THE TWO SYNDICALISMS

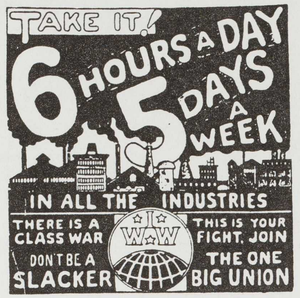
Syndicalism, like anarchism itself, is not a monolithic nor unified movement. All anarchists agree that the centralized nation-state must be replaced with a decentralized federation of communities, but disagree on the specific forms and methods of struggle. There are anarchist-individualists, mutualists, insurrectionists, pacifists, communalists, and sydicalists. All syndicalists agree that the wage system must be overthrown by the direct industrial action of the workers and their organizations, but disagree on how to help workers organize and prepare for this struggle. On the one hand are the advocates of revolutionary caucuses in the otherwise conservative trade unions. On the other are the advocates of revolutionary unions independent of the conservative unions.

The advocates of revolutionary caucuses believe that the minority of workers who are revolutionary should remain within the dominant unions, no matter how conservative and reactionary. They seek to move these unions in a revolutionary direction by a combination of propaganda, structural reforms, and running for union offices. There is nothing new about their program, which can be traced back to the 1880s and probably earlier. At the turn of the century, they sought to gain a following in the trade unions by urging the various craft unions to merge together to form industrial unions, a process called "amalgamation." Today's caucusites now back a program of "union democracy." Historical examples of this school of syndicalism include William Z. Foster's short-lived "Syndicalist League" in America and the activities of the anarchists in the French C.G.T. prior to World War I.

The revolutionary unionists believe that rather than remaining minorities in pro-capitalist unions, revolutionary workers should build unions in which those favoring an end to capitalism and the state are in a clear majority. They recognize that at most times revolutionary workers are in a minority of the general workforce, but do not feel this justifies catering to the conservative element by supporting conservative methods or conservative unions. That is why revolutionary unionists emphasize organizing independently of the "business unions." They do not feel such conservative unions can be reformed. Revolutionary unionism has been around for a long time, dating back to the anti-state sections of the First International Workingmen's Association. Historical examples include the CNT in Spain and the IWW in America.

Before giving reasons why I feel the position of the revolutionary unionists is preferable, and to be fair to the advocates of caucuses, I will give their more persuasive arguments for the caucus approach. To begin, they feel that by building separate organizations revolutionary workers will isolate themselves from the masses of workers loyal to the conservative unions. This, they then claim, only makes it easier for reactionary bureaucrats to dominate the majority of workers remaining in the conservative unions. In addition, the formation of separate unions only makes it easier for the state and the employers to single out the revolutionary element and crush it. Besides, modern advocates of this school argue, the recent upsurge of workers wishing to reform their unions can best be moved towards a revolutionary position if revolutionaries work side by side with them.

While these problems are admittedly real obstacles, they are not insurmountable. First, it is not necessarily true that by forming separate organizations, revolutionary workers cut themselves off from non-revolutionary workers. Revolutionary unionists will still be in the same communities, the same workplaces, and



(in struggles with the employers) will be on the same picket lines. It is just that many times revolutionary unionists will take direct action even though the conservative element does not approve, something a caucus is not well suited for.

Secondly, the weakest point of the union bureaucrats is not the occasional union election, but at the point of production. The bureaucrats only have power because workers are afraid to take action without the approval of the officials (for with approval comes the strike pay, the welfare benefits, the help of the legal "experts", and other things the rank-and-file has been conned into believing are indispensable). By getting workers to act independently and not rely on authorization, the bureaucracy will crumble.

Third, it is of course true that revolutionary unions are often repressed while conservative unions are government-subsidized and employer-supported. But this does not mean revolutionaries are any safer in conservative unions, since the bureaucrats can easily point them out to the authorities (as was done during the "Red Scares" following both World Wars). All revolutionary action risks repression, regardless of what union label it is carried out under. Revolutionary unions are more often repressed because they act more revolutionary.

Finally, just as having organizations separate from the conservative unions need not isolate revolutionary workers from the conservative worker, neither does it isolate them from workers rebelling against conservative union bureaucrats. Revolutionary unionists can still educate trade union insurgents and support wildcat actions taken by them. In addition revolutionary unions can further inspire them by giving a concrete example of self-managed, bureaucrat-free labor organization.

