

One of the most vital efforts of Syndicalism is to prepare the workers, *now*, for their role in a free society. Thus the Syndicalist organizations supply its members with textbooks on every trade and industry, of a character that is calculated to make the worker an adept in his chosen line, a master of his craft, for the purpose of familiarizing him with all the branches of his industry, so that when labour finally takes over production and distribution, the people will be fully prepared to manage successfully their own affairs...

This method of applied education not only trains the worker in his daily struggle, but serves also to equip him for the battle royal and the future, when he is to assume his place in society as an intelligent, conscious being and useful producer, once capitalism is abolished.

Nearly all leading Syndicalists agree with the Anarchists that a free society can exist only through voluntary association, and that its ultimate success will depend upon the intellectual and moral development of the workers who will supplant the wage system with a new social arrangement, based on solidarity and economic well-being for all. That is Syndicalism, in theory and practice.

60. Pierre Monatte and Errico Malatesta: Syndicalism—For and Against (1907)

In 1907 an international anarchist congress was held in Amsterdam. Among the topics debated was the relationship between syndicalism and anarchism. Pierre Monatte (1881-1960) spoke in support of the French Confédération Générale du Travail, defending its apolitical stance and urging anarchists to join the syndicalist movement. Errico Malatesta criticized the syndicalists on a number of grounds, offering a broader conception of anarchism that was not exclusively working class. The following excerpts are taken from George Woodcock's The Anarchist Reader (London: Fontana, 1977), and are reprinted with the kind permission of the Writers' Trust of Canada on behalf of the Woodcock estate.

Pierre Monatte

ONE WOULD HAVE TO BE BLIND not to see what there is in common between anarchism and syndicalism. Both seek to root out capitalism and the wage system by means of the social revolution. Syndicalism exists as the proof of a reawakening of the working-class movement, and it revives in anarchism a consciousness of its origins among the workers; on the other hand, the anarchists have contributed not a little towards bringing the working-class movement into the revolutionary path and towards popularizing the idea of direct action. In such ways syndicalism and anarchism have influenced each other to their mutual benefit.

It is in France, among the militants of the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, that the ideas of revolutionary syndicalism emerged and were developed. The Confederation occupies an entirely unique place in the international working-class movement. It is the only organization that, in declaring itself entirely revolutionary, has no attachments to any of the political parties, not even the most advanced of them. In most countries other than France, social democracy plays the leading role. In France, the CGT leaves far behind it, both in terms of numerical strength and of the influence it exercises, the Socialist party; claiming to represent *only* the working class, it has firmly repulsed all the advances that have been made to it over the past years. Autonomy has been its strength and it intends to remain autonomous.

This stand of the CGT, its refusal to have dealings with the political parties, has earned it the title of “anarchist” in the mouths of its exasperated adversaries. Yet nothing could be more false. The CGT, a vast grouping of syndicates and labour unions, has no official doctrine. All doctrines are represented within it and enjoy equal tolerance. A number of anarchists serve on the confederal committee; there they meet and work with socialists, the majority of whom—it should be noted in passing—are no less hostile than the anarchists to any idea of an alliance between the syndicates and the Socialist party.

...[N]either the realization of working-class unity, nor the coalition of revolutionaries would have been able on its own to lead the CGT to its present level of prosperity and influence, if we had not remained faithful, in our syndicalist practice, to the fundamental principle which in fact excludes syndicates based on opinions: *only one syndicate for each profession and town*. The consequence of this principle is the political neutralization of the syndicate, which neither can nor should be either anarchist, or Guesdist, or Allemanist, or Blanquist, but simply working-class. In the syndicate divergences of opinion, which are often so subtle and artificial, take second place, and in this way agreement is possible. In practical life, interests come before ideas; in spite of all the quarrels between the schools and the sects, the interests of the workers, by the very fact that they are all subject to the law of wages, are identical. And that is the secret of the accord that was established between them, the accord that made the strength of syndicalism and allowed it last year, at the Congress of Amiens, proudly to affirm its self-sufficiency...

