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Italian syndicalists speak out

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latest “IWA Congress” in Warsaw

Unione Sindacale Italiana

December 29, 2016

The *Unione Sindacale Italiana* was one of the founding members of the International Workers Association in 1922. Refounded in 1977 after Italy’s “Hot Autumn,” they have been the second-largest and most workplace-focused IWA section for a long time after the Spanish CNT. They have a reputation for avoiding sectarianism, prioritizing solidarity, and maintaining cool heads. Together with the CNT and the German FAU they organized the recent Bilbao Conference of revolutionary unions, and were expelled from the IWA shortly after. [*This and all other footnotes are from the translator.*]

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Retrieved on 29th July 2024 from lifelongwobbly.com

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Once again, those who claim to represent the IWA have shown their true colors: bureaucracy, authoritarianism, paranoia, sectarianism. In fact, at this point they have expelled three sections (USI – Italy, CNT – Spain, FAU – Germany) which alone represent more than 90% of the IWA’s membership. Another section, FOR A – Argentina, was suspended

for the time being as they weren't aligned. **Who decided this?** Ten or so supposedly "national" Sections (some of which themselves have only ten or so members). Nobody can deny this. Taken all together, they might represent a total of 300 workers – if we're being generous. There are a few of these sections from which we've never heard any attempt at activity, much less struggle.

We rebuke the activity of some individuals in particular – we don't want to refer to whole Sections, since we only ever see the same four people – affiliated to ZSP (Poland) and KRAS (Russia). This latter section only exists on the web, and we're only aware of one single initiative, a conference at a state university, while others in Russia are feeling the effects of Putin's dictatorship...

To justify all of this, they accuse us in the gloomiest tradition of ... *reformism!* **What reformism?** How can this expression match up to the real activity that we put into practice as anarcho-syndicalists? These web-only "comrades" have no tools except for ridiculous lies such as these. **To twist the IWA into a specific, ultra-purist political organization would mean giving up on any real contact with the problems of the working class. It would mean confusing specific political organizations with anarcho-syndicalist organizations.¹ It would mean robbing words and actions of their meaning.** The Italian proletariat will not support this by watching in silence – that would mean denying its principles and taking a step backwards in anarcho-syndicalist values and practices.

Today, however, it's enough to just look at the tools of propaganda that the current secretary is using: insult after insult, with no consideration for historic truth, for listening, for respect, or for logic – and we won't forget it...

¹ "Specific" in this case refers to tight-knit anarchist political organizations, similar to the Latin American concept of *especificismo*.

We also want to emphasize the path of the current Secretary: affiliated in December of 2009 (!), after creating a split in Poland, in only six years they have destroyed the IWA itself! The first accusations against this improvised “freelance” were over personal use of an IWA Facebook page, which did not yet exist. Later, various Sections brought accusations that the Secretary was inserting itself into internal discussions, eventually broadening them into splits which could have – and should have – been avoided. In the last two years, finally, we’ve seen the expulsion of everyone who was not aligned – that is, of the largest and oldest sections, which saw this inward spiral and which – having a real base to hold them accountable – drew attention to these contradictions. At the same time, the Secretary has seized the IWA’s enormous funds, fruits of the sacrifice of many fellow workers, in particular members of the Sections which are now expelled, and the Secretary is managing these funds in a very questionable way. The last Congress, ignoring the libertarian custom of rotating responsibilities, decided that the IWA Secretariat should stay with the ZSP.

If we think about what the IWA represents (or represented), and what it’s been reduced to today, with the oldest and largest Sections expelled, with only Sections that are totally insignificant in the eyes of employers and governments remaining, but which, nevertheless, have been left with the funds ... it may be a sin to always think the worst of others, but this path gives rise to strong suspicions...

Today they wash their mouths with words like anarcho-syndicalism and solidarity, although with no goal beyond keeping the status quo. On the other hand, we have personally witnessed the “internationalism” and “solidarity” of these people when they refused to support the USI’s project of self-managed aid, outside of institutional circuits, to the victims (including

USI members) of the earthquake in central Italy.² (This would have amounted to a tiny fraction of the amount that we have poured into the IWA funds, unlike them.) We won't forget this either, and it will remain forever as a disgrace for these little leaders and for their small congregation of people who just raise their hands to vote.

Anyone who has lived through the inward spiral of the IWA in recent years will have noticed the bureaucratic and authoritarian tendency: obsessive, continual voting over paragraphs and sub-paragraphs, violent struggles between majorities and minorities, without any possibility for paying attention to or debating the real problems of the working class. This vote factory has nothing to do with us, just as we reject the logic of acting like a political party and violating the autonomy of the Sections. We remember that Internationalism was born precisely as a countermeasure to self-proclaimed central offices. Today, in the ersatz IWA there is a real power bloc of Lilliputian Sections, which, thanks to a Victorian voting system, are blocking a more balanced, federalist representation of all workers. Seven fellow workers from Slovakia vote (and count, by this absurd logic) more than 6000 from Spain; three workers in Russia are equivalent to 1000 in Germany or Italy. **Is this what they call anarcho-syndicalism these days?**

At the same time, we don't like paranoia about enemies. We feel only boredom and grief when some people avoid struggle, preferring to fight against other workers, when they prefer to worry obsessively about mysterious "parallelists" everywhere they turn (yesterday it was others, today obviously we are the "parallelists"), when they prefer to focus above all else on the relations that other Sections have that they might not know

² Central Italy experienced three strong earthquakes in August and October 2016, with hundreds of deaths and many people having to evacuate.

about, when they prefer to continually threaten expulsions.³ Is this what they call anarcho-syndicalism these days?

Anybody who has met them knows exactly who they are.

However, we are totally different from those sectarians. We want to extend a hand towards all of those Sections who, although they are still in the IWA, have always worked closely with us until just the other day. Unlike these people, we know the meaning of respect, of autonomy, of history, of relationships. We still consider people comrades even if our paths have diverged (only momentarily, we hope); and we know how to distinguish the authoritarianism of individuals from the reality of entire unions. The great Idea which we carry in our hearts – of a free and liberated world – is bigger than the nastiness of those who are grasping at tiny amounts of power.

Now we are committed to the reconstruction of an IWA which is real, not virtual; which raises hell more than it spreads slogans; which is horizontal and federalist, not centralized; which has a transparent system for voting and payments, avoiding selfishness; a coherent International, in which members find space to compare their experience of struggles, rather than a self-proclaimed directing center whose approval they must obtain under threat of excommunication and expulsion.

The USI was born in 1912 and has been part of the IWA since 1922, this is our history.

What happened is very important, and we invite all anarchist or libertarian workers around the world to reflect seriously on what is happening. At the same time, we hope that this phase will introduce a better future, free of bureaucrats and full of hope and struggle.

³ In the jargon of the current IWA, "parallelism" refers to attempts to organize internationally outside of the IWA. See this recent example in English and Spanish.