The obstacles to revolutionary caucuses in the conservative unions, however, are much worse. In the first place, by accepting a minority status in the conservative unions the syndicalists are faced with a contradiction. If they are sincere about self-management and union democracy, they must be willing to submit more often than not to the conservative majority. They can do little more than protest the "sell-outs of the leadership." On the other hand, if they insist on a revolutionary course without being in the majority, they must renounce open libertarian methods and in effect take on the strategy of a vanguardist element. Trapped in this contradiction, it is easy to see why so many syndicalists that have chosen this path have been won over to the leninist camp. William Z. Foster became a bigwig in the Communist Party—USA. The CGT in France became dominated by the Communists after World War I. (The CNT and the IWW did not succumb to the post-Russian Revolution Communist tide.) Of course, not all caucus-syndicalists become leninists or union bureaucrats. It is just that when this approach

is used, syndicalists are playing a game that the leninists and bureaucrats can always play better.

The problem of dealing with conservative majorities might be overcome in time through patient education. That is, if it were not for the entrenched bureaucracy in the conservative unions. Unlike the revolutionary unions, the conservative unions have professional staffs running into the thousands. No significant changes in the policies or structure of the conservative unions can come about without roadblocks being put in the way by these massive bureaucracies. It is inescapable that any effort to revolutionize these unions will require syndicalists to compete with conservatives for union office. To win elections and stay in power, revolutionaries will have to build their own political "machines" by passing out staff positions to supporters. Deals will have to be struck with conservative factions and ambitious union officials intent on moving up in the hierarchy. In time "revolutionary leaders" divorced from the shop-floor struggle, dependent on their union salaries, afraid that new rank-and-file rebels might topple them from power, will take on the same qualities as the old bureaucrats. Is this an exaggeration? Consider Miners for Democracy, the democratic reform group that defeated Tony Boyle's regime in the UMW. Once in office they became nearly as corrupt and autocratic as Boyle, which caused the miners to dump them from office (to be followed by a new dictator, Sam Church).

If these obstacles were not bad enough, one more factor now complicates the caucus approach, the rise of the corporatist state. Since the rise of social democracy in Europe and welfare statism in North America, the conservative unions have been gradually incorporated into the apparatus of the government. It is no longer just a matter of a few labor leaders preaching

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BEWARE OF NUCLEAR RESPECTABILITY

What's this I hear about the success of the movement to freeze nuclear weapons? Can we take heart from the fact that there are articles sprouting here and there on how bombs are bad for children and other living things? NYT—July '82, Schell's series in the *New Yorker*, and Mary McGrory's regular lambasting of the nonsensical idea of civil defense in the face of the horror of nuclear disaster are examples of a degree of sanction of the freeze movement by liberal members of the intelligentsia.

Is there real cause for optimism? Other observations seem to point in the same positive direction.

ITEM 1: Pres. Reagan reopens the dialogue with the Soviets on the SALT/START treaty.

ITEM 2: Senator Kennedy came out strongly against nukes (with a new book—Wow!).

ITEM 3: The House votes on several nuclear freeze proposals.

ITEM 4: In Washington, D.C., a petition to bring the freeze to the ballot in November succeeds.

ITEM 5: On a related matter of "military preparedness" 800,000 young men have neglected to register themselves as available in the event of a draft.

Are we on the verge of winning? Is it possible that the anti-nuclear weapons movement, which—in its most dramatic manifestation—was able to draw three-quarters of a million people to Central Park in New York on June 12th to demonstrate their support for a freeze, is able to actually affect government thinking? Is the Pentagon being brought to its Knees?

Before we hold a party in celebration, consider the following:

COUNTER-ITEM 1: The Administration has not supported the SALT II treaty ratification, and easy and effective and relatively painless way of demonstrating sincerity in arms 'control.'

COUNTER-ITEM 2: So what!

COUNTER-ITEM 3: The nuclear freeze proposal that the House passed was for "achieve parity now—freeze later."

COUNTER-ITEM 4: Congress has a reputation for ignoring the petitions of the "stateless" District of Columbia residents.

COUNTER-ITEM 5: On 17 August 1982 Enten Eller was convicted in the US District Court in Roanoke, Va. His crime? Knowingly failing to register for the draft. His grounds were religious convictions. On 26 August Benjamin H. Sasaway was convicted in San Diego by a federal court jury of refusal to register. His grounds were that registration was "immoral and incompatible with a free society."

ODD ITEM: The US Postal Service has recently released plans to continue delivering mail after a nuclear attack. The service has extra change-of-address forms ready and waiting. (Stamps for migratory birds will be eliminated; why remind the survivors of the extinct species? Of course, postmen will probably not have to worry about the family dog biting them—said animal will have become a crispy critter.)

The forgoing begins to read like a standard joke form—first the good news and then the bad. And any optimism that we might have been feeling should become very guarded indeed. None of the three branches of government is operating on anything approaching a freeze mentality. This is not the time for complacency.

NO NATIONS NO NUKES!

W.H.