

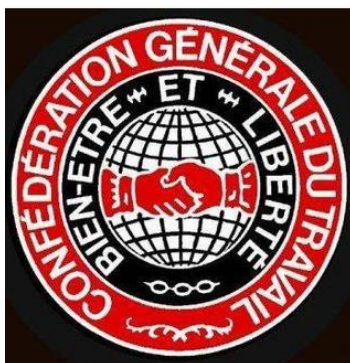
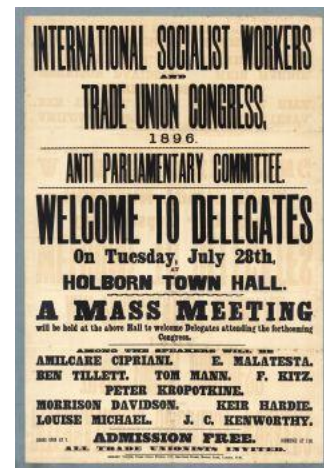
# Black Flag

## Anarchist Review



### Tom Mann and British Syndicalism

### Libertarians and the Second International



### Émile Pouget and French Syndicalism

**And much more...**

**Autumn 2021**

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## Editorial

Welcome to the third issue of the relaunched *Black Flag*!

Originally, we planned to be at least bi-annual but happily we have managed to exceed our hopes and produce three issues this year. This issue has taken on a syndicalist theme, marking as it does the anniversaries of the deaths of both Tom Mann and Émile Pouget. The former is inextricably linked to the Great Unrest of 1910 to 1914 and we take the opportunity to discuss Mann's ideas as well as British Syndicalism. As well as an in-depth account of his syndicalist ideas, we include many of his pamphlets and articles along with articles from *Freedom* discussing industrial unionism. Hopefully there are lessons to be learnt from both for today's activists. From a leading British Syndicalist, we turn to Pouget who was a leading French one. We reprint all but one of his most famous pamphlets, including a new, complete, translation of *Le Syndicat (The Union)* and his 1898 article on *Sabotage*. Again, we hope that these will be of use to current activists. We start and end with some passages by Bakunin indicating his syndicalist ideas.

This year also marks the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1896 Congress of the Second International in London. Here we recall the attempt by anarchists to gain access to the new socialist International, which resulted in definitive expulsion of libertarians from the organisation. We also mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the *Arditi del Popolo* with an article discussing the lessons to be gained from fighting fascism in Italy and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.

Finally, we mark the founding in 1936 of the Spanish anarcho-feminist group, *Mujeres Libres* ("Free Women"). This important organisation fought not only against the sexism of capitalist society but also that of their male comrades, who all too often combined a theoretical opposition to all forms of hierarchy with a distinctly patriarchal practice. They are an important reminder that fighting economic and political hierarchy is not enough and that all social hierarchies need to be destroyed in order for a free society to exist.

If you want to contribute rather than moan at those who do, whether its writing new material or letting us know of on-line articles, reviews or translations, then contact us:

blackflagmag@yahoo.co.uk

# Protest of the Alliance

Michael Bakunin

July 1871

[...]

1) As long as the economic organisation of the current society lasts, that is to say as long as capital, or raw materials and the instruments of work, necessary for production, remain monopolised in the hands of this bourgeois oligarchy, and the proletariat forced by hunger and inevitably competing to escape hunger, sell their labour, the true, the only producer, as a commodity at the lowest price, always more or less determined by the price of what is absolutely necessary so as not to allow its productive force to die of starvation, the increase in the misery and suffering of the proletariat will always be a direct reason for the increase of wealth or what is called the development of material interests and the economic prosperity of nations.

2) That the more this prosperity grows, the more wealth or capital will be monopolised by an ever smaller number of bourgeois oligarchs; what will have and what already has the necessary consequence of pushing the middle bourgeoisie into the petty [bourgeoisie] and the petty bourgeoisie into the proletariat.

3) That this deplorable state of affairs, whose duration threatens to plunge the human world into a new barbarism, will only end when the capital, the raw materials, the instruments of labour necessary for production, including without doubt the earth, ceasing to be appropriated by individuals, will become collective property.

[...]

It [the International Workers Association] was based on intellectual inspiration and *social science* derived from historical study and the critique of economic facts. Is this science accessible to the proletariat, in the state of ignorance in which it now finds itself? Without doubt, yes, and more than any other. This science, as well as all other positive sciences, is based on experience, on an exact knowledge, and on the analysis of facts. But are not the facts that serve as their focus precisely the situation, the misery, the sufferings of the proletariat? so

that a worker needs only to consider and explore his own situation, to find the effects and causes, which all renew themselves for him, nor can he eventually escape, to become a perfect economist, much more truthful and serious than a host of well-known bourgeois economists, but who study this science about the sufferings of others and which they have every interest to reduce the importance of.

To be placed right in the middle of economic and social science, the worker therefore has only one thing to do: that is to make his own fate an object of constant reflection, as much in relation to the severity and duration of his own work, of his wages, of the price of things necessary for the upkeep of him as well as his

family, than by the earnings and leisure that his work provides to the boss who employs him. Let him then compare his position with that of his comrades in the workshop, then with that of the workers of his trade in the same locality, and again with that of the workers of the same trade in foreign countries; finally with those of workers of other trades in all lands. Going step by step in this entirely experimental way, comparing the facts and deducing general

implications, he will arrive by himself to the perfect knowledge of the principles which constitute the basis of social science.

It was only in this way and not by attending courses on political economy, that many English workers have been able to acquire knowledge so right, so vast, and at the same time comprehensive in social economy, that the commissions of inquiry which the English Parliament usually appoint during great crises to ascertain the situation of an industry in distress, have often been astonished listening to simple workers give them not only the most accurate information about the situation, but also on the general causes which produced it.

In general, we cannot sufficiently recommend to workers the study of economic science, which, we

**The organisation of trade sections, their federation in the International [Workers'] Association and their representation by trade councils... carry the living seeds of the *new social order* that is to replace the bourgeois world. They create not only the ideas but the very facts of the future**

repeat it again, is precisely that which is most accessible to them, and not to begin this study with the reading of economic books, whose more or less abstract terminology could frighten them. Not that they begin it in the wholly experimental manner we have just indicated, initially by making an exact account of their own situation and of their own economic and social relations, and then extending their investigations to the relations and the situation of the workers first of a single profession and later of all trades.

Nothing is as favourable to this study as the organisation of the *sections of a trade*. What is their purpose? It is the struggle in common to obtain from the bosses of their trades the most favourable conditions from the point of view of wages and working hours. This is such a completely determined struggle, the conditions of which can only be established by the exact knowledge of all the economic facts which have a relation to developments, the prosperity or decline of such-and-such an industry, first of all in the locality, then necessarily in many other countries that compete with local production. While thereby discussing amongst themselves their own problems, their deepest and most cherished interests and amongst others that of their daily bread, workers are forced at the same time to discuss the most abstract principles of social science. What will this be then, when, following the impulse given to them in Belgium by a group of young socialist revolutionaries as intelligent as they are devoted, the workers of all trades, or rather the different trade sections, will reach agreement with each other in every country to establish a *trades council* [*chambre de travail*], or the delegates of every section or of every trade, bringing with them their *workbooks*, discuss “all the issues that are dealt with in the bourgeois political parliaments,” from the point of view of the workers in general, as well as the workers of each industry considered specifically!

This completely practical, completely vital study of social science undertaken and constantly pursued by the workers themselves, both in their respective trade sections and in these trades councils, will necessarily lead and has already led to a large extent to produce in them this unanimous and fully considered conviction, demonstrable both in theory and in practice, that the *serious, final, complete emancipation of the workers is possible only on one condition, and that this condition is the appropriation of capital, that is to say the raw materials and all the instruments of labour, including land, by the workers collectively.*

We insist on the necessity of these studies, both practical and theoretical, for every member of the International, first because they constitute, strictly and by themselves, the main object, the daily interest, the great issue of every trade section, whose immediate aim is to safeguard the economic interests as well as the freedom and dignity of its members; and secondly,

because we have this conviction that science or economic knowledge, considered initially from its narrowest point of view as embracing only the collective interests of a section or of all the workers of the same trade in the same locality, then extending consecutively, not by way of abstraction, of self-annihilation or of an impossible fusion, but by way of federation, first to the workers sections of the same trade throughout the civilised world, and then to the workers sections of all trades, both locally and in other countries, and thereby achieving, by the stringent analysis of all the workers' situations and the economic causes of which they are the effects, to embrace and formulate the general conditions of the emancipation for all the workers of the world – because we are convinced that this, or this collective consciousness, must henceforth constitute the material basis, the sole basis of all aspirations, commitments and actions of workers in any line of thought or whatever the events. The economic question considered in this extent and embracing both all conditions of labour as well as those of the just distribution of the products of labour, is the real terrain that the worker must never abandon. As soon as he abandons it, he loses himself in metaphysical, juridical, political, theological abstractions, and disorientated, deprived of his two faithful guides, his common sense and the awareness or instinct of his real interests, he always finds himself once again, to his great surprise, the slave and exploited of the bourgeois. While remaining on the economic terrain, the worker will be all powerful. No siren voice from the bourgeois world can shake his real understanding, his common sense, and no sophism can prevail against this simple question: “The fine things you propose to us will change our economic condition to equal that of the privileged classes. Do you want to work as we work, and share all the enjoyments as well as all the duties of life, according to justice, equally with us? Do you want Capital to stop oppressing us and exploiting us, that is to say, do you want it to cease being a private property and become the collective property of the federated workers associations? If not, leave. We will not give up this sole question whereby we see clearly, to let ourselves be led astray by you, [give up] this terrain which is solely ours, and the leaving of which we become once again your dupes, your tools, your slaves.”

The organisation of trade sections, their federation in the International [Workers'] Association and their representation by trade councils [*Chambres de travail*] not only creates a great Academy where all the workers of the International, uniting practice with theory, can and must study economic science, they even carry the living seeds of the *new social order* that is to replace the bourgeois world. They create not only the ideas but the very facts of the future.

[...]

# Émile Pouget:

## Proletarian Pamphleteer, Syndicalist Theorist and Organiser Constance Bantman<sup>1</sup>

Émile Pouget (1860-1931) had a long, highly eclectic activist career in anarchism and syndicalism, and it would be facile, if tempting, to start by describing him as the most famous anarchist you've never heard of – one of many striking instances of a 'Belle Epoque' anarchist whose influence at the time and legacies are momentous, yet have oddly sunk into relative oblivion. While, upon his death in 1931, the mass daily *Le Petit Parisien* described Pouget as “one of the former stars of syndicalism”, his name today remains largely ignored beyond specialised academic and militant circles. His entry in *Le Maitron* (France's labour movement biographical dictionary) rightly describes Pouget as “a major figure” of the anarchist movement and “one of the founding fathers” of France's workers and trade union movement; while these are indeed essential aspects, one might add that the French emphasis is restrictive, given Pouget's impact, at a time when anarchism and syndicalism were profoundly internationalist in both ideology and (to a lesser extent) organisation.

### The making of a Belle Epoque *compagnon*: from Aveyron to anarchism

Pouget was born on 12 October 1860, halfway through Napoleon III's Second Empire, into an educated, middle-class family, which was soon to undergo downward social mobility. This was quite characteristic of France's first generation of anarchists: alongside the familiar figure of the radical artisans, the new factory proletariat, lower middle-class *déclassés* and avant-garde artists formed the bulk of the movement's sociological make up as it emerged from the late 1870s onwards. The staunchly republican and deeply political family environment in which Pouget grew up provides a clue to his own politicisation: in November 1871, his step-father, Philippe Vergely – himself the editor of the Republican paper *L'Aveyron Republicain* after 1870 – took young Émile to nearby Rodez, to attend the trial of



Émile Pouget (1860-1931)

several members of the Commune de Narbonne, one of the many communal insurrections of early 1871.

It was not long before Émile's own taste for activism and journalism manifested himself: 1873 saw him publish his first paper at the Lycée de Rodez, *Le Lycéen Republicain* (the Republican schoolboy). Following his father-in-law's death in 1875, Émile now had to earn a living; he left Aveyron the following year, heading for Paris and finding work there as a shop employee. This remained a period of intense repression in the young, conservative-dominated Third Republic set

up after the 1870 Franco-Prussian War and Commune – one in which the risk of a monarchist restoration remained very real, following the pattern of the revolutionary nineteenth century. Post-Commune repression of the labour movement also remained vigorous for most of the decade. The 1877 legislative elections saw a Republican victory, followed by a relative détente, symbolised by the amnesty of many Communard exiles and prisoners in 1880. This must have provided a more favourable period for Pouget to embrace a host of new pursuits. According to his *Maitron* entry, it was by reading the paper *La Révolution sociale* (1880-81) – famously a mousetrap funded by the Paris police, but one written for by serious anarchists such as Louise Michel – that Pouget was won over to anarchism, just as the movement was starting to gain ground in France. He attended anarchist gatherings as well as the wine shop of Rousseau, one of Paris's many anarchist haunts, with Émile Digeon, the former Communard whose trial he had attended in Rodez a few years earlier. It was also Digeon who had also convinced Pouget to take part in setting up the shop assistants' union in 1879. Pouget also assisted Digeon in penning a small antimilitarist pamphlet in 1883, *L'Armée*. This combination of family politics, reading of anarchist papers, club and meeting attendance as well as direct contact with earlier generations of radicals is

<sup>1</sup> The term “proletarian pamphleteer” is borrowed from Paul Delesalle's obituary of Pouget, originally published with the title ‘Émile Pouget Ad Memoriam’, available at <https://libcom.org/history/pouget-emile-1860-1931-0>

quite characteristic of the paths through which many of Pouget's contemporaries also came to anarchism.

1883 was also the year when Pouget – and the young anarchist movement – made a striking entrance in the public consciousness. This happened with the Les Invalides's unemployed demonstration in Paris, which had been called in response to the dire economic and labour conditions of the period. After the main meeting was quickly dispersed by the police, a small group headed towards the affluent boulevard Saint-Germain, led by Pouget and Louise Michel. A bakery was ransacked, an incident which encapsulated at once the tense social climate caused by unemployment, and how anarchism might just spark off revolutionary agitation once again. The 1881 London Social Revolutionary Congress, after all, had seen a majority of delegates endorse 'propaganda by the deed', a doctrine which, for all its ambiguities and many anarchists' reservations, was construed as an endorsement of political violence. The 1883 unemployment demonstration has gone down in public memory as being the first occasion when the anarchist black flag was waved for the first time. The point has been challenged, but this claim nonetheless captures the fact that the movement was making strides, and was increasingly being perceived as a public threat by the authorities, as attested too by the contemporaneous Lyon trial.

This demonstration also led to the first in a long series of prison sentences for Pouget. An initial 8-year sentence (based on false charges) was eventually reduced to three years, after a campaign in Pouget's favour. As summarised later by fellow anarchist and syndicalist Paul Delesalle, "[p]rison, however, had not cowed the militant"; Pouget's activism would in fact go from strength to strength, as he fully embraced proletarian journalism, which soon proved a highly congenial mode of activism for him.

### **From *Le Père Peinard* to Syndicalism**

The first issue of Pouget's *Le Père Peinard* (Easy Father), a weekly inspired by the French revolution's radical *Le Père Duchesne*, appeared on 24 February 1889. Carrying the sub-heading 'Réflects d'un gniaiff' – musings of a shoemaker – it was illustrated with a drawing by the now-famous artist Maximilien Luce, a lifelong anarchist and syndicalist, depicting a shoemaking workshop, with the journalist writing away among the workers.

It is hard to do justice to the quality and originality of this remarkably long-lived and influential paper. Its inimitable style and use of slang are striking; they created a sense of connivance with the readers, which was integral to the construction of anarchist communities. A classic example may be that of

Pouget's repeated references to the 'Chambre des amputés', a no-holds-barred wordplay on the Chambre des députés (the French parliament) which tapped into the slang meaning of 'amputees' as a someone who is useless; these three words probably did just as much as many theoretical essays to convey the antiparliamentarian core of anarchism with an appealing mockery. This, in turn, was a contribution to the ethos of rebellion which was so central to the success and perceived danger of anarchism in those years. The Law courts were renamed 'Palais d'Injustice' – the title of a recurring section of the paper chronicling the vicissitudes of a class-based justice system. It may not be the least of ironies that Pouget's dazzling ability to create a new shared language to convey anarchist ideas remains the subject of many academic studies to this day; such enduring interest is nonetheless fully warranted.<sup>1</sup> Another important formal characteristic of the paper was the role of illustrations, especially from May 1890. This was not specific to *Le Père Peinard*, at a time when many artists such as Luce associated with anarchism and supported the movement by donating their art to serve as another pedagogical tool in publications. The neo-impressionist painter Paul Signac was a recurring contributor; another name of interest was the journalist, art critic, collector and War ministry official Félix Fénéon. An extensive illustrated *Almanach du Père Peinard* was also published yearly between 1893 and 1897.

The formal invention and humour should not hide the fact that the paper served a very ambitious and effective militant project. The *Peinard* was one of the most widely read anarchist papers in the French anarchist movement and internationally, and made many anarchists by itself. As Delesalle recollected, 'there was real proletarian agitation in certain workers' centres and I could name ten or twenty workers' districts, like Trélazé or Fourchambault, where the whole movement dwindled to nothing once the pamphlets stopped coming out.' Nor was this impact strictly national: *Le Père Peinard* had a global readership and was circulated at the very least within transatlantic networks of French-speaking anarchists and workers, in the US and in Latin America. Its role in the development of French-speaking anarchism and a wider revolutionary movement in the US, for instance, has been noted by historians such as Ronald Creagh and Michel Cordillot.

Lastly, the paper was an important site for the development of anarchist and, soon, syndicalist strategy. From its launch, it was resolutely proletarian in its orientation, with a focus on labour organisation and agitation which was not widely accepted in the movement, at a time when propaganda by the deed held considerably sway and strategies like the general strike and mass unionisation were often rejected as 'reformist'

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<sup>1</sup> Readers may usefully refer to the extensive digitisation of the paper on-line and challenge themselves by reading

through them, or even attempting an English translation! See: <https://www.archivesautonomies.org/spip.php?article3872>

compromissions. In contrast, as early as 1889, Pouget wrote with interest on the expropriating general strike, as part of a wide-ranging, scathing critique of all established authorities and a genuine sense of anger at the deprivations faced by so many.

All of these factors combined to bring on serious legal troubles for Pouget and his associates. Like many fellow anarchist editors, he went through several periods of detention at St Pélégie prison, and the paper's managing editors changed with a very high turnover. In the late 1880s, propaganda by the deed swept over the world, and France was hit by a series of anarchist inspired attacks. Pouget, not one to hold back on the importance of the general strike or in his campaign against the attempted coup of the General Boulanger, was terse on the highly controversial issue of anarchist violence. Such nuances were, however, lost on the authorities, especially since the set of highly repressive 'Wicked Laws' (Lois Scélérates) passed from December 1893, in response to the bomb thrown by Auguste Vaillant in the French Parliament, were primarily targeted at the anarchist press. January 1894 saw many police raids in individual houses or in anarchist papers; unsurprisingly, both the *Peinard* office and Pouget's own home were targeted. The August 1894 'Trial of the Thirty', closely following the assassination of French President Sadi Carnot in June, at the hand of the Italian anarchist 'lone wolf' Sante Geronimo Caserio, was the apex of the repressive phase. Despite the continuing blanket repression of anarchism, this put a rather farcical conclusion to the period of propaganda by the deed. Pouget was among the 30 anarchists indicted in this show trial, where committed and often well-respected anarchists such as Jean Grave, Sébastien Faure and indeed Pouget found themselves lumped together with petty criminals and robbers only distantly connected with the movement. With a few exceptions, only the most conservative and alarmist segments of the press and public opinion regarded the trial as anything else than an embarrassing miscarriage of justice, and it was not a surprise when a verdict of acquittal for most of the accused was returned.

Pouget, nonetheless, had not waited up: like many persecuted revolutionaries before him (not least the Communards, just a generation earlier), he had crossed the Channel and found asylum in London, and was therefore one of a handful of comrades sentenced *in absentia*. Never one to rest, as early as September, he relaunched *Le Père Peinard* from London, in the form of small, easy-to-hide-and-circulate pamphlets, with changing titles. The first one was called 'Il n'est pas mort' (It is not dead); the last one, dated January 1895 was 'Débâcle bourgeoise'. This new series was very much a continuation of its Parisian predecessor, in tone if not format, in its extensive French and international networks of contributors and readers, in its biting critique of anti-anarchist repression in France and

beyond and heavily satirical pieces exposing the powerful. One theme which gained even more prominence was that of labour organisation as a revolutionary route. It is likely that, for all his boredom in London, Pouget used his stay there to meet Italian and British anarchists and witness or take part in the discussions which, in those very years, were increasingly moving towards advocating for the revolutionary general strike as well as trade union permeation and, more broadly, anarchist organisation. These themes were especially important in the Italian movement, which also had a very active London outpost, and among British anarchists, where many militants were also trade unionists. Pouget briefly contributed to the international, English-language anarchist and then proto-syndicalist paper *The Torch*, which was a key forum for these discussions.

It was the second issue of the London series of the *Peinard*, in October 1894, which clearly announced Pouget's new strategic mindset, by explaining that 'one place where there's jolly good work to be done for the comrades is the union of their corporation'. Unions were legal in France – a major upside given that, in practice, anarchist groups no longer were – and the ambitious types who were believed to populate them might just be ousted if anarchists entered them *en masse*. The mood of the trade union movement also seemed favourable: the 1894 Nantes trade union congress had seen an antiparliamentarian win, with the proclamation of the political independence of trade unions and the adoption of the general strike. Pouget also argued that unions provided what had crucially failed anarchists throughout the previous decade: an organisational basis where they would be able to make contact with the workers, not just small circles of affiliates. This was a very early formulation of Pouget's budding syndicalism.

### **Syndicalism as theory and practice**

Pouget went back to France in early February 1895, when an amnesty potentially applying to anarchists was pronounced, and soon set about publishing a new paper, from May 1895. It was *La Sociale*, a relatively short-lived publication (1895-96) to which Fernand Pelloutier, another important anarchist theorist of revolutionary syndicalism, was also associated. Pouget collaborated closely with Pelloutier and Bernard Lazare, with the aim of bringing anarchists closer to anti-parliamentary socialists on a European scale, at a time when the parliamentary left was gaining ground.

Anarchist concerns over a takeover which would evict antiparliamentarians from the left were proven right at the 1896 London Congress of the Second International, which he attended as the delegate of several unions. This watershed event saw the exclusion of the anarchists from the organisation, the culmination of a



process which had been in train since the 1893 Zurich Congress. Within French socialism, the London congress accelerated the separation between parliamentary socialism and the organised trade union movement – between activism in the political and the ‘economic’ sphere. The French trade union confederation, CGT, set up in 1895, was to become the flag-bearer of this independence and, soon, of the direct-action syndicalism associated with it.

By 1896, *Le Père Peinard* was back with its original title. Together with *La Sociale* and a string of pamphlets penned by Pouget, these publications formed a very significant contribution to syndicalism. One interesting trait was the considerable inspiration which Pouget had drawn from British trade unions – however legalistic and reformist they might be regarded as – in developing his own brand of anarchist-influenced trade unionism. The role of unions in securing piecemeal and tangible improvements for workers, often criticised by anarchists as a stopgap which actually deferred the revolution, was now lauded, and integrated into a two-tier conception of revolutionary action, in which unions were tasked with securing both concrete improvements and working towards the revolution – a dual function famously further theorised by Fernand Pelloutier in his 1901 *Histoire des Bourses du Travail*. In the doctrine of syndicalism, unions were also the organising cells of future, post-revolutionary society, as dramatised later by Pouget and Émile Pataud in their 1909 political utopia *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth*. Important tactics soon to be associated with the French movement and the CGT were directly derived from the British inspiration and reinterpreted from the perspective of direct action, such as sabotage and ca’canny; the former was formally adopted at the 1897 Toulouse congress of the CGT. Its history and principles were presented by Pouget that same year, in an eponymous pamphlet. The influence of Pouget’s brief but impactful stay in Britain was also manifest in the way he continued to report on labour disputes in his publications, using – perhaps somehow counter-intuitively – the practices and gains of British unions as an argument and a model to be emulated in France. One key principle was that of trade union independence, which was soon to pervade the French syndicalist movement and its seminal 1906 manifesto, the Amiens Charter.

Meanwhile, anarchist permeation of trade unions progressed apace; this process is considered to have been complete by 1902, when the CGT, which grouped trade unions along occupational lines, merged with the

## The Charter of Amiens

Confédération générale du travail

October 1906

The Confederal Congress at Amiens confirms Article 2, constituting the CGT:

The CGT groups, outside of every political school, all workers conscious of the struggle to be undertaken for the disappearance of wage-workers and bosses.

The Congress considers this declaration as a recognition of the class struggle which pits on the economic field workers in revolt against all forms of exploitation and oppression, both material and moral, carried out by the capitalist class against the working class.

The Congress clarifies, by the following points, this theoretical assertion: in day-to-day work demands, trade unionism pursues the coordination of workers efforts, the increase of workers well-being by the achievement of immediate improvements, such as the reduction of working hours, the increase of wages, etc. But this task is only one aspect of the work of trade unionism: on the one hand, it prepares for complete emancipation, which can only be achieved by the expropriation of the capitalist, and, on the other hand, it advocates a general strike as a means of action and considers that the union, today a grouping of resistance, will be, in the future, the production and distribution group, the basis of social reorganisation.

The Congress declares that this double task, day-to-day and future, derives from the position of wage-earners which weighs on the working class and which makes it a duty for all workers, whatever their opinions or their political or philosophical tendencies, to belong to the essential group that is the union.

As a consequence, as far as individuals are concerned, the Congress asserts the complete freedom for the union member to participate, outside of the trade grouping, in such forms of struggle that correspond to his philosophical or political concepts, merely asking, in return, not to introduce into the union the opinions that he professes outside it. As far as organisations are concerned, the Congress declares that in order for trade unionism to reach its maximum effect, economic action must be exerted directly against the bosses, Confederate organisations do not, as union groupings, have to be concerned about the parties and sects which can, outside and alongside, pursue social transformation with complete freedom.

Fédération des Bourses du Travail, a federation of local labour exchanges, which had been another hotbed for proto-syndicalist ideas. The year 1906, with the



proclamation of the Amiens Charter, can be regarded as the apex of French syndicalism and a victory for Pouget who, with Victor Griffuelhes, had written and put forward the resolution which famously proclaimed the CGT's independence from all political interference, stating that 'the CGT brings together, outside any political affiliations, all the workers who are conscious of the work to be carried out for the disappearance of wage-earners and employers'. Since 1901, and until 1909, Pouget occupied high-ranking functions within the CGT's general committee; he was also the chief editor of the confederal paper, *La Voix du Peuple*. However, despite this institutional influence, it should be stressed that Pouget had not aged into a trade union official of the kind so reviled by anarchists; in his obituary of Pouget, Delesalle was at pains to stress that "he was able to come up with something new every time to hold spellbound a mass of workers occasionally overly inclined to self-doubt. So there is no exaggeration in saying that, wherever it was able to enforce its will entirely, the working class enjoyed the eight hour day and owes that, in no small part, to Émile Pouget. One need only review the succession of CGT congresses between 1896 and 1907 to get the measure of the profound influence that he wielded over those labour gatherings. His reports, his speeches and above all his effective work on working parties are still the most reliable index of syndicalism's debt to him."

### **Defeat, Retreat**

Nonetheless, for all Pouget's dedication and talent, the CGT's low membership figures, altogether tame everyday practice and the persistence of strong parliamentary and reformist currents at all levels of the organisations serve as important cautions against the golden legend of an all-powerful syndicalist CGT. These were obvious by 1906, when the long-planned May Day general strike for the eight-hour workday – a cause ceaselessly championed by Pouget – petered out, and the government unleashed a highly repressive strategy led by Home Interior Secretary Georges Clemenceau, which soon saw Pouget behind bars again for a couple of months in 1908.

This prison stay marked a turn for Pouget who, once released, relinquished his editorship of *La Voix du*

*Peuple* and gradually withdrew from the CGT leadership, to pursue new journalistic projects which did not materialise. He continued to write for other papers and to publish his own syndicalist pamphlets. At the outbreak of the First World War, the French and international anarchist movement was torn asunder by differences in their responses, between the defencist anarchists and, on the other hand, the majority who held on to their internationalist principles. Pouget leant towards the former; Jean Grave, the co-author of the

1916 Manifesto of the Sixteen, the infamous pro-entente text co-authored with Kropotkin, which formalised the defencist position, had hoped that Pouget would join the signatories, as many of his generation had. By then, however, Pouget had largely withdrawn from public life, due at least in part to his deteriorating health. After the outbreak of the war, he briefly continued his literary and political contributions to the socialist paper *L'Humanité* and worked as an editor, until his death in July 1931.

### **To conclude**

Pouget, usually described as a quiet, reflective militant, was a vociferous

and highly talented writer, an important theorist and skilled organiser. It is remarkable, given his flair for writing in a way which eluded many contemporary working-class publications, that he also showed quite a knack as an organiser, theorist and union official. This relatively brief text makes no claim to exhaustivity. It draws heavily on the Maitron entry, which is far more detailed and also provides a useful bibliography for further research. This text was written with a view to providing insights into an incredibly rich and, possibly, uniquely important, activist career. Some equally important causes which Pouget championed and which offer further evidence of his versatile activism certainly warrant further exploration, for instance his human rights, anti-persecution activism and writing during the Dreyfus affair. As the paper *Les Hommes du jour* stated in a 1908 portrait, Pouget "led good fights for the emancipation of workers and did revolutionaries the immense favour of pushing them, of grouping them on a battlefield from where they could expect victory with certainty. This is more than enough as a title of glory for one single man".

**Pouget, usually described as a quiet, reflective militant, was a vociferous and highly talented writer, an important theorist and skilled organiser**

# Sabotage

Émile Pouget<sup>1</sup>

*Almanach du Père Peinard, 1898*

Sabotage is a splendid stratagem which, before long, will make the capitalists laugh out of the other side of their mouths.

At the last Trade Congress at Toulouse, where a lot of good blokes have gathered from the four quarters of France, sent by the Unions, SABOTAGE was loudly acclaimed.

The enthusiasm was staggering!

And all the delegates swore, once returned to their home towns, to popularise the thing so that the workers would put it into practice all over.

And I assure you, mates, this enthusiasm is not the result of a passing craze, – a flash in the pan.

No!

The idea of SABOTAGE will not remain in the state of a wishful dream: we will use the thing!

And the exploiters will finally understand that the job of boss will no longer be all rosy.

That said, for the good guys who still do not know what it is, let me explain what sabotage is.

Sabotage is the conscious shirking of duties, it is the botching of a job, it is the grain of sand cunningly stuck in the fiddly gears so that the machine stays broken, it is the systematic shrinking of the boss.... All this practiced on the sly, without making a fuss, or showing off.

Sabotage is the younger cousin of the boycott. And fuck, in a host of cases where the strike is impossible it can render a hell of a service to the proles.

When an exploiter senses that his workers are not in a position to strike, he does not hesitate to humiliate them. Caught in the gears of exploitation, the poor buggers, afraid of being sacked, dare not say a word. They are eaten up with anger and bow their heads: they suffer the bosses' boorishness, rage in their guts.

But they suffer it! And the boss does not care, provided they do as he wishes, whether it is with or without rage.



Why is that?

Because the proles have not found a means to respond to the ape tit-for-tat and, by their action, neutralise his nastiness.

Yet the means exists nevertheless:

It is sabotage!

The English have been practicing it for a long time, – and they find it a damned good thing.

Suppose, for example, a big sweatshop<sup>2</sup> whose boss, all of a sudden, has a rapacious whim, – either he has a new mistress to maintain, or he has bad luck buying a mansion... or another fancy which necessitates an increase of profits on his part. The bastard does not hesitate: to realise the profit that he

seeks he cuts the pay of his proles – on the pretext that business is bad – he has no fucking lack of bad reasons.

Let us suppose that this mangy man has made his plans very well and his tightening of the screw coincides with a situation so entangled that his proles cannot attempt a strike. What then?

In France, the poor exploited will grumble grimly, curse the vampire. Some – the most astute – will raise a ruckus and dump the sweatshop; as for the others, they will suffer their bad luck.

In England, fuck, things would be different! And that is thanks to sabotage. Quietly, the proles of the factory whisper the watchword in the ear: "Hey, friends, we sabotage... we must go slowly but surely..." And, without further ado, production will be slowed down. So slowed that if the boss is not a complete simpleton, he will not persist in his boorishness: he will return to the old tariff, – for he will realise that in this little game, for the five pennies he fleeces from the day's work of each prole he loses four times as much.

This is what it is like to have a nose for such things!

Where suckers would have been swindled, astute lads, full of gumption and initiative, get themselves out of the mess.

<sup>1</sup> Pouget later expanded upon this subject, producing in 1911 the much reprinted and translated pamphlet of the same name. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> Pouget uses the word *bagne* which can also refer to a chain gang, prison, penal colony and labour camp. (*Black Flag*)

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The English got sabotage from the Scots – for the Scots are loafers – and they even borrowed from them the system’s given name: *Ca canny*.

Recently, the INTERNATIONAL UNION OF DOCK LABOURERS, which has its offices in London, issued a manifesto advocating sabotage, so that the dockers will have the nerve to practice it, because so far, it is mainly in mines and textiles that the English proles have used sabotage.

Here is the manifesto in question:

What is *Ca canny*?

It’s a short and convenient word to designate a new tactic utilised by workers instead of going on strike.

If two Scotsmen are walking together and one goes too fast, the other tells him: *Ca canny*, which means, “Slow down.”

If someone wants to buy a hat worth five francs, he has to pay five francs. But if he wants to only pay four, well! he will have one of lesser quality. The hat is a “commodity.”

If someone wants to buy six shirts at two francs each, he must pay twelve francs. If he only pays ten, he will only get five shirts. The shirt is still “a commodity for sale on the market.”

If a housewife wants to buy a piece of beef worth three francs, she must pay it. And if she only offers two francs, then they will give her bad meat. Beef is again “a commodity sold on the market.”

Well, the bosses declare that labour and skill are “commodities for sale in the market” – just like hats, shirts, and beef.

– Perfect, we answer, we take you at your word.

If they are “commodities” we will sell them just as the hatter sells his hats and the butcher his meat. For bad prices, they give bad goods. We will do the same.

The bosses have no right to count on our charity. If they refuse even to discuss our demands, well, we will put in practice *ca canny* – the tactic of “working slowly” – until we are listened to.

Here, then, is sabotage nicely defined: *for bad pay, bad work!*

Well, it will be grand when this weapon has entered into our way of life: a bad blow for the bragging bosses,

when the apes are convinced – by experience – that, from now on, misfortune is always ready to fall on the pig. The fear of losing cash and of sliding towards bankruptcy will soften the arrogance of the capitalos.

Feeling vulnerable, at the cash register – which serves them as a heart! – they will think twice before producing some of their usual bullshit.

Certainly, there are some good fellows who, under the pretext that we must focus on the radical disappearance of capitalism, will find it too little to limit themselves to keeping the apes at bay and preventing them from getting their claws out.

These lose sight of the double face of the Social Question: the present and the future.

Now, the present prepares the future! If ever the proverb “So you make your bed, so must you lie on it!” was appropriate, it is certainly here:

The less we let ourselves be subjugated by the bosses, the less intense will be our exploitation, the stronger will be our revolutionary resistance, the greater will be the consciousness of our dignity and the more vigorous our desires for freedom and well-being.

And consequently, the better able we will be to prepare the outbreak of the glorious society where there will be no more rulers or capitalos;

And also more able, when we have achieved it, to develop in the new milieu.

If, on the contrary, instead of beginning, right now, the apprenticeship of freedom, we ignore daily life, scorning the needs and passions of the present hour, we shall soon shrivel up in abstraction and become famous hair-splitters. In this way, living too much in dreams, our activity will wane and, as we will have lost all contact with the masses, the day we want to shake off our torpor, we will be as entangled as an elephant who has found an enema pump.

There is no getting away from it: to achieve balance in life, to carry human activity to the highest degree, neither the present nor the future must be neglected.

When one of them prevails over the other, the loss of balance which results produces nothing good: either, when we are all in the present, we get stuck in foolishness and pettiness; or else, if we fly off into the blue, we become entrapped in the ideal.

And that is why I am drumming it into those lads who have some pluck: that they do not lose sight of the present or the future.

In this way, they will activate the germination of glorious ideas and the spirit of revolt.

**Here, then, is sabotage nicely defined: *for bad pay, bad work!***

# The Basis of Trade Unionism

Émile Pouget<sup>1</sup>

1903

## DEFINITION OF TRADE UNIONISM<sup>2</sup>

Of late the term “Trade Unionism” has a far more far-reaching meaning than it used to have. The term continues to qualify “members of a Trade Union organisation.” Besides this nebulous and colourless definition, which, by stretching a point, might be a label for “Yellow” as well as for “Red” Trade Unions, the term has acquired a new and very precise meaning.

The term “Trade Unionism” has become a comprehensive term: the impulsive power of conscious workers towards progress. The workers who invoke this epithet have thrown aside unsound and deceptive notions, and are convinced that improvements, be they partial or extreme, can only result from popular force and will. On the ruins of their former sheeplike hopes and superstitious beliefs in miracles to be expected from State Providence as well as from Divine Providence, they have elaborated a healthy, truly human doctrine whose basis is explained and proved by social phenomena.

The Trade Unionist is evidently a partisan of grouping workers by means of Trade Unions, only he does not conceive a Trade Union as an agent for narrowing his vision to such a point that his sphere of action is restricted to daily debates and wrangles with his employers; and although at present he strives to get minor grievances redressed, he never puts aside the evils arising from the exploitation of the workers. Neither does he conceive the Trade Union to be, as some politicians do, an “elementary school of Socialism”, where men are recruited and trained to be aggressive fighters in a cause they consider effective and worthwhile – the conquest of governmental power.

For the Trade Unionist, the Trade Union is a perfect combination answering to all needs, to all aspirations, and therefore sufficient for all purposes. It is an association conceived by “reformers” affording opportunity for daily conflict with employers, for improvements, and for settling minor claims.

But it is not only this; it is a combination capable of bringing about the expropriation of capital and the reorganisation of society, which some Socialists, who are deceived by their confidence in the “State”, believe will be brought about by the seizure of political power.

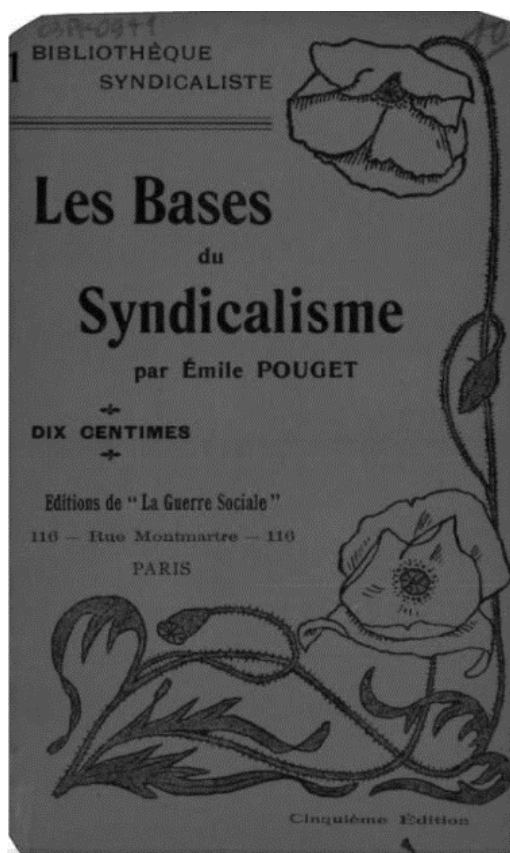
Therefore, for the Trade Unionist the Trade Union is not a transient association, only suited to the needs of the hour, and whose usefulness could not be conceived apart from its present surroundings. For him the Trade Union is an initial and essential combination; it should arise spontaneously, independently of all preconceived theories, and develop in any surroundings.

In fact, what more reasonable than for the exploited of the same trade to come together, to agree to unite in defence of common advantages that are to be gained immediately?

On the other hand, supposing society to have been annihilated and a Communist or any other

society to have blossomed forth on its ruins, it is evident that in these circumstances, in these new surroundings, the need of associations, bringing men employed in identical or similar work and duties in contact with one another, will be most urgent.

Thus the Trade Union, the corporate body, appears to be the organic cell of all society. At present, for the Trade Unionist the Trade Union is an organism of conflict and claim of worker against employer. In the future it will



<sup>1</sup> “The Basis of Trade Unionism”, *Freedom*, December 1907 to February 1908; *The Basis of Trade Unionism* (London: “Voice of Labour” Pamphlet, 1908). (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> The French word “Syndicat” has been rendered into English as its nearest equivalent. The French organisations, however, differ from the English in inculcating a revolutionary spirit and ignoring political action.

be the base on which normal society will be built, when freed from exploitation and oppression.

### THE WORKING CLASS BATTLES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The conception of the forerunners of Trade Unionism is not the result of a hypothetical system sprung from some brain and not justified by practical tests; on the contrary, it proceeds from the examination of historical events and of their clear interpretation. We may say that it is the result of a whole century of conflict between the working classes and the middle classes.

During the whole of the nineteenth century the proletariat strove to separate its movement from that of the purely political action of middle-class parties. This was indeed a great effort, for the middle classes wanting to govern without hindrance, the assent or indifference of the proletariat was necessary, and politicians exerted themselves, not only to fight and massacre proletarians when they rose against their exploiters, but also to make them tractable by a sham education, designed to turn them on from the examination of economic questions, and to cause their energy to drift towards the deceptive hope of democracy.

We cannot make it too clear that the autonomous working-class movement has been, and is still, obstructed by all the forces of obscurantism and reaction, and also by the democratic forces that are, but under new and hypocritical disguises, the continuation of old societies in which a handful of parasites and maintained in plenty by the forced labour of plebeians.

The middle classes, through the State, whose function, independently of its form, consists in protecting capitalist privileges, have applied themselves to stifling and deviating working class aspirations. Thus, during attempts at emancipation proletarians have been compelled to realise that the Governments they were subjected to were all alike, no matter by what name they were labelled. They passed from one rule to another without deriving any result from change of scenery, mentioned by history as of great importance. All governments treated them with animosity and ill-will. When they obtained from their rulers a mitigation of their wretched fate, they owed it, not to feelings of justice or pity, but to the wholesome fear they were able to inspire. To government initiative they are indebted for Draconian legislation, arbitrary measures, and savage reprisals.

Antagonisms between the State and the working classes dominates the whole of the nineteenth century. we see it most plainly when we observe that governments, by way of throwing their enemies a bone to gnaw, have readily conceded political rights to the people, while they have shown themselves intractable as far as regards

economic liberties. In the latter case they have only given way to popular *pressure*.

The difference in behaviour on the part of the rulers is easily explained. Recognition of political rights to the people does the governments no harm, as these baubles do not imperil the principle of authority and do not undermine the class basis of society.

It is another story when economic liberties are in question. These are of real advantage to the people, and can only be acquired at the expense of the privileged. It is therefore evident that the State, the upholder of capitalism, refuses to the last to grant a particle of economic improvement.

The demonstration of this permanent conflict of the working class with the State would lead us into writing a martyrology of the proletariat. To prove the truth and constancy of this antagonism a few historical landmarks will suffice.

Less than two years after the taking of the Bastille (June 1791), the bourgeoisie, by its mouthpiece, the Constituent Assembly, despoiled the working classes of their right to form associations,<sup>1</sup> a right they had just obtained by revolutionary means.

The workers believed the Revolution to be the dawn of economic freedom. They thought the burning gates of Paris where town dues were collected (June 12, 1789) would destroy all barriers. Let us add that two days after the burning of the gates of Paris, the Bastille was taken by assault, not because it was a political prison, but because it was a danger to rebellious Paris, as was the Mont Valérien in 1871.

Workers taken in by the enthusiastic strains of pamphleteers thought themselves freed from the trammels of the ancient régime, and began to come to an understanding with one another and to group themselves in order to resist exploitation. They formulated precise claims. The bourgeoisie soon proved to them that the Revolution was only *political* and not *economic*. It elaborated repressive laws, and as the workers lacked knowledge and experience, as their agitation was confused and still incoherent, it was not hard for the government to check this movement.

We should be mistaken in supposing that the Chapelier law was expedient, and that those who voted for it ignored its effect on social life. To make us swallow this fanciful interpretation, we are told that Revolutionists of that period raised no protest against it. Their silence only shows us that they ignored the social aspect of the Revolution they took part in, and that they were only pure *Democrats*. Moreover, there is nothing astonishing in their great want of foresight, and even today we see men pretending to be Socialists who are also merely simple *Democrats*.

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<sup>1</sup> *La loi Chapelier*, passed on June 17, 1791.

As a proof that the parliamentarians of 1791 know what they were about, some months later, in September 1791, the Constituent Assembly strengthened the Chapelier law prohibiting combinations among industrial workers, by enacting another law that made associations of agricultural labourers illegal.

The Constituent was not the only Assembly that manifested its hatred of the working masses. All Assemblies that followed strove to tighten the bounds enslaving the worker to his employer. More than this, seeing that passing laws trying to make it impossible for workmen to discuss and defend their interests was insufficient, bourgeois Assemblies contrived to aggravate the wretched position of proletarians by putting them under absolute police control.

The Convention did not prove more sympathetic to the working classes. In the month of Nivôse of the year II, it legislated “against coalition of workmen, employed in different trades, who, by writing or by emissaries, incite to the cessation of work.” This behaviour of the Convention, the revolutionarism of which meets with so much praise, clearly proves that political opinions have nothing to do with economic interests. A still better proof is that, in spite of the changes in governmental forms, starting from the Democracy of the Convention, the Autocracy of Napoleon I, the Monarchy of Charles X, to the Constitutionalism of Louis-Phillipe, never were the severity of the laws against workmen mitigated.

Under the consulate, in the year XI (1803), a new link to the slaves’ chain was forged – the *Certificate Book*, which made the working men a class of specifically registered individuals. Then, with their vile and crafty legal procedure, and their lawyers who drafted the Code we still suffer from, rulers tied down and gagged the proletariat so well that Louis XVIII and Charles X, heirs to this baggage, did not need to increase it.

Nevertheless, in spite of severe legislative prohibitions, the workers came to an understanding, grouped themselves under mild forms such as “mutualities”, and constituted embryo Trade Unions for organising resistance. The combinations grew to such an extent that strikes multiplied, and the *Liberal* government of Louis-Phillipe inflicted greater penalties against associations (1834). But the impetus had been given! This recrudescence of legal severity did not stop the movement of the workers. In spite of the law, the

*Sociétés de Résistance* multiplied, and were followed by a period of growing agitation and numerous strikes.

The Revolution of 1848 was the result of this movement. A proof of the economic scope of this Revolution is that economic questions took precedence over all others. Unfortunately, the corporate groups lacked experience. The urban workers ignored the peasants, and vice versa. Thus in 1848 the peasants did not stir, not understanding the working class movement; likewise in 1852 the town workers understood nothing of the peasants’ attempt at insurrection. In spite of these failures – and there were many others – all improvements were due to working class energy. It was the will of the workers that was expressed in the Luxembourg Commission and was legally registered by the

**The Trade Unionist is evidently a partisan of grouping workers by means of Trade Unions, only he does not conceive a Trade Union as an agent for narrowing his vision to such a point that his sphere of action is restricted to daily debates and wrangles with his employers**

Provisional Government.

In the first hours of the Revolution the frightened middle classes showed themselves conciliatory, and to save capitalism were disposed to sacrifice a few trifling privileges. They were, however, soon reassured, by the inoculation of the people with a political virus – universal suffrage – as much as by inconsistency on the part of the corporate organisations, and their ferocity became as great as had been their fear. The massacres of June 1848, were for the middle classes the first instalment of satisfaction. Soon after, in 1849, the representatives of the people, proving themselves simply the representatives of the middle classes, legislated against associations. They were prohibited, and their members subjected to penalties decreed in the law of 1810.

As the reaction of Louis-Phillipe failed to check the working class movement, so did the Republican and Napoleonic governments fail. Without troubling themselves about the form of government, or with the prohibition to combine, the corporate groups continued to develop in number and in strength, so much so that by their pressure on public authorities they wrung from the government legal sanction for the ameliorations and liberties they had forcibly acquired, thanks to their revolutionary vigour.

It was by what we now call *direct action* that the right of combination was wrung from Caesarism in 1864. The workers of all associations grouped themselves, combined and went on strike without taking the least

heed of the law. Beyond all others, the printers distinguished themselves by their revolutionary character, and in Paris (1862) one of their strikes was the determining event that brought about the recognition of the right to combine. The government, blind like all others, thought to kill the movement by striking a great blow. Wholesale arrests took place. All the members of the strike committee were imprisoned, as well as the most active amongst the strikers.

This arbitrary abuse of power, far from terrorising, excited public opinion, and such a current of indignation resulted from it that the government was obliged to capitulate, and to recognise the workers' right to combination. This was due only to *pressure from without*. It would be difficult to attribute this success to Socialist deputies, for the excellent reason that there were none in Parliament.

The conquest of the right to combine so stimulated Trade Union organisation, it grew so rapidly irresistible, that the State was compelled to put a good face on a bad matter. In 1863 Trade Union liberty was recognised by an Imperial circular, which said, "As to the organisation of working class association, the Administration must leave to those interested in them full liberty."

Meanwhile, the International Workers' Association, definitively constituted in 1864, after several earlier fruitless attempts, shed its rays on Western Europe and opened up new horizons to the working class, horizons that were to be obscured by the great crisis of 1871.

Let us now stop, so as not to be lured on too far by this retrospective summary, and let us draw logical conclusions from it.

From the landmarks of history that we have mentioned, it follows that at the dawn of the present régime, in 1791, the government, as defender of the privileges of the middle classes, denied and refused all economic rights to working men, and ground them down until they were like particles of dust, having no cohesion with one another, so that they were at the mercy of exploitation.

Later on the workers emerged from chaos, on which the middle classes would like to keep them. They grouped themselves on economic ground apart from any politics. The Government, whatever name it is labelled with, tries to arrest the proletarian movement, and not succeeding, makes up its mind to sanction the improvements or liberties obtained by the workers. The most salient point in all these agitations and these social shocks is that exploited and exploiters, governors and governed, have interests, not only *distinct*, but opposed; and that between them a *class war* in the truest sense of the term.

In the short summary given we see the drift of the Trade Union movement, untrammelled by Parliamentary contamination, and the wisdom of working men's

associations on solid economic ground, which is the base of all true progress.

## AGREEMENT IN ORDER TO LIVE

### BASIS OF SOCIAL HARMONY

Having demonstrated that, from a historical point of view, the Trade Union movement of the 20th century is the normal consequence of the working class efforts of the 19th century, we must now examine the value of this movement from a philosophical and social point of view. To begin with, let us set down the premises in a few lines. *Man is a sociable animal*. He cannot, and has never been able to, live isolated in the world. It is impossible to conceive the life of men who do not form a social group. However rudimentary were primitive human agglomerations, men always gathered together in associations. It is not true, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, theorist of democratic servitude, taught – that before they formed societies men lived in a "state of nature", and were only able to emerge from it when they relinquished some of their natural rights by means of a "social contract."

This idle nonsense, now out of date, was much in vogue at the end of the 18th century. It inspired the revolutionary middle class in 1789-93, and it continues to be the basis of law and of institutions that hamper us.

However erroneous Jean-Jacques Rousseau's sophisms may be, they have the advantage of giving a philosophical varnish to the principle of authority, and of being the theoretical expression of middle-class interests. For this reason the middle class made them its own. It drew them up in the "Declaration of the Rights of Man," as well as in articles of the "Code" of laws, so as to set up for itself a complete compendium of exploitation and domination.

Neither is it true, as proclaimed by Darwinists, that society is but a battlefield where the *struggle for existence* alone regulates the action of human beings. This theory, as monstrous as it is erroneous, gives a false hypocritical and scientific varnish to the worst forms of exploitation. By these means the middle classes construe that the exploiter is the *strong being* produced by natural selection, whereas the exploited is a *weak being*, the victim of an invincible necessity (also natural); and that the weak are compelled to vegetate or disappear as the strong derives profit from one or another of these solutions.

Such a theory could only take root by an arbitrary and erroneous interpretation of Darwin's ideas. If it were true, it could only apply to different species anyway. War among one species is an accidental monstrosity, among different species, living in association, it is also unnatural, for *harmony* is an unquestionable necessity.

The human animal needs harmony. If in far distant ages he had not been in solidarity with his fellowmen, he would never have emerged from the animal stage. Good



fellowship among men is not only essential to *progress* but to *life*.

The agreement in order to live, far from causing a diminution of individuality in man, is a means of accruing and multiplying his power of well-being. The examination of the real conditions of *life* that prevail in human species ends in the negation of theories circulated by the dominant classes, theories that only aim at facilitating and justifying exploitation of the masses.

Indeed, although both doctrines – the democratism of JJ Rousseau of the 18th century and the middle-class Darwinism of the 19th – have theoretical distinctions, they come to the same conclusions: they proclaim the spirit of renunciation, and teach that “the liberty of each is limited by the liberty of others”. By means of these doctrines, the spirit of sacrifice that went out of fashion and was discredited in its religious aspect has again risen and become a social principle. These doctrines teach that as soon as man agrees to live in society, he of necessity agrees to renounce some of his natural rights. This renunciation he makes on the altar of Authority and Property, and in exchange he acquires the hope of enjoying the rights that have survived his sacrifice.

Modern nations led away by metaphysics, now wearing a scientific, now a democratic mask, have bent their backs and sacrificed their rights; for these doctrines have been so drilled into them that today even citizens who pride themselves on being so intellectually emancipated accept as an unquestionable axiom that the *liberty of each is limited by the liberty of others*.

This lying formula will not bear examination; it means nothing more and nothing less than a constant and perpetual antagonism between human beings. If it had any truth in it, progress would have been impossible, for life would have been a continual struggle of enraged wild beasts. As the human animal could have only satisfied his wants by injuring his fellow human beings, it would have meant never-ending struggles, wars and unlimited ferocity.

But in spite of all criminal theories that represent society as a battlefield, and men as beings only able to exist if they injure one another, tear one another to pieces and devour one another, we have progressed, and the idea of solidarity has flourished because the instinct of social harmony is more powerful than the theories of the struggle for existence.

This deduction may be objected to by some, who say that the State has been an agent of progress, and that its intervention has been moralising and pacifying. This

allegation completes the sophisms quoted above. The “order” created by the State has consisted only of repressing and oppressing the masses in order that a privileged minority might profit, the masses being made malleable by the belief they have been impregnated with, consisting in the admission that the renunciation of part of their “natural rights” is necessary when they agree to a “social contract.”

We must oppose the middle-class definition of liberty that sanctions slavery and misery with a contrary formula, that which is the real expression of social

truth, arising from the fundamental principle of “harmony in order to struggle” – that is, *the liberty of each grows when in touch with the liberty of others*.

The unquestionable evidence of this definition explains the progressive development of human societies. The power of *harmony in order to live* has a dynamic force superior to the forces of division, repression and suppression exercised by parasitical minorities. That is why societies have progressed. That is why they have not consisted solely of butchery, ruins and mourning.

It is to our advantage to become impregnated with this notion of liberty, in order to be proofed against the inculcation of middle-class sophisms, so as to be able to understand what the word “society” means. It means that the chief propelling power is humanity is *harmony, association*.

Let us also understand that SOCIETY is the agglomeration of those individuals that constitute it, and that it has no individual life of its own apart from them; consequently there can be no question of aiming at

**The most salient point  
in all these agitations  
and these social shocks  
is that exploited and  
exploiters, governors  
and governed, have  
interests, not only  
*distinct*, but opposed;  
and that between them  
a *class war* in the truest  
sense of the term.**

happiness other than that of the individual happiness of the human beings composing society.

## **UNION FOR PRODUCTION THE EMBRYO OF SOCIETY**

### *Civic and Democratic Derivatives*

Harmony and concord in the battle of life being recognised as the social pivot, it follows that society's method of aggregation will consist of groups; and in order that individual growth may not be stunted and that it should ever continue developing, it is necessary for the group to be in complete accord with economic functions.

For human beings these functions have two irreducible actions – (1) *Consumption*; (2) *Production*. We are born consumers, and we become producers. Such is the normal process.

### **THE CONSUMER**

As a consumer, a human being should follow his own inclination, and in fulfilling this role only think of his needs, the satisfaction of which will perforce be limited by possibilities. Consumption is the measure of social development: the greater it is for each, the higher is the level of well-being. Present society works in no way along these lines. Far from being free, the individual is subject to prohibitions and obstacles that can only be removed by means of money. Now, as the money is seized by the governing class, this class, thanks to the privileges it enjoys, consumes according to its will and pleasure. On the other hand, the workers, who have made natural products consumable, and who besides this have benefited the capitalist from whom they receive wages, are placed in a position in which it is impossible for them to consume according to their needs.

Such an inequity is intolerable. It is monstrous that individuals, save children, invalids and old people, should be able to consume without producing. It is also monstrous that the real producers should be deprived of the possibility of consuming.

Consumption takes precedence over production, for we consume long before we are capable of producing. Yet in social organisation it is necessary to invert these terms and make production the starting point.

### **THE PRODUCER**

The producer is the basis of everything. She or he fulfils the essential organic function that preserves society from extinction. They are also the first cell of economic life. It is their union and good understanding with other producers who work with the same purpose in mind – that is to say, at the same industry, the same trade, with similar efforts – that creates the bonds of solidarity which, like a net, stretches over the human collectivity.

This enforced and logical harmony causes UNION FOR PRODUCTION, which is the foundation of society. No other form of association is so necessary. All others are of a secondary nature. It alone is the social nucleus, the centre of economic activity. But for the productive group to perform its function normally, it must raise the individual, and it must never tend to diminish their autonomy under any pretext whatsoever.

Most assuredly, the awareness of the fundamental part played by the producer in society, and the group of which they have the right to be an integral part, is relatively new. The identity of interests and communion of aspirations amongst producers, coordinated according to their needs, their professional activities and their tendencies, have not always been as tangible as now. The understanding of social phenomena was impeded by ignorance, even without taking into account the fact that economic development had not then acquired the acuteness of our times. Another cause impeding comprehension sprung from the survival of the dominant part formerly played by family groups. At a given moment, when humanity was mostly composed of hunting and pastoral tribes, the family fulfilled the function of social nucleus, a phenomenon explained by the fact that in those far-off ages production, both industrial and agricultural, hardly went beyond the family circle, so that this form of association being enough for basic needs, barter had not begun to modify existing conditions.

Today these conditions have been subjected to such a transformation that it is impossible to consider the family as an organic nucleus. It would indeed be equivalent to legitimising all forms of slavery, for all slavery follows as a consequence of an authority that the head of the family appropriates, by virtue of his supposed strength and ancestry.

Besides, nobody dreams of such regression. In quite another direction did the middle class at the dawn of its revolution in 1789 try to guide the tendencies of the people towards sociability. The middle class, needing men who would work, who would be flexible, malleable and deprived of all power of resistance, destroyed the bonds of true solidarity, the class – under pretext of uprooting trade privileges formerly looked upon with favour by the old regime. Then, to fill the empty space left in the popular consciousness, and to hinder the idea of association with an economic basis, the reappearance of which it dreaded, the middle class manoeuvred to substitute in the place of true bonds of solidarity resulting from identical interests fictitious and deceptive bonds of citizenship and democracy.

Religion, which until then had served the powerful of the earth to check and restrain the tendency towards improvement of their lot that impelled the people, was relegated to the background. Not that the middle class distained the brutalising power of this “curb,” but it considered religion out of date and as having done its

work. The middle class professed Voltairianism, and although it attacked priests, it suggested to the working classes superstitions just as debasing as those of Christianity. SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE! HOME AND COUNTRY! These became the fashionable idols.

### THE PATRIOTIC CURB

In a civic direction the middle class glorified patriotic sentimentality. The ideological lines that unite men born by chance between variable frontiers surrounding a certain territory were glorified as sacred. They earnestly taught that the most glorious day in the life of a patriot is the one in which they have the pleasure of being butchered for their country.

They deceived the people with such nonsense and hindered them from reflecting on the philosophical value of the moral virus they were being infected with. Thanks to the sound of trumpet and drum, warlike songs and jingoistic bluster, they were trained to defend what they had not got: their inheritance. Patriotism can only be explained by the fact that all patriots without distinction own a part of social property, and nothing is more absurd than a *patriot without patrimony*. Notwithstanding the absurdity, proletarians have reached the point at which they do not possess a clod of the national soil; it follows that there is absolutely no reason for their patriotism, which is just a disease.

Under the old system the military career was a profession like any other, only more barbarous; and the army, in which the patriotic big drum was not beaten, was a medley of mercenaries "marching" for pay. After the Revolution the middle classes devised a *blood tax*, *Conscription* for the people, a natural deduction from the hypothesis that in future the Fatherland was to be "everybody's property"; but it has continued to be "the property of a few," and these few have, thanks to the new system, solved the problem of causing their privileges to be protected by others, by those despoiled of their inheritance.

Here, indeed, appears a formidable contradiction. The bonds of nationality, of which militarism is a tangible form, and which we are told tends to the defence of common interests, has a diametrically opposite result – it checks working-class aspirations.

It is not the ideological frontier that separates nations into English, French, Germans, etc., that the army watches over, but principally *the frontier of riches* in order to keep the poor chained up in poverty.

### THE DEMOCRATIC CURB

The middle class has itself as crafty in a democratic direction. Having conquered political power and secured for itself economic domination, it took care not to destroy the mechanism that had been of use to the aristocracy. It confined itself to replastering the State

frontage enough to change its appearance, and to get it accepted as a new power by the people.

Now in society there is nothing real, except for economic functions, which are completely sufficient for individuals and useful to groups. Consequently, all exterior crystallisation and all political superfluity are parasitic and oppressive excrescences, and therefore noxious.

But of this the people had no consciousness, and so it was easy to fool them.

The middle class, with the intention of impeding the blossoming of economic sovereignty which was germinating in the freedom of association they had just stifled, taught the people to turn to the mirage of political sovereignty, the powerless manifestations of which would not disturb capitalist exploitation. The fraud succeeded so well that the belief in political equality – that great hoax – has done a good service in keeping the masses down during the last century.

Only a small amount of wisdom is required to understand that the capitalist and the worker, the landowner and the dispossessed, are not equals. Equality is not a fact because both rich and poor are in the possession of a voting ticket.

And yet the fraud goes on. It goes on to such an extent that even today there are, amongst well-meaning people, those who still have confidence in these idle fancies.

They are victims of a superficial logic; they sum up the influence of the popular masses and compare it to the numerical weakness of the governing minority, and suppose that the education of the masses is enough to ensure that they will triumph by means of the normal action of majorities.

They do not see that the democratic grouping, with universal suffrage as a basis, in not a homogenous or lasting association, and that it is impossible to regulate it with a view to persistent action.

This group brings together temporary citizens whose interests are not identical, such as employers and employed, and when it unites them, it only confers on them the right to decide about abstractions or illusions.

The want of coherence in Parliaments, their ignorance of popular aspirations and also their powerlessness, are facts that have been sifted through so carefully that it is useless to dwell on them. The result is no better when we examine the consequences of universal suffrage in municipal districts. A few examples briefly-described will demonstrate this.

During the last quarter of a century rural municipalities have been, for the most part, in the hands of peasants. Wealthy landowners were not opposed to this conquest, knowing that, owing to the invincible necessities of present society and the obstacles put in the way by a

central authority, nothing effectual could be attempted against them.

By Socialist push, the same conquest of municipalities has been realised in working-class districts; the benefit to the workers has been small. The municipalities annihilated by the government have not been able to realise their programme, and disillusion has been the consequence. Yet another danger. Workers have turned from their union to political efforts, all their energy has gone in this direction and they have neglected economic organisation, so that bad employers, whose exploiting ferocity has no limits, have benefited by not finding an active and vigorous Trade Union group to oppose them.

In the north of France – Roubaix, Armentières, etc. – where municipalities are or have been Socialistic, wages are frightfully low. In the Ardennes the same goes. There numerous Trade Unions had been formed, but the members having allowed themselves to be completely absorbed by politics, the Unions have lost the power of opposing their employers.

To all these defects Democracy adds, if possible, yet a greater mistake. Progress, as demonstrated by the whole of our historic past, is the consequence of the revolutionary efforts of conscious minorities. Now Democracy organises the stifling of minorities to the profit of sheepish and conservative majorities [or to their mutual fleecing? - transcribers' note].

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The work of deviating the economic movement attempted by the middle class could only be momentary. The corporative group is not the result of artificial growth. It springs up and develops spontaneously and inevitably in all surroundings. It is to be found in ancient times, in the Middle Ages, and today, and we can show that at all times its development has been obstructed by the possessor of privileges, who, fearing the expansive power of this method of organisation, took up the cudgels against it – without, however, succeeding in destroying it.

It is not astonishing that corporative groups have such an intense vitality. Their absolute annihilation is impossible to realise. In order to succeed it would be necessary to destroy society itself. Indeed, the corporate group has its roots in the existing form of production, and normally proceeds from it. Now, as association for production is an inevitable necessity, how could it be possible for workers gathered together for this purpose to limit their cooperation to matters only useful to their employers, who benefit by exploitation in common? In order to satisfy capitalist interests, producers were brought together in economic groups, and they would have had the intelligence of molluscs had they not enough judgement to overstep the boundaries imposed on them by their exploiters.

Workmen possessing a bit of common sense were inevitably brought to see the flagrant antagonism that makes them, the producers, the irreconcilable enemies of their employers; they are the robbed, their employers are the robbers.

Therefore, for them the discord is so radical that only politicians or employers' menials can spout about "harmony between capital and labour."

Besides, it would not take long for wage-earners to recognise that the employers' rapacity is the more exacting, the weaker is working class resistance. Now it is easy to prove that the isolation of the wage-earner constitutes their maximum of weakness. Consequently, cooperation for production having already taught the exploited to appreciate the benefits of association, they only needed will and initiative to create a group for workers' self-defence.

They soon learned its value. The middle classes, who had no fear of the "People as electors". were compelled by the people as a "Trade Union" to recognise the right of combination and Trade Union liberty.

In consideration of these first results, repeated attempts have been made to divert the working class from the Trade Union. In spite of such manoeuvres, the part played by the Trade Union has grown clearer and more precise, so much so that in future it can be thus defined:

In the present, the permanent mission of the Trade Union is to defend itself against any reduction of vitality – that is to say, against any reduction of wages and increase in working hours. Besides resisting attack, it must play a pro-active part and strive to increase the well-being of the union, which can only be realised by trespassing on capitalist privileges, and constitutes a sort of partial expropriation.

Besides this talk of incessant skirmishes, the Union is engaged in the work of integral emancipation, of which it will effectively be the agent. It will consist of taking possession of social wealth, now in the hands of the middle class, and in reorganising society on a Communist basis, so that the maximum amount of social well-being will be achieved with a minimum of productive effort.

### **THE RIGHT OF TRADE UNIONISM**

We will now examine how Trade Unionism is constituted. Forming part of a certain corporation, an infinitesimal minority of bold individuals, possessing enough character, create a group in order to resist and to fight capitalists.

