

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ANARCHISM, LABOUR AND SYNDICALISM

The Individual, the National and the Transnational

INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST
WORKERS & TRADE UNION CONGRESS
1896.

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DAVID BERRY and CONSTANCE BANTMAN

New Perspectives on Anarchism,
Labour and Syndicalism

New Perspectives on Anarchism,
Labour and Syndicalism:
The Individual, the National
and the Transnational

Edited by

David Berry and Constance Bantman

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P U B L I S H I N G

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The Individual, the National and the Transnational,
Edited by David Berry and Constance Bantman

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Pour François Poirier, qui aimait les anarchistes, le syndicalisme
et les études transnationales. CB

For René Bianco, for all the help and encouragement he gave a young
and ignorant PhD student. DB

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—CB and DB

ACRONYMS

AFL:	American Federation of Labor
AFP:	Anarchist Federation of Poland
AK:	Home Army (Poland)
CAS:	Comité d'Action Syndicaliste (Syndicalist Action Committee, France)
CCN:	Comité confédéral national (National Confederal Committee, France)
CGT:	Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labour, France)
CGT-FO:	Confédération Générale du Travail—Force Ouvrière (General Confederation of Labour—Workers' Force, France; also known as 'FO')
CGTSR:	Confédération Générale du Travail Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Syndicalist General Confederation of Labour, France)
CGTU:	Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (United General Confederation of Labour, France)
CNT:	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour, Spain)
CNT:	Confédération Nationale du Travail (National Confederation of Labour, France)
CUAS:	Cartel d'Unité d'Action Syndicaliste (United Syndicalist Action Cartel, France)
FAI:	Federación Anarquista Iberica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, Portugal and Spain)
FAU:	Freie ArbeiterUnion (Free Workers' Union, Germany)
FAUD:	Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands (Free Workers' Union of Germany)
FEN :	Fédération de l'Éducation Nationale (National Education Federation, France)
FNSA:	Fédération Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes (National Federation of Independent Trade Unions, France)
FO:	Force Ouvrière (France)
GFP:	General Federation of Labour (Poland)
ILP:	Independent Labour Party (Great Britain)

- IWMA: International Working Men's Association
 IWW: Industrial Workers of the World (United States)
 KPD: Communist Party of Germany
 NAS: Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat (National Labour Secretariat, Netherlands)
 OMN: National Youth Organisation (Poland)
 PCF: Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party)
 PPR: Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Labour Party)
 PPS: Polish Socialist Party
 PTT: Postes, télégraphes et téléphones (National Post and Telecommunications Service, France)
 PZPR: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party)
 RSA: Movement for an Alternative Society (Poland)
 RIOK: Workers' Institute for Education and Culture (Poland)
 SAC: Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation (Central Organisation of the Workers of Sweden)
 SD: Democratic Party (Poland)
 SDF: Social Democratic Federation (Great Britain)
 SFIO: Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (United Socialist Party, France)
 SLLPW: Socialist People's Polish Party of Freedom
 SOW: "Freedom" Syndicalist Organisation (Poland)
 SPD: Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social-Democratic Party, Germany)
 TUC: Trade Union Congress (Great Britain)
 UAI: Unione Anarchica Italiana
 UCES: Union des Cercles d'Études Syndicalistes (Union of Syndicalist Study Groups, France)
 UD: Union Départementale (Departmental Union, France)
 USI: Unione Sindacale Italiana (Italian Syndicalist Union)
 USOLA: Union des Syndicats Ouvriers Libres de l'Aude (Aude Union of Free Workers' Unions, France)
 ZNR: Union for Republican Development (Poland)
 ZPMD: Polish Democratic Youth Union
 ZSP: Polish Syndicalists Union
 ZZZ: Central Wydział Zawodny (Union of Trade Unions, Poland)

INTRODUCTION

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ANARCHISM, LABOUR AND SYNDICALISM: THE INDIVIDUAL, THE NATIONAL AND THE TRANSNATIONAL

CONSTANCE BANTMAN AND DAVID BERRY

Recent years have seen an upsurge of interest in the history of European anarchist and syndicalist movements. The rise of alter-globalisation protest borrowing many of its direct-action tactics from pre-World War I anarchism and syndicalism has been important in bringing it on over the last ten years or so. As the anthropologist and anarchist activist David Graeber has commented: “most of the creative energy for radical politics is now coming from anarchism,” and horizontal, acephalous organisation, networks, prefigurative politics and consensus decision-making have all become major themes for debate.¹ The necessity to control international terrorist networks has also rekindled public interest in the anarchist diaspora of the late-nineteenth century, the golden age of “propaganda by the deed”, sparking many debates about the relevance of such comparisons.² Within the academy, the study of anarchist and syndicalist movements and their functioning has been greatly spurred by new

¹ “The New Anarchists”, *New Left Review* 13 (January-February 2002), <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2368> (accessed July 15, 2010).

² Among a large number of publications, see “For jihadist, read anarchist,” *The Economist*, August 18, 2005. In more academic perspectives, see Michael Collyer, “Secret Agents: Anarchists, Islamists and Responses to Politically Active Refugees in London,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28:2 (2005): 278–303; Ersel Aydinly, “Before Jihadists there were anarchists,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:10 (2008): 903–923. See also the recent debate in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, initiated by James Gelvin’s article “Al Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian’s Reply to Terrorology,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:4 (2008): 563–581.

methodological developments opening up new perspectives. As a result, three essential trends have been developed in this field of study: the move towards transnational or global history; a renewed interest in historical biography and the mapping out of personal networks, and, as a result, new approaches to comparativism.

The current shift towards transnationalism in labour history can be taken to have started in 1990, with the publication of Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe's landmark study *Revolutionary Syndicalism in International Perspective*.³ Transnational history—a term still competing with “new global history”, “connected histories”, or “entangled histories”—has recently been defined as the study of “links and flow...people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between polities and societies”.⁴ Most areas of the humanities and social sciences have responded to this dramatic change of focus, which is based on the awareness of the entangled and interconnected nature of societies, not only as a result of the most recent period of economic globalisation, but also over the past centuries, and in their very essence. This drive towards transnational revisionism has stemmed from the acknowledgment that historiography has been overwhelmingly written within a national framework and needs to be reconsidered with greater attention for the international context which constitutes, explains, determines or contradicts national developments. This approach is also necessary to provide a much-needed history of globalisation.

Anarchism, syndicalism and more generally labour history provide a case in point for the pertinence of this angle of study, especially as a way of expanding research on working-class internationalism. Internationalism as an ideal and a practical organisational goal has been at the centre of labour activism since at least the universalist proclamations of the French Revolution, and became a prime endeavour after the International Working Men's Association was set up in 1864. Labour internationalism, in its traditional and most widely accepted basic definition, is the ideology promoting universal brotherhood and solidarity among workers, and the setting up of organisations in order to achieve these aspirations.

³ It is true that, as Pierre-Yves Saunier points out, the German linguist Georg Curtius first used the term in a lecture in 1862, and that it was most likely already in use by then, but the term's academic career started in the 1960s. Saunier, “Transnational,” in *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 1051.

⁴ Iriye and Saunier, *Palgrave Dictionary...*, xviii.

