy, presenting syndicalism as a sincerely revolutionary (but inadequate) movement with proletarian support: for example, Leon Trotsky conceded that syndicalists 'not only wish to fight against the bourgeoisie' but also 'tear its head off'.[6] This approach was especially popular when the early Comintern/Profintern sought to win syndicalists over.

Most, however, seek to square Marxist orthodoxy with syndicalist reality, either insisting that syndicalist workers were based in artisan crafts or small industry, or (like Antonio Gramsci) drawing a neat distinction between 'petty bourgeois' syndical-

[6] L. Trotsky, 'Speech on Comrade Zinoviev's Report on the Role of the Party', in L. Trotsky (Ed), *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, volume 1 (New York: Pioneer, [1920] 1945), 97–99.

minimising the number of full-time union staff, in favour of volunteerism and self-sacrifice; and placing all paid staff under strict democratic controls, limiting powers and incomes to the maximum. There is no reason why negotiations cannot proceed on the basis of mass meetings, democratic deliberation and strict mandates—rather than handed over to specialists.

There is in fact extensive evidence of unions and other mass organisations avoiding—and even overthrowing—internal oligarchies. The notion that unions are always confined to collective bargaining within capitalism is also false, as shown by the history of syndicalist (and some other) unions (see below).

Origins, Influences and Relationship to Anarchism

The lineage of syndicalism has been the subject of some controversy. Werner Sombart is credited with the claim that the French philosopher Georges Sorel (1847–1922) was the main theorist of syndicalism, a position that converges with the notion that syndicalism was current born of the French CGT in the 1890s. Syndicalism, the argument proceeds, new and distinct ideology, despite some influences from the older Marxist and anarchist traditions. Scholarship in this tradition presents syndicalism and anarchism as separate, even competing, movements. Since Sorel subsequently moved to the radical right, as did a number of syndicalists (and Marxists), this scholarship sometimes locates syndicalism in the rightist and fascist—rather than leftist and socialist—milieu, an argument championed by David Roberts.[4]

However, while the term 'syndicalism' dates to the 1890s French CGT—derived from *syndicalisme révolutionnaire*, 'revolutionary unionism'—as a movement 'syndicalism' precedes the

[4] D. Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

term by decades. Sorel commented as an outsider and a latecomer; his ideas—often at odds with CGT positions—had negligible influence upon it; this means it is nonsensical to project Sorel's later rightist affinities onto syndicalism. Sorel was influenced by syndicalism, rather than the reverse.

The core syndicalist positions and practices emerged in the anarchist wing of the International Workingmen's Association (the 'First International', formed 1864), identified with Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876). Bakunin was influenced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865)'s stress on class-based self-organisation to create a self-managed society, as well as by Marxist economics. Unlike Proudhon, Bakunin stressed mass struggle and social revolution; unlike Karl Marx, he advocated mass, revolutionary unions that 'bear in themselves the living germs of the new social order, which is to replace the bourgeois world'[5]—rather than constructing political parties to capture state power. His syndicalism was condemned by Friedrich Engels' 1873 tract, *The Bakuninists at Work*. Syndicalism continued in the International's anarchist-led majority wing after the 1872 split, delegates at the 1873 congress, for example, stressing the revolutionary general strike.

The first syndicalist unions emerged in the 1870s, not the 1890s: the *Federación de la Región Española* (FRE, Spanish Regional Federation, 1870); the *Congreso General de Obreros Mexicanos*

[5] Key texts include P. Cole, D. Struthers & K. Zimmer (Eds), *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW* (London: Pluto, 2017); S.J. Hirsch & L. van der Walt, *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014); V. Damier, *Anarcho-Syndicalism in the Twentieth Century* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009); Thorpe, *op. cit.*, Ref. 1; W. Thorpe & M. van der Linden (Eds), *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Otterup/Aldershot: Scholar/Gower, 1990); D. Berry & C. Bantman (Eds), *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: The Individual, The National and the Transnational* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010); R. Darlington, *Radical Unionism. The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013).