What will the attitude taken by this handful of militants be? Will they wait to state their claims till they have won over, if not the whole, at least the majority of their fellow workers belonging to corporation?

They would act in this way if into the economic struggle they introduced the political prejudices held by the majority.

But as the everyday practical demands of the struggle are more urgent than democratic sophisms, the logic of life impels them into action, towards new ideas opposed to the political formulas with which they have been saturated. To obtain this result, it is not necessary for the combatants to possess a great quantity of judgement, but only if they not be paralysed by formulas and abstractions.

We have even witnessed, in a very important circumstance, the politician Basly respect Trade Union principles and demand that they be put into practise. It is almost superfluous to add that this manoeuvre on his part was unadulterated cunning, in order to discredit revolutionary tendencies. It was at the Miners' Conference held at Lens in 1901 when the question of a general strike was being discussed, that Basly endeavoured to impede the movement by proposing a referendum; and, contrary to democratic theories, he caused the Congress to decide that the number of non-voters should be added to the total of the majority.

This politician, who thought himself so cunning, would have been very astonished if it had been pointed out to him that, instead of having tricked the congress, he had acted as a revolutionary and had been inspired by Trade Union principles. Indeed, in this particular instance, Basly paid no attention to the opinion of men without judgement; he looked down on them as human zeros, only fit to be added to thinking units, as inert beings whose latent powers could only be put into motion by contact with energetic and bold men. This way of looking at things is the negation of democratic theories that proclaim equality of rights for all men, and teach that the sovereign will of the people is fully carried out by means of universal suffrage. Basly was not clear on this point, and for a while, forgetting his political theories, he was easily influenced by the economic doctrines of his surroundings.

Let us also remark that democracy has never been in vogue amongst corporate groups. Face to face with social needs, combatants in the ranks of Trade Unionism solved problems as their common sense taught them. Their deeds, therefore, preceded the declaration of Trade Union principles.

Trade Unionists have never believed that they must consult the entire working class according to rule; and suit their action to please the majority. As many as were of one mind formed a group, and presented their claims without taking heed of non-thinkers.

Could anything be more natural! Let us distinguish between the theoretical and abstract right that democracy dangles before our eyes, and the true and tangible right that represents the whole of our interests,

and the starting point of which is an act of conscious individuality.

The right of every individual to rise against oppression and exploitation cannot be denied. The right of a man who stands alone to protest and rebel against all remains inalienable. Should it please the masses to bend their backs beneath the yoke and lick the boots of the masters, what matters it to him? The man who abhors cringing, and, unwilling to submit, rises and rebels, such as man has right on his side against all. His right is clear

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***The right of these masses will only take shape and be worthy of respect when men, tired of obedience and working for others, dream of rebellion.***

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and unquestionable. The right of downtrodden masses, as long as it is restricted to the *Right of Slavery*, is unworthy of notice and cannot be compared to it. The right of these masses will only take shape and be worthy of respect when men, tired of obedience and working for others, dream of rebellion.

Therefore, when a group is formed within which men of judgement come into contact with one another, they need not take the apathy of the masses into account. It is enough for Trade Unionists to regret that non-thinkers lay aside their rights; they cannot allow them the strange privilege of impeding the proclamation and realisation of the right of a thinking minority.

Without any theory having been elaborated beforehand, Trade Unionists were inspired and guided by these ideas when they formed groups. They acted, and still act, in harmony with them.

From this we gather that Trade Union right has nothing in common with democratic right.

The one is the expression of unthinking majorities who form a compact mass that would stifle thinking minorities. By virtue of the dogma "Sovereignty of the people", which teaches that all men are brothers and equals, this democratic right ends by sanctioning economic slavery and oppressing men of initiative, progress, science and liberty.

Trade Union right is the exact opposite. Starting from individual sovereignty and the autonomy of human beings, it ends in agreement in order to live: in solidarity, so that its logical, unquestionable consequence is the realisation of social liberty and equality.

Thus we can understand that by virtue of their individual sovereignty Trade Unionists have grown strong by coming into contact with other identical sovereignties; they do not wait until the nation agrees to manifest their will; they think and they act in the name of all, as if their group were really composed of the masses as a whole. Logic leads them to think and act as if they were those whole of the working class – in fact, the entire nation.

Besides, what proves to us that militant Trade Unionists are justified in considering themselves exponents of the aspirations and the will of all is that when circumstances require it – for example, in a case of strife with their

employers – non-Unionists follow the Trade Union lead and spontaneously group themselves, fighting side by side with their comrades who have organised the movement with patience and energy.

The non-Unionists, the unthinking, need therefore not be offended by this sort of moral guardianship assumed by those with judgement. Militant Trade Unionists refuse none who come with goodwill, and those who are hurt at being treated as unworthy of notice need only withdraw from their inferior position, shake off their inertia, and enter a Trade Union.

More than this, laggards have no right to complain, as they profit by results gained by their comrades who think and fight, and benefit without having had to suffer in the struggle.

Thus the benefits gained by a few are extended to all, which proves the superiority of the Trade Union over democratic right. How far Trade Union principles are removed from middle class platitudes, which teach that every worker is the master of their own destiny! In the working class, every worker has the conviction that when fighting for themselves they are fighting for all, and it never enters their heads to find in this a motive for recrimination or inaction.

The workers despise the narrowness and pettiness of middle-class egoism, that under the cloak of individual

expansion, breeds poverty and disease, and dries up the springs of life. Convinced that mutual aid in order to live is the precondition of all social progress, Trade Unionists identify their interests with the common interest. That is why when they do act, it is not in their own name, but in the name of the people whose destiny

they shape. By further logic they do not limit their activity to their Association, but, stating general claims, they extend it to the whole of the working class. This, when they have wrung an improvement from capitalism, they expect all to benefit by it – all! Non-Unionists! The unthinking, even blacklegs!

This feeling of broadminded fraternity, this profoundly human understanding of social harmony, raises Trade Unionism to a plane of excellence. Its superiority to democratic principles, which only breed shabby tricks,

fratricidal struggles and social conflict, is unquestionable. Therefore, Trade Union right is the expression of the new, profoundly human right that rouses the conscience and opposes ancient dogmas by preparing social regeneration; a society in which the oppressive system of law will be replaced by a system of free contracts consented to by all parties concerned, improvable or revocable at will, in which capitalist production will give way to economic federation, brought about the cohesion of producing groups, whose members will assure to human beings the maximum of well-being and liberty.

## CONCLUSION

It would be more to the point to say, "Introduction," In these articles I have endeavoured to define the ideas that guide Trade Unions. The most important is still to follow. It is to show the harmony of Trade Union action with Trade Union theories, and by an accumulation of facts and examples prove that, even sometimes unconsciously, Trade Unions are inspired by these ideas.

They demonstrate that the application of these guiding ideas greatly influences present society, and that face to face with ancient organisms overtaken by old age, there are being developed germs of a new society in which human beings will evolve without hindrance in the midst of autonomous groups.

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# The Union

Émile Pouget<sup>1</sup>

1904

## The Hell of Wage-Labour

What position does the worker – the employee – occupy in today’s society?

This is what we do not teach in state schools.

It is therefore up to those concerned to improve their education for themselves on this subject, deliberately neglected by bourgeois teachers. Besides, this does not require great knowledge or enormous brain power. You just need common sense.

Social questions are not difficult, abstruse and abstract matters. You do not need to be a genius to convince yourself that all human beings must have a secure existence and not be obliged to lead, from cradle to grave, the life of a slave.

Now, a little insight and reflection leads the worker to realise that this is far from being the case! His fate is at the mercy of the MASTER. Tomorrow’s bread is never secure. Today, if he finds a boss (for whose enrichment he works) who agrees to employ him, he struggles to survive; but, if this boss, for whatever reason, sacks him, here is this worker facing misery... All the worries of unemployment grip him!

The Law (codified expression of the “great” principles of 1789) proclaimed – as a joke? – the Poor the equal of the Rich. And here is this Poor Man, in his capacity as a Free Man, hauling around his carcass in search of an exploiter who wants him as a voluntary slave. If he rebels, refusing to prostitute his muscles and his brain for the benefit of the Bourgeoisie, he only escapes wage-labour to doom himself to Penury.

Is such a fate exceptional?

Alas, no! It is the lot of all workers – this is the fate of the people of the 20th century!

Also, we are led to conclude that there is no essential difference between the precarious existence of the modern wage-worker and that of the Serfs of the Middle Ages.

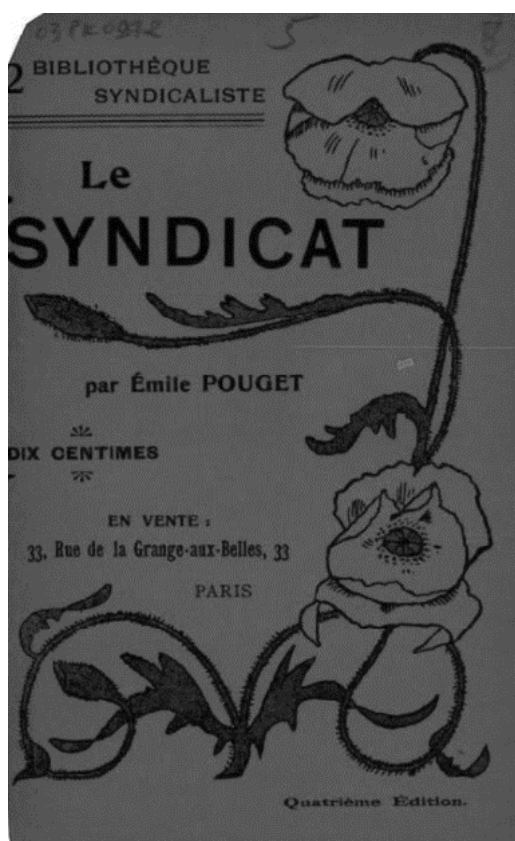
Certainly, the modern wage-worker benefits (in a small proportion) from the scientific and industrial advances that change social living: he eats on plates that would have seemed luxurious to the ancient slave; he is illuminated by oil, candle, gas or electricity, all methods of lighting that are far removed from the smoky lamps or resin torches of the Middle Ages.

But these wonders of the human genius – and so many others that it is superfluous to list them – if they can be the condiments of well-being and happiness, do not constitute the essential elements. To be happy, it is not enough to enjoy the sight of – or even to have, as far as you can afford it – automobiles, railways, telegraphs, telephones, etc.,

Happiness – which is the sublimation of well-being – results from a normal balance between productive effort and the possibility of consuming – a balance that allows you to enjoy life without stresses or worries. Happiness consists in the serenity of mind resulting from the certainty of assured existence, in the present and the future; it consists in not being under the subordination of anyone – no more a boss

than a leader – and knowing yourself, morally and materially, an autonomous being, freed from all the shackles and all the servitudes arising from human wills.

Science, however wonderful the progress it makes, does not alter the social relations which place the Worker under the control of the Capitalist. These relations are always those of Master and Slave. Obviously, over the



<sup>1</sup> New, complete translation. A section was included by Daniel Guérin in *No Gods, No Masters: An Anthology of Anarchism* (AK Press, 2005) as “What is the Union?” and translated by Paul Sharkey.



ages, under the pressure of the spirit of revolt, they have lessened – at least in form.

Nominally, the Wage-worker is a Free Man, whereas the ancient Slave was a living commodity, which was trafficked, and the Serf of the Middle Ages was an impersonal thing, attached to the soil and suffering the vagaries of the domain upon which he vegetated. However, this liberation, completely notional and formal [*toute fictive et légale*], has not released the Wage-worker from his economic subjugation. In fact, he is at the complete mercy of the Capitalist. Nay, in some ways, his fate is more uncertain than that of the Ancient Slave; the latter's monetary value made him appreciated by the owner who had an interest in keeping his "merchandise" in good condition, to avoid depreciation.

Today, the Capitalist no longer owns the Worker – he limits himself to renting him; in this way the exploiter's liability is reduced to a minimum; he only has to answer for "rental risks" and again, in this case – that is to say, in the event of accidents, a sudden breach of contract, etc., – the hirer of workers finds in the law the means to avoid his responsibility.

Then when the productive vigour of the wage-worker declines, the boss suffers no loss: he dismisses this worthless worker, despite the fact that this unfortunate man had for a long time helped build his fortune.

Thus, in today's society, the Proletarian never has tomorrow's loaf assured and his exhausting toil does not secure him from the miseries that he can see in his future: unemployment, illness, old age... And he has no

illusions! He has no hope that with instruction, thrift, resignation – and other soothing "virtues" with which his educators have stuffed him – he will be able to avoid the back luck which, resulting from a defective Social Organisation, strikes indiscriminately and blindly. Indeed, his wage is so insufficient that he consumes it as he goes along, to make ends meet; on the other hand, his situation is always unstable, because he is at the absolute mercy of his boss who, without shame, can throw him into the street today or tomorrow.

### ***How Capital is created***

Contrasting with the fate – uncertain, precarious and joyless – that is the existence of the Worker, that of the Capitalist is crammed with leisure and excess.

However, the happy life of this privileged person is only in appearance the result either of his individual effort or of his personal merit: in reality, it derives from his cunning or his villainy in the monopolisation of Capital – unless the fortune came to him whilst he was sleeping, by chance of birth and by way of inheritance.

Individual effort, no more than personal merit, is not sufficient to explain the establishment of a sizeable fortune: the man who would limit himself to simply accumulating the direct product of his personal labour, who would not increase the meagre wealth thus acquired by making it grow – that is to say, by employing it to exploit his fellows either by trade or by industry – such a person could save a small nest egg, but not become a Capitalist.

To become a Capitalist, it is absolutely necessary *to amass the labour of others*.

What then is Capital?

*Accumulated Labour, crystallised Wealth.*

But in order for the *product of labour – wealth* – to acquire the characteristic of *Capital* it is essential that its accumulation be carried out by others than its creators, a formidable iniquity.

The Workers, by undertaking and transforming the products of Nature according to the needs and desires of humans create *Wealth*.

If this *Wealth*

remained unowned [*impersonnelle*] – social – it would constitute a common asset and, multiplied and enhanced indefinitely thanks to the efforts of all, it would be the source of general well-being.

Unfortunately, this is not yet the case!

*Wealth* – CREATED BY LABOUR – is, at its root, channelled, individualised and monopolised by the exploiters. It is thus transmuted by them, for their selfish benefit, into *Capital*.

Consequently, from its origin, *Capital* emerges as *the product of Theft*.

Here is the process: parasites – either because they are scoundrels or because they have a little "wealth" which they have saved from their personal production –

***Property! Authority!... are merely the manifestation and divergent expression of one and the same "principle" which results in the realisation and consecration of human servitude.***

accumulate “Labour” which they swindle from its real producers and, by this fraudulent transaction, *Capital* is formed. They carry out this “deduction” very simply; if they are industrialists, and supposing that they employ workers producing each and every day a value of fifteen francs, they will keep ten francs under the pretext of general expenses, the return on Capital, etc., and they will distribute the remaining hundred sous as wages to the worker; if they are traders they will sell for eight francs that which is worth three...

There are no nuances or distinctions to be drawn in the abusive and criminal deductions made by the parasitic minority, to the detriment of the productive mass. The *social swindle* is perpetrated with the same intensity in all branches of human activity: the landowner exploits the peasant who cultivates the soil, just as the factory boss exploits the worker and the myriad of merchants, traders, intermediaries, etc. are exploiters in the same way.

### ***Equivalence of Authority and Property***

Thus from a scrupulous examination of economic conditions, it follows that society is divided into two classes as distinct as they are hostile:

On one side, the ROBBERS: the Masters – Capitalists and Landowners;

On the others, the ROBBED: the enslaved – factory and workshop workers, employees, miners, peasants.

But Society does not appear with this schematic simplicity: here the Robber, the Robbed.

Compared to the mass of the Robbed, the Robbers are small in number. Thus, if they had relied for the perpetuation of their privileges only on physical strength or even individual prestige, their reign would not last long. So, to remedy their numerical inferiority, they utilised a ruse: in order to protect themselves against hints of revolt by their victims, the Robbers have secured their plunder with Principles: they proclaimed *Property, Authority... Property*, which is just Authority over things; *Authority*, which is just Property in human beings...

Brigands thus became the privileged and, thanks to the people’s lack of consciousness and ignorance, sanctified their crimes against Humanity.

Appropriately, the revelation of the PRINCIPLES involved intermediaries, a social layer of parasites – the *Pimps* – whose mission consisted in the proclamation, the justification, the defence of the Privileged.

The *Pimps* – privileged themselves – have, thanks to an imbroglio of poisonous institutions, collaborated in keeping the Robbed under the yoke.

Only in times of crass ignorance, when the People’s spirit of enquiry was not to be feared, was the imbroglio of parasitic institutions was uncomplicated; it has

developed in parallel with the rise in the level of popular consciousness – and this is why, today, the number of social pimps is greater than ever before.

Moreover, in order to gain better acceptance, these parasites – priests, judges, military officers, etc. – have known how to give the institutions in whose heart they ensconced themselves an appearance of usefulness; this, in order to encourage the naïve to believe that social life is closely linked to the functioning of these superfluous and repressive cogs. In this way human servitude has been justified and legitimised: *Property, Authority* have become the Palladium of servitude.

But it would be pointless to claim to have established which appeared first amongst the two forms of human constraint symbolised by these two “principles”. One is not prior to the other; neither follows from the other: they are the same. In early times, they merged into each other and if, in the course of time, there has been a split, it was under the influence of the phenomena which led to the division of labour in Humanity. Just as the division of labour was expressed in the useful functioning of society, so it was undertaken in the institutions of servitude. This is why our negation of Property cannot be reconciled with the affirmation of Authority or, visa versa, the affirmation of Property with the negation of Authority.

*Property! Authority!...* are merely the manifestation and divergent expression of one and the same “principle” which results in the realisation and consecration of human servitude. There is therefore only a difference in how they are viewed: seen from one angle, slavery appears as a *Crime of Property*, while, from another angle, it is seen as a *Crime of Authority*.

In Life, these “principles” – muzzles for Peoples – have been expressed in oppressive institutions whose facade alone has changed over the ages. At present, in spite of all the transformations carried out in the regime of Property and the modifications made in the exercise of Authority – all superficial transformations and modifications – submission, constraint, forced labour, hunger, etc. are the lot of the working classes.

This is why the Hell of Wage-Labour is a dismal hell: the vast majority of human beings languish there, bereft of Well-Being and Liberty. And in this hell, despite the democratic trappings which cover it, misery and sorrow flourish in abundance.

### **How to break free?**

Inevitably, a day comes when the above reflections vaguely preoccupy the Worker who, until then, emasculated by prejudices, led astray by bourgeois education, remained voluntarily harnessed to the capitalist yoke, with the indifferent apathy of a plough ox.

From that day onwards, the instinct of revolt – which is only the instinct for progress, made explosive by the

oppression which hinders its logical progression – transforms the Worker: he acquires the sense of his weakness; he notes that it is the result of the isolation and selfishness advocated by the Bourgeoisie. From then on, the desire arises within him to enter into contact with his fellows in order to remedy his individual powerlessness, because he releases that his Weakness with become Strength through the action of the group and thanks to the practice of solidarity.

Moreover, the form of exploitation which he suffers encourages him to organise as a group. Industry has agglomerated him with his fellows in workshops, factories, mills. What could be more natural than to unite with one's comrades? And this unconscious accord led to revolts, also unconscious, but whose relative success gave rise to the trade group.

Therefore, the Worker whose consciousness awakes, sees the need to group together and, quite naturally, he takes the path of the Union.

### *The Essential Grouping*

The trade grouping is, in fact, the sole body which, in its constitution, satisfies the aspirations which drive the Wage-worker: it is the only agglomeration of human beings produced by the absolute identity of interests, since it has its reason for existing in the form of production, upon which it models itself and of which it is merely an extension.

What in fact is the union? An association of workers united by trade ties.

Depending on the situation, this trade combination can be expressed at times by the narrower link of craft or, in the massive industrialisation of the 20th century, embrace proletarians from several trades but whose efforts contribute towards a common task.

However, whatever the form preferred by its members or imposed by circumstances, whether the union agglomeration is limited to the "trade" or encompasses the "industry," the same objective always emerges. Which is:

1. To constantly stand up to the exploiter: force him to abide by the improvements won; stop any attempt to backslide; then, also, to strive to lessen exploitation by demanding partial improvements such as: reduction of working hours, increased pay, better conditions, etc. – changes which, although they relate only to details, are nonetheless effective attacks on capitalist privileges as well as an attenuation of them.
2. The Union aims to cultivate increasing coordination of relations of solidarity, so as to make possible, sooner rather than later, the expropriation of the capitalist, the only basis that can serve as a starting point for a complete transformation of society. It is only after this legitimate social restitution that any possibility of parasitism can be destroyed. Only then – when no one is

obliged to work for someone else, Wage-labour being abolished – will production become social in its outcome as it is onset: at that time, economic life being a genuine fusion of reciprocal efforts, all exploitation will not only be abolished but become impossible.

Thus, thanks to the Union, the Social Question expresses itself with such clarity and acuteness that its obviousness imposes itself upon the least perceptive; the trade grouping unambiguously draws the line

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between Wage-workers and Masters. Thanks to it, Society is exposed as it is: on one side, the Workers – the ROBBED; on the other, the Exploiters, the ROBBERS.

For this reason, because it is the only group which illuminates fully and constantly the antagonism of interests and shows Society divided into two distinct and irreconcilable classes, the Union reveals itself as being the essential grouping – the association par excellence. Therefore it must take precedence over all types of human agglomerates; all must be subordinate to it, for if there are very useful ones, it alone is indispensable.

To remain aloof of the Union, to be willing to ignore it, to steer clear of it, is tantamount for the Worker being disinterested in his own fate. It is therefore logical that all those who do not calmly accept human exploitation and who do not resign themselves to misery should join the trade association. Only there can they meet and work together, sure of not wasting effort. In the Union, in fact, there is no possibility of misunderstanding: given that there is a grouping based on the identity of interests, usefulness is complete.

This characteristic of absolute usefulness is not found in the other various forms of grouping; all of them can have useful aspects, whilst still permitting flaws and

defects to develop which deprive them of the characteristic of necessity.

### ***The Affinity Group***

In this category of useful groupings, although inevitability it does not apply to all, can be placed the AFFINITY GROUPS that, for a long time, the various social and revolutionary schools have advocated as the basis for organising and which some have not hesitated to even proclaim superior to the Union.

The AFFINITY GROUP is a grouping of “ideas”, “opinions” and not “interests”; it is the *Social Circle*, the *Study Group*, the *Popular University*, etc.

There is, in these groupings, intellectual cohesion, moral communion, identity of aspirations, commonalities of hopes and visions of the future, etc., but they lack the material basis which can give these groupings lasting vitality; being only the result of intellectual postulations – and not of tangible interests – they risk breaking up when the aspirations they synthesise cease to be in complete harmony or when lack of success dampens enthusiasm.

It is to these symptoms of disintegration that the stagnation of affinity groupings must be attributed. They can, in periods of heightened social agitation, experience a considerable growth, but this is an artificial phenomenon because their recruiting being subordinated to the acceptance by the new supporters of the theories advocated, it follows that such recruitment is problematic. Then, by the very fact that in these groupings all material interest is lacking, there is a tendency to be selective, to satisfy oneself with abstractions and also to isolate oneself from the mass of the people.

To attend an affinity group, to continue to participate in it, it is necessary to have already undergone an intellectual evolution, to have understood all the horrendousness of current society and want its transformation. The unconscious worker who mistakenly visits runs the risk of feeling estranged by the discussions which take place there and which, furthermore, he does not understand the significance; there is therefore a chance that, lacking the impetus of a tangible benefit, he loses interest and does not return to this circle.

The evidence is there, showing the truth of the matter: the affinity groups which have proliferated for a quarter of a century have not grown steadily, in spite of the intense propaganda they have conducted; their development and vitality have been dependent on individual activities to the point that, when these have faltered or failed, the affinity group has vegetated.

Despite this, it cannot be denied that the work of these groupings was fruitful; in the past they have, in many areas, awakened popular consciousness and, by that

very fact, facilitated the emergence of various kinds of groupings – starting with the Unions.

Therefore, this critique of affinity groups is a simple indication that their activity, however eminently good it may be, is not paramount; it cannot dispense with participating in union action which, because it has its roots in the economic terrain, is the only one qualified to change working conditions and prepare and carry out social transformation.

### ***Union Autonomy***

However superior the Union may be to every other form of grouping, it does not follow that it has an innate and independent existence from that imparted to it by its member. This is why, in order to act as conscious union members, they must participate in the work of the Union. And it would be, on their part, to have no conception of what constitutes the strength of this grouping were they to suppose that they have affirmed themselves perfect union members by doing their duty by the Union financially.

Of course, it is a good thing to pay dues regularly, but that is only the smallest part of what a convinced member owes to himself – and therefore to the Union: he must, in fact, be aware that the Union’s value is less a matter of its monetary contributions than the multiplication of its members’ coherent energy.

The Individual is the constituent cell of the Union. Except the union member is spared the depressing phenomenon which manifests itself in democratic circles where Universal Suffrage is venerated, the tendency to crush and diminish the human personality. In a democratic setting, the voter can use his will only for an act of abdication: he is called upon to “give” his “say” to the candidate whom he wishes to have as a “representative.”

Membership of the Union has no such implications and even the greatest nit-picker could not discover the slightest infringement on the human personality in it: after as before, the union member is what he used to be – afterwards, as before, autonomous he was and autonomous he remains.

In joining the union, the Worker merely enters into a contract, always revokable, with comrades who are his equals, in Will and Power, and at no time will the opinions he may be prompted to utter, the actions in which he may happen to participate, have the suspension or abdication of the personality which distinguish and characterise the ballot.

In the Union, for example, it is a question of appointing a Union Council to take charge of administrative matters. This “selection” is not to be compared with “election”; the method of voting usually employed in such circumstances is merely a procedure whereby labour can be divided and is not accompanied by any delegation of authority. The strictly defined functions of

the Union Council are only administrative. The Council performs the task entrusted to it, without ever overriding the members, without substituting itself for them or acting in their place.

The same can be said of all decisions taken in the Union; all are restricted to a definite and specific act, whereas in the democratic domain, election implies that the elected candidate has received a blank cheque from his electors which allows him to decide and do as he pleases, on everything and for everything... , without

even the hindrance of the possibly contrary wishes of his constituents whose opposition in such a case – however strong it may be – is of no consequence until such time as the elected representative’s mandate has run its course.

So there is no possible parallel – and even less confusion – between Union Action and participation in the disappointing chores of Politics.

In a well-functioning Union, the personality of the Union Member radiates without barriers. In addition to safeguarding his autonomy, it is only in this environment that he can reach his maximum potential.

Of course, it may be that in some current groupings this fullness of life is not attained. But this lack of development should never be for workers – whatever their mentality – a sufficient reason to stand outside the Union. On the contrary! It is incumbent on these who are aware of this deficiency in the trade body, of which they are a part, to contribute to its organisational evolution. If the Union were an institution with rigid structures, into which the working masses must perforce be fitted, a certain reluctance could be understandable. Except this is not the case, the Union is a living body; it is the constantly modifiable extension of the individualities that compose it and it is shaped by the mentality of its members. It is therefore incumbent on them not to allow it to stagnate, nor to become paralysed under the influence of democratic narcotism.

It would be a big mistake to trace the responsibility for the defects that may exist in certain groupings to the very principle of the Union. The opposite is true; if defects are noted in trade groupings, it is because the mass of union members, still imbued with Democratism, have implanted into union circles the political errors which it has been saturated for too long. Consequently, it is incumbent on astute members who

see these defects not to use them as a pretext to become disinterested in the Union and to leave it, but to redouble their efforts to point out the danger in an amicable manner and to strive to destroy it.

Moreover, union activity remedies these defects, which are regressive tendencies, by an impetus which is specific to it: the elimination of the residues of democratism takes place spontaneously, by normal development.

It is inevitable that this is so, for there is no

possibility of agreement between the two doctrines: Trade Unionism and Democratism are two opposite poles which exclude and neutralise each other. Examples abound, which everyone can recall: in all the economic groupings where Politics has infiltrated, disintegration and decline have been noted.

This is because Democratism is a social superfluity, a parasitic and foreign excrescence, while Trade Unionism is the logical expression of an expansion of Life; it is a rational cohesion of human beings and that is why, instead of restricting their individuality, it extends and develops it.

### *The Union, School for the Will*

Socrates’s dictum “Know thyself!” is, in the Union, complemented by the maxim: “Act for yourself!”

Thus, the Union establishes itself as a school for the will: its prime function reflects the Will of its members and, if it is the highest form of association, it is because it is the concentration of the workers’ Strength, made effective by their DIRECT ACTION, an inspiring form of the conscious activity of the will of the proletarian class.

The Bourgeoisie has contrived to preach resignation and patience to the People by giving it hope that progress would be accomplished by a miracle, without effort on its part, thanks to the State’s intervention from without. This is nothing more than the continuation, in less inane form, of millenarian and religious beliefs. Now, while the leaders were trying to substitute this disappointing illusion for the no less disappointing religious mirage, the Workers created in the shadows, with an indomitable and unflinching tenacity the organism of liberation that is the Union.

This organism, a veritable School for the Will, was formed and developed during the 19th century. It is thanks to it, thanks to its economic character that

## **the Union establishes itself as a school for the will: its prime function reflects the Will of its members and, if it is the highest form of association, it is because it is the concentration of the workers’ Strength, made effective by their DIRECT ACTION**

Workers were able to resist inoculation by the virus of politics and defy every attempt to divide them.

It was in the first half of the 19th century that trade groupings were established, in spite of the interdicts aimed at them. The persecution of those who had the audacity to unionise was ruthless, so it took ingenuity to evade repression. So, in order to group together without too much risk, Workers disguised their resistance associations behind innocuous appearances – such as mutual societies.

The Bourgeoisie has never taken umbrage with charitable bodies, knowing very well that, being mere palliatives, they cannot in any way serve as a remedy for the evil of poverty. Hope in charity is a soporific poultice good only for preventing the exploited from reflecting upon their dismal lot and searching for a solution to it. This is why mutual associations have always been tolerated, if not encouraged by rulers.

Workers were able to take advantage of the tolerance granted to these groups: under the pretext of helping each another in the event of illness, of setting up retirement funds, etc., they got together, but in pursuit of a more virile objective: they were preoccupied with improving their living conditions and aimed to resist the employers' demands. Their tactics were not always successful in deceiving the authorities which, alerted by the employers' denunciations, often persecuted these suspect mutual help societies.

Later when the Workers, by dint of experience, *of acting for themselves*, felt strong enough to defy the law, they discarded the mutualist disguise and boldly called their groupings RESISTANCE SOCIETIES.

A splendid name! Expressive and clear. It is a programme of action in itself. It proves how much the Workers – even though trade groups were still embryonic – sensed the necessity not to follow politicians and also not merge their interests with those of the Bourgeoisie, but, on the contrary, to stand against and in opposition to it.

Instinctively, it was the beginning of the CLASS STRUGGLE, which the *International Workers' Association* was to provide the clear and definitive formulation, by proclaiming that “THE EMANCIPATION OF THE WORKERS MUST BE CARRIED OUT BY THE WORKERS THEMSELVES.”

This formula, a brilliant affirmation of Workers' Strength, purged of all dross of democratism, was to serve as a guiding idea for the entire proletarian movement. It was, moreover, merely the open and categorical affirmation of tendencies germinating amongst the People. This is abundantly demonstrated by the theoretical and tactical agreement between the hitherto underground and imprecise “trade unionist” movement and the *International's* initial Declaration.

After having posited as a principle that the Workers have to rely only upon their own forces, the *International's* Declaration complemented the proclamation of the necessity of the Proletariat's autonomy by indicating that it is only by DIRECT ACTION that it can achieve tangible results; it added:

Considering,

That the economic subjection of the worker to the owners of the means of labour, which is to say, the sources of life, is the primary cause of his political, moral and material servitude;

That the economical emancipation of the workers is consequently the great end to which every political movement *must be subordinate as a means*;

Thus, the *International* did not confine itself to clearly proclaiming workers' autonomy; it complemented its Declaration by affirming that political agitations, modifications to the governmental form, should not impress workers to the point of making them forget economic realities.

The current trade union movement is only the logical continuation of that of the *International*; the concordance is absolute and it is on the same footing that we continue the work of our predecessors.

However, when the *International* laid down its premises, the workers' Will was still insufficiently clear-sighted, the proletariat's class consciousness insufficiently developed for the economic approach to prevail without the possibility of deviation.

The working class had to endure the diverting influence of squalid politicians who, seeing the People merely as a stepping-stone, flatter it, hypnotise it and betray it. It also let itself be carried away by loyal, disinterested men who, imbued with democratism, placed too much importance to an excessive statism.

It is thanks to the double influence of these elements that, in the current period (which began with the slaughter of 1871) the trade union movement vegetated for a long time, pulled in various directions. On the one hand, sordid politicians strove to domesticate the unions and make them support the government: on the other, Socialists of various schools endeavoured to ensure that their faction would prevail. So both intended to transform the Unions from “interest groups” to “affinity groups.”

The trade union movement has too vigorous roots, it is too inevitable a necessity for these divergent efforts to be able to hinder its development. Today, it continues the work of the *International*, that of the pioneers of the “resistance societies” and of the initial groupings. Of course, tendencies have become clearer, theories are clarified, but there is an absolute concordance between the 19th century trade union movement and that of the

20th century: one flows from the other! There is a logical development, an ascent towards an ever more conscious Will and expression of the increasingly coordinated Strength of the Proletariat, which blossoms into a growing unity of aspiration and action.

### **Union Work**

Union work has a twofold purpose: it must pursue, with relentless tenacity, improvements in the current conditions of the working class. But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this transient work, workers must be concerned with making possible – and imminent – the essential act of complete emancipation: EXPROPRIATION OF THE CAPITALIST.

The superiority of the Union over other methods of uniting individuals lies in the fact that the work for partial improvements and that more decisive social transformation are carried out simultaneously and in parallel. And it is precisely because the Union reflects this twofold tendency and faces it without destroying any initiative, without stifling any aspiration, without sacrificing the present to the future any more than the future to the present... it is for all this that the Union establishes itself as the grouping par excellence.

### **Current Work**

At present, Union Action aims at the conquest of partial, gradual improvements which, far from being a goal, can only be considered as a means to demand more and wresting new improvements from Capitalism.

The bosses find in the Union a domain of resistance which is in geometric proportion to the resistance of its members: it curbs the appetites of the exploiter; it makes him maintain less draconian working conditions than those resulting from the individual contract inflicted upon the isolated wage-worker. For the one-sided contract between the boss armoured with Capital and the proletarian with nothing, it substitutes the collective contract.

Now, facing the employer stands the Union which mitigates the despicable “labour market”, the supply of hands, by stemming, to a certain extent, the dire consequences of a pool of unemployed workers: which imposes on capitalist respect for workers and also, in proportion to its strength, demands that he stop using perks as incentives [*bribes de privilèges*].

This question of partial improvements served as the pretext to try to sow discord in trade organisations. Politicians, who can only make a living out of the confusion of ideas and who are irritated by the unions’ growing revulsion for their personalities and their dangerous interference, have tried to carry into economic circles the semantic squabbling with which they deceive the voters. They strove to create divisions and to split the Unions into two camps, categorising workers as REFORMISTS and as REVOLUTIONARIES. To better discredit the latter,

they have dubbed them “the advocates of all or nothing” and they have falsely claimed them opponents of improvements possible right now.

This nonsense has no superior than its stupidity. There is no worker, whatever his mentality or his aspirations, who, on principle or by tactics, would insist upon working ten hours for a boss instead of eight, while earning six francs instead of seven.

Yet it is by peddling this idiotic drivel that politicians hope to alienate the working class from economic organisation and dissuade it from acting for itself and from working itself to secure ever greater well-being and freedom. They are counting upon the poison of these calumnies to break up the Unions by reviving inside them the pointless and divisive squabbles which have disappeared since politics was banished from them.

What appears to afford some pretext to such chicanery is that the Unions, cured thanks to the cruel lessons of experience of hopes in government intervention, are justifiably mistrustful of it. They know that the State, whose function is to act as the gendarme of Capital, is by its nature inclined to tip the scales in favour of the bosses’ side. So, when a reform is brought about by legal means, they do not fall upon it with the relish of a frog devouring the red rag that hides the hook; they accept it with the caution it warrants – especially as this reform is made effective only if the workers are sufficiently organised to enforce its implementation.

The Unions are even more wary of gifts from the government because they have often been poisoned chalices. Thus, they have a very poor opinion of “gifts” such as the *Superior Labour Council* and *Work Councils*, institutions invented only to counterbalance and curb the work of the trade groupings. Similarly, they have no reason to be enthusiastic about *mandatory arbitration* and *regulation* of strikes, the clearest consequence of which would be to vex the workers’ capacity for resistance. Likewise the *legal* and *commercial status* granted to the workers’ organisations have nothing worthwhile to offer them, for they see in these the desire to make them abandon the terrain of social struggle, to lure them onto the capitalist terrain where the antagonism of the class struggle would give way to squabbling over money.

But, because that the Unions strongly distrust the government’s benevolence towards them, it does not follow they are reluctant to conquer partial improvements. Only they want them to be genuine. This is why, instead of waiting for Power is bestow them, they extract them by hard-fought struggle – by their DIRECT ACTION.

If, as happens, the improvement they seek is subject to the Law, the Unions strive to obtain it by external pressure upon the Public Powers and not by trying to return specially mandated deputies to Parliament – a



puerile little game that could drag on for centuries before a majority appeared in favour of the dreamt-for reform.

When the desired improvement is to be wrested directly from the capitalist, it is again by vigorous pressure that the trade groupings express their will. Their methods vary – although always based on the principle of DIRECT ACTION: depending on the circumstances, they use the *strike*, *sabotage*, the *boycott*, the *union label*.

But, whatever the improvement conquered, it must always constitute a reduction in capitalist privileges – be a *partial expropriation*.

So, whenever you are not satisfied with the political bombast, whenever you analyse the methods and the value of Union Action, the subtle distinction between “reformist” and “revolutionary” disappears and you are led to the conclusion that the only really reformist workers are the Revolutionary Trade Unionists.

### ***Building the Future***

Alongside the day-to-day defence work, the Unions have the task of preparing for the future.

The producer group must be the cell of the New Society. It is impossible to conceive of a *real* social transformation on any other basis. Therefore, it is essential that the producers prepare for the task of taking possession and of reorganisation which must lie with them and which they ALONE are able to carry out.

It is a social revolution and not a political revolution that we want to make. They are two distinct phenomena and the tactics that lead to one divert from the other.

For the goal we are pursuing, any straying onto the political terrain is a piece of propaganda diverted from its useful purpose. Indeed, supposing that, thanks to parliamentary agitation, an electoral majority was achieved and that this resulted in the creation of a socialist government, what would happen? Could this government, by means of decrees and laws, carry out social transformation? That is extremely unlikely. What we saw during the Commune of 1871 would happen: when the Revolutionary Assembly had decreed that workers could take possession of the workshops abandoned by the bosses – as the economic education of

the workers was unfortunately not done – this decree remained more or less a dead letter.

It may be objected that the hypothesis of the inability of a socialist government with regard to social transformation is very pessimistic. It is, however, only the logical deduction of the necessities of political agitation: on that terrain, the aim is not so much to get the voters to think as to train them to vote “well”. The proof of this lies in the fact that constituencies won by

Socialists later give a majority to the bourgeoisie. Whatever the grubby means employed by the reactionaries to obtain this result, it must be recognised that it denotes amongst the votes, who have thereby changed, an underdeveloped socialist consciousness.

It is therefore absolutely necessary to familiarise yourself with the work of economic transformation. This can only be done in the Union. It is only there that you can examine under what conditions the workers of a trade will have proceeded in order to: 1. remove the capitalists; 2. to

reorganise production and ensure the distribution of products on a communist basis.

As long as their work of preliminary education is not sufficiently advanced so that it permeates an active and powerful enough minority to defeat the forces of the Bourgeoisie, all hope of complete emancipation will be not able to take shape.

As long as the workers have not familiarised themselves enough with the *General Strike* which, in the present circumstances, is the only means to overthrow the capitalist and governmental order, they will have to resign themselves to languishing in Wage-labour.

It is therefore important to understand the scope of this movement for the EXPROPRIATING GENERAL STRIKE; it must be realised it will mean changing the direction of Society, its outward organisation but also altering its foundations completely.

The great cogs of governmental excess, which today seem indispensable – the ministries, the administrations – will be discarded; life will withdraw from them, because new organism will have taken over those few

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[valid] functions of social co-ordination which created the illusion of their usefulness. The main organisms will be the large trade Federations, which will henceforth be responsible for regulating production and satisfying consumption demands.

In addition, in the centres of workers' activity, the trades council [*Bourse du Travail*] will replace the municipality, and become a communist nexus which will get rid of the municipal centre, the Town Hall.

The dominant aspect of this new social aggregation will therefore be an economic decentralisation which will flourish upon the ruins of capitalism and of statist and municipal centralisation.

It is with the utmost urgency that the Union must study these problems of social reorganisation. For each one we must pose the question: "What would do in the event of a General Strike?" For each, depending upon the trade or industry, the answer may vary with regard to the methods of action... but for all will be affirmed the identity of the goal: to educate yourself and to prepare yourself so that the anticipated Revolution is fruitful.

And it would be wrong to abandon this work of gymnastics, which is both educational and speculative; it is necessary to pursue it with as much tenacity as the more down-to-earth task of transient improvements.

It is, in fact, from the perfect balance between these two aspects of Union work that the value of the trade grouping derives.

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The Union, as we have just explored, is therefore not a grouping of stagnation but a grouping of transformation. If it were limited to works of mutualism, if had no other objective than to heal the injuries of life's wounded – which is possible without undermining the capitalist order – its social impact would be null.

It is not that! Above all, and primarily, it is a grouping of struggle; its constant preoccupation is to seek the causes of social evil, to study them, to fight them, to destroy them.

This combative task implies inescapable necessities; as with the Union as with individuals; it cannot confine itself to an arrogant isolation and, to increase its Strength, it must come into contact with its fellows – establish relations with other Unions.

Moreover, the economic organisation of Society obliges the Union to this expansion of activity. A trade is not a walled town wherein it is possible to enclose yourself and ignore the rest of the world; it is open to all and if, out of narrow-mindedness, a privileged trade only cared about itself, the swift influx from outside would quickly remind it that Solidarity is an essential condition of Life.

This vital agreement between Unions is carried out in the Trades Councils [*Bourses du Travail*] and by the conduit of the Trade Federations. The condition and results of this coordination of efforts will be the subject of the next pamphlet: the PARTY OF LABOUR.

### APPENDIX: Union Functioning

To the above theoretical notions, it is useful to add a few brief practical, necessarily concise, details:

How do you create a Union?

Nothing could be simpler. The comrades with initiative who meet for this purpose write statutes, as concise as possible, and register them at the town hall. In addition to this, a formality if required: file at the town hall the names of the administrators who must be of French nationality (one can reduce, if one wishes, the Administration to the bare minimum: a secretary and a treasurer; but, most of the time, these are complemented by a Union Council which can have as many members as you want).

The Union can also be created outside the [legal] Code, without worrying about the 1884 law on Unions. You only have to group and work together while neglecting to deposit the articles of association and the names of the administrators. Until the last few years, many Unions were averse to the law and, if their number has decreased, it is because the Unions feel strong enough not to be in any way hindered by the law.

THE METHOD OF ORGANISING – Depending on the situation, the Union is formed by a craft or by a specific industry. Usually, it groups the workers of a craft and those similar to it. Under the pretext that the law did not clearly stipulate that State or Municipal workers can unionise, obstacles have been placed on the organising of these comrades. Let these not be upset; let them ignore the law, let them unionise, let them be strong! And the authorities will respect their organisations.

In large companies, such as Le Creusot, or in a huge operation like the railways, the Union must unite all categories of workers; the method of organising is, here, indicated by the form of the employer. Indeed, it is obvious that the exploited of these large companies would have hardly any strength for resistance and demands if they established Unions fragmented by craft.

One question interests militants: that of organising by craft or by industry. The first of these two modes of organisation can be criticised for perpetuating a narrow perspective [*esprit de corps*]; but, whatever individual preferences, what must be avoided is that the Union slips into being a grouping of *opinion*. Unions in which "politics" dominate are of this kind as are those classified as "for general labour" [*d'irréguliers de travail* »] and wherein converge workers of various trades. These groups, despite being called a union, are only social groups, where *affinity* prevails over *interest*. For too long, "politics" has been the stumbling block for

Unions; members have to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

Regarding general Unions [*Syndicats d'irréguliers*], they group comrades according to their *opinion* and they open the door to all the dangers of the past; if all workers did the same, there would be no more Unions: there would only be social groups. Moreover, day-to-day action eludes them too much and, what is more, they can only speculate on the work of expropriation in a very abstract manner and not from a trade point of view.

DUES – For the Union to make propaganda, it needs men...and also money! A contribution is therefore necessary. Of how much? The least, 50 centimes; the best, 1 franc per month... It is a small expense, and one which is easy to cover by not having a few glasses at the bar.

You should not, however, be so deluded as to believe that a large union fund can get the better of capitalist ill-will. That is the exception! In most cases, partial strikes only succeed thanks to the support given by all the [other] Unions. So the best union fund is to practice solidarity, to help comrades in struggle... and those who give, will receive when needed. Consequently, the union fund must be constituted primarily for: 1. for propaganda; 2. for solidarity.

GENERAL ASSEMBLIES – The Union Council executes the decision of the general assembly of the Union which, for its part, is always sovereign. All union members must come to the assemblies; if they neglect to attend, they must acquiesce to the decisions made. It

cannot be otherwise, without falling back into the dangers of democratism where those lacking in consciousness and the weak hide the energetic. The decisions of the general assembly must be final, regardless of the number present. The assembly may find it useful, on an important question, to consult by referendum all members, but that decision must be its. If it were the Union Council which, in order not to carry out the decisions made, organised a referendum on its own accord, then it would be nothing less than a small union Coup d'État; it would introduce into the union organism the political system which stifles conscious initiatives under the mass of majorities as compact as they are sheepish.

MUTUALISM – Tendencies from when necessities formerly led Unions to mask their economic action under mutualist appearances have persisted. There are Unions which provide mutual insurance, bestow sickness relief, have retirement funds, etc. There is a danger in this which comrades must be aware of; not that mutuality is bad in itself, but because it could distract the Unions from their work. The Union is an organism of struggle and it would be hoped all works of a mutualist character should not be welded to it and that they should be contributed to by specific payments. The same can be said of Consumer and especially Productive Cooperation. If you want to do it, then let it be alongside the Union. To do otherwise would be to risk narrowing the trade organisation, to make it deviate from its course and would diminish the character of an organism of the social struggle which is its reason for existing.



# The Party of Labour

Émile Pouget<sup>1</sup>

## Its Definition

The Party of Labour is what it says it is, the banding together of the workers into one homogeneous bloc; the autonomous organisation of the Working Class into an aggregate operating on the terrain of the economy; by virtue of its origins, its essence, it shuns all compromise with bourgeois elements.

The grassroots cell of the Party of Labour is the Trade Union and it is by the Trade Unions coming into contact with one another, through their shows of solidarity that the Party of Labour reveals itself, shows itself and acts.

On the one hand, the Trade Union is affiliated to the national federation of its trade; on the other, to its Departmental Union. The federal agencies of these two in turn federate with each other and out of their union comes the agency that marshals the workers energies and interests: the General Confederation of Labour.

This federalism of overlapping concentric circles is a marvellous amplifier of workers; strength; its component parts reinforce one another and the particular strength of each is magnified by the support of all the rest. On its own, the Trade Union has no resources or energies other than its own and could operate in a restricted way only; whereas, through its affiliation to the Party of Labour, it can draw upon the considerable powers afforded it, in a ripple effect, by organised solidarity.

This enormous strength – which defies measurement in that it is forever growing – is the result of association on economic terrain. That is the only basis upon which such a thriving organism with nothing to fear from the intrusion of any disorganising factor can be constructed. In fact, since the construction of this coming-together is in the class interests of the proletariat, any attenuation of its demands and revolutionary power is pointless and every attempted deviation doomed in advance to futility.

The Party of Labour is a party of interests. It takes no account of the opinions of its component members: it

acknowledges and co-ordinates only the interests – be they material or moral or intellectual – of the working class. Its ranks are open to all of the exploited regardless of their political or religious views.

Yes, the Party of Labour ignores opinions, no matter what they may be! On the other hand, it goes after the exploitation of human beings in whatever form this may assume.

A worker with baroque philosophical or political views – who may be a believer in some God or in the State – will have his place alongside his comrades within the ranks of this party. But what comes in for criticism within this party is the exploitation of theological, political or philosophical creeds; what is reproached is the intrusion of priest or politician, both of whom make a livelihood out of speculating with peoples beliefs.

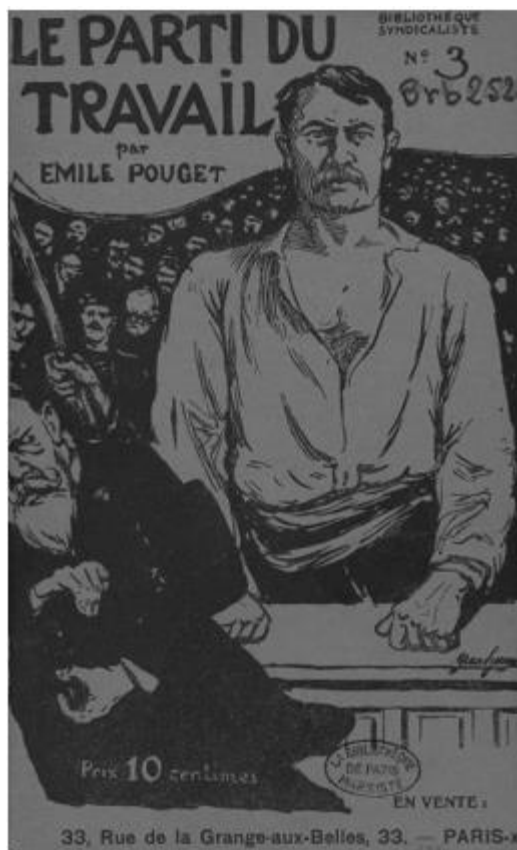
Within the party, there is a place for all of the exploited, even if many of them (in today's society where there is nothing but absurdity and crime) are obliged to buckle down to pointless or indeed harmful undertakings.

The worker in the arms plant, the builder of warships, etc., are

engaged in noxious tasks: they are doubly the victims of bad social organisation since they are not only exploited but must also do their bit towards malevolent activity. However, their place is still inside the Party of Labour.

By contrast, anyone who is, by virtue of his personal function, a bringer of harm – the informer, say – is to be shunned. Such a person is a parasite of the most revolting type: sprung from the working class, he has debased himself with the vilest of undertakings: as a result, only in the bourgeoisies' ranks is there any place for him.

Thus the Party of Labour stands apart from all other parties by virtue of this essential fact: that in banding together those who work against those who live from exploitation of human beings, it marshals interests and not opinions. Thus, of necessity, there is a unity of outlook in its ranks. Among the personnel making up



<sup>1</sup> English translation by the Kate Sharpley Library (1999).

the more or less moderate, more or less revolutionary schools of thought, such a unity of outlook is feasible (and exists!); but such differences on the detail neither invalidate nor breach the trade unionist unity that arises from identity of interests. This power to absorb individual differences, under the umbrella of the agreement that necessarily springs from a community of interest, gives the Party of Labour an edge in terms of vitality and action and affords it an immunity from the blights afflicting the political parties.

Inside every party – the Party of Labour excepted – the over-riding objective is “policy”, and on the basis of a similarity of opinions, men of divergent interests – exploiters and exploited (and one must be either one or the other!), are thrown into one another’s company. This is a characteristic of all democratic parties. They are, all of them, a motley collection of men whose interests run counter to one another.

Not that this anomaly is peculiar to the bourgeois democratic parties. It also disfigures socialist parties which, once having set foot upon the slippery slopes of parliamentarism, come to jettison the specific characteristics of socialism and become nothing more than democratic parties, albeit of a more accentuated variety.

More and more capitalists, bosses, etc. are being won over to socialism and these reconcile their parasitical existence as best they can with the acting out of their beliefs. One of the things that attracts recruits from the enemy camp is the deviation in the direction of parliamentarism. Whereas they have not quite completely been eliminated, then at least the fact that the theory of taking government power has relegated revolutionary concerns to the background, has whetted some appetites. And these defectors from the bourgeoisie have calculated the benefits of turning socialist and cherish the hope of gaining the upper hand in that way. So much so that there are those who become socialists the way that others become lawyers or publicans. It is regarded as a career move – an excellent way of getting ahead?

The Party of Labour need have no fear of such dangers. By virtue of the very fact that it is constructed upon the class interests of the proletariat and that its action takes place in the sphere on economics, there is no way that individuals can rely upon it or invoke it in the satisfaction of their selfish interests. The contradiction there is formal and insurmountable. Indeed, since the gratification of personal ambition is feasible only in the realm of “Politics”, any who attempt any such chicanery and pursue a selfish private interest within the Party of

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Labour can accomplish but one thing: their own self-exclusion from the labour camp.

The same phenomenon can be seen when a working man becomes an employer: even though the parvenu may still be motivated by good intentions and cling to his revolutionary aspirations, as a rule he is excluded from collective groupings – his Class interests having changed.

The same thing goes for the “parvenu” in politics: he quickly drops out of trade union activism and, in most cases, once he has achieved his purposes, and risen to the desired elevation, he willingly steps aside and refrains from all activity within the economic organisation.

Now, if individual deviations are incompatible with the organisational make-up of the Party of Labour, it is all the more firmly to be excluded as a possibility that that body as a whole should succumb to a deviation that would be nothing short of its very negation. By virtue of the very fact that it is constituted upon the class interests of the Proletariat, it cannot at any time or in any fashion be a breeding ground for the ambitious. It cannot turn into a party of “politicians”. Apart from the fact that that would be lapsing back into past errors which exhausted the working class in futile struggles and in efforts that brought it no benefit (albeit that they were not futile and without benefit for those keen to speed their progress up the ladder!), such a comprehensive deviation would be tantamount to an affirmation that the proletariat, deserting the prey for its shadow, would disdain to win economic and social improvements and be wholly consumed instead by the pursuit of political illusions.

So just as it is unthinkable that the Working Class should lay aside its interests, it is also unthinkable that the Party of Labour should turn into a democratic party.

### Its necessity

The Party of Labour is a direct by-product of Capitalist Society: it is the concert of proletariat forces, for which the Working Class logically strives from the moment it wakes up to its interests.

The current Society is made up of two classes whose interests run counter to each other: the Working Class and the Bourgeois class: consequently, it is only natural that each of these should rally around its own social pole – the workers around one, the exploiters around the opposite social pole.

The coming-together of the Working Class makes up the Party of Labour: it, therefore, is the aggregation suited to the form of exploitation, which is why it emerges spontaneously with no preconceived notion governing its co-ordination.

It would be a waste of time for us to dwell upon demonstrating the existence within Society of two antagonistic social classes which, far from amalgamating into one homogeneous unit, merely accentuate their differences. That is a fact so patently obvious that we need not labour the point.

This irreconcilable antagonism is the result of the seizure by the ruling class of all of the assets of Society – its instruments of labour, property and resources of all sorts. From which it follows that the lower class is obliged, in order to survive, to submit to the conditions foisted upon it by these grasping types.

Such deference to the capitalist by the proletarian who, in return for his labour, receives a wage considerably less than the value of the labour forthcoming from him, the wage-slave, is, the Bourgeoisie contends, a natural phenomenon. They even venture to argue that the wage is not subject to change – and are none too bothered in their contentions by the successive disappearances of slavery and serfdom, which ought to caution them against the absurdity of arguing that Property (as held by them) alone is the exception to the laws of Life which are movement and change. However, even as they contend that the waged – as a Class – are doomed to eternal exploitation, they see fit to blind them with the chimera of individual emancipation, dazzling their victims with the possibility of escaping Wage Slavery and taking their place in the ranks of the capitalist class.

Aside from the fact that as far as the Bourgeoisie is concerned such hopes have the merit of inducing the exploited to bear their misfortune with patience, they neutralise or at any rate slow down the growth of class consciousness among the Proletariat.

The education and training bestowed upon younger generations have no other purpose: those generations are subjected to a method of intellectual castration based upon rehearsal of prejudices, peppered with preaching about resignation, as well as incitements to unrestrained self-seeking.

The argument is that in the present society, everyone has the bed he has made for himself and the place he deserves: that, if one is to make it one has to be an honest, sober, intelligent worker and so on. What is not said, although it is implied, is that to these qualities, one more must be added: one must be devoid of scruples and elbow one's way ahead without regard to ones fellows.

In the bourgeois view, life is an ongoing struggle of human against human; society is an arena where each is the enemy of all.

Distracted by such sophistry, the Proletarian at first dreams of individually breaking free of Wage Slavery. Since work underpins everything and since wealth is

there for the taking for those who display order and perseverance, he will make his fortune! Moreover, in his view, Wealth is only the achievement of independence and freedom and the assurance of well-being. But alas! He must discard his dreams. Reality requires it and he has to admit that it is materially impossible for the workers to attain the yearned for relief. Before he could achieve individual emancipation, he would have to own his instruments of labour and the wherewithal to set them

**For as long as social relations remain as they are – the relation of employer to wage slave, of ruler to ruled – the problem will remain and class struggle will be an inevitable phenomenon.**

in motion. Now, modern production, being formidably industrialised, requires such considerable capital outlay that a worker would have to be mad to imagine that he might set aside, out of his wages, the capital he requires to acquire a factory.

To be sure, some proletarians do step out from their class: thanks to exceptionally favourable circumstances, some powerful personalities without scruples as to the choice of method do manage to inch their way into the bourgeoisie. There are even some cases of men who

started out as workers (Carnegie, Rockefeller, etc.) turning into the kings of wealth.

The bourgeoisie has taken these upstarts to its bosom. It is all the more pleased to welcome them aboard because, by introducing an injection of new blood, they consolidate its privileges: moreover, it parades them by way of unanswerable arguments to show that it is easy for parsimonious working men to become bourgeois.

It would be naive of the workers to let themselves be tempted by this bait and to content themselves with hopes of just such an eventuality. That would be tantamount to letting themselves be lulled by the same song as the shepherdesses of legend who dreamed of a Prince Charming showing up to ask for their hand in marriage.

And then what? Even if it were true that the most gifted members of the proletariat can make their fortune, the situation of the mass of them would not have altered: the workers would carry on slaving for their exploiters, grazing materially and spiritually, with no prospect to look forward to but the repose of the grave.

Thus the individuals escape from wage slavery, which anyway means that those who make it are obliged to exploit their class brothers, offers no remedy to the social ills afflicting the proletariat. Such escapes can only occur on a small scale and all that they imply is a few adjustments to a few individual situations, having no impact upon the fate of the workers as a whole, who carry on slaving for the benefit of the masters and rulers.

Furthermore, even were the numbers achieving comparative ease, indeed wealth, larger, that would do nothing to erase the antagonism that pits the producer class against the parasite class. For as long as social relations remain as they are – the relation of employer to wage slave, of ruler to ruled – the problem will remain and class struggle will be an inevitable phenomenon.

Even if we were to suppose that the moans of the masses crushed and broken on the social battlefield were to trouble the peace of mind of the smug and those who, out of a spirit of charity or guile, may deign to cater for the material lives of the exploited, amalgamation of the classes would not be the outcome of such intervention and society would not be pacified by that remedy.

It has often been said: “Man does not live by bread alone!” Which is why the social question is not just a material problem. For us to be happy and content, it is not enough that we should be assured of our “crust”: we also want to be free of all impediment and all domination: we want to be free, to be beholden to none and to have no relations with our neighbours other than those founded on equality, regardless of the differences in our abilities, expertise and functions.

The point therefore is to work a change in the structure of society so that henceforth there is only one category, one class possible: that of the producers. Such essential change can only be wrought on the basis of communism – communism alone being able to guarantee that every individual enjoys complete autonomy and unfettered scope for development.

Once upon a time, before big industry drove the artisan from his tiny workshop – and stripped him off the instrument of his labours – the working man had some prospect of carving out a rough, but independent existence for himself. Today, in industry, such a dream is feasible only in exceptional cases.

Even now in the countryside the peasant can hope to carve out a comparatively free existence upon a tract of land. However, such liberation is tending to become more and more fraught with difficulties (and in most cases very precarious) because of the confiscation of the land by the rich, because of the escalating taxes and the rapaciousness of the middlemen. And anyway, the peasants liberation is accompanied by such worries! He lives in constant terror of the tax collector, the moneylender and leads a joyless, crushingly bleak existence slaving like an ox.

Such autonomy of peasant and artisan, gained at huge effort, is a particularly illusory emancipation in that both are beholden to capitalism and their earnings are modest, in comparison with the amount of toil required of them. They are society’s hybrids who do not quite fit the description bourgeois, nor are they wage-slaves: they are a hang-over from the artisanate and the peasantry: although not readily classifiable, their interests and those of the working class are the very same. At present, though, they can be taken to task for preferring their own fate to that of the wage slave: except that they ought to be saying to themselves that their living conditions are a hang-over from the past and that it is in their interest to lend a hand in the coming social change: indeed, they have much to gain from offering no resistance to the Revolution, and instead playing a part in its success and adapting to the new modes of production and distribution.

So we can see how illusory is the bait of individual emancipation held out by the bourgeoisie: of the several methods of personal escape from Wage Slavery hypothetically on offer, none is liable to be widely taken up and thus cannot be embraced by the workers at large as a remedy to their sad lot, for none is likely to provide for a free and comfortable existence for all.

So, if this dream of individual escape from wage slavery has been peddled by the bourgeoisie, it is because the bourgeoisie has seen it as a siding that can stop the working class from attaining class consciousness. By stimulating appetites and over-stimulating selfish ambitions, it has counted upon keeping the Proletariat divided against itself indefinitely so that with each



individual's head filled with thoughts of nothing but the scramble to get ahead, his only concern will be with climbing on his comrades backs, which will act as a brake upon the spirit of revolt and nullify innate tendencies towards solidarity.

But the human being could not resign himself fatalistically to perpetual slavery: the seeds of discord and hatred which the bourgeoisie look forward to seeing sprout from the People's hearts so that its own security can be assured are a weed, the spread of which cannot forever strangle the growth of instincts of sociability, for life through agreement is every bit as crucial to the survival of human society as the ferocious struggle to survive is dear to the exploiters.

Consequently, in spite of the sophistry and the falsehoods with which its head is filled, it was inevitable that the proletariat should attain consciousness of its class interests, especially as the merest flickering glimmer of reason had to open its eyes to the fact that society's afflictions are not inescapable.

Why these striking, revolting inequalities? How come there are wretches who want for their daily bread when there are some who cannot think up ways of squandering their surplus? How come men are paid only inadequate wages for hellish toil when there are parasites wallowing in comfort and luxury?

What is the reason for it all? Is agricultural and industrial output not up to meeting everyone's needs?

No! In the course of his active life, any man devoting himself to useful toil produces more than he needs to match what he consumes (in food, clothing, accommodation, etc.), and then some; over that time he produces as well enough to reimburse the community for the advances it has made to him to rear him to manhood and he also produces enough to ensure that he has the wherewithal to live when, overtaken by old age, he will not be able to work any longer.

Now, if the existence of every single person is not guaranteed, for the present as well as for the future, out of this fund of intense personal productivity, the reason is that this wealth is not being used to guarantee the upkeep of those with a natural entitlement but is diverted by the capitalist class away from its social destination and mainly turned to its own benefit.

That the level of agricultural and industrial productivity is high enough for everyone's needs to be met is now incontrovertible.

In industrial terms, production potential is, thanks to the tremendous improvement in tools, well-nigh unlimited: so true is this that in spite of the prudence of industrialists who each try to tailor their workers output to the commercial demands of the market, there often is a glut in the shape of over-production. Those hardest hit in such circumstances are the workers: it is they who suffer the painful consequences of such crises, because,

in order to restore the balance, the exploiters cannot think of any better solution than to slow down production, which leads to unemployment and leads to even greater wretchedness for the working class.

On the agricultural scene, the picture is equally sombre: the object of farming is not to reap mammoth harvests and thereby create food in great abundance: the object of farming is to sell at a profit. Now since sale prices slump in years when the harvest has been good, whereas man-power tends to become more expensive, farmers would rather a passable than an abundant harvest, the former being more easily and more profitably disposed of.

So here we have the general position: abundance of produce of all sorts is dreaded rather than desired and there is a tendency to keep the supply low so that it can be sold dear. The needs of the mass of humanity never figure among the preoccupations of the capitalists who preside over production: we have the monstrous spectacle of entire peoples bereft of the means of survival – and all too often literally perishing of hunger – when there is an adequate supply of food, clothing and accommodation available.

Such a glaring iniquity is condemnation enough, without further arguments being required, of the social organisation that engenders it. It is utterly necessary that this monstrous system of distribution that vests almost everything in an exploitative, parasitical ruling minority, most of whom have little or no hand in wealth creation, should be overthrown. Now, given the extent of industrial and scientific development, such a solution seems practicable only thanks to a fundamental transformation: the system of exploitation that marshals human resources in order to set them to producing for the benefit of the confiscator of natural resources and instruments of labour must be replaced by a system of solidarity taking natural resources and the instruments of labour into common ownership and setting them to work for the benefit of all.

This change is an ineluctable necessity and its advent is hastened as the working class acquires a better understanding of its class interests. But this task of reorganising society can only be carried out and brought off in a context purged of all bourgeois contamination. This function of acting as midwife to the new society thus falls legitimately upon the shoulders of the Party of Labour, the sole agency which, by virtue of its very make-up, excludes all of the dross of society from its ranks.

Consequently, the marshalling of the working class into a bloc separate from all the parties – and with appropriate tactics and methodologies of its very own – is no flash in the pan; it is an inherent requirement of the present context, for only in such a party – which implies perfect homogeneity and utter identity of interests – can it feel utterly at home.

Anywhere else, any other grouping is open to infiltration by elements of the propertied class and the ambitions of individuals can have noxious implications. Which is why none of them can boast the unity of outlook, action and aim that are automatically attributes of the party of the proletariat class: which is why none is so plainly qualified to prosecute and accomplish the task of social revolution, expropriation and reorganisation.

#### **Its Aim**

The Party of Labour is the party of the future. In the harmonious society whose day is coming, there will be no place for anyone but Labour: parasites of every sort will of necessity be eliminated from it. So it is only natural that the Party of Labour, the crucible in which the social combinations of yearned for tomorrows are made, stands outside of all the existing parties. This is especially unremarkable since it stands apart from them by virtue not only of its form of cohesion, but also in terms of the aim it pursues and the methodologies it advocates and practises.

Whilst other parties have as their objective the retention or removal of the government line-up – according as they reckon that it is, or ought to be favourable to their own appetites, their ambitions or quite simply to their cronies – the Party of Labour ignores this outward and quite superficial business and sets its cap at working an internal and external change in the elements of society; it labours to change mind-sets, forms of association and economic relationships.