The study of labour and socialist internationalism or its absence among the workers of the world logically emerged as a key theme for labour historians; such an approach is usually considered to have had its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ It developed in three directions: the history of institutions and leading actors, the history of congresses and debates, and the probing of the strengths and weaknesses of internationalism.⁶ This clearly left many areas unexplored, as the main emphasis was on the institutional or organisational level, with little attention paid to individual activism or to informal modes of organisation and action. And yet these levels do not overlap and often have diverging chronologies and fortunes. Classical studies of labour internationalism have thus ignored the networks and informal links underpinning or bypassing many established organisations. This has had especially notable consequences for the study of anarchism and other anti- or extra-parliamentarian movements, for which the rejection of formal militant organisation and the denunciation of parliamentary politics are held as central tenets. A related pitfall has been a dominant interest in charismatic leaders and institution officials. Lastly, in many cases, internationalism has been dealt with as an entirely separate category of study, and the three classic levels of historical study, the local, the national and the international, have been dealt with like Russian dolls—to borrow Pierre-Yves Saunier’s image⁷—studied in isolation, internationalism being easily dispensed with in many cases.⁸ This can be

⁵ Such first-generation landmarks in the history of international socialism include Lewis L. Lorwin, *Labor and Internationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); Édouard Dolléans, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier 1830–1871*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1936), although the latter is considered as a militant as well as a scientific study; James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955); G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought, The Second International 1889–1914* (London: Macmillan, 1956); Milorad M. Drachkovitch, ed., *The Revolutionary Internationals 1864–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); Annie Kriegel, *Le pain et les roses: jalons pour une histoire des socialismes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

⁶ Patrizia Dogliani, “Socialisme et Internationalisme,” *Cahiers Jaurès* 191 (2009): 14; Marcel van der Linden, “Transnationalizing US Labor History,” *The Journal of American History*, 86:3 (1999): 1078–1092.

⁷ Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux,” *Genèses* 57 (2004) : 111.

⁸ This is a marked trait in most studies on local anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in France. See for instance Vivien Bouhey’s recent *Les Anarchistes contre la République. Contributions à l’histoire des réseaux sous la Troisième République, 1880–1914* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008). Notable exceptions include René Bianco, “Le mouvement anarchiste à Marseille et dans les Bouches

illustrated by the history of the French anarchist movement, whose international aspects were pretty much ignored in the canonical studies of Jean Maitron⁹—as if French anarchism, being very influential as it was, did not have or need international connections. Similarly, the history of the French trade-union federation, the CGT, has often been dissociated from the international discussions it took part in—however vocal the latter were; as a result, separate and often groundbreaking monographs have had to make up for these gaps and provide the much-needed “broader picture”.¹⁰ This is one of the aspects in which the fairly new corrective of transnationalism proves most welcome, as it binds together the various geographical levels of study as well as the interaction of existing national or local cultures with outside influences.

Indeed, the contributions gathered in this book testify to the continuing emergence of a “new history” of anarchism, syndicalism and labour, in response to all these limitations. This work is a summary of these research strands and methodological developments, although this was initially largely coincidental. The volume is the result of a session held in 2008 during the first Anarchist Studies Network conference at the University of Loughborough,¹¹ for which a very broad call for papers had been issued; however, it appeared very early on that the contributions offered in response echoed one another, thus testifying to current research trends. This volume is intended to bring such trends to light. It opens with a comparative survey by Wayne Thorpe, which highlights the key themes of this volume: international cross-influences, personal connections, the mapping out of European syndicalism, and the role of informal ties

du Rhône, 1880–1914” (PhD Diss., IEP Aix en Provence, 1977), Nancy Green, *The Pletzl of Paris. Jewish Immigrant Workers in Paris in the Belle Époque* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier Publishing, 1985) or David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917-1945* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009).

⁹ Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France, 1880–1914* (Paris : Maspero, 1975); see also Jean Maitron (ed.), *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français* (Paris : Éditions Ouvrières, 1964).

¹⁰ For instance Susan Milner, *The Dilemmas of Internationalism. French Syndicalism and the International Labour Movement, 1900-1914* (Oxford: Berg, 1991); Wayne Thorpe, “*The Workers Themselves*”. *Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour 1913–1923* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989). Thorpe and Van der Linden, *Revolutionary Syndicalism...*

¹¹ Except for the chapters by Wayne Thorpe and Davide Turcato. The conference also featured a paper by Ralph Darlington, since published under the title “*Syndicalism and the Influence of Anarchism in France, Italy and Spain,*” *Anarchist Studies* 19:2 (2009): 29–54.

through travel, journalism or the translation of theoretical works.¹² Thorpe proceeds with a comparative survey of the various national movements and the often insurmountable hurdles to effective national and international coordination, through formal organisations or congresses. This contribution sketches out an extraordinarily dense web of international networks, stressing that “syndicalism found proponents in the easternmost and westernmost reaches of the European continent”. This overview is logically followed by several studies on “Individuals”, international and ideological mediators, sometimes well-known, sometimes completely unknown. The last case is exemplified in Yann Béliard’s evocation of Gustav Schmidt/Gus Smith, a migrant activist whose itinerary from Germany to Hull and from anarchism to the Labour Party bears witness to the importance of individual work migration for ideological dissemination, as well as to the two-way nature of such influences. Carl Levy highlights the intense international networking activity of Errico Malatesta, the “rooted cosmopolitan”, a prime example of the transnational activist in the age of the Second International. Drawing on Comintern and Profintern archival material, Reiner Tosstorff follows the CNT leader Ángel Pestaña on his 1920 journey to Moscow, to seal the inclusion of the CNT in the newly-founded Red International of Labour Unions and his growing disenchantment upon his return. Dieter Nelles writes on Alfons Pilarski and Upper-Silesian anarchism, a broadening of geographical and time scope, in a complex national and international context of disputed borders after 1914 and the rise of fascism. This leads to a third section, devoted to the movements which result from such individual activism and the personal networks underpinning them. Davide Turcato, examining Franco-Italo-British syndicalist connections, ponders the 1896 London congress and its long-term strategic significance, replacing the debates held at large congresses in the context of individual or small-group discussions over the crucial and ever-problematic question of the relation of anarchism to the organised labour movement. Constance Bantman charts the evolution of revolutionary syndicalism through 30 years of Franco-British discussions and reflections, questioning the notions of national militant models and emphasising the importance of ideological transfers in their making. In a survey which spans a century, Rafal Chwedoruk depicts the complex but hitherto under-researched ideological filiations of Polish anarchism and

¹² This text was originally published in French, under the title “La famille agitée. Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire en Europe de la charte d’Amiens à la Première Guerre Mondiale,” *Mil Neuf Cent* 24 (2006) : 123–152. We are grateful to Wayne Thorpe and the revue *Mil Neuf Cent* for agreeing to reprint this study, which appears in English for the first time.

syndicalism, stressing the importance of foreign ideological imports and their appropriations—not least with an enduring nationalist strand—in the vexed geopolitical context of the country, whilst emphasising equally the national particularities of Polish syndicalism. Guillaume Davranche similarly reconsiders the history of the CGT in an international perspective, revisiting its 1947 split as the result of the mounting ideological tensions of the early Cold War, but considering the scission not in terms of monolithic ideological currents, but through a close study of the concerns, aspirations, hesitations and ambiguities of the individual activists, and the history of the local groups. Bert Altena's essay on the importance of community in Dutch syndicalism concludes the volume, by putting forward another interpretation for the rise of syndicalism. Taking as its starting-point extensive primary research on contrasting labour organisations and cultures in two neighbouring Dutch towns, Altena's contribution provides a detailed discussion of the existing literature on syndicalism, and argues for the investigation of a little-heeded factor: the nature of the local community—an element hitherto neglected in favour of excessively economic/technological or political explanations. However, Altena points out in his conclusion the entanglement of the local and the national levels. Of course, in the age of the first globalisation, both were also heavily dependent on international developments, so that the question of scales of analysis remains crucial.