Labour. It was inspired by Tom Mann's (1856–1941) radical network in the orthodox unions, the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (1910), itself modelled on the *noyaux* syndicalist cells that won the 1890s French CGT. While United States' IWW rejected 'boring-from-within', it was practised by the Australian IWW. In South Africa, the syndicalist International Socialist League (ISL, 1915) and its sometime rival, the Industrial Socialist League (1918), formed new syndicalist unions *and* worked within orthodox unions. The former undertook propaganda and promoted a semi-autonomous Workers' Committee movement within existing movement; the latter won key positions in the Cape Federation of Labour. The ISL's committee movement was modelled on the syndicalist-influenced Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement, a rank-and-file movement in British unions that started with the Clyde Workers' Committee.

Syndicalists have even worked within unions closely integrated linked into authoritarian party-states. For example, syndicalists became a leading force in the Polish *Central Wydzial Zawodny* (ZZZ, Union of Trade Unions), formed in 1931 as a nationalist, state-aligned federation. In Bolivia, most FOL unions joined the *Central Obrera Boliviana* (Bolivian Workers' Centre, COB) formed in 1952 and tightly linked to the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR) government.

Syndicalism repeatedly emerged in Second International parties—examples include Australasia, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the United States—and the allied International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (formed 1901). A vocal syndicalist current emerged in the Socialist Party of America. The United States' Socialist Labour Party (SLP) meanwhile moved from Marxist orthodoxy to a form of syndicalism around 1904: De Leonism. De Leonism had influence in Australia, Ireland (through figures like James Connolly (1868–1916)), Scotland (notably on the

establishing a powerful presence in the rural areas. In 1910s Japan, syndicalism was especially important amongst printers. In South Africa, the Industrial Workers of Africa (founded 1917) was the first (for a time, only) union amongst black African workers, and, in 1919, the main union amongst black African dockworkers in Cape Town.

There were recurrent efforts to find ways to link syndicalists, especially syndicalist unions, internationally. Although the short-lived Black International has been associated with insurrectionist approaches, its two largest affiliates, Mexico's *Congreso* and the United States' IWPA, were embedded in syndicalism. Anarchists, including syndicalists, fought to remain in the Socialist International (so-called Second International, formed 1889), despite Marxist and social-democratic hostility. An international syndicalist bulletin from 1907, a world congress in 1913, and a battle for space within the Communist International (Comintern, 1919) were followed by a syndicalist International Workers' Association (IWA) in 1922, which included a ten-country Latin American *Asociación Continental Americana de Trabajadores* (American Continental Workers' Association) from 1929. Meanwhile the IWW had a separate international IWW network, with unions and supporters worldwide, including Africa, Asia, Australia and Latin America.

Syndicalists have also been active within orthodox unions, sometimes allied with other currents, sometimes as organised factions. Initially Argentina's FORA and Spain's *Solidaridad Obrera*, immediate predecessor of the CNT, united anarchists and social-democrats. In Puerto Rico, anarchists and syndicalists were an influential minority in *Federación Libre de Trabajadores* (Free Federation of Workers, formed 1899). In the late 1910s, before the USI (re-)emerged in industrial Turin, Italy, in 1920, syndicalists worked inside the CGL's *Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici* (FIOM, Federation of Metal Workers Employees).

The United States' Syndicalist League of North America (SLNA, 1912) promoted 'boring-from-within' the American Federation of

(General Congress of Mexican Workers, 1876); the United States' Central Labour Union (CLU, 1884); and Cuba's *Círculo de Trabajadores de la Habana* (1885, followed by the *Alianza Obrera*, Workers' Alliance, 1887). These were integral to the rapidly rising anarchist movement: FRE was the largest section of the First International, at 60,000 members (1873); the Mexican *Congreso*, at 50,000 members in 1882, was affiliated to the Anti-Authoritarian ('Black') International (formed 1881); the CLU was linked to this International through the affiliation of the United States' anarchist International Working People's Association, the main force in the CLU; Cuba's *Círculo* was born of rising anarchist influence in unions and anarchist-led. None of these formations called themselves 'syndicalist', but their politics was indistinguishable from that of the 1890s CGT and its contemporaries.