The goal it pursues is thoroughgoing emancipation of the workers. Espousing as its own the watchword of the *International Working Men's Association*, of which it is the logical heir, it takes it as inevitable that that emancipation will be the working class's own doing, without meddling by outside or heterogeneous elements. It is obvious that, if it is not to be a mirage, that emancipation will have to imply the elimination of the bourgeois class and the utter demolition of its privileges.

Which is to say that the Party of Labour aims at a radical transformation of the social system.

Examination of economic phenomena demonstrates that that transformation must be achieved through neutralisation of private property and the burgeoning of a communist arrangement, so that the current relations between individuals – the relations of wage-slave to capitalist, of led to leader – may be turned into relations of equality and liberty.

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In fact, there will be no thoroughgoing emancipation unless exploiters and leaders disappear from the scene and tabula rasa made of all capitalist and state institutions. Such an undertaking cannot be effected peaceably, much less lawfully! History teaches that the privileged have never surrendered their privileges without having been compelled so to do and forced into it by their rebellious victims. It is unlikely that the bourgeoisie is blessed with an exceptional greatness of soul and will abdicate voluntarily...Recourse to force, which, as Karl Marx has said, is “the mid-wife to societies”, will be required.

So the Party of Labour is a party of Revolution.

Except that it does not regard the Revolution as a future cataclysm for which we must wait patiently to see emerging from the inevitable working-out of events. Such pious awaiting of the final catastrophe would be nothing more than transposition to and continuation upon materialist ground, of the old millenarian dreams.

The Revolution is an undertaking for all times, for today as well as tomorrow: it is continual action, a daily battling without let-up or respite, against the forces of oppression and exploitation. A rebel embarked upon a revolutionary act is one who, repudiating the legitimacy of present society, works to undermine it.

It is to this unrelenting task of Revolution that the workers in their Trade Unions are committed. They regard themselves as being in ongoing insurrection against capitalist society and, within its bosom, they are hatching and developing the embryo of the society wherein Labour will be All.

However, in spite of this consistently subversive stance, they are prey to the requirements of bourgeois rule: but, whilst deferring to the needs of the present, they do not conform to the forms of legality and do not bless it with their acquiescence, even when it decks itself out with reforming colours. Their revolutionary efforts are designed to wrest partial improvements from the bourgeoisie, improvements that they never mistake for definitive. Thus, whatever the improvement they gain, and however significant it may seem, they always declare it to be inadequate and, as soon as they have the measure of their strength, they waste no time before demanding more.

There is another advantage to these struggles which are forever being relaunched in ongoing harrying of the exploiters, quite apart from the fact that they undermine and dismantle capitalist institutions, and that they blood and strengthen the working class.

It is this posture of ongoing insurrection against definitive conformity with existing conditions that marks the revolutionary character of the Party of Labour.

It is a mistake to imagine that violence is always characteristic of a revolutionary act: such an act can also assume a very moderate shape displaying nothing of the destructive brutality which our adversaries point to as the essential feature of revolutionism.

Indeed, it should not be forgotten that in most circumstances the act in itself has no definite character: it acquires one only as the motives that prompted it are subjected to analysis. Which is why the same acts can, according to the case in point, be declared good or bad, just of unjust, revolutionary or reformist. For instance: killing a man on the corner of the boulevard is a crime: killing him using a guillotine is, from the bourgeois point of view, an act of justice: killing a despot is an act glorified by some and despised by others. And yet these various acts are in fact the same: a human life is ended!

It follows therefore that the revolutionism of the working class can manifest itself in very anodyne actions just as its reformist mentality might be underlined by unduly violent acts. This, moreover, is what we can see in the United States: strikes there are often marked by acts of violence (renegades executed,

dynamite outrages, etc.) which are not indicative of a revolutionary frame of mind, in that the object the strikers have in mind is restricted to improvements that pose no challenge to the principle of exploitation: the current society looks bearable to them and doing away with wage slavery does not enter their minds.

As a result, the index of the Party of Labour's revolutionary character is that, without ever neglecting to fight for minor improvements, it aims at the transformation of capitalist society into a harmonious society.

Improvements, secured on a day to day basis, are thus merely stages along the road to human emancipation: the immediate material advantages they bring are matched by a considerable moral benefit: they bolster the working class's ardour, stimulate its desire for betterment and prompt it to press for more significant change.

The only thing is that it would be the most dangerous of illusions to confine Trade Union action to the securing of partial improvements: that would be to slide into a morbid reformism. Important though such improvements may be, they are not enough: they are

merely a partial claw-back of the bourgeoisies' privileges: as a result, they do not tinker with the relations between Labour and Capital. No matter how splendid these improvements might be imagined to be, they leave the worker still under the rule of wage-slavery: he is just as dependent upon his Master as ever! Now what the working-class needs is complete liberation: which means wholesale expropriation of the bourgeoisie.

That decisive act, the culmination of preceding struggles, implies utter ruination for privilege, and, whereas the preceding struggles may have been pursued peacefully, it is unimaginable that the ultimate clash will come to pass without some revolutionary conflagration.

### Historical Summary

The Party of Labour finds organisational expression in the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) which was launched in Limoges at the Trade Union congress held there in 1895. But if we wish to investigate its gestation and lineage, we must look a lot further back in time: there is a direct line showing the Party of Labour to be an emanation of the INTERNATIONAL WORKING

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Throughout the 19th century, the workers fought with indefatigable tenacity to break through the impediments imposed by the bourgeoisie upon their wishes to band together: instinctively, they set up class groupings (embryonic, naturally), under cover of mutual associations or in the shape of resistance societies. When at last the International Working Men's Association was established, a tremor of hope ran through the proletariat: its aspirations, hitherto ill-defined, acquired substance and the future struck it as a less bleak prospect.

In fact, in its "givens", the *International* framed the programme of the Party of Labour: it declared:

That the emancipation of the workers must be the workers own doing...

That the subjection of the worker to capital is the source of all servitude: political, moral and material

That, on that basis, economic emancipation is the great goal to which all political movement must be SUBORDINATE.

That all efforts to date have failed, *for want of solidarity between the workers of various trades within each country and of a fraternal union between the workers of various countries.*

There is a formal linkage of theory and tactics: the only differentiation made is in the mode of association, which is henceforth to be the *interest group* – the Trade Union – whilst within the *International*, general agreement was established through the affinity group – the branch – into which motley elements poured. It has to be pointed out, though, that this difference in the mode of association was something of a consequence of the conditions in which the social struggle was conducted under the Second Empire: so it would be incorrect to see it as a derogation from the principle of class struggle, especially as the "givens" cited above are indicative of the importance that the internationalists gave to trade association.

But it was not long before two camps emerged within the ranks of the *International*: on one side, the centralists, the authoritarians, including Karl Marx who, in accordance with the formula devised by his disciple Eccarius, called for "the conquest of political power in order to pass laws for the benefit of the workers": and, on the other, the federalists or autonomists loyal to the spirit of the International who fought against this tendency "in the name of the social revolution we

espouse, whose programme is: *Emancipation of the workers by the workers themselves*, outside of any directing authority, even should said authority be elected and agreed by the workers."<sup>1</sup>

And the autonomists went on to add:

The society of the future should be nothing more than the *International's* universalisation. So we ought to take care to match that organisation as closely as possible to our ideals. How could one expect an egalitarian, free society to emerge from an authoritarian organisation? That would be an impossibility. It behoves the *International*, as the embryo of the human society of the future, to be, from this moment forth, the faithful reflection of our principles of freedom and federation and to cast out any principle leaning towards authority and dictatorship.

The Party of Labour espouses these principles of autonomy and federalism as its own.

### ***Trade Union recovery***

In the wake of the events of 1870-1871, following the ghastly massacres that followed the crushing of the Commune, the bourgeoisie, drunk on the bloodshed, reckoned that it had purged the working class for good of any inclination to press its claims. It forgot that the spirit of revolt is a by-product of a bad social milieu and not the result of subversive preaching and that it would inevitably return as long as the context remained likely to favour its development.

By the final years of the reign of Napoleon III, the Trade Unions had grown so much that they dared to organise themselves into a Federation and, although that rudimentary agency bound together only the Parisian unions, its propaganda activity and solidarity activity reached out into the provinces. These federated unions were simultaneously affiliated to the *International*: they took a hand in uprisings and, after the storm had passed, those which had not foundered utterly had to hold their tongues.

In 1872, a forerunner of yellow unionism, Barberet<sup>2</sup> thought that the time had come – with the revolutionaries crushed or scattered – to federate what few unions were left and steer them along the paths of righteousness. Twenty five unions answered his call, but the moral order was in such a fright about workers organisations that it banned the *Cercle de l'Union syndicale*. Whilst no direct measures were taken against the unions, their isolation and weakness was a comfort

<sup>1</sup> This quotation, like the next one, is lifted from the Circular issued by the Jura Federation congress held in Sonvilier (Switzerland) on 12 November 1871. The signatories included one Jules Guesde who subsequently ...

<sup>2</sup> In return for his attempts at domesticating the workers, Barberet was appointed (sometime around 1880) the mutualist great Manitou at the Interior ministry.

to the government: they carried on existing on the fringes of the Code, merely tolerated.

Between then and 1876 Trade Union activity showed itself in delegations to the Expositions in Vienne (1873) and Philadelphia (1876), which delegations created temporary liaison between the various groups, but, reactionary though it may have been, they could scarcely have caused the government a second thought.

Growing bolder, the plan emerged for a labour congress: it met in Paris in 1876 and delegates from 70 Parisian unions and from 37 towns (with mandates from one or more trades associations) took part in it. The figures give some clue as to the growing vigour of the Trade Union movement: one year earlier, in 1875, figures rather higher than the real ones placed the number of existing unions at 35 in Paris and provinces alike, manifest proof that the workers did not wait for the licence granted under the 1884 legislation before setting up their unions. The 1884 law merely registered a *fait accompli*: the bourgeoisie, unable to thwart the rise of the Trade Unions, put a brave face on things by granting them legal recognition.

At the first congress in 1874 Barberet had pontificated: however, objections were voiced to his presence and from then on, it was made plain that authentic labour organisations jealous of their dignity and autonomy would never condescend to allow themselves to be tamed.

At that time, the demarcation lines between political organisations and trades associations were blurred: social studies groups and Trade Unions engaged in joint propaganda, took part in workers congresses, etc. and did so all the more agreeably for political concerns being relegated to the background. The movement was plainly anti-parliamentary: all of the revolutionaries joined forces to see off the *Barberettiste* menace.

That danger averted – it was warded off once and for all at the Marseille congress (1879) and the Le Havre congress (1880) – a number of schools of thought surfaced. For a start there was the division between the anti-statists, steadfast advocates of anti-parliamentarism (the anarchists) and those who, with the seal of approval, of Karl Marx after he put his “Minimum Programme” into circulation, laid claim to the designation of collectivists and leapt into the parliamentary arena, hypnotised by the hope of capturing power. There was a rational basis to that first split, in that it arose from divergent outlooks. It became apparent that personnel who made everything secondary to capturing public office and those who still staked all their hopes upon revolutionary action could no longer travel the same road.

But if that split was explicable in terms of a difference of principle, the same cannot be said of the splits that came after: they were simply the consequences of regrettable but inevitable electoral competition. The

desire quickly to capture a majority of votes cast led to a watering-down of the programme: the diehards, faithful to the “Minimum Programme”, were called *Guesdists*, after their leader Jules Guesde, and they hung the label of *Possibilists* on those who were more inclined to follow Paul Brousse and Joffrin.

It was the Saint-Etienne congress in 1882 that their paths separated: the Guesdists found themselves outnumbered there and after some stormy proceedings they withdrew to hold a congress in Roanne.

A few years on, in 1890, a further split added to the dispersion of worker elements: this split hit the Possibilist ranks at the Chatellerault congress: the moderates turned into followers of Brousse (*Broussists*) whereas the revolutionaries whose sympathies lay with Allemane were described as *Allemanists*.

These internecine squabbles had a particularly damaging effect because the Trade Union groupings were an integral part of the various feuding factions and, quite naturally, professed to belong to this faction or the other, in line with the preferences of the militants by whom they were headed. This state of affairs led to an understandable weakening of the Trade Unions: the more or less conscious workers were too inclined to keep them at arms length – as were those who looked to a faction other than the one that held sway within their own trade association. Trades organisations, neutered by political jockeying, were thus reduced to having scarcely any more influence than the social studies groups with whom they rubbed shoulders when workers congresses were held.

### *Towards autonomy*

One can only be wrong-footed for a certain length of time. The Trade Unions gained strength. Being the essential coming-together, they are too necessary a thing for the political jockeying acted out within their ranks to do any radical damage.

The unions grew and, as they grew, becoming conscious of their *raison d'être* and the mission that has fallen to them, they dreamed of wriggling free of political tutelage. The first sign of this was the organisation of a congress that met in Lyon in 1886. Participation was open only to Trade Union delegates: the main issue posed was the creation of a Federation to liaise between the unions.

The government believed that this distancing of the unions from irksome, discordant political concerns was going to serve its own plans for domesticating the workers and, in the hope of a resurgence of *Barberettisme*, it advanced subsidies for the congress.

How cruelly disappointed it was! Examination of the 1884 law on trades unions was the touchstone issue at the congress. This law, only recently implemented, was gone over with a fine-tooth comb. It was established that the unions had not at all waited for its promulgation

before expanding and that its only justification was a capitalist desire for self-preservation and an ulterior notion that the trades union movement might prove susceptible to be channelled through it.

Then it was decided that a *National Federation of Trade Unions* should be launched to marshal trades bodies on a class struggle basis against the powerful organisation of the bourgeoisie, for the purposes of offence and defence.

But, considerable though they were, the ravages of politics were not yet, in everyone's mind, sufficiently plain for any thought to be given to preventive action against their repetition. No prophylactic steps were taken and so the Trade Union Party which tended to make its stand outside of the various schools of socialism continued to come under fire from that quarter and the Trade Unions remained in thrall to those schools. However, in spite of the climate of the Federation of Trade Unions being still heavy with the miasma of politics, the thinking peculiar to trade unionism was hatching and gathering weight there. Thus, at its third congress, held in Bordeaux in 1888, the principle of the general strike was passed: another motion, also passed, committed "the workers to separate from the politicians.. and to organise trades councils on a firm footing (these) alone will make up the great army of social demands." Again the following congress (Calais, 1890) enjoined the workers, as of 1 May 1891, to "report to the factory as normal and then to walk out, after eight hours on the premises, whether the boss likes it or not."

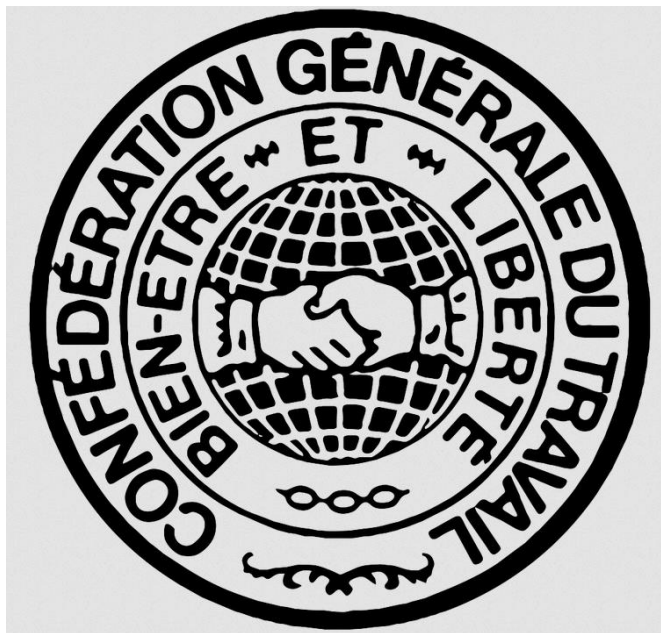
These trends in economic action were to grow, in spite of the opposition mounted by the socialist (Guesdist) school of thought which at that time was in the majority in the Trade Union Federation: this can be seen plainly at the congress of Marseilles in 1892: in spite of the pressure from the Guesdists, the efficacy of the General Strike was again affirmed and the futility of seeking public position proclaimed.

One blemish – a product of the pre-eminence afforded by the Trade Union Federation to political concerns – ruled out adaptation of that organisation to the needs of trade unionism which were becoming plainer and plainer. It was a body connecting the Trade Unions only singly, so that they remained isolated within the umbrella group (which was a federation in name only)

and it neglected to establish between these single unions the links that were essential at local level as well as within each trade. Now, since "the function creates the agency", it was inevitable that a grouping suited to the unions needs would be launched. The Bourses du travail were already in existence, coordinating the Trade Union forces at local level: trades federations too were already in existence, linking the unions within the same trade right across France. But these agencies were, if not isolated from one another, then at least without regular contact with one another.

In 1892 the establishment of the Federation of Bourses du Travail went half-way to meeting the unions requirements: although it grouped only the Bourses du

Travail or Local General Trades Unions, it quickly gained considerable influence. This was because it addressed the aspirations to economic union and turned a blind eye to political opinions. These trends towards economic cohesiveness surfaced at the Trade Union congress sponsored by the Federation of Bourses and held in Paris in July 1893. The resolution below which was adopted there posed once and for all and with clarity the fundamental status of class agency that the General Confederation of Labour



(CGT) would turn out to be:

All labour unions must, with all possible urgency:

- 1) Affiliate to their trade *Federation* or, should none exist, launch one: band together into a Local Federation or *Bourse du Travail*, whereupon these *Federations* and *Bourses du Travail* ought to set themselves up as National Federations:
- 2) The National Trades Federations, once in place, will have to come to some accommodation with the Federations abroad and establish International Federations.

In an effort at conciliation, the congress expressed the wish that the Federation of Bourses du Travail and the Federation of Trade Unions might amalgamate into a single organisation. Such an amalgamation was to be attempted at the Nantes congress in 1894: but instead of the rapprochement that was aimed at, there was a definitive split. It could scarcely have been otherwise: the outlook of the tendencies present made the falling-out predicable. The issue of the General Strike was the touchstone: a wide-ranging debate proved the

theoretical and tactical irreconcilability between political-parliamentary action and economic action: the vote that endorsed the latter gave the victory to those who went on to become the *Trade Unionists*: 67 votes were cast in favour of the General Strike and 37 against.

That spelled the end for the Trade Union Federation and the congress realised that, so much so that it decided that a *National Labour Council* would be launched. It vegetated for a year, up until the Limoges congress in 1895.

### ***Economic take-off***

The falling-out at the Nantes congress went considerably further than merely severance from the political elements: it involved a final breach with the capitalist regime. The working class was to create its own autonomous agencies which, for the time being, would be combat organisations and, in the future, would garner enough revolutionary strength to stand up to the bourgeoisies political and administrative institutions and to destroy them or take them over as the need might be.

At the Limoges congress the launching of the GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR (CGT) did not proceed without some resistance. Article one of the confederations charter laid down the principle that was to breathe life into Trade Union associations: *the personnel making up the Confederation must stand outside of all schools of politics*. This triggered heated arguments. In spite of everything, it was passed by a huge majority: out of 150 votes cast, 124 were in favour and only 14 opposed.

Those arguing for pride of place to be given to political actions moved that only the Confederation as such was obliged to keep out of politics: as for the component unions, it would be up to them to make their own decision. This argument was rejected. In practice, though, all too often, this was the principle that was adopted. The congress had laid down guidelines, but no one could – and no one tried to – enforce obedience through authority. This itself was an indication of the consciousness of the workers.

The important thing was to affirm the necessity for organising on the economic terrain and eliminating all preoccupation with politics. As for the germination and development of this principle, that was left to the passage of time and to the initiative of the militants.

Over the following five years, the CGT remained stalled at the embryonic stage. Its activities were virtually nil and most of its time was spent on underlining a regrettable antagonism that had developed between itself and the Federation of Bourses du Travail. This latter organisation, which was at that time autonomous, was a rallying point for all of the revolutionary activity of the Trade Unions, whilst the CGT (which by this

point was only an umbrella for the trades Federations) was in a state of vegetation.

Over this period of time, the Confederation took its lead and its guidance from elements which have since tended to be labelled as reformist. Since the politicians were unable to take the organisation over, they looked down their noses at it: some of their disciples were part of the majority within it, however, but, irritated by the congress of Limoges's decision, they were unable to engage in proper politicking and, lacking any real belief in the value of economic action, they did not to encourage development of the Confederation.

It was only following the trades congress held in Paris in 1900, when the Confederations own mouthpiece (*La Voix du peuple*) was launched and when revolutionary elements flooded into and gained the upper hand within the Confederation, that under this dual stimulation, that body graduated from its larval stage.

From then on, it never looked back. In 1900, at the opening of the Paris congress, it embraced only 16 national federations and 5 different organisations: by September 1904, and the opening of the Bourges congress, it embraced 53 trades federations or national unions, plus fifteen single unions. Moreover, under the sway of revolutionary elements, a sort of moral *unity* was created between the Federation of Bourses du Travail and the CGT, and this was vital for the struggle and was a prelude to what has since been termed "labour unity". The Montpellier congress in 1902 proclaimed the need for just such unity and made it a reality by knitting together the Federation of Bourses du Travail and the Federation of national trades federations (which is what the CGT had amounted to up until then).

And so, nine years on, the motion passed by the Trade Union congress held in Paris in 1893 was fleshed out, organisationally.

Since the Montpellier congress, the GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR (CGT), the organisational structure of which seems to have settled .. with only a few minor adjustments, as the need arises – has expanded normally: from then on it was a force with which bourgeois society had to reckon: it made its stand against capital and the State, determined not merely to render them less harmful but to lay the groundwork for and encompass their final ruination.

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In the brief historical survey above, we have seen trades associations banding together to establish an organism genuinely free of all tutelage and tailored to the revolutionary task at which they work. Such a panoramic overview is more revealing about the power of the PARTY OF LABOUR than doctrinal affirmations and shows that the economic approach of the unions is no fleeting phase but rather the logical outcome of the development of worker consciousness.

The new party's programme is concise: article one of the Confederations statutes offers a summary of them:

The CGT embraces – outside of all of the schools of politics – all workers cognizant of the struggle to be waged for the elimination of wage-slavery and the employer class. That brief statement of principle encapsulates the entire essence of trade unionist doctrine: it is the very definition of it. As for the other articles of the CGT statutes, they mirror the moment and are thus subject to amendment just as they would be in any living organism. They are not to be taken as a prerequisite framework, but rather as the labouring masses form of cohesion, the form best suited to the demands of the current struggle. The Party of Labour does not owe its power to its statutory framework: its strength arises from the individuals who are its component parts and from the intensity of the spirit of rebellion by which they are driven.

What sets trade unionism apart from the various schools of socialism – and makes it superior – is its doctrinal sobriety. Inside the unions, there is little philosophising. They do better than that: they act! There, on the no man's land of economic terrain, personnel who join, imbued with the teachings of some (philosophical, political, religious, etc.) school of thought or another, have their rough edges knocked off until they are left only with the principles to which they all subscribe: the yearning for improvement and comprehensive emancipation. Which is why – without erecting any doctrinal barriers, and without formulating any *credo* – trade unionism looms as the quintessential practice of the various social doctrines.

For it is not in theory only that the PARTY OF LABOUR has a profile of its own: its tactics and methodology are peculiar to itself and, far from drawing inspiration from the democratic idea, they are the negation thereof. But tactics and methodology are so natural that the workers, even those most imbued with democratism, once they enter the trades organisations, are subjected to the influence of their surroundings and act just like all their colleagues do, as trade unionists.

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<sup>1</sup> At the Paris congress in 1918, an overhaul of the statutes abolished the Federation of Bourses du Travail which was replaced by a section made up of Departmental Unions, as Article 2 of the CGT statutes attests:

Article 2 – The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) is made up of:

1. National industrial Federations
2. The Departmental Unions of the various Trade Unions

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## **This tactical approach is *Direct Action* in action! From it flow all of the modes of Trade Union action. Strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc., are all merely translations of *Direct Action*.**

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The modalities of trade unionist action are not the expression of the consent of the majority manifesting itself through the empirical procedures of universal suffrage: they draw their inspiration from the means by which, in Nature, Life in its many forms and aspects manifests itself and develops. Just the way that Life appears first at one point, in one cell: just as, with the passage of time, there is always one cell that is the agent of ferment and change; so, in a trade unionist context, the first move comes from the conscious minorities who, through their example, their thrust rather than through authoritarian injunctions) draw the most frigid masses into their orbit and sweep them into action.

This tactical approach is *Direct Action* in action! From it flow all of the modes of Trade Union action. Strikes, boycotts, sabotage, etc., are all merely translations of *Direct Action*.

### **Appendix**

THE CONFEDERAL ORGANISM – The network of the confederal organisation that binds the unions one to another is as straightforward as can be, given the demands of propaganda and of the struggle with which they have to contend.

The CGT is made up of two sections: that of the trades Federations and that of the Bourses du Travail.<sup>1</sup>

Through affiliation to the Bourse du Travail (or Local Union of Trade Unions) the various trades unions gain a facility of propaganda within a city or specific region: this is a task that they would find difficult, if not impossible, to tackle if they were to slide into a

And the make-up of the Confederal Committee was amended as follows:

Article 9 – The National Committee is made up of a coming together of delegates from the Federations and the Departmental Unions. It meets thrice each year, in March, July and November, and, extra-ordinarily, at the invitation of the Steering Commission and the Bureau. It is the executor of decisions made by national congresses. It takes a hand in every aspect of worker life and pronounces upon matters of a general order.



pernicious isolation. That mainly educational undertaking consists of establishing new unions and of honing the consciousness of the unionised so as to draw the largest possible numbers of workers into the Trade Union orbit. To this end the Bourse sets up reading rooms and lays on classes, helps with anti-militarist propaganda by welcoming young-barracked troops under its wing, offering legal advice, etc.

Affiliation to the national trade Federation addresses, rather, the need for combativeness and resistance. These Federations are an umbrella for the unions belonging to the same trade or industry and they encompass the whole of France, which makes them energetic fighting associations: should a dispute arise anywhere, the solidarity of the masses is mobilised to defeat the employers. Thus, the strength of a given union is magnified by moral and material backing from its federated unions right across France.

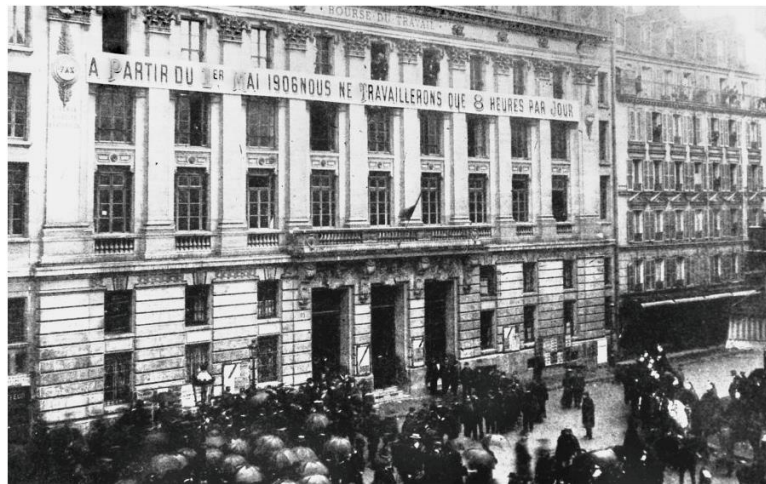
The only thing was that if the Bourses du Travail remained isolated one from another and if the trades Federations did likewise, the cohesiveness of labour, stopping at the mid-way mark, could never attain a generalised strength, given that the local bodies would not be able to reach beyond the boundaries of their own regions and the national bodies would not see any further than the boundaries of their own trades. In order to attain to a greater power, these several bodies federated with one another, in accordance with their natures: the trades Federations with trades Federations and the Bourses du Travail with other Bourses du Travail.

It was at this level of the Trade Union organism that the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) arose: it comprises both sections – the section made up of trades Federations and that made up of the Bourses du Travail. Each of these federal wings is topped by a Committee made up of delegates from each affiliated organisation: these delegates are subject to recall at all times: as a result, they remain in ongoing liaison with the association from which they receive their mandate, which is at liberty to replace them at any time.

The Federations wing and the federated Bourses du Travail wing are each autonomous bodies.

Finally, at the last level we have the National Confederation Council: it is made up of a coming-together

of the delegates from both wings, and within its remit fall general propaganda matters of relevance to the working class as a whole. Thus, to cite some examples of the tasks that fall within its remit, we need only note that the campaign agitating against the placement bureaux and the eight hour day agitation campaign were taken in hand by special commissions appointed by it to do the needful.



**Paris Bourse du Travail (1906)**

Such, in broad outline, is the confederal organism: it is not a leadership body but a body that co-ordinates and amplifies the working class's revolutionary activity: it is therefore the very opposite of the democratic agencies which, by dint of their centralisation and

authoritarianism, stifle the vitality of their component parts. Inside the CGT, there is cohesion but not leadership: federalism prevails throughout: at every level, the various bodies – from the individual, through the Trade Union, the Federation or the Bourse du Travail, up as far as the confederal wings – are all autonomous. Herein lies the secret of the CGT powers of projection: the initiative comes, not from the top down, but from anywhere and the vibrations of it are passed on by means of a ripple effect through the masses of the Confederation.

**CONGRESSES.** – Every two years, the CGT organises a national congress with the participation only of delegates from its affiliated Trade Unions. The Congress is the equivalent of what the general assembly would be at the level of the Trade Union: thanks to these meetings, Trade Union members are brought into contact with one another and a useful fermentation follows: currents of opinion emerge and guide-lines are defined.

**INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY.** – The activity of the Party of Labour is not confined within artificial boundaries: most of the trades Federations are affiliated to an international Federation linking the various national organisations and with ramifications everywhere. Moreover, the Confederation is affiliated to the International Trade Union Federation based in Amsterdam, which keeps the “confederations” around the world in contact with one another. Thus is established and developed a living network which materialises the International Workers Association more firmly than ever.

# Direct Action

Émile Pouget<sup>1</sup>

1910

## What we mean by 'Direct Action'

Direct Action is the very symbol of trade unionism in action. The formula speaks of the battle joined against Exploitation and Oppression. With inherent clarity, it announces the direction and orientation of the working class's endeavours in its relentless attack upon Capitalism.

Direct Action is such a plain-spoken notion of such self-evident transparency that merely to speak the words defines and explains them. It means that the Working Class, forever bridling at the existing state of affairs, expects nothing from outside people, powers or forces, but rather creates its own conditions of struggle and looks to itself for its

methodology. It means that from now on the *producer* looms before the existing society which recognises only the *citizen*. And that producer, having grasped that any social grouping models itself upon its production system, means to mount a direct attack upon the capitalist mode of production in order to transform it by eliminating the employer and thereby achieving sovereignty in the workshop – the essential precondition for the enjoyment of real freedom.

## Democratism denied

Direct action thus implies that the working class subscribes to notions of freedom and autonomy instead of genuflecting before the principle of authority. Now, it is thanks to this authority principle, the pivot of the modern world – democracy being its latest incarnation – that the human being, tied down by a thousand ropes, moral as well as material, is bereft of any opportunity to display will and initiative.

The entire trade unionist approach arises out of this rebuttal of the hypocritical falseness of democratism, this latest incarnation of Authority. Direct action therefore arises as simply the fleshing out of the principle of freedom, its realisation among the masses; no longer in the form of abstract, vague, nebulous

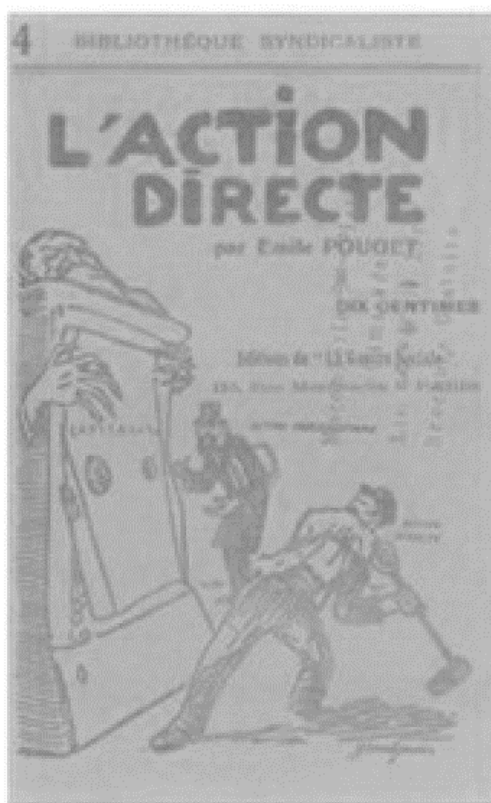
formulae, but rather as clear-cut, practical notions inspiring the pugnacity that the times require: it is the casting down of the spirit of submissiveness and resignation that degrades individuals and turns them into willing slaves – and a blossoming of the spirit of revolt, the factor fertilising human societies.

This fundamental, thoroughgoing dichotomy between capitalist society and the world of labour, as encapsulated in Direct Action, was articulated by the *International Working Men's Association* in its motto: 'The emancipation of the workers will be the workers' own doing.' And it made a contribution towards making a reality of this divorce by affording pride of place to

economic associations. But there was still some confusion regarding the degree to which they would be preponderant. However, the IWMA did have an inkling that the undertaking of remaking society has to begin at the bottom and that political changes are merely a consequence of amendments made to the system of production. Which is why it hailed the action of trades associations and, of course, legitimised the procedure whereby the vitality and influence appropriate to the body in question, find expression – and which cannot be anything other than Direct Action.

Direct Action is in fact the normal function of the unions and the first cause behind their establishment; it would be a glaring nonsense for such associations to restrict themselves to bring the waged

together, the better to adapt to the fate reserved for them in bourgeois society – production for others. It is all too plain that persons of no particularly clear cut social outlooks band together into the trade union for the purposes of *self-defence*, in order to struggle first hand and as individuals. They are drawn to it by a community of interests; they gravitate towards it instinctively. There, in that nursery, the work of fermentation, elaboration and education proceeds; the union raises the



<sup>1</sup> Translation by Kate Sharpley Library, 2003: <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/vhhngg>

consciousness of workers still blinkered by the prejudices inculcated into them by the ruling class; it opens their eyes wide to the overriding necessity of struggle and revolt; it schools them for social battles by marshalling their concerted efforts. It follows from such instruction that every individual ought to act without ever offloading onto others the task of acting in his place. Direct Action's very powers to fertilise reside in such exercises in imbuing the individual with a sense of his own worth and in extolling such worth. It marshals human resourcefulness, tempers characters and focuses energies. It teaches self-confidence! And self-reliance! And self-mastery! And shifting for oneself!

Now, if we compare the methods in use in democratic associations or groupings, we find that they have nothing in common with this ongoing tendency to raise consciousness, nor with this adaptation to action that permeates the economic associations. And we have no reason to suppose that the methods extant in the latter can be transposed into the former. Other than on the economic terrain, direct action is a meaningless formula, in that it flies in the face of the operation of democratic groupings, the premise of which is the representative system, implicit in which is that individuals at the grassroots should be inactive. Trust to our representatives! Refer to them! Rely upon them! Leave things to them!

The autonomous and personal approach of the Working Class, as encapsulated by Direct Action, is clarified and accentuated by its being made manifest on the terrain of the economy, where all mistakes founder, where misunderstandings are out of place and where every effort serves some useful purpose. There, democracy's contrived combinations whereby persons whose social interests are mutually antagonistic are thrown together simply come apart. Here the enemy is visible. The Exploiter and the Oppressor cannot hope to conceal themselves behind misleading masks or bamboozle people by dressing themselves up in ideological glad-rags: class enemies they are, and they must be exposed openly and brutally as such! Here, the struggle is face to face and no holds barred. Every effort strives for some tangible, perceptible outcome; it translates in the short term as some whittling away of the employer's authority, as a relaxation of the shackles binding the working man to the workshop, as a relative improvement in well-being. Which is why, of course, the overriding necessity of some accommodation between class brothers so that they may march into battle side by side, standing up together against the common enemy, is invoked.

So, it follows logically that, the moment that a trade association is set up, one should infer from its inception that, wittingly or unwittingly, the workers banding together there are making ready to look after their affairs for themselves; that they are determined to stand up to their masters and look only to their own efforts for

success; that they mean to act directly, without intermediaries, without leaving it up to others to carry out the requisite tasks.

Direct Action is, therefore, merely trade union action, stripped of all accretions, freed of all impurities, with none of the buffers that deaden the impact of belligerent upon belligerent, and with none of the deviations that vitiate the meaning and extent of the struggle; it is trade union action without capitalist compromises, without the flirtation with the bosses of which the sycophants of 'social peace' dream; it is trade union action without friends in the government and with no 'go-betweens' horning in on the debate.

### *Exaltation of the individual*

Direct Action spells liberation for the masses of humanity hitherto trained in the acceptance of imposed beliefs, their ascent towards reflection and consciousness. It is a summons to all to play their part in the common endeavour; the individual is invited to be a human cipher no more, to look no more to those above or outside of him for his salvation; he is urged to set his hand to the plough rather than submit passively to social inevitabilities. Direct Action puts paid to the age of miracles – miracles from Heaven, miracles from the State – and, in contraposition to hopes vested in 'providence' (no matter what they may be) it announces that it will act upon the maxim: salvation lies within ourselves!

This incomparable radiant power of direct action has been recognised by men of varying persuasions and temperaments who have thereby paid homage to this approach, the fruitful social value of which cannot be gainsaid.

Keufer it was who in 1902, apropos of the then precarious trade union circumstances of the glassworkers, (their organisations being in disarray at the time) wrote:

'We should not be surprised if politics were not unconnected with these divisions, for all too often, in the social contest, lots of comrades believe in the efficacy of the intervention of politicians to champion their economic interests.

'We, on the other hand, reckon that the workers, solidly organised in their trades or industrial unions and federations will be invested with a greater power and authority enough to treat directly with industrialists in the event of disputes, with no assistance other than that forthcoming from the working class which will not be found wanting. *The proletariat must look after its own affairs...*'

And in parliament Marcel Sembat had this to say:

‘Direct action? But that is merely the banding-together of the workers into labour unions and federations so that, instead of being beholden for everything to the State, or to the Chamber, and instead of forever doffing their caps to parliament in the hope that it might from time to time scornfully spare them a morsel of its time, the workers can band together and join forces.

‘The workers agreed with one another, direct action upon the bosses, pressure brought to bear upon the legislator to compel him, should his intervention be required, to concern himself with the workers ...

‘We know – the unionised say – that mores predate the law and we wish to create the mores beforehand so that the law may the more easily be applied should we be awarded one or so that we may compel its passage should we be forced to wait unduly! For they wish also – and they make no bones about it – to force the law-maker’s hand from time to time.

‘And we law-makers, have we ever needed anyone to force our hand? Do we always concern ourselves, unsolicited, with evils and abuses? Is it not a good thing that those who are afflicted by these evils and are injured by these abuses should protest and bestir themselves to attract attention to themselves and indeed to impose the remedy or the reform that have become necessities?

‘That, gentlemen, is why it would be wrong to attempt to depict to you as disreputable these men who preach direct action: if they do their utmost to get by without recourse to deputies, remember that they do so with reluctance ...

‘There are enough people who do not manage sufficiently without you for you to seek satisfaction in the sight of workers striving to bring their class together along trade union lines into economic organisations and doing their utmost to look to their affairs for themselves.’

And, writing in *Le Peuple* in Brussels, Vandervelde wrote:

‘If a bone with there merest morsel attached to it is to be wrested from capitalism, it is not enough for the working class to give a mandate to its representatives to campaign in its place and stead.

‘We have told it so time out of number, but we could scarcely say it often enough, and there is a lot of truth to the theory of *direct action*, that far-reaching reforms are not obtained through go-betweens.

‘Now, if we may offer a criticism of this Belgian working class which, abandoned by its exploiters and masters to ignorance and misery, has, for the past twenty years, furnished enough evidence of its valour and spirit of sacrifice, it would be, maybe, that it has been *unduly*

*reliant upon political action and co-operative activity, which required the least exertion:* that it has not done enough in the way of trade union action; that it has surrendered a little unduly to this dangerous illusion that, come the day when it has returned its representatives to the Chamber, reforms will fall from the sky like gobbets of roast lark.’

So, in the estimation of the men cited above – and in our own view as well – Direct Action develops the feeling for human personality as well as the spirit of initiative. In contrast with the spinelessness of democracy which makes do with shepherds and followers, it shakes people out of their torpor and steers them to consciousness. It does not regiment nor does it number the workers.

Quite the opposite! It opens their eyes to self-esteem and a sense of their own strength, and the groupings it forms at its prompting are living, vibrant associations where, numerical strength cannot overrule merit by dint of mere weight or the inertia of the unconscious. Men of initiative there are not stifled and minorities which are – and always have been – the factors for progress, can exercise themselves without hindrance and, through

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their propaganda activity, engage in the coordinating activity that leads on to action.

Thus, Direct Action has an unmatched educational value: It teaches people to reflect, to make decisions and to act. It is characterised by a culture of autonomy, an exaltation of individuality and is a fillip to initiative, to which it is the leaven. And this superabundance of vitality and burgeoning of 'self' in no way conflicts with the economic fellowship that binds the workers one with another and far from being at odds with their common interests, it reconciles and bolsters these: the individual's independence and activity can only erupt into splendour and intensity by sending its roots deep into the fertile soil of common agreement.

Direct Action thus releases the human being from the strangle-hold of passivity and listlessness wherein democratism tends to confine and paralyse him. It teaches him will-power, instead of mere obedience, and to embrace his sovereignty instead of conferring his part upon a deputy. By so doing, it shifts the axis of social orientation, so that human energies, instead of being squandered upon pernicious and depressing activity, derive from their legitimate expenditure the necessary sustenance for their continued growth.

### ***Education for expropriation***

Fifty years ago, in the time around 1848, back in the days when republicans still believed in something, they admitted how much of an illusion, how much of a lie and how powerless the representative system was and they searched for ways to overcome its defects. Rittinghausen, unduly mesmerised by the political frippery which he imagined was crucial to human progress, reckoned that he had come up with a solution in the shape of 'DIRECT REPRESENTATION'. Proudhon, on the other hand, presaging trade unionism, spoke of the coming economic federalism that would bypass, with all of life's superiority, the sterile notions of the whole political set-up; the economic federalism being hatched within the workers' organisations implies the recuperation by trades bodies of certain useful functions. Thanks to which the State conjures up illusions as to its *raison d'être*, and at the same time, the elimination of those of its noxious, restrictive and repression functions to which capitalist society is indebted for its perpetuation.

But for this burgeoning of society to become a possibility, preparatory work must first have drawn together within the existing society those elements whose role it will be to make it happen. This is the task assumed by the Working Class. Just as a building is built from the foundations up, so this internal undertaking which involves both the dismantling of the factors making up the old world and incubating the new edifice starts from the bottom up. No longer is it a matter of taking over the State, nor of tinkering with its cogs or changing its personnel: the point is to transform

the mechanism of production, by doing away with the boss in workshop and factory and replacing production for their benefit with production in common for the benefit of all ... and the logical consequence of this is the ruination of the State.

This drive to expropriation has begun; at every step it is pursued by day to day struggles against the current master of production, the capitalist; his privileges are undermined and eaten away, the legitimacy of his leadership and mastery functions is denied, and the charge that he levies upon everyone's output on the pretext of recompense for capital investment, is considered theft. So, little by little, he is being bundled out of the workshop – until such time as he can be driven out entirely and forever.

All of this, this burrowing from within, escalating and intensifying by the day, is Direct Action rampant. And when the working class, having grown in strength and consciousness, is ready to take possession and gets on with doing just that, that too will be Direct Action!

Once the expropriation of capital is underway, and when the railway companies find their shares – the 'diplomas' of the financial aristocracy – rendered worthless, and when the parasitical retinue of rail directors and other magnates can no longer survive in idleness, the trains will continue to operate ... And this is because the railway workers will have taken things into their own hands; their trade union having turned from a fighting group into a production association, will thereafter take charge of running operations – and not now with an eye to personal gain, nor yet for plain and simple corporative motives, but for the common good.

And what will be done in the case of the railways will be replicated in every sphere of production.

But if this task of liquidating the old world of exploitation is to prosper, the working class has to be familiarised with the wherewithal of making a reality of the new context and must have acquired the capacity and will to see to this for itself: it must rely, in facing up to the difficulties that will crop up, solely upon its own direct efforts, on the capabilities that it possesses within itself, rather than on the graciousness of 'GO-BETWEENS', providential men, these new-style bishops. In the latter case, exploitation would not be eradicated and would persist under a different guise.

### ***The revolution is the handiwork of day-to-day action***

Thus, if the way is to be prepared, the restrictive notions and dead formulae that stand for a persistent past must give way to ideas that point us in the direction of crucial exercises of the will. Now, these new ideas cannot but derive from systematic implementation of Direct Action methods. From, in fact, the underlying current of autonomy and human solidarity, intensified by practical action that erupts and fleshes out the idea of replacing the existing social disorder with a form of organisation

wherein labour alone has a place and every individual will be free to give expression to his personality and his faculties.

This task of laying the groundwork for the future is, thanks to direct action, in no way at odds with the day to day struggle. The tactical superiority of Direct Action resists precisely in its unparalleled plasticity.

Organisations actively engaged in the practice are not required to confine themselves to beatific waiting for the advent of social changes. They bring all possible combativity to the here and now, sacrificing neither the

present to the future, nor the future to the present. It follows from this, from this capacity for facing up simultaneously to the demands of the moment and those of the future and from this compatibility in the two-pronged task to be carried forward, that the ideal for which they strive, far from being overshadowed or neglected, is thereby clarified, defined and made more discernible.

Which is why it is both inane and false to describe revolutionaries drawing their inspiration from Direct Action methods as 'ADVOCATES OF ALL-OR-NOTHING'. True, they are advocates of wresting EVERYTHING from the Bourgeoisie! But, until such time as they will have amassed sufficient strength to carry through this task of general expropriation, they do not rest upon their laurels and miss no chance to win partial improvements which, being achieved at some cost to capitalist privileges, represent a sort of partial expropriation and pave the way to more comprehensive demands.

From which it is plain that direct action is the plain and simple fleshing-out of the spirit of revolt: it fleshes out the class struggle, shifting it from the realm of theory and abstraction into the realm of practice and accomplishment. As a result, direct action is the class struggle lived on a daily basis, an ongoing attack upon capitalism.

Which is why it is so despised by the politicians – a breed apart – who had set themselves up as the 'REPRESENTATIVES' or 'BISHOPS' of democracy. Now, should the working class, scorning democracy, go a step further and look for some alternative path, on the terrain of economics, what is to become of the 'go-

betweens' who used to pose as the proletariat's spokesmen?

Which is why it is even more despised and upbraided by the Bourgeoisie! The latter sees its demise rudely accelerated by the fact that the Working Class, drawing strength and increasing confidence from Direct Action, and breaking once and for all with the past, and relying upon its own resources to espouse a whole new mentality, is on its way to constructing a whole new environment.

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### **The necessity of effort**

It is such a commonplace that there has to be struggle against the all manner of obstacles placed in the way of mankind's development that it may seem paradoxical to have to extol the necessity of effort.

Besides action, indeed, what else is there but

inertia, spinelessness and passive acceptance of slavery? In times of depression and inertia, men are degraded to the status of beasts of burden, slaves trapped in hopeless toil; their minds are stultified, constipated and thoughtless; their prospects are limited; they cannot imagine the future, nor suppose that it will be any improvement upon the present.

But up pops Action! They are shaken from their torpor, their decrepit brains start to work and a radiant energy transforms and transfigures the human masses.

Because Action is the salt of life ... Or, to put it more plainly and simply, it is life itself! To live is to act ... To act is to be alive!

### ***The catastrophic miracle***

But these are banalities! Yet, the point has to be laboured, and the effort glorified, because stultifying education has washed over the older generation and planted debilitating notions in its ranks. The futility of effort has been elevated to the status of a theory and it has been given out that any revolutionary achievement would flow from the ineluctable course of events; catastrophe, it was proclaimed, would come to pass automatically. Just as soon as, in the ineluctable course of events, capitalist institutions would reach a point of maximum tension. Whereupon they would explode by themselves! Effort by man in economic terms was proclaimed redundant and his kicks against the



restrictive environment besetting him were decreed futile. He was left but one hope: that he might infiltrate his own into the bourgeois parliaments and await the inevitable unleashing of catastrophe.

We were taught that this would come to pass mechanically and inescapably when the time was ripe: with concentration of capital being effected through the immanent laws of capitalist production itself, the number of the capitalist potentates, usurpers and monopolists was spiralling ever downwards ... so that a day would come when, thanks to the conquest of Political Power, the people's elected representatives would use law and decree to expropriate this handful of great capitalist barons.

What a perilous and stultifying illusion such passive waiting for the coming of the Messiah-revolution represents! And how many years or centuries will it take to capture political power? And even then, supposing that it has been captured, will the number of capitalist magnates have fallen sufficiently by that point? Even allowing that the expansion of trusts may have swallowed up the medium bourgeoisie, does it follow that they will have been thrust down into the ranks of the proletariat? Will they not, rather, have carved themselves out a place in the trusts and will the numbers of parasites living without producing a thing not be at least the same as they are today? If the answer is yes, can we not suppose that the beneficiaries of the old society will put up a fight against the expropriating laws and decrees?

An equal number of problems would be posed, before which the working class would be powerless and bewildered as to what to do, should it have made the mistake of remaining mesmerised by the hope of a revolution's coming to pass in the absence of any direct effort on its part.

#### ***The so-called 'iron law'***

Even as we were being bamboozled with this messianic faith in the Revolution, to stultify us even further and the better to persuade us that there was nothing that could be attempted, nothing to be done, and in order to plunge us even deeper into the mire of inaction, we were indoctrinated with the '*iron law of wages*'. We were taught that, under this relentless formula (primarily the work of Ferdinand Lassalle), in today's society any effort is a waste of time, any action futile, in that the economic repercussions soon restore the poverty ceiling through which the proletariat cannot break.

Under this *iron law* – which was then made into the keystone of socialism – it was proclaimed that 'as a general rule, the average wage would be no more than what the worker strictly required for survival'. And it

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***But things take a different turn the moment that a glimmer of consciousness stirs this worker-potato into life. When, instead of dooming himself to inertia, spinelessness, resignation and passivity, the worker wakes up to his worth as a human being and the spirit of revolt washes over him: when he bestirs himself, energetic, wilful and active... then, the laughable equilibrium of the law of wages is undone***

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was said: 'That figure is governed by capitalist pressure alone and this can even push it below the minimum necessary for the working man's subsistence ... The only rule with regard to wage levels is the plentiful or scarce supply of man-power...'

By way of evidence of the relentless operation of this *law of wages*, comparisons were made between the worker and a commodity: if there is a glut of potatoes on the market, they are cheap; if they are scarce, the price rises ... It is the same with the working man, it was said: his wages fluctuate in accordance with the plentiful supply or dearth of labour!

No voice was raised against the relentless arguments of this absurd reasoning: so the law of wages may be taken as right – for as long as the working man is content to be a commodity! For as long as, like a sack of potatoes, he remains passive and inert and endures the fluctuations of the market... For as long as he bends his back and puts up with all of the bosses' snubs,... the law of wages obtains.

But things take a different turn the moment that a glimmer of consciousness stirs this worker-potato into life. When, instead of dooming himself to inertia, spinelessness, resignation and passivity, the worker wakes up to his worth as a human being and the spirit of revolt washes over him: when he bestirs himself, energetic, wilful and active; when, instead of rubbing shoulders absently with his neighbours (like a potato alongside other potatoes) and comes into contact with them, reacts with them, and they in turn respond to him; once the labour bloc comes to life and bestirs itself ...

then, the laughable equilibrium of the law of wages is undone.

### ***A novel factor: the will of the worker!***

A novel factor has appeared on the labour market: the will of the worker! And this factor, not pertinent when it comes to setting the price of a bushel of potatoes, has a bearing upon the setting of wages; its impact may be large or small, according to the degree of tension of the labour force which is a product of the accord of individual WILLS beating in unison – but, whether it be strong or weak, there is no denying it.

Thus, worker cohesion conjures up against capitalist might a might capable of standing up to it. The inequality between the two adversaries – which cannot be denied when the exploiter is confronted only by the working man on his own – is redressed in proportion with the degree of cohesion achieved by the labour bloc. From then on, proletarian resistance, be it latent or acute, is an everyday phenomenon: disputes between labour and capital quicken and become more acute. Labour does not always emerge victorious from these partial struggles: however, even when defeated, the struggle workers still reap some benefit: resistance from them has obstructed pressure from the employers and often forced the employer to grant some of the demands put. In which case the high solidarity content in syndicalism is vindicated: the outcome of the struggle brings benefits to untrustworthy, less conscious brothers, and the strikers relish the moral delights of having fought for the welfare of all.

That labour's cohesion leads to wage increases is acknowledged with quite good grace by the theoreticians of the 'iron law'. The facts are so palpable that they would be hard put to it to offer a serious rebuttal. But they protest that, in parallel with the wage increases, there is an increase in the cost of living, so that there is no increase in the worker's purchasing power and the benefits of his higher pay are thereby nullified.

There are circumstances in which we do find such repercussions: but the rise in living costs in direct association with the rise in pay is not so constant that it can be taken as axiomatic. Moreover, when such rises occur, this is – in most instances – proof that the worker, after having struggled in his *producer* capacity against his boss, has neglected to look to his interests in his capacity as *consumer*. Very often it is the passivity of the purchaser vis a vis the trader, of the tenant vis a vis the landlord, etc., that allows the landlords, traders,

etc., to claw back from added levies upon the working man as consumer the benefit of the improvements that he has extracted as producer.

Furthermore, the irrefutable proof that wage levels need not necessarily result in parallel increases in the cost of living is furnished by countries where working hours are short and wages high: Life there is less expensive and less restricted than in countries where working hours are long and wages low.

### ***Wages and the cost of living***

In England, the United States and Australia, the working day often lasts eight hours (nine at most), with weekends off, yet wages there are higher than among us. In spite of which life is easier there. First because, over six working days, or better yet, over five and a half (work grinding to a halt by the Saturday afternoon in most cases), the worker earns enough to support himself through the seven days of the week: then because, as a general rule, the cost of basic necessities is lower than in France, or at any rate more affordable, in terms of wage levels.<sup>1</sup>

Such findings invalidate the 'iron law'. Especially so as it cannot be argued that the high pay rates of the countries in question are merely the consequence of man-power shortages. In the United States as well as in Australia, and in England too, unemployment bites deep. So it is plain that if working conditions in those countries are better, it is because in the establishment thereof there is a factor at work other than plentiful or restricted supply of labour: the *will* of the workers! Such improved conditions are the results of workers' efforts, of the determination of the worker to refuse to accept a vegetative, restricted life, and they were won through the struggle against Capital. However, no matter how violent the economic skirmishing that improved these conditions may have been, they have not created a revolutionary situation: they have not pitted labour against capital in a face to face confrontation between enemies. The workers have not – at any rate not as a body – attained *class consciousness*: thus far their aspirations have been unduly modest, at the aspiration to accommodation with the existing society. But times they are a-changing! The English, the Yanks and the rest are in the process of acquiring the class consciousness that they were lacking.

If we move on from examining high-wage, shorter-hours societies to look at our own peasant regions where, confident of finding an ignorant, compliant population, a number of industrialists have set up their

goods and manufactured products, etc., which (in spite of the additional costs imposed by transport costs and in spite of customs levies too) can compete with similar items on our market here? It must therefore be self-evident that in the United States those goods are not on sale at higher prices ... We could cite many other conclusive proofs. But the confines of a pamphlet make that impracticable.

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<sup>1</sup> On the say so of superficial observers, many people unquestioningly swallow and repeat the story that 'life is expensive' in the aforementioned countries. The truth of the matter is that luxury items are very expensive there: 'society' living is very burdensome there: on the other hand, basic necessities are affordable. Moreover, don't we know that, from, say, the United States, we get wheat, fruit, canned



factories, we find the opposite phenomenon: wages there are very low and working conditions unduly demanding. The reason is that since the will of the workers there is lethargic, it is CAPITALIST PRESSURE alone that determines the working conditions; the working man, still ignorant of and unfamiliar with his own strength, is still reduced to the status of a 'commodity', so that he is prey to the unmitigated operation of the supposed 'law of wages'. But should a spark of revolt quicken the victim of exploitation, the situation will be changed! The dust of humanity, which is what the proletarian masses have been up to now, need only be compacted into a trade union bloc and the pressures from the bosses will be countered by a force that may be weak and clumsy in its beginnings but which will soon increase in might and consciousness.

And so the light of experience shows just how illusory and false this alleged 'iron law of wages' is. 'Iron law' is it? Get away! It is not even a rubber law!

The unfortunate thing is that the consequences of the penetration of the world of labour by that fateful formula have been more serious than mere flawed argument. Who can say how much suffering and disappointment it has given rise to? For too long, alas, the working class has reclined and dozed upon this false pillow. There was a logical connection: the theory that effort was futile spawned inaction. Since the pointlessness of action, the futility of struggle, the impossibility of immediate improvement had been proclaimed, every vestige of revolt was stifled. Indeed, what was the point of fighting, once effort had been identified in advance as pointless and unproductive, when one knew that one was doomed to failure? Since struggle promised only blows – with no hope of even slight benefit – was it not the wiser course to remain calm?

And that was the argument that ruled the roost! he working class accommodated itself to an apathy that played right into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Thus, when, under pressure of circumstance, the workers were driven into a dispute, it was only with a heavy heart that the gauntlet was picked up: striking even came to be reputed as an evil to be endured if it could not be averted and one to which one resigned oneself with no illusion that any real improvement might issue from a favourable outcome.

### ***Overwhelming evil is not the seed of rebellion!***

Alongside this crippling belief in the impossibility of breaking through the vicious circle of the 'iron law of wages', and by way of a warped deduction from this 'LAW' that trusting to the revolution's coming to pass as events unfolded without assistance, without any intervening effort on the part of the workers, some people rejoiced if they could detect any increase in 'pauperisation', the worsening of misery, employer

arbitrariness, government oppression, and the like. To listen to these poor logicians, the Revolution just had to sprout from overwhelming evil! So every upsurge in misery and calamity, etc., struck them as good thing, hastening the fateful hour.

A crack-brained error! A nonsense! The only thing that abundance of evils – no matter what form these may assume – achieves is to wear down those who suffer them even more. And this is readily appreciated. Instead of bandying words, one need only look around and take it all in.

Which are the trades where trade union activity is most pronounced? The ones where, not having to put in unduly long working hours, the comrades can, when their shift is finished, enjoy a social life, attend meetings, and take an interest in matters of common concern: the ones where wages are not slashed to such an extent that any deduction for dues or a newspaper subscription or the purchase of a book amounts to one loaf less upon the table.

By contrast, in the trades where the length and intensity of the work are excessive, once the worker leaves penal servitude to his boss behind him, he is physically and mentally 'spent'; so his only ambition, before making his way home to eat and sleep, is to down a few mouthfuls of alcohol to buck himself up, lift his spirits and stiffen his resolve. It never enters his head to drop by the union, attend meetings, such is the toll taken upon his body by weariness and such is the difficulty his exhausted brain finds in working.

By the same token, what effort could one expect of the wretch fallen upon endemic impoverished circumstances, the ragamuffin ground down by lack of work and deprivation? Maybe, in a fit of rage, he will venture a gesture of revolt ... but that gesture will not bear repetition! Poverty has drained him of all will, of all spirit of revolt.

These observations – which any one of us is free to verify and of which we can find our own examples – amount to a rebuttal of this queer theory that misery heaped upon misery and oppression heaped upon oppression sows the seeds of revolution. The very opposite is the case, is true! The weakling, at the mercy of fate, his life restricted and himself materially and morally a slave, will not dare to bridle under oppression: for fear of worse to come, he will draw in his horns and refuse to budge or make any effort and will wallow in his wretchedness. It is different with someone who achieves manhood through struggle, someone who, having a less narrow life and a more open mind and having looked his exploiter in the face, knows that he is the match for him.

Which is why partial improvements do not have the effect of lulling the workers to sleep: instead they act as a reassurance and a spur to him in staking further claims and making further demands. The result of well-being –

which is always a consequence of the display of proletarian might – whether the interested parties wrest it from the struggle, or the bourgeoisie deems it prudent and politic to make concessions, in order to take the edge off clashes which it foresees or fears – is to add to the dignity and consciousness of the working class and also – and above all else! – to increase and hone its appetite for the fight. As it shrugs off its physiological and intellectual poverty, the working class matures: it achieves a greater sensitivity, grows more alive to the exploitation it endures and its determination to break free of this is all the greater: it also gains a clearer perception of the irreconcilable contrast between its own interests and those of the capitalist class.

But, no matter how important one may suppose them to be, piecemeal improvements cannot take the place of the revolution, or stave it off: the expropriation of capital remains a necessity if thoroughgoing liberation is to be feasible.

Indeed, even supposing that capital's profiteering could be heavily handicapped and that the State's poisonous role could be partly done away with, it is unlikely that these handicaps could extinguish them entirely. None of it would have altered the relationships: there would still be, on the one side, the waged and the governed, and, on the other, the bosses and the leaders.

Obviously partial gains (no matter how important we may suppose these to be and even if they should largely whittle away at privileges) do not have the effect of altering economic relationships – the relations obtaining between boss and worker, between leader and led. Therefore the worker's subordination to Capital and the State endures. From which it follows that the social question looms as large as ever and the 'barricade' dividing the producers from the parasites living off them has not been shifted, much less flattened.

No matter how much the hours of work may be reduced, no matter how high wage rates may climb, no matter how 'comfortable' the factory may become from the point of view of hygiene, etc. as long as the relationships of wage-payer to waged, governor to governed persist, there will be two classes, the one struggling against the other. And the contest will grow in degree and scale as the exploited and oppressed class, its strength and consciousness expanding, acquires a truer appreciation of its social worth; as a result, as it improves itself and educates itself and betters itself, it

will bring ever more vigour to its undermining of the privileges of the opposing, parasite class.

And this will carry on until all hell breaks loose! Until the day when the working class, after having steeled itself for the final break, after having hardened itself through continual and ever more frequent skirmishes against its class foe, will be powerful enough to mount the crucial assault ... And that will be direct action taken to its ultimate: the General Strike!

**partial improvements do not have the effect of lulling the workers to sleep: instead they act as a reassurance and a spur to him in staking further claims and making further demands**

Thus, to sum up, careful scrutiny of social phenomena allows us to set our faces against the fatalistic theory that proclaims the futility of effort and against the tendency to suppose that better times can spring from bad ones run riot. Instead, a clear-sighted appreciation of these phenomena throws up the notion of a process of unfolding action: we find that the reverses suffered by

the bourgeoisie, the piecemeal gains wrested from it fan the flames of revolt: and we find, too, that just as Life springs from Life, so Action inspires Action.

### **Force and Violence**

Direct Action, the manifestation of the workers' strength and determination, shows itself in accordance with circumstance and setting, through acts that may well be very anodyne, just as they might as easily be very violent. It is simply a matter of what is required.

Thus, there is no specific form of Direct Action. Some people, with a very superficial grasp of things, explain it away in terms of an orgy of window breaking. Making do with such a definition – which brings joy to the hearts of the glaziers – would be to take a really narrow view of this exercise of proletarian might: it would be to reduce Direct Action to a more or less impulsive act, and that would be to ignore what it is in it that constitutes its greatest value and to forget that it is the symbolic enactment of workers' revolt.

Direct Action, is workers' Might applied to creative purposes: it is the Force that acts as midwife to a new law – enshrining social entitlement!

Force lies at the back of every movement and every action and, of necessity, it is the culmination of these. Life is the exercise of force and, beyond Force, there is only oblivion. Nothing is made manifest, nothing is materialised in its absence.

The better to pull the wool over our eyes and keep us under their yoke, our class enemies have drummed it into us that immanent justice need not resort to force. Nonsensical exploiters of the people! In the absence of

force, justice is nought but tomfoolery and lies. The grievous martyrdom of the people down through the centuries bears witness to this: though theirs were just causes, force, in the service of the religious authorities and secular masters crushed and trampled the peoples: all in the name of some supposed justice that was nothing but a monstrous injustice. And that martyrdom goes on!

### *Minority versus majority*

The labouring masses are always exploited and oppressed by a parasitical minority which, had it only its own resources to rely upon, could not preserve its rule for a single day, for one single hour! This minority draws its power from the bovine acquiescence of its victims: it is the latter – the source of all strength – who, in sacrificing themselves for the class that lives off their backs, create and perpetuate Capital and uphold the State.

Now, if this minority is to be unseated, it cannot be enough (today any more than in the past) to dissect the social falsehoods that serve as its principles, expose its iniquity or detail its crimes. Against brute Force, an Idea, reduced to its powers of persuasion alone, is beaten before it starts. The fact is that, no matter how beautiful it may be, an Idea is only a soap-bubble unless sustained by Force, unless rendered fertile by it.

So what will it take to put paid to the unwitting sacrifice of majorities to a sensual, rascally minority?

The establishment of a force capable of counter-balancing what the propertied and ruling class extracts from the people's delusion and ignorance. It us up to conscious workers to make just such a force a reality: if those desirous of shrugging off the yoke fashioned for them by the majorities, the problem consists of reacting against so much passivity and seeking one another out, coming to some accommodation and reaching agreement.

This vital task of revolutionary coalescence is carried out inside the trade union organisation: there a growing minority is formed and grows, its aim to acquire sufficient strength, first, to counter-balance and then to annihilate the forces of exploitation and oppression.

This potential for propaganda and action strives first to bring enlightenment to the unfortunates who, by acting as the defenders of the bourgeois class, perpetuate the depressing saga of slaves armed by their masters to fight against the rebels promising liberation. It would be impossible to focus too much effort on this preparatory task. In fact, we must get the full measure of the dampening potential represented by militarism. The people in arms are always pitted against their own, better armed, offspring. Now there is historical proof aplenty to show that all popular uprisings that have not enjoyed either neutrality or support from the people in greatcoats – to wit, the army – have foundered. So our

continual object must be to stymie the unwitting strength afforded to rulers by a segment of the working class.

That done, there still remains the matter of breaking the power of the parasitical minority proper – and it would be a grave error to regard it as negligible.

This, in broad outline, is the task that falls to the conscious workers.

### *Ineluctable violence*

As for anticipating the circumstances and timing of the decisive clash between the forces of the past and the forces of the future, that belongs to the realm of hypothesis. What we may be sure of, is that it will have been prefaced and prepared by more or less sudden sniping, clashes and contacts. And another thing of which we may be sure is that the forces of the past will not be resigning themselves to abdication or bowing the knee. Now, it is precisely this blind resistance to progress which has, in the past, all too often marked the achievement of social progress with brutality and violence. And it cannot be emphasised too strongly: the responsibility for such violence does not lie with the men looking to the future. For the people to determine upon the final uprising, they must be driven to it by necessity: they resolve upon it only after a lengthy series of experiences have demonstrated the impossibility of following the peaceable route and – even in those circumstances – their violence is merely a benign and humane retort to the excessive and barbaric violence from their masters.