So whilst different methods and approaches coexist, these papers partake in an overall attempt to replace the “—isms” at the human level, break free from methodological nationalism, and show the many connections operating between the individual, national and transnational levels. The shift between different scales of analysis points to what Carl Levy describes as “the importance of the binominal”, between “local patriotism and cosmopolitanism” but also, we could add, the individual and the collective, informal and formal modes of organisation, as well as between internationalism, nationalism, localism and, occasionally, xenophobia.

It must be pre-emptively added that this collection does not escape the common accusation of Eurocentrism or Western-centrism which many transnational studies seek to rectify. These contributions are devoted exclusively to European developments and cover a limited time-span. Nor is the traditional supremacy of white male workers—to put it bluntly—challenged. This is yet another case of researchers being “the complacent

victims of [their] own networks and locations”.¹³ But for all its limitations, this convergence testifies to the shared questionings of a group of researchers rather than to any ideological preference or assumption. In terms of periods, the three decades before the First World War and the War itself are at the centre of several chapters. This reflects the significance of these pivotal years, those of the first globalisation, which saw a great increase in exchanges across Europe, and when a handful of anarchist and syndicalist movements in Europe and the United States achieved some form of hegemony.

Britain, which played host to many anarchist exiles and numerous foreign workers in the last decades of the long nineteenth century, also holds pride of place, with studies on Franco-British, Franco-German or Franco-Italo-British connections. France’s CGT or the Spanish CNT also retain some of their usual historiographic pre-eminence and feature in the foreground of several contributions, as well as in the background of others; however, rather than perpetuate the existing and occasionally debatable hegemony of these institutions, these contributions seek to provide new perspectives on them, by exploring their international ramifications and influences or by focusing on individual members.

Key topics stand out, many of them pertaining to the field of transnational history, along with a marked influence of the social history pioneered in the 1960s by Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson. The first theme is the significance of individual and network-based activism if one is to understand both national and international developments in the labour movement. Social histories of anarchism have usually been written as histories from below, recreating the perspective of lesser-known and middling militants. Pivotal works in this perspective include Jean Maitron’s encyclopaedic *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier*, where anarchists and syndicalists are duly represented.¹⁴ Branching out of the anti-parliamentary and revolutionary territory, a similar project exists across the Channel, with Joyce Bellamy and John

¹³ Iriye and Saunier, *Palgrave Dictionary...*, xix. For an overview of the literature on anarchist and syndicalist movements around the world, see the “Bibliographic Essay” in Vadim Damier, *Anarcho-syndicalism in the 20th Century* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009), 207–24.

¹⁴ This canonical work is currently under revision, and a *Maitron des Anarchistes* is to appear in 2011. This title itself is revealing of the current prosopographic emphasis, with a striking shift of focus from the labour movement to its actors, from a general to a more individualised perspective.

Saville's *Dictionary of Labour Biography*.¹⁵ While these key works are a few decades old, the genre of historical biography is currently enjoying a revival. The biographical dictionary went transnational with the publication in 2002 of *La Sociale en Amérique. Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier francophone aux États-Unis, 1848–1922*, under the supervision of Michel Cordillot, which transposed the interest in the lives and influences of lesser-known militants into a transnational context, by studying Francophone exiles and emigrants in the United States.¹⁶ A “Maitron des anarchistes” is currently under way in France, making room for unheard-of militants as before, but also for Francophone exile groups outside France. Important biographies of anarchist or syndicalist militants have recently appeared or are about to be published, such as Sheila Rowbotham's biography of Edward Carpenter and Benedict Anderson's *Under three flags*, which shows all the potentialities of biography in the context of transnational/global history.¹⁷ Carl Levy's forthcoming biography of Errico Malatesta, *The Rooted Cosmopolitan*, will explore a similar questioning (Levy's contribution to this volume presents some of this research).¹⁸ This historiographic development could perhaps also be seen as deriving from anarchist principles, which advocate individual or small-group action against large organisations. Indeed, in the words of José Moya, anarchism “formed the world's first and most widespread transnational movement organized from below and without formal political parties”.¹⁹ Such accounts are especially interesting for the pre-1914 period, which has often been described as the golden age of the

¹⁵ Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, nine vols. (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972–93). For a list of other biographical dictionaries, see the relevant section in the bibliographical appendix to Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Class and Other Identities. Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), 183–5.

¹⁶ See also Cordillot's recent *Révolutionnaires du Nouveau Monde. Une brève histoire du mouvement socialiste francophone aux États-Unis (1885–1922)* (Montreal : Lux, 2010).

¹⁷ Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter. A Life of Love and Liberty* (London: Verso, 2008); Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags. Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹⁸ Davide Turcato, whose contribution appears here, has also defended an acclaimed doctoral thesis on Malatesta. See also Constance Bantman, “The Militant Go-Between: Emile Pouget's Transnational Propaganda (1880–1914),” *Labour History Review*, 74:3 (2009): 274–287.

¹⁹ José Moya, *Palgrave Dictionary*, entry on “Anarchism,” 39.

charismatic leader rather than the rule of party politics,²⁰ and of formal as well as informal labour organisation. Even if syndicalism did not share this anti-organisational reluctance, it still relied heavily on prominent activists and a tight organisational network, and thus also lends itself well to biographical approaches. Hence also the pertinence of Bert Altena's focus on the local level and the community as the basis of syndicalism.

Network approaches have logically built on this biographical interest, since informal networks play a key role in the dissemination of ideologies, as evidenced by many of the contributions gathered here. Traditionally derided as mere “overlapping biographies” (Hobsbawm), or as a tedious and abstract social science tool, networks—used with various degrees of scientific pretension—are proving increasingly useful for social historians,

Going beyond the hyper-individualisation of life narratives typical of oral history, without however reverting to the disembodied generalisation of the dominant historiography of the 1950–1970 period. [They] make it possible to study the formation of political and social micro-identities, to insert individuals in collective webs of socialisation.²¹

At a more basic level, networks also evidence how militants cooperate outside institutions to propagate their views.

Travel and migration, so often a “moment of redefinition,”²² when new contacts are made and existing allegiances questioned, surface as another recurring theme, whether it is a question of attendance at an international congress (such as the 1896 London congress, or Pestaña's journey to Moscow), of labour migration (in the case of Gustav Schmidt), of exile (Malatesta and the French anarchists), or of simple visits, often kept up through personal correspondences, the translation of foreign writings and more or less formal collaborations. The contributions proposed here build on a growing body of research exploring anarchist and syndicalist cultural and countercultural activities in exile and migration.²³ And of course,

²⁰ Georges Haupt, “International leading groups in the labour movement,” in *Aspects of International Socialism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 81–100.

²¹ François Poirier, “Retours sur *In Place of Strife*,” in *Les années Wilson, 1964–1970*, ed. A. Capet (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen 257, 1999), 137. Our translation (and in all other translations from foreign sources, unless otherwise stated).

²² Saunier, “Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux,” 113.

²³ See for instance Constance Bantman, “Internationalism without an International? Cross-Channel Anarchist Networks, 1880–1914,” *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 84:4 (2006): 961–81; Pietro Dipaola, “Italian Anarchists in London, 1870–1914” (PhD Diss., University of London, 2004); Tom Goyens, *Beer and*

following the old stereotype, physical journeys should also be read as journeys of the mind: the atypical trajectories depicted here are both physical and figurative, the crossing of borders—physical and ideological—often go together.

A great wealth of cross-border interactions has been highlighted by recent studies, retracing intellectual, militant and ideological transfers in the history of anarchism and syndicalism, which often defy or qualify traditional historiographic distinctions between movements and political cultures, by pointing out the links and similarities between them at the national or international level and thus the hybrid character of such movements.²⁴ This acknowledgment in turn leads us to explore ideological and militant borrowings and the implied processes of adaptation. Hence the themes of ideological hybridity (transnational and transpolitical, especially in highly disputed areas like those studied by Nelles and Chwedoruk in this volume), or the study of geographical and historical variations in the interpretation of ideologies, along with the use of foreign references...

