

Letter from an outraged Sydicalist

Somerset Solidarity Federation

1998

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Dear Organise!

If your periodic ‘analysis’ of syndicalism is not a defining characteristic, then what other purpose does it serve? You know perfectly well that anarcho-syndicalists are as opposed to mere trade unionism as is the even tinier anarcho-communist element yet any casual reader would be hard-pressed to discover this from the pages of your comment paper Organise!. A little defining ‘sectarianism’ probably does no-one harm, however, and we’ve grown use to these ‘attacks’ over the years.

You rightly point to the counter-revolutionary activities of anarcho-syndicalists during the Mexican Revolution. this may have been due to a lack of information as to the reality of the situation in the south, it does not lessen the naiveté of the anarcho-syndicalists who participated but neither does it follow that modern anarcho-syndicalists would take a similar decision.

“Many of the earliest critics of Moscow were not syndicalist however but Marxists...” (Organise! 46). How early is early? Golos Truda, an anarcho-syndicalist paper, was warning of the dangers in issues No 13, 15, 3rd & 6th November 1917. Anarcho-syndicalist criticism of Bolshevik machinations continued throughout the revolution as a little more reading would show. It is also disingenuous to imply that anarcho-communists were more or less immune to the pseudo-libertarian slogans of the Leninists statist.

I’ve no idea where Lorenzo Kom’boa Ervin got the idea that anarcho-syndicalists believe, “...that somehow the unions are progressive, and what’s more the unions are some kind of force that can not be revolutionised” (Organise! 46). Unless, of course, he was talking of syndicalism, which, as we know, does not have a libertarian revolutionary perspective. I think anarcho-syndicalists and the ACF would agree that industrial workers can be ‘revolutionised’ and that this grass-roots break with trade union reformism is an essential prerequisite to the libertarian confrontation with capitalism. Workers’ Councils or Workers’ Assemblies? Not much difference really, but anarcho-syndicalists recognise the need for these to co-ordinate in order to make them effective – it is this horizontal co-ordination that names the worker’s union.

Readers could be forgiven for thinking that Malatesta never made a mistake as he is obviously the last refuge of simple insurrectionism, not that he was very successful in that. However, he did suggest anarcho-syndicalism as a cohesive force for the diverse anarchist groups at a conference in Amsterdam 1907 (Brenan, p172) so his antagonism couldn’t have been that strong. The ACF is unwilling (for reasons of definition and survival) to recognise that we are working for the same goal by slightly different (anarchist) methods. If it cannot find anything more relevant with which to fill its pages than attacks on fellow-militants then it’s time it gave up the ghost and accept its ‘lack of success’ with good grace. Not much chance I fear, so when is the ‘analysis’ for 1998 scheduled?

TS (Somerset Solidarity Federation)

Reply

Thanks for your letter. It’s good to know that revolutionaries are thinking critically and you have obviously been thinking critically of us comrade!

We're sorry to hear that anarcho-syndicalists have grown used to "attacks" over the years, but we can assure both you and our other readers that Organise! has not been "filling its pages" with "attacks on fellow militants" and our Syndicalism: A Critical Analysis is intended as a contribution to a much needed discussion, not an exercise in sectarianism.

Note, comrade, that we said that many of the earliest critics of Moscow were not syndicalists. This does not deny the validity of the criticisms made by the anarcho-syndicalist Golos Truda any more than it denies the criticism made by the anarchist Nabat group. Indeed, the Golos Truda comrades were in advance of many anarchists of the time when they said that the trade unions were dead organisations and the Factory Committees were the form the struggles of the revolutionary proletariat would take in the future.

Anarcho- communists "immune" from the siren call of Bolshevism? Far from it! Countless anarcho-communists were attracted to Bolshevism. This was, partially, a failing of traditional anarcho-communist thinking and organisation, but the attraction of an ostensibly successful revolution was a bigger factor.

The ACF is of the opinion that anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists are working towards the same goal- a classless, stateless, marketless world (communism), and as such we embrace them as comrades in struggle, but we disagree with the method chosen i.e. the syndicalist (unionist) method, which we believe to be fundamentally flawed (see our article in this Organise! for details). Our "lack of success", I think you will find, is shared by revolutionaries everywhere. We hope they (or you) will not "give up the ghost"- you can rest assured that we won't. The 1998 analysis? It starts right here comrade...

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