Were the people violent by instinct, they would not endure the live of misery, privation and hard slog – studded with rascality and crime – which is the existence foisted upon them by the parasitical, exploitative minority for another twenty four hours. Here we need have no recourse to philosophical explanation to demonstrate that men are born 'neither good nor bad' and become one or the other according to their environment and circumstances. The matter can be resolved by everyday observation: it is beyond doubt that the people, sentimental and soft-hearted, display nothing of the endemic violence that characterises the ruling classes and which is the mortar holding their rule together – legality being only the thin whitewash of hypocrisy designed to screen this deep-seated violence.

The people, held down by the education inculcated into them, awash with prejudices, are obliged to make considerable effort to raise themselves to consciousness. Now, even when they pull it off, far from letting themselves be swept along by a justified wrath, they abide by the principle of least resistance: they seek out and stick to the path that looks to them the shortest and least fraught with difficulties. They are like waters following the slope to the sea, peaceable here and thundering there, according to whether they meet with few obstacles or many. To be sure, they are bound for

the revolution, regardless of the impediments placed in their way by the privileged: but they proceed by the fits and starts and hesitations which are the products of their peaceable disposition and their wish to fight shy of extreme solutions. So, when the people's force, smashing through the obstacles raised against it, sweeps over the old societies like a revolutionary hurricane, this is because it has been left no other outlet. Indeed, there is no denying that had this force been able to exercise itself without encumbrance, following the line of least resistance, it might not have manifested itself in violent actions but displayed a peaceable, majestic, calm aspect of itself. Isn't the river that rolls to the sea with Olympian but irresistible sluggishness not made up of the very same liquid molecules that, tumbling torrentially through steep-sided valleys, barged aside the obstacles placed in their path? The same goes for people power.

### *Illusory palliatives*

But, given that the people do not resort to force just for the pleasure of it, it would be dangerous to hope to preempt such recourse through the use of palliatives along parliamentary and democratic lines. Thus there is no voting system – no referendum, nor any other procedure that would seek to divine the key to the people's wishes – thanks to which one might attempt to forestall revolutionary movements. Clinging to illusions of this sort would be tantamount to lapsing back into the unhappy experiences of the past, when the miraculous virtues attributed to universal suffrage were the focus of widespread hopes. True, it is more convenient to believe in the omnipotence of universal suffrage, or even of the referendum, than to see things as they really are: it spares one the need to act – but, on the downside, it brings economic liberation no nearer.

In the final analysis, we must always be brought back to this ineluctable conclusion: recourse to force!

However, the fact that some voting method, some referendum procedure, etc., is unlikely to sound the extent and intensity of revolutionary consciousness should not be interpreted as finding against their relative worths. Referendum, say, may have its uses. In certain circumstances, recourse to it may well be the best policy. In instances posed with precision and clarity, it is convenient to gauge the tenor of workers' thinking by this method. Moreover, trade union organisations can use it, as the need arises (and this goes for those of them which, not being as yet completely free of the hold of capitalism, look to State intervention, as well as for those which are plainly revolutionary). And this has long been the case! Neither the one nor the other waited until any attempt was made to enshrine it as a system and for the attempt to be made to pass it off as a by-product of Direct Action.

It is therefore absurd to argue that the referendum runs counter to the revolutionary method – just as it would

be absurd to argue that it is its inevitable complement. It is a mechanism for quantitative measurement and quite unsuited to qualitative assessment. Which is why it would be ill-advised to depend upon its being a lever capable of shifting capitalist society off its foundations. Even if it were to become more commonplace, its practice is not going to take the place of the initiatives required and vigour crucial when an idea's time has come.

It is infantile to talk about a referendum when what is at stake is revolutionary action such as the storming of the Bastille ... Had the *Gardes Francaises* not defected to the people on 14 July 1789, had a conscious minority not set about attacking the fortress ... had an attempt been made first to determine by referendum the fate of that odious prison, the likelihood is that it would still be dominating the entrance to the *faubourg* Antoine ...

Our hypothesis with regard to the seizure of the Bastille is applicable to all revolutionary events: let them be put to the test of a hypothetical referendum and similar conclusions will be reached.

No! There is no suffrage-based or referendum-based panacea likely to take the place of recourse to revolutionary force. But we must be plainly specific on this point: such recourse to force does not imply that the masses are sleeping. Quite the opposite! And it is all the more effective, the more these masses are endowed with a more enlightened consciousness.

For the economic revolution that capitalist society carries within itself to unfold at last and result in achievements, and for backward lurches and savage backlash to be impossible, those beaver away at the great undertaking must know what they want and how they want it. They have to be conscious entities and not impulse-driven! Now, let there be no mistake about this, numerical strength is only truly efficacious from the revolutionary viewpoint if it is fertilised by the initiative of individuals and by their spontaneity. By itself, it is nothing more than an accumulation of indeterminate men that might be compared to a pile of inert matter prey to the impulses reaching it from without.

Thus it turns out that Direct Action, whilst proclaiming that the use of force cannot be avoided, lays the groundwork for the ruination of the rule of force and violence, in order to supplant it with a society based on consciousness and concord. This because it is the popularisation, in the old society of authoritarianism and exploitation, of the creative notions that set the human being free: development of the individual, cultivation of the will and galvanisation for action.

And so we are brought to the conclusion that Direct Action, quite apart from its value as a boon to society, carries within itself a value as a moral impregnation, in that it refines and elevates those whom it impregnates, releasing them from the straitjacket of passivity and inciting them to radiate strength and beauty.

# Socialists and Workers: The 1896 London Congress

Davide Turcato<sup>1</sup>

A reader unfamiliar with anarchism would probably find it puzzling, after reading the title, that this article is about anarchists. Precisely that puzzlement—which stems from the habit of equating the labour movement with socialism and socialism with its statist version—is evidence that after 120 years the events of the International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress that took place in London from 26 July to 2 August 1896 are still worth revisiting. That equation mirrors exactly the

Marxists' hegemonic view that motivated the anarchists' final exclusion from the congresses of the Second International. In contrast to that view, anarchists fought for admission, in the name of a pluralist view that considered socialists one component of the labour movement and anarchists a component of socialism.

The anarchists' exclusion was the issue that dominated the congress.

Though controversies over this question had occurred in all previous congresses of the Second International since its founding in 1889, anarchist opposition was episodic until their exclusion was formalised at Zurich in 1893. Only with the London congress did a coordinated opposition to the anarchists' exclusion take place. The controversy is usually depicted as a revival of Bakunin's struggle with Marx, with anarchists fighting once more the old battle and losing it once and for all. The cliché underlying standard accounts is that anarchists were backward-looking, unchanging, disruptive, and doomed. Instead, the congress was an early, significant step in the parallel resurgence of labour-oriented anarchism in France and Italy in the second half of the 1890s. In this perspective, the

anarchists' struggle in London was forward-looking, novel, and constructive.

By "resurgence of labour-oriented anarchism" I refer to both the rise of revolutionary syndicalism in France and to the experience of "anarchist socialism" that climaxed in Italy in 1897–8. In France, 1894 was a turning point between a three-year period predominated by individual deeds and culminated in the Trial of the Thirty and an era in which anarchists acted as conscious minorities

amidst workers. In 1894 the anarchist movement was at low ebb in Italy, too, after the repression of the Crispi government had disbanded its ranks. That year Errico Malatesta and others began reconsidering anarchist tactics, lamenting the ineffectiveness and isolation in which anarchists had fallen. In both France and Italy, a line divided anarchists: on one side, there was a view, which I call "labour-oriented

anarchism," based on organisation, participation in the labour movement, and collective action; on the other side, a view hostile to large, formal organisations, suspicious of the "reformism" inherent in unions, and supporting autonomous initiatives by small groups and individuals.

For labour-oriented anarchists, demanding admission to the congress meant reasserting socialism and the labour movement as central to anarchism. In other words, the struggle for admission to the congress was a statement of the labour-oriented anarchists' new tactics.

Conversely, the marxists' effort to exclude anarchists aimed at denying that they had a place among socialists and workers.

**"The anti-parliamentarians, however, were determined to have an opportunity of speaking, and here arose a scene of much excitement. Malatesta had spoken but half a dozen words when the chairman's bell was brought into requisition."**

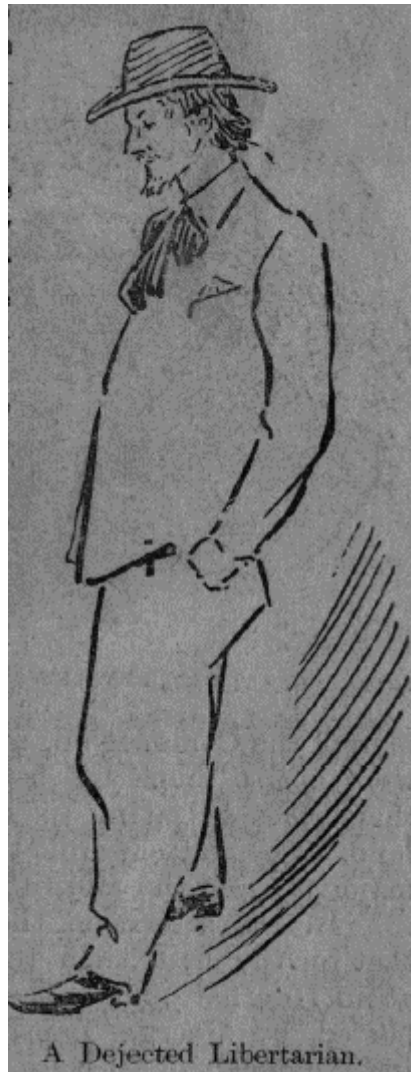
**– *Proceedings of the International Worker's Congress, London, July-August, 1896***

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws on two earlier works: "The 1896 London Congress: Epilogue or Prologue?" in *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism*, ed. by David Berry and Constance Bantman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010); and chapter 7 of my *Making Sense of Anarchism*, paperback ed. (Oakland: AK Press, 2015). The article is published with the permission of Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

For French anarchists, the continuity was not so much with the First International but with the Nantes labour congress of two years before, where a split occurred between the marxists and a syndicalist majority that voted for general strike tactics. More generally, the terms of the question had changed since the First International. As Malatesta recalled in Keir Hardie's *Labour Leader* shortly before the congress, in the old International both marxists and bakuninists wished to make their programme triumph. In the struggle between centralism and federalism, class struggle and economic solidarity got neglected, and the International perished in the process. In contrast, he remarked, anarchists were not presently demanding anyone to renounce their programme. They only asked for divisions to be left out of the economic struggle, where they had no reason to exist. Thus, the issue was no longer hegemony, but the contrast between an exclusive view of socialism, for which one political idea was to be hegemonic, and an inclusive one, for which multiple political views were to co-exist, united in the economic struggle. As Kropotkin remarked, since the congress was announced as a *Universal Workers' Congress*, either trade unions only were admitted, or all socialist and revolutionary groups were entitled to participate. In brief, the controversy was no longer with the anarchists, but about the anarchists.

Accordingly, the struggle was presently between two larger fronts, or at least between a compact one, led by the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SPD, for which parliamentarianism was a *sine qua non* of socialism, and a diverse one including not only the anarchists, but also the majority of the British Independent Labour Party, the Allemanist fraction of French socialism, the "young" German socialists expelled from the SPD Erfurt congress of 1891, and the Dutch, anti-parliamentarian *Socialistenbond* of Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis and Christian Cornelissen. Hence, if continuity existed with the First International, it was on the marxist side, as Engels's comment on the 1891 Brussels congress confirms: "Voting the exclusion of the anarchists was the right thing to do: thus had ended the old International, and it is thus that the new one is being launched. It confirms, purely and simply, the resolution taken at The Hague nineteen years ago."



*Proceedings of the International...*

By demanding admission to the London congress, Malatesta and his comrades faced not only the opposition of marxists, but also set themselves apart from anarchist currents opposed to organisation and involvement in the labour movement. That anarchist forces coalesced around a congress was itself a declaration of intent about their tactical orientation. Though the struggle with marxists was a clash of ideas, it took the form of an extenuating battle over mandates, letterheads, stamps, voting systems, that is the very machinery that many anarchists dreaded as outward symbols of the authoritarianism inherent in organisation.

In this respect, Kropotkin's absence from the congress was telling. Though he was one of the earliest advocates of anarchist mass participation in the congress, he did not participate. This was no accident, but a firm resolution on his part. Repeated efforts were made to secure his participation, but in vain. Malatesta conjectured that Kropotkin's reluctance to participate proceeded from his deep-seated aversion to voting, and at the same time from his sensing that circumstances would arise at the congress in which not voting would play in the hands of the opponents. He also reported Kropotkin saying that he admitted "no delegation, no congress, except for those of academic type, where each one goes on his own, and therefore he would be very embarrassed in a congress of delegates." Thus, the anarchists' congressional initiative was engaged on a double front, aiming to assert the anarchists' place

among socialists and workers and to propagate an organisation- and labour-oriented attitude in the anarchist ranks.

Meetings in London to organise the anarchist presence at the congress started a year earlier. In the following months, the initiative was taken by the British anarchists, though it was fraught with dissension and ineffectiveness. A committee was eventually formed, whose activities were wound up with a meeting in the West End of London at the end of April 1896. However, other anarchists in London believed that much remained to be done. By late June a new "Anarchist and Anti-Parliamentary Committee" was formed, with Malatesta as the most active member. While the previous

committee had focused on domestic propaganda, Malatesta liaised with anarchists abroad, especially in France. Throughout July 1896 a nearly daily correspondence went on with French anarchist Augustin Hamon, through which Malatesta was also in contact with Fernand Pelloutier, the French revolutionary syndicalist. According to Hamon, these three militants were the main organisers of the anarchist opposition.

A key task was to ensure mandates for anarchists living in London. As a result, the list of French delegates contained the names of several British anarchists. The distribution of mandates at the congress is a telling indicator of both the role of international anarchist exiles in London and the affinity and cooperation between Italian and French anarchists. Malatesta himself was admitted to the congress in virtue of a mandate from the Amiens metal workers; Pelloutier represented the Italian Federation of Labour Chambers; Louise Michel carried a mandate from an anarchist-communist association in Northern Italy; and the Italian anarchists Antonio Agresti and Isaia Pacini represented French associations.

Malatesta's congressional tactics displayed a remarkable pragmatism and political moderation. He regarded unity of action as paramount, stating to Hamon that he would even prefer that "a stupid course of action be taken," rather than each acting in a different way. A final decision on a common line of conduct was to be taken at a private meeting of delegates on the eve of the congress. British trade unionists, French syndicalists, Dutch and Italian delegates attended the meeting. However, as Hamon reported, "the discussion was quite vague, though it all took place peacefully. No resolution was taken and nothing came out of the meeting."

The meeting's indecisiveness illustrates the divisions and biases that hindered the effectiveness of anarchist opposition. Ten days before the congress, Malatesta already expressed to Hamon his disappointment about the gap between what anarchists could have done and what they actually did: "Certainly, if we win or just come out well, we will owe it to the French labour organisations and the Allemanists. You know that the anarchists in a strict sense have been very divided throughout on the question of the congress, and because of this they have done almost nothing."

**"There were also ten Italian Anarchists present, of whom three came as trade-unionists. The remaining seven were excluded . . . There was a great waste of time over the Dutch report, ending in the admission of the Free Communists or Libertarians who were mostly trade-unionists . . . Nieuwenhuis and the members of the Dutch Socialist League formally withdrew on the plea that since Anarchists were not to be admitted as such the Congress was no longer representative of the entire movement."**

*– Proceedings of the International...*

international anarchism, such as Elisée Reclus, Peter Kropotkin, and Amilcare Cipriani. Such narratives tend to blur the line between "insiders" and "outsiders": those who attended the congress and those who did not. However, that line existed and had consequences. Again, it had to do with the respective attitudes toward organisation and set apart the protagonists of labour-oriented anarchism from its mere sympathisers.

The outcome of the congress is too well-known to need recounting: the Zurich resolution was confirmed and only a few anarchists that held unobjectionable credentials from unions were admitted. In contrast, the French socialist Jean Jaurés expected to attend the congress without credentials, on the sole ground of representing French workers in Parliament. In obliterating any distinction between political and labour representation, his demand epitomised the Marxist outlook on the relationship between working class, economic struggle, and political party: political representation was a higher form of representation, the only in which the proletariat was represented as a class. Being a duly elected socialist parliamentary representative was regarded as the strongest form of workers' mandate.

Though anarchists did not win, they did come out well. Various British newspapers, including the mass circulation radical liberal *Star* and the literary weekly *The New Age*, sympathetically reported the libertarians' battles. Most notably, the anarchists won the sympathy of the *Clarion*, the main newspaper of British socialism, with a circulation of 60,000. Its editor Robert Blatchford sternly remarked that the congress proceedings were conducted with "intolerance and contempt" and presented socialism as "a cast-iron creed

The anarchists' internal division is obscured in congress accounts. These usually contain reports of the first tumultuous sessions—in which such anarchists as Paul Delesalle, Malatesta, and Joseph Tortelier appear—next to reports of the ensuing anarchist mass meeting of July 28 at Holborn Town Hall, where Pelloutier, Louise Michel, and Gustav Landauer shared the speaking platform with other foremost figures of

administered by a dictatorship or priesthood of superior persons of the conference platform type.” Moreover, the French delegation remarkably voted against the exclusion of the anarchists. The fact that the pro-anarchist majority won by a narrow margin shows how crucial the painstaking work of securing mandates for London anarchists had been. That vote foreshadowed the predominant role that anarchists would have in the French labour movement in the following years.

In the next decade, the relation between French syndicalism and Italian anarchist socialism remained one of great affinity of ideas on collective struggle,

labour involvement, and organisation. Despite the exclusion, for French and Italian anarchists alike the 1896 London congress was a step in the constructive path towards asserting anarchism as a significant force in workers’ collective struggles. Rather than being the epilogue of an old story that started with the First International, the London congress was the prologue of a process that culminated in the 1907 anarchist congress of Amsterdam, where the various currents of labour-oriented anarchism, by then firmly established, could convene and engage in a historical debate.

# Should Anarchists Be Admitted to the Coming International Congress?

**Errico Malatesta**

*The Labour Leader*, 11 July 1896

Why not? Perhaps because, as they have said, we are not Socialists. Well, if there are any persons who delight in calling themselves Anarchists, and who are not Socialists, certainly they have nothing to do with a Socialist Congress, and they ought to have no desire to take part in it. But we Anarchist-Communists or Collectivists desire the abolition of monopolies of all kinds; we demand the complete abolition of classes and all domination and exploitation of man by man; we wish that the land and all the instruments of production and distribution, as well as the wealth accumulated by the labour of past generations, should become by the expropriation of its present holders the common property of all mankind, so that all that work shall be able to enjoy the full produce of their work, either in full Communism or by each man receiving according to his efforts, according to the will and agreement of those interested. We wish to substitute for competition and war among men fraternity and solidarity in work for the good of all. And we have spread this ideal, and have struggled and suffered for its realisation for long years, and in some countries—Italy and Spain—long before the birth of parliamentary Socialism. What honest and well informed man will affirm that we are not Socialists?



**Errico Malatesta (1853-1932)**

Perhaps we are not Socialists because we wish the workers should conquer their rights by their organised efforts, and not to trust to the hope which we think vain and chimerical—that they will obtain them by concessions from any Government? Or because we believe that Parliament is not only a useless weapon for the workers, but that even without the resistance of the middle classes it will never, by the law of its nature, represent the interests and the will of all, and will always remain the instrument of the domination of a class or party? Or because we believe that the new society ought to be organised by the direct agreement of all concerned, from the circumference to the centre, freely, spontaneously, under the

inspiration of the sentiment of solidarity and under the pressure of natural and social necessities, and because that if this organisation was made by means of decrees from a central body, either elected or a directorship, it will begin by being an artificial organisation, forcing and dissatisfying everybody, and it would end in the creation of a new class of professional politicians, who would seize for themselves all sorts of privileges and monopolies? It might easily be maintained with more justice that we are, if not the only Socialists, certainly the most thorough and logical, because we claim for every man, not only his entire portion of social wealth,



but also his part in social power—that is to say, the real faculty of making his influence felt equally with that of others in the management of public affairs.

If we are Socialists then it is clear that a congress from which we are excluded cannot honestly call itself “The Socialist Workers’ Congress,” and that it ought to take the particular title of the party or parties admitted to its deliberations. For example, none of us would think of mixing with a congress which would be called a “Social Democratic Congress” or a “Congress of Parliamentary Socialists.”

But let us leave alone this question of nomenclature, and neglect also the discussion of the question, if the London Committee has properly interpreted the resolutions of Zurich. Let us go to the root of the matter. It is to the interest of all the enemies of our capitalist society that the workmen should be united and solid in the struggle against capitalism, and that they should be conscious that this struggle is of necessity of an economic character. It is not because we ignore the importance of political questions. We believe not only that government—the state—is an evil in itself, but that it is the armed defence of capitalism, and that the people cannot take possession of their own property without passing over the bodies of its armed police—really or figuratively, according to circumstances. Thus we ought necessarily to occupy ourselves in the political struggle against government. But it may be owing to the difference of conditions and of temperaments of the peoples of various countries, or the fact that the relations between the political constitution and the conditions of the masses are very complicated, hard to adapt and less capable of being treated in a way that seems good to everybody, that politics are in effect a great source of division, and the fact is that the conscious workers in the different countries whom it would be easy to solidly unite in the economic struggle, are by politics broken up into many fractions. Consequently an understanding between all the workers who fight for their emancipation is not possible, save on economic ground—and it is this that is of most consequence, because political action of the proletariat, parliamentary or revolutionary, is equally futile so long as it does not form a conscious organised economic force. Every attempt to enforce a single political opinion upon the labour movement tends to its disintegration and stops the progress of its economic organisation.

The Social Democrats evidently desire to force upon the workers their special programme. It might almost be

said that they want to prevent those who do not accept the decisions of their party from fighting for human emancipation! They have had in this direction more or

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***Certainly the Anarchists will soon be brought by the logic of their programme and by the necessities of the struggle to put their strength and their hope in the international organisation of the masses of the workers.***

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less success—perhaps they will have more—but that can only take place at the expense of a general understanding among the workers, and certainly without desiring it, serving the interests of the middle classes. If Socialists would only remember the history of the old International, which certainly the old among them know better than it is generally related. There were plenty of insults between Marxists and Bakunists. The truth is that both sections wished to make its special programme triumphant in the International, and in the struggle between Centralism and Federalism, between Statism and Anarchism, we neglected the class struggle and economic solidarity, and the International perished through it. Today the Anarchists, though we owe to them in many countries the first Socialist trade unions, by a series of circumstances and errors which there is no need at present to examine, have not much influence—save in Spain—in the Labour movement. But this will not last long, and the Social Democrats would do wrong to reckon upon it.

Certainly the Anarchists will soon be brought by the logic of their programme and by the necessities of the struggle to put their strength and their hope in the international organisation of the masses of the workers. Already eloquent signs of this can be seen. What will happen then? Will there be again *two* Internationals, wasting in internal quarrels the strength which ought to be employed against the capitalist middle classes, and will they again end in killing each other?

We have no intention of demanding—far from that—that the different parties and schools should renounce their programme and their tactics. We hold to our own ideas, and we understand that the others will do the same. We only ask that division shall not be carried

where it ought not to be; we demand the right for every worker to fight against capitalism hand in hand with his brothers, without distinction of political ideas; we ask that all shall fight as they think best, with those that believe as they believe, but that all shall be united in the economic struggle.

Then, if the Social Democrats persist in their attempt at military despotism, and thus sow dissension among the workers, may the latter be able to understand and bring to a glorious triumph the noble words of Marx: “Workers of the world, unite!”

# The Forthcoming Congress

## F. Domela Nieuwenhuis

*Liberty: A journal of anarchist communism, July 1896*

The International Congress is approaching. Shall it be a failure or a success? That is the question.

Shall this congress for the International movement have a similar result to that which the Congress of the Hague, in 1872, had for the old International? If the sectarian spirit of the so-called Marxists (German model) triumphs, the Congress will be a failure.

To understand the question we must have the circumstances described clearly and distinctly. Let us try to do this.

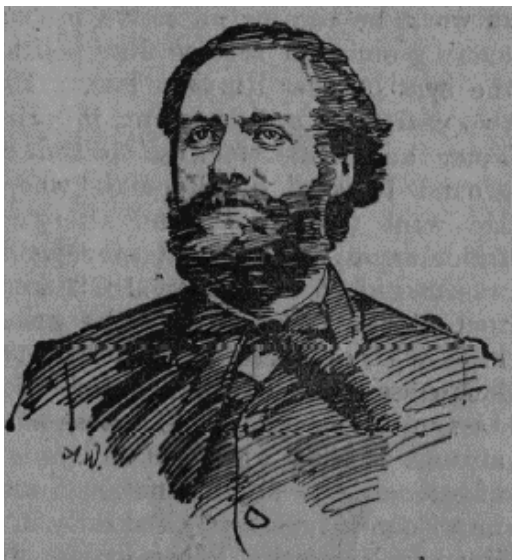
At the Zurich Congress of 1893 the majority adopted the following resolution:

“All Trade Unions shall be admitted to the Congress; also those Socialist parties and organisations which recognize the necessity of the organisation of the workers and of political action. By ‘political action’ is meant that the working-class organisations seek, as far as possible, to use or conquer political rights and the machinery of legislation for the furthering of the interests of the proletariat, and the conquest of political power.”

By this resolution all the anti-parliamentarians were excluded. If this resolution only were to be acted on, we should not think of coming to the congress at London. Everyone has the right to make the conditions on which he invites others, and this condition was strong enough to limit the frontiers.

But what happened after one fore going was adopted? The following day, the proposers themselves of the resolution made a declaration which, with the consent of the congress, was written in the protocol. This declaration was:

“The addition proposed does not say by any means that everyone who comes to the congress should be obliged to take part in political action



**F. Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919)**

under all circumstances and in all details of our definitions. It claims only the acknowledgement of the labourer’s right to use the political rights altogether of their country, which, in their opinion, are for the promotion of the interests of the labouring classes, and to constitute themselves as an independent political labour party.”

The resolution closed the door: the declaration opened it.

What is now the position of the congress?

Nobody denies the right of those labourers who will use the political rights, if we are not obliged to use them. This declaration gives freedom to both; to those who will use the political rights, and to those who refuse to use them. Therefore we antiparliamentary socialists have the right to be at the congress. We do not ask for a privilege, we ask for no change of the conditions; we come with an appeal to the congress, which has decided for free action. If we are excluded, the congress must put itself on the standpoint of the resolution and annihilate the declarations, but it is dishonest to refuse us, and Bebel himself, as one of the proposers of the addition, must plead our admission.

What will the congress do? Shall it be so narrow-minded as to exclude the libertarian socialists?

It is curious how history repeats itself. Marx remembers how history repeats itself – once as a farce and once as a tragedy. We shall see what is played this time. The old christians have had the same struggle against heresy; and we can see how the heresy of today will be the dogma of tomorrow. In that time there was a great difference in one single letter. Some said that the son (Jesus) was equal to the father (*homoousios*), and others that the son was uniform with the father (*homoiousiios*). This single “I” was the cause of their fighting and

killing each other, and the whole body of christians was divided into two parties.

Shall the like happen after fifteen centuries? Alas! poor mankind!

Will you make Socialism ridiculous in the eyes of men? Go and exclude other Socialists, who do not think as you, but are as good Socialists as yourselves. On the Sunday before the congress, Hyde Park will contain the spectacle of Socialists who fraternise – who can hold a meeting for promoting the international peace of all the peoples of the world. On the following day, an international dispute will commence as to what Socialists shall be admitted to the sacred temple and who shall be refused. And perhaps there will be a fight between Socialists! And who will laugh? The capitalist class, who will ask, “Is that the outcome of Marx’s advice, ‘Proletarians of the world, unite?’”

Shame on those who will exclude, who will divide in place of uniting. The world will see a repetition of the struggle between Marx and Bakunin in 1872. It will be another struggle between authority and freedom.

Imagine such men as Kropotkin, Reclus, Malatesta, Tcherkesoff, Cipriani, and many others excluded the congress, and you must admit that it is no more a Socialist congress, but only a parliamentary, a reform congress of a set of social democrats – that is, a sectarian congress.

Choose what you will be! – a congress of serious Socialists who discuss all questions, which interest the Socialists, or a congress of sectarians, from which are excluded as heretics so many men who have fought and suffered for the cause of the people.

## On the Congress

**Louise Michel**

*Liberty: A journal of anarchist communism, August 1896*

Where I not an Anarchist of long standing, the Parliamentary Congress in London would have made me one; many others feel likewise, not to mention those who were actually won over by it. The opening of the Congress, more exclusive than the Chambers of Badingue and little William, has precipitated events; the presidential bell has rung the knell of the dogma, the credo of which had to be recited before entering.

Having reached power, the Religion, the State, the new Papacy shut itself up in a fortress, happily too small to enclose the earth teeming with justice, liberty, and happiness. The new papacy had walled itself up.

It was conclusively proved at the Congress that the best, the most intelligent, the most devoted of men will be worse than those they seek to replace. No one will return to such a Congress. Parliamentarians will have only themselves to blame for it. Therefore it was not worthwhile to call their next senate in a German town in 1899. Where will Parliamentarians be then? Perhaps carried away in the general break up. But the idea will be grander, clearer than today; the idea they wished to nail to the stones of their fortress will have progressed.



**Louise Michel (1830-1905)**

The excommunication of Anarchists and anti-parliamentarians by the Queen’s Hall Infallibles will follow the fate of all excommunications.

The idea of Liberty glittered like flames round the world; they have stirred it up till it irradiates like an aurora.

It was perfectly logical to exclude, from a council in which they believe articles of creed without examination, associations for social studies, the members of which strive to obtain a clear conception of human tendencies at the end of our epoch. This incident must

however be mentioned – that the Anarchists delegated by trade unions could not be excluded. And a grotesque thing might have happened. Felix Faure – who is a tanner, Constans – who is a nightman, Tirard – who is a clockmaker, and many others so situated, could easily have obtained mandates from their trades, and, as they profess Parliamentarianism, the Congress gates – decked with the flag of trade unionism – would have been open to them.

Another comical thing is, that the police on this occasion were worse than the police of kings and emperors. As I had to wait at the door of the Congress for my entrance card, that I had omitted to change the day before, in order to reach the anti-parliamentarian

meeting in time, the policeman who guarded the entrance began to push me from my place. With my accustomed obstinacy I returned each time he pushed me away. Had I not a perfect right to be present at our excommunication? He ended by being sufficiently rough for me to have to remind him in my very best scullery English that it was not customary to act thus: I said "You are not in Paris for to be insolent like French police: you are in London." After this very correct observation he grew a little politer during the half hour I was made to wait for my card, which was difficult to obtain, although Mrs. Aveling herself asked for it, because the "formality" of changing had been forgotten on the previous evening.

At last I had the satisfaction of assisting at the sentence pronounced on us by Parliamentarians, and I should have been much amused had it not been painful to see old friends in their ranks, waked up by a stupid dogma, while the horizon is so vast.

Domela Nienwenhuis was right when he said "It is curious how history repeats itself – sometimes like a farce, sometimes, like a tragedy. What sort of play will they act this time we wonder! The old Christians had the same struggle with heresy, and we can see how the heresy of today is the dogma of tomorrow!"

**"Peter Kropotkin: Whilst the desire to make one's own will predominate over that of others may have created dissensions, nevertheless we are all delighted to see that such an enormous mass of workers, by sending delegates to the Congress, expressed their determination to fight against Capital and to take property out of the hands of the monopolists and exploiters of labour. He hopes that only workers' associations will be admitted at future congresses: we want delegates not as Social Democrats nor as Anarchists, but as men who have won the confidence of a workers' association, whatever be their personal opinion. Furthermore, not only the trade unions ought to be represented, but also all workers who do something to free themselves from the capitalist yoke, notably the *co-operative associations*. He also deprecates the voting by nationalities in an assembly purporting to be a really international one."**

– "Report of the Holborn Town Hall Meeting", *Freedom*, August-September, 1896

But Anarchy will never become a dogma, it would then no longer be Anarchy; it must follow freely, without god or master, the eternal call of progress.

# International Congresses and the Congress of London

**Peter Kropotkin**

II

(*Les Temps Nouveaux*, 29 August 1896)

## A Page from History

Things happen so quickly nowadays that we very easily forget events which are of the greatest importance in contemporary history.

Among these events there is one which stands out above all the others. I am referring to the great achievements of the International Working Men's Association in its early years and the tremendous scope of its first four Congresses from 1866 to 1869.

What made these Congresses so successful? What gave them their historic scope, a scope so great that in spite of what those who boast that they are "scientific socialists" may have to say on this question, the fact remains that the minutes of these four Congresses constitute the epitome of all modern socialism? It is there, in reality, and not in the obscure writings of Marx and Engels that we have learned the socialism of modern times, the socialism to which we adhere.

The answer is simple. The first Congresses of the International did not seek to control the socialist movement: they sought rather to find its expression. They did not pose as “Parliaments of Labour”, this absurd name was invented later. They were simply places where the workers of the two worlds could exchange ideas.

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The founders of modern socialism – of the “fourth awakening of the proletariat” to quote Malon – did not try to make themselves the masters of the young movement. They tried to *learn*; learn from some, and teach others. The great masses of workers, they said, are being stirred by new currents. It is not the communism of Fourier, or Cabet, of Robert Owen or of Pierre Leroux, nor the “governmentarianism” of Louis Blanc nor the mutualism of Proudhon, nor the neo-christianism of Lamennais. Contemporary ideas hold on, undoubtedly; but they differ essentially [from the new ones]. It is necessary, therefore, that these [new] currents of ideas grow, that they are affirmed, that they find their expression.

It is not to the bourgeoisie – not even the most highly inspired – to whom we must turn for this concrete expression. The whole mental set of the bourgeoisie is warped by its science, by its education, by the fact that it lives at the expense of the working class. It is the workers themselves – the most active and most intelligent of them, who remain in the ranks of the toiling masses, who partake of its life, of its joys and its sorrows, whom we must ask to express these aspirations. And they must do so, not by placing themselves on the field of political struggles where they surely will be swallowed up by the bourgeois gentlemen, but by remaining on the field of economic struggles – the day by day struggles against capitalist domination.

The watchword of that epoch was, “the emancipation of the working class is the task of the working class itself.” And this formula was taken *literally*. Later on it was replaced by the deceitful formula that the task of the emancipation of the working classes should be left to a few, chosen in the electoral lottery.

No. At that time it was understood that for the achievement of the social revolution it was necessary that the popular spirit *find new forms of social organisation* – forms which could not be representative government, nor a State such as was elaborated for the triumph of the Roman and Christian idea, nor the governmental Jacobinism of Louis Blanc – but

something completely new arising from the needs of modern production and distribution.

Something as different from that which exists at present as the communes of the twelfth century, described by Thierry and Sismondi, were different from the feudal world against which they revolted. Something that will emerge *from the struggle of the*

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*workers against capital*, from their national and international *unions*, from the [common] *interests* which exist amongst the workers of the two worlds, outside of the present political forms, from the *ideas* germinating in their midst.

That is what the International was seeking when its work was interrupted by the war of 1870.

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All the workers, however, do not think in the same fashion. The great majority, on the contrary, sees nothing outside of reforms or political revolutions. Many dream of dictatorship; a large number adore Jacobin terror. The great mass puts its faith in universal suffrage and believes in worker [electoral] candidates. Others do not see how much economic serfdom dominates political liberties. Lodged in the tradition of 1793 and 1848, they fail to see that the industrial worker and the peasant will remain the serfs of the rich and the nobility, whatever their political rights, so long as they themselves are not masters of the land, the factories and all the social wealth.

Consequently the International had to pursue a twofold aim.

In its daily life it would establish unions among men of various trades in each city, region and nation, and among all the trades internationally.

And through its Congresses it would carry on propaganda work – far beyond the confines of its own ranks, it would speak to the whole world and disseminate its ideas among all peoples – especially those not as yet influenced by the revolutionary vanguard of the working class.

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In its Congresses the workers – the workers only – in the various trades and from various nations would learn to know each other. They would develop mutual understanding for the purpose of ensuring the success of their strikes by means of regional and international solidarity. They would learn to paralyse, to stun the capitalist monster by the power of international attack. They would know how to put it in its death throes, to make it yield to the united forces of the workers.

They would study in the meantime how to produce and distribute the products of their labour by themselves. From those understandings, renewed each year by means of international exchanges of ideas, would develop the plans for the new forms of economic organisation which should eventually replace capitalist production and distribution.

At the same time the regional and international Congresses would serve as a powerful medium for the propagation of the socialist idea as well as for the elaboration of new ideas.

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Each Congress would decide upon two or three important problems to be studied in preparation for the following Congress. These questions would be posed and discussed, in the period between the two Congresses, at first in the local workers groups, then in small regional or national Congresses and finally in the annual international Congress.

Men of good will would come together and prepare elaborate reports summarising the local and regional discussion; these reports would be used as the basis for discussion at the next Congress. After being published in the minutes they would be used as material for discussion and for propaganda in newspapers.

No scientific congress was ever better organised in this respect than the Congresses of the International – for this organisation was not the work of a single individual but the fruit of the practical collective spirit.

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That is why, in the realm of everyday practical life, each Congress marked a step in advance in the establishment of mutual understanding among the various trades. One saw trades which formerly were at odds with each other – for example, the Swiss clockmakers and building workers – now united for common action; one saw

nations, formerly enemies, now united to hold common council in a strike.

Likewise, each Congress *marked a step in advance in the realm of ideas*. The International shattered many old prejudices. Lefrançais presented his splendid thesis against dictatorship; Liebknecht (in 1869) launched his formidable attack upon parliamentary action and against the political fakers who attempted to drag the proletariat into electoral struggles. In the sphere of economics there was, at the Lausanne Congress, in 1867, a free discussion of the public utilities and on the role of the State, on the land question at Brussels (1868), and on property in general at Basle (1869) – each of these marked a new step in the evolution of ideas, each report being a major piece of work rising from the heart of the International.

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The Basle Congress was the last of this kind.

In 1870 there came the war. France raised the flag of the Commune and was bled under the heels of the French murderers as well as under the heel of Bismarck. The Germans, inflamed by their military successes which they attributed to the “governmental organisation” of Moltke and Bismarck, to “discipline”, to the political State, devoted themselves body and soul to governmentalism, to politicalism. From being “socialist” they turned into “socialist *democrats*”, into Jacobins, into ultra-Statists.

Germany had conquered France; was that not sufficient evidence of the value of “strong government”? Socialism, therefore, required a strong government.

From then on all the Congresses, including the current fiasco in London, had as their aim *establishment of a socialist government*.

Those who believe that we are exaggerating need only to read the invectives in the social-democratic press against the anarchists who place obstacles in the way of the formation of such a government. The establishment of an international socialist government became, from that time on, the goal of all the international Congresses.

At the Conference of 1871, held in London, the Marxists of London, supported by the infamous Utin, promulgated the doctrine of “the conquest of political power” while laying down the bases of an international government.

At the Hague, in 1872, the Marxists, supported by the French Blanquists, preferred to exclude the Jura Federation and Bakunin, to split the International in two and to send the General Council to New York to die an ignominious death – “to kill the International” – rather than to see an International which (in France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and in Switzerland) did not recognise the authority of the Marxist General Council.

In Ghent, in 1878, [there was the] same attempt to establish the international socialist government – an attempt that fails again, thanks to the resistance of the embryonic federation of France (represented by [Paul] Brousse), of Spain, of Italy, of Switzerland and, partly, of Belgium – failure that *Vorwärts* [*Forward*], the organ of the German social-democrats, always blames, with reason, the nine anarchist delegates for.

Finally, in Paris and Zurich, the whole struggle against the anarchists was just a struggle to oust from the international labour movement those who do not want an international socialist government.

Everything was sacrificed in this struggle. All forces were exhausted by this fight.

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And what is the result?

While the anarchists worked continually on the development of their conceptions of a society without government, while they were working out the problems and questions of production, distribution, cooperation, of the aims of production, of morality, or philosophy – the other party remained *absolutely* stationary.

Since the Basle Congress – that is to say, since twenty-eight years ago – not a single idea, not a single thought which might indicate a forward step in socialist evolution, has issued from the International Congress. For to say: “Let us be numerous in Parliament and vote for an eight-hour law” is not to express an idea. This is not a contribution to the immense social problem. It is merely a pious wish, a pious fancy.

And while international Congresses of various trades are being held (such as the international Congress of glass-workers which has just ended), while international conferences (conducted without ballyhoo) of American and British dockers together with Belgian workers, are preparing for large-scale international action which *shall reduce* working hours and may perhaps lead to the expropriation of the docks – while all this is taking place the international socialist worker Congresses [of the Second International] have been for the past twenty-eight years precisely what the last Congress was: the arena for the display of personal feuds and ambitions.

That is where we are.

As for the London Congress and the end which was pursued by parliamentarians; we discuss that in a forthcoming issue, with all the necessary details.

V (end)

(*Les Temps Nouveaux*, 10 October 1896)

We have seen the past of international congresses. Now let us take a look at the future.

Taking socialism as a whole, let us first note that *no party can encompass it in its entirety*. To try to do this, to strive to make it happen, as the social-democrats do, is a waste of time; it is to betray the cause that you claim to defend.

We must first recognise – recognise with happiness – that the movement of ideas which has been named *socialism* has gone beyond the period when we could hope to bring it within the framework of a single party. A party can no longer encompass it as a whole. It is already a flood, that we cannot dam anymore.

Like human thought itself, like society, it has taken on a variety of aspects and nuances that respond to the thousand shades of the human spirit, to the thousand

tendencies that emerge in a society that lives, that thinks, that develops.

This variety of aspects is its strength. It is this that allows it to be universalised, to penetrate all classes of society – to make inroads into the peasant-owner and the peasant in the municipality, the worker of the large factory and the worker of the small Parisian business, the thinker, the writer, the artist. It is this that allows them to be united, all, in the same aspiration for equality and freedom, through the socialisation, in one form or another, of social capital – the heritage of humanity – put at the service of all.

All great movements have had this characteristic of universality and variety. We are happy that socialism has finally reached this stage, that it has gone beyond the embryonic period of the party, that it has become so widespread to the point of permeating society. This is proof that it will no longer be smothered.

So trying to bring this vast movement into a single party, to put it under a single programme, as the social-

**At that time it was understood that for the achievement of the social revolution it was necessary that the popular spirit *find new forms of social organisation***

democrats do, is a waste of time. We must recognise the variety: it is life itself.

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This being given, recognised, proven – what can be the role of future international socialist Congresses?

It must be openly recognised that any attempt to impose a government, a general guardianship on this movement is as criminal as it was [in the First International], that it is still the papacy's attempt to want to rule the world.

It is one thing to believe in the usefulness of a government within a party. It is, after all, only an error of judgement. But to believe that you can impose a ruler [*gouverne*] on to a movement that tends to become as universal as civilised society itself – that is simply criminal madness, worthy of the Catholic Church but unworthy of a socialist.

This is what should be, first of all, understood in the movement; what the authoritarian socialists themselves must be brought to recognise.

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Indeed, take any nation – France, England, Germany, Russia, whatever! [–] and you try to give an account of this immense throng of interests, thoughts, aspirations, that a nation represents.

England is the country in which industry dominates, and where already half of the country's workers are enlisted in large factories. It is immense, compared to the continent. But can it be said that the interests of the nation are summed up in the interests of these two or three million workers? That it would suffice to render them masters of their factories to solve the social question? That he who speaks in their name, and asks, on their behalf, the socialisation of the factories, speaks in the name of the working class of England? – And the workers of the soil? And the form of possession of the soil itself which, at bottom, takes precedence over all economic questions? And the trade that sustains more people than the soil itself in this country of merchants? And these millions of others who live from work in the thousand small industries that abound in England as elsewhere?

How much more complicated is the social question when you go to France, where half of the population exists on the products of the soil? In Germany, where two-thirds, if not more, are in the same situation? In Russia, where nine-tenths of the population are farmers? In Italy and Spain, which are somewhere in between Russia and France?

Well, do you represent those millions, scattered amongst the villages and hamlets, and the multitude of their interests, their conflicts, their mutual relations, their relationships to the thousand strings of the State – and the sincere man in his thought must recognise that

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**They want those who prepare the social revolution *in actions and concrete ideas* to abandon this task to the makers of laws. As if it were enough to become a legislator to understand all that these millions of individuals learn in their daily struggles against authority, the boss, the priest....**

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there are thousands and thousands of interests about which socialism, as it is today, has not only never pondered, but did not even suspect.

Nobody – no individual in the world, not even a universal arch-genius – can speak in the name of those thousands and thousands of interests. Nobody except *the totality* of all those interested parties, speaking, *and above all acting*, themselves, learning [what] their interests [are] through their very action.

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Since the current conditions of economic and political life do not meet the needs of society, we see a thousand movements arising and sprouting from all points in society which seek to demolish these conditions, vaguely inspired by this fundamental idea of socialism: “The wealth already produced and the means to produce new riches should belong to society – not to the individual.” Movements which seek, each in its own domain, the means of reaching this aim, and whose very goal is determined and defined as they work to achieve it.

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Already today we see four or five groups of various movements taking shape.

We have the social-democratic movement, representing in our societies the Roman, Catholic, and later Jacobin tradition of the centralised, disciplined State, concentrating in its hands the political, economic and social life of nations. This tendency exists in society, it has its past, and in socialism – the reflection of society – it is represented by the more or less social democracy, with a thousand nuances of its own.



Then we have the anarchist movement, which has frankly affirmed itself as communist, and aims at the demolition of the State to substitute for it the direct free agreement of consumer and producer organisations, grouped to satisfy all the infinitely varied needs of human nature. It represents the popular tradition of societies.

In this same movement, we still have the group which, watchful about safeguarding the rights of the individual, [is] based mainly on individualism, making cheap points against socialisation (the primary basis, in our opinion, for the blossoming of individuality); a movement which still has its reason for being [*raison d'être*], to counterbalance the authoritarian tendencies of Communism.

Then we have an immense, a colossal trade union worker movement, which, by modest increases of wages and reductions in hours of work, has already done more, perhaps, than all the other movements to affirm the rights and respect of the man in the worker, and which does not aim at anything less than to drive the master out of the factory, the mine, the transport routes, by waging guerrilla warfare every day.

Then comes another large movement – very large in England – the co-operative movement, straying from its origins but tending nevertheless today to pour its current into the great socialist flood, which will eventually win. A movement that aims to eliminate that immense number of intermediaries who place themselves between the producer and the consumer, and tries to replace the boss by associated producers.

Then come all these movements of agreements between peasants which, under the name of syndicates, are created as soon as the law ceases to punish them as criminals; the varied and deep movements that forge links of direct agreement between farmers and which it would be absolutely necessary to bring back into the open and put in contact with the general flood of socialism. The movement of co-operation in small trades, which occurs mainly in Russia under the initiative of a few pioneers, comes to line up with the two previous ones.

Then come all these movement which, either in the form of consciousness objection as in France or religion as in Russia, strongly work in the popular masses to produce rebellion against the State in its two main manifestations – military service and taxation. Movements that can only be ignored if you want to remain absolutely ignorant of the immense role played by similar movements in the history of all popular uprisings in previous periods.

In addition, we are witnessing a profound communalist movement, the effects of which we have already seen in the uprisings of the communes in Paris, in the south [of France], in Spain. A movement which has deeply stirred minds, since 1871, in France and Spain and which, in

England, has lately been given a strong push, not only in the direction of what they tend to call “municipal socialism,” but even more so in a whole body of ideas germinating in the working masses.

And finally, it is impossible to ignore the various movements that occur in the best elements of the bourgeoisie itself, and which result in either a whole series of more-or-less philanthropic institutions, that is to say by movements to manual labour, “to the people,” “to the land,” and so on, as well as by a tendency accentuated every day in literature, art and science, and which denotes that the bourgeoisie is already losing, in its best representatives, faith in its right to exploitation.

A host of other small movements should be mentioned – such the liberation of the individual from [hypocritical] morality, the emancipation of women, ethical movements, etc., etc. But, let us move on!

Finally there is all this throng of rebels, here individually, there in groups, who revolt against all social and political inequities, who sacrifice themselves to awaken the slumbering society and, by their actions, broach all [issues]: exploitation, servitude in all its aspects, hypocritical morality.

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And they want all these movements, in which thousands of men and women are seeking, in one way or another, to directly transform society, moving with more or less efficiency towards the socialisation of wealth – they want all these varied movements to cease to exist and be epitomised in one mode of action: that of naming candidates to parliaments or municipalities!!

They want to absorb all these energies in electoral struggles – for what? That the deputies, who, themselves, *do not do* this work of direct transformation of morals, institutions and ideas, find – intuitively, I suppose – the means of bringing about all these transformations by means of laws?

They want those who prepare the social revolution *in actions and concrete ideas* to abandon this task to the makers of laws. As if it were enough to become a legislator to understand all that these millions of individuals learn in their daily struggles against authority, the boss, the priest, the policeman, the State [employed] teacher, the narrow selfishness of ignorance, laziness of mind!...

To hear such nonsense said and preached is almost enough to make you despair of a human nature that never seems to overcome this idea of saviours, of popes discovering the truth by intuition from above and producing a miracle!

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Well, since it is certain that the personal contact of intellects and conflict stimulates minds, and that this contact is achieved better in Congresses than by the

press, we do not need a Congress, we need a hundred, a thousand.

Many are already held. There is no lack of Congresses [–] regional and national, trade union, co-operative, although agricultural unions are still lacking, [those] concerning the work of the small trades, etc. But that is not all.

All these currents, necessarily, will be led to pour into socialism. The era requires it. Is this a reason, however, for waiting, with folded arms, for the Marxist “negation of the negation” to produce itself? On the contrary, it is necessary that in *each* of these congresses the voice of the socialist, especially the anarchist, should be heard. Let him speak there, not as a teacher who comes to lecture the children or to come to tell them that all their work is useless – but as a man who understands that *all these currents have their reason for being*; that without them the social revolution would be impossible; that they all bring their little stone to the reconstruction of society, which must be done locally and on the spot, by those same groups; that all must eventually be inspired by the idea of the century – as a man who understands this *and who comes to bring them this inspiration*.

The social-democrat cannot do that; he can only say to them: “Vote!” It must therefore be up to the anarchist to go there, to fight, to speak, where they hardly suspect

the revolution to be carried out; to speak to them – not of the uselessness of the work, but of the new utility it would gain if this small current is poured into the great flood of social reconstruction. In addition, a compelling need is happening right now. The discussion of socialism, as a whole, was interrupted in 1870, and has never been resumed since. A whole flood of preposterous theories is circulating at this moment under the name of “scientific socialism,” and, under this cover, they are debating nonsense [*énormités*] that would have made poor Marx’s hair stand on end.

It is time for the discussion of socialism to resume, for a complete review of the goods circulating under the brand “patented S.G.D.G.” to be made<sup>1</sup> – not only in the press, as our friends D. Nieuwenhuis and Tcherkesoff have undertaken, but in plain sight, in front of the socialists of the two worlds.

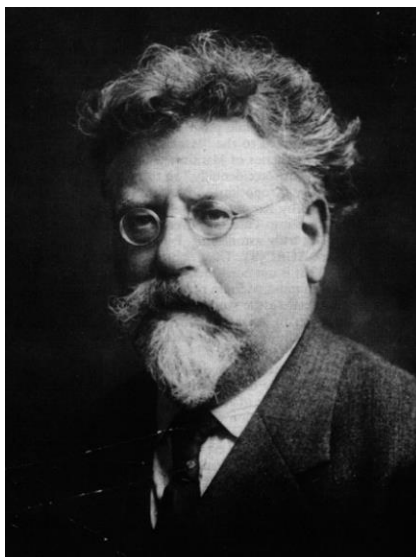
The newspaper, the pamphlet, the book prepares the ground. But it must also be done openly [*avec éclat*], in congresses, at large congresses – prepared by discussions in groups – to which would be invited all those who are keen to clarify ideas or to obtain information themselves.

It is obviously in this direction that it will be necessary to work.

# The International Socialist Congress in London

Rudolf Rucker<sup>2</sup>

In July 1896 the International Socialist Labour Congress met in London. It was the fourth congress of the kind since the two Paris Congresses of July 1889. As at both the previous Congresses (Brussels 1891 and Zurich 1893), the question of admitting the anarchists and other trends played an important part in the discussions and gave rise to fierce arguments. The young people of today may find it strange that the anarchists at that time placed so much weight on being represented at those Congresses, for they could never have hoped to have any appreciable influence in the decisions. The fact is that from the time of the First International till



Rudolf Rucker (1873-1958)

1889, no general socialist Congresses had been held. The so-called World Congress in Ghent in 1877 was no more than the echo of a period that had passed and had no practical significance for the future. It was only with the two congresses in Paris that a new chapter was opened. A new International was born, which had little in common however with the original aspirations of the First International.

The Second International was an association of political Labour parties, whose practical activity was mostly confined to co-operation in the bourgeois parliaments, and of trades unions which were largely

<sup>1</sup> “Sans Garantie Du Gouvernement” (S.G.D.G.) was legally required to be stamped on French products with a legal patent between 1844 and 1868. Meaning “Without Guarantee of the Government,” it signified that the patent did not mean that the

State guaranteed the proper functioning of the product. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 5 of Rucker’s autobiography, *The London Years* (1956/2005). (*Black Flag*)

under the influence of those parties. Had the Congresses of the Second international not concealed their true nature and acknowledged themselves for what they were. international conferences of Parliamentary socialism and of social democratic parties, the anarchists would have been the last to want to be represented. But as long as they called themselves International Socialist Labour Congresses it would be wrong to deny them admission. For the anarchists too were after all socialists, for they opposed economic monopoly, and worked for a co-operative form of human labour, aiming to satisfy the needs of all and not the profits of the few. Nor could it be disputed that the great majority of the anarchists in the different countries belonged to the working class.

True. the Zurich Congress had decided that only trades unions and those socialist movements that recognised the necessity of political action should be admitted to all future international congresses. But the anarchists were never opponents of political action as such. They only rejected a specific form of it, parliamentary activity. The anarchists had never repudiated the defence of political rights and liberties; they had often joined in the struggle for them against reaction.

The fact that the Zurich Resolution admitted the trades unions as such complicated the matter still more. The English trades unions had no connections at that time with any political party Their members voted for whichever party they wished. The British Labour Party came into existence only three years after the London Congress. The great majority of the Spanish trades unions were anarchist. The Spanish Socialist Party embraced only a small minority of the Spanish labour movement. In Italy, Portugal, Holland and other countries there were definite movements in the trades unions which rejected parliamentary activity in principle. There was at that time, largely under anarchist influence, a growing powerful anti-parliamentary tendency in the French trades unions, which a few years later led to the formation of the *Confédération Générale du Travail*; it was soon the strongest organisation of the French working class, and because it was working for a socialist transformation of society, it rejected all co-operation with the socialist parties. Some of the most influential representatives of the French trade union movement were avowed anarchists.

At the same time there was a split in the socialist parliamentary parties in the different countries, the beginnings on the one, hand of the revisionist movement started by Eduard Bernstein and, on the other, a definite swing away from belief in the value of parliamentary action. In Holland the great mass of the socialists had formed a new organisation with a clear anti-parliamentary line. The Socialist Labour Party of Holland launched in 1894 and generously assisted by funds from the German social democrats, represented then only a small minority of the Dutch labour

movement. In France the socialist movement was split in half a dozen different parties, and the Allmanists had completely abandoned parliamentary activity, and concentrated on propaganda in the trades unions. In Italy, especially in Romagna and the south there were powerful revolutionary tendencies which were often very troublesome to the parliamentary leaders. In Belgium, Switzerland and Denmark too there were similar smaller socialist trends.

The 1891 International Congress in Brussels had already given me occasion for losing some of my youthful illusions. But what I now saw in London outdid it all in petty spite and brutal trampling down on all freedom of opinion. The Germans surpassed themselves in London with their unashamed intolerance, their refusal to see any point of view but their own.

The 750 delegates included a considerable number of anarchists and representatives of other libertarian movements in Great Britain, France, Italy, Spain, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark and Germany, whose position the Congress had to consider before it could proceed to business, Malatesta, for instance, was entrusted with mandates from a number of trades unions in Spain, Italy and France, including one from the Catalanian railway workers, who had a larger membership than the entire Socialist Party of Spain. Of the thirteen delegates from Holland only two or three belonged to the Social Democratic Labour Party; the rest represented the Socialist Bond and the trades unions in the National Labour Secretariat. The twenty Italian delegates were equally divided, ten representatives of the Socialist Party of Italy, and ten anarchists, including Malatesta and Pietro Geri who also represented trades unions. There were over a hundred delegates from France, most of them representatives of trades unions and of different trends of the socialist movement, who almost invariably voted against Congress majority. The French delegation in particular gave the Germans a real headache. They couldn't understand how any socialists should refuse to follow the line set by the German social democrats.

Britain had of course the largest representation, though it remained a mystery how all those mandates had been filled. For example, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) which at that time had barely 4,000 members in the whole country had over a hundred delegates, while the Independent Labour Party with a membership of over 40,000 had less mandates than the SDF. In the other countries there were no large socialist parties then except in Austria, Belgium and Switzerland. Elsewhere the movement was still in its beginnings. It was represented by only a few delegates from each of these other countries. Yet these delegates turned the scales at every vote.

The Congress began on Sunday, July 28th, with a peace demonstration, followed by a mass meeting in Hyde

Park. As the first marchers entered the park there was a cloudburst, and most of them fled for shelter. There were twelve speakers' platforms, but very few people round them. The downpour persisted, till even those few melted away. Only the anarchists, who had gathered under Reformers' Tree, went on with their meeting, till the end. We were soaked to the skin.

The Congress proper was opened the next day in Queen's Hall. Over the platform hung solitary a huge flower-garlanded oil portrait of Karl Marx. It was the symbol of the narrow-minded attitude of those who had arranged the Congress. For one might have expected at least one more portrait, that of Robert Owen, who was the great pioneer of British socialism; he had influenced the whole movement in Britain, while Marx, though he had lived in England for many years, never had any influence on the British labour movement, and after the Hague Congress of 1872, which had split the First International, he was at daggers drawn with all the prominent leaders of the British trades union movement.

The first important question before the Congress was that of admitting the anarchists and representatives of other anti-parliamentary groups. The resolution adopted by the Zurich Congress on this question was worded so vaguely that everybody could interpret it differently. True, the anarchists had been excluded from the Zurich Congress on the grounds of this resolution, but feeling among the French, Belgians, Dutch and others rose so high against it that a rider had to be added to the resolution. Its text, introduced by Rebel,

Kautsky, Adler and others, and adopted by the majority of the Zurich Congress, said that it was not intended to mean "that everyone who comes to the Congress is bound in consequence to engage in political action under all circumstances and in every detail in accordance with our definition. It asks only for the recognition of the right of the workers to use all the political powers of their countries, according to their own judgment, for promoting the interests of the working classes, and to constitute themselves as an independent labour party."

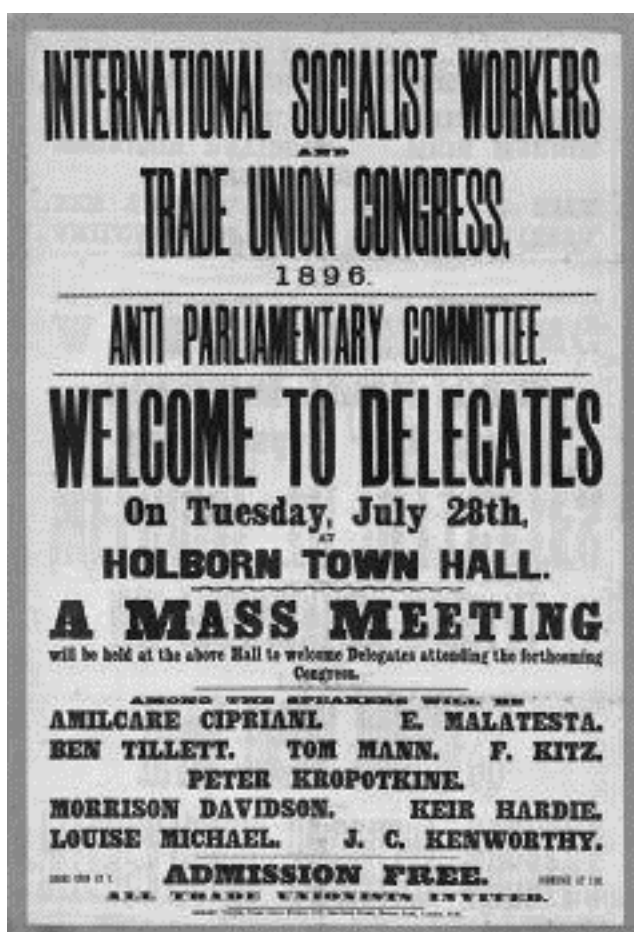
It was, quite clear that the rider had been added at the time only to secure the future participation of the trades unions, without which the congresses could never have claimed to be labour congresses. All the socialist parties, without exception, included socialists who did not belong to the working class. But only workers could belong to the trades unions. No anarchist, as Gustav Landauer said at the London Congress, defending his right to his mandate, had ever thought of denying to other socialists the right to engage in parliamentary activity. What they asked was the right to hold a different opinion about the value of parliamentary action.

The Germans tried to steamroller the Congress on this question so ruthlessly that it infuriated a great many delegates. The English trade unionist leader Ted Leggatt, who belonged to the anarchist wing, thundered against it. "Proletarians of all countries unite!" he cried, in his powerful voice that the chairman's bell could not drown.

The conduct of the majority on the second day was even worse. Examination of the mandates had shown that three members of the French Parliament, Jaures, Viviani and Millerand, had no mandates and took the attitude that their mandates in the French Parliament were sufficient. The French majority, which was entirely anti-parliamentary, had agreed to admit these three, thereby showing a tolerance that was totally absent from the Congress majority. Some of the leading British delegates, including Bernard Shaw of the Fabians, protested that being a Member of Parliament did not itself

confer the right to attend the Congress as a delegate. The Congress majority ignored them.

Germany had sent 46 social democrats and five anarchists. Switzerland with 12 delegates had two anarchists among them. Denmark with seven delegates had one anarchist. The Dutch delegation consisted of two social democrats and 13 anarchists. Bohemia sent one social democrat and one anarchist. The Italian delegation was also equally divided, ten social democrats and ten anarchists.



The Chairman on the second day was Paul Singer, a member of the German Parliament (Reichstag). He tried to stop the discussion, and said he would take the vote on the question.

Pandemonium broke loose. The Chairman's gong, which sounded, like a big church bell, was drowned in it. The Germans, the Austrians and their supporters in other delegations backed Paul Singer's ruling. But Keir Hardie, of the ILP, who was deputy chairman of the session, got up and making himself heard above the uproar, told Singer that people didn't conduct meetings like that in England. Before the vote was taken both sides must be given a hearing. So Malatesta and Landauer were allowed to speak.

The reports about the Congress in the London press were very sarcastic about Singer's behaviour in the chair. Of course, Malatesta and Landauer and other speakers made no impression at all on the Congress majority. Damela Nieuwenhuis, who had at that time not yet joined the anarchists, said: "We do not contest the right of any movement to hold congresses and to decide who is to attend to fit in with their programme. But then it must be made absolutely clear what sort of a congress it is. This congress has been called as a general socialist congress. The invitations said nothing about anarchists and social democrats. They spoke only of socialists and trades unions. No one can deny that people like Kropotkin, and Reclus and the whole anarchist-communist movement stand on the socialist basis. If they are excluded, the purpose of the Congress has been misrepresented."

On the third day, Millerand, in the name of the French minority, said that as the French majority had spoken for admitting the anarchists the minority refused to continue to work with the majority. He asked that the Congress should recognise two separate French delegations, each with its own vote.

There was an outburst of protest. The English delegates lost their temper. Vandervelde, one of the moderates of Belgian socialism, opposed the idea of splitting the French delegation. If that were agreed to, he said, the same right would have to be given to the Dutch and the Italians. Karl Marx's son-in-law denounced Vandervelde as a traitor to the cause.

Bernard Shaw rose on Millerand's proposal, to move next business. The Chairman informed him that the French Marxists would then leave the Congress. Shaw's answer was that if that were so he really insisted on moving next business.

Delegates who tried to speak on the motion were shouted down. It went on for hours, and most of the third day was simply wasted. At last the Chairman succeeded in putting Millerand's proposal to the vote. Britain, France, Holland, Belgium and Italy voted against it. The Germans were supported by Austria, Switzerland, and fourteen other delegations like Portugal, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, etc., most of which had only two delegates each. But it gave them a majority. So France was split into two delegations.

The fourth day saw the expulsion of the anarchists. I often asked myself during this London Congress what would happen if people so intolerant and despotic as these German social democrats ever came to power in a country. I began to fear that socialism without liberty

**I began to fear that socialism without liberty must lead to an even worse tyranny than the conditions against which we were fighting. What has since happened in Russia has proved my fears to have been more than justified**

must lead to an even worse tyranny than the conditions against which we were fighting. What has since happened in Russia has proved my fears to have been more than justified. The anarchists held an international protest demonstration in the Holborn Town Hall. A great many messages of support were received and were read from the platform, including messages from William Morris, Walter Crane and Robert Blatchford of the Clarion. They roundly condemned the intolerance which had

manifested itself at the Congress. William Morris said that if he were well enough he would have come to express his condemnation from the platform.

Keir Hardie and Tom Mann came and spoke. Keir Hardie said he was no anarchist, but no one could prophesy whether the socialism of the future would shape itself in the image of the social democrats or of the anarchists. The crime of the anarchists in the eyes of the Congress' majority appeared to be that they were a minority. If they agreed with that attitude then the socialist movement as a whole had no right to exist, because it represented a minority. The other speakers at the meeting included Kropotkin, Élisée Reclus, Malatesta, Louise Michel, Kenworthy and Landauer.

[...]

# Tom Mann and British Syndicalism

Iain McKay

Tom Mann (1856-1941) played a critical role in the industrial struggles of 1910-1914, better known as “the Great Unrest” or “the syndicalist revolt”. While it is an exaggeration to suggest, as Fabian elitist Beatrice Webb did, that the “absurd” and “pernicious doctrine of ‘workers’ control of public affairs through trade unions, and by the method of direct action” was “introduced into British working-class life by Tom Mann,” he certainly played an important role in popularising syndicalism.<sup>1</sup>

Mann was born in Foleshill, Coventry, in 1856. Starting work in a mine at the age of nine, he eventually became an engineer and joined the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1881. A member of various parties at different times – including the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Independent Labour Party (ILP) – he gained fame as one of the leaders of the 1889 London dock strike before becoming the President of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers’ Union of Great Britain and Ireland until 1893 and helping to form the Workers’ Union in 1897. He left for Australia in 1902, remaining active in both trade unionism and labour parties before returning to Britain converted to syndicalism and just in time to take a key role in the labour disputes of the next four years:

Tom Mann did not in any sense cause the strikes or the unrest: he contributed a great deal to the direction they took and to the guiding of the “unrest” into definite and constructive channels, but he cannot be said to have caused it. He utilised an existing state of affairs with an eye to a wider future as well as to the present.... Mann’s success came no doubt largely from his personal qualities, his gift of oratory, and his

strong personality and vivid enthusiasm; but it came much more from the fact that he chose the right moment for his reappearance. The time was ripe, and it was his fortune and privilege to be the spark to set the train alight.<sup>2</sup>

Given the impact of Mann’s ideas, that this was the closest Britain came to a mass syndicalist movement and, including the post-war ferment, the closest to a social revolution, it is worthwhile to reconsider them. Moreover, all the leading syndicalist activists in Britain at the time were working class. There does seem a distinct sense that syndicalism is viewed with condescension by many who comment upon it, particularly by Marxists (academics or not). The underlying position seems to be that theoretically it is worthless and no match for ideologies produced by middle-class intellectuals (particularly Lenin). A similar perspective permeates accounts of Proudhon, namely the idea that working class people can develop their own theories seems to shock. More, they are all too

often ascribed ridiculous notions which some reflection and research would quickly debunk.