It is important that the proletarians of all countries should profit from the syndicalist experience of the French proletariat. And it is the task of the anarchists to make sure that the experience is repeated everywhere that there is a working class working towards its emancipation. To that partisan unionism which has produced, in

Russia for example, anarchist unions, and in Belgium and Germany Christian and social democratic unions, the anarchists should oppose a syndicalism in the French style, a syndicalism that is neutral or, more exactly, independent. In the same way as there is one working class, there should be, in each industry and each town, no more than one working class organization, a single syndicate. Only on that condition can the class struggle—ceasing to be hindered at every moment by the squabbles of rival schools and sects—develop in all its breadth and achieve its maximum effect.

Syndicalism, as the Congress of Amiens proclaimed in 1906, is sufficient unto itself. That statement, I know, has never been fully understood, even by the anarchists. It means that the working class, having at last attained majority, means to be self-sufficient and to rely on no one else for its emancipation. What fault can an anarchist find with a will to action so finely expressed?

Syndicalism does not waste time promising to the workers an earthly paradise. It calls on them to conquer it, assuring them that their actions will never be entirely in vain. It is a school of will, of energy, and of fertile thinking. It opens to anarchism, which has been too long closed in upon itself, new perspectives and new hopes. Let all anarchists then come to syndicalism; their work will be all the more fertile for it, their blows against the social regime all the more decisive.

Errico Malatesta

The conclusion Monatte has reached is that syndicalism is a necessary and sufficient means of social revolution. In other words, Monatte has proclaimed *that syndicalism is sufficient unto itself*. And that, in my view, is a radically false doctrine...

Today, as in the past, I would like to see the anarchists entering the working-class movement. Today, as yesterday, I am a syndicalist in the sense that I am an upholder of the syndicates. I do not ask for anarchist syndicates, which would immediately give legitimacy to social democratic, republican, royalist and all other kinds of syndicates, and which would divide the working class more than ever against itself. I do not even want to see *red* syndicates, because I do not want to see *yellow* syndicates [employer controlled unions]. I would like far more to see syndicates wide open to all workers without regard for opinions, syndicates that are absolutely *neutral*.

Therefore I favour the most active participation in the working-class movement. But I do so above all in the interests of our propaganda whose scope in this way will be greatly widened. But in no way should that participation be considered as tantamount to a renunciation of our most cherished ideas. Within the syndicate we must remain anarchists, in all the strength and breadth of that definition. The working-class movement, in my eyes, is no more than a means—though doubtless it is the

best of all the means that are available to us. But I refuse to take that means as an end, and in the same way I would not want us to lose sight of the totality of anarchist conceptions, or, to put it more simply, our other means of propaganda and agitation.

The syndicalists, on the other hand, are inclined to turn the means into an end, to regard the part as the whole...

Yet, even if it fortifies itself with the somewhat useless epithet of revolutionary, syndicalism is no more—and will never be more—than a legalitarian and even conservative movement, with no other accessible end but the amelioration of the conditions of work. I need not look for any further proof than that which is offered to us by the great North American unions. Having shown themselves, when they were still weak, as imbued with the most radical revolutionism, these unions have become, in so far as they have gained power and wealth, completely conservative organizations, entirely concerned with making their members into the aristocrats of the factory, the workshop or the mine, and far less hostile to paternalistic capitalism than they are to non-organized workers, to that proletariat in rags so condemned by the social democrat! But that ever-growing unemployed proletariat, which is of no account to syndicalism, or which—rather—is merely an obstacle to it, we—the other anarchists—cannot forget, and it is our duty to defend it because its members have most to suffer.

Let me repeat: the anarchists must enter the working-class unions, first of all to carry on anarchist propaganda there, and then because it is the only way in which—on the day we all hope for—we may have at our disposition groups who are capable of taking over the direction of production; we must enter the unions, finally, to struggle energetically against that detestable state of mind that makes the syndicates disinclined to defend anything but special interests.

In my view, the basic error of Monatte and of all the revolutionary syndicalists arises from a much too simplistic conception of the class struggle. It is the conception according to which the economic interests of all the workers—of the working-class—are identical, the conception according to which it is enough for workers to take in hand the defence of their own interests, and the interests of the whole proletariat will be at the same time defended against capitalism.