Unexpectedly perhaps, transnational and individualised approaches have resulted in a fresh confidence in comparative studies, probably because they are validated by archival work, take into account the extent

Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914 (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

²⁴ In addition to works previously cited here, see José Moya “Italians in Buenos Aires’ Anarchist Movement: Gender, Ideology and Women’s Participation, 1890–1910,” in *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World*, ed. D. Gabaccia and F. Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002). Recent ESSH conferences testify to a boom in this field of study. The 2008 conference featured a panel entitled “Anarchist Networks in Port and Provincial Cities: Latin America in Comparative Perspective”. The 2010 session of ESSHC was just as focused on international, transnational and comparative approaches, with Steven Hirsch’s “Anarchist Trails in the Andes: Transnational Influences and Counter-Hegemonic Practices in Peru’s Southern Highlands, 1905–1928”, Kirwin Shaffer’s “Contesting Internationalisms: Transnational Anarchists Confront US Expansionism in the Caribbean, 1890s–1920s”, and Geoffroy De Laforcade’s “Anarchist Federative Networking in Latin America: The Impact and Legacy of the Argentina Regional Workers’ Federation (F.O.R.A), 1901–1930”. Another panel was dedicated to “Trans-Atlantic Anarchy: Re-Evaluating European Anarchist Experiences in North America, 1890s–1930s”, with contributions by Kenyon Zimmer on Yiddish- and Italian-language anarchism in America, Travis Tomchuk on factional disputes among anarchists in Canada and the United States; Davide Turcato on “Malatesta in America, 1899–1900”, and Amparo Sanchez Cobos, on Spanish anarchists in Cuba.

to which the notion of the “national” is problematic, and are informed by an awareness of the pre-eminence of local, regional or occupational differences over any “national model”, quite simply because “nations can be too big for comparison”.²⁵ The confrontation in context of national militant cultures, allowing for the subtleties of individual experience, avoids the blunt juxtaposition which often besets comparativism; this is how local/individual studies can lead to fruitful comparisons. After all, transnational history is not to be understood exclusively as a study of interactions, and comparativism is integral to this approach, if we follow Marcel van der Linden’s definition of the term:

By “transnational”, we mean the placing in a wider context of all historical processes, no matter how geographically “small”, by means of comparison with processes elsewhere, the study of interaction processes, or a combination of the two.²⁶

This makes for compelling social and political history, because of the background and personal histories of those involved, and also because anarchism and syndicalism can so often be read as the reflections and manifestations of changing societies. Here they emerge as a consequence of the first modern globalisation, in a period marked by industrialisation and revolutions in communications and transport, but also as “a phenomenon in circumstances in which the world of workers was isolated from the rest of society” geographically, economically, politically, symbolically...²⁷ In the wake of Van der Linden and Thorpe’s *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, the questioning on the reasons for the international syndicalist outburst continues. In an approach which breaks away from the predominantly socio-economic factors put forward by Thorpe and Van der Linden, Altena puts the emphasis on the importance of the socioeconomic structure of the community, the workers’ independence and the buoyancy of local working-class cultural activities. Chwedoruk analyses the impact of a large set of determinants, such as political liberalism/repressive regimes; nation- and state-building; the existence of local political traditions as well as foreign influences; the social structure and degree of industrialisation of the country.

²⁵ Stefan Berger, “Introduction,” in *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies*, ed. S. Berger, A. Croll, N. Laporte (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1.

²⁶ Marcel van der Linden, “Globalizing Labor Historiography: the IISH Approach” <http://www.iisg.nl/publications/globlab.pdf>, (accessed on February 4, 2010), 2.

²⁷ Bert Altena, “Analysing Revolutionary Syndicalism: the Importance of Community,” ch.10 of this volume.

Another question which arises once the transnational ramifications of anarchism and syndicalism have been brought to light is whether these foreign inputs actually improved the way workers' struggles were fought or at least made some impact. Davranche's conclusions are clear: the international level can be paralysing when it is highly polarising, as in the case of the Cold War. Chwedoruk and Nelles also show the terrible impact of wars. Most of the papers presented here are devoted to the circulation of ideology but this raises the problem of actually implementing these new ideas and it is always difficult to measure the practical impact of militant doctrines. Studies focusing on local interactions in transnational contexts often underline the ethnic tensions or at least the separateness between native and foreign workers, which leads us back to the all too familiar subject of working-class xenophobia and fascism. Such ideologies were also occasionally endorsed by anarchist and syndicalist movements, as shown by the Polish example here. Thus, against the idea that the internationalist principles of syndicalism and anarchism also held in practice, and against the reality of transnational cooperation and ideological diffusion, several contributions point to the gap between the internationalist rhetoric and the realities of militancy, echoing ongoing research about colonial or imperialist contexts in particular.²⁸

The last issue which emerges in the course of this volume, but which has been little studied so far, concerns the complexities of terminology in a transnational labour movement and the resulting difficulties for those who set about exploring it. Indeed, since English is the reference language used here, the distinction between trade unionism and syndicalism arises, which is especially challenging when dealing with a movement where trade union organisations are in fact syndicalist, as in the case of France. As stressed by James Bennett, "some terminology embedded within one historiography fails the test of portability across boundaries".²⁹ But

²⁸ Lucien van der Walt, "The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW and the ICU, 1904–1934," paper presented at the International Conference "Re-thinking Worlds of Labour. Southern African labour history in international context", University of the Witwatersrand, July 2006, available online:

<http://web.wits.ac.za/NR/rdonlyres/8C2196B0-155B-4786-B7FF-3A08F022238B/0/vanderwaltLHC2006.pdf>

(accessed February 18, 2010); Yann Béliard, "Imperial Internationalism? Hull Labour's Support for South African Trade-Unionism on the Eve of the Great War," *Labour History Review*, 74:3 (2009): 319–329.

²⁹ James Bennett, "Reflections on Writing Comparative and Transnational Labour History," *History Compass*, 2009, 7: 2 (2009): 385.

sometimes linguistic portability and the semantic dimensions of political transfers become the very objects of study of the historian: thus, all the contributions refer at some point to the use of language as a way of nodding to a reference (syndicalism, CNT in Chwedoruk's paper), a way of adapting and symbolising a new ideological affiliation (Gus Smith/Gustav Schmidt) or, on the contrary, as a contentious practice (see Thorpe's remark on the foreign adaptations of the French term *syndicalisme révolutionnaire*). For us, this insistence on the symbolic dimension of militant terminology also linked up with an editorial dilemma: to translate or not to translate? We have opted to give the original names, mainly with a view to helping researchers, usually followed by an English translation, so that the actual meaning of organisation names might not be lost. It is hoped that, this way, the research summaries collected here will carry on opening up perspectives for further explorations.