Given this, a review of British syndicalism via one of its leading lights, Tom Mann, is warranted.<sup>3</sup> Hopefully we can learn lessons useful for today and debunk some of the worse claims made against it.

## Syndicalists and the Great Unrest

Neither Tom Mann nor British syndicalism can be discussed or understood without an appreciation of the wider social context, namely the period of extensive industrial struggle between 1910 and 1914 (“the Great



Tom Mann (1856-1941)

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Ken Coates, “Preface”, Tom Mann, *Tom Mann’s Memoirs* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), xii.

<sup>2</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *The World of Labour: A Discussion of the Present and Future of Trade Unionism* (London: G. Bell & Son Ltd, 1915), 40.

<sup>3</sup> This article will not cover Jim Larkin and Irish revolutionary unionism.

Unrest"). Faced with falling real wages and other issues such as union recognition, resistance to management control and not being treated with appropriate dignity, bolstered by relatively full employment, workers across Britain took part in an industrial revolt whose scale exceeded that of the decade before: the average number of person days lost through strikes between 1900 and 1909 averaged 2½ to 3 million but in 1910, 1911, 1913 and 1914 there were about 10 million person days lost, with nearly 41 million in 1912. Union membership rose from 2.5 million to over 4 million during those four years. Strikes were usually unofficial and militant:

The trade union leaders, almost to a man, deplored it, the government viewed it with alarm, the ILP regretted this untoward disregard for the universal panacea of the ballot box, the SDF asked, 'Can anything be more foolish, more harmful, more... unsocial than a strike'; yet disregarding everything, encouraged only by a small minority of syndicalist leaders, the great strike wave rolled on, threatening to sweep everything away before it.<sup>1</sup>

Mann's return to Britain could not have come at a better time. Yet it should not be assumed that he ploughed unbroken ground. Rather, syndicalist ideas had been advocated for some time in Britain. The earliest was *Freedom* from the early 1890s onwards, to later be joined by the de Leonist Socialist Labour Party (SLP) which split from the SDF in the 1900s but whose impact was limited. The 1900s also saw the anarchists publish the short-lived *The General Strike* (1903-4) and *The Voice of Labour* (1907). Awareness of revolutionary syndicalism in France (the Confédération Générale du Travail) and its spread to other countries was increasingly widespread.<sup>2</sup>

British syndicalists had two main strategies. The first, dual-unionism, saw the existing unions as very much part of the problem and argued for building new revolutionary one. These were influenced by the example of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The second argued that the existing trade unions could be transformed by their members and so urged what became known as "boring from within" (the term associated with the American syndicalist William Z. Foster).

In May 1907 Guy Aldred helped create the Industrial Union of Direct Actionists from a number of existing anarchist groups but it did not last. The dual-unionists of the SLP also formed the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism (BAIU) that year which aimed to build new revolutionary unions on the pattern of the IWW. Slightly before the American IWW, it split over

political action. The SLP managed to alienate even other dual-unionists by their sectarianism, and their creation of an Industrial Workers of Great Britain in 1909 was stillborn. The "anti-political" faction formed the Industrialist League which acted as an unofficial British section of the Chicago IWW and launched the *Industrialist* in June 1908.

The North-East of England saw the first stirrings of the labour unrest. From November 1909 until July 1910 spontaneous strikes took place by the shipyards' boilermakers which resulted in the bosses locking them out. January 1910 saw the start of a three-month strike by the traditionally moderate Durham miners against an agreement already signed by their union officials. Railwaymen, despite having a five year agreement in place, struck successfully for three days in mid-1910. In the Autumn, militant tactics were used by cotton workers which saw a lockout in reprisal.

Mann arrived in Britain in May 1910 and immediately "visit[ed] the CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail) to study its methods of procedure... and examined thoroughly the principles and policy of the CGT, the syndicalists of France."<sup>3</sup> He then helped set up *The Industrial Syndicalist* which was issued as 11 monthly pamphlets between July 1910 and May 1911. This swiftly became very influential and in November the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) was founded at a two-day conference attended by 200 delegates representing 60,000 workers. Not a union, not even a formally structured body, the ISEL saw its role as spreading syndicalist ideas in the trade unions for it, like Mann, favoured the "boring from within" strategy to create a national federation of industrial unions and another of trade councils, recognising that dual-unionism risked isolating militants from a wider audience who would be sympathetic to their arguments. Its influence was reflective of the mass struggle which unfolded during these years and unlike earlier attempts, syndicalist ideas now found a fertile soil and a wider pool of activists than just Britain's small libertarian groupings.

The Great Unrest is usually dated from September 1910, with the beginning of the unofficial Cambrian Combine Strike in South Wales. Initially, the strike centred on wages and conditions but it took on an increasingly insurrectionary nature. Syndicalist influence grew steadily, with at least three syndicalists active on the strike committee and other syndicalist miners helping to spread the dispute throughout Wales while Mann and other ISEL members were frequent visitors. In contrast to syndicalist solidarity, the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) refused to abandon its policy of conciliation as a means of settling

<sup>1</sup> Walter Kendall, *The revolutionary movement in Britain, 1900-21: the origins of British Communism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), 26.

<sup>2</sup> The best account of this period remains Bob Holton's *British Syndicalism 1900-1914 Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, 203.

grievances. After ten months, it ended in defeat for the miners but it had not been entirely in vain as, for example, the 1912 demand for a minimum wage for all miners emerged from it as did a campaign to reconstruct the SWMF on fighting lines, centred on the syndicalist-influenced Unofficial Reform Committee and based on the pamphlet *The Miner's Next Step*.

The summer of 1911 saw unrest spread to the transport industry, the dockyards and railways. Between June and September, largely unofficial strike action took place in all the main British ports and throughout the railway network. The disputes originated with a strike by seamen in Southampton, which spread quickly. In Liverpool, solidarity action saw other trades strike in support of the seamen, with a strike committee, which included Tom Mann, formed to represent all workers involved and their demands. The seamen and dockers strike ended in early July with a partial victory but more strikes were called by London dockers. Seeing the militancy elsewhere, the port authorities made significant concessions that were accepted by the unions, but rank and file activists argued for continuation of the strike and the resulting unofficial action quickly spread until the docks were paralysed. As food became scarce, further concessions were won from the government.

Just as the dockers strike ended, strikes began on the railways. Poor wages and conditions combined with dissatisfaction with the Conciliation Boards set up in 1907 contributed to the actions. The strike began on Merseyside, where 1,000 rail workers walked out in favour of higher wages and an end to conciliation in early August 1911. Within 5 days, the unofficial strike had spread to include some 15,000 railway workers and a further 8,000 dockers, who came out in sympathy. Rail workers in other areas joined the dispute, with unofficial action in Hull, Bristol, Swansea and Manchester forcing the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) to call a national strike. Within days, all the rail unions had joined the stoppage, making it the first ever national rail dispute.

In Liverpool the new strike broke out the very day the Agreement for the previous one had been signed. Within a week, the ship-owners imposed a general lock-out and the strike committee called for an all-out strike by transport workers. Soon over 70,000 were on strike – with the traditional sectarian hatred between Catholics and Protestants being temporarily overcome. Liverpool was brought to a standstill, with the State reacting to this challenge by sending some 3,000 troops, large numbers of police and two gunboats. Concessions saw the end of the 72 day strike on Merseyside and in its wake a new monthly syndicalist journal, *Transport Worker*, was launched. Edited by Mann, it attained a circulation of 20,000 by October 1911 in the North-West of England before closing when he was imprisoned for his revolutionary activities in March 1912. *The Syndicalist*

*Railwayman* was also launched in the Autumn of 1911 and syndicalist activists were elected onto the ASRS executive.

January 1912 saw the first issue of the monthly newspaper *The Syndicalist* appear. The issue contained a reprint of an anti-militarist article urging soldiers to refuse to shoot at strikers written by Fred Bower, a syndicalist stonemason, which was first published in Jim Larkin's *Irish Worker* in July 1911. Railway worker Fred Crowsley distributed it at Aldershot barracks. Crowsley was sentenced to four months, Guy Bowman (the editor of *The Syndicalist*) received nine months and the printers six under the Incitement to Mutiny Act 1797. Mann was later charged under the same act when he read the article at a public meeting and was sentenced to six months (reduced to seven weeks by public pressure). With the prosecutions, trials and imprisonment associated with the "Don't Shoot" leaflet, syndicalism became far better known and sales of *The Syndicalist* rose from around 5,000 copies to 20,000.

The biggest dispute of 1912 centred on a national minimum wage for miners. Parliament, fearful of unrest, rushed through legislation agreeing in principle with the demand but it did not set a rate. Nevertheless, the miners voted against this solution and for continued strike action, only to see the decision overturned by union leaders who ordered a return to work. This blatant betrayal by the union officialdom led to further increase in syndicalist influence.

In November 1912, the ISEL held two conferences with an attendance of 235 delegates representing 100,000 workers. That winter, the organisation began setting up branches and drawing up a constitution. The labour unrest continued and in 1913 syndicalism began to gain ground in other sectors of industry including engineering. One notable strike broke out in the Black Country, organised by the Workers' Union. At its peak 40,000 workers were involved, with strikers marching from factory to factory to spread the strike. Amalgamation committees spread across the engineering sector while syndicalist influence grew in the building industry. The Dublin lockout saw sporadic sympathy action in opposition to the TUC's finance only support, with – as an example – 10,000 railway workers unofficially striking in September 1913 after three workers were suspended for not handling Dublin traffic as called for by the Irish strikers. That month saw an international Congress of syndicalist unions and groups (except the CGT) held in London. Organising this successful Congress was probably the high-point for the ISEL as some within it were moving to a dual-unionist position and the resulting tensions caused the body to break-up, with its rump continuing to publish *The Syndicalist* after a seven month gap.

Mann did not attend the Congress as he was on a speaking tour of America. One such meeting, in which



he debated the Marxist Arthur Lewis on the motion “*Resolved*, That economic organization is sufficient and political action unnecessary to the emancipation of the working class”, was subsequently published as a pamphlet.<sup>1</sup> After his tour, *The International Socialist Review* published his “A Plea for Solidarity” (January 1914) which reiterated his opposition to dual-unionism as well as “Big Bill” Haywood’s reply.<sup>2</sup> On his return to Britain, he moved away from the ISEL due to its increasingly sectarian dual-unionist position but he continued to advance the syndicalist case. He – like many former ISEL members – became associated with the Industrial Democracy League which grew out of the Amalgamation Committee Federation and which followed his favoured policy of working in and transforming the existing unions. As well as writing for its journal *Solidarity: A Monthly Journal of Militant Trade Unionism*, Mann also wrote for the *Daily Herald* – which had began as a bulletin issued during the London printers’ strike of 1910-11 before being relaunched as a socialist daily in April 1912 – and spoke at the *Herald* supporters Leagues established in the winter of 1912-13. With a pre-war circulation of 50,000-150,000 copies, this was an important means of getting the syndicalist message across:

The role of the *Herald* as a publicist for syndicalist views was more significant. The meaning and utility of syndicalism was a topic for debate within the paper from its inception. This emphasis was stimulated at the editorial level by Charles Lapworth, himself a committed syndicalist, and by [George] Lansbury. Prominent syndicalists like Tom Mann, Guy Bowman and A. D. Lewis were involved as contributors and *Herald* publicists from 1912, while many rank-and-file syndicalists gave financial support. By these means the *Herald* not only gave the syndicalists’ objectives a wider national publicity than was possible within their own monthly press and outdoor agitation, but also helped create through its correspondence

<sup>1</sup> Tom Mann and Arthur M. Lewis, *Debate between Tom Mann and Arthur M. Lewis : at the Garrick Theatre, Chicago, Illinois, Sunday, November 16, 1913* (Chicago : C.H. Kerr, 1914).

<sup>2</sup> William D. Haywood, “An Appeal for Industrial Solidarity”, *The International Socialist Review*, March 1914.

## First International Syndicalist Congress Declaration of Principles

That this Congress, recognising that the working class of every country suffers from capitalist slavery and State oppression, declares for the class struggle and international solidarity, and for the organisation of the workers into autonomous industrial Unions on a basis of free association.

Strives for the immediate uplifting of the material and intellectual interests of the working class, and for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the State.

Declares that the class struggle is a necessary result of private property in the means of production and distribution, and therefore declares for the socialisation of such property by constructing and developing our Trade Unions in such a way as to fit them for the administration of these means in the interest of the entire community.

Recognises that, internationally, Trade Unions will only succeed when they cease to be divided by political and religious differences; declares that their fight is an economic fight, meaning thereby that they do not intend to reach their aim by trusting their cause to governing bodies or their members, but by using Direct Action, by workers themselves relying on the strength of their economic organisations.

And in consequence of these recognitions and declarations, the Congress appeals to the workers of all countries to organise in autonomous industrial unions, and to unite themselves on the basis of international solidarity, in order finally to obtain their emancipation from capitalism and the State.

*The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News* (December 1913)  
*Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism* (October 1913)

columns and news reports, a sense of syndicalism as a coherent movement. Last, and perhaps most important, the *Herald*’s emphasis on syndicalism helped to encourage a cross-fertilisation between revolutionary industrial thought and other currents of dissidence. Syndicalism became, in the words of a contemporary activist “part and parcel of the left wing approach.”<sup>3</sup>

Syndicalists had growing influence with the railway workers by building upon the industrial unrest which had culminated in the 1911 railway strike, the dissatisfaction caused by how the Government brought the strike to an end and the Conciliation Scheme which resulted from the settlement. The syndicalists attacked the demand for nationalisation, arguing that it would simply change the boss and that real emancipation was only possible when workers had complete control over the industry which could only be achieved by solidarity

<sup>3</sup> R. J. Holton, “*Daily Herald* v. *Daily Citizen*, 1912-15: The Struggle for a Labour Daily in Relation to ‘The Labour Unrest’”, *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1974), 358-9.

and direct action. A resolution on these lines was passed at the 1912 annual conference of the ASRS, the largest railway trade union at that time. When the ASRS amalgamated with two other unions in 1913 to form the National Union of Railwaymen, the new union resolved at its 1914 AGM that “[n]o system of state ownership will be acceptable to organised railwaymen which does not guarantee to them their full political and social rights, allow them a due measure of control and responsibility in the safe and efficient working of the railway system, and ensure them a fair and equitable participation in the increased benefits likely to accrue from a more economical and scientific administration.”

Likewise in the building trade, which had seen the formation of the Building Trade Consolidation Committee (BTCC) in 1912. This had called for an industrial union for all building workers, regardless of trade and, in 1913, building workers voted for the amalgamation by 31,541 to 12,156. The leaders of the various unions chose to ignore the result. A series of

rethink by syndicalist building workers. The majority, previously committed to working within existing unions, decided to form a new revolutionary union, the Building Workers’ Industrial Union (BWIU) which four existing unions immediately joined. The growth of the BWIU – like the wider labour unrest – was only halted by the outbreak of the First World War.

This can only be a short and selective account of the great unrest. A feel of the atmosphere of the times can be seen when *Freedom* wrote of “1913: The Dawn of Revolution”:

It would simply be impossible to enumerate all the happenings of the past year that have interest in a special sense for the sincere revolutionists – that is, for those who fervently hope for a fundamental change in the bases of society. It is sufficient to say that the general unrest has shown no signs of diminishing, and that the all-round awakening to a sense of what life really should mean to the great army of wealth-producers, has brought with it new tactics in the struggle against the power of capitalism, and a new spirit of rebellion, which has developed an unprecedented kind of solidarity between all sections of the working classes.

In a word, the class struggle – the exploiter against the wage-slave – has reached a point at which the great issue – the use of the instruments of production in the interest of all – is no longer clouded by “the divine right of property.” The private ownership of land, of minerals, of factories, of means of transport, anti-social in its origin and in its effects, is attacked on all hands. It is attacked directly by the economic struggle which means nothing less than an all-round demand in the ranks of the workers for sustenance and a fuller development of life, with war to the knife on the inhuman misery which the monopoly of these sources of wealth inflict on them; and it is attacked indirectly, feebly and half-heartedly by political reformers of the democratic-radical type, who would compromise with the evils of our present system, so long as the keeping of body and soul together, with a show of some elementary decencies. of life, can be maintained.<sup>1</sup>

That year saw *The Voice of Labour* relaunched, reflecting the fact that the ideas that anarchists had been championing for decades – direct action on the



**Mann Addressing strikers in Liverpool, 1911**

unofficial strikes prompted the employers to warn the unions’ officials in December 1913 that if they could not discipline their own members then they would take action themselves. They duly called a lock-out which affected some 40,000 building workers and the organisation of the dispute was taken over by the syndicalists around the BTCC to secure rank and file control.

After five months, employers offered a number of concessions, only to see their offer turned down by the strikers by 21,000 votes to 9,000. Some union leaders then began to break ranks but despite rank-and-file protest, they had effectively sold out the workers by breaking the unity of the dispute. This led to a radical

<sup>1</sup> “1913: The Dawn of Revolution”, *Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism* (January 1914).

economic terrain to achieve workers' control of industry – had become extremely influential in the labour movement. The industrial struggles had transformed those involved, confirming the syndicalist argument that a “new mentality is created by mass association, a more intense thought and action.”<sup>1</sup> For example, one miners' strike saw the strike committee express itself in increasingly radical tones, with a leaflet of June 1911 calling for the miners' “To put an end to Capitalist Despotism and do battle for the cause of Industrial Freedom.”<sup>2</sup> Anarchist support for direct action and solidarity as the means of individual and social transformation had been, again, strikingly confirmed.

Likewise with the syndicalist activists themselves. While Mann and many others in the ISEL did not start as an anarcho-syndicalist, the lessons they drew from the struggles of the period drove them to that position. We now turn to Mann's syndicalist ideas.

### Mann's Syndicalism

Mann's syndicalist period – 1910 to 1916 – was not a long one compared to his decades of activism but it is, along with his role in the 1889 dockers' strike, what he is best remembered for. His syndicalism reflected various aspects of his earlier politics such as his union organising as part of the New Unionism of the early 1890s and calls for an eight-hour day. He had long seen the importance of practical struggles for reform as the means to achieve longer term transformation. However, many in the SDF (and its later incarnations like the British Socialist Party, BSP) followed the position of its leader Henry Hyndman and opposed strikes, thinking them a waste of time, energy and resources better spent on “political action” (i.e., standing for election and failing to win).

Mann's move to syndicalism occurred when he lived in Australia between 1902 and 1910. This was a product of seeing first-hand how the state-owned railways did not represent railway workers interests, the effects of arbitration (introduced under Labour Party administrations) as well as closely following developments in Syndicalism in France, Italy and Spain as well as the IWW after its founding in 1905. By 1907 he started to lecture and write on “Revolutionary Unionism” but did not reject political action yet. The Broken Hill strike of 1909 was the catalyst for his syndicalist turn, seeing the failings of the arbitration system (it punished workers while employers could ignore its rulings with impunity) and the transporting of the police used to break the strike by organised railway workers. This caused him to pen the pamphlet *The Way*

*to Win* (1909) which, while not rejecting political action, stressed the need for industrial unionism and the primacy of economic organisation. In short, it “seemed clear to Tom Mann that solidarity had to transcend sectional boundaries and the workers had to rely on their own direct action rather than on the efforts of legislators. The long-term project was the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.”<sup>3</sup>

Like other syndicalists, Mann considered that the “engines of war to fight the workers' battles to overthrow the Capitalist class, and to raise the general standard of life while so doing – must be of the workers' own making. The Unions are the workers' own.”<sup>4</sup> The first task was to transform the unions, for if you think workers can transform the world in their unions then first transforming those bodies would not be an impossible task and, moreover, a sensible position to start from:

Those who say, “We will have nothing to do with organisations that have not been on the clear-cut, class-conscious basis,” will practically take up the position of saying, “We will have nothing to do with humanity.” To ignore the unions does not commend itself to experienced men as a wise method of procedure... The unions... are truly representative of the men, and can be moulded by the men into exactly what they desire.<sup>5</sup>

The unions were seen as having many useful functions:

The Union stands between the worker and a “boss” to guard the worker against arrogance and insult. The Union is the place for fellow workers to fraternise; the real educational institution where information should be forthcoming about the World's Movements of Workers, all struggling for economic emancipation.

The Union is conducive to good fellowship. It should and will explain the “Class War” and the stages of progress made in that war. It lifts the Worker out of the mere routine of working for bread, and tends to brighten and broaden his views of life. Comrades, get into the Union according to your occupation. Don't receive advantages for which other men fight without doing a share yourself. Join and attend well, and do a share of work, and get others to join, and get and keep your eyes on the goal, the true goal of working class emancipation, the wiping out of the capitalist system of Society and the

<sup>1</sup> E.J.B. Allen, “Is Syndicalism Un-English?”, *The Syndicalist*, July 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Holton, 84.

<sup>3</sup> John Quail, *The Slow Burning Fuse: The Lost History of the British Anarchists* (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1978), 262.

<sup>4</sup> Mann, “Prepare for Action”, *The Industrial Syndicalist*, July 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Mann, “First Conference on Industrial Syndicalism”, *Industrial Syndicalist*, December 1910.

ushering in of a worthier and happier time. Line up then inside the Unions; whatever is wrong we can put right, far better inside than outside.<sup>1</sup>

His views on the State remained ambiguous at this stage although he admitted in an early debate on syndicalism that he “cannot get rid of this important fact that Parliament was not brought into existence to enable the working classes to obtain ownership and mastery over the means of production... Parliament was brought into existence by the ruling class... to enable that ruling class to have more effective means of dominating and subjugating the working class.” While not discounting electioneering, he argued that reforms via parliament were possible but only as “the direct outcome of effort first put forth outside of Parliament.”<sup>2</sup> By May 1911, he had come to reject his previous position on electioneering:

My experiences have driven me more and more into the non-Parliamentary position... I find nearly all the serious-minded young men in the labour and socialist movement have their minds centred upon obtaining some position in public life such as local, municipal or county councillorship... or aspiring to become an MP... I am driven to the belief that this is entirely wrong... So I declare in favour of Direct Industrial Organisation, not as a means but as THE means whereby the workers can ultimately overthrow the capitalist system and become the actual controllers of their industrial and social destiny.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, if we took the advocates of political action seriously there would be no need for unions or collective struggle as the elected representatives would do all that for us. The reality is different. As Mann suggested in a debate with an American Marxist, his opponent seemed “to conclude that as a result of the political organisation of the German social democracy... that they were achieving economic changes as a consequence... Have they achieved them? And if they have, will my opponent be good enough to recite them to us?” This explained the rise in syndicalist influence as many political socialists had “spent so long in the movement, and obtained so little, or no return, that they decided to give it the ‘go-by’ entirely. From that time they have resorted to economic organisation; and in proportion as they have done so, they say they have achieved results in the way of reduction of hours and

increase in pay.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the capitalist State was unsuited to the task of creating socialism:

Those who know the real attitude of Syndicalists towards parliament, know full well that our ignoring parliamentary methods is not as the [BSP] manifesto states... Our objection is a much more serious one, it is that parliament is part of the decaying capitalist regime, and [an] institution wholly unsuited to afford the workers opportunities of getting control of the industries and the wealth produced by the workers in these industries... We declare it to be not of the smallest value that there should be a few socialist speeches made in such a place. Such speeches would give the workers no power nor would they send fear to the hearts of the capitalists. Naturally the capitalists will fear nothing until they find they are losing the power to control the working class. Our syndicalist method is the encouragement of the working class to control itself. There is absolutely no agency in existence or projected at all suitable to this great work except the industrial organisations of the workers.<sup>5</sup>

His non-political perspective in the class struggle fed into his vision of the future socialist society, affirming an anarcho-syndicalist position by 1913:

I am not for any government. I am for that free co-operation of the workers, industry by industry, district by district, co-ordinated and co-related with and to each other so effectively that we shall know exactly what output of commodities will be required and what necessaries of life will be required, and what the productive capacity is. Therefore I rely upon perfect industrial organisation. And if any of you care to know what that means, it is exactly what is meant by the term “syndicalism”.<sup>6</sup>

Thus not only improvements in the here-and-now could be achieved by syndicalist tactics but also social revolution for “that which is known as the ‘Trades Union movement’, when it is properly broadened, properly idealised and intelligently utilised, which I believe it will be by-and-by, then I argue that that institution — the working class industrial organisation — known now as the ‘Trade Union movement’ — when that is made what it ought to be, we shall be quite equal to achieving the entire economic and social change.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mann, “The Need for a Federation of all the Workers in the Transport Industry”, *The Industrial Syndicalist*, August 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Mann, “Debate on Industrial Unionism”, *Industrial Syndicalist*, January 1911.

<sup>3</sup> quoted by Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914 Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 65.

<sup>4</sup> Mann, *Debate*, 45-46, 48-49.

<sup>5</sup> Mann, “The Manifesto of the B.S.P.”, *The Syndicalist*, November 1912. Parts of this article were reprinted in *Mother Earth* (September 1913) under the title “Tom Mann on Parliament”.

<sup>6</sup> Mann, *Debate*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Mann, *Debate*, 12-13.

Mann, however grand his hopes on the possible future of the union movement, was also realistic about the present and noted that it was “too early at present to go beyond the educational stage, as only a small minority have been reached in any definite fashion.”<sup>1</sup> Even as the class struggle intensified in the following years, he remained well aware that such a reformed union movement would take time to produce. “Would that the workers were reasonably prepared to overthrow the wretched system that compels us to work for the profit of a ruling class, and ready to co-operate intelligently for universal well-being,” he wrote in February, 1912. “But we know that the workers are not ready to do this, and we must therefore fall back on something less ambitious for the time being.”<sup>2</sup>

### Mann and the Anarchists

So over the space of a few years Mann moved from a social-democratic position to syndicalism to, finally, anarcho-syndicalism. “If Mann is not an Anarchist, (and he never said he was),” noted *Mother Earth*, “he believes everything the Anarchist does.”<sup>3</sup> Yet Mann’s libertarian ideas during this period did not come out of nowhere. He had had a long association with anarchists dating back to at least the 1889 Dockers’ Strike:

Like Morris, Shaw and Cunninghame Graham, [Kropotkin] went down among the dockers to inspire them with his speeches, and he made at this time a friendship with Tillett and Mann which lasted until his eventual departure from England [in 1917]. On Mann he had even some influence, for while Burns and Tillett both took the road that led to political power and a high place in the rapidly growing hierarchy of the trade unions, Mann remained very much a rebel and soon followed Kropotkin’s example in doubting the value of political action. His later adhesion to revolutionary syndicalism, when he founded the [Industrial] Syndicalist Education League, was

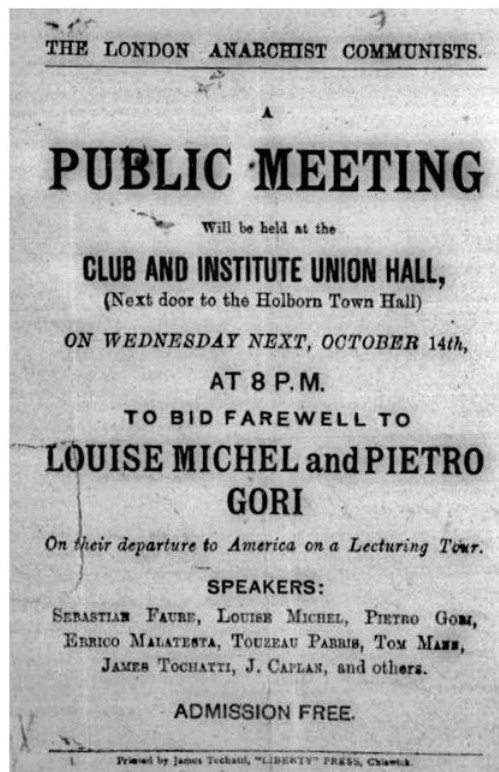
undoubtedly due in great part to the influence of his anarchist friends.<sup>4</sup>

In April 1896 C.S. Quinn of the Associated Anarchists wrote to Mann expressing the feeling of “general satisfaction among the Anarchists” with his account of anarchist communism at a lecture series he held.<sup>5</sup> Later that year he argued that the anarchists should be allowed as delegates at the London Congress of the Second International and spoke at the protest meeting organised by the anti-Parliamentarians. October 1896 saw a meeting of London Anarchist Communists to “bid farewell to Louise Michel and Pietro Gori on their departure to America on a lecturing tour” in Holborn at

which he spoke along with Errico Malatesta and Sebastian Faure. In early 1900, Mann took part in an anti-Boer War meeting in London along with Emma Goldman<sup>6</sup> while the pub he ran in Long Acre, London, in the years before he left for New Zealand and Australia was “an anarchist hangout. Was Mann close to them? There is some scattered evidence that suggests he quite possibly was” and so “his exposure to anarchism was real and continuing in the last years of the 1890s.”<sup>7</sup> In Australia, he regularly mentioned Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid* as shown in one 1908 address in which explained to his audience that this book “was complementary to Darwin’s work, and should be read by everyone. It was a set-off to the idea that the individual struggle for existence was everything in evolution, as it

showed that the development of social instincts was just as important.”<sup>8</sup>

His return to Britain and his embrace of syndicalism saw closer links develop between him and the anarchist movement. The veteran anarchists Errico Malatesta and John Turner (of the Shop Assistants Union) spoke at an ISEL New Year’s Event in 1911, the former “congratulated the League on its libertarian ideas” and the later “declared that Syndicalism was giving to progressives a much needed opportunity to translate their theories into action.”<sup>9</sup> Turner later joined its



<sup>1</sup> Mann, “Forging the Weapon”, *Industrial Syndicalist*, September 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Holton, 57.

<sup>3</sup> Ben L. Reitman, “Tom Mann”, *Mother Earth* (January, 1914), 341.

<sup>4</sup> George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: a biographical study of Peter Kropotkin* (London: Boardman, 1950), 232-3.

<sup>5</sup> Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann 1856-1941: The Challenges of Labour* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 103.

<sup>6</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970) I: 255-7.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph White, *Tom Mann* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 121, 114.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by John Laurent, “Tom Mann, R. S. Ross and Evolutionary Socialism in Broken Hill, 1902-1912: Alternative Social Darwinism in the Australian Labour Movement”, *Labour History*, No. 51 (Nov. 1986), 60.

<sup>9</sup> “A Hopeful Start”, *The Syndicalist*, January 1912.

executive while Malatesta spoke “under the aegis of Mann’s Industrial Syndicalist Education League on a number of occasions.”<sup>1</sup> *Freedom* reported how Mann had “charged himself with foolishness in the past in looking to Parliament for Labour’s emancipation” and had “now came out as a full fledged Direct Actionist.”<sup>2</sup> As *Mother Earth* summarised:

No one enjoys greater respect among the workers of England than Tom Mann .  
Deservedly so: has he not been an active participant within the last twenty five years in every struggle of the proletariat in England, Australia, and South Africa? Like so many other Socialists, he has become convinced through experience of the uselessness of parliamentary activity and he has learned the importance of direct action and the General Strike.

The methods which the Anarchists have been propagating for a score of years have finally triumphed in England. Thus an important bond has been formed between the toilers of Great Britain and the revolutionary movement on the Continent.

By means of direct action and the General Strike the English workers have accomplished more in a few days than their leaders have succeeded in doing in the yearlong “activity” in Parliament. They have not only carried their demands , but also caused tremendous injury to their masters, the capitalists.<sup>3</sup>

“What a pity, “ Emma Goldman lamented, “we lack a Tom Mann in America, to gather up the forces that are sick to their very souls with the opportunistic compromises of the [Socialist] party? The soil has never been more ripe, the material never more ready for a real revolutionary Syndicalist movement.”<sup>4</sup> Mann contributed articles to *Mother Earth* including, in December 1912, an article celebrating Kropotkin’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday while the December 1912 issue of *The Syndicalist* also had a short article marking it, noting “that magnificent revolutionary study, ‘The Conquest of Bread’” and how he had “devote[d] himself to the self-imposed task of helping to rid the world of economic slavery and its twin evil – political government.” The “best homage all can pay to him is to study his works, imitate his unselfishness, and propagate his ideas.”

<sup>1</sup> Quail, 269.

<sup>2</sup> “The Industrial Syndicalist Education League”, *Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism* (January 1912).

<sup>3</sup> Hippolyte Havel, “Surprised Politicians”, *Mother Earth*, September 1911; included in *Proletarian Days: A Hippolyte Havel Reader* (AK Press, 2018)

<sup>4</sup> Emma Goldman, “The Power of the Ideal”, *Mother Earth*, June 1912.

<sup>5</sup> “Tom Mann Writes from Mid-Atlantic”, *Maoriland Worker*, 26 September 1913.

September 1913 saw Mann argue that workers had to “see the unfitness of the Capitalist State to deal with industrial problems; and, what is of equal importance, the impossibility of the working class ever functioning as the controllers of industry through the State machine. They require to feed on a good course of Peter Kropotkin to wean them from the idea that the modern State as a governing entity is in any sense a real necessity.”<sup>5</sup>

Anarchists in Britain and America viewed Mann’s evolution with interest, seeing in it a confirmation of their long-held views. This is reflected in *The Syndicalist* which informed its readers about “The Old International” which was originally “a Federalist and Revolutionary body” until the Hague Congress of 1872. While “the authoritarians, under the guidance of Marx and Engels, evolved from a revolutionary body to a reformist one” and “became Social Democrats and foreswore all revolutionary methods”, the “Federalists kept alive the revolutionary traditions, and in Spain they originated Syndicalism by declaring for the expropriation of the landowners and capitalists and the control of industry by free Federations of the workers.” Bakunin “was the champion of the Federalist element” and “although the Federalist International disappeared... its ideas went on developing regionally”, meaning that his “ideas are now more alive than ever.” Needless to say, the author linked themselves to those expelled from the London Congress of 1896.<sup>6</sup>

Mann remained in contact with Kropotkin over many decades and in an article for the Amalgamated Engineering Union journal included Kropotkin – along with Robert Owen, J.S. Mill, Proudhon and Bakunin – amongst those who had influenced his idea of communism.<sup>7</sup> In 1938 he outlined to his Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) biographer, Dona Torr, how he had met Kropotkin and that he had talked “about his hostility to the State, and this influenced me very much”.<sup>8</sup>

This does not mean that anarchists were uncritical of aspects of Mann’s syndicalism.

While bemoaning that Mann had “not cut himself quite clear of the political octopus, which, to our mind, is a danger”, *Freedom* welcomed the launch of *The Industrial Syndicalist* with its “call for Direct Action and General Strike” and that it “speaks the truth” that “the future... is with the *economic* struggle.”<sup>9</sup> In

<sup>6</sup> “The Old International”, *The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News* (February 1913)

<sup>7</sup> Tsuzuki, 202-3.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Antony Howe, “‘Our only ornament’: Tom Mann and British communist ‘hagiography’”, *Twentieth Century Communism*, Issue 1 (2009), 103.

<sup>9</sup> “The Industrial Syndicalist”, *Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism* (August 1910).

contrast, the following month it reported with approval the passing of a motion noting “the futility of Parliamentary action” at the second annual Conference of the Industrialist League, arguing that “industrial Unionism will gain immensely by adhering to the one clear call for economic struggle. Propaganda in this direction is sadly needed at the present moment.”<sup>1</sup>

Anarchists also recognised that the structure of unions mattered with Glasgow anarchist John Paton criticising Mann for his ambivalence over Parliament and, more importantly, that he did not explicitly address the power of officialdom within the unions:

In deciding for the retention of the present organisations, Mann has quite evidently failed to get to grips with the root of the problem he is facing. The curse of Trade Unionism in this country is the centralisation of executive power with its resultant multiplication of officials. The corresponding stagnation and death of local life and spirit is the inevitable consequence. This centralisation would be enormously extended and developed by Mann’s scheme... We must decentralise and as far as possible destroy executive power. Let the workers themselves bear the burden and responsibility of decisive action.<sup>2</sup>

The *Industrial Syndicalist* reflected a range of views as regards officials. One SWMF activist, W.F. Hay, argued that officials should be “elected for a definite period with definite instructions” but given substantial powers to secure the demands agreed by the members. Members were envisioned as having little say beyond removing them from office if they were unsuccessful for “no General can consult with his troops when going into battle with the enemy” and, moreover, this was how shareholders acted when “appointing a Manager” as how he secures their wishes “is of no concern of theirs.” As such, “we may learn from our masters.”<sup>3</sup> Of course, shareholders are not subject to the authority of the manager and structures which work well exploiting workers are not suitable for freeing them. Other activists – as expressed at the ISEL conference held in November 1910 – were critical of officialdom and the powers it held, seeking to empower the members and so activists “must see that they did not have too much leadership” (W.G. Kerry) and “[o]ne of the things they

ought to work and fight for was to take out of the hands of the Executives and leaders the power they now have, and they could do it by getting among the members.” (T. Wilson Coates).<sup>4</sup> This often proved harder than expected with, for example, the resistance by the union officialdom in the building industry seeing a rise in dual-unionism, with the creation of the BWIU in August 1914.<sup>5</sup>

Unsurprisingly, then, most anarchists saw the opportunity afforded by the rise of industrial unionist ideas, arguing that they “can use their influence to make it [the I.W.W.] anti-Parliamentary (the Industrialist League, the British section of the I.W.W. is already anti-Parliamentary); they can point out to the Industrial Unionists the fallacies and dangers of centralisation; and they can help the movement reach its logical aim – Anarchy.”<sup>6</sup> As the “great unrest” developed, this hope increasingly became reality and libertarian influence within the ranks of British syndicalism grew.

Of course, Mann’s syndicalism does not address the problems with the doctrine that Malatesta so elegantly explained in many articles and, most famously, against Pierre Monatte at the International Anarchist Congress of 1907.<sup>7</sup> As Malatesta rightly argued in 1922, “the Trade Unions are, by their very nature reformist and never revolutionary. The revolutionary spirit must be introduced, developed and maintained by the constant actions of revolutionaries who work from within their ranks as well as from outside, but it cannot be the normal, natural definition of the Trade Unions function.”<sup>8</sup> The ISEL seems to reflect the kind of libertarian involvement with the labour movement Malatesta championed, raising libertarian ideas and tactics within the unions with remarkable success.

One last point on the subject of anarchism and syndicalism.

While many Marxists today often like to portray anarchism and syndicalism as incompatible (the former being “individualistic”, the latter collectivist), their ancestors recognised the links. “In Germany,” one argued, “the thinking of Karl Marx is dominant; in France the thinking of Proudhon, the anarchist.”<sup>9</sup> In Britain, they bemoaned the “insidious preaching of Syndicalism, Direct Action and similar forms of anti-political anarchism”.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, it is interesting to see that Mann wrote for *Mother Earth*<sup>11</sup> and stated it

<sup>1</sup> “Industrialist League and Parliamentary Action”, *Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism* (September 1910).

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Quail, 264.

<sup>3</sup> “The Miner’s Hope”, *Industrial Syndicalist*, November 1910.

<sup>4</sup> “First Conference on Industrial Syndicalism”, *Industrial Syndicalist*, December 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Holton, 162-3.

<sup>6</sup> Industrialist, “Industrial Unionism or Anarchist Communism?”, *Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism* (January 1912)

<sup>7</sup> Various relevant articles can be found in *The Method of Freedom: an Errico Malatesta reader* (Edinburgh/Oakland: AK Press, 2014), edited by Davide Turcato.

<sup>8</sup> *Errico Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* (London: Freedom Press, 1993), 117.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, *Debate*, 26-27.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Quail, 271.

<sup>11</sup> Mann’s articles in *Mother Earth* are: “In Appreciation” (December 1912); “A Rebel Voice from South Africa” (June 1914); “*Mother Earth* and Labour’s Revolt” (March 1915); “War and the Workers” (September 1915); “Two Hundred



“voiced in clear terms the necessity for ‘working class solidarity,’ ‘direct action in all industrial affairs’ and ‘free association.’ I subscribe to each of these with heart and mind.” It was “labouring so thoroughly to popularise principles calculated, as I believe, to emancipate mankind, intellectually and economically.”<sup>1</sup> The journal, in return, was very praising of him and his activity. All facts which are hard to square with the common-place (and false) Leninist assertion that Emma Goldman was an elitist cultural activist who ignored the class struggle.

### The Move to Bolshevism

It is disappointing to note that Mann, like many other syndicalists (although not as many as Leninists today like to imply) became a Communist, although he did not take a role in the formation of the CPGB in 1920 and joined once it has been created. Given that he joined the BSP sometime after the June 1917 Leeds convention on the Russian Revolution “and toured the country calling for support for the Russian Revolution and for soviets in Britain”,<sup>2</sup> the BSP made up the bulk of the new CPGB, and his syndicalism was a relatively recent development built upon decades of Marxist prejudices, perhaps this development is less surprising than some would think.

In 1921 he visited Russia to take part in the Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern), an experience he wrote about in a pamphlet entitled *Russia in 1921*. This makes no mention of the dictatorship of the Communist Party and instead quotes a “Comrade Peterovsky” from *The Communist Review* that “Communism has never yet existed in Russia; what has existed has been the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e., of the best organised and most class-conscious of the town industrial workers, supported actively in the Soviets by the remainder of the working class, and passively by the peasantry, so long as its elementary demands were satisfied” while “the large industrial establishments will be entirely owned, managed and controlled in all respects by the government with the aid of the trade unions in a very real sense”.<sup>3</sup> He repeated this claim in his *Memoirs*:

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and Fifty Thousand Cotton Operatives Get an Advance by Direct Action” (December 1915); “Situation in England” (July 1916).

<sup>1</sup> “*Mother Earth* and Labour’s Revolt”, *Mother Earth*, March 1915.

<sup>2</sup> White, 193.

the Russian Revolution has taught us many things. Perhaps the most important of these is that the administration or management of industry must be by councils of workers and not by parliaments... I am, therefore, strongly in favour of the universal establishment of workers’ councils, and the universal formation of shop committees. These institutions are indispensable instruments for achieving the complete overthrow of capitalism and the full control of all forms of industry by the workers. Such control will be secured, and the administration of industry will be effected, through industrial organisations, through our present trade unions when they have shed their narrowness and absurdities, have broadened their bases, and have welded themselves

together so as to become equal to all industrial requirements.

This is the essence of syndicalism. The outlook for the future is not that of a centralised official bureaucracy giving instructions and commands to servile

subordinates; I look for the coming of associations of equals, working co-operatively to produce with the highest efficiency, and simultaneously to care for the physical and mental wellbeing of all... With the experience of Russia to guide us, I entirely agree that there will be a period, short or long, when the dictatorship of the proletariat must be resorted to.<sup>4</sup>

Yet such a regime did not exist in Russia and, moreover, the Bolshevik “dictatorship of the proletariat” had been the mechanism by which tendencies towards that future had been systematically destroyed and replaced by rule by a massive, corrupt bureaucracy “giving instructions and commands to servile subordinates.” Lenin, like the other leading Bolsheviks, rejected both in practice and in theory the idea of workers’ management of production and, ironically, had in 1920-1 denounced a weakened demand for this by the Workers’ Opposition as a “syndicalist” deviation.<sup>5</sup> There was simply no workers’

<sup>3</sup> Tom Mann, *Russia in 1921* (London : British Bureau, Red International of Labour Unions, 1921), 36-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Tom Mann’s Memoirs*, 270-1.

<sup>5</sup> The Workers’ Opposition did not reject the dictatorship of the party nor the predominant role of the party in the election of economic institutions nor question the Bolshevik prejudice



control in Soviet Russia and substantial ideological reasons why this would remain the case.

Mann's hope was that parliamentary action could be used "to prevent the capitalist class from using force to block the workers' movement" and that "ignoring the existence of the plutocratic state machine, or by indifference to its functioning in a manner hostile to the workers" would be unwise, so "it would be impolitic to leave the forces of the state machine in the hands of our plutocratic enemies."<sup>1</sup> This – as we will see – was just the old Social Democratic critique he had replied to in his syndicalist period and which would mean no strike would be wise until Communists made-up more than 50% of parliament. It also failed to take into account that the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" had used the forces of *its* state machine against strikes from 1918 onwards.<sup>2</sup> Ironically, the Bolshevik regime confirmed the warnings of the syndicalists that nationalisations meant "the further power of the political machine, the political power extended to the industrial" and would create "an all-powerful bureaucracy, with its own laws, and its own army and police to support it".<sup>3</sup>

Was Mann aware of this? Probably not. Like so many, he wanted to believe the Bolshevik Myth and so closed his eyes to those – including his previous libertarian comrades – who exposed the grim reality of Bolshevik Russia. Emma Goldman recounted her disappointment with Mann and his initial unwillingness to support the protests at the 1921 Profintern Congress for the imprisoned Russian anarchists and syndicalists:

Tom Mann, always anathema to the ruling class of his country, now accepted and made much of by the head of the new dynasty, proved clay in Bolshevik hands. He was too weak to resist Lenin and he was overcome like a debutante first receiving male homage.<sup>4</sup>

To be fair, he did sign the protest letter on the issue of the anarchists (much to Harry Pollitt's dislike) but the fact Mann remained, like Scottish ex-syndicalist William Gallacher, a Communist until his death and so stuck with the party as it became Stalinist. Yet he also remained true to some of what he had learned before the war. "We aim," he wrote in 1927, "at applying the principle of workers' control in the shops, factories, mills, mines, ships and railways until we get complete

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in favour of centralisation. As such, their calls for workers' management of production were a faint echo of genuine syndicalist ideas on the matter and, as such, would not have saved the revolution.

<sup>1</sup> *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, 270-1.

<sup>2</sup> See section H.6.3 of *An Anarchist FAQ* volume 2 (Edinburgh: AK Press, ) for details.

<sup>3</sup> A.G. Tufton, "Osborne Judgement Outcome: An Address delivered to the Walthamstow Trades' Council", *The Industrial Syndicalist*, March 1911, 22.

control".<sup>5</sup> Eleven years later he was still arguing for workers' control.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Dona Torr – the CPGB member tasked with writing his biography<sup>7</sup> – "revealed that Mann was not altogether satisfied with his party career, 'feel[ing] deeply' that there was an 'essential difference between the side he has fought on since 1921' and his life before the party."<sup>8</sup>

So Mann's legacy primarily lies in his trade union activism rather than his membership of various Marxist parties before and after his syndicalist period. As one contemporary noted, "Tom Mann is today, even in his old age, a giant among pygmies. It is pathetic, however, to think of him spending his declining years in association with a bunch of political nonentities"<sup>9</sup> like the CPGB. Significantly, Torr's pamphlet *Tom Mann* (1936) issued to mark his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday had some twenty-seven pages dedicated to the period of the 1880s to 1914 while the post-1914 period had only two.

Ironically, this is reflected in the fact that the source of Mann's appeal for Leninists is not his Bolshevik period – beyond a few references to the 1920s National Minority Movement it is rarely mentioned – but rather his activities which predated the CPGB. This reflects his utility to the Bolsheviks themselves, who recognised that "he was nevertheless one of the world's foremost syndicalists, and his adherence to communism had a tremendous potential value as a counter to be paraded around Europe before anarcho-syndicalist and 'leftist' critics of Bolshevism."<sup>10</sup>

Still, regardless of this, Mann's arguments and activities from 1910 to 1916 should be better remembered. That Mann is remembered for his syndicalist period is significant for it shows the power of the ideas he advocated compared with his stints in various socialist parties (SDF, ILP, BSP).

### A few Marxist Myths Debunked

Yet while the move from syndicalist to communist is celebrated as a good example to be followed by libertarians today, Mann's toleration of Stalinism is less noted by Marxists. Understandably, given what it says about their ideology. Insofar as Leninists mention the Stalinist endpoint of the likes of Mann, it is usually explained by reference to their pre-Communist politics – a lingering legacy of their libertarian period.

<sup>4</sup> *Living My Life* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970) II: 909.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Coates, "Preface", xii.

<sup>6</sup> White 201.

<sup>7</sup> Her death meant that only the first of three volumes appeared: *Tom Mann and his Times*, vol. 1 1856-1890 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956).

<sup>8</sup> Howe, 102.

<sup>9</sup> Bonar Thompson, *Hyde Park Orator* (New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1934), 84.

<sup>10</sup> Howe, 94.

Paul Foot, for example, noted how Mann “supported the Russian Revolution throughout the Twenties and by the time Stalin started to extirpate every revolutionary vestige of that revolution, Tom was an old man”, bemoaning how he went to China in 1927 and “chronicle[d] the disaster for which [his] beloved Stalin was chiefly responsible. Once more the abstentionism inherent in the syndicalist case – the abandonment of ‘difficult’ political decisions to ‘them upstairs’ had blinded Tom Mann to the cause of this most awful horror.”<sup>1</sup> Yet surely – as a leading member of the SWP – he was aware that Bolshevism is based on “democratic centralism” in which party members are expected to follow the decisions of the central committee (actual “them upstairs” rather than unspecified ones) regardless? As Trotsky put it in 1924 during his fight with Stalin:

Comrades, none of us wants to be or can be right against the party. In the last analysis, the party is always right, because the party is the sole historical instrument that the working class possesses for the solution of its fundamental tasks... I know that no one can be right against the party. It is only possible to be right with the party and through it since history has not created any other way to determine the correct position.

The English have a proverb: My country right or wrong. We can say with much greater historical justification: Whether it is right or wrong in any particular, specific question at any particular moment, this is my party... I consider my duty at the present time to be the duty of a party member who knows that the party, in the last analysis, is always right.<sup>2</sup>

So the whole point of democratic centralism is that you submerge your views and parrot the party line. To blame Mann’s Stalinism on syndicalism rather than Bolshevism is unconvincing, particularly as embracing Leninism in the first place meant supporting – or turning a blind-eye to – the party dictatorship, state capitalism and “dictatorial” one-man management of the Bolshevik regime under Lenin and Trotsky. So

<sup>1</sup> Paul Foot, “Right as Pie”, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 13, No. 20 (24 October 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923-25)* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975), 161-2.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Thorpe, *The workers themselves’: revolutionary syndicalism and international labour, 1913-1923*

ignoring your own experiences and doubts in favour of following the Comintern line was part of the CPGB position *from the start* and *not* a later development under Stalin. Mann, then, followed the decisions of the Comintern under Lenin and Stalin due to the same (non-syndicalist) principles – undoubtedly because the Russians had a “successful” revolution under their belts, one which Stalin had taken part as a key supporter of Lenin. Following Lenin was the soil upon which following Stalin flourished just as the former had extirpated every revolutionary gain of 1917 long before the latter secured his position precisely on those foundations.

There are other issues with Foot’s claims. He suggested that Mann’s “apolitical syndicalism left him without independent political answers when the workers, on whose industrial strength he depended exclusively, stampeded to the colours.” Except, of course, syndicalists around the world campaigned against the war while almost all Marxist parties sided with their State in the imperialist conflict. As a Spanish syndicalist

noted at the Second Congress of the Communist International when the Bolsheviks suggested something similar, “of the professed syndicalist organisations only the CGT deserved this reproach, that precisely the political unions – those maintaining connections with the socialist parties – had supported the war and thus aided the capitalists.”<sup>3</sup> As syndicalist-turned-Bolshevik Alfred Rosmer noted, “people talked too much, and not always intelligently, about ‘syndicalist prejudices’” yet “these ‘prejudices’ had not stopped syndicalists being in

the front line of resistance to the war and of the defence of the October Revolution.”<sup>4</sup>

Trying to save this claim, Leninist academic Ralph Darlington looked at the syndicalist movement in France, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Britain and America. Of these, only the CGT became pro-war (although “there emerged a tiny internationalist and anti-war minority within the CGT”) and “in both Spain and Ireland the syndicalist movements mounted opposition to the war”

(Dordrecht/London: Kluwer Academic and International Institute of Social History, 1989), 133.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin’s Moscow* (London: Bookmarks, 1987) 137.

while “the bulk of Italian syndicalists confirmed their anti-militarism and internationalism”. In Britain and America, the syndicalists and IWW are condemned for not explicitly campaigning against the war although he does not explain how their “ambiguous stance was a reflection of their syndicalist refusal explicitly to link industrial activity with political ideas and organisation” when, as he himself shows, other syndicalists managed to do so. Needless to say, he draws no similar generalisations from his admission that in Britain “[e]ven those shop stewards’ leaders who were members of revolutionary socialist parties, such as the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party, acted no differently.” Add the other countries he mentions in which the syndicalists took an anti-war position – Germany, Sweden, Spain and the Netherlands – and it seems hard to conclude that syndicalist theory somehow hinders opposing imperialist war.<sup>1</sup>

So, in reality, compared to political Marxism and its affiliated unions, the syndicalists – like the anarchists – have a far better track record as regards opposing the First World War. Foot’s grasp of the facts can also be seen from his claim that

Mann “threw himself into the Red International Labour Union, which was founded in Moscow in 1921. Lenin’s aim was to set up revolutionary trade unions to counter the ‘reformist’ trade unions which were being set up in the capitalist world.” While the former is true, the latter is not. Indeed, the opposite is the case: Lenin’s aim was to get the revolutionary unions to disband and for their militants to join both the Communist Party and the reformist trade unions.

Then again, Foot once managed to write an article on Louise Michel which failed to mention she was an anarchist so perhaps we should not be too surprised. However, his claims are often repeated and so worth debunking. Likewise with another common claim that

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Darlington, “Re-evaluating syndicalist opposition to the First World War”, *Labor History*, 53: 4 (2012), 526, 524, 528, 531, 533.

<sup>2</sup> James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards’ Movement* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973), 278-9. Hinton, it should be said, immediately contradicted himself by noting that the syndicalists also thought that the “revolutionary General

the syndicalists “neglected politics and the role of the state altogether”<sup>2</sup>. Another historian suggested “that ‘pure’ syndicalism’s (and Mann’s) theory of the state – and his consequent denial of the need for anything that can plausibly be called political action – was as close to being just plain wrong and for the reasons most commonly cited.”<sup>3</sup> This is reflected in this passage:

Welsh syndicalists consistently underrated the significance of the state. Politics were unimportant because the state was simply the superstructural manifestation of the economic power of the bourgeoisie. The real fight was with a real not an abstract enemy at the point of production...Unfortunately the state was not an abstraction but a force in its own right which intervened with decisive effect during the decontrol struggle in 1921. That experience

underlined the relevance of the arguments advanced by the British Socialist Party in its pre-war polemic against Syndicalism. “You cannot get very far by mere industrial action”, wrote Fred Knee at that time. “So long as the capitalist state remains, with its army, navy and police... so long will it be possible for that capitalist state, when thoroughly awake to any danger, to throttle



**Police mobilised during the 1911 Liverpool Transport Strike**

any strike, however big”<sup>4</sup>

In terms of the Welsh syndicalists, are we expected to believe – to take just one example – that they were unaware that Churchill had during a south Wales miners’ dispute in 1910 sent battalions of police from London and held troops in reserve in Cardiff, in case the police failed in their task? That during what became known as the Tonypany riots that the authorities fortified Pontypridd with 400 policemen, two troops of infantry and a squadron of the 18th Hussars (who were stationed at the Llywnypia pit)? Is there any doubt that they knew that the State was on the side of the employers given what they saw with their own eyes?

Strike” would “fragment the forces of bourgeois repression.” (279)

<sup>3</sup> White, 171.

<sup>4</sup> M.G. Woodhouse, “Mines for the Nation or Mines for the Miners? Alternative Perspectives on Industrial Democracy, 1919-1921”, *Llafur*, Vol.2 No.3, Summer 1978, pp.92-109

Moreover, Mann – and other syndicalists – were fully aware of the role of the State and repeatedly answered *at the time* this apparently unanswerable critique. Indeed, Arthur M. Lewis raised the same claim in his debate with Mann during the latter’s tour of America and got this reply:

Of course I am aware of what is likely to be said with regard to their being the men in possession; they are the owners of the factories, the mills and the mines. At present I know that they are the virtual owners of the state machinery, and the virtual owners of the fighting forces. And it may be argued that they can use these against us, against the working class. I am declaring they could not do anything of the kind when class solidarity is once a fact. Given solidarity, the army cannot move. Given solidarity, the navy cannot move. Given solidarity, the judges cannot function in their particular grooves. Given solidarity, neither statesman, politician, church, nor others will be able to aid in supplying the daily bread.<sup>1</sup>

Mann re-iterated this answer by noting that while “it is claimed that if you will ignore the state, the state has its machinegun, etc.” he had, “[i]n the plainest of English language... commented upon the existence of that power” and had “also made the straightest possible reference to the means whereby I would deprive them of that power”, namely that “functioning on the industrial field by the exhibition of solidarity... would entirely deprive the government of the present power it has, and it could no longer control those who would make use of the guns to pop holes through you.”<sup>2</sup> He mocked those who said that “political action” was essential to capture the State in order to then destroy it:

*That it may be abolished!* Is that the same “state” that Mr Lewis is now proposing we shall spend our energy in capturing? And what will be the good of it when we have got it? What will we do with it when we have it? If it is to be abolished, and I say it is to be abolished, what is the good of spending time over it trying now to get hold of it, when here I have shown — and he has not refuted it or attempted to — I have shown that by refusing to function at the bidding of the bosses we thereby deprive the state entirely of its present power. I request him to be good enough to deal with that.<sup>3</sup>

At an ISEL Conference the previous year Mann moved a motion on this:

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***Mann – and other syndicalists – were fully aware of the role of the State and repeatedly answered at the time this apparently unanswerable critique.***

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#### Methods of Direct Action

Whereas the State is always prepared to use its armed force in the interests of the capitalists to coerce the workers into submission whenever they attempt to better their conditions;

Whereas the capitalists have even gone so far as to raise armed forces of their own;

Whereas the workers, who have no country, have no interest in any war, except the class war;

The Conference declares the necessity for the workers to devise means of Direct Action against the State as well as against the capitalists – such as the Strike, the Irritation Strike, the Pearl Strike, Sabotage, the Boycott, and Anti-Militarism.<sup>4</sup>

And, lest we forget, Mann embraced Industrial Unionism after seeing organised railway workers transport “the armed police and other henchmen of the companies” to Broken Hill “thus enabling the master class to have at its disposal the machinery of the state and the services of the organised workmen to beat the miners.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise during the Liverpool transport strike, Mann saw 3,000 troops and several hundred police imported into the city along with gunboats on the Mersey. The 13<sup>th</sup> of August – Bloody Sunday – saw a mass demonstration of 80,000 workers violently dispersed by police and troops. Two days later, two strikers were shot dead by troopers as crowds attacked prison vans taking those convicted for resisting the police on the 13<sup>th</sup> to prison.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, he was imprisoned for anti-militarist propaganda (the “Don’t shot!” leaflet) in 1912.

<sup>1</sup> Mann, *Debate*, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Mann, *Debate*, 40. Mann later repeats this argument (72).

<sup>3</sup> Mann, *Debate*, 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> “London and Manchester declare for Syndicalism”, *The Syndicalist*, December 1912.

<sup>5</sup> *Tom Mann’s Memoirs*, 193.

<sup>6</sup> Holton, 99-100.

Now it is one thing to say that such responses were inadequate,<sup>1</sup> it is quite another to suggest that the syndicalists were blissfully unaware of the issue and had not responded to it. Yet, apparently, we are meant to believe that Mann – like *all* syndicalists – was unaware of the role and nature of the State in spite seeing its forces of coercion deployed against strikes.

So, as Bob Holton summarised, the Syndicalists “quite clearly perceived the oppressive role of the state whose periodic intervention in industrial unrest could hardly have been missed.” They “were hostile to any view of parliament and the state as socially neutral and therefore malleable by supporters of social reform. State institutions were seen instead as functioning in capitalist interests.”<sup>2</sup> In reality, then, syndicalists addressed this issue and argued that anti-militarist agitation and the general strike would paralyse the forces of the State.<sup>3</sup>

This perspective flowed from “the Syndicalist view that the organised State, with its government and officials and armed forces, was brought into existence by the opponents of the Workers, and functions only in the interests of the enemies of the Workers.”<sup>4</sup> They rejected the idea that the State was a neutral body which could be captured:

Political Socialism works by legal means from above; Syndicalism works from underneath, irrespective of legality.

The Political Socialist sees in everything the need for the State or the Municipality to do something, thereby forgetting the class nature of the State and his own teaching that anything to be done, must be done by the workers themselves, and that no law will be enforced effectively in the workers’ interest, until the workers can enforce it themselves.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kropotkin in his “Preface” to *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution* noted that the authors “have considerably attenuated the resistance that the Social Revolution will probably meet with on its way. The check of the attempt at Revolution in Russia [in 1905] has shown us all the danger that may follow from an illusion of this kind.” (*Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* [Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014], 561).

<sup>2</sup> Holton, 22, 182. Also see, R. J. Holton, “Syndicalist Theories of the State”, *The Sociological Review*, Vol 28, Issue 1, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Dismissal of this answer by Leninists may also be combined with criticism that the CNT helped defeat the October 1934 uprising in Asturias by its members transporting troops on the railways. This ignores that the majority of organised railway workers outside of Catalonia were in the UGT and that the assault on Asturias was by sea using colonial troops from Spanish Morocco, the Spanish Legion (part of Spain’s Army of Africa) and Assault Guards as it “was soon decided that the rebellion could only be crushed by experienced, professional troops. The other areas of Spain could not be denuded of their garrisons in case there were other

This analysis also informed their critique of nationalisation. First, “[w]here ‘Labour Governments are in power the workers are still wage-slaves. They are still exploited.’”<sup>6</sup> Second, why expect the *capitalist* State to be the means of liberating labour? As one syndicalist stressed:

The State which now sends British soldiers and police to protect blacklegs... and to bludgeon British workers who are fighting for their bare rights to existence, can hardly be expected to inspire the workers with much confidence as to its intentions as an employer of labour... it is likely to be as unscrupulous an exploiter as is the private corporation. And this need hardly be wondered at. The State is essentially a ruling-class organisation, and its functions are chiefly coercive. The State came into existence with the rise of private property and a privileged class; its main functions have always been the protection of ruling-class property and the keeping of the masses in subjection.<sup>7</sup>

It should also be noted that the Marxists of the time had the naïve position that the State machine would simply follow the decisions of any Socialist government rather than, say, ignore parliament and organise a military coup. As one leading British syndicalist argued:

Besides, if our rulers, by Parliament, can prevent a General Strike, so equally can they take measures to prevent a Parliamentary Socialist Victory.... Does it ever strike the politicians that if capitalist politics can be used to tie up the workers’ industrial revolt, how still more easily can they be used to tie up, deceive, or cajole the workers politically?

The base of the matter is to be found in the formidable error of thinking that the workers

revolutionary outbreaks. Franco therefore called upon Colonel Yague to lead a force of Moorish regulars to help reconquer the province from the rebels.” (Richard A. H. Robinson, *The origins of Franco’s Spain: the Right, the Republic and revolution, 1931-1936* [Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1970], 190-1) Sadly, Trotskyist Felix Morrow – the source of such claims – did not indicate how he came by this information or why troops based in Africa were first ferried to Spain before being transported by rail across the country to then board the ships which were used to get them to Asturias in order to crush the revolt.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Mann, “George Lansbury”, *The Syndicalist*, December 1912.

<sup>5</sup> A.G. Tufton, “Osborne Judgement Outcome: An Address delivered to the Walthamstow Trades’ Council”, *The Industrial Syndicalist*, March 1911.

<sup>6</sup> E.J.B. Allen, “Politicians and the General Strike”, *The Syndicalist*, February 1912.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Watkins, “The Question for Railwaymen: Conciliation or Emancipation?”, *The Industrial Syndicalist*, May 1911.

can emancipate themselves with the *permission* of their rulers.... The General Strike cannot be combatted by laws if the workers are determined to resort to it.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the critique was somewhat beside the point as no Marxist Party ever got into that position – electioneering ensured that any which managed to achieve a majority had by that time become completely reformist (indeed, the 1945-51 British Labour Party government had no qualms in sending in troops to break dockers’ strikes). Ironically, one of Mann’s Marxist critics admitted as much when he noted in passing how French socialist Aristide Briand “had proven himself a deserter.”<sup>2</sup> The rest of the twentieth century simply confirmed the syndicalist recognition that socialists “prior to being returned, were unquestionably revolutionary, are no longer so after a few years in Parliament.”<sup>3</sup>

In short, syndicalists regularly addressed the issue of the use of State forces in strikes and at a minimum argued for anti-militarist propaganda within the armed forces and that solidarity strikes would hinder their deployment if they proved immune to calls for class solidarity. Others, such as Pataud and Pouget, recognised the need for actively “disorganising the State, of dismantling and thoroughly disabling it” (insurrection) along with “The Arming of the People” to form an “organisation of defence, with a Trade Union and Federal basis” and these “Syndicalist battalions were not a force external to the people. They were the people themselves” who “had the common-sense to arm themselves in order to protect their conquered liberty.”<sup>4</sup>

Given this, their urging that we direct our energies to building our own organisations rather than on a futile attempt to capture those of our masters becomes simply stating the obvious.

Finally, the question of the General Strike. Marxists have a tendency to portray this as a passive “folded arms” revolt. Indeed, initially many French syndicalists

envisioned it this way and were critiqued by anarchists (most famously, by Errico Malatesta at the 1907 International Anarchist Congress). The notion that the general strike could starve out the capitalist class ignored the resources available to it and the disruption to the community such a strike would have. The need then, as Kropotkin had stressed in the early 1880s, was

**that we direct our energies  
to building our own  
organisations rather than  
on a futile attempt to  
capture those of our  
masters becomes simply  
stating the obvious**

to turn the general strike into a general insurrection and expropriation.<sup>5</sup> This critique was recognised as valid by many syndicalists with, for example, Pouget and Pataud arguing that the general strike was the precursor for an uprising, swift expropriation of the means of life and the resuming of production under workers’ control.

This perspective was also expressed by British Syndicalists:

For Syndicalists to preach passivism is absurd. The expropriation of the capitalists is not going to be accomplished by the starvation of the workers. For us the general strike is not a national movement for working-class starvation but the commencement of the capitalists’ expropriation... Direct Action, sabotage, general strike, insurrection leading to expropriation are the only methods that Syndicalists can use to emancipate the workers.<sup>6</sup>

Thus “Direct Action will have to carry the victory ultimately. There is no solution for the abolition of wage system other than expropriation... the Revolutionary General Strike for the expropriation of the capitalists.”<sup>7</sup> It was a fallacy to suggest otherwise:

Our conception of the Social Revolution, effected by the direct and forcible expropriation of the capitalists, abolishes at once and for all the wages system... It means the communist reorganisation of society, the abolition of all political government, all society being workers, and these regulating and controlling their own conditions of existence through their economic

<sup>1</sup> E.J.B. Allen, “Politicians and the General Strike”, *The Syndicalist*, February 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, *Debate*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Mann, “Prepare for Action”, *The Industrial Syndicalist*, July 1910.