Syndicalist ascendancy in the 1890s French CGT is best understood as spurring a *revival* of syndicalism globally, not its genesis, a second wave. Syndicalism's key theorist was Bakunin, not Marx or Sorel, and it was part of the tradition of 'mass' anarchism, which favoured prefigurative mass organising and immediate struggle, to build revolutionary counter-power and counter-culture. Not all anarchists supported syndicalism—notably, the insurrectionist wing, which rejected reforms and large formal organisations—but syndicalism was an anarchist *strategy*, not a distinct ideology.

This is not altered by the fact that some anarchists criticised syndicalism, or that some syndicalists rejected the anarchist label, presented syndicalism as new, invented spurious Marxist genealogies for it, or labelled it 'revolutionary syndicalism', 'anarcho-syndicalism', 'revolutionary industrial unionism', or De Leonism. Syndicalism, as movement, thus includes the tradition of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW): emerging in 1905 in the United States, and spreading worldwide, it was inspired and influenced by syndicalism.

Syndicalism is also not, as sometimes suggested, at odds with anarchist-communism. Leaving aside that it is very difficult to

identify a distinct anarchist-communist strategy or current, for a range of reasons, the vast majority of people identified in the literature identified as anarchist-communists, including Piotr Kropotkin (1842–1921), championed syndicalism, while most syndicalists endorsed the goal of anarchist-communism, a democratic and stateless socialist society, based on distribution according to need.

Size and Impact

The influence and historical role of syndicalism has been substantial, especially in the 1890s–1920s. In this period, anarchists and syndicalists established, led, or influenced, unions in countries as varied as Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Britain, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Guatemala, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, the United States, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Spanish syndicalist unions, notably the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT, National Confederation of Labour, 1910), have tended to dominate accounts. With around 1.5 million members in the 1930s (in a population of 24 million), the CNT was numerically the largest syndicalist union ever. However, Spain's CNT was proportionately *smaller* than the many other mass syndicalist unions, as it included half of organised labour, facing social-democratic rival of almost equal numbers, *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT, General Union of Worker).

By contrast, syndicalism dominated the labour movements of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, France, Mexico, Peru, Portugal and Uruguay, where it was adopted by the largest union centres, and faced no significant rivals. For example, the *Federación Obrera Regional Argentina* (FORA, Argentine Regional Workers' Federation, 1901) was the main union centre in Argentina, and the main division within organised labour in the late 1910s was between two rival FORAs, one of 70,000 in 1920, the other 180,000. Given the class structure and union density in Argentina, and a population of eight million (1914), these numbers were relatively enormous—and the pattern was similar in the other countries listed here. The syndicalist *Confederação Operária Brasileira* (Confederation of Brazilian Workers, 1906) dominated the union movement, with between 100,000 and 125,000 members in Rio de Janeiro alone by mid-1919. The Netherlands' *Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat* (NAS, 'National Labour Secretariat, formed 1893, syndicalist from 1901) was that country's main labour centre. In Cuba, syndicalism led the main centres, the *Confederación Cubana del Trabajo* ('Cuban Labour Confederation', 1895) and the *Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba* 'National Workers Confederation of Cuba, 1925).

There were also substantial syndicalist minority unions elsewhere, notably in Canada, China, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States. Amongst the largest was the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI; often translated as 'Italian Syndicalist Union', 1912), a breakaway from the social-democratic *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* (General Confederation of Labour, CGL). It reached 800,000 in 1920—against over 3.5 million in CGL and Catholic unions, and the Spanish CNT's 1.5 million.

Minority syndicalist currents were often concentrated in specific regions, industries or layers, and within these, were often the dominant unions, and exerted a powerful influence on others. For example, the CLU was Chicago's main union centre, its 24 affiliates including the city's 11 largest unions. Perhaps half the 100,000 members of the United States' IWW (at its 1917 peak) were in its Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union, a power in the wheatbelt. In 1921, syndicalism dominated the cities of Guangzhou and Changsha, the leading force in both cities' labour movements until 1925. Bolivia's *Federación Obrera Local* (FOL, Local Workers' Federation, formed 1927) was the largest union centre in La Paz, also