PART I

THE SYNDICALIST FAMILY

CHAPTER ONE

UNEASY FAMILY:
REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM IN EUROPE
FROM THE *CHARTE D'AMIENS*
TO WORLD WAR ONE

WAYNE THORPE

Early in the twentieth century the French of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (General Confederation of Labour —CGT) presented a notable contrast to the labour thought and practice that predominated in much of Europe.¹ This difference was most conspicuous in relations between trade unions and political parties. In Britain, long-standing reformist trade unions were collectively bringing into being the Labour Party (1906) to speak on their behalf. In Germany the dominant trade unions had emerged under the auspices and imbued with the values of the German Social Democratic Party. A number of European countries exhibited a pattern similar to that of Germany, with major trade unions seen as the industrial arm and parties as the political arm of a social democratic movement. But the leading trade union organisation in prewar France, the CGT, prized the autonomy of militant unions. The CGT, in short, embraced revolutionary syndicalism, which postulated that autonomous and self-reliant trade unions, uniting workers at the point of production rather than as voters within cross-class political parties, constituted the fundamental and decisive workers' organisations, preserving the identity of workers as producers and best prepared to defend their interests. Unions should

¹ This chapter first appeared in *Mil neuf cent: Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, no. 24 (2006): 123–52, a special issue launched in sessions at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris in October 2006 to mark the centenary of the *Charte d'Amiens* of the CGT. I am grateful to *Mil neuf cent* for permission to reproduce it here. The present version has been somewhat revised, but does not incorporate work that has appeared since 2006, including most immediately the other chapters in this volume. Some post-2006 work will nevertheless be cited in the notes.

therefore remain independent of all political parties, including socialist ones. Since inevitable class conflict was fought out first and foremost on the economic terrain, direct action through trade unions was more effective than indirect action mediated through electoralism and parliamentarism in advancing not only short-term goals but long-term revolutionary objectives, notably the inauguration of a collectivised, worker-managed society.

Initially the CGT constituted the only self-described revolutionary syndicalist organisation in Europe. But revolutionary syndicalism (hereafter, usually simply “syndicalism”)², by no means limited to France, was an international movement whose appeal was felt widely in Europe, North and South America and beyond.³ Here the focus will remain on the

² The term “anarcho-syndicalism”, although not used by its activists, is sometimes applied to the prewar CGT. An example: Barbara Mitchell, *The Practical Revolutionaries: A New Interpretation of the French Anarchosyndicalists* (New York: Greenwood, 1987). Anarchists, to be sure, were active in the labour movement from the 1890s onward, in France and elsewhere, and did much to fortify the insistence on union autonomy. See for example, Anthony Lorry, “Anarchisme et syndicalisme en France avant 1914,” Michel Pigenet and Pierre Robin, eds., *Regards sur le syndicalisme révolutionnaire* (Nerac: Albret, 2007), 49–70; David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945* (Westport: Greenwood, 2002), ch. 6. Very rare in prewar France, the term “anarcho-syndicalism” was coined in 1907 by socialists to disparage the programmatic neutrality of the CGT. See Anthony Lorry, “1907: Les guesdistes contre ‘l’anarcho-syndicalisme’”, http://www.pelloutier.net.dossiers.php?id_dossier=262. The pejorative was deployed much more widely in the early postwar period, usually by communists, against advocates of union autonomy. Only in the wake of the war, it appears, did movements begin to adopt “anarcho-syndicalism” as a self-description, for example, the All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists of 1918. Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt have recently argued that anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism, used as descriptive typologies, are best understood as nearly identical movements falling under the canopy of the “broad anarchist tradition”. *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, vol. 1 (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), ch. 5.

³ The syndicalist movements in eight European countries (as well as Argentina, Mexico, the USA and Canada) are discussed in Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, eds., *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990). The editors’ introduction (1–24) to that volume offered a brief and tentative analysis of the factors encouraging the emergence of syndicalism in the era of the second industrial revolution: a generalised radicalisation of labour; the changing nature of labour processes and relations that challenged job control and workers’ autonomy; the growing feasibility of the general strike; spatial and geographical considerations; and the increasing rejection of the dominant labour strategy. We noted (6) that “the matrix of contributing factors [...] always took

European arena, within which the French enjoyed preeminence. With a membership perhaps exceeding 500,000 at its prewar height, the CGT was easily the largest syndicalist body in Europe, indeed, the world. Only in France had a syndicalist organisation emerged as the largest trade union association in its country, moreover, and it possessed an array of active and articulate advocates. The most visible exponent of syndicalism in Europe, the French movement also served as an example and an inspiration. Workers elsewhere could draw on their own traditions of self-reliance, for example, or the legacies of the libertarian wing of the First International to encourage direct action. But whatever combination of indigenous factors prompted militants elsewhere to embrace syndicalism—and they were above all responding to immediate circumstances—the comparative success of the CGT did not escape their attention. Many activists elsewhere saw syndicalism as an alternative to the reformist unions and Labour or Socialist Parties with which they were increasingly dissatisfied. In France itself, belated unification in 1905 of various socialist factions into a single French Socialist Party did not change the picture. To the contrary, it provided the backdrop for the CGT's single most important statement of union autonomy and revolutionary commitment, endorsed in 1906 and later known as the *Charte d'Amiens*.⁴ Revolutionary unionists beyond France often applauded the *Charte*. In Switzerland *La Voix du peuple* hailed it as “the most brilliant victory that trade unionism has ever achieved”. Over another border, the Spanish militant Adolfo Bueso recalled the *Charte* as a primer of radicalism, as

distinctive colouration from varying occupational, regional and national conditions”. Van der Linden pointed to some of those conditions, such as the role of the state and ideological dimensions, as well as to cultural factors, in “Second Thoughts on Revolutionary Syndicalism,” in van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 71–84. See also the discussions in Larry Peterson, “The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism,” in James E. Cronin and Carmen Siriani, eds., *Work, Community and Power: The Experience of Labor in Europe and America, 1900–1925* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 49–87, and more recently, in Ralph Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Study* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 49–93.

⁴ On the development of the CGT see the work of the leading French analyst, Jacques Julliard, including *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971) and *Autonomie ouvrière: Etudes sur le syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1988). Julliard reflects on the centenary of the *Charte* in “La charte d'Amiens, cent ans après: Texte, contexte, interprétations,” *Mil neuf cent* 24 (2006) : 5–40.

“the ABC of revolutionary syndicalism”.⁵ Foreign sympathisers could commend the *Charte*, to be sure, but they also witnessed a CGT that was in its “heroic period” of confrontation with employers and the state, which only enhanced its power as an example. Over the years, activists widely dispersed in Europe invoked that example in promoting syndicalism in their own countries. They identified with the CGT, or rather, they identified both the CGT and themselves as part of a wider European syndicalist family.

These pages consider this wider but informal family, but selectively, touching on only a few themes: the preeminence of the CGT and its role as an example within this perceived family; family harmonies and disharmonies, or similarities and differences among syndicalist movements; and the failure of the syndicalists collectively—despite the debt to the French that those outside France felt and readily acknowledged—to translate this sense of belonging into a common international policy.

The Example of France

Foreign militants observed the CGT as best they could, either indirectly, through the print media, or directly, through personal contact with its members, the *cégétistes*. For some of them, Paris constituted the Mecca of syndicalism, a destination for pilgrims seeking inspiration or those eager to observe the French example at first-hand. To speak only of Europeans—for the CGT drew observers from beyond Europe as well—among the most significant foreign advocates to visit Paris was the Dutch militant, a former teacher of working-class origins, Christiaan Cornelissen. Cornelissen had been a founder of the Dutch *Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat* (National Labour Secretariat—NAS) in 1893. His thinking paralleled that of Fernand Pelloutier, an influential early organiser and formulator of French syndicalism, and the Secretary of the *Fédération des Bourses*, which merged with the CGT in 1902. Indeed, it has been argued that “syndicalism as a coherent unity of ideas and movement, inspired to a large extent by Cornelissen, emerged even earlier in the Netherlands than it did in France under the influence of Fernand Pelloutier”.⁶ But it was in

⁵ *La Voix du peuple*, October 20, 1906; Adolfo Bueso, *Recuerdos de un cenetista*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Ariel, 1976), 53.