<sup>4</sup> Émile Pataud and Émile Pouget, *How we shall bring about the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Co-operative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), 78-84, 150-8.

<sup>5</sup> See Kropotkin’s comments on the American 1877 railway strike in the chapter “Expropriation” in *Words of a Rebel*.

<sup>6</sup> “Some Fallacies Stated and Answered”, *The Syndicalist*, December 1912.

<sup>7</sup> E.J.B. Allen, “Politicians and the General Strike”, *The Syndicalist*, February 1912.

organisations that have been shaped to that end.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the insurrectionary and expropriatory general strike so vividly portrayed by Pouget and Pataud was also advocated by many British syndicalists (Mann suggested that while details would differ, “all the present day developments compel acquiescence in the main lines of the forecast”<sup>2</sup>). Needless to say, their book was also positively reviewed by Max Baginski in the June 1913 issue of *Mother Earth* and was advertised in it alongside Goldman’s pamphlet *Syndicalism: The Modern Menace to Capitalism*.

### What now?

The industrial scene is very different now. Large-scale industry is nowhere near as significant as it was in Mann’s day (the utter destruction of coal mining being the most obvious example). The unions have moved from primarily sectional trade-based ones to giant general ones rather than industrial ones. They are subject to draconian regulations which impose – to use Pouget’s term – “Democratism” onto them, so disempowering the militant minority who can inspire mass action and empowering the officials who can diffuse it. We have no equivalent of the *Daily Herald*.

The “free market” and “anti-red-tape” Tories have passed law-upon-law regulating industrial action (and so the labour market) and wrapping the trade unions in red tape. Spontaneous (“unofficial”) action and solidarity strikes have no legal protection. In the 1960s and 1970s, the wage share was around 60% but fell rapidly after 1981 (reaching 53.5% by 2007). Decades of defeats mean a sense of power is lacking, with the vision of most unions being at best fighting against attempts by bosses and politicians to make things worse rather than anything as “utopian” as workers’ control. Most just aim to survive until a Labour government is elected with the unspoken expectation that they will be ignored rather than further regulated and weakened.

Given all this, does Mann’s syndicalism have any relevance for today?

The unions are hardly the perfected weapon of struggle Mann hoped they would become. Officialdom still reigns and industrial organisation is rare. Where some unions are industry based – for example, the University and College Union – the workers are usually divided by grade even if they face the same boss. Thus activists can be in the ironic situation of having their senior management being fellow union members while workers subject to that manager’s diktats cannot join

due to being in a lower grade – and various trade union anti-poaching agreements exist to maintain this illogical arrangement. As such, Mann’s industrial unionism is still relevant.

Then there is the lumping of all workers in a workplace in a single branch and this being the body which decides on action. Such a situation does make some sense, but it does allow management to utilise salami-slicing tactics, targeting subunits for “re-organisation” on the often all too correct assumption that the wider branch will not be willing to back a minority of members (even if the branch does back action, the bosses can rely on the new legal 50% barrier on ballots to work its magic). Obviously, building a culture of solidarity is essential here, as is stressing that such attacks are usually rolled out across the organisation as a whole, but making the branch itself a federation would make sense and encouraging others to practice their right to not cross pickets organised for legal strikes.

Which is part of the issue. The law limits official strikes considerably – but in terms of the barriers it places on taking action and the types of action allowed (no sympathy and “political” strikes<sup>3</sup>). For all their talks of “union bosses”, the Tories’ anti-union laws give union officials yet more power as they mitigate against “unofficial” action. This means that any new syndicalist revolt will need to understand the importance of “unofficial” action and the impact that can have on strikers and their unions. Likewise, attempts to outlaw any effective actions by whatever government is in office would need to be met with direct action and solidarity rather than relying on elections to return the lesser evil (who, like New Labour, never get around to ending the restrictions).

Ultimately, though, the Tory anti-union laws reflect the correctness of many aspects of Mann’s syndicalism. The power of direct action and solidarity – both in terms of improving pay and conditions and transforming people’s consciousness – was something the Tories wished to destroy and have done so to a large degree. The task is to build a sense of power in workers, a raising of awareness of what in Mann’s time could be taken for granted for a large section of the population.

The question of how much time, effort and resources to invest in reforming the existing unions remains as valid now as in the 1910s. Mann’s strategy had the distinct advantage of both giving activists a feasible short-term goal and of bringing them into contact with activists

<sup>1</sup> “Some Fallacies Stated and Answered”, *The Syndicalist*, December 1912.

<sup>2</sup> Mann, Foreword, Pataud and Pouget, ix.

<sup>3</sup> The Tories banning sympathy strikes does not stop their cheerleaders also moaning about “the unions” being “selfish” and only interested in their members.

who shared some, if not all, of their ideas and so could be more easily convinced to move further. However, the power of officialdom remained – not least because it reflected the role of trade unions in negotiating agreements with bosses and so having to uphold their side (e.g., industrial quiet for at least a while). So a clear danger is that militants become integrated into the union machine, become part of the very officialdom which they sought to eliminate – as shown by a few former British syndicalist militants who saw through the Bolshevik Myth.

So electing radicals to positions within the officialdom with a clear anti-bureaucracy reform strategy may be the end result of the process but it can never be the start. Yes, many union branches have little attendance at general meetings but without a culture change in the membership any activists “elected” to branch committees will be isolated – both as regards the bureaucratic-minded existing Committee members who will be in the majority and from the rank-and-file who may not appreciate the changes or activities being championed. The aim must be a transformation at the bottom and that will influence any wider strategies within the existing unions.

Mann’s support for amalgamation and “boring from within” provided activists with something to do. The latter should not be underestimated for the bane of revolutionary politics is a lack of constructive activity, of actually seeing your ideas making a positive impact on the world. Mann’s strategy gave a positive activity, something which would bring us a step closer to socialism, rather than building tiny “pure” revolutionary unions which are very similar to activist groups simply existing to propagate abstract revolutionary propaganda. This is not to say that new unions may not be needed at some stage – the example of the Building Workers strike of 1913-4 springs to mind – just that this is almost certainly not the starting strategy in most areas.<sup>1</sup> Still, we should not forget that there are more options than just “boring from within” or dual-unionism and that different tactics may be applicable in different situations.

Then there is the state of the left. Mann faced the sectarian SLP and the SDF/BSP rather than the plethora of “revolutionary” sects we have today. These far more than the old parties will seek to grasp hold of any

radical currents within the unions and use them to build their parties at the expense of creating a wider spirit of revolt. The negative impact of this can be seen from the lack of influence of the CPGB’s National Minority Movement and the fact that parties with the “correct” Leninist position have rarely grown in influence compared to the syndicalists between 1910 and 1914. However, the danger remains as shown by the anti-poll tax movement of the early 1990 – extra-parliamentary, direct actionist, based on community solidarity – being used as a means of electing Militant activists (such as Tommy Sheridan) into council and other seats before being allowed to disappear. Any new syndicalist revolt would need to be aware of this danger and stress its

apolitical nature – after all the CPGB dissipated the promise of the syndicalist revolt by importing a party model formed in a pre-capitalist Tsarist autocracy and we should seek to learn that lesson.

In terms of goals, Mann’s call for workers’ control (self-management) remains as valid as ever although the idea that unions are the means to organise it depends very much on workers being in direct control of those. However, whether by unions or new workplace assemblies and committees, workers’ control of production remains a fundamental principle of any genuine socialism. The decline in syndicalist influence and rise of Leninism saw the demand for workers’ control essentially disappear, arising again only in the 1960s when we saw some of the descendants of those who buried it proclaim – without a hint of shame – their support for it. We cannot allow such hypocrisy to go unmentioned.

To conclude. We should recall that despite all the patronising and selective Leninist accounts of British syndicalism, none of these various Marxist parties and sects have managed to gain the influence that Mann and others achieved between 1910 and 1914. If British syndicalists did not bring about the revolution, then the move to Bolshevism has been far less successful. This is not to suggest that a simple reapplication of the ideas and strategies of over 100 years ago is wise, simply that there is far more to learn from that experience than seeking to apply that of a party that ensured a failed revolution in a quasi-feudal absolutist monarchy.

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<sup>1</sup> Being a member of two unions, a reformist and a revolutionary one, is always an option but that means the

revolutionary union is more an educational body than a union and this should be acknowledged.



# The Way to Win

Tom Mann

*Barrier Daily Truth, Broken Hill, May 1909*

*An Open Letter to Trades Unionists on Methods of Industrial Organisation*

Comrades,

The great crisis is drawing nigh when the supreme effort must be made by the workers to take entire responsibility for the management of all industry and commerce; the existing system of society must of necessity give place to some other system that will adequately provide for the requirements of all.

The nature of the newer order will depend in considerable measure on the standard of intelligence possessed by the workers, and their courage to apply sound principles that will ensure social and economic equality.

The object I have in writing this letter is not to enlarge upon principles or ideals, but to direct attention to the machinery that is necessary to enable us to achieve our object.

THE PRELIMINARY  
ESSENTIAL CONDITION IS  
WORKING-CLASS  
SOLIDARITY

Without this solidarity, i.e., without the power and the disposition to act in concert as the working-class against the dominating plutocratic class, there is no hope.

At present we have not got this solidarity, either industrially or politically.

The weakness of our industrial organisation lies less in the fact that only one-fourth of the workers are organised, than in the much more serious fact that those who are organised are not prepared to make common cause with each other.

Hitherto we have been content with trades unions — meaning unions of skilled workers, supplemented by unions of unskilled workers. But each of these unions has for the most part initiated and as far as possible carried out a policy for itself alone; more recently broadened out somewhat by joining Trade and Labor Federations to secure something in the nature of general help in time of trouble or warfare.

Still, the basis of unionism to-day is distinctly sectional and narrow, instead of cosmopolitan and broad-based.

In Australia, more particularly, resort to Arbitration Courts and Wages Boards for the settlement of industrial disputes has resulted in settlements being arrived at and agreements entered into by the various unions, binding them not to become actively engaged in any dispute during the period covered by the agreement.

Such agreements in themselves absolutely destroy the possibility of class solidarity.

Agreements entered into between unions and employers directly - i.e., without the intervention of Arbitration

Courts or Wages Boards - are equally detrimental to, and in dead opposition to working-class solidarity. They, therefore, must be classed as amongst the chief obstructive agencies to general working-class progress.

Thus it is clear that to continue entering into binding agreements with employers is to render the unionist movement impotent for achieving our economic freedom.

Therefore, no more agreements must be entered into for lengthy periods. Of course, temporary adjustments must be made, but they must be for the hour only, leaving the workers free for concerted action with their fellows.

The form of capitalist industry has changed during the past 50 years. It has passed through the stages of individual ownership of shop or factory, the employer taking part in the business and competing with all other employers in the same business, then to limited liability and joint stock companies, which removed the individual employer - whose place is taken by a manager - and reduced competition between the capitalist firms. From this it has now gone to trusts and combines, inter-State, and even international in their operation.

A corresponding progress must take place with the workers' organisation. Sectionalism must disappear, and the industrial organisations must be equal to State, national, and international action, not in theory only, but in actual fact.

Another influence tending strongly towards discord and not towards solidarity, is the stipulating in some unions

**Experience in all countries shows most conclusively that industrial organisation, intelligently conducted, is of much more moment than political action, for entirely irrespective as to which school of politicians is in power, capable and courageous industrial activity forces from the politicians proportionate concessions.**

that a man who joins an industrial organisation by that act pledges himself to vote in a certain way politically.

I have, in days gone by, argued strongly that the industrial organisations should be the special places where economic knowledge should be imparted and adequate scope for discussion afforded. I hold so still, but I am thoroughly satisfied that it is a source of serious discord to couple the political with the industrial in the sense of demanding that a man must vote as the industrial organisation declares.

It is not difficult to understand why this should be so. It is because in the unions or industrial organisations we are (or should be) prepared to enrol every person who works, irrespective of his or her intelligence, or opinions held upon political or other subjects.

Take the case of an organiser, who finds himself in a centre of industry where there is practically no organisation. He soon discovers that the usual orthodox bodies are there, theological and political. He finds out the composition of the local governing bodies and the type of politician who received the votes at last election. From this he concludes that there are resident there the usual percentage of reactionaries, Liberals, Laborites, and Socialists, and each of these parties finds its adherents chiefly in the ranks of the workers.

That ought not to interfere with industrial organisation, in which they should be enrolled entirely irrespective of political faith; and becoming members of the industrial body, it is here these workers should get their education in industrial and social economics, and this would prove the true guide to political action.

To insist upon them voting solidly politically before they have received instruction in matters economic, is to add to the difficulties of organisation.

Notwithstanding what has been done and is now being done by the Australian Workers' Union, it is abundantly clear that we shall have to separate the industrial from the political, and so afford scope for growing activities with the least amount of friction.

I am not wishful to deprecate political action, but it is necessary to say that during recent years, in Australia, undue importance has been attached to political action; and although the actual membership in industrial organisations may be as large, or even larger than in former years, there is not held by the typical unionist a

proper understanding of the fundamental and vital importance of economic or industrial organisation. Indeed, to listen to the speeches of the typical Labor politician it is clear that he is surfeited with the idea that that which is of paramount importance is the return to the legislative bodies of an additional number of Labor men, and that all else is secondary and relatively trifling.

In absolute fact, the very opposite is the case. Experience in all countries shows most conclusively that industrial organisation, intelligently conducted, is of much more moment than political action, *for entirely irrespective as to which school of politicians is in power, capable and courageous industrial activity forces from the politicians proportionate concessions.*

It is an entirely mistaken notion to suppose that the return of Labor men or Socialists to Parliament can bring about deep-seated economic changes, unless the people themselves intelligently desire these changes, and those who do so desire know the value of economic organisation. During the past few years the representative men of

France, Germany, Italy, and other countries have urged upon the workers of the world to give increased attention to industrial organisation, and they are acting accordingly.

Indeed, it is obvious that a growing proportion of the intelligent pioneers of economic changes are expressing more and more dissatisfaction with Parliament and all its works, and look forward to the time when Parliaments, as we know them, will be superseded by the people managing their own affairs by means of the Initiative and the Referendum.

However, I am not an anti-Parliamentarian. I am chiefly concerned that we should attend to the first job in the right order, and thus make it the easier to do whatever else may be necessary.

It is encouraging to see the practical turn of affairs in Port Pine, SA. There the Combined Unions' Committee has already sent out a circular letter to the unions of South Australia, in which they say:

During the present struggle with the Broken Hill Proprietary Company, we have had ample opportunity of ascertaining in wild manner industrial organisation might be made more effective resisting the tyrannical encroachments of modern capitalism, arid securing to the worker a larger share of the product of his labor. My Committee have come to a definite

**It is an entirely mistaken notion to suppose that the return of Labor men or Socialists to Parliament can bring about deep-seated economic changes, unless the people themselves intelligently desire these changes, and those who do so desire know the value of economic organisation.**

and unanimous conclusion that craft unionism has outlived its usefulness, and that 20th century industrial development demands on the part of the workers a more perfect system of organisation. With this end in view we urge, preliminary step, the holding of a Trades' Union Congress in Adelaide during the month of July next. We sincerely hope that this proposition will meet with the earnest and energetic support of your members, and that immediate action will be taken.

This is a significant sign of the times, and an encouraging, one, too, to those who lament the sectionalism of the present unionism movement.

Such a conference could well discuss and carry such resolutions as follow:

That the present system of sectional trades unionism is incapable of combatting effectively the capitalist system under which the civilised world is now suffering, and such modifications and alterations should be made in the existing unions as will admit of a genuine Federation of all organisations, with power to act unitedly for industrial purposes.

That this Conference urgently advises all trade societies, unions, and associations to speedily make such changes in their rules as may be necessary to separate the funds subscribed for purposes usually provided by Friendly Societies from the funds subscribed for economic or industrial purposes, and proceed to at once form district Federations of all unions as distinct from trade or craft Federations.

That a Provisional Committee, or Council, be formed in each State (or, if need be, in each industrial district), to direct organising activities, until the movement attains such dimensions as will warrant the holding of an Interstate Congress, at which Congress all details as to objects and methods can be definitely decided upon. The members composing such provisional councils or committees to be drawn from members of unions agreeing to the previous proposals.

That no dispute be entered upon and no encouragement given to any section to formulate grievances (unless compelled by the action of employers), until the movement shall have attained a high standard of organisation, approved by the proposed Interstate Congress.

That in order to guard against dissension, it be declared from the outset that this movement is neither anti-political nor pro-political, but industrial and economic, and that members may belong to what political organisation they

please providing they do not oppose the expressed objects and ideals yet to be agreed upon at the Inter-state Congress, and at present set forth in the previous proposals.

If the unions of the Barrier agree to take such action as suggested in the foregoing proposals, I believe there could be, in a short time, a far more powerful organisation than anything of the kind known to modern times.

Beyond any question, the industrialists of Australia are prepared to carefully consider any well thought-out proposals submitted to them by the comrades of Broken Hill and Port Pirie.

The time is particularly opportune also, because for some two years past much discussion has been indulged in as to the merits of industrial unionism, and the minds of many are prepared to co-operate in such effort as here set forth.

Many of the unions in New South Wales and Victoria have already given much attention to the subject, and are well disposed thereto.

To remain in the present forcibly feeble condition characteristic of present-day unionism would be to stamp ourselves as incapables; and would admit of an indefinite prolongation of capitalist tyranny.

On all sides we see hysterical efforts being made by the plutocratic Governments of the different countries to prepare for war on an unprecedented scale, as a relief from glutted markets. Such is the condition of the peoples in Europe and America that deaths by starvation and deaths from diseases arising out of ill-nourished and unsanitary conditions are so appallingly large that the modern system stands condemned in the eyes of all intelligent citizens.

Through the ages men have died by millions before the naturally allotted span of life, because they have not been able to produce life's requirements in the necessary abundance; but never before did the anomaly we now witness obtain, viz., that people die of hunger because they have produced so much as to glut the markets and fill the warehouses, and are then deprived of the opportunity of work, therefore of incomes. Hence, poverty, destitution, and misery.

These conditions cannot last. In spite of colossal ignorance, there is already too much intelligence and genuine courage to acquiesce in such class dominancy and exploitation as bring such results in its train.

Therefore, comrades, get to work like men of intelligence and courage, count it a privilege to be permitted to share in the great work of social and economic emancipation; for, indeed, there is no higher, no worthier, no holier work that can engage the energies of man.

# From *The Industrial Syndicalist*

## Prepare for Action

Tom Mann

*The Industrial Syndicalist*, July 1910

The Great World Movement. In the twentieth century it is no longer possible for members of any political or religious party whatever to deny that there is, on foot, a great world Movement aiming definitely and determinedly at the economic emancipation of the workers.

Even those, who, for obvious reasons, regard this as the greatest evil, have come to realise the futility of attempting to combat this Movement by burying their heads in the sand and pretending to themselves that its influence is merely local and transitory.

There is no need for us to slur over real weaknesses – weaknesses which, by the way, our opponents have without exception failed to note.

Chief among our faults is our remarkable gullibility. We have been singularly ready to take the word for the deed – and take it with a degree of gratitude and enthusiasm that has gladdened the hearts of the capitalists. We have frequently allowed ourselves to be hypnotised by the flattering assurance that we are reasonable men (and not Revolutionary fanatics) into a quite unreasonable acceptance of the difficulties suggested by the Masters. Moreover our numbers are considerable, and for that reason we have amongst us all sorts and conditions of men. Faint hearts there are; indolent and selfish members there must be amongst so many. But an honest enemy of the Cause would be compelled to admit that not Cowardice but Courage, not indolence and sloth but well directed energy, based upon the principle of Common action for the Common good, is coming to be the predominant characteristic of the Workers of all nations.

The present situation is unique in the history of the World. Never before has there been so extensive a Movement, which, surmounting the barrier of nationality, is consciously striving forward to the next

stage in the Evolution of Mankind, where Competition will have to give way to Co-operation as surely as primitive Society had to give way to civilisation.

It is said that history repeats itself and it is quite true that, from time immemorial, the slave-class, which is our class, has arisen against the master class. Many sops have been thrown to the snarling Demos. The earliest on record were “bread and circuses.” The latest are profit-sharing and Old Age Pensions. But never before have the masters been face to face with a literate and coherent democracy.

To attain this state of collective fighting efficiency is our immediate object.

**The engines of war to  
fight the workers’  
battles to overthrow  
the Capitalist class,  
and to raise the  
general standard of  
life while so doing –  
must be of the  
workers’ own making.  
The Unions are the  
workers’ own**

### Our Experiences.

I, myself, have had the privilege of sharing in the efforts to extend working class solidarity, cheerfully abandoning myself to the great work of educative agitation, and assisting others in the stupendous work of industrial and political organisation of the toiling millions who, while called the working class, constitute ninety per cent. of the total population. I have seen and rejoiced in the steady progress we have made and are making towards Socialism. Not the least significant fact is the assemblage (upon such occasion as the Ferrer murder protest) of vast, sincere

crowds who are out for Socialism and nothing but Socialism. At the last May-day celebration in London, when it was estimated that no less than 40,000 were gathered together in Hyde Park, the capitalist press was disappointed in being unable to report a single instance of drunkenness or disorderly conduct. The capitalists are more afraid of these silent, earnest multitudes than of the old-time rioters. For they suggest the possibility of organisation – and organisation is the one thing that the capitalist even dreads, more than the Ballot box ..

Most of us have all along been ready and willing to take our share of work in any direction making for the

advance of our ideal, viz., the Abolition of Poverty by the Abolition of CapitalISM (not, as some of our intelligent critics say, by the Abolition of Capital). And in this spirit we have contributed our quota in building up the Trade Union Movement. We have belonged to, and helped in, the Co-operative Movements. We have assisted in political and municipal campaigns. We have tried unceasingly to influence educational authorities and administrative departments, always aiming to achieve the ideal and raise the standard of life as we proceed.

As a result there have been elected hundreds of members of Parliaments and thousands of municipal councillors more or less imbued with the Socialist spirit who are serving in that capacity. We have indirectly inspired an incalculable number of enthusiastic democrats whose ultimate ideals and present objects are almost identical with our own, but who honestly believe that those objects will be attained most readily by adherence to one or other of the capitalist-opportunist political parties. Liberal-Radicalism in particular can claim a large following of this kind-and it caters for its public by hysterical and utterly spurious denunciation of the House of Lords. But the Whig wire-pullers are playing with fire when they preach the immorality of hereditary Landlordism.

For that very considerable section of their adherents who have taken them seriously will, when they find they have been fooled, gradually perceive that the same arguments can be applied to hereditary Capitalism and allay themselves with the only party whose uncompromising hostility to both abuses cannot be doubted.

Lastly, we have been the means of inducing additional scores of thousands to join the industrial organisations. And we are richer, by far, in experiences than we were twenty years ago.

That I am a common soldier in the People's Army is my only warrant for addressing my comrades in the Cause as to the particular stage of development at which we have now arrived, and as to the nature of activities called for on our part.

Our experiences enable us to draw certain conclusions as to the relative merits of the various methods employed.

## **Parliamentarism and Trade-Unionism.**

Those who have been in close touch with the Movement know that in recent years dissatisfaction has been expressed in various quarters at the results so far achieved by our Parliamentarians.

Certainly nothing very striking in the way of constructive work could reasonably be expected from the minorities of Socialists and Labour men hitherto elected. But the most moderate and fair minded are compelled to declare that, not in one country but in all, a proportion of those comrades who, prior to being returned, were unquestionably revolutionary, are no longer so after a few years in Parliament. They are revolutionary neither in their attitude towards existing

Society nor in respect of present day institutions. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that many seem to have constituted themselves apologists for existing Society, showing a degree of studied respect for bourgeois conditions, and a toleration of bourgeois methods, that destroys the probability of their doing any real work of a revolutionary character.

I shall not here attempt to juggle with the quibble of "Revolution or Evolution," – or to meet the contention of some of those under consideration that it is not Revolution that is wanted. "You cannot change the world and yet not change the world." *Revolution is the means of, not the alternative to, Evolution.* I simply state that a working class Movement that is not

revolutionary in character is not of the slightest use to the working class.

The Trade Union Movement has beyond question, been of great service to the workers. With its rejuvenescence in 1825 it became, for the time, the means whereby agitation and education were carried on. Results speedily followed, in particular in the all important matter of reducing working hours. The Class War was waged and for a period the battles were conducted by the Unions with an admirable abandon that brought off many victories. It was in the nature of things that periods of relative flatness and inertia should ensue, during which the fighting spirit disappeared and the encroachments of the capitalist class grew apace. The workers succeeded in obtaining political recognition with the right to vote ; but, beyond that, nothing that they actually did, or tried to do through Parliaments or through the Unions, could be said to have constituted any considerable advance.

***Revolution is the means of, not the alternative to, Evolution... a working class Movement that is not revolutionary in character is not of the slightest use to the working class.***

Now the most notable development of the latter half of the nineteenth century is the prodigious increase in the wealth-producing capacity of the people all of which, above the actual subsistence wage of the workers, was taken, as it is to-day, by the Capitalist Class ; and it must be admitted that Trade Unionism, up-to-date, has shown itself unable to reduce the universal exploitation save, in a few exceptional instances, by a very meagre percentage.

### **Direct Action.**

But spasmodic outbursts of renewed Unionist activity appeared from time to time and gave a measure of hope to the workers. As, for instance, in the year 1889, when the Gas Workers of London resolved to obtain an Eight Hour Day in place of the twelve hours then in vogue. Failing to get any promise of assistance from Parliament, the workers resolved to resort to Direct action. They organised an effective Union, showed great courage, and, in a remarkably short time, achieved their object. That the organisation was sectional in character, and not properly linked up on the basis of Industrial Unionism, is seen in the fact that one of the biggest of the London Gas Companies was able to defy the Union and continues to this day on the twelve hour plan.

On the other hand the fight spread to the provinces, and the working time was reduced by one third and a higher actual wage was obtained for the eight hour day than had previously been paid for the full twelve hours.

A few months later in the same year there took place the Great Dock Strike of London which involved the whole of the Port workers. Much healthy activity was shown at this time and the far reaching effects of the psychological wave at that period were very considerable.

### **The Curse of Sectional Unionism.**

But looking back, as one of those connected with the numerous struggles that arose at that time, it would seem that this system, as it stands, considered as an instrument by which the Class War is to be scientifically conducted, is "lame dog " indeed. There are innumerable pettifogging sectional interests and very little that is soul inspiring.

That the numbers are somewhat greater than formerly is true. There are about two and a quarter millions out of an eligible industrial and agricultural a very population of not less than twelve millions.

But this enormous disparity between organised and unorganised is *not* the cause of the present day impotency of the Movement.

That weakness is to be found simply, if not solely, in the sectional character of the eleven hundred Unions of the United Kingdom – in the complete absence of the true spirit of working class solidarity and, therefore, in

the inability of the Unionists to utilise the machinery at their disposal for scientifically conducting the Class War. That is to say for obtaining anything worth getting towards mitigating the poverty of the workers.

The prodigal dissipation of energy is at once the characteristic and the curse of the Movement. From this follows inevitably an increasing lack of confidence – and despair of ever being able to achieve anything substantial.

Thus there is a revulsion towards Parliamentary "action" in the excitement of which we are able, for the moment, merge incompetency, with innumerable other incompetents, in the general hogwash of "Parliamentarianism."

Sectional Unionism is our curse. The ability to act trade by trade, occupation by occupation, each independent of the other, may have been of some service a couple of generations ago. But it is no use now! Let us see !

Miners are organised in a given district. Engine drivers at the hauling engines to our own are organised. Miners have trouble with the Masters. They strike. They ask the Engine drivers to help them by refusing to lower blacklegs into the mines, or to haul any stuff whatever that is detrimental to the Miners' interests. The Engine drivers take a vote of their members. They decide it is not their quarrel – why should they risk good jobs? A big majority against the miners decides the latter's fate.

This actually happened to the Gold Miners on the Rand in the Transvaal. They used all the money they could get, and in a few months were at the mercy of the capitalists. Who had beaten them? Not the blacklegs! Beyond any question, the Engine drivers. A little while afterwards the gratitude of the capitalists to the Engine drivers was expressed by a substantial increase in wages.

Now this case of the Johannesburg Miners is typical of present day Unionism. It would be quite wrong to suppose that it was the intention of the Engine drivers to help the capitalists or to interfere with the well-being of their friends. But they had their own Trade Union.

They "attended to their own affairs and let others look after theirs, etc., etc."

And in this way. the capitalists score everywhere and every time – solely by the lack of Unionist solidarity.

It is not wise to name instances too pointedly, as this merely tends to open wounds that are better left to heal. Here is another typical case – also at the Mines, but this time in Australia.

The Miners had good cause for quarrel, as the Masters were forcing a reduction. The latter asked for special police, not because there was the slightest disorder, but because, apparently, they thought it would strengthen their case to have mounted police "patrolling" – which is another name for irritating. These police were

carefully conveyed a distance of fourteen hundred miles over the railways of three states by enginemen, guards, linesmen, etc., each of whom belonged to his particular trade union. The supplies for these policemen, with their horses and carbines, swords, revolvers, and baggage, were all handled by Union men. And here is the astounding paradox! These same Union men were subscribing given sums per week to help the Broken Hill miners to carry on the fight *While Actually Engaged in Entrenching and Supplying the Enemy*.

But this is so common an occurrence that there is no need to go to Australia for instances.

### **“Scabs to Order.”**

The Shipping Federation systematically supplies British workmen as “scabs to order” in this or any other country. It is no use objecting that these miserable wretches ought not to be called British Workmen. The facts palpable. And these blacklegs, with all their necessary food, liquor, bedding, etc., etc., are shipped and conveyed over hundreds of miles by rail and road, as well as water, by other Union men. The drivers of locomotives, conveying them in batches of a hundred to the are too port, carry their Union card. The Engineers on the boat belong either to the Marine Engineers’ Union or the Amalgamated Engineers. The carman, carrying foodstuffs for the scabs, is a member of his Union. The carpenters who make to order the fittings to house them, are Unionists.

It is these Union men, and not the capitalists, who beat the other Unionists trying to resist reduction or obtain increases. And so it must continue until we can organise by Industries and not merely by Trades. Until we can unify the Industrial Movement into one compact fighting force.

Comrades, we have got to face the fact that Sectional Unionism is played out.

### **Industrial Unionism the Necessary Outcome of Capitalist Organisation.**

The growth of Capitalist industry has compelled this class to organise perfectly. In the case of the large Trusts a decision given at a Board meeting often affects hundreds of thousands of workmen. The Masters’ organisations cover. all connected with the Industry. In the case of the Engineering and Shipbuilding Industry the action of the Masters is aimed to cover, and succeeds in covering, the whole of those workers in the establishments owned by them, no matter how many trades there may be. It is the entire Shipbuilding Industry they are after, and so they take care to act concertedly over the whole – and this covers some twenty different trades, organised into some twenty-four different Unions. These twenty-four Unions have never been able to take combined action against the capitalists. Hence this weakness!

The unit of organised efficiency must be the whole of the workers connected with an Industry, no matter how many trades there may be. For fighting purposes the Boiler Makers, Moulders, Fitters, Turners, Coppersmiths, Blacksmiths, Patternmakers, Drillers, Strikers, Machinists, Handymen and Labourers, no matter what the occupation--even the clerical staff and drawing office--must combine, and, for fighting purposes, act as one man.

This is the meaning of Industrial Unionism!

It is not in Britain only that this urgency for Industrial solidarity exists. It is in every country alike.

In 1905 there was held a Convention in Chicago, U.S.A., to consider the faultiness and inefficiency of the Trade Union Movement in that country. The outcome of that convention was the formation of a new organisation known as the “Industrial Workers of the World” – the essence of which is the organisation of all workers on the basis of working class solidarity irrespective of occupation. It declared that the old method of organising to protect the interests of those connected with a particular craft or trade is essentially mischievous, and harmful to working class interests as a whole. It creates and perpetuates divisions, instead of making for the unity of the working class. They therefore held that organisation on the lines of the “American Federation of Labour” was essentially reactionary, maintaining craft and sectional bias amongst the workers. Worse still, that the Unions of the A. F. of L. were not aiming at the overthrow of Capitalism, but were compromising with capitalists and merely seeking, at best, to patch up the increasing holes made by The Conveners stated in a circular that their object was to be able to take united action and present a solid front to the enemy – as was being done in some of the European countries. that system.

### **The Worker’s Own.**

Whether or not the decision to ignore the existing Unions and to build up an entirely new organisation on scientific lines is the best method of procedure for the workers of America – is a matter for the Americans themselves to decide. But whilst entirely endorsing all main principles laid down by the I.W.W. and knowing well the shortcomings of the British Trade Unions, I do not believe that it is the best way for us to achieve industrial solidarity. I have given close attention to the arguments submitted by those who adopt this view, and I consider them insufficient. I know it will be a formidable task to get the existing Unions to unite whole-heartedly and share courageously in the Class War. But I believe that it can be a done. And I am confident that the proposed alternative would be even more formidable and less likely to succeed. I hold that such entire reconstruction would result in years of bickering ; entailing all the present sectionalism, and probably adding thereto by drawing large bodies into an

even more reactionary position than they occupy now. In Australia, where the situation is precisely the same on smaller scale as that which prevails in Britain, I associated my efforts with those who strongly defended Industrial Unionism – but not with those who attacked the existing Unions, seeking to establish a new force. Moreover I am entirely satisfied that the right course to pursue here in Britain is not to show hostility to the existing Unionist Movement, but rather to make clear what it ought to be – the real class-conscious fighting machinery for the overthrow of Capitalism and the realisation of Socialism. The engines of war to fight the workers' battles to overthrow the Capitalist class, and to raise the general standard of life while so doing – must be of the workers' own making. The Unions are the workers' own; and with a clearer conception of the use to which they should be put, and the determination and ability scientifically to unite and use them, locally, nationally, and Internationally they can and will, speedily become a stupendous power, affording the necessary fulcrum upon which to rest our lever for removing the obstacles that bar our progress.

#### **French Syndicalism.**

I am confirmed in this, having just had the opportunity to visit Paris where I got in touch with the C.G.T. (*i.e.*, Confédération Générale du Travail – the General Confederation of Labour).

For ten years past the French Trade Unionists have been busily occupied in re-organising the Unionist Movement – and they have developed more than those of any other country.

There are 700,000 Unionists in France ; and a large majority of these are covered by the C.G.T. They possess the fighting instinct. They are genuinely revolutionary. They, too, seek to secure better conditions en route, always giving attention to the reduction of working hours. And they are bent on an international propaganda for the overthrow of the Capitalist system.

Their plan is to organise first in the syndicates or Unions; then, for each Industry a federation of syndicates is formed; then, over all these Industrial federations is the General Confederation. It is the latter body that issues the Union cards to the Federations of Industry, and these again to the Unions. The subscription card contains spaces for each month's subscriptions to the Trade or Industrial Federation and to the Trades Councils – so that harmonious relations are secured and common methods followed.

They have eliminated the antagonisms and sectional craft interests, and they prove by their behaviour, that

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***the right course to pursue here in Britain is not to show hostility to the existing Unionist Movement, but rather to make clear what it ought to be – the real class-conscious fighting machinery for the overthrow of Capitalism and the realisation of Socialism.***

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they dare fight, and know how to fight. They declare themselves revolutionary. They favour resorting, when advisable, to the General Strike. But while working for the Revolution they do not neglect to do all possible to secure general betterment.

They are, for the most part, anti-patriotic and anti-militarist, *e.g.*, they declare that the workers have no country, and are not prepared to fight in the interests of a bureaucracy ; but most distinctly *are* prepared to fight for the overthrow of Capitalism in France and elsewhere. They are “non” not “anti” Parliamentary. They issue a weekly paper called “The Voice of the People,” a bi-monthly called “The Life of the Worker” and “La Guerre Sociale,” a weekly, edited by Gustave Hervé. This latter voices in all particulars the ideals and methods of the C.G.T.

#### **A Policy to Adopt.**

Now, without urging a close imitation of the French or any other method I strongly believe that, on the average, the French policy is one that will suit us best ; for whilst the temperament of the French is undoubtedly different from that of the British, their interests are exactly as ours, and their enemy is also as ours – the Capitalist system.

Of course, in some measure we are working on similar lines in this country. We have a number of Trades Union Federations, and we have the General Federation to which many of these belong. But we have no solidarity. Nor have we at present, the Socialist conception in the Unions to help these on to the right lines. And yet I hold that they are wrong who suppose that we have not genuine, class-conscious proletarians in the Unionist movement. I am quite sure that there are many thousands who understand the Class War, and wish to take their rightful share in the fighting; but as yet they can find no satisfactory outlet. Sooner or later these leading turbulent spirits will find a method – and it would be wise on the part of those occupying responsible positions to endeavour to make it easy for



such reorganisations as may be necessary, so that those who are determined to fight may not be compelled to find other agencies.

Personally, I would very much prefer to see the existing machinery made equal to the whole work than be driven to the conclusion that new agencies must be brought into existence.

The only existing organisation in this country, which is, as which is, as it were, marked out to undertake this all-important task, is *The General Federation of Trade Unions* of which Mr. Appleton is the able Secretary, and there is no reason why it should not become the responsible, reconstructive agency, and supervise, control, and direct the entire Unionist Movement.

Their badge, which is shown opposite, is the best emblem of solidarity that could be found. It reproduces the spirit of the fable of Æsop. Let the General Federation put the meaning of its badge into practice, let them act upon it, and they will have achieved a task of enormous advantage to the workers.

### **What is Called for?**

But what will have to be the essential conditions for the success of such a movement?

*That it will be avowedly and clearly. Revolutionary in aim and method.*

Revolutionary in aim, because it will be out for the abolition of the wages system and for securing to the workers the full fruits of their labour, thereby seeking to change the system of Society from Capitalist to Socialist.

Revolutionary in method, because it will refuse to enter into any long agreements with the masters, whether with legal or State backing, or merely voluntarily; and because it will seize every chance of fighting for the general betterment – gaining ground and never losing any.

Does this mean that we should become anti-political? Certainly not.

Let the politicians do as much as they can, and the chances are that, once there is an economic fighting force in the country, ready to back them up by action, they will actually be able to do what now would be hopeless for them to attempt to do.

The workers should realise that it is the men who manipulate the tools and machinery who are the possessors of the necessary power to achieve something tangible; and they will succeed just in proportion as they agree to apply concerted action.

The curse of Capitalism consists in this – that a handful of capitalists can compel hundreds of thousands of workers to work in such manner and for such wages as please the capitalists. But this again is solely because of the inability of the workers to agree upon a common

plan of action. The hour the workers agree and act they become all-powerful. We can settle the capitalists' strikebreaking power once for all. We shall have no need to plead with Parliamentarians to be good enough to reduce hours – as the workers have been doing for fully twenty years without result. We shall be able to do this ourselves – and there will be no power on earth to stop us so long as we do not fall foul of economic principles. One condition only is essential to this – concerted action on the part of the workers. Police and Cabinet alike become powerless to enforce the dictates of the bureaucracy when the workers are united.

I should like here to offer my hearty congratulations to comrades who have done pioneer work in this country in propagating the principles of Industrial Unionism. As a fact, others long ago were aiming at the same idea. Without dwelling on the Owenite attempt Unionist Federation there were thousands of Unionists and Socialists seriously discussing, some dozen years ago, the possibility of uniting, for real fighting purposes, all the Industrial organisations. The best men of that time wished, in essence, all that is now covered by the term "Industrial Unionism." But when their efforts resulted in the present General Federation it was evident that the soul had gone and not much remained. Still, I repeat, the existing Federation has now its chance, if it has the spirit, the will, and the vim, to take the responsibility.

I know that many will at once declare that mere federation will be of little value. I am quite sure that mere federation of the kind we are accustomed to will not be worth bothering about. The unifying of the Unions must be, as regards their industrial and economic functions, equal to a real amalgamation. That is, it must ensure unanimity amongst all in an industry. There must be no loose affiliation, each one running off on its own policy. There must be a pooling of interests.

"Ah," some will say, "that means a pooling of funds – and how can it be expected that Unions having £7 or £8 a member will pool with other Unions having only as many shillings?"

I admit at once that it could not be expected. It certainly would not be required. The Unions with relatively large funds hold them chiefly for Friendly Society Benefits, e.g., the Engineers, providing old age pensions, sick benefit, death provision, etc. These funds are, and must remain, entirely the property of the Unions whose members have subscribed to them.

What is asked now is the pooling of the economic or industrial fighting fund only. Where these are not already separated, an alteration of methods of account keeping will be necessary, so that the quota subscribed purely for economic purposes may be thus used. Then we shall get rid of the unnecessary talk about "threepenny unions." As a fact, most of those who pay high subscriptions pay quite as little in proportion for

genuine economic purposes as do those whose subscription is nominally lower.

But before we get details let us be content to deal with main principles.

### “Workers of the World, Unite.”

In a sense we have come to the parting of the ways. It will no longer be possible for us to continue as we are today – that is to say, as we were eighty years ago. We must not go out to meet a Maxim with a blunderbuss! not use in 1910 the same weapon used against the Masters in 1829! Can we think that the Masters have sat still all these years while the membership of the Unions has been growing?

We know that they have not. We know, from the records of recent strikes, We may that we that the complexities of modern industry have effectually aided the organisation of the Masters to defeat us. We have fought, and wasted our substance, in the acquisition of trifling concessions that have made comparatively little difference in our lives, and no difference whatever in our complete subjection to the Master class. And while we are hesitating the Trust is growing about us.

To-day the small manufacturer is doomed. Every year the big men are getting fewer and bigger. That means

that every year the organisation of the Masters is automatically simplified against us. But Unionism is not played out! Rather is Unionism in its infancy ! We are only just beginning to get a glimpse of the meaning of the word! Our present organisations, excellent as they may be in many respects, are but feeble affairs compared to the organisation we could achieve if we set our minds to it.

“Unite” was Marx’s advice long ago, but we have never thoroughly acted upon it.

Now is the time to do it, and we will do it right here in England. We will lead them a devil of a dance, and show whether or not there is life and courage in the workers of the British Isles.

Now, Comrades of the General Federation, the Engineers’ and Shipbuilders, Federations, and members of every Union throughout the land, it is up to us to adapt ourselves to the changed order of things.

Those who are asleep had better wake up or they’ll be kicked out of the way. Those who say it can’t be done are hereby invited to stand out of the way and look on while it is being done. “Workers of the World Unite. You have a world to Win. You have Nothing to Lose but your Chains.”

## All Hail, Industrial Solidarity!

Tom Mann

*The Industrial Syndicalist*, October 1910

### BRAVO! BRAVO! COMRADES OF FRANCE!

By the announcement in No.3 of the “Industrial Syndicalist,” readers would be expecting No. 4 to deal chiefly with the Reduction of Working Hours; the same was written and sent to press, but when the French Industrial struggle assumed such proportions it was decided to reserve the matter for another occasion. In the meantime, it is necessary to say that for various reasons there is no subject of equal importance to that of Reducing the Hours of Working

Whilst the unemployed exist in the numbers they now do, the workers are seriously handicapped in every attempt at betterment; but even if this were not so, it is, and must ever be, our task to help those who are lowest in the social scale, and none can be so low as the workless. Upon those of us who fully realise this, rests the responsibility of taking the necessary action. That they may be fed and clothed, we must reduce the hours of labour generally, and get them into the ranks of the workers. And by the very

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Whilst the unemployed exist in the numbers they now do, the workers

means whereby we make it possible to absorb the unemployed, we also obtain the power to do many other things; chief amongst them must be the raising of the wage standard for the “unskilled” of whom I will say something further on.

### Syndicalism all Round.

In two short weeks we have experienced the Transport Workers’ fight in Berlin, the Revolution in Portugal, and the Industrial revolt in France.

It is Friday, the 14th of October, 1910, the fourth day of the Rail way Strike in France.

The Strikers are Masters of the Situation-Paris in Darkness through the Great Strike-Candles in De mand — Deserted Stations-Four Railways Affected — The Northern, the Western, the Paris-Lyons-Mediterranean, and the Paris Metropolitan.

Such are the headlines in today's London papers, with several pages occupied by descriptive reports and illustrations.

Nothing approaching this has been experienced since 1875. It is, indeed, a magnificent lesson in working-class solidarity the French comrades are teaching. Some papers sillily declare that it is an "unpopular strike," and that yesterday afternoon the strike cloud showed distinct signs of lifting. But not one fact is given in support of this, which shows the absurdity of the London press, which is trying to manufacture encouragement for the reactionaries.

The completeness of the work; the calmness with which the electricians and masons decided to leave work as soon as that step became necessary in order to help the railwaymen; the unconcern with which the threats of the ex-Socialist, Premier Briand, were received; the utter inability on the part of the military to frighten the Strikers, to run trains, or to in any way change the situation beyond posing for photographers, thus giving a stimulus to the sale of capitalist papers — all these things are lessons to capitalists and the public, writ so large that many will begin to learn that the workers, after all, are really of some little importance in the world.

Whatever the results, the lesson given can never be lost; the world over, the workers will profit by this splendid example of courage and solidarity on the part of our French comrades. There are now millions who will realise how much nearer the Social Revolution is than they could have thought even a week ago.

When the same clearness of policy and the same agreement up on the objective will be characterising the workers of Europe as a whole, the Social Revolution will be at hand. But that hour is not yet. We in England have a long way to go before we can reach general agreement upon the objective, or before we can demonstrate our solidarity; but no one doubts whether we are travelling in that direction or not. That, at any rate, is settled.

### **Who are the Public?**

As is customary, the English papers are against the French strike, because it interferes with the "convenience of the Public." The Public, one is told, ought to be, and must be, considered.

Well, who are the Public? Does not the Public consist of 85 per cent. of the workers, and the balance of those who live upon the workers? Therefore, every properly-conducted struggle of the whole of the workers, or a section thereof, is truly in the real interests of the Public itself.

The sniggering of the capitalist press, which habitually speaks of men on strike in contemptuous terms, as though they were a troublesome, selfish and insignificant lot of animals whom it would be well to

destroy in the interests of the PUBLIC, tells plainly what a strong feeling of brotherly love prevails in the hearts and minds of the capitalist class and their Governmental agencies.

Hitherto, owing to the sectional arrangements and temporary interests, working-class solidarity has not been possible, and we have witnessed a hundred times over, struggles between one section of the workers and the capitalist class, with the vast majority of the other workers looking on in the most indifferent fashion; we have even seen them siding with the employing class in a most nonchalant manner, thereby helping to defeat those of their own class who were struggling with the capitalist opponent.

The chief difference between British and French workmen is this : the French have instinctively and rationally a keener appreciation of class solidarity. So far as this is the result of educational effort, it is primarily due to the persistent propaganda of the General Confederation of Labour. The sturdiness of their industrial battles is based upon the open and persistent declaration of the CLASS WAR. They know and declare that they can achieve nothing by relying upon conciliatory methods, or in any way compromising with the capitalist class.

They believe in political action, but have little confidence in Parliamentary action. They rely upon extending the principle and fullest recognition of industrial solidarity, and the result is they have developed a power to achieve altogether beyond what is possible with the compromising methods resorted to in Britain of late years.

### **Direct Action in Germany.**

What a scare it gave the Berlin police and the Prussian authorities. The orderly German resorting to "direct action" and scoring better in two days by so doing than in ten years by peaceful methods. And immediately they took action and showed they were not afraid, either of the brutal police or of the traitorous blacklegs, the capitalists, who had beforehand refused any better conditions, came forward with offers of increased wages, etc. By defying the minions of the law, and showing revolutionary courage and capacity, the law-abiding Teutons have shown their determination and readiness for Direct Action as occasion requires.

### **Advance in Portugal.**

The overthrow of the monarchy in Portugal, carried out so effectively that the whole affair was over in one week, has been a nasty knock to the law and order gentry; the régime that was is no more, and ex-king Manuel is a private citizen of the world. The result, of course, is not in any genuine sense a *social* revolution, but it is an effective set-back to the reactionaries; and whilst it facilitates the more complete grip of the

plutocracy, it remains in accord with revolutionary progress leading to the final goal of economic freedom.

### **Tied-down Slaves of England.**

It is singular that the industrial revolt in France comes immediately upon the close of the Cotton Operatives' dispute in this country.

There is nothing for the workers to feel proud of in the settlement of this matter. The Cotton Operatives' cause of the trouble was "picking flats," but that has not yet been settled, and it is apparently to be settled by the employers. The fuss, and push, and splosh that entered into the conducting of the negotiations; the innumerable conferences, all to result in no change, would make a cat laugh if only it could look on long enough; and all this comes through the workers giving up the control of their own affairs in their unions.

This inviting of Board of Trade, or any other Government officials, to come and take charge of the negotiations is the maddest thing in modern development.

What may have happened to the men's officers that it should be necessary for them to stand back and leave negotiations to Government officials?

There is in Britain a healthy sentiment against the idea of Compulsory Arbitration, like that which obtains in New Zealand and Australia, but it is very little better to have Board of Trade officials increasingly roaming round, ever anxious to secure peace, sweet peace, at any price to the workers. The worker cannot secure what good sense demands unless he can show fight. The wily employing class knows this, and to be able to say they will leave the matter in the hands of a public official, as though that were not the same thing as keeping it in their own hands, suits them exactly.

No Board of Trade official dare do anything to advance the interests of the men. The Board of Trade is a Government Department. The Government is in essence, and in detail, the machine of the Plutocracy, through which, and by which, they keep the workers in subjection.

For any man to imagine that a Governmental Department may be seeking to do anything that will facilitate the overthrow of the ruling class is to declare himself a fool; and the converse of this is that Governmental Departments are extending their sphere of influence even to the obtaining a controlling power over the workmen's own organisations in the interest of the capitalist class. To "tie the workers down," that is their work. Tie them down by assisting the capitalists to get them pledged to five year agreements; and to renew these agreements often enough so that it shall ever be an offence against the compact, or conference decision, or the law direct, for the worker to take any action to overthrow the parasitic class.

How healthy, and glorious, and stimulating, and inspiring is this action of the French Railway Workers and their comrades who are backing them, in comparison to our "tied-down" slaves!

### **Transport Workers Waking Up.**

But the trade unionists of Britain are waking up, and the two resolutions, carried at the Trades Union Congress at Sheffield last month, are important indications.

Comrade Ben Tillett moved a resolution aiming at national solidarity, which was carried; and later a definite resolution in favour of organisation by industry on the basis of Amalgamation or Federation, moved by our comrade Tom Ring, of the Sheffield Cabinet Makers, was carried by 1,175 to 256. This was no snatch vote either, for the subject had been brought well before the delegates, and we must conclude that this vote represents the feeling of the Congress with regard to the matter.

As an evidence of growth in the same direction, it is pleasing to know that the Conference of Transport Workers, with a view to uniting all interests in the carrying trades, held in London last month, was entirely successful.

Every delegate present from the 14 societies represented, declared amalgamation to be desirable, but as to bring that off would have taken too long, the best plan would be to federate. This the delegates were unanimous upon, and instructed the provisional secretary to convene the next Conference on the 10th and 11th November. To this all the 31 societies connected with the carrying industry have been invited.

Ald. Harry Gosling, L.C.C., who presided over the Conference, declared that he entirely concurred in the object aimed at, and he and his fellow-delegate of the London Watermen and Lightermen pledged themselves to do their utmost for its realisation.

Will Thorne, M.P., representing that portion of the Gasworkers which is connected with transport, was even more emphatic in urging speedy action in the interests of all unions.

Cr. J. N. Bell, of Newcastle-on Tyne, Chas. Duncan, M.P., and H. J. Havelock Wilson all urged the necessity for action.

It was interesting to note the effect of the speeches of the Seamen's delegates, as some had thought that they were anxious to insist upon a wild-cat scheme in favour of "bull and rush," but they made it clear that, whilst they held it vitally necessary that a fight should take place as early as possible, they were satisfied it would have to be by the united action of all in the Transport Industry, and they were prepared to continue their organising campaign, and to make common cause with other unions for determined action at a suitable date.

I was present at the Conference as one of the delegates of the Dockers ' Union, and it was very encouraging to me to find Cr. Jim Sexton, J.P., and Joe Cotter, of the Ships' Stewards, and Ben Tillett, of the London Dockers, all declaring for common action.

But the most stimulating and encouraging feature of the Conference was the speech of the delegate from the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, who declared that their organisation had decided to take action in connection with all other Transport Workers, that they were favourable to federation, and altogether were for an advanced policy.

Mr. Connor, president of the Long shermen's Association of America, told of the good results they had achieved by federating the sectional societies, obtaining very substantial improvements in wages and conditions, and they were ready for international relations.

#### **Attend to the Commissariat.**

It requires little comment to show the enormous power such a Federation will possess when the spirit of solidarity is genuinely prevalent.

Should the day arrive when all in the Transport Industry of the United Kingdom are determined upon courageous action, and should the necessity arise for them to declare for action, then will be witnessed a struggle so far-reaching that every country on earth would be affected.

The shipping and railways, the trams and cabs, taxis and motor ' buses, motor cars and char à bancs, all being included in the Transport Industry, a stoppage on all these would simply be all-powerful to enforce anything the workers desired; in three days the whole of the activities of Britain could be tied up as no other force could do it; and we are definitely laying ourselves out to bring this about unless redress be obtained speedily by other means.

Of course, the knowing ones who write for the well-being of the workers in the capitalist press, tell their readers that the workers, in their ignorance, will hurt themselves so much more than they will their opponents; that anything in the nature of a general strike will defeat itself. We suggest that they should continue to say this to the capitalists in whose interest they write; it may prove comforting to them until the shock comes. The period of suspense will be shorter than if they told the capitalists anything more truthful.

But the workers must attend to the commissariat, and that we shall do.

We must scientifically prepare for a week or so cessation from the ordinary grind in the interest of the capitalist class, and it is not absolutely necessary that we should concern ourselves to specially inform that class of our movements and intentions.

#### **W.D. Haywood on the "Unskilled" in America.**

It has been a cause of extreme pleasure to me during the past week to meet comrade W. D. Haywood, of America.

Like thousands of others, I watched the progress of the trial with keen interest when Haywood, Moyer and Pettibone, of the Western Federation of Miners, were before the United States Courts; and when it looked — as at one time it certainly did — that they would be hanged, the intensity of feeling among the comrades in Australia was great, and the relief proportionate on their release,

Of course, we knew that our comrades believed in Industrial Unionism, that comrade Haywood had presided at the first Convention in 1905 in Chicago, when the I.W.W. was formed; but it has added enormously to my appreciation of William Haywood to have had the opportunity of interchanging opinion at length and sharing with him in propagandist activity.

It was very interesting and informing to learn from him in detail of the many struggles of the Western Federation of Miners to enforce the laws which dealt with industrial conditions. In No. 3 of the "Industrial Syndicalist". I dealt with the unskilled workman as follows ( see page 5 ):

The reason that many men are graded as semi-skilled or unskilled is because the capitalist system will not admit of all engaging in skilled work — no matter what the amount of skill men may possess. There must be no lowering of the standard of the skilled, but there must be a raising of the standard of the lower-paid man. The position of the latter must be made worthy of a man; and as he serves Society, not in the manner he desires, but in the manner Society compels him, he must in future be counted as a man and a brother. The skilled men must throw off that silly notion of superiority that still characterises a number of them.

Wm. Haywood states that although the W.F.M. have had many fights for wages, they have never had one directly on behalf of the skilled men who received the highest money, but always on behalf of the lowest paid to raise them to the standard of the highest. He declares this has worked exceedingly well for all concerned, and as a result all those working about the mine get a minimum wage of three dollars a day, the labourer just as much as the skilled man.

Although some miners may get three and a-half or four dollars, their standard is three dollars, and all the labourers get the same wage as the result of the efforts ' of the Federation.

This is splendid testimony to their good sense and to their faith in the principle of brotherhood.

The Federation has used its influence to get laws passed favourable to the conditions of the miners, but in nearly every instance they had also to use the power of their industrial organisation to enforce the laws, frequently striking in order to do this.

I have asked comrade Haywood to write a few paragraphs dealing specifically with Industrial Unionism, and so he wrote as follows:

Industrial Unionism is the merging of Labour forces into one gigantic organisation, where in the workers will become citizens of the industry in which they are employed, rather than subjects of the State in which they reside.

Industrial Unionism will unite the workers of all parts of the world, no matter what the race, creed or colour.

In operation, it is the fulfilment of the Socialist programme.

Primarily the purpose of Industrial Unionism is to amalgamate the overwhelming power of Labour that it may take and hold the machinery they now operate and which they and none other have produced, and manage the same themselves in their own interest.

A fight well fought, though lost, is infinitely better than compromising with an enemy.

No contracts, no agreements, no compacts; these are unholy alliances, and must be damned as treason when entered into with the capitalist class.

Comrade Haywood is exceedingly keen upon the industrial and political phases of development, and believes we are very near to very great changes. He is delighted to find that Industrial Syndicalism is taking hold in this country, and at all the meetings he addresses, he keeps this subject to the fore.

Comrade Haywood leaves this country in a few weeks, and expects to have an extended lecture tour through the United States. He is also intending to publish a book in which he will deal with the Industrialist Movement of America, including the account of the kidnaping, trial, and acquittal of himself and his comrades of the Western Federation of Miners.

### **A Call to Arms.**

The first work of the skilled workers, even in their own interest, ought to be, to force the bringing about of a substantial raise of the wage standard of the unskilled, and by this means they will have destroyed the strongest weapon of the employers.

The wages received by millions of men in this country does not exceed 30s. a week, but there is an enormous number who do not get £1 a week; there are scores of thousands of labourers receiving not more than 16s. a

week, and many less than that. We must encourage these men to demand a decent wage, and we must help them to get it. Less than 30s. a week cannot be considered a decent wage for a labourer, even as things are, and we of the Syndicalist movement must help them to get it. This must be a minimum demand, and we must organise forthwith to obtain it.

We must let the labourer know that, although hitherto he has been shut out from a chance in life, he has been compelled, by the force of circumstances, to accept about two thirds or one-half only of that received by the skilled man; that state of affairs is to disappear with the advent of Industrial Syndicalism.

There is no greater anomaly in our Industrial System than this we confronted with, and which passes by, year in and year out, as part of the established order of the Universe. Skilled workers, in many instances doing but little work, receive from two to seven or eight pounds a week, whilst the labourer, having the same responsibilities as regards family and citizenship, is compelled to accept one-third of it or less.

This must not be. We must not preach social equality and utterly fail to practise it, and for those receiving the higher pay to try and satisfy the demands of the lower paid man for better conditions by telling him it will all be put right under Socialism is on a par with the parson pretending to assuage the sufferings of the poverty-stricken by saying "it will be better in the next world." It must be put right in *this* world, and we must see to it *now*.

All men in the United Kingdom who are in receipt of less than thirty shillings a week should recognise in these words a call to arms; first, of course, to organise; then, to unite with all others and prepare for a fight; for an eight hours day and a minimum of five shillings a day.

Don't worry over any tales the capitalists will trot out about it being impossible to pay such rates; we know it will be impossible until the workmen make it possible.

A man who isn't worth seven pence half-penny an hour ought to give up and go to heaven, but not until he has tried with his mates to obtain tolerable conditions.

### **Apprenticeship to Disappear.**

I am fully alive to the fact that many of the old-time unionists who put on "side" as skilled men are utterly indifferent to the welfare of the labourers; or they might perhaps desire them to get an extra couple of shillings, but they certainly do not want them to come anywhere near their standard.

Now, every well-informed and fair-minded mechanic will admit that the apprenticeship system is rapidly disappearing. The last twenty years have witnessed such inroads upon it that at the present time eighty per cent. of the men in all occupations are classed and treated as

unskilled. This is the chief reason why the total number of organised workers is only one-fifth of the total number of male workers. With the advance of mechanical and chemical processes, the proportion of men classed as skilled becomes smaller year by year.

If I were a “piecer” in a Lancashire cotton mill, receiving, as many piecers do, less than a pound for a full week’s work, and being, as many are, anything from twenty to thirty years of age, and with no better prospect of making headway than that of the average “piecer” today, I should want to know why the “piecers” must rest content with such a kid’s wage as eighteen or twenty shillings a week?

I should not be disposed to take the view that the spinner with whom I worked received any too much when taking his fifty shillings a week or thereabouts, but being a member of the same union as the spinner I should try and exhaust all methods to get that union to take action in order to raise the “piecer’s” rate up to thirty shillings a week; not at the expense of the spinner, but at the firm’s.

If there were no possibility of using the union to raise the standard, I should encourage my work mates to take such other action as might be necessary to get it raised.

The low-wage men ought to revolt against the slavish conditions at present imposed upon them, but they must remember that action must be taken by *themselves*, and

as soon as they show courage and capacity to fight for something better, help will be forthcoming.

Someone must dare to declare that our present-day form of trade unionism is incapable of meeting the requirements of the workers.

The question now is: Is it a fair thing to tolerate a system of unionism which encourages such a shameful inequality as that which obtains?

The reply to that is: Abolish the present system of apprenticeship and insist that every boy shall have the chance of selecting and learning such industry as shall lift him from the position of an untrained person, and when he works in such capacity as Society may require him let him receive what a man ought to receive to maintain himself and his family, and not be condemned, as an unskilled worker, to do the least

interesting and heaviest work for *half the pay* of other men little or no better than himself; fair play demands that each should receive approximately the same.

I am told I shall earn the hatred of many by such advocacy as this. I do not know, and I do not care. But I am deeply convinced that the right course to pursue is the one indicated, and I am further convinced that such principles and methods are calculated to lift the depressing clouds that have hung so long over the lives of millions. We can go a long way towards wiping out poverty if we go to work on a definite plan, and without waiting for, but work for, the Social Revolution.

## **We can go a long way towards wiping out poverty if we go to work on a definite plan, and without waiting for, but work for, the Social Revolution.**

## **A Twofold Warning**

**Tom Mann**

*The Industrial Syndicalist*, April 1911

### **Who is to Control Industry?**

Upon the answer to this depends the well-being or ill-being of the people in real life.

Is industry in the future to be controlled by an organised capitalist class running it in its own interest as at present? If so, we know the result :— Continued demoralisation of the workers and enrichment of the owners.

“No,” say the progressive politicians, “Parliament will run the industries in the common interest of all alike.”

The Industrial Syndicalist declares that to run industry through Parliament, i.e., by State machinery, will be even more mischievous to the working-class than the

existing method, for it will assuredly mean that the capitalist class will, through Government departments, exercise over the natural forces, and over the workers, a domination even more rigid than is the case to day. And the Syndicalist also declares that in the near future, the industrially organised workers will themselves undertake the entire responsibility of running the industries in the interest of all who work, and are entitled to enjoy the results of Labour.

### **Quiescent, but Groping.**

The workers to-day are partly conscious of the injustice they are subjected to, owing to the domination of the capitalist class, but they display overthrow this

domination, and to n ) confidence in their own ability to work out their economic freedom.

They tacitly accept the capitalists as a superior class, a ruling class to whom they must be subject; they accept their decisions all-but unquestioningly as to how industry shall be carried on; and finding it pans out with wretched results, they turn to yet another dominator, Parliament, and beseech the parliamentarians to have mercy upon them, and for pity's sake to relieve the burden a little. Parliament is deaf, the organised capitalists are brutal, and the workers are quiescent, but groping.

If the workers owned the land, and machinery, and tools of production, we could... But I can hear someone saying, contemptuously: if all the workers were in heaven, they need not, etc....

**Yes, Exactly.**

Well then, let me start again.

Even though the workers do not own the land and minerals, and mines and machines, and engines and gear, etc., etc. ; and even though the capitalist class *does* own all these essentials : If the workers dared to declare that the first charge upon industry should be an adequate income for every worker, and acted accordingly, poverty would immediately disappear ; it is as simple as that. Despite all disadvantages, our own deck on to secure a substantial livelihood for all, backed by solidarity in mine, mill, factory, shop, etc., would of itself secure the object aimed at. It is exactly this that the capitalists are doing—running the industrial machinery in their class interest---and the story told in the following pages of the inner workings of the Cotton Ring, makes it abundantly clear.

The Master Cotton Spinners and Manufacturers desire to raise the price of cotton goods ; to do so, they agree to fix up an artificial shortage which, even the increased supply of gold, the standard of value, is unable to counteract, and they secure 20 per cent. above average prices to add to their profits. The owning class, the bosses, decided upon it, in their own exploiting interests; and the subjugated class, the workers, quietly acquiesced. Tens of thousands of these workers, when on full time, received not more than 18s. a week, and when running, in the interest of the bosses, on short time for a year on end, they averaged less than 15s. a week. And this was as stated, purely in the interests of the owners.

Had the textile workers in the twenty-two countries where the Master Cotton Spinners' Federation operates demanded a standard wage for everybody in the industry ; had they withheld their labour till they got it ; had other workers industrially organised, backed them up ; they might, at this hour, be enjoying a minimum equal to adequate maintenance.

But being unable to take the view that they as workers, have the most perfect right to do this for themselves, they systematically await the pleasure of the capitalists for any improvement in their condition ; these, however, and naturally enough, are seeking their own additional advantage.

**Twofold Warning.**

**I sincerely believe that the chief reason why the workers have not given proper attention to reducing the hours is owing to their having been encouraged to take the view that only by Parliamentary enactment can such a thing be brought about.**

The writer of the following pages on the Cotton Ring has rendered great service by his lucid exposition of the master class methods ; his warning is twofold. It tells us what is awaiting the workers in all industries when the capitalists have perfected their industrial organisation, and it is a warning to us to speedily get out of the silly sectional trade union ruts in which, as workers, we are at present.

As the writer puts it, "*Labour is without up-to-date organisation, and the labourer is apathetic and gullible.*"

If industrial solidarity had characterised the workers in the Textile industry, and they had realised—what is an absolute fact—that there is no power on earth equal to the workers,

solidly organised, and agreed as to a rational course of action, then, the same weapon that has been used by the employers in the industry, would have been used by the workers also and the hours of labour in the textile industry, as well as in other industries, would be substantially reduced, and the minimum wage substantially raised.

Here are the facts demonstrating that the power of production in the Cotton industry exceeds demand ; that the Master class resorts to international organisation to prevent "the undue extension of machinery," thus checking production to secure bigger profits.

The writer emphatically declares that "*there is not with the present capacity of production, enough work to go round.*"

This, of course, points directly to the urgent necessity for reduced working hours. No argument can overcome



the contention that if working hours were reduced adequately, every unemployed person could be included in the ranks of the workers.

Why do not the workers therefore take direct action and reduce the working hours?

### **Gulled into Parliamentary Action.**

I sincerely believe that the chief reason why the workers have not given proper attention to reducing the hours is owing to their having been encouraged to take the view that only by Parliamentary enactment can such a thing be brought about.

After all the experience we have had, I now believe this to be utterly wrong, and I believe it has had a most demoralising effect upon the workers at large, and upon their organisations as well.

I have before me a copy of the April number of the Report of the International Federation of Textile Workers' Associations. It is published at Manchester, in English, German and French. From it, one learns that the next International Congress of Textile Workers is to be held in June next, at Amsterdam.

The German contributors to the Report express regret that the resolutions to be submitted to the Amsterdam Congress are not already known, so that the same might be discussed beforehand by the members of the various societies, and on their own account they submit :-

### **The Question of International Solidarity.**

The Germans declare that "The sharply pronounced class distinction, which to-day is a factor to be reckoned with, and which will not be overcome through any make-believe in harmony between the owners and the non-possessing, but which have to be dealt with through the medium of a bitterly-contested fight of the non-possessing, tribute-paying class against the possessing and tribute-exacting class, in favour of the proletariat.