I suggest that the reality is quite different. Like the bourgeoisie, like everyone else, the workers are subject to that law of universal competition which derives from the existence of government and private property and which will only disappear when they are extinguished. Thus, in the true sense of the word, there are no classes because there are no class interests. In the heart of the working "class," as in the heart of the bourgeoisie, competition and struggle continue. The economic interests

of one category of workers will be irrevocably opposed to those of another category. And everywhere one sees workers who both economically and morally are far nearer to the bourgeoisie than they are to the proletariat...I don't need to remind you how often in strikes the workers employ violence—against the police and the managers? Not in the least, but against the *blacklegs* who nevertheless are workers just as exploited as themselves and even more humiliated, while the true enemies of the workers, the real obstacles to social equality, are still the police and the employers.

Nevertheless, moral solidarity is possible among the workers even in the absence of economic solidarity. The workers who isolate themselves in the defence of their corporate interests may not be aware of it, but it will emerge on the day when a common will towards social transformation turns them into new men. In present-day society, solidarity can only result from a communion that develops under the aegis of a shared ideal. It is the role of the anarchists to awaken the syndicates to that ideal, to orient them gradually towards the social revolution—at the risk of harm to those “immediate advantages” to which at present they seem so partial.

One cannot deny that syndicalist action involves us in certain perils. The greatest of these perils undoubtedly lies in the acceptance by the militant of office in the syndicates, particularly when it is paid office. Let us take it as a general rule: the anarchist who becomes a permanent and paid official in a syndicate is lost to propaganda, lost to anarchism! Henceforward he is under obligation to those who pay him and, since these are not all anarchists, the salaried official—placed between his conscience and his interest—must either follow his conscience and lose his position, or follow his interest—and then, goodbye to anarchism!

The presence of the official in the working-class movement is a danger comparable only to that of parliamentarism: both of them lead to corruption, and from corruption to death is not a very long step.

And now, let us consider the general strike. Personally, I accept the principle and for years I have been propagating it to the best of my powers. The general strike has always seemed to me an excellent means for starting the social revolution. Yet we must be on our guard against falling into the disastrous illusion that the general strike makes armed insurrection unnecessary.

We are told that by means of halting production abruptly the workers will succeed in a few days in starving out the bourgeoisie who, dying with hunger, will be obliged to surrender. I can think of no more grandiose absurdity. The first to die of hunger during a general strike would not be the bourgeois, who dispose of all the stores, but the workers who have only their toil on which to live.

The general strike as it is foretold to us is a pure utopia. Either the worker, dying with hunger after three days of striking, will go back with bowed head to the workshop, and we can chalk up yet another defeat. Or he will seek to take over production by main force. Who will he find waiting to stop him? Soldiers, policemen, apart from the bourgeois themselves, and then the matter cannot help resolving into shooting and bombs. It will be insurrection, and victory will be to the strongest.

Let us therefore prepare for that inevitable insurrection instead of limiting ourselves to looking forward to the general strike as a panacea for all ills...

But even if we consider it in realistic terms, the general strike is still one of the weapons with two edges which it is necessary to employ with great caution. The provision of subsistence cannot be suspended indefinitely. Sooner or later it will be necessary to seize the means of feeding people, and for that we cannot wait until the strike has developed into an insurrection.

It is not so much to cease work that we should call on the workers, but rather to continue it for their own benefit. Without that, the general strike will soon be transformed into a general famine, even though one might have been energetic enough to seize hold immediately of all the produce accumulated in the shops. Basically, the idea of the general strike emerges from a totally erroneous belief: the belief that by taking over the products accumulated by the bourgeoisie, humanity can continue consuming, without producing, for no one knows how many months and years...

In the past I deplored that the comrades isolated themselves from the working-class movement. Today I deplore that many of us, falling into the contrary extreme, let themselves be swallowed up in the same movement. Once again, working-class organization, the strike, the general strike, direct action, boycott, sabotage and armed insurrection itself, are only *means*. Anarchy is the *end*. The anarchist revolution which we desire far exceeds the interests of a single class: it proposes the complete liberation of enslaved humanity, from the triple viewpoint, economic, political and moral. And let us therefore be on our guard against any unilateral and simplistic plan of action. Syndicalism is an excellent means of action by reason of the working-class forces which it puts at our disposition, but it cannot be our sole means. Even less must we lose sight of the one end that is worth our effort: Anarchy!