⁶ Homme Wedman, “Christiaan Cornelissen: Marxism and revolutionary syndicalism,” *Die Rezeption der Marxschen Theorie in den Niederlanden*, Marcel van der Linden, ed. (Trier: Karl-Marx-Haus, 1992), 84–105, 93. On Cornelissen, see Bert Altena and Homme Wedman, eds., *Tussen anarchisme en sociaaldemocratie. “Het Revolutionaire Kommunisme” van Christiaan Cornelissen*

France that syndicalism received its most influential formulation and its fullest organisational expression. Cornelissen, who had settled permanently in Paris by 1898, played a variety of roles within the movement. First, he had shaped and served the early Dutch organisation, which honoured him as “the father of the NAS” on its twentieth anniversary in 1913.⁷ Second, he long served within the French movement, notably as a journalist for *La Voix du peuple* and after 1911 as foreign editor of *La Bataille syndicaliste*, both newspapers of the CGT. Third, Cornelissen edited and published from Paris *Le Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste*, a journal intended to keep the increasing number of revolutionary-oriented labour organisations in the various lands informed about one another.

Cornelissen chose to operate permanently from Paris, but other activists—to point to only a few examples—spent shorter periods in the Mecca of syndicalism. Drawn in 1904 to the Paris of revolutionary history, Hungary’s Ervin Szabo sought out syndicalists as well as socialists. Some years later, deploring the influence of what he regarded as the stultifying model of German-Austrian socialism, Szabo hoped that the workers of Hungary would embark on the path mapped by “the genius of the French people”.⁸ In 1910 Szabo founded a Syndicalist Propaganda Group in Budapest. Two of the earliest Russian advocates of syndicalism, Maria Korn and K. Orgeiani, observed the French movement at first-hand. Maksim Raevskii, Russia’s most notable émigré syndicalist, spent much of 1906–1910 in Paris where he co-edited *Burevestnik (The Stormy Petrel)*. Sweden’s Albert Jensen, hailed by the Danish paper *Solidaritet* as the most able syndicalist writer in Scandinavia, periodically visited the *cégétistes*, both before and after he participated in the 1910 establishment of the *Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation* (Swedish Workers’ Central Organisation).⁹ Many of the Spaniards who promoted the founding in 1910 of the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (National Confederation of Labour—CNT) had spent time in France.¹⁰ Prior to establishing the Industrial Syndicalist Education League in England, Tom Mann and Guy Bowman arrived in Paris in May 1910 to consult “the men of direct

(1864–1943) (Bergen: Anarchistische Uitgaven, 1985). On Pelloutier, see Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier*.

⁷ NAS, *Jaarverslagen van het Nationaal Arbeids-Secretariaat in Nederland over de Jaren 1911, 1912 en 1913* (Amsterdam: NAS, n.d.), 144.

⁸ Quoted in Tibor Süle, *Sozialdemokratie in Ungarn: Zur Rolle der Intelligenz in der Arbeiterbewegung 1899–1910* (Koln: Böhlau, 1967), 185.

⁹ *Solidaritet*, October 4, 1913. See Jensen’s unpublished and unpaginated memoirs, “Memoarfragment,” in the Jensen Archive, *Arbterrörelsens Arkiv*, Stockholm.

¹⁰ Bueso, *Recuerdos*, 1:53.

action".¹¹ Italian syndicalists also frequented Paris and became well-acquainted with the leaders of the CGT. They included Alceste de Ambris, Italy's best-known revolutionary unionist prior to 1914. Armando Borghi, who would lead the *Unione Italiana Sindicalista* (Italian Syndicalist Union—USI) through World War I, spent some months in Paris during 1911-1912. Following his return to Italy, he published a volume on Fernand Pelloutier.¹²

But French influence reached far beyond those who visited Paris itself, for the writings of CGT activists and supporters were widely available on the continent. The propaganda brochures of Emile Pouget could be found in Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English, German and Swedish. John Andersson, later the head of the *Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation*, recalled the series of works—by Pelloutier, Pouget, Georges Yvetot, Victor Griffuelhes, Léon Jouhaux, Hubert Lagardelle—published in Swedish by the Young Socialists. Manuel Joaquim de Sousa similarly recalled the influence of Portuguese editions of works by Pouget, Yvetot, Griffuelhes and Paul Delesalle.¹³ Spanish editions of Yvetot, Pataud, Griffuelhes, and especially Pouget, were widely and avidly read in Spain in the half-decade or so preceding the foundation of the CNT in 1910.¹⁴ When the CNT fell under a judicial ban in 1911 its first Secretary, José Negre, took refuge in Paris.

Even more readers were reached by the journals that propagated syndicalism outside France. In some cases, existing militant newspapers like *Die Einigkeit* in Germany and *Brand* in Sweden, both dating back to the nineteenth century, came to embrace and publicise the cause. The Russian journal in Geneva, *Kheb i volia (Bread and liberty)*, whose first issue in 1903 praised the general strike, endorsed syndicalism during the Russian Revolution of 1905. The proliferation of newly-created journals

¹¹ Quoted in Bowman's introduction to Tom Mann, *From Single Tax to Syndicalism* (Walthamstow, 1913). On much earlier interchanges of activists and advocacy of direct action unionism between Britain and France, see Constance Bantman, "Internationalism without an International? Cross-Channel Anarchist Networks, 1880–1914," *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire* 84 (2006) : 961–81.

¹² Armando Borghi, *Fernand Pelloutier nel sindacalismo francese* (Bologna: Azzoduidi, 1913).

¹³ John Andersson, *Rebell i klassamhälle och välfärdsstat: En syndikalists minnen* (Stockholm: Federativs Förlag, 1961), 34; Manuel Joaquim de Sousa, *O Sindicalismo em Portugal*, 3 ed. (Porto: Movimento Operário Português, 1972).

¹⁴ Antonio Bar, *La CNT en los años rojos (del sindicalismo revolucionario al anarcosindicalismo, 1910–1926)* (Madrid: Akal, 1981), 72. See also Bueso, *Recuerdos*, 1:53.

devoted primarily to promoting syndicalism illustrates its increasing geographical appeal in the era of the *Charte d'Amiens*. The following list is not complete, but it demonstrates that from 1905 not a year passed without a new voice being added to the syndicalist chorus—1905: the NAS journal *De Arbeid* (The Netherlands), *L'Action directe* (Belgium), and *Il Sindacato operaio* (Italy); 1906: *La Voix du peuple* (Switzerland), which called the *Charte d'Amiens* “a syndicalist triumph”¹⁵; 1907: *Voice of labour* (Britain); *Solidaridad obrera* (Spain); 1908: *L'Internazionale* (Italy) and *A Greve* (Portugal), sustained by the typographers of Lisbon, whose editor would claim it was the world’s first syndicalist daily¹⁶; 1909: *Storm* (Norway); 1910: *Industrial Syndicalist* (Britain) and *O Sindacalista* (Portugal); 1911: *Syndikalisten* (Sweden) and *Solidaritet* (Denmark); 1912: *The Syndicalist* (Britain) and *Direkte Aktion* (Norway); 1913: *L'Action ouvrière* (Belgium).

These and other publications not only gave voice to French and non-French advocates of syndicalism in many lands in Europe, but more directly testify to the example and inspiration that the French provided.¹⁷ “From France”, *El Trabajo* in Sabadell in Spain declared in May 1906, “the nation from which so many good initiatives have emerged, comes the example that we ought to follow”. *L'Action directe*, supported above all by the miners of the Charleroi basin, urged Belgian workers to adopt “the example of our confederated friends of France”. Tullio Masotti was invoking the French example in Italy in *La Pratica sindacalista* two years before the founding of the USI that he would head.¹⁸ Individual participants in the movement outside France during the period—for example Adolfo Bueso in Spain, Alexandra Vieira in Portugal, John Andersson and Albert in Sweden—later recalled the inspiration they and their fellows drew from the *cégétistes*.¹⁹ Groups and organisations elsewhere

¹⁵ *La Voix du peuple*, October 20, 1906.