"The methods of the proletariat of this country to fight against the oppressors do not go far enough. They cannot lead to a favourable and deciding issue in this struggle. In fact, the possessing class is conducting the fight with unheard-of solidarity; they are giving it such a wide basis and act with such sharpness, that the proletariat in hundreds of thousands will have to stand up and fight."

The French contributor reports numerous strikes in the textile industry. At the town of Halluin a dispute is now on over wages, which has already lasted eight months; the employer is described as an "arch-millionaire who behaves like a despotic Czar"; at Tourcoing a strike has been on for seven months. At St. Maurice-sir-Moselle the weavers are on strike; also in several other districts where wages are exceptionally low. In Belgium, too, the report describes the conditions as very bad, and disputes very numerous, but in all cases, as far as can be judged, the fights are merely sectional, and therefore puerile.

The Lancashire cotton operatives have opportunities of heading a gigantic movement, if only they can properly appreciate solidarity.

Unfortunately, the "piecers," or assistant spinners, are, for the most part, tied down by the spinners, i.e., the higher paid men; so that the higher paid men are able to keep control of the lower paid ones. If International Solidarity really were a fact, a revolution could be speedily accomplished in the conditions of the workers, not only of Lancashire, but also of every one of the twenty-two countries where "Syndicalism" on the employer's side is already a fact.

A substantial reduction of working hours and a minimum wage of 30s. a week would be worth fighting for, and if the Lancashire textile operatives would only set about it in real earnest, it could be brought off.

### **In all Solemnity.**

I ask the officials of the Unions in the cotton industry why they should not use the International Federation this year to secure the dual purpose of reduced hours and a minimum wage?

As to what the reduction should be, judging by the facts given in this pamphlet, I consider a 45-hour week would be ample; i.e., five days of eight hours, and five hours on Saturday; or, as many seem to prefer, five days of nine hours, and Saturday free from the mill.

The cotton men are not the only ones with whom reduced hours of work is an urgent necessity. The men in the Transport industry need similar improvement. The carrying trades are more active than they have been for years, and dock and wharf work is affected similarly; yet the struggle at the principal docks in London, Southampton and other places, is of so revolting a character as to sicken the heart of any one witnessing it.

### **Reducing the Hours Means Employment for All.**

The sea-going men have tasks imposed upon them on many lines that only fit with slavery. The vast majority of the 10,000 boats constituting the merchant men of this country are always inadequately manned, and fair-minded men understanding all that appertains to seamanship, declare that an average of three more men per vessel is a very moderate demand to secure proper manning. If this were done, it would mean employment for 30,000 more men.

To establish an eight-hour day, or a 48-hour week on the Railways, would necessitate 60,000 additional men.

If the gangs were properly made up in connection with work at the Docks throughout the country, and a 48-hour working week acted upon, another 90,000 men would be required here.

Some of the London carmen, of whom there are fully 40,000, regularly work 60 to 70 hours at a stretch; thousands are working an average 14-hour day. A case

came to light recently of a carman in the employ of the United Cartage Company, Kennington Cross, who was on duty for five days and nights consecutively, getting a snatch of sleep only whilst his van was being loaded, but he was responsible the whole of the time. Reasonable working hours for present carmen would necessitate another 7,000 to 8,000 men in London alone.

I submit there is no other method whereby substantial economic betterment can be achieved comparable to that of reducing the working hours.

#### **No Necessity for "Submerged Tenth."**

I contend that reducing the working hours provides a solution to the problem of unemployment, and it matters not what economic system obtains. Providing the

workers have thoroughly organised industrially, and are able to act upon the principle of solidarity, they will be able to secure regular incomes, and throw the burdens of fluctuations in trade off their shoulders.

There is no necessity whatever for a "submerged tenth." The only reason the submerged are ever present, is because the workers as a class have never been bold enough to insist upon all sharing in the work to be done.

The workers are beginning to see the enormous power which lies in industrial organisation, and the far-reaching effects of proper regulation of working hours.

The Right to Work requires no Bill or Act of Parliament. Let the workers in all industries follow the example of the Master Cotton Spinners, and there will be work for all.

## **The Railwaymen**

### **Tom Mann**

*The Industrial Syndicalist*, May 1911

Transport Workers' Federation is a powerful body with which the Railwaymen have as yet not identified themselves. It is to be hoped, however, that they will do so ere long.

The day when unified action with the Railwaymen and seagoing men, and other sections of those employed in the transport industry, becomes a fact, it will be an occasion for much rejoicing.

Later, the actual control of working hours on the Railways by the men themselves, through their industrial organisation, will become a fact; and later still, this same organisation will be entrusted by the community to control the entire Railway system in the community's interest, and, of course, with due regard to their own well-being.

Syndicalists do not demand the nationalisation which means the capitalisation of the railways, but the entire control and management of them in the common interest by themselves.

But this will be understood more clearly in due time ; meanwhile, let it suffice to guard against the notion of nationalisation and to tilt thought on to the truer views of direct control by the workers for the community.

The many facts and figures, so well presented by comrade Watkins [in "The Question for Railwaymen: Conciliation or Emancipation?" in this issue of *The Industrial Syndicalist*], will prove a real storehouse of information for all students of Industrialism.

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Whether you work by the piece,  
Or work by the day,  
Reducing the hours  
Increases the pay.

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The 8-Hour Day :  
Get ready for the fray in 1912.

**Syndicalists do not demand the nationalisation which means the capitalisation of the railways, but the entire control and management of them in the common interest by themselves**

# From *The Syndicalist*

## What we Syndicalists are after

Tom Mann

*The Syndicalist*, January 1912

The Industrial Syndicalist Education League has come into being for a specific purpose. That purpose is to popularise Syndicalist principles amongst Trade Unionists with a view to the realisation of the Industrial Commonwealth.

We are not wishful, however, to bring into existence some organisation or society to take the place of the existing Trade Union Movement; we simply wish to facilitate its development towards real Solidarity and Direct Action lines. True, the present Unions are sectional and lacking in proper appreciation of Direct Action Methods, but we are confident that our efforts will make them appreciate the

necessity of Federating, in many cases of amalgamating, and of resorting to the methods of Industrial Solidarity for all grades and industries. We of the League, being members of the existing old-line unions, seek by visits to Union Branches and Lodges, Trades Councils, Working Men's Clubs, etc. to stimulate discussion on Syndicalist principles and methods.

We are ourselves non-parliamentarians; but we do not worry over the fact that many attach importance to the political action which we have discarded. Our concern is that the Trade Unionist Movement, as the chief agency of working class activity, should be made as perfect as may be for fighting the class war, and shall eliminate for ever the sectional and racial animosities that have hitherto checked our advance.

We lay special stress upon the urgency of the necessity for a substantial reduction of working hours in all industries. We are therefore favourable to, and earnest advocates of, a maximum eight hour day, though we consider that miners, chemical workers, and all those working in specially dangerous trades, ought not to work more than six hours a day.

But we shall hasten to say that neither an eight hour day, a seven, or a six hour day, can cure unemployment. The cure for unemployment is to be found in the proper regulation of working hours; and this will be done when the industrial organisations undertake to regulate

working hours themselves, in each industry, to the complete absorption of all available workers, and to follow up with further reductions as rapidly as capitalists apply labour-saving devices.

When, under this system, the state of trade goes below normal, we Syndicalists would reduce the hours of all, and keep all at work, instead of allowing a percentage to be thrown out of work to starve, and when abnormal activity comes about, working hours would be added to, in order to meet requirements. This would give the workers the power to fix wages, because it would remove competition for employment amongst the workers.

**Our concern is that the Trade Unionist Movement, as the chief agency of working class activity, should be made as perfect as may be for fighting the class war**

The orthodox declare this cannot be done; but 1911 opened the eyes of many as to a few things that can be done when Solidarity is in the saddle, 1912 will show this in a much larger degree, and when the capitalists get tired of running industries, the workers will cheerfully invite them to abdicate, and through and by their industrial organisations, will run the industries themselves in the interests of the whole community.

We know the advantage of achieving results with the least expenditure of energy, and will, therefore, always discourage

unnecessary strikes; but we also know that the strike is the chief weapon of the working class. It is all-powerful when wisely conducted over a sufficiently extensive area. We therefore most certainly favour strikes; we shall always do our best to help strikes to be successful, and shall prepare the way as rapidly as possible for THE GENERAL STRIKE of international proportions. This will be the actual Social and Industrial Revolution. The workers we refuse any longer manipulate the machinery of production in the interests of the capitalist class, and there will be no power on earth able to compel them to work when they thus refuse!

Into it, then, Fellow Workers! No longer hesitate! Into your Unions by the million! No arbitration: No compromise! But straight out definite slogging for our children, our women, and the whole working class!

# Syndicalism at Work

Tom Mann

*The Syndicalist*, March-April 1912

The exceptional trade-union activity, the increase in volume and variety of the various phases of Labour unrest, and the recent application of Syndicalist principles and methods in the industrial world, is simply so much evidence that the efforts of the working class to obtain improved conditions are not flagging, but multiplying; and all who recognise the existence of the Social Problem have cause for satisfaction that this stimulating force is apparently in the ascendant and destined to produce great results in the near future.

Syndicalism means the control of industry by "Syndicates" or Unions of Workers, in the interest of the entire community; this necessarily pre-supposes the relatively perfect industrial organisation of all who work, and the right relationship to each other of every section. Robert Owen, over eighty years ago, advocated the necessity for such a method of organisation, and made a very good start at putting it into practice; but, as it proved, the workers were not equal to resorting to such relatively highly-trained methods; and they have had to spend twice forty years in the industrial wilderness because they were neither mentally nor physically qualified to enter the Promised Land. Since Owen's time, several other methods have been resorted to by the workers to escape from their industrial bondage, but none of them have proved really effective, parliamentary action least of all.

In Robert Owen's vigorous days the workers of England had no political rights, and it would appear that Owen set small store by the possession of any such "rights." He saw and taught that the workers' difficulties arose as a consequence of their industrial subjugation to the capitalist class – in other words, that the members of the employing class had no concern for the members of the working class, except to control and exploit their labour force for the specific purpose of using them as profit-making machines for themselves.

The Syndicalist of today has learned that all-important fact, and so refuses to play at attempts at social reform

through and by means of Parliaments, these institutions being entirely under the control of the plutocracy, and never tolerating any modification of conditions in the interest of the working class, save with the ulterior motive of more firmly entrenching themselves as the ruling class.

All this is admitted by most Socialists as regards the motive and object of the capitalist class, but the typical Socialist retains an abiding faith in the "wisdom and power" of Parliament, and seeks to achieve revolutionary changes by means of Parliament. And yet he also fully admits that all the really serious grievances of the workers are economic or industrial and not political in character. Many of them can also see clearly enough that Parliament cannot manage or control an industry, or really rectify industrial wrongs; but still the glamour of this imposing bourgeois institution commands their obeisance and subjection.

The Syndicalist, that is, the trade and labour unionist of the revolutionary type, recognises not only that all changes favourable to the workers must be brought about by the workers, but also that the only correct method of doing this is through and by the workers' own industrial organisations.

Organised labour means the control of labour power by the labourers organised, and this means the control of wealth production to the extent to which Labour is organised.

It is only while Labour is partially organised that recourse to strikes is necessary; not even the general strike will be necessary when Labour is universally organised. Universal organisation must carry with it industrial solidarity, – i.e., universal agreement upon the object to be attained, for otherwise the capitalists will still triumph. With solidarity on the industrial field the workers become all-powerful.

There is nothing but a little reflection wanted to enable anyone to see that such is really the case. All students of social economics, who recognise the operation of the law of wages, know that, irrespective of what the

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worker produces, all that the worker on the average receives is a subsistence wage; but we also know that, in order to get that subsistence wage, there are some who work but six hours a day, whilst others work twice and even three times as long. The most effective means of securing social betterment is by reducing the working hours. It is better to get the subsistence wage for relatively few hours than for many hours of work.

Syndicalism will do this, and by so doing will solve the problem of unemployment, and by the same means will kill excessive working hours; and by the same methods will wipe out all low wages. A further application of the same principle will secure to the workers the full reward of their labour. All will come in a perfectly natural manner as the direct outcome of *industrial solidarity*, guided intelligently and applied courageously.

The State Socialist, confronted with the unemployed problem, admits the necessity for trying to cure the evil, and proposes a "Right to Work" Bill. This proposal has been in the forefront of the State Socialists' programme for fully twenty years, and it has never yet reached the stage of serious discussion – that is, it has not yet been considered of sufficiently urgent importance to be classed by the average parliamentarian as being within the region of practical politics. Nor is there any valid reason for supposing it is likely to be seriously dealt with by those who claim to attach importance to it.

The Syndicalist says: "Apply direct action and reduce working hours up to the point of absorbing all available workers in the ranks of the actively employed, and quite as rapidly as labour-saving devices are applied still further reduce working hours, so that there will never be any unemployed."

"But," says the parliamentarian, "in order to reduce hours we must have an Act of Parliament." The Syndicalist says: "Such reduction of working hours can be far better brought about by industrial organisation. Nothing is wanted but the organisation of the workers, and agreement to use the organisation for such a purpose."

The trade unionists themselves, having had their minds so fully occupied with the idea that Parliament is the all-important institution, and never having even hoped to see all workers organised industrially, have failed to realise what enormous power lies in industrial

solidarity. The nearest approach to any one industry exhibiting solidarity was that of the late great strike of the miners in March, 1912; but even here it was not complete, for many colliery enginemen and others did not give in their notices at the same time as the colliers, and no arrangement at all was made with other organised workers to secure their co-operation in an active and warlike manner.

The arm-chair discussions that took place for several weeks before the miners' notices expired, and the ready acceptance of the intervention of the Government, showed how childishly simple were many of those responsible on the men's side. They did not view it as a national battle to be fought by the organised workers engaged in the class struggle.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of the "miners' leaders" had no conception that there was or that there is a "class struggle,"

and, indeed, they had done their utmost to prevent the national claim for a minimum wage coming along as forcefully as it did.

Some of the capitalist papers charged these same leaders with being "Syndicalists"! The fact is that many of them had never pronounced the word in their lives, and not five per cent, of them knew what the term meant. But they made an excellent fight, and were truer Syndicalists in fact than in theory. Nevertheless, if the Syndicalist principle of brotherly solidarity in all industries had been understood and resorted to, the whole pressure of the transport workers, including railwaymen, would have been applied at the end of the first week, and no power on earth could have prevailed against them.

Once again, the object aimed at by the Syndicalists is the control of each industry by those engaged in it in the interests of the entire community. This will be followed by the ownership of the tools and other means of production and transportation jointly by the industrial community. Strikes are mere incidents in the march towards control of industry and ownership of the tools of production. "Sabotage," "Ca' Canny," and irritation strikes are mere incidentals in the progress onwards. The master key to the entire problem is INDUSTRIAL SOLIDARITY.

Naturally, much absurd criticism has been directed against "Syndicalism," and quite a host of Labour men



**Session at the 1913 International Syndicalist Congress**

have hastened to declare not only that they are not Syndicalists, but, indeed, that they have pronounced opinions against it – which, upon analysis, amounts to this: they are obsessed with the plutocratic institution of Parliament and are also fearful lest identification with the workers' real movement should debar them from sharing the contents of the Egyptian fleshpots. But they need not fear, timid souls! They may still propitiate plutocratic opinion by disclaiming identification with

## **Syndicalism and the State**

**Tom Mann**

*The Syndicalist and Amalgamation News, March-April 1913*

It is distinctly encouraging to find so many evidences that the workers are recognising the necessity for industrial organisation and Direct Action. The amalgamation of the three sectional societies of railwaymen and the spirit of solidarity shown by them over the case of Guard Richardson is magnificent evidence of the right kind of development; but it is necessary to point out that we have to travel much further than this before we arrive at the right conception of Syndicalism.

Syndicalism is not a perfected "stateism." It is opposed to stateism. It is not a case of developing a force by industrial organisation to be applied through the machinery of the organised state. It is the voluntary organisation of the workers outside of and independent of the state, for the direct control of all industry.

The state is the enemy and the "stateists," (i.e. those who seek to bring about changes by means of the state machinery), are opponents of voluntary organisation, voluntary control and voluntary ownership. The state, and with it parliament and all the governmental departments, are opposed to direct control and ownership by the people engaged in the industries. The state caters directly for the ruling class. The ruling class is not the Working Class. The Working Class cannot become the ruling class by state action, nor can its members throw off the yoke of bondage imposed on them by the present ruling class by any means short of refusing to act as wealth producers for a ruling class or for any body or institution other than themselves.

the virile fighting force that is already lifting the working class out of the bogs and quagmires of mugwumpish parliamentarism.

The watchwords are INDUSTRIAL SOLIDARITY and DIRECT ACTION. By these means we can and will solve unemployment, cure poverty, and secure to the worker *the full reward of his labour*.

William Morris always advocated the vital necessity for the workers themselves to control the work they do. The only possibility for people to become artists again, as our fathers in the Middle Ages certainly were, will be when all responsibility for the entire output of wealth is claimed and discharged by the workers who will form the community. However large or small that community may be, the men and women therein must not be regimented, ordered and bossed by superiors of any kind. The real life of the people will show itself in the work of the people, and with the abolition of economic

servitude all shoddy production – all trade trickery – all forms of adulteration will cease, as no one will be a gainer by resorting to such methods.

The workers today must learn to hold the ruling class in contempt and to treat the agency with which they

### **BURNING WORDS.**

**"We don't care for your public opinion; we do not ask for your sympathy. You have failed—failed utterly to abolish poverty. All your churches, all your governments, all your institutions, all your laws have failed; you are an admitted failure, all of you. But, by heaven, we are not going to fail. We are going to abolish poverty, and do it ourselves, without asking help of any except ourselves."—Tom Mann, at Mass-Meeting in Liverpool During the Strike.**

*The Syndicalist (Chicago), 15 January 1913*

keep alive the glamour, viz. parliament, in the manner it deserves. They must realise that it belongs to their enemies, and see in it an institution that can never be used effectively by the workers. They must view it as belonging to the capitalist regime, tottering, doddering, decaying with capitalist decay. The live men of the country know it to be more and more a pretentious "Joss House," revered only by the capitalist class itself, and those of the Working Class whose minds are incapable of activity, save within those channels provided by the master class. The despising of that master class and the whole of the judicial and legislative trappings upon which it depends for its continued domination is a necessary condition of a healthy mental virility.

**The workers today must learn to hold the ruling class in contempt**

# **From *Mother Earth***

## **In Appreciation**

### **Tom Mann**

*Mother Earth*, December 1912

In the name of the Syndicalists in Britain I wish to, join in loving greetings, most hearty congratulations and genuine thanks to Comrade Peter Kropotkin on his seventieth birthday. We heartily congratulate him on his full and intensely useful life; we thank him most sincerely for the battles he has fought, the struggles he has endured, and the example he has set.

It is more than twenty years since I first had the pleasure of meeting the great teacher; it is near thirty years since, as a propagandist, I joyfully began selling Kropotkin's "Appeal to the Young," one of the finest appeals ever issued in propagandist literature to young or old.

I have always felt it to be a great privilege to shake hands with and to have a few words with the grand old man, truly a delightful character. I have ever felt towards Comrade Kropotkin that there is an atmosphere of knowledge, of love, and of human kindness of heart surrounding him beyond that of any other man I have known.

So real a master of the knowledge of the time, so diligent a student of that yet to be known, and bearing himself withal so quietly, so unassertive, so superbly balanced, that I gaze on his modest, smiling, fatherly face in his photograph with wondering admiration.

That fate should have decided that our comrade should have lived in this country so long is a matter for us to be thankful for, but the mass of the working class have hitherto failed to learn one of the principal lessons the old teacher has been striving to impart, i. e., the

absurdity, the wrongfulness and economic unsoundness of relying upon State Action to bring about the economic changes essential for well-being; but the workers are learning that great lesson now and very rapidly.

In their struggle for the "Conquest of Bread" they will in future rely upon their own powers of Direct Action to achieve the same; and we are hopeful we shall yet be able to equal the barbarians of centuries ago in showing mutual regard for the general welfare.

I never read a more encouraging book than "Mutual Aid," and I thank our comrade for it; so full of delightful incident bearing so pointedly upon the all-important principle he is teaching, and so optimistic of humanity again being at least as sensible as the savages, coupled with scientific advance.

Many thousands have had their minds opened to the reception of knowledge by "Fields, Factories, Workshops," and many of us are strenuously engaged in endeavouring to apply the lessons therein taught.

We thank the Russian people for so glorious a man, and we thank the man and brother for such stupendous work so magnificently achieved. With our comrades of Europe, of America, aye, and of the world at large, we join wholeheartedly and offer our loving appreciation to Peter and Madame. May they have many happy years to observe the realization of their ideals.

Tom Mann

Southfields, London, Eng.

## ***Mother Earth* and Labour's Revolt**

**Tom Mann**

*Mother Earth*, March 1915

I take great satisfaction in writing my congratulations to and expressing my admiration for the controllers of *Mother Earth*. For nine years it has voiced in clear terms the necessity for "working class solidarity," "direct action in all industrial affairs" and "free association." I subscribe to each of these with heart and mind. We have been passing through a long and dreary stage of Bureaucratic Stateism, and we are not out of it yet. Because of it, the European war became an easy affair to precipitate, when the hour arrived that served the purposes of the War Lords, Governments and Bureaucrats.

The condition of Europe to-day, after six months of war, is such that there is much excuse for good honest lovers of freedom to bewail the present and future of mankind. No doubt that there were millions of men and women in Europe, who fearlessly strove for the advancement of mankind; the vast majority of these to-day are either actually engaged in war or are actively supporting the war by their everyday efforts, believing that they are either resisting "barbaric aggression," or are engaged in the defence of Human Liberty and Progress.

Neither the organised Social Democrats of Germany, nor the Socialists or Syndicalists of France, and certainly not the Labour Movement of Britain were equal to the exhibition of international solidarity, when the governments of these countries decided to throw open the hellgates that have fed hatred, savagery, and a desire for maiming and killing on the vastest scale the world has known.

Fate decided that the crucial test should first be experienced by the Germans, and these singularly failed to practice the solidarity they had stood for; how near to being really successful the minority were, who were prepared to face every obstacle rather than identify themselves with Kaiser and Government, it is not yet easy to judge. But we are compelled to know that the real Internationalists of the respective countries were miserably inadequate successfully to initiate the spirit of solidarity.

I most sincerely believe that the chief reason for this insufficiency is to be found in the fact that, as yet, it is only a small percentage of the workers who are emancipated from the bourgeois conception of life. There is still a belief in State, in government, in rulers; and the beauty of a free condition of society, co-operating in all its parts, with an absence of domination from any section has not as yet been fully perceived by them; and until it is, in the hour of crises, they will turn to the institution through which power, government and domination finds chief expression.

This being so, I am the more grateful to the editor and conductors of *Mother Earth* for labouring so thoroughly to popularise principles calculated, as I believe, to emancipate mankind, intellectually and economically.

I desire to add that, notwithstanding the awful fact that there are now thirty millions of men, either at war,

preparing for war, or, already maimed and killed in this present top-notch effort at human annihilation, I am unable to be really pessimistic with regard to the future. It is too much to hope that the Americans, not being embroiled in this slaughtering campaign, will, as onlookers, see much more clearly than most of us have been able to, the real need for bedrock class conscious advocacy of such principles of national and international co-operation, as will admit of relatively rapid advance being made.

The servile State is here, and this accursed war is giving it another lease of life. State ownership and administration will stand a better

chance after the war than before; yet I venture to predict that this stage will not last long. It will be the final, but perhaps, necessary stage of modern Capitalism, speedily to be superseded by a freer co-operation of peoples, minus an official bureaucracy, which in recent times has existed in its most highly developed form in Germany.

Allow me to express my thanks to the group of comrades who have kept *Mother Earth* running for nine years as a source of inspiration and guidance. May its tenth year of life prove of even greater use than the past.

*Manchester, England.*

***Mother Earth... has voiced in clear terms the necessity for "working class solidarity," "direct action in all industrial affairs" and "free association." I subscribe to each of these with heart and mind.***

## **War and the Workers**

**Tom Mann**

*Mother Earth*, September 1915

It has taken a year for the full tension to be applied to the people in an industrial, financial and psychological sense. Increasing tightness on the workers has been the plan of those connected with the reins of government; now cajoling, now threatening, the people have been made to feel the power of the State; and in the middle of the twelfth month of the war, the coal miners of South Wales, having failed to obtain any consideration from the mine owners, resolve to strike. But already the minister of munitions has been empowered to take drastic action in areas and industries essential to the conducting of the war. And the statesmen announce through the official press, that they will stand no

nonsense from miners or others, that exceptional powers will be applied without hesitancy.

Quite calmly but firmly the miners state their case; that the mine owners have increased the price of coal at the pits mouth by five shillings per ton and they refuse even to discuss the possibility of an advance to the miners, who are, like others, subject to the increased cost of living; they state, what all observers knew, that the coal owners fix their contracts in the month of July, some for six months, some for twelve months in advance; that the owners have already fixed many contracts at exorbitant prices, and refuse to make any concession to the men, who were asking for five pence per ton increase. The



government prepare to apply the special powers in case the men should strike. The men quietly ignore what the government does and the whole 200,000 men cease work; threats of all kinds follow, the men are loyal to each other, and the exceptional measures of the government remain a dead letter and the minister of munitions conducts negotiations after the men have been out of the mines for a week, securing to the men an increase of four pence, half penny (nine cents as against the ten they asked for), per ton; and the men accept this and return to work.

*The details are trivial, but the main fact exhibits the force of combination on the part of ordinary workmen, and demonstrates their power as superior to the State.*

It is a matter of congratulation that such solidarity should have been shown by the Welsh miners, that is, solidarity as regards their everyday toil. No other form of solidarity could have withstood the State, all other means proved utterly ineffectual; resorting to direct action as regards their labour gave them pre-eminence over all opposing forces. If these same miners were prepared to show solidarity of the same order to secure control of the mines they could get it, backed up, of course, by their fellow workers in other industries. And when the war is over, if the workers can show solidarity, and be as firm about refusing to work except under their own conditions, they would control the economic situation, and the social revolution would be realized.

I have read with intense interest all I have been able to get about the Caplan-Schmidt case and I was especially interested in Alex. Berkman's article on this subject in current issue of MOTHER EARTH. I see no chance of these comrades getting a fair deal in the courts — unless the workers are prepared to resort to direct action on their behalf.

I admire the capable manner in which the Californian Trade Unionists are backing their comrades; but again it must be said, that there is little chance of safety for them unless the workers will show solidarity on the industrial field to secure it.

As regards the workers here in Britain very few are war mad, very many are really international at heart, but it is an exceedingly difficult thing to show it just now. Industrial mass action is equal to anything, but for small and comparatively isolated sections to attempt even to do educational work, means being confronted with tremendous obstacles, but we are not entirely despondent on that account. We look to America to keep out of this war. Surely it is sufficient that four-fifths of Europe should be involved, and the United States keeping out of actual participation may render great service in negotiation; but if the United States actually enters into the general mad struggle she will lose magnificent opportunities.

*Manchester, England.*

## **Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand Cotton Operatives Get an Advance by Direct Action**

**Tom Mann**

*Mother Earth*, December 1915

The biggest question we are confronted with in Britain just now is the prospect of conscription, the determination to bring this about is very strong with many capitalists, politicians and newspaper contributors. You will be aware that the authorities have decided to try more rigorous methods to get soldiers, if volunteers in sufficient number have not enlisted for the army by the end of November. Meanwhile in certain areas strong attempts are being made to enlist men into Industrial Battalions particularly in connection with Transport Workers. At the present time insidious attempts are hourly made to cajole and to coerce the Carters of Liverpool to don Khaki and line up as government slaves.

This is being done, not openly and above board but in hole and corner fashion; calling union officials in to confer and holding out dire prospects as to what will take place unless the Carters agree. The plea put up is that congestion exists for lack of adequate organisation and number of carters to meet the requirements of the government at the Docks; the truth being that any

congestion that exists is directly traceable to faulty storage and warehouse accommodations and management. I am glad to tell readers of *Mother Earth* that very great courage is being shown by the carters any many other workers in refusing to submit to joint dictation of government officials and that of bosses posing as patriots.

An encouraging incident is that of the cotton operatives of Lancashire who put in a claim for a five per cent. increase in wages. The employers refused to grant anything. On several occasions the employees approached them and offered to submit the case to arbitration; but the bosses absolutely refused; the workers who are well organized and 250,000 (two hundred and fifty thousand) in number then decided to "strike" at certain mills in various districts and to conduct a series of fights to secure their end. Preparations were completed and business clearly meant. Then the employers sent to the men and agreed to discuss the matter and settled as follows:

The employers agree to give a war bonus of 5 per cent. on the prices paid for weaving by the uniform list and Colne coloured goods list, and a similar bonus to those engaged in the weaving of towels, quilts, sheetings, and cotton blankets, and to weavers, reelers, and beamers, whose wages rise or fall with the weavers' wages.

The employers also agree to give a war bonus of 5 per cent. to twisters and drawers and overlookers who are paid standing wages, to cloth lookers, warehousemen and other odd hands employed in the weaving section of the trade.

Where the wages are paid on the basis of a list the war bonus is to be an addition of 5 per cent. on such a list. In the case of weavers in the grey trade who are paid on the uniform list the weaving price (whilst the war bonus is in operation) will be the uniform list plus 10 per cent., and in the case of weavers in the coloured trade who are

paid by the Colne coloured goods list, the weaving price for coloured stripes will be on the coloured goods list plus 12 ½ per cent., and the weaving price for coloured checks will be Colne coloured goods list plus 7 ½ per cent., whilst the bonus is in operation.

The pity is that whilst the cotton operatives are repeatedly having experiences showing the efficiency of Direct Action for the most part they still attach unwarrantable importance to State Machinery.

In South Wales just now there is the keenest competition amongst the Labour Leaders to be selected as Candidates to fill the position of M.P. made vacant by the death of Keir Hardie, but for all that there is an increasing number of clear minded men realising the true import of the State and the way in which it ever serves the interests of the dominant class.

## Miscellaneous

# Report of the Holborn Town Hall Meeting

*Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism*, August-September 1896

TOM MANN: He considered it his duty and took pleasure in meeting advanced men and women active in the same movement as he. Not long ago he had explained his position toward Communist Anarchism in that very same hall, and it was well understood that he did not pose there as an Anarchist; he did not seek the kind recognition of Anarchists nor of anybody else; but he recognised Communist and Collectivist Anarchists and anti-parliamentary Socialists as members of a common school for the overthrow of a tyranny which he had learned to despise himself, and everyone was doing his share in that work. He further said:

“I was never identified with the Individualist Anarchist movement; but my sympathies are strongly disposed towards the Communist Anarchist movement. I am not working altogether upon their lines, but upon lines which penult me to take part in political action, municipal and trade unionist efforts, as well as every other way of action. I do not advise Anarchists which way they ought to go, I am faithful to the cause for which I work; but I will speak my opinion on those who work as Socialists and are doing good in their way, but who show a degree of intolerance pitiful to look at. I was infinitely sorry to see the intolerant attitude of the Congressists yesterday and today against those who differ with them as to methods. And as I am constituted—whether I am right or not I do not care—whenever I see a majority acting in this tyrannical way against a minority, only because it is a minority. then I side with the minority. The argument which was used today for the hundredth time, that the Anarchists wanted

to take part in the Congress only to upset it, is so utterly baseless and in every way so shameful that I gladly separate myself from all persons who use it deliberately. Some friends of mine in the I.L.P. and other friends are very sorry to see me at this meeting; but various men here at various times been so damned sorry for me that I have tried to live without their advice and to form my own way from the facts before me; and the conclusions I draw from them and what little courage I possess make me to go where I believe it to be right to go.”

He then addressed the more indifferent part of the audience, who wondered what it all meant, on the main principle of Communist Anarchism and of Collectivism, which he himself upholds. Whether we work from the Collectivist standpoint (by political action) or from the anti-parliamentarian standpoint (by voluntary agencies, trade union effort, etc.), or from the Communist Anarchist viewpoint, in each case we work for the destruction of monopoly and no more room for parasites. That men may lead happy lives, that women and children shall no longer starve;—think and remember that it is these wicked Communist Anarchists and anti-parliamentarian Socialists who use all the energy they are capable of to bring this about. As to methods,—be not Pecksniffian, but be clear minded, nevertheless.

**“my sympathies are strongly  
disposed towards the Communist  
Anarchist movement”**

# Tom Mann Quits Politics

## Tom Mann

*The Agitator: A semi-monthly advocate of the Modern School, Industrial Unionism, Individual Freedom, 1 July 1911*

(Letter from Tom Mann to H. W. Lee, Secretary Social-Democratic Party, London, England.)

Dear Sir and Comrade

I hereby tender my resignation as a member of the SDP.

I do so partly because of the endorsement by the recent conference of the official attitude of the party on the subject of war, but more so because, since re-joining the party a year ago, on my return to this country, I find myself not in agreement with the party on the important subject of parliamentary action.

My experiences have driven me more and more into the non-parliamentary position; and this I find is most unwelcome to most members of the party. After the most careful reflection, I am driven to the belief that the real reason why the trades unionist movement of this country is in such a deplorable state of inefficiency is to be found in the fictitious importance which the workers have been encouraged to attach to parliamentary action.

I find nearly all the serious minded young men of the Labour and Socialist movement have their minds centred upon obtaining some position in public life, such as local, municipal or county councillorship, or

filling some governmental office, or aspiring to become a member of parliament.

I am driven to the belief that this is entirely wrong, and that economic liberty will never be realized by such means. So I declare in favour of Direct Industrial Organisation, not as a means, but as *the* means whereby the workers can ultimately overthrow the capitalist system and become the actual controllers of their own industrial and social destiny.

I am of the opinion that the workers' fight must be carried out on the industrial plane, free from entanglements with the plutocratic enemy.

I do not forget that it was in the ranks of the Social-Democratic Federation that I first learned the principles of revolutionary socialism, and I believe I am entirely loyal to those principles in resigning my membership for the reasons given.

Yours fraternally,

Tom Mann

## Tom Mann In New York City

*New York Call, 3 August 1913*

Tom Mann, veteran of many labour fights in various parts of the world, especially Great Britain and Australia, made his first speech in thirty years in this country, August 3d, in New York City. About 1,000 persons welcomed the great agitator.

The greeting Mann received was intensely enthusiastic. He was cheered for several minutes and there were outbursts of applause during his address. William D. Haywood, who was chairman at the meeting, summed up Mann as a worker "who has no country, bows down to no flag and worships at no altar, but who is loved by the working class the world over."

Haywood, in welcoming Mann, declared that he would find conditions no different in this country than in England. Incidentally Haywood, who was one of the leaders of the Paterson silk strike, denied that it was over. "The strike is just beginning, and the workers propose to fight the bosses harder than ever they did and to do this they mean to fight them with sabotage," he declared.

Mann had not been speaking ten minutes when a photographer took a flashlight picture of him. Mann met him with the following remark: "Shooter, are you all right? I am identified with the policy of don't shoot, so

don't do it again until I tell you." The crowd was Mann's from that moment on.

"I have come from a country," continued Mann, "where poverty is so vile that every year millions of human beings die off twenty years before the natural term of their lives. This means social murder, not spasmodically or occasionally, but always there. The capitalist system in England is very successful, accumulating wealth faster than ever.

"Every month it throws thousands of workers into the semi-skilled or unskilled labour class. The capitalist system is not increasing the number of well paid workers, but steadily diminishing them. Skilled labour is losing its place and losing it fast."

The "parliamentarians" had failed in Germany, said Mann, because "they respect law and order as laid down by the capitalists. They have failed to function because they have not centred their minds upon industrial organisation. Not until they turned their eyes to industrialism was any change effected. I have seen the same thing in Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, South Africa and in England.

"I was closely connected with the labour movement, both political and industrial, in Australia. There is a general idea that the eight hour law prevails in

Australia. It does in some industries. The eight hour law has been established in some industries since 1856, but the men who took part in the fight were exiled. The capitalist has a complete grip upon Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania.

“As soon as the Australian sugar workers resorted to industrial action they got the eight hour day.

“In the smelting furnaces in northern Australia, although labour and Socialists have been returned to office, the men work seven days a week. In Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, one-half of the miners work under the contract system; that is, they get paid a regular day’s wage if they produce gold, and some times they work months and months for nothing. You ask me how they live? They live on the earnings of their children. The miner there, when he works, never makes more than 22 shillings 6 pence a week. Never more.

“The real place to exercise power is in the places where work is done — if the workers control their labour they control wealth and can transfer the industrial power from the dominant capitalist class to the labouring class.

“The power of the working class is increasing as fast as they realise their power and rebel against the ruling class.”

“Trust to no saviour but yourself — I don’t care where I go after I die. I am thinking about now — trust to no

politician or parliament, or to no class that is not your class. The thing to do is to educate.

“Solidarity is what will save you workers,” cried the Englishman. “By banding together and educating yourselves alone shall you inherit the earth. We don’t preach violence. We don’t court violence, but if it comes we don’t shun it. But violence is only incidental. In our fights it is something that cannot be helped.

“We do not advise violence, but we do not dodge it. After all, what we are engaged in is war. Capital does not hesitate to underpay us, overwork us, or risk our lives in bad factories if it can or dare. Why should we hesitate to lay our hand to any weapon that will wound capital? By fighting and refusing to be misled by compromises we have won heaps of strikes in England and you have only to look to France and Belgium to see the triumph of our doctrine of an invincible solidarity. So great and strong is our banding together in France and Belgium that violence is unnecessary to accomplish anything we wish. And, as we scorn the government, the government must come to us. So there is no chance of our cause being betrayed.

“The standard of life in Britain is better than ever it was. It is further away from the social hell than it was before we organised industrially. Consider yourself as a soldier in the workers’ army and arm yourself with intelligence and know exactly where you are going.”

**“The power of the working class is increasing as fast as they realise their power and rebel against the ruling class.”**

## **Tom Mann Writes from Mid-Atlantic**

**Tom Mann**

*Maoriland Worker*, 26 September 1913

Dear Harry

Our letters crossed. No doubt you received mine alright as I received yours.

I was glad to hear from you, and hope developments have all been satisfactory. I am now in Mid-Atlantic en route United States on a lecture run, and I expect to have a very interesting time.

As far as I can judge from a distance, I should say that the workers in New Zealand are not likely to make much real progress until they see the unfitness of the Capitalist State to deal with industrial problems; and, what is of equal importance, the impossibility of the working class ever functioning as the controllers of industry through the State machine. They require to feed on a good course of Peter Kropotkin to wean them from the idea that the modern State as a governing entity is in any sense a real necessity. Of course, it is much the same in England; the Labor Party is composed of men

who honestly wish to see the realisation of a Collectivist State, and in their minds they believe that this would be equal to the realisation of the revolutionary ideal, when there would be no exploiting class or idle section living at the country's expense, against the people's will, but this I believe to be utterly unrealisable through and by any means of the State as an organised entity. William Morris was much nearer the ideal in holding the Government and Parliament in contempt as utterly unnecessary and altogether mischievous institutions.

I have not been to America for 30 years -- the only previous occasion was in 1883 when I was working there as a mechanical engineer. The developments in the United States the last five years are of especial interest and full of importance, and I am intending studying the same at first hand. Many of the Socialist papers seem to have changed their attitude, and whilst classing themselves as I.W.W. are really identical with the European Syndicalists. I am not quite sure about

this, and shall be careful not to conclude it is so until I have full evidence on the subject.

Rob Ross, I see, is in harness again in Melbourne. I hope he gets at grips with the situation there. To my mind five-sixths of the Australians have yet to unlearn State reliance. It is an awful thing that as regards Militarism the Government and the capitalists of Britain should be able to point to the laboring force of Australasia as an example of the most extreme form of Conscription yet known. Lord Roberts, Baden Powell, Lord Kitchener, and jingoes generally are exceedingly grateful to Australia and to the Labor Party particularly; but I do not think Lord Roberts and Company will

succeed in making every man a soldier in England. The revolutionary seed has not only been sown; it is bearing fruit too, and the crop will continue to increase year by year.

Good luck Harry; [increased] power to you and all your [countrymen.] I hope yet to see the day when [the] intelligently industrially [organised working] class will successfully [challenge and] overthrow the dominant [powers].<sup>1</sup>

Fraternally and sincerely yours,

Tom Mann

## Foreword

Tom Mann

Émile Pouget and Émile Pataud, *How we shall bring about the revolution*, 1913

It is with very great pleasure I write a few words to arrest the attention of fellow workers and direct them to this valuable forecast of the Revolution by our French comrades [Émile] Pataud and [Émile] Pouget. The remarkable change that has taken place in recent years in the revolutionary movement has received its chief inspiration and stimulus from France.

The reliance upon the State, or the confidence that the machinery of the State could be democratised and used by the workers to achieve the Social Revolution or that the State could be used for such a purpose even if it were "captured" by votes, is no longer entertained by whole-hearted Revolutionaries.

In political Socialist ranks, as well as among the reactionaries, the most frequent of all questions is, "How are you going to do it without the State?" This book gives a clear and well-thought-out account of how the writers think it may happen in France: and whilst it cannot be that these precise lines will be followed, all the present day developments compel acquiescence in the main lines of the forecast.

Many will be specially interested in Chapter VII ["The Beginning of the Syndicalist Attack"], where definite action is described to actually achieve the change.

In this and subsequent chapters it will be seen how great an importance is attached to the Trade Unions. It is the Unions that step in, and in the most natural manner assume the responsibilities of provisioning, clothing, and housing the people. The General Federation, in conjunction with the Trades Councils (translated as Labour Exchanges) and the National and Local Unions, become the directing and controlling agencies supervising the carrying on of all necessary services. It

is precisely here that the workers of Britain stand in need of the greatest lesson: that the Unions themselves must at once prepare to accept or take responsibility in the control of all industrial affairs.

Of corresponding importance is it to notice how many times the Authors refer to the great value of the Co-operative Societies. In industry and in agriculture, artisan and peasant alike find the change made easy where Co-operation is known; the lesson to us is, that *all* workers should, without delay be identified with the Co-operative movement, Distributive and Productive.

A hundred objections can be raised no doubt as to the value of the army to the Capitalist class, the difficulties of the workers assuming entire Control, the break up of Parliamentary institutions, the readiness of the agricultural labourers to resort to Direct Action methods, and the Co-operative cultivation of the soil, etc., etc.

That the book is splendidly suggestive, thought provoking and guiding I think all will admit who read it.

With greetings and congratulations to our French Comrades, I earnestly advise all I can reach to read this book, to which it is pleasing to find our grand old comrade [Peter] Kropotkin has written a preface.<sup>2</sup>

Industrial Solidarity and Direct Action methods are being increasingly resorted to here in Britain, and this most interesting and enlightening forecast of the Revolution is sure to help on the movement that will precede the actual Revolution.

Tom Mann.

Manchester, 1913

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<sup>1</sup> This last paragraph was somewhat faded in the original newspaper and the given text is our best guess as to the words Mann actually used. (*Black Flag*)

<sup>2</sup> This important preface is included in *Direct Struggle Against Capital: A Peter Kropotkin Anthology* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2014). (*Black Flag*)

# A Plea for Solidarity

Tom Mann

*The International Socialist Review*, January 1914.

In writing this article commenting upon the experiences I have had during my twenty weeks' run in the United States and the conclusions I have drawn, I desire to say that I do so with some diffidence because necessarily I shall appear as an advisor and instructor in some measure, a position I certainly do not wish to occupy; still if I do not give expression to such news as have grown upon me it would not be fair to those who are really desirous of facing facts in the face.

I had a fairly correct knowledge of the situation in the United States prior to my arrival here as regards the nature and amount of industrial organisation that existed here; and was on the look-out for additional information at every point. What I was anxious to understand at first hand was the particular psychology of the A. F. of L. and I. W. W. at the end of 1913.

My visit has been in no special way remarkable, but I have had opportunities of coming into direct contact with the rank and file of the two bodies referred to at many points and under a variety of conditions.

I have had meetings in some seventy cities between Boston and San Francisco; I have had hundreds of quiet conversations with men who belong to one or other of these organisations, and equally with those who belong to neither, but many of whom have pronounced views concerning both. My mind had long turned towards Pittsburgh as a vitally important industrial centre destined some day to achieve big things in the labour world.

I must express my deep disappointment at finding practically no organisation at all in the district as regards the men in the metal trades. The industry is vaster than I had expected to find it; the organisation of the men is a minus quantity. In the whole of the Westinghouse companies in the Pittsburgh district at which some 25,000 are employed, not two per cent are organised. In the whole of the district, steel workers, engineers, and every variety of machinists with a total of 250,000 men, not three per cent are organised.

I did not expect to find roseate conditions anywhere, but I confess I was surprised to find so considerable a number of steel workers, working twelve hours per shift and seven shifts a week.

A. F. of L. men criticise the I. W. W. and vice versa, and neither are showing any capacity to organise these workers.

It was in the nature of a surprise, too, to find that practically all metalliferous miners regularly work seven shifts a week, even in the places where every man is organised.

To learn that there are districts where coal miners are still paid — not in cash — but in metal checks, to be cashed for household requirements, only at the company's stores, with special prices fixed because of this monopoly, was not an agreeable experience, showing as it does that the economic organisation of the workers is a long way from being efficient in such districts.

It appears that — the most generous computation as to the number organised in the trade unions is three millions, two-thirds of whom are financially related to the A. F. of L.; amongst those not connected with the A. F. of L. are the Bricklayers, also the railroad men. About 400,000 of the latter are organised, or 50 per cent of the whole, i. e., tram employees; the total number of railroad men in U. S. seems to be about 1,900,000 including 650,000 track employees and 360,000 shop workers.

Only a small percentage of those organised in the unions are labourers, whilst there are some fifteen millions of others eligible for organisation, the vast majority of whom are graded as skilled and unskilled labourers.

Amongst these are the migratory workers, compelled by economic pressure to be almost continually on the move; not because they wish to, but because the work is seasonal, and move they must to get the means of life, and to provide labour power for exploiters.

When, in 1905, the Industrial Workers of the World came into existence, it looked as though the principle of labour solidarity would soon find recognition and acceptance and that the interests of the migratory workers would not be neglected. It is greatly to the credit of the I. W. W. that with all the troubles it has been confronted with, it has persisted in voicing the claims of the migratory men. How magnificently the I. W. W. has fought in districts where labour is of quite a different character is well known to all likely to be interested in reading these lines; and more than this, tory men. How magnificently the I. W. W. have done magnificent educational work at the street corners. They have not only spread a knowledge of economics to which the mass of the working populace were strangers, but by a courageous advocacy and bold assertion of human rights, they have inspired many thousands and imparted a confident belief that the time will come when wage slavery will go and a saner system take its place.

All this and much more stands to their credit, and yet, if one looks to find permanent results achieved by the efforts of the I. W. W. outside of what is here described,

if one looks to find definite, tangible, effective organisation, to what extent does it exist?

It seems to me any fair minded person, unwilling to be unwarrantably optimistic, must frankly admit the results are utterly unsatisfactory. It is not as though organisation were a matter of indifference; it is admitted to be fundamental and vital, yet, where is the I. W. W. organisation other than the 14,000 declared to be in financial standing at the convention in September? If this is the net organised result after so much energy, does not the case call for inquiry as to whether the present lines are the right ones?

I admit fully that I may be unable to adequately weigh up the forces, and am quite conscious of the fact that if I try to draw comparisons from other countries I shall be told that the conditions in the United States are altogether different and methods useful elsewhere are not applicable here; but one's opinion may be recorded all the same, and my opinion on this matter is, that there is little or no

difference in the psychology of the labour movement in the United States, and that of the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom, as in the United States, some of the influential members of the unions are reactionary to a degree; they are entirely lacking in appreciation of the real meaning and spirit of class solidarity; they have no knowledge of the real nature of the class struggle; they are quite willing that the labourer shall receive only one-half or less of the amount that they themselves receive as wages. They are primarily concerned to maintain a ring fence about their own particular craft as though the march of machinery and science were not the revolutionary agencies all well informed persons know them to be; yet notwithstanding all these hindrances the unions are the real agencies, the perfectly natural and proper economic institution through which the workers will function and in which the revolutionaries should now be at work.

It matters nothing that some present members of the unions would do all they could to resist any efforts at broadening the basis of the unions, and would do their utmost to keep them sectional — so much is to be expected — but the men of virility and clear vision must work unceasingly to counteract and to nullify reactionary effort, and the trend of the times will favour good results.

It is because we realised the genuineness of the trade union as the natural agency of the organised worker for economic activities, that we syndicalists in Britain

refused to try and build up an organisation outside of the unions; we knew that it was possible by sensible effort inside and outside the unions, to stimulate them to worthy endeavours. The result has entirely justified that conclusion.

When I came to the United States twenty weeks ago I refused to express opinions as to the method of organising here, determining to wait till I had at least had some opportunity of seeing and hearing and learning, and as the result of the peregrinations over not less than 12,000 miles, I am now entirely satisfied that as regards the United States, the right way to organise,

to educate and to ultimately function as controllers of industry is through the unions.

If the fine energy exhibited by the I. W. W. were put into the A. F. of L. or into the existing trade union movement to hasten the day when solidarity shall be shown; all my experience says that the results would be fifty-fold greater than they now are.

**I hold therefore that it is the duty of the revolutionaries to become members of the existing unions, where dual unions exist, merge them at once, unite all on the basis of industry, and tactfully and persistently spread a knowledge of industrial solidarity**

As it is, see what is happening, the I. W. W. men, genuinely in favour of the economic revolution, stand aloof from and show hostility to the existing unions, and the politicians are left free to go in and capture them.

Disaster has followed in every country where the politicians have been allowed to get control of the unions.

In every country in Europe where the politicians exercise an important influence in the unions, economic activity ceases and the hog wash of politics is in the ascendant; I hold therefore that it is the duty of the revolutionaries to become members of the existing unions, where dual unions exist, merge them at once, unite all on the basis of industry, and tactfully and persistently spread a knowledge of industrial solidarity. I verily believe three-fifths of the rank and file of the existing unions are ready for any sensible action that may be resorted to.

I urge the advisability not of dropping the I. W. W. but certainly of dropping all dual organisations and serving as a feeder and purifier of the big movement. Line up with the rest. It is pitiable to find A. F. of L. men berating the I. W. W. and vice versa ; it is at this hour hindering real working class progress, and staving off the revolution.

We need now a Holy Crusade to rope in all workers, to make industrial solidarity a fact, and then to achieve the economic and social revolution. May it come soon.

# ***Freedom on Industrial Unionism***

## **The Future of the Labour Struggle**

*Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism*, June 1910

The return of Tom Mann reminds us that he brings with him a knowledge and experience of the Labour movement in Australia from which we may all learn very much, and as a consequence of which, let us hope, the future of the Labour movement will be something more effective and sensible than mere political campaigning.

Tom Mann stands primarily for the principles of Industrial Unionism, and as these confine themselves almost exclusively to the economic struggle, it seems quite possible that Direct Action may be taken up by Trade Unionists and some real progress made in the organisation of the working class in a revolutionary sense.

In England we have at present a very sinister reaction of the governing class, and at the same time an ominous collapse of the Labour Party, with its narrow political Opportunism and self-seeking ambitions. It is a moment of real danger, and unless the position is realised and new tactics employed, we may be thrown fifty years back, so far, at least, as the Labour struggle is concerned. There have been many things happening of late to prove that Trade Unionism has still a battle to fight to ensure its *effective* existence. The capitalist, with his friend the law, is in reality doing today what was done in the "fifties" of the last century, when, as George Howell has written: "Trade Unions were no longer forbidden by the Statute Law, but there was a widespread design among employers to crush them out by the weight of their own combinations and length of purse, and of using, as far as might be, the strong arm of the law to cripple their action and resources, and thereby render them powerless for the advancement, or even defence, of Labour."

The result of this was, as we know, a period of strikes and lock-outs; the Sheffield "outrages," probably the work of paid agents, and a bitter struggle, to maintain advantages already gained. At the present moment we seem to be face to face with a situation much resembling those times, and, unless new methods with

revolutionary aims are adopted, the time and money and energy of the Labour movement will be frittered away in a fruitless endeavour to stave off by political action the insidious attacks of the masters.

Now, Industrial Unionism is not Anarchism, but in so far as it is non-political it is quite in accord with Anarchist methods. Its first and most important principle is the *solidarity of Labour*, expressed in an industrial organisation which presents a solid front to the masters on the economic battlefield. It also strives for real international solidarity – a thing many Socialists have forgotten of late years. It would use the General Strike when necessary, and all forms of Direct Action would be the logical outcome of its existence. In many

of its features it would answer to the Revolutionary Syndicalism of the French Trade Unions; and as these are not holding their ground so well as might be desired, it may be advisable to point out, some of the difficulties that must almost certainly arise here in England, as elsewhere, in such an organisation as that aimed at.

Two serious dangers always attend working-class organisations. One is officialism, the other is the crushing of individual initiative. The first ought not to be an insuperable obstacle. Think for a moment of the immense amount of routine work that is done voluntarily by people devoted to various movements; some with a serious social or educational object, some merely for sports, pastimes, and

the rest. Indeed, it can be truly said that much is done in Trade Unions themselves by "unofficial persons" – in other words, by the rank-and-file – which is certainly helpful, which opposes no obstacle to individual initiative, but, on the contrary, encourages it, and which claims no pecuniary reward.

Admitted that at present the paid secretary, treasurer, and-organiser cannot be dispensed with, yet it is quite obvious that far too much fuss is made of those who do this work, and a ridiculous importance attaches to the opinions expressed by these persons, who are generally

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*interested* parties. Hence the need for encouraging amongst the workers a greater spirit of independence and self-reliance – an object the Anarchists have always had in view. The fact is, the officialism of the Trade Unions and the Labour Party is only a reflex of the capitalist system – that obsession that makes so many believe we must always have some one at the top to direct us. H. M. Hyndman, speaking at the welcome to Tom Mann at St. James's Hall, pointed out how the skilled workers often look with contempt on the unskilled, and even exploit them. That may be true, but not so true as it was. Yet the S.D.P. has never done so much to remedy this evil as Industrial Unionism would do. And this Tom Mann made abundantly clear. So it is quite possible to *minimise* the evils of paid officialism.

In a word, the evils that may arise from the industrial organisation of the workers – which be it understood, works *with* and not against Trade Unionism – are real, but not insuperable. As to those Anarchists who fear that such an organisation, if it could achieve the Revolution, would end in what may be called “the despotism of Labour,” we can only say, preach

## Tom Mann and the Industrial Union Movement

*Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism*, November 1910

The efforts of Tom. Mann to awaken the British Trade Unionists to a sense of the realities of their position, followed as it will be by an increasing public interest in Industrial Unionism, will be watched by Anarchists with considerable interest, an interest which will be in no sense abated because of our recognition, of the tremendous obstacles to be surmounted. The inertia and apathy which characterise the rank-and-file of our Trade Unions can only be dispelled by a long and persistent propaganda having as its object the development of the revolutionary spirit among the workers.

The ideas being propagated by Tom Mann are, in my opinion, not merely useless, but almost certain to aggravate and intensify the condition of things already existing. His proposals may be briefly summarised as being to make use of the present organisations, but to make them more effective fighting machines by federating the different sections, so that they may act solidarily. He does not propose in any way to destroy the present Unions, but to extend and develop their sphere of action, aiming at the destruction of the sectional spirit, although not destroying the Sectional

Communism everywhere and always – Communism, if you like, without formulas, but never without freedom.

One thing more remains to be said. It is often asked : What do Anarchists who preach antimilitarism propose to do in case of war? Is Germany to be allowed to crush France, Austria, the Balkan States, or England the rest of the world (we think that is the Jingo ideal), ,because we would have no military organisation? The problem is a tremendous one, greater even perhaps than Gustave Hervé realises. But while it would take too long to discuss the whole subject now, one answer, at any rate, is that the international organisation of workers with a genuine ideal of real solidarity, and prepared to use the General Strike *spontaneously* in case of need, would do more to avert the possibilities of capitalistic wars than any one thing we can conceive of.

The Trade Unions have needed the breath of a new ideal to blow away the dry rot of Parliamentary action. Perhaps they may find it in Industrial Unionism. If so, Tom Mann will find plenty of good work to do outside the House of Commons.

Union ; and by means of effective federation to establish Industrial Unions, He decides for a policy of non-Parliamentarianism us against anti-Parliamentarianism.

**It is our duty as revolutionists to make active the revolutionary spirit lying latent in the Unions... To feed this revolutionary spirit it is necessary to break down the present movement towards centralisation... We must decentralise, and as far as possible destroy executive power. Let the workers themselves bear the burden and responsibility of decisive action, let them no longer put their trust in sagacious officials**

In examining his proposals, let us take the last one first. The refusal to take a definitely anti-Parliamentary attitude can only be described as a piece of pure expediency, a truckling to the Parliamentary tradition so strong among British workers. The sitting on-the-fence attitude of the non-Parliamentarian is so illogical as to be quite absurd. The spirit of compromise thus early made manifest augurs ill for the ultimate success of the movement.

In deciding for the retention of the present organisations, Mann has quite evidently failed to get to grips with the root of the problem which he is facing. The curse of Trade Unionism in this country is the centralisation of executive power, with its resultant multiplication of officials. The corresponding stagnation and death of local life and spirit is the inevitable consequence. This centralisation would be

enormously extended and developed by Mann's scheme.

It is quite probable that the present reaction against Parliamentary tactics consequent on the absolute failure of the Labour Party in the House of Commons, and the no less complete futility of the sectional strike, will operate very powerfully in Mann's favour. It seems almost certain that we are on the eve of a great development of our Unions on the lines of the semi-military organisation, which has proved such a complete failure, both in this country and in Germany. A huge, cumbersome, slowly acting machine of the familiar type, in which the slightest tendency towards originality and initiative will be almost certainly ruthlessly stamped out, so that "unity and discipline" may be maintained.

It is our duty as revolutionists to make active the revolutionary spirit lying latent in the Unions. The spirit which is responsible for the heroic struggle of the shipyard boilermakers, the same spirit of solidarity which gave birth to the spontaneous strike of the workers of all grades on the North-Eastern Railway, both struggles entered into not because of the respective organisations, but in spite of them, in direct opposition to the wishes of their own officials. To feed this revolutionary spirit it is necessary to break down the

present movement towards centralisation. Federations and amalgamations will *not* give birth to the spirit of industrial solidarity, yet without this spirit, as recent events have shown us, the most gigantic union is powerless. Given the proper spirit, the great present-day fetish of organisation is useless. It is not merely a positive hindrance, but the ultimate destroyer of the ideals which called it into being. No! the Revolution will not come by means of "National Amalgamated Federations," wherein the spirit of revolt will be suffocated- by the too fond embraces of a clinging officialism.

We must decentralise, and as far as possible destroy executive power. Let the workers themselves bear the burden and responsibility of decisive action, let them no longer put their trust in sagacious officials, who by their petty jealousies and ambitions stifle and stultify them at every turn. Let the workers but once realise the power and the strength which lie in their own concerted and direct action, and the Revolution will have begun. It will come as the result of a new feeling of self-reliance and the mutual confidence of each worker in all workers—the spontaneous expression of the spirit of solidarity.

John Paton

## **Anarchist Methods in Revolutionary Syndicalism**

*Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism*, November 1911

Every schoolboy knows that the Plebeians of ancient Rome obtained concessions from the Patricians by a repeated general strike, which took the form of an exodus of the producing classes to the Aventine Mountains. The same means is used by the people in the despotic States of the Orient; when they are determined to wrest some rights from their oppressors, they close their shops and bazaars till they have gained their cause. This, again, is a perfect form of a general strike.

By strikes and economic struggle, the English workers during the first half of last century, without possessing the vote, obtained great economic advantages, created a powerful Trade Union organisation, and even forced the governing classes to recognise their claims (1869-76) in Labour legislation, including an extended political franchise.

Notwithstanding these experiences, after the defeat of the Paris Commune, when German military reaction spread over Europe, when the teaching of Socialism was corrupted by politicians and people striving for personal advancement in the name of Socialism and working-class interests, the doctrine of legal, Parliamentary, and peaceful tactics began to be preached everywhere.

Only the Federalists of the great International Working Men's Association, grouped around the Jurassian

Federation, remained faithful to the tradition of direct action by the workers in the economic struggle. Only those Federalists, afterwards known as Anarchists, exposed the futility and hypocrisy of those Parliamentary tactics, with their Labour legislation, compulsory arbitration, etc.

But so intimidating and paralysing was the influence of the European reaction of the "seventies" on all classes, that our Anarchist conceptions were considered dangerous even by the workers themselves. The French proletariat having lost nearly 30,000 of its best organised workers during the Commune, was crushed under martial law until 1876-77, and was not allowed to hold public meetings or congresses. The International was prohibited, in France, and every member was liable to imprisonment for five years and more.

Not until 1879 was the first working-class Congress held, in Marseilles; and the most impressive reports dealing with tactics in the economic struggle were presented by Anarchists. The same happened at the next Congress at Havre, the reports on direct action, opposed by the Parliamentary section of the Congress, having been the work of Anarchist delegates. But at that Congress many of those workers who agreed to Parliamentary tactics were nevertheless in sympathy with direct action, and it was decided that "Syndicates" (Trade Unions) must be developed as vigorously as

possible. Those non-Anarchist but Syndicalist workers formed a very active group, to which belonged men like Pelloutier, who were working in full sympathy with us Anarchists. From our side comrades like Guerinau, Tortellier, and others were carrying on an active propaganda of revolutionary direct action and the general strike in their paper *Pot au Colle*, a paper specially published for cabinetmakers.

The movement grew quickly. At the English Trade Union Congress in London, 1888, Tortellier, speaking for the French Unions, in his address developed the idea of the general strike. So

successful was the propaganda of our Anarchist comrades in France, that at the International Socialist Congress of Zurich, against the bitter opposition of Engels, Liebnicht, and other Social Democrats, the French delegates obtained a discussion of the general strike.

From that moment Syndicalism with direct action and the general strike, gained ground so rapidly, that at the next International Socialist Congress in London, 1896, the majority of the French delegates were Anarchists, and this time the general strike was put on the official agenda of the Congress. Not only in France, but also in Spain, Italy, Holland, Germany, and other countries, the ideas of direct action and the general strike were rapidly penetrating; and strike movements, with a tendency to a general strike, became more and more frequent. During the last fifteen years a general strike was declared several times at Barcelona, ending in sanguinary street fights with the police and troops. The same in Italy, at Massa-Carrara; but especially well known is the general strike at Milan in 1898, when guns were used against the people, a barbarity avenged by Bresci.

The power of a general strike was impressively demonstrated in the events of the Russian revolution, when the general strike of the railway, postal, telegraphic, and transport workers declared in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and spread over the whole Empire, paralysed the whole governmental system, and finally wrung from an unwilling tyrant a political amnesty and a Constitution.

This triumph broke down the obstinate opposition of Parliamentarians against the general strike, and even the

German Social Democrats were obliged to recognise the value of this weapon in the social struggle. But in order to save their dignity they declared themselves in favour of a *political* strike!

Such is, in short, the history of the Revolutionary Syndicalism which is now a dominating factor in the working-class movement in France, Italy, Spain, and Holland, and rapidly gaining ground in the Scandinavian countries, Germany, and Austria, notwithstanding the efforts of the capitalists and Social Democratic bureaucracy. Even in Russia, under the

most cruel oppression Revolutionary Syndicalism is making headway among the best elements of the organised workers.

But in England for the last fifteen years no manifestation of the revolutionary spirit was observed. By a strange contradiction, the English working-class movement, which had started with strike tactics and direct action, seemed to rely more and more on Parliamentary action. "Respectable" Labour leaders and Parliamentarians preached the necessity and the beneficial results of Labour representation in Parliament, Labour arbitration, etc. But real life, and economic oppression did not fail to open the eyes of the workers, and at the initiative of the boiler-makers and the Welsh miners, the traditional tactics of direct action were resumed, and the long-pent-up indignation of the workers burst forth in the great railway and transport strike, which was followed by a series of smaller strikes in all branches of industry. What the workers

gained in this short period is well known and is the best proof of the efficiency of the direct action and general strike tactics with which the revolutionary spirit has reawakened.

As the reader sees, our Anarchist propaganda of revolutionary initiative and direct action was long and difficult, but it may be said that Revolutionary Syndicalism is now a living force among the working classes. It is our task to point out to them that these tactics are, however, only the means towards the final aim: the Social Revolution, the abolition of wage-slavery and of State organisation, and the realisation of a free, Communistic society.

**What the workers gained in this short period is well known and is the best proof of the efficiency of the direct action and general strike tactics with which the revolutionary spirit has reawakened.**

# Industrial Unionism

*Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism, March 1912*

Anarchists must regard Industrial Unionism with deep interest and sympathy, if only because that movement insists so much upon the axiom that "they who would be free themselves must strike the blow." Industrial Unionism has already done good service in the Labour struggle both in the United States of America and in Great Britain. The Labour upheaval of 1911 was by no means the unintelligent strike fever which so many people imagined it to be. It is true that the rise in the price of commodities during the last ten years, which had effected a considerable reduction in the purchasing power of wages, and the prevalence of personal tyranny in the industrial world, were to a large extent responsible for the revolts which have taken place; but the education of the working classes in economic matters had been steadily going on, and though many weary years have passed since the task was first undertaken, it has not been unsuccessful, and the first-fruits were the striking demonstrations of discontent and united revolt we witnessed during last year.

The propaganda of Industrial Unionism contributed its share in this awakening of the toilers, a propaganda which found eager sympathisers in very many quarters outside the circle of its avowed adherents, although the work which was being performed was done by people who did not enjoy the limelight of publicity and did not pose as "leaders of men." But the principles and policy of the movement include so much which Anarchists have themselves taught that they are bound to consider the part they should take in its development.

Industrial Unionism insists that the workers must recognise the necessity for combining as a class in order to meet the employers in the most effective manner, and it alleges that the old-fashioned Trade Unionism, by the divisions which it necessarily produces in the workers' ranks, and by the power which that form of organisation places in the hands of officials and "leaders" to make terms and agreements over their heads, no longer possesses the necessary qualities for useful service in the present phase of the Labour struggle. There should be one Union only, including every kind of worker of both sexes, old and young. This is rendered necessary by the fact that one employer or a body of employers may employ the workpeople of fifty or a hundred different crafts, who, divided and hindered in their action by their various organisations, are unable to combat the aggression of their employers by prompt action in one solid body. The general strike would be used whenever necessary, and, as a matter of course, would not be restricted to a section, but include all those workers whose labour might in any way be used to defeat the efforts of those who were directly concerned

in the dispute, The interests of each are to be considered as the interest of all.

The above, in brief, are the methods, The objects of Industrial Unionism are to seize and hold all the means of producing wealth. These are to be held as the collective property of the organised working class, and they will directly control them. But ultimately a Parliament of Industry, which is to be the central directing authority, is advocated by some Industrial Unionists.