¹⁶ Peter Merten, *Anarchismus und Arbeiterbewegung in Portugal* (Hamburg: Libertäre Assoziation, 1981), 59–60.

¹⁷ It is a sign of growing interest in the topic that since this essay was written a volume appeared at the end of 2009 (which I have yet to see) largely devoted to the influence of the *Charte d'Amiens* and the French example in a number of European countries, including Italy (by Mauricio Antonioli), Spain (Francisco Madrid) and Portugal (João Freire): Miguel Chueca, ed., *Le Syndicalisme révolutionnaire: La Charte d'Amiens et l'autonomie ouvrière* (Paris: Éditions CNT, 2009).

¹⁸ *El Trabajo*, May 26, 1906; *L'Action directe*, September 17, 1907; Tullio Masotti, *La Pratica sindacalista* (Parma: Tipografia Camerale, 1910), 16.

¹⁹ Bueso, *Recuerdos*, 1:53; Alexandre Vieira, *Para a História do Sindicalismo em Portugal*, 2 ed. (Lisbon: Seara Nova, 1974), 40; Jensen, “Memoarfragment”; Andersson, *Rebell*, 34.

explicitly invoked the example as well. *La Voix du peuple* in Lausanne spoke of the dreams of “we fellow syndicalists” of the *Fédération des Unions Ouvrières*, “the organisation corresponding” to the CGT in French-speaking Switzerland. Fritz Kater, the head of the *Freie Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften* (Free Association of German Unions), specifically invoked the CGT in successfully urging his organisation to adopt a syndicalist programme in 1908. The members of the *Union des Syndicats de Liège*, whose programme was accepted as that of the newly-founded *Confédération Syndicale Belge* in late 1913, described themselves as “partisans of direct action as advocated by the French C.G.T.”²⁰ The example of the CGT, widely deployed in rhetorical arsenals, was nearly ubiquitous. Clearly, the European syndicalists outside France viewed their own movements as members of a larger family, within which, as a Belgian put it, the French were the elder brothers.²¹ “In a certain sense, we in Italy”, wrote Armando Borghi, “were the daughters of France”.²²

A Growing Family

The appeal of syndicalism had made itself felt widely in Europe well before the CGT endorsed the *Charte d'Amiens* in 1906. The appearance of Cornelissen's *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste* in 1907 was itself both a symptom of the transnational character of the movement and a means of registering and celebrating, sometimes exaggerating, its growth. Those with less sympathy for syndicalism also had to acknowledge its presence. The German sociologist Werner Sombart, long an observer of social movements in Europe, made a major change in his *Sozialismus und Soziale Bewegung* by adding a chapter on syndicalism to the sixth edition of 1908. Sombart granted that the phenomenon appeared to run counter to the main thesis of his book: the growing uniformity of labour movements. For Sombart, syndicalism could only have developed in France, a country combining a revolutionary history and a highly developed, almost overly-refined, culture. Sombart observed that the great merit of syndicalist thought was “without doubt to have illuminated more

²⁰ Switzerland: *La Voix du peuple*, October 20, 1906; Germany: FVdG, *Das Programm der Freien Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften* (Berlin: Kater, 1908), 12; Belgium: quoted in Jan Moulart, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en Belgique* (Ottignies: Quorum, 1996), 320.

²¹ *La Vie ouvrière*, April 5, 1913, 405.

²² Borghi, *Mezzo secolo de anarchia (1898–1945)* (Naples: Edizione scientifiche italiane, 1954), 120.

fully than any other socialist doctrine the evils of our civilisation". Where the Marxists were quick to see solutions the syndicalists, in Sombart's opinion, more clearly saw and refused to minimise problems: the steadily dehumanizing encroachments of centralised state power, the increasing bureaucratisation of modern life, the inability of proposals of state socialism to remedy such problems. For Sombart, however, syndicalism was specifically French, or at most Franco-Italian, the product of cultures in which impulsiveness and sudden enthusiasms reigned over application and perseverance.²³ But Sombart was writing in 1908, before syndicalism had demonstrated the breadth of its appeal and the range of cultures in which it could find expression.

In 1906, when the CGT endorsed the *Charte d'Amiens*, only in France was there a self-designated national syndicalist labour organisation. By 1914 there were such bodies in The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Spain, and Italy, and the Belgians were attempting to launch a national organisation as well.²⁴ There were also propaganda groups advocating the cause in Portugal, Norway, Denmark, Hungary, Britain and elsewhere. Syndicalism found proponents in the easternmost and westernmost reaches of the European continent. The leading advocate in southern Russia until he was imprisoned, the Odessa-based activist who called himself Daniil Novomirskii ("Man of the New World") enjoyed success sufficiently enviable that an anarchist rival ruefully observed that "God, if he existed, must be a syndicalist". For Novomirskii, the trade unions were to conduct the struggle for immediate gains and to serve as "the cells of the future workers' society". Novomirskii envisioned a Russian version of the CGT in the form of an All-Russian Union of Labor.²⁵ On the westernmost part of the continent, in Portugal, the syndicalists had outpaced the social democratic trade union movement by 1914. After the disruptions of world war, the largest union organisation in the country in 1919, the *Confederação Geral do Trabalho*, would be syndicalist. Sombart's 1908 volume observed that in his own Germany those defenders of the general strike in the *Freie Vereinigung*, known as "localists" for their advocacy of local union autonomy, could not be considered syndicalists. But the *Freie*

²³ Werner Sombart, *Sozialismus und Soziale Bewegung*, 6 ed. (Jena: Fischer, 1908), 129; see 123–9.

²⁴ In Ireland the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, although perhaps not national prior to 1914, exhibited strong syndicalist traits. Emmet O'Connor emphasises a later period in *Syndicalism in Ireland 1917–1923* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1988).

²⁵ Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 78, 77.

Vereinigung's 1908 congress, in which the example of the French CGT was invoked, resolved that its programme would be revolutionary syndicalist in everything but name.²⁶

That name, “revolutionary syndicalism”, could be seen as problematic. In French, in which a trade union was a “syndicat”, the phrase “revolutionary syndicalism” designated a trade unionism (“syndicalisme”) that was self-consciously revolutionary. The phrase “revolutionary syndicalism” fit well enough into the Romance languages, where a trade union was a “sindicato” (Spanish, Portuguese), or a “sindacato” (Italian), terms sometimes simply appropriated from the French.²⁷ But in the Germanic languages where a trade union might be a “Gewerkschaft” (German), or a “vakvereniging” (Dutch), or a “fackförening” (Swedish), it struck an unusual note. In those languages, moreover, the phrase “revolutionary syndicalism” reduced to versions of the noun—“Syndikalismus” (German), for example, or “syndikalismen” (Swedish)—which incorporated the “revolutionary” adjective and stood alone. The term could have the effect of highlighting its character as something non-native. Critics in central and northern Europe, often social democrats, complained that the term was ill-fitting in their languages, even forbidding and threatening. Sombart pointed to its oddity in German, Otto Järte to what he regarded as its misleading and sinister character in Swedish.²⁸ Commentators in Britain similarly found the term alien. The movement “has already commandeered much of the social gunpowder in this country”, *The Times* observed in March 1912, “though even its name is hardly yet acclimatised”. J. Ramsay Macdonald noted that the term was a “stranger in our language, with no registered abode as yet. Had it not been an ugly word it would probably never been brought over, for it has achieved fame by reason of its capacity to frighten”.²⁹ Perhaps it was the term’s power to intimidate that prompted Lord Howard de Walden of British horse racing circles to amuse himself by naming his favourite filly of the 1911–1912 seasons “Syndicalism”.³⁰ But only in the rarest cases did its supporters outside France see the term as a liability, as did those

²⁶ Sombart, *Sozialismus*, 111; Freie Vereinigung, *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen vom 8. Kongress der Freien Vereinigung deutscher Gewerkschaften* [1908] (Berlin: Kater, 1908), 131.