International unity and economic organisation are regarded as imperative necessities in the struggle of Labour against Capitalism. But in this economic struggle a political shade or ghost, as it were, is to attend its progress—as the doctrine is promulgated by many of its "advocates"—and a Parliamentary party is to be formed to defend and legalise, if possible, the action of the industrial revolution. There is humour in the idea, and we do not see very well how it could be done. But there, Anarchists are *so* unpractical! Naturally, the necessity for the political ghost is not recognised by many Industrialists, and so a large number have discarded it altogether.

However, it is not our intention to dwell upon differences of opinion inside the movement, but rather to discuss its proposals and its influence generally. We have said that Industrial Unionism has already exerted considerable influence upon the minds of working people in this country, and amongst the effects may be noticed the active efforts in many trades for the linking up of many small sectional Unions in larger combinations wherein united action may be more easily arranged. Mere size, of course, is not the object, nor is it necessarily advantageous, but the abolition of many small and expensive organisations makes simultaneous action for common purposes easier of attainment. Also for years past the tendency to federation of Unions and industries has been growing (though we regret to say that this method makes the Labour "boss" an unpleasant possibility). Now this desire and effort for a closer union amongst working men *has come from the men themselves*. Industrial Unionism has been whispered from end to end of the country, and at a number of conferences, Labour and Socialist, the official wirepullers have had to use their wits to keep it in the background. For without doubt the more such ideas make headway, the more the scope of the leader and the politician diminishes.

Happily, the Anarchists are untroubled by those considerations, and we are at liberty to approve and assist the good side of the movement, and to point out what appears to us to be the evil part. Each one, of

course, must decide for himself; but we think that Anarchists, generally speaking, approve of united action on the part of the working class in efforts to resist capitalist aggression and to effect their economic emancipation. It is no doubt true that Trade Unions, which have played a useful part in the workers' interests in past times, are, on the old lines, to a great extent played out; but it is possible that working men may adapt them, or some of them, by necessary internal changes, to a revolutionary purpose, even making them a portion of the revolutionary Union (of the working class) desired by the advocates of Industrial Unionism.

But is there not a danger that when we have our one solid Union centralisation in control [it] may check the local initiative, and, combined with the dead weight of the slow-moving majority, the Central Council, may hinder that revolt for which the founders of the organisation laboured? It is bad enough in the Labour organisations now, as witness the difficulties against which local rebels amongst coal-mines and railway men contend. We do not maintain that these difficulties cannot be overcome; but if they are to be overcome, then it seems to us that the power and opportunity for action must be decentralised, or the class Union will impose a new form of tyranny upon its members. Moreover, the power of a reactionary section, who, well organised, had got control of the organisation, might easily paralyse its action or render it abortive. So far as we have been able to see, there is no more safeguard in the proposed new form of Labour organisation than in the old—indeed, less—except that Industrial Unionism, as at present expounded, would reduce the purely official element to a minimum. But the workers' opportunity to revolt is little enough now, and it is imperative that this contingency should not be overlooked, even as a matter of theory. Speaking frankly, we think that no central body could respond to the multifarious needs of all sections of Labour in every part of this island. They who suffer know best where the shoe pinches, and the best part of the teaching of Industrial Unionism is that which enjoins upon the workers the necessity of responding at once, in a body, to the cry for help of their oppressed brethren. Centralisation would hinder, not aid, such action.

It seems to us that knowledge is far more important than the form of organisation. Workers possessing the necessary knowledge and sympathy with their fellows may act, as they did last year, in advance of, or apart

from, or even in defiance of, the organisation. But without knowledge, sympathy, and the spirit of revolt they are helpless and hopeless.

With regard to the political ghost, we notice that many Labour and Socialist politicians are saying “Industrial Unionism—oh! very good. But you must allow us to organise you on the political field.”. Their audacity in this respect is amusing. On the one hand we have a statement of principles which declares that the vital necessity of the time is the economic organisation of the workers for purposes absolutely contrary to the political Constitution and authority, and which proves that a *revolutionary* attack upon capitalist society is necessary; and on the other hand, a number of politicians who can by no stretch of reasoning harmonise their Parliamentary efforts with a movement which must absolutely set aside both them and the institutions to which they belong as of no account in the life of the people—except as enemies. They are to do something—what, no one knows. But these human Providences *must* thrust their services upon some one.

**But is there not a danger that when we have our one solid Union centralisation in control [it] may check the local initiative, and, combined with the dead weight of the slow-moving majority, the Central Council, may hinder that revolt for which the founders of the organisation laboured?**

As regards the ultimate Parliament of Industry—the new central authority—we need only point out that it would be no more capable of managing the industries, etc., of forty millions of people in this country than the central political cliques with their highly paid “experts” (the dream of the State Socialists). In the age of Common Sense people will decline their services (politely or otherwise), and manage their own concerns better and more cheaply for themselves.

That Industrial Unionism seeks the overthrow of Capitalism; that it places above all else in importance the economic struggle; that it seeks to remove the petty differences of “craft” and to destroy the power of those who mislead and divide the workers on both the political and industrial fields; that it teaches and promotes the international solidarity of Labour; that it advocates the General Strike and Direct Action by the workers for their own emancipation—are all ideas with which we may sympathise strongly; but we submit that it is the function of Anarchists, whether in that movement or out of it, to keep boldly before the eyes of mankind the necessity of removing that great obstacle to their happiness and their development, that relic of the ignorance and slavery of past ages, government of, man by man.

# Correspondence: Industrial Unionism and Anarchist Communism

*Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Communism* (March 1912)

Dear Comrades

The line of argument adopted by Comrade Stubbs is rather peculiar. Finding himself getting into difficulties, he has gone off the original discussion at a tangent; He accuses me of assuming that . because many members of the I.W.W. are Anarchists, that therefore all Industrial Unionists are Anarchists. He has merely made another mistake. Such an assumption would be, in my opinion, every whit as absurd as his own deduction that because some members of the I.W.W. are opposed to Anarchy, that therefore all Industrial Unionists are anti-Anarchists. The following quotation from *FREEDOM* of June, 1910, could hardly be cited in support of his deduction:—"But we were to be luckier still that day, for after some time members of the Industrialist League approached, courteously inviting us to their waggon at the very top of the ground, enabling us to view the whole range of things, thus giving us the biggest meeting in Bradford on that May Day afternoon. (It appeared that the Industrialist League speakers had not turned up, so they utilised ours as kindred spirits.)"

Let me state in a few words my position with regard to Industrial Unionism. I find that many Industrial Unionists are avowed Anarchists, and many others are virtually Anarchists without knowing it: the balance is fast becoming a negligible quantity, as it is being absorbed by the other sections. I hold, therefore, that all working-class Anarchists should join the I.W.W. It is the most advanced section of the organised workers, and affords a splendid field for propaganda.

In his first letter Comrade Stubbs said:—"There is nothing in their literature, so far as I have been able to discover, to lead one to believe that they are in any way sympathetic towards a non-governmental form of society, whilst there is abundance of evidence to show that they do not favour Anarchy." In his second letter he says:—"Failing, then, any definite statement as to

whether Industrial Unionists are aiming at an Anarchical form of society, we have to judge by the general tone of their literature, and in this respect. I declare there is 'abundance of evidence' that they are not Anarchists." Why has he altered the tone of his first statement? I appreciate at their real value his reasons for not producing "abundance of evidence." To judge by the general tone of their literature, I submit that the Industrialists are, consciously or unconsciously, propagating Anarchism under their own label.

I do not agree with White Slave "that the Industrialist League's preamble is necessarily antagonistic to Anarchy." There is a striking similarity between his quotation from the preamble and the concluding paragraph of the article ["The Development of the American Labour Movement"] by Lucy E. Parsons which appeared in *FREEDOM* last month. That paragraph read as follows:—"The crisis has come between Capital and Labour. The day for Industrial Unionism is here. It is in the line of evolution; it is the logic of events and of conditions over the development of which no man or set of men have had control. The workers must at once organise industrially to meet the new conditions, or they and theirs will be threatened with the fate of becoming hopeless slaves!" It may interest "White Slave" to learn that I have been a member of the Industrialist League for a considerable time. The other members with whom I happen to be acquainted are also Anarchist Communists, and include some of the most influential members of the League.

I have written this letter under a different heading to prevent a . possible misunderstanding. It is not my aim to advocate Industrial: Unionism *in preference to* Anarchist Communism.

—Yours fraternally,

INDUSTRIALIST

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Those who know the real attitude of syndicalists towards parliament, know full well that our ignoring of parliamentary methods is not as the manifesto states, because the present Labour Party in the House of Commons has failed to voice the real needs of the people. Our objection is a much more serious one, it is that parliament is part of the decaying capitalist regime, an institution wholly unsuited to afford the workers opportunities of getting control of the industries and the wealth produced by the workers in these industries. We look upon parliament as utterly unsuited to the enabling of the workers to apply their own labour in the controlling and ultimate owning of all wealth-producing agencies. Many members of the British Socialist Party claim for parliament that it is an excellent platform for propaganda purposes, but they frankly admit its uselessness for the purposes of revolution and reconstruction of society. We declare it to be not of the smallest value that there should be a few socialist speeches made in such a place. Such speeches would give the workers no power nor would they send fear to the hearts of the capitalists. Naturally the capitalists will fear nothing until they find they are losing the power to control the working class. Our syndicalist method is the encouragement of the working class to control itself. There is absolutely no agency in existence or projected at all suitable to this great work except the industrial organizations of the workers. Industrial solidarity is the one and only all-powerful agency through which and by which work will be controlled, all unemployment solved, and capitalist exploitation stopped forever.

— "Tom Mann On Parliament", *Mother Earth*, September 1913

# Lessons from the Historic Fight Against Fascism

Wayne Price

In the United States and around the world, there has been a rise of right-wing authoritarianism, including fascist and semi-fascist forces. This has caused many to consider the history of European fascism and the fight against it in the 'twenties and 'thirties. Unfortunately, the lessons taken from that history are often dangerously wrong.

I will look at that history and what I think are the conclusions we should draw. But first I will discuss what "fascism" is. By "fascism" I do not mean just any sort of authoritarianism, any kind of political repression, or any politics I do not like. Bourgeois representative democracy (or "liberal democracy") may be quite repressive by itself. For example, the period after World War II, the 1950s, was called the "Golden Age of Capitalism." It was also the height of the anti-communist hysteria, McCarthyism, Hoover's FBI, the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Hollywood blacklist, the purge of Communists from the labour unions and schools, and Truman's government loyalty oaths. The US Communist Party (whose top leaders were imprisoned) decided that the US was going fascist and sent other leaders underground. They were wrong, the US remained a limited bourgeois democracy, mainly due to the unprecedented post-war prosperity. (By comparison, today's right-wing is expanding in the context of economic, political, health, and ecological crises.)

Nor should we limit the term "fascist" to those movements which are precisely like Mussolini's Fascist Party or the Nazis. History repeats but never exactly. By "fascism," I mean a right-wing movement which aims at overturning capitalist democracy while maintaining capitalism. It ends elections (or has "elections" with only one party), bans independent newspapers or other media, outlaws oppositional speech, and imprisons or kills political opponents. Old-time military juntas or monarchies left people alone if they did not challenge the authorities. Fascism, instead, is "totalitarian." It demands public support from everyone. With all this, the fascist state will keep big business humming along, making more profits than ever, without unions to protect the workers. (I am not discussing the similarities and differences between fascist and Stalinist totalitarianism.)

Fascist ideologies and overt programs are varied, illogical, vague, and irrational. They usually are nationalist, mystical, nativist, and racist. To compete

with the Socialist and Communist parties in 'twenties Germany, the fascists called themselves the National Socialist German Workers Party, that is, Socialist-Workers as well as National-German. Now, in the U.S.A., the far-right claims to be in the US tradition of loving "freedom," individualism, and "small government." Meanwhile they propose to ban women's right to choose abortions and to build up the police and military—not very libertarian or small-governmental.

To achieve power and then to maintain power, the fascists build popular movements, mostly of lower middle class (and upper working class) elements. This gives them a mass base, a force greater than that of a police or military coup. These movements use violence to break down the barriers of legality to which their liberal and conservative opponents cling. However, fascists are willing to also use legal manoeuvres. The Italian Fascists and the German Nazis had many representatives elected to their respective parliaments before they took power. Mussolini was officially appointed prime minister by the king. Hitler was named Chancellor by the elected President.

## The Fight Against the Rise of Italian Fascism

After the First World War, Italy (which had been on the winning side) was devastated by material and human destruction and economic crisis. There was much poverty and unemployment, and the ruin of middle layers. Earlier, in June 1914, a wave of working class insurrection had swept the country. After the war there were the "two red years" of 1919—1920. Centred in the industrialized north, the workers struck and occupied the factories, forming workers' councils. Italy teetered on the edge of a workers' revolution, but the leadership of the main union federation was Socialists. Unlike today, the Socialist Parties of that time claimed to be for a new, socialist, society, although in practice they compromised with the big industrialists. This is just what they did in Italy during the strike wave. The anarcho-syndicalists had played a major role in the occupations and were disgusted by the Socialists' sell-out. The well-known anarchist, Errico Malatesta, warned the workers and peasants, "*Complete the revolution quickly or the bourgeoisie sooner or later will make us pay with tears of blood for the fear that we have instilled in them today.*" (Pernicone 1993; p. 294) He could not have been more prescient.

Discharged soldiers, with no futures, formed the core of reactionary vigilante groups, often led by former

officers. These were the “Arditi” (“commandos”). The most successful group was led by Benito Mussolini, who had previously been in the left-wing of the Socialist Party, sympathetic to the revolutionary syndicalists. Now he organized his forces into the Fascist Party, with subsidies from the rich. The Fascists roamed the country, focusing on specific towns or cities, one at a time, violently attacking union halls and left-wing gatherings, trashing left-wing newspaper offices, and beating and killing prominent radicals. (Riddell 2018) Note that the issue was never “free speech for fascists,” but that they committed physical crimes. They got away with these acts of aggression due to sympathetic police and judges.

Italian anarchists called for a united front against the Fascist gangs. (Rivista Anarchica 1989) The anarchists (anarcho-syndicalists) were a significant minority, leading their own union federation, the Unione Anarchica Italiana. They called for unity in action of the left parties and their unions, to physically combat the Fascists, to defend workers’ institutions, and to drive the Fascists off the streets. To the extent that they could, they carried out this strategy, with whomever would work with them. They supported the rank-and-file defense organization, the “Arditi del Popolo” (“people’s commandos”). Beside anarchists, these included supporters of the Socialist and Communist parties (the Communists having by now split off from the Socialists). They also included radical republicans (militant anti-monarchists). In a number of towns and cities, the Arditi del Popolo did drive out Mussolini’s invading goons.

However, the Socialist Party leadership would not join such radical activities. Instead of organized self-defence, they demanded that the capitalist government pass laws to reign in the lawless Fascists. Some laws were passed, but were dead letters due to the sympathies for the Fascists of the police and courts. In August 1921, the Socialist Party actually negotiated a truce, a so-called Pact of Pacification, with the Fascists. This disarmed the Socialists but was ignored by the Fascists of course. Limiting themselves solely to legality and parliamentary politics, the Socialists were like lambs to the slaughter.

The Communist Party also did not support the Arditi del Popolo nor join any kind of united anti-fascist front. At the time, it was led by Amedeo Bordiga (then supported by Antonio Gramsci). Then and later, Bordiga was extremely authoritarian and super-sectarian. He did not

believe that Communists should join a united front unless they could control it. He forbade members from joining the Arditi del Popolo or working with the anarchists. (Some years later Bordiga was expelled from the Communist International, not so much for his continued opposition to united fronts but for criticisms of Stalin. His views are still influential among some far-left Marxists.)

So both the Socialists and the Communists—each in their own way—sabotaged the possibility of a united front to fight Italian fascism. Without effective opposition, at the end of 1922, the Fascist Party took power. It had the blessings of the monarchy and the mainstream capitalist parties. Feeling their way through a period when they superficially maintained limited democratic institutions, the Fascists eventually established a totalitarian state—which would serve as a model for Hitler. As Malatesta had warned, the bourgeoisie made the Italian workers “pay with tears of blood.”



### The Fight Against the Rise of Nazism

The rise to power of the Nazi Party is more well known in the US. After World War I, Germany suffered through hard times, which got worse as the Great Depression spread worldwide. There were two attempted workers’ revolutions (both brutally defeated) and an ongoing class war between the workers and right-wing groups led by former officers. Again, the issue was not “free speech” but the violent aggression of the Nazis and other reactionary groupings. The right spread its Big Lie that the only reason Germany had lost the war was due to a “stab in the back,” betrayal by Social Democrats and Jews. Class conflict and threats to profits caused big business to become willing to hire the Nazis to take over the government. They became the biggest single party in the Reichstag (parliament) but never won a majority.

On the left, the largest party was the Social Democratic Party. It was sometimes in the government and sometimes out, always relying on legality and parliamentary manoeuvring. When a revolution had broken out at the end of the war, the Social Democrats had allied with the right wing military to put it down with bloodshed (killing Rosa Luxemburg). The result was to replace the monarchy by the Weimar Republic, a limited bourgeois democracy but not a socialist revolution.



In the pivotal presidential election of 1932, the Social Democrats decided that it was all-important to keep Hitler out. So they endorsed, as a “lesser evil,” the conservative old general, Paul von Hindenberg. Their slogan was “Smash Hitler, Elect Hindenberg!” With socialist support, von Hindenberg won. But the economic and political crisis was not solved. After a period of manoeuvring and negotiating, President Hindenberg...appointed Hitler as Chancellor! The reformist socialists ended up with the “greater evil” after all.

The other left party was the Communists, smaller than the Social Democrats but still of significant size and influence. By the end of the ‘twenties it had become completely subservient to the Russian government of Stalin. Independent thinkers, followers of the tradition of Luxemburg, Trotskyists, and far-left Marxists, had all been driven out. Whatever the Russian leadership (that is, Stalin) said, was it. This was true for all parties in the Communist International.

After the defeat in Italy, the Communist International had adopted a program of calling for united fronts of workers parties and unions to fight fascism. But by 1928 the CI abandoning that for a new, bizarre, program. It announced that revolution was immediately sweeping the world and that all parties should abandon all support for reforms in favour of imminent revolution (this was called the “Third Period”). They should quit all unions that did not have “revolutionary” (Communist) programs. It was declared that all political forces which did not subordinate themselves to the Communist Parties were not merely reformist but were “fascist.” Social Democrats were now officially “social fascists.” Liberals and conservatives were fascists. Every non-Communist was a fascist. Anarchists were “anarcho-fascists.” Obviously there was no point in allying with socialists or unionists against the fascists, since socialists and unionists were also fascists. They had re-created, if anything in a worse form, all of Bordiga’s errors.

Joseph Stalin declared, “*Fascism is the militant organization of the bourgeoisie which bases itself on the active support of the Social Democracy. Objectively, Social Democracy is the moderate wing of fascism.... These organizations [fascists and Social Democrats] do not contradict but supplement one another. They are not antipodes but twins.*” (Price 2007; p. 153)

Despite its pretences, the leadership of the Social Democratic party had no intention of really overthrowing capitalism and its state. It was reformist, not revolutionary. But it relied on elections to parliament, free speech, freedom of association, freedom to form labour unions, and other democratic rights. Without these bourgeois-democratic institutions and rights it would lose everything. The fascists intended to smash all these democratic forms and liberties while setting up a dictatorship. Both fascists

and reformist socialists were supporters of capitalism, but they supported it in clashing ways.

Of those who tried to work out a revolutionary alternative to the programs of the Social Democrats and the Communists, it is worthwhile to note the views of Leon Trotsky—by then exiled from Russia by Stalin. He had few followers, especially in Germany at the time, probably less than the German anarchists or far-left Marxists. However, he left a record of political polemic which is useful to examine—although I am not a Trotskyist nor even a Marxist. (Trotsky 1971)

Trotsky proposed that the Communists and Social Democrats, their parties, unions, and other organizations, should form a fighting alliance—a united front. In every city and neighbourhood they would set up joint defence committees. They would defend each other from Nazi assaults. Mutual patrols would drive the Nazis from the streets. They would map out Nazi halls and headquarters and bring the fight to them. Committees in shops and offices would check how business was supporting the fascists. In case the Nazis took power regionally or nationally, they would work out plans for a general strike. This was not a political merger but an alliance. “*March separately, strike together!*” Trotsky wrote. Over time he expected that the workers would compare the parties and chose the more militant and radical leaders. The committees might even become the basis for revolutionary workers’ councils (as the strike committees in Russia had become revolutionary soviets).

This never happened. The Social Democrats stuck to constitutional legality. The Communists denounced Trotsky as another fascist. Anarchist and other far-left groupings were too small to make a difference in time. In 1933 Hitler took full power. It was to take the combined efforts of Stalinist Russia, the British empire, and US imperialism to defeat the Nazis and Fascists. Not only the German and Italian workers but much of the world would “pay with tears of blood” for the failure of workers’ revolutions to prevent the rise of fascism.

### **Lessons to be Learned and Un-learned**

The most common reference I hear to the rise of fascism is from liberals. They denounce the sectarianism and isolation of the Communists in Germany (and implicitly in Italy) at the time. This becomes a rationale for voting for Democrats against the Republicans.

This would be relevant if they were calling on the labour unions and the organized African-American community as well as migrants, environmentalists, and women’s groups to strike and demonstrate against far-right Republicans, including right-wing “militias” and organized thugs. But voting for the Democrats means supporting a capitalist and imperialist party.

This view completely ignores the record of the German and Italian Social Democrats. They relied on the bourgeois-democratic parties and the state to protect them from fascism. The Germans endorsed a conservative capitalist figure for president. These policies led to defeat. Even in this extreme political situation of Germany, one of life or death, the strategy of supporting the “lesser evil” did not work.

It also ignores the further development of the Communist Parties. A few years after the victory of Hitler, in 1935, they jumped over their heads in a leap to the right. Not only did they now endorse alliances with Social Democrats (the former “social fascists”) but they now sought political unity with liberal, capitalist, parties. This was the “Popular Front.” An alliance with other workers’ parties could imply a class-

against-class revolutionary struggle. But an alliance with liberal parties meant that they were committed to not going beyond the limits of capitalism, since the liberals would not accept that. This policy was implemented in the Spanish civil war and in French mass struggles—in both cases leading to the victory of fascists. (In Spain, the mainstream anarchists also joined in Popular Front governments with Social Democrats, Communists, and liberal bourgeois parties—against the opposition of some anarchists such as the Friends of Durruti Group.)

The other wrong lesson some take from this history is a focus on street fighting and direct confrontation. Both the Italian anarchists and Trotsky advocated direct conflicts with the fascists instead of relying on the courts or elections—and they were right. But the forces they called to fight the fascists were mass organizations, big political parties and labour unions. Fighting fascists is necessary but not as distinct from working to win over the majority of the population. Otherwise it becomes, as has been said, “vanguards against vanguards.”

The need to confront fascist rallies does not mean physically fighting against right-wing supporters of bourgeois democracy, such as conservatives. The issue, as I have said, is not and was not “free speech for fascists,” but the right of fascists and semi-fascists to terrorize, violently attack, and break up left wing demonstrations, radical bookstores, union pickets, and to lynch African-Americans, Asian-Americans, or LGBTQ people.

The radical left must not let the far right appear to be the defenders of “free speech.” As a political minority, the far-left depends on the wide-spread belief in free

speech and association to defend itself from state repression. Anarchists and other anti-fascists must oppose all government repression of political viewpoints; they should oppose the efforts of Biden and other Democrats to create new “anti-domestic terrorism” laws. These will start with the far-right but soon be used against the left. Of course the government will arrest people for violent actions (such as the

Capitol invasion) but should not repress speech. Opposition to state repression of free speech and assembly does not prevent anti-fascists from organizing self-defence against far-right aggression.

### Conclusion

Currently the United States as well as much of the world is threatened by a rise of right-wing authoritarianism. In the US, one of its two parties has swung far to the right. From its leadership around Donald Trump (even those who do not like him personally) to its core

of big donors, the Republican Party is hard right-wing. Its deluded base is around 30 to 40 percent of the public, including a minority of people prepared to directly attack the government (as was done in the Capitol disruption). The Democratic Party is weak in opposition. (Price 2020)

The country is not immediately under threat of fascism or even a Republican coup. But continuing crises and disruptions—political, economic, climate, military, public health, or other—could crash the system. The alternatives, once again, could be some sort of fascism, or a libertarian socialist revolution. In that case, we would do well to review what can be learned from previous failures to defeat the rise of fascism.

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**Anarchists and other anti-fascists must oppose all government repression of political viewpoints... These will start with the far-right but soon be used against the left.**

# Lessons from Spain's *Mujeres Libres*: Anarchism & the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women

Martha Ackelsberg

*Fifth Estate*, Spring 2006

In 1936, groups of women in Madrid and Barcelona founded *Mujeres Libres*, an organisation dedicated to liberation from their “triple enslavement to ignorance, as women, and as producers.” While it lasted for less than three years (its activities in Spain were brought to an abrupt halt by the victory of Franco’s forces in February 1939), *Mujeres Libres* mobilised over 20,000 women, and developed an extensive network of activities designed to empower individual women while building a sense of community.

Like the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement in which they were rooted, *Mujeres Libres* insisted that the full development of their individuality was dependent upon the development of a strong sense of connection with others.

Those who established *Mujeres Libres* were all deeply committed to the larger anarchist movement and its goals. But they found the existing organisations of that movement inadequate to address the specific problems confronting them as women, whether in the movement itself or in the larger society.

They came to insist that a separate organisation, devoted to emancipation—to freeing women from their triple enslavement: enslavement to ignorance, as women, and as workers—was essential both to women and to the success of the larger movement. In this brief piece, I will locate *Mujeres Libres* in the context of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement—what it offered, what its limits were, and then explain why—in that case—women thought it necessary to create an autonomous women’s organisation.

Anarchism aims to abolish hierarchy and structured relations of domination and subordination in society, and to create a society based on equality, mutuality, and

reciprocity in which each person is valued and respected as an individual.

This social vision is combined with a theory of social change, two dimensions of which were particularly critical to understanding *Mujeres Libres*’ visions and actions: a) means must be consistent with ends; and b) people cannot be directed into a future society, but must create it themselves, recognising, thereby, their own abilities and capacities.

Further, some nineteenth-century anarchist writers and activists, both in Spain and elsewhere, specifically addressed themselves to the subordination of women in their societies, and insisted that full human emancipation required not just the abolition of

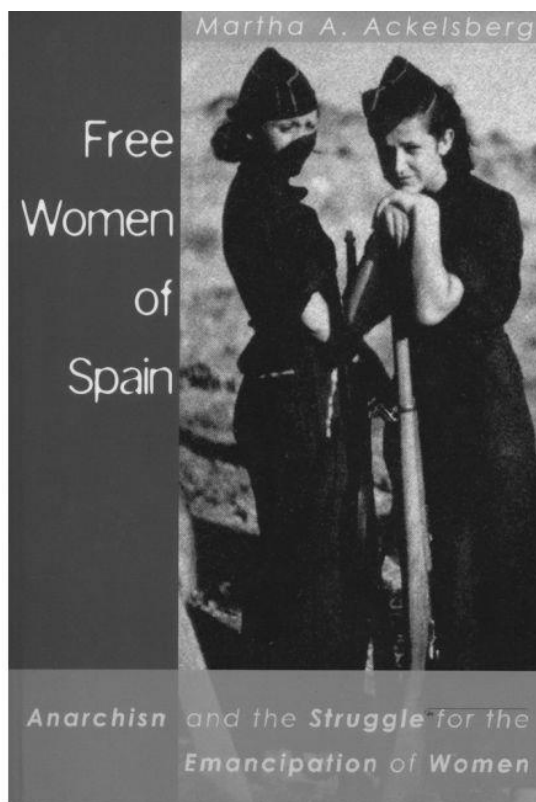
capitalism and of authoritarian political institutions, but the overcoming of women’s cultural and economic subordination, both within and outside the home.

For example, as early as 1872, an anarchist congress in Zaragoza, Spain, declared that women ought to be full equals of men in the home and in the workplace.

However, neither theory of anarchism nor the practice of anarcho-syndicalism in Spain was egalitarian in the full sense of the word. Although many writers acknowledged the importance of women’s emancipation to the anarchist project, and the importance of them to the movement, few gave those concerns top priority. As was the case with socialist movements

throughout Europe, many anarchists treated the issue of women’s subordination as, at best, secondary to the emancipation of workers, a problem which would be resolved “on the morrow of the revolution.”

Thus, although the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist movement offered the promise of fully integrating a



concern with the subordination of women into a theory of radical social transformation, that promise was not fulfilled in practice. Despite the apparent awareness at the core of anarchist theory that relations of domination were manifold and complex, attention to the subordination of women was repeatedly given lower priority than the oppression of male workers. *Mujeres Libres* was founded to address itself to this and other shortcomings of the movement.

### ***Mujeres Libres and Anarchist Understandings of Social Change***

As I noted above, *Mujeres Libres* was created by women who were, themselves, deeply-rooted within the larger anarcho-syndicalist movement. They, too, rejected domination in all its forms, and looked toward a society characterised by mutual respect and reciprocity, in which each person would be valued and respected as an individual. They recognised that economic organisation—and structures of power and dominance based on control over the means of production—was an important source of power and inequality. They noted that such relationships dehumanise both the powerful and the relatively powerless, and insisted that the only way out of such relationships was through the self-organisation of the disempowered/subordinate.

The process of organising and struggling collectively changes people's perceptions of themselves, raises consciousness, empowers, and enables people to create a new reality. At the same time, they did not privilege economics, insisting that it was necessary to confront all forms of hierarchically-structured power, not just those based in economic relations (e.g. including the state, church, and men over women). And, perhaps most importantly, they took to heart the anarchist insistence on the relationship between means and ends in social struggles. You cannot create an egalitarian society through authoritarian means; any truly revolutionary process must create an egalitarian society in its practices. At the same time (and perhaps a bit paradoxically), "You can't improvise a revolution"—people must prepare for it.

In the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist context, that meant (a) direct action: revolutionary activity must begin where people are, not through intermediaries (e.g., political parties). And, they must be activities which change the realities in which people live. In Spain,

anarchists advocated – and supported – union organising and work-place strikes, but also “quality of life” protests and other forms of community. The other crucial feature of this approach was (b) education, in a variety of forms. They believed strongly that literacy would contribute to an improved sense of self, and greater ability to gain information about the world. Thus, anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists created “rationalist schools” and ateneos (storefront cultural centres) in the early years of the 20th century, designed for both adults and children.

They organised and supported an extensive array of cultural centres, youth groups, drama groups, a variety of outdoor and informal activities that would contribute to “enculturation,” literacy, a sense of what Martin

Luther King, Jr. would later call a sense of “somebodyness.” These sorts of activities—particularly those connected to cultural/literacy programs—were a “signature” element of anarchist organising in both rural and urban areas.

### **The Subordination of Women**

Some anarchist writers in the early years of the 20th century used the example of what happened to women in male-dominated society to illustrate their claims about the disempowering effects of hierarchy in general. But that did not mean that all (or even most) male anarchists (or anarcho-syndicalist organisations) were committed to the liberation of women as a significant priority for the movement. In fact, the

movement in Spain was divided both about the place of women in working-class organisations, and about the nature of women's subordination and what would be necessary to overcome it.

There were two dominant streams of thought in Spain about male-female relationships during the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. One followed the work of Proudhon, and treated women, essentially, as reproducers, who contribute to society in and through their role in the home and family. A second, with roots in Bakunin's views, asserted that women were equal to men and that the key to women's emancipation would be their full incorporation into the paid labour force on equal terms with them. The official position of the CNT [Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, the anarcho-syndicalist labour union confederation] followed this second view. But that was no guarantee that the

**Despite the apparent awareness at the core of anarchist theory that relations of domination were manifold and complex, attention to the subordination of women was repeatedly given lower priority than the oppression of male workers.**

majority of CNT members would act in accordance with that commitment.

But there was, in addition, a third view—held mostly by women within the movement (but not only)—that organising women into unions would not, in itself, be sufficient. Those who held to this perspective (one articulated, for example, by Emma Goldman) insisted that the sources of women’s subordination were broader and deeper than economic exploitation at the workplace. Therefore, women’s subordination was as much a cultural, as an economic phenomenon, and reflected a devaluation of women and their activities mediated through institutions such as family and church. Some located woman’s subordination in her reproductive role, and in the double standard of sexual morality, arguing that these, too, would have to change.

### **Movement Organisations & Women’s Subordination**

“All those *compañeros*, however radical they may be in cafes, unions, and even affinity groups [FAI – Federaci6n Anarquista Iberica, Iberian Anarchist Federation], seem to drop their costumes as lovers of female liberation at the doors of their homes. Inside, they behave with their *compa˜eras* just like common husbands.” – Kyralina [Lola Iturbe]

Most women reported that male colleagues (in unions, youth groups, cultural centres) did not always treat them with respect. As Enriqueta Rovira (who came from a large family of anarchist activists) said she told her comrades: “It’s true that we have struggled together, but you are always the leaders, and we are always the followers. Whether in the streets or at home, we are little better than slaves!” Women virtually always found themselves in a minority among activists in unions or *ateneos*, which meant that it was difficult to get other women involved—especially when their small numbers made them particularly vulnerable to sexist comments or actions from their male comrades.

A few of their stories help to recall the atmosphere of the time.

1. Azucena Fernandez Barba had two parents deeply committed to the movement. She and sisters (who included Enriqueta Rovira) and brother helped found the *ateneo Sol y Vida* in Barcelona. But, she stated, “inside their own homes, [men] forgot completely about women’s struggle. It’s the same as—to use an analogy—a man who is obsessed with playing cards. They go out to play cards, and they do it regardless of what’s going on in the house. The same with us—only it wasn’t cards, but ideas....They struggled, they went out on strike, etc. But inside the house—worse than nothing.”

2. Pura Perez Benavent Arcos also noted that men did not seem to take women seriously, whether at home or in more “public/political” context. She reported that when girls went to meetings of the *Juventudes* (the

anarchist youth movement), the boys would often laugh at them even before they spoke!

3. Pepita Carpena, long active in the CNT and *Juventudes* in Barcelona, told this story about one of her experiences with a *compa˜ero* from the *Juventudes*:

I’ll tell you a story – because, for me, what has always been my saving grace is that I’m very outgoing, and I’m not bashful about responding to people who give me a hard time...

One time, a *compa˜ero* from the *Juventudes* came over to me and said, “You, who say you’re so liberated. You’re not so liberated”—I’m telling you this so you’ll see the mentality of these, these men— “because if I would ask you to give me a kiss, you wouldn’t.”

I just stood there staring at him, and thinking to myself, “How am I going to get out of this one?” And then I said to him, “Listen: when I want to go to bed with a guy, I’m the one that has to choose him. I don’t go to bed with just anyone,” I said. “You don’t interest me, as a man. I don’t feel anything for you...Why should you want me to ‘liberate myself,’ as you put it, by going to bed with you? That’s no liberation for me. That’s just making love simply for the sake of making love.”

“No,” I said to him, “love is something that has to be like eating: if you’re hungry, you eat; and if you want to go to bed with a guy, then...”

“Besides, I’m going to tell you something else. Perhaps you’ll get angry at me—(this I did just to get at him, no?)—your mouth doesn’t appeal to me...And, I don’t like to make love with a guy without kissing him.”

He was left speechless! But I did it with a dual purpose in mind...because I wanted to show him that that’s not the way to educate *compa˜eras*... That’s what the struggle of women was like in Spain – even with men from our own group – and I’m not even talking about what it was like with other guys.

These attitudes and behaviours reflected some of the variety of views that had been developing on women’s proper place—both in society and in a revolutionary movement. Despite an official commitment to women’s equality, the organisation of women workers was rarely, if ever, taken seriously. Many male anarchists effectively viewed women more as “helpmates” than as active revolutionaries.

Further, although women actively joined unions in the late 19th century—and even constituted a majority of members in some textile locals—they were rarely represented in union leadership. The practice of anarcho-syndicalist unions – whether with respect to the

mobilisation of women workers or to the incorporation of “women’s issues” into the syndical agenda – tended to lag rather far behind its ideological commitment to women’s equal inclusion.

### ***Mujeres Libres: Captación and Capacitación***

In this context, between 1934 and 1936, women began to discuss the specific subordination of women within the movement—and ways to organise to address it. Why a separate organisation for women? Not because they didn’t trust men; and not because men were not ready to commit themselves to women’s equality. Rather, because only through their own autonomous, self-directed actions would women come to recognise their own capacities and be able to participate as equals within the revolutionary movement. Lucia Sanchez Saornil, who was to be one of the three co-initiators of *Mujeres Libres*, wrote in 1935:

It is not he [the male *compañero*] who is called upon to set out the roles and responsibilities of the woman in society, no matter how elevated he might consider them to be. No, the anarchist way is to allow the woman to act freely herself, without tutors or external pressures; that she may develop in the direction that her nature and her faculties dictate.

Groups started meeting in a variety of cities and towns throughout the country, with different foci. In Terrassa, women textile workers, all members of the clandestine CNT union, started meeting in 1928. Their purpose: to become comfortable speaking in a group, and to discuss issues (work or salaries, for example) that they might wish to raise in union assemblies. As a result of these meetings, the union included the right of women to equal salary with men for equal work, and eight weeks of paid maternity leave in its demands as early as 1931.

In Barcelona, a group began to form late in 1934. It brought together women who were involved in CNT unions with the goal of fostering solidarity and encouraging them to take more active roles in their unions and in the movement. As Soledad Estorach (one of those who called that first meeting) reported,

In Catalonia, at least, the dominant position was that men and women should both be involved. But the problem was that the men didn’t know how to get women involved as activists. Both men and most women thought of women in a secondary status.

For most men, I think, the ideal situation would be to have a *compañera* who did not oppose their ideas, but in whose private life would be more or less like other women. They wanted to be activists 24 hours a day—and in that context, of course, it’s impossible to have equality....Men got so involved that the women were left behind, almost of necessity.” As a

result, “What would happen is that women would come once—maybe even join. But they would never be seen again. So many *compañeras* came to the conclusion that it might be a good idea to start a separate group for these women...

Similar efforts were undertaken in Madrid, and elsewhere. Eventually (sometime in 1936), the groups learned of one another’s activities, and representatives started meeting together. They wanted to explore what they recognised as the specific subordination of women in capitalist society, in an atmosphere that would take women—their lives, experiences, and hopes—seriously.

Before I turn to an exploration of their programs, I want to make clear that they did not define themselves as “feminists”—by which they meant women who focus on access to education and professional jobs. These types of issues had long been the concern of middle-class feminists, but they had been rejected by anarchists as irrelevant to the concerns of working-class people (women as well as men), and as reinforcing structures they were committed to overthrowing.

As Soledad reported, “We aren’t and we weren’t ‘feminists,’ those who were fighting against men. We didn’t want to substitute a feminine hierarchy for the masculine hierarchy. It was essential that we work and struggle together, because otherwise, there would be no social revolution. But we needed our own organisation to fight for ourselves.”

During the early months, groups engaged in a combination of consciousness-raising and direct action. They created networks of women anarchists who attempted to meet the need for mutual support in union and other movement contexts; and attended meetings with one another, checking out reports of chauvinist behaviour on the part of their male comrades, and strategising about how to deal with it. The Barcelona group established *guarderías volantes*, “flying day-care centres.” In their efforts to involve more women in union activities, they were met repeatedly with the claim that women’s child-care responsibilities prevented them from staying late at work, or going out at night, to participate in meetings. They decided to address this problem by offering child-care services to women who were interested in serving as union delegates.

In July 1936, the Spanish Civil War began with an attempted military coup d’état that was repulsed by a combination of armed civilians, including many CNT members, and some loyal soldiers. The failed coup—and resulting civil war—provided the context for widespread social revolution that built on over 70 years of anarchist (and socialist) organising in Spain. Militias replaced the army, workers collectivised factories abandoned by owners, agricultural workers took over abandoned

farms/estates, and many municipalities were also collectivised.

Meanwhile, in August, the US, Britain, France, Italy, and Germany signed a “Non-Intervention Treaty,” although Italy and Germany immediately announced they wouldn’t abide by it, and supplied soldiers and war materiel to the fascist rebels throughout the conflict. This treaty resulted in the increasing international isolation of the Republican government, as only Mexico and the USSR agreed to provide any material support to the Loyalists. Russian support, in turn, contributed to a vast increase of the power of the Communist Party within the Republican coalition.

In this context, *Mujeres Libres* developed two sets of goals *capacitación* and *captación*. *Capacitación* can roughly be translated as “empowerment” – coming to an awareness of/acting on one’s capacities or abilities. This was the essence of virtually all its programs derived from *Mujeres Libres*’ commitment to direct action and, specifically, the notion of “preparation.”

They organised education and literacy programs, at all levels, for both adults and young people; employment and apprenticeship programs – in both rural and urban areas – because they believed women’s employment was critical to their emancipation, and not simply a temporary response to wartime labour shortages; programs of consciousness-raising, that also took place in the context of unions and workplaces; programs of education and support around motherhood and child-rearing; education around sexuality and birth control for women, educational programs for soldiers around prostitution, and articles and advocacy opposing the sexual double-standard; support for the war (e.g. propaganda campaigns, visits to militias at the front); and, extensive public relations and media efforts, including creating a magazine that published 14 issues, a broad-based program of publications (books, pamphlets, etc), a radio program, and public speaking (both teaching young women to speak in public, and organising tours with CNT and FAI to villages and small cities).

*Captación* took on ever-greater importance as the counterrevolution grew in strength: it meant mobilising women into the libertarian, as opposed to communist movement organisations. The women of *Mujeres Libres*

saw themselves in a struggle with the Communist Party (and the Association de Mujeres Antifascistas – the Communist-dominated women’s organisation) for the allegiance and affiliation of women. They expected to have support from the CNT and the Juventudes in their efforts, but these organisations never seemed to understand what *Mujeres Libres* was trying to do. Instead, they viewed the women as “separatists” who were undermining the unity of the anarchist/anarcho-syndicalist cause. As the civil war dragged on, and the need for support from male-dominated organisations increased, *Mujeres Libres* tried to explain to their male comrades why they needed a separate organisation. As they wrote in a communique in 1938:

We are aware of the precedents set by both feminist organisations and by political parties... We could not follow either of these paths. We could not separate the women’s problem from

**they acted on the basis of an understanding of the situation of women in society that was advanced – even revolutionary – not just for their own time, but even for ours. Most significantly, they conceived of the emancipation of women as an integral part of “human” emancipation.**

the social problem [e.g., class-based injustices], nor could we deny the significance of the first [women’s subordination] by converting women into a simple instrument for any organisation, even our own libertarian organisation. The intention that underlay our activities was much much broader: to serve a doctrine, not a party; to empower women to make of them individuals capable of contributing to the structuring of the future society, individuals who have learned to be self-determining, not to follow blindly the dictates of any organisation.

Their struggles, however, were never fully understood or appreciated. They never received the explicit financial and other support from the broader movement they expected. Their experiences have been, and are, echoed by women involved in radical movements in many other places around the world (including both in the U.S. and Canada).

### Conclusions/Appreciation

*Mujeres Libres* demanded that the new society—and efforts to create it—include women as well as men. Practically, they insisted that the movement treat women and men equally, while respecting women’s differences from men—not an easy task, and one that we, in the U.S., have not necessarily been much better at. This perspective was *Mujeres Libres*’ unique contribution to development of the libertarian movement in Spain (and, in fact, in the broader world).

At the same time, it was that which posed the greatest challenges for them.

Despite the difficulties they had (I explore both the successes and difficulties in my book, *Free Women of Spain*), it is important to recognise what they accomplished, even in the midst of civil war.

First, they acted on the basis of an understanding of the situation of women in society that was advanced – even revolutionary – not just for their own time, but even for ours. Most significantly, they conceived of the emancipation of women as an integral part of “human” emancipation. Further, they struggled hard to work toward that end in the context of a broad social movement, which, in turn, required them to confront their own comrades and organisations, at the same time that they were trying to work with them. These are not now–nor were they then–easy goals to achieve.

Second, they offered a truly important vision of emancipation of women: one that was not about women’s conquest of power (economic, political, or social), but that was a profound critique of hierarchy in all its forms. They insisted that striving for privileges for some will always leave on the margins others who are “disprivileged” (e.g., today, the unemployed, the immigrants, the underemployed, “welfare mothers,” gays). And they envisioned a society “mas justa, mas humana Para todos” [more just, more humane, for everyone]–and they insisted that, if such a goal is to be achieved, women must work for it together with men.

Third, they recognised the importance of diversity, variety, differences among people. And they put forward a vision of social transformation in which

different groups would be included, with all their differences. They argued that true freedom–emancipation in the full sense of the word–is to be achieved only in community, and through social/collective struggle. As one of their original “calls” put it:

Do you live in a village where women are relegated to a life of obscurity and insignificance, considered little more than things, dedicated exclusively to the care of home and family? Undoubtedly, many times you have found yourself disgusted with this, and, when you have witnessed the freedom that your brothers, and the men of your household exercise, you have felt sorrow at the plight of woman...

Well, against all that you have had to suffer, against all this, comes *Mujeres Libres*. We want you to have the same freedom as your brothers, we want your voice to be heard with the same respect as that of your father. We want you to achieve that independent life that you sometimes imagine for yourself.

Now, remember, all this will require work from you; these goals will not be achieved simply by wanting them; you will need the help, the collective efforts of other compañeras. You will need others to be interested in the same things as you; they will need to help you, and you to help them. In one word, you will need to work together in community.

Not a bad vision, even for our own day!

# The Place of Women in Society

**Emma Goldman**

*Mujeres Libres*, Week 21 of the Revolution (December 1936)

Human progress is very slow. In fact it has been said that for every step upward the human race has made, it retreated two steps into the bondage it has striven to escape. It has taken centuries for man to rise from his prostrate position – his blind belief in the superstition of the church, the divine right of kings and the power of a master class. True, this vicious trinity still holds sway over many millions in every part of our planet. Still it can no longer rule with an iron rod or exact obedience at the point of torture or death, though this is still the case in Fascist lands. However, Fascism is, historically speaking, only of the hour. And even under this black pest the rumbling of the approaching storm is coming nearer and growing ever louder. In Spain Fascism is meeting its Waterloo, all along the line. On the other hand is the ever increasing volume of active protest in the world at large against the evil institutions of capitalism. Strangely enough, the average male, so

ready to fight heroically for his own emancipation, is far from believing in the same for the opposite sex.

To be sure, the women of many countries have brought about a veritable Revolution in their own social, political and ethical status. They have done so through years of bitter struggle – after heart-breaking defeat and discouragement, but also final triumph.

Unfortunately this cannot be said for the women of all countries. In Spain, for instance, woman seems still to be considered very much inferior to man, a mere sex-object for his gratification and childbearing. This attitude would not be so surprising were it only to be found among the bourgeoisie. But to find the same antediluvian conception among the workers, even among our comrades, is a very great shock indeed.



Nowhere in the world has Libertarianism so entered the very life of the worker as it has the life of the Spanish masses. The glorious victory of the Revolution, born in the pangs of the July battle, testifies to the superior revolutionary stamina of the Catalan and Spanish working men. One would assume that their passionate love of liberty also includes that of women. Far from this being the case, most men in Spain either do not seem to understand the meaning of true emancipation, or they know, yet prefer to keep their women in ignorance of its meaning. The fact is, many men make themselves believe that women enjoy being kept in an inferior position. It was said that the Negro also enjoyed being owned by his plantation master. In point of truth, there can be no real emancipation so long as any form of mastery of one individual over another exists, or any group over another. Much less has emancipation of the human race any meaning so long as one sex dominates another.

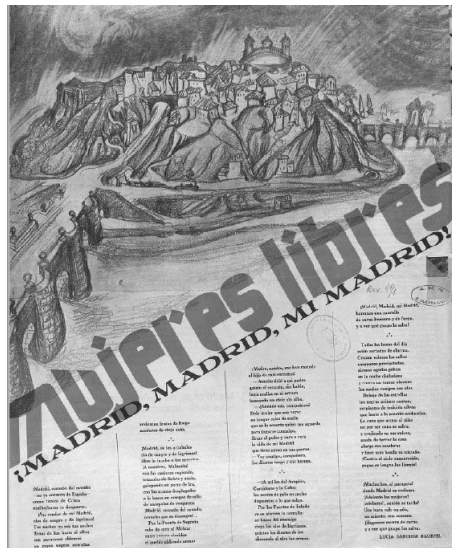
After all, the human family presupposes both sexes. Of the two, woman is the more important because she is the bearer of the race. And the more perfect her development, the more perfect the race will be. If for no other reason, this alone should prove the importance of woman's place in society and the social struggle. There are other reasons. Foremost among them is woman's awakening to the fact that she is a personality in her own right. And that her needs and aspirations are as vital and important as those of the male.

Those who still imagine they can keep woman in a straitjacket will no doubt say "Yes, but woman's needs and aspirations are different, because she is inferior." This only goes to prove the limitation of the male and also his arrogance. Else he would know that her very

differentiation enriches life individually as well as socially.

Besides, the extraordinary achievements of woman in every walk of life have silenced forever the loose talk of woman's inferiority. Those who still cling to this fetish do so because they hate nothing so much as to see their authority challenged. That is the characteristic of all authority, whether the master over his economic slaves or man over woman. However, woman is everywhere escaping her cage, everywhere she is going ahead with free, large strides. Everywhere she is bravely taking her place in the battle for economic, social and ethical transformations. It is not likely that the Spanish women will escape much longer the trend of emancipation.

It is true of woman, as it is of the workers. Those who would be free must themselves strike the first blow. The workers of Catalonia, of all of Spain, have struck the first blow. They have freed themselves, they are shedding their blood to safeguard their freedom. Now it is your turn, Catalan and Spanish women, to strike the blow to break your fetters. It is your turn to rise in your dignity, your self-respect, to stand proudly and firmly on your rights as women, as free individualities, as equal members of society, as comrades in battle against Fascism and for the Social Revolution. Only when you have freed yourself from the superstitions of religion – the prejudice of the double standard of morality, the degrading and enslaving obedience to a dead past, will you become a great force in the anti-Fascist battle – in the defence of the Revolution. Only then will you be able and worthy to help build the new free society where every man, woman and child will be truly free.



## Controllers and Controlled

**Lucía Sánchez Saornil<sup>1</sup>**

*Mujeres Libres*, 8, 10th month of the revolution (April), 1937.

We could write the history of our movement from July to the present on the basis of these two vogueish Gallicisms.

Although we can feel it slipping from our grasp with every minute we cannot give up on the revolution. The people won it in the bloody days of July, and all the confusing slogans designed to distract the attention of the workers will not make them forget it, just as we

cannot, as the women's sector of the struggle, forget the fundamental objectives of the war. Because we all know that giving up on the revolution means accepting the unlimited continuation of the principle of enslavement as the basis of society. As workers and as women, we are convinced that only the revolution can bring us the moral and economic liberation that has been longed for over so many centuries.

<sup>1</sup> <https://libcom.org/library/1-may-1937-controllers-controlled-luc-s-nchez-saornil>

It is precisely because of this conviction that we sound the alarm at the turn that events are taking. It wouldn't have occurred to anyone in July to doubt that the workers had begun their revolution. Property, production, the whole life of the country was in their hands. The government, which during the revolt had lost its real organs of expression and power – the armed forces – was at the mercy of the workers and was only maintained by and through them. With the state apparatus demolished, the government survived by the grace of the people that used it to create a temporary nexus of convergence and unity of the popular sectors assaulted by fascism. The government stopped being the representation of a non-existent state whose prerogatives of organising national life had passed entirely into the hands of the workers. In a nutshell, the people controlled in one day all the actions of the government, displacing it from power and leaving it in place as a merely nominal skeletal representation.

This was the first revolutionary error. By maintaining the government, its old bourgeois structure was respected and around it the whole weight of the bureaucratic apparatus that it had sustained up to that point. The workers did not realise that they had left the most vicious enemy of the revolution standing.

The revolutionary work began. The committees, in which the people expressed and perfected their administrative organisations, grew and multiplied. It was not fast work, but slow and hard. It was necessary to step forwards and then step back, to stitch and to undo stitches, before finding the exact expression of



**Lucía Sánchez Saornil  
(1895-1970)**

popular aspirations. And it was against this process that the impatient, pressured by bureaucrats who saw the ebbing of their privileges and administrative hegemony, began a low-intensity war against the Popular Committees.

Immediately the revolution began to stagnate. The need to win the war was manipulated by certain sectors against the social movement, calling for maximum power to the government. Day by day the prerogatives of the committees passed to the old and failed bureaucracies. The organisation of housing, transport and food supply

were snatched from the hands of the Popular Committees on the pretext of their not contributing effective solutions and thus, from being controlled, the government gradually became the controller. To the extent that it was able to wrest power from the workers, it was converted from a mere organ of anti-fascist representation into an organ of power. The creation of economic privileges facilitated the rapid construction of an armed force at its service, and with the resurrection of the new state the strangulation of the revolution began.

Nevertheless, all is not lost if the unions know how to act decisively; if they do not allow the plunder to be finalised and they defend their right to the management of the economy, we might yet save ourselves.

And to those who say that the war comes before everything, we will respond: For the war everything, except freedom. Long live the revolution!

## Women In the Revolution

*Spain and the World, 25 August 1937*

### **Report from the Madrid Group of Mujeres Libres**

The war has developed the lines of activity of the Madrid Group in a direction somewhat different from the ideas that motivated us in the beginning.

We proposed to awake in women, by an adequate cultural education, the stimulus of social activity. Now we find ourselves incorporated in a collective life and obliged to serve the needs of the moment. Therefore, the chief characteristics of our group are represented in our Sections of Labour.

At the beginning of the war many women felt the sudden desire for activity, the necessity to make themselves useful. They came to us, always asking the

same questions: "What can I do? Where can I help?" And we started making lists. Two months later we had seven Labour Sections organised and operating: Transport, Public Health, Public Services, Nursing, Clothing and Mechanics. We also have in our Mobile Brigade a section that comprises all those comrades whose limitations do not permit specialisation, and also those who do not care what they do and are grateful for every working place where they can be useful.

We organised at the same time brigades, able to substitute men needed for the war, in order to maintain intact our economic and public life.

Naturally to realise this task we had to ask for the help of the syndicates, who gladly assisted us. The transport workers syndicate at once began instructing 40 women comrades in the mechanics and driving of motorcars.

Now, since these sections are installed and working, we shall devote more attention to the cultural questions. Shortly, a course of elementary instructions will

commence, which are very much needed. Later we shall continue with lectures on science, social and economic questions.

As soon as the fronts of the war will be removed further away from Madrid, we shall find it easier to carry out all our projects in this respect.

### ***Slogans of "Free Women"***

from a leaflet, distributed in the streets of Barcelona.

"Every woman must be a fighter in the rear. The war demands the efforts of all." Not a single woman should remain inactive at these moments. In the circle of *Mujeres Libres* you will find your place. The war we are waging is not a capitalist war; we are not out to gain land or to win laurels.

Two classes and two ideologies are fighting each other; labour versus privileges. Liberty versus dictatorship.

Our war is a revolutionary war. The unity of the workers will win it. Women: Your efforts will decide victory.



Here are our aims:

To emancipate women from the triple slavery of ignorance, traditional passivity and exploitation.

To fight ignorance and educate our comrades individually and socially through simple lessons, conferences, talks, lectures, cinema projections, etc.

To arrive at real understanding between men and women: living together, working together and not excluding each other.

We will perform a powerful part in the revolutionary task of reconstruction supplying: nurses, teachers, doctors, artists, chemists, intelligent labourers. Something more effective than just good will and ignorance.

We will liberate women from the stagnation of mediocrity.

## **New Education**

Concerning education, we insist: the most urgent task at the moment is not to educate children, but to educate teachers, capable of educating children. To create such, we have formulated these fundamental affirmations:

- 1.) Pedagogy, considered as a science, must be exercised as an art; it must be developed - within those intimate and creative recesses, known as inspiration.
- 2.) Pedagogic inspiration will teach the teacher how to discover in every child and at every moment the truth of life, which every child at every moment possesses innately.
- 3.) There is no rationalist doctrine excellent and infallible enough to be used as supreme reason in dealing with the child's mentality.

4.) The real teacher does not love children abstractly. He loves every single child. From this love he will understand and learn how to teach the child.

5.) The good teacher will measure the sensibility of every child with the most exact measure of psychology. He will give mathematics to the witty ones and music to the sensitive ones.

6.) There shall be a few children in each class.

The good teacher can be nothing but a teacher. He carries his mission like a divine grace and feels honoured to be able to exercise his profession, which he believes and feels to be his vocation.

(From a leaflet).

## **Mujeres Libres**

From the time we came into existence we have kept a record of the activities of the feminist movement in favour of the anti-fascist cause and the Spanish Revolution.

We are happy to have initiated and largely organised this movement. Before the creation of the *Mujeres Libres* group, all social work was in the hands of some Republican groups, and the feminist movement played a very secondary part. It had no real power to go beyond the lines of traditional custom.

The organisation of anti-fascist women has devoted itself to the service of war, without reserve of ideological or revolutionary orientation.

*Mujeres Libres* has fulfilled its commitments. Apart from our monthly publications, groups of women have emerged everywhere and have actively organised their activity in accord with the revolutionary aims of the proletariat.

We have succeeded in awakening women to the vital consciousness of the movement. We have convinced them, that isolated and purely feminine activity is now impossible, that they must see everything from the angle of comprehensive human aspirations for emancipation, which can be realized only in a social

Revolution. All of which makes it necessary for us to add our efforts to those of the workers defending our common cause.

Already we can begin gathering the fruit of our labour. In Catalonia, Valencia, Alicante, Madrid, Guadalajara, in the towns and villages of the South — throughout the whole of Spain that is free from fascist yoke, we can count on active groups of women. True to their libertarian concepts they work independently, adapting themselves and their activity to circumstances and surroundings. They work actively and efficiently for the war, in a co-ordinated manner, without neglecting at the same time the task of education and cultural development. By this activity alone our movement will constitute an effective factor in the future construction of Society.

And everything is done with an enthusiasm and dynamism, never suspected by the literary cultivators of female “passivity.”

We are contented with the results achieved. We have made a good start. Today our organisation has a recognised personality of its own, which no sincere revolutionary in the antifascist battlefield can doubt.

Lucia Sanchez Saornil

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## **Parish Notices**

After a year or more of being closed, social centres and other radical spaces are re-opening. More information on who is doing what and where is available from the Social Centres Network: [socialcentrenetwork.weebly.com](http://socialcentrenetwork.weebly.com)

SARS-COV-2/COVID-19 has however, not gone away. One of the few positives we can take from the global pandemic, is the emergence of Mutual Aid Groups: [covidmutualaid.org](http://covidmutualaid.org)

Similarly launched as an anarchist response to the pandemic, No Safety No Work: [nosafetynowork.wordpress.com](http://nosafetynowork.wordpress.com)

Following their first online Plenary and Extraordinary Congress, the IWA-AIT has new Sections and Friends, including in Pakistan, Colombia, and the Philippines: [iwa-ait.org/content/addresses](http://iwa-ait.org/content/addresses)

*Green Anti-capitalist Media* (GAM) is a collective of individuals that organises under the Green Anti-Capitalist Front (GAF) to create independent media content for the radical ecological movement and to support the constellation of individuals and groups taking action under GAF all around the world: [greenanticapitalist.org](http://greenanticapitalist.org)

*Black Flag* was founded as the *Bulletin of the Anarchist Black Cross*. The ABC is, unfortunately, still needed. Contact, Green and Black Cross ([greenandblackcross.org](http://greenandblackcross.org)) & the ABC Federation ([abcf.net](http://abcf.net)).

With articles in *Black Flag*, and his book *Stefano Delle Chiaie*, Stuart Christie was one of the first to expose the nature of the ‘stay-behind’ organisation, GLADIO. Robin Ramsay has an article in, *Lobster*, Summer 21, ‘The British Gladio and the murder of Sergeant Speed’: [lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster81/lob81-british-gladio.pdf](http://lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster81/lob81-british-gladio.pdf)

There is a new David Graeber Foundation website: <https://davidgraeber.org>

**“When strikes spread, they gradually connect, they are very close to turning into a general strike; and with the ideas of emancipation that now prevail in the proletariat, a general strike can only lead to a great cataclysm which would renew society.”**

– Michael Bakunin, “Organisation and General Strike”, *Égalité*, 3 April 1869

# Review: Bob Holton's British Syndicalism 1900-1914

Albert Meltzer

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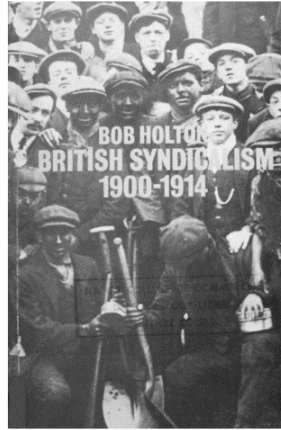
So far as most people are concerned the history of the working class movement is as shrouded in myth and mystery as any ancient civilisation. The histories of whole peoples were wiped out for precisely the same reason that the history of the working class movement in recent times is wiped out: it does not suit the conquerors for it to be known, because traditions keep alive the spirit of revolt. When the archaeologist comes along, his revelations are at first greeted with scepticism as apocryphal, legendary, "romantic." Then after years of patient work — and when it is too late for the traditions to influence revolt — the jigsaw puzzle is added in.

Bob Holton is something of an archaeologist of social history whose research in the British working class movement has come up — not with the bowdlerised Marxist history which provides an academically recognisable alternative interpretation to orthodox economic history — but with the facts about the working class movement in the first fourteen years of the century, when it was clearly moving to syndicalism. This syndicalism (as Ramsey Macdonald recognised in his theoretical analysis from the point of view of social democracy) was a clear cut challenge to State socialism.

It was in fact a work of genius of the Communist Party to have diverted it, in a short period (1921 to 1931) to an acceptance of authoritarianism and dictatorship and political leadership. This was totally alien to the British working class (as to most others). They managed to evade the issue during the thirties, when the hatred of fascism and the real belief it was coming here helped the Communist Party to smash the libertarian ideas and aspirations of the working class. It did the fascist's job for them and they became redundant to the capitalist class.

I am no researcher, and in "The Anarchists in London 1935/55" I based myself on recollections and anecdotes: in the postscript I made a reference to the Scottish and Welsh comrades I knew, and gave a sketch of the pre-World War I and after movement in those countries — briefly, because I confined myself to facts I knew from old comrades. Bob Holton goes deeper into the matter from research. Those who think my account was exaggerated and a mere "hankering for the glorious past" will find themselves refuted in his account of British Syndicalism, in retrospect the golden age of the British working class movement, when it knew what it was fighting for, knew *how* to get it, and (but for the war) was on the high way to get it. It built a movement as great as any revolutionary organisation in the world,

and even the Great War (with its demagogy, and even the internal deportation of strikers on par with the deportation of Irishmen today) did not deter it. The shop steward's movement is a legacy of the days when the syndicalist movement tried to form a horizontal organisation on the forms of council communism and industrial unionism, because of the collapse of the vertical one which became a bureaucratic department of the State.



The anarcho-syndicalist beginnings and influence are traced by Bob Holton. The whole syndicalist movement was wider than the labour organisations created by the anarchists. The militant figures in the labour movement were not only those taking a revolutionary line and disagreeing entirely with State socialism. There was a more "ecumenical spirit" about; many "crossed the lines" (some, like Tom Mann, saw nothing

incompatible with belonging to the trade union movement, the ILP, supporting the Labour Party — and later the CP — yet being a syndicalist). The wider syndicalist movement is the one described in this book. It included those recognising how the industrial free society would be won, and accepting the libertarian criticism of the State, but not necessarily belonging to the anarchist groups of the time which were narrower in their scope? They might call themselves anarchists, or anarcho-syndicalists, or, in some cases, have accepted both parliamentary action and direct action and not regarded socialism and anarchism as incompatible (as was possible, at least in theory, before State socialism conquered).

But it was a working class movement.

When the Left politicians, and the middle class (it was originally the middle-aged middle class, before the era of "the student revolt"), took over, first of all the workers were divorced from anarchism — and then socialism itself became an alien creed as it was defined by the politicians. Anarchism was thought of wistfully by the older generation, and was unknown to the younger generation (which is now, of course, very much the older generation and has even in turn died out).

This book is one of the most exciting accounts of British syndicalism I have read. It is an indication of the broadening of the scope of Pluto Press that it should have published it. Pluto Press is looking into workers' history and coming up (for International Socialists, for whom it was once the publishers) with some fascinating titles which could have come from an anarchist publisher. Taking an unbiased look at Britain — no less than Italy and Spain — is bound to do this.

# Open Letter to British Soldiers

*The Syndicalist*, January 1912

**Men! Comrades! Brothers!**

**You are in the army.**

**So are WE. YOU, in the army of destruction. WE, in the industrial, or army of construction.**

**We work at mine, mill, forge, factory, or dock, etc, producing and transporting all the goods, clothing, stuffs, etc, which makes it possible for people to live.**

**YOU ARE WORKINGMEN'S SONS.**

**WHEN WE go on strike to better our lot, which is the lot also of YOUR FATHERS, MOTHERS, BROTHERS and SISTERS, YOU are called upon by your officers to MURDER US.**

**Don't do it.**

**You know how it happens. Always has happened.**

**We stand out as long as we can. Then one of our (and your) irresponsible brothers, goaded by the sight and thought of his and his loved ones' misery and hunger, commits a crime on property. Immediately YOU are ordered to MURDER US, as YOU did at Mitchelstown, at Featherstone, at Belfast.**

**Don't you know, that when YOU are out of the colours, and become a "Civy" again, that YOU, like US, may be on strike, and you, like us, be liable to be MURDERED by other soldiers?**

**BOYS, DON'T DO IT!**

**"THOU SHALT NOT KILL," says the Book.**

**DON'T FORGET THAT!**

**It does not say, "unless you have a uniform on".**

**No! MURDER IS MURDER, whether committed in the heat of anger on one who has wronged a loved one, or by clay-piped Tommies with a rifle.**

**BOYS, DON'T DO IT.**

**ACT THE MAN! ACT THE BROTHER! ACT THE HUMAN BEING!**

**Property can be replaced! Human life, never!**

**The idle rich class, who own and order you about, own and order us about also. They and their friends own the land and means of life of Britain.**

**YOU DON'T! WE DON'T!**

**When WE kick they order YOU to MURDER US.**

**When you kick, you get court-martialled and cells.**

**YOUR fight is OUR fight. Instead of fighting AGAINST each other, we should be fighting WITH each other.**

**Out of OUR loins, OUR lives, OUR homes, YOU came.**

**Don't disgrace YOUR PARENTS, YOUR CLASS, by being the willing tools any longer of the MASTER CLASS.**

**YOU, like US, are of the SLAVE CLASS. When WE rise, YOU rise; when WE fall, even by your bullets, YE fall also.**

**England with its fertile valleys and dells, its mineral resources, its sea harvests, is the heritage of ages to us.**

**You no doubt joined the army out of poverty.**

**We work long hours for small wages at hard work, because of OUR poverty. And both YOUR poverty and OURS arises from the fact that, Britain with its resources, belongs to only a few people. These few, owning Britain, own OUR jobs. Owing OUR jobs they own OUR very LIVES. Comrades, have WE called in vain? Think things out and refuse any longer to MURDER YOUR KINDRED. Help US to win back BRITAIN for the BRITISH, and the WORLD for the WORKERS!**