²⁷ As in Italy: see Willy Gianinazzi, “Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire en Italie (1904–1925): Les hommes et les luttes,” *Mil neuf cent* 27 (2006) : 95–121, 96.

²⁸ Sombart, *Sozialismus*, 109; Järte, *Tiden*, December 1908, 37.

²⁹ *The Times*, March 1, 1912; J. Ramsay MacDonald, *Syndicalism: A Critical Examination* (London: Constable, 1912), v.

³⁰ *The Times*, September 27, 1911 *passim*.

members of the *Freie Vereinigung* who endorsed syndicalism in 1908 but declined to “burden” their movement “with foreign names”, a reservation they soon abandoned.³¹ Its advocates in northern Europe, to the contrary, did not hesitate to distinguish their own movements from reform—and party-minded ones by designating them “syndicalist” and by bestowing on their newspapers such titles as *Syndikalisten* in Sweden and *The Syndicalist* in Great Britain, which was also a means of identifying their movements as members of a larger international family.

On Native Soil: Syndicalism as International

The family metaphor was a useful one, for it suggested mutual interest and affinity between syndicalist movements, but in the sense of family resemblance rather than strict identity. The metaphor allowed for national and regional variations among them, for indigenous distinctiveness, rather than implying an effort to replicate a specifically French model in conditions alien to it. Syndicalism, some supporters had long argued, was simply the expression of working life in modern capitalist societies, flowing naturally from the proletarian experience, although this left unexplained why syndicalism was not even more widespread. The experience of class conflict in its most immediate form on the economic front, on this account, prompted producers to fashion their own autonomous workers’ organisations. True, such organisations could only be forged against opposition, and therefore did not come without conscious will and effort, which syndicalists also stressed. But the unions were nevertheless the most natural means by which to defend and advance workers’ interests through direct action at the point of production, where class antagonism was at its rawest and most evident. That experience gave rise to such principles as resistance to collective contracts, antimilitarism, and the general strike. Fernand Pelloutier noted that the unions “scoffed at theory”, that their practical experience, “their empiricism [...] is worth at least as much as all the systems in the world, which have precisely the duration and exactitude of predictions in the almanac”. For the syndicalist, in Werner Sombart’s words, “the maxim is not: in the beginning was the Word—was theory, doctrine, dogma—but: in the beginning was the Deed”. When the French sought to convey their views to German workers in France, they explained that the very title of the German-language journal they published in Paris for this purpose, *Der Syndikalist*, “is an entire programme. To show how this programme grows out of working

³¹ Freie Vereinigung, *Protokoll* [1908], 131.

life itself, out of the daily struggle, is the task of this paper".³² When revolutionary unionists outside France applauded the French as the pioneers of syndicalism, they meant that the French had advanced further in articulating its axioms and giving institutionalised expression to its practices, not that those axioms and practices were singularly or even distinctively French. In Britain E.J.B. Allen spoke for virtually all syndicalists when he wrote that "syndicalism is a natural product, peculiar to no nationality".³³ For the Polish Revolutionary Syndicalist Group in Cracow the oppressed mass "organises itself syndicalistically in a natural manner".³⁴ Syndicalism not only issued from immediate experience, its advocates argued, but it found expression in direct and practical action, also shaped by immediate circumstances. Foreign militants who took up the syndicalist flag wanted to acknowledge France as the country where syndicalism had developed most fully, but also to assert the integrity of the direct actionist programme as natural and appropriate to the workers' experience in their own habitat. Tom Mann's observations in the first issue of *The Industrial Syndicalist* in England in some measure illustrate the delicate balance between acknowledging French inspiration and validating syndicalist strategy outside France:

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.³⁵

Non-French syndicalists wished in particular to deflect the charge that they were slavishly adopting and endeavouring to apply a foreign model inappropriately in their own countries, a charge that their adversaries were quick to make against them. Diffusion theorists refer to "hyper-difference" as the highlighting of the foreign character of an example or innovation

³² Pelloutier, *Histoire des Bourses de Travail* (Paris: Schleicher, 1902), 155; Sombart, *Sozialismus*, 117; *Der Syndikalist*, March 1911.

³³ *The Syndicalist*, July 1912. Similar claims were made about the general strike, as in Albert Jensen, *Generalsträjken: Ett diskussionsinlägg och en antikritik av Brantings kritik* (Helsingborg: Nilssons and Ströms, 1907), 13.

³⁴ Provisional Agenda [1913 Syndicalist Congress], Jack Tanner Papers, Nuffield College, Oxford University, Oxford. For the Poles syndicalism, at least metaphorically, was "biologically inevitable".

³⁵ *The Industrial Syndicalist*, July 1910, 17. See also, Tom Mann, *Memoirs* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1967 [1923]), 205–6.

“as an argument to dismiss it or at least doubt its legitimacy”.³⁶ Non-Gallic syndicalists did not know the expression, but recognised the tactic. Italy’s Alceste De Ambris observed that the common strategy of its adversaries was to posit the false premise that syndicalism was “an exclusively French ‘mode’” in order to conclude that those who supported it outside France acted in “an arbitrary spirit of imitation”.³⁷ In every quarter of Europe, in Spain and Italy, in Sweden and Britain, critics—social democrats foremost among them—accused syndicalists of attempting to graft a foreign weed onto an indigenous working-class plant. In Catalonia *La Justicia social* charged that the new CNT in Spain had “imported from France” only the negative, had “sought out from the French CGT, an organisation of its ilk, only what is defective”.³⁸ In Belgium, *L’Action ouvrière* had in mind socialist critics of syndicalism when it invoked the Arab adage: “The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on”.³⁹ In articles like “Syndicalism on a Swedish Foundation”⁴⁰ and “Is Syndicalism Un-English”⁴¹ native defenders rebutted charges that syndicalism was alien to their lands. In Britain such criticism was not limited to socialists. In a moment of some irony given the syndicalist view of the significance of parliament, Mr. Ormsby-Gore rose in the House of Commons to assert that the syndicalism indigenous to France was not appropriate to Britain, but also to introduce a motion declaring that “the growth and advocacy [...] of an anti-social policy of Syndicalism [...] constitute a grave danger to the State and the welfare of the community”. His seconder, Mr. Hewins, observed that “Syndicalism is the child of the French Revolution”, adding in apparently genuine puzzlement, “why go to the human race when you have the British Empire”?⁴²

³⁶ Henk te Velde, “Political Transfer: An Introduction,” *European Review of History* (2005): 205–21, 209.

³⁷ *La Vie ouvrière*, September 5 1913, 264.

³⁸ *La Justicia social*, June 10, 1911, quoted in Xavier Cuadrat, *Socialismo y anarquismo en Cataluña (1899–1911): los orígenes de la C.N.T.* (Madrid: Revista de Trabajo, 1976), 477.

³⁹ Quoted in Moulaert, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en Belgique*, 318.

⁴⁰ *Brand*, 23, July 30, August 6, 1910. Previously *Tiden* (December 1908 and following) had published a series asserting the inappropriateness of syndicalism in Sweden.

⁴¹ *The Syndicalist*, July 1912. Socialist critics in Britain included Ramsay MacDonald, *Syndicalism* and Philip Snowden, *Socialism and Syndicalism* (London: Collins, n.d.).

⁴² *Parliamentary Debates (Official Report)*. Fifth series, vol. 36. House of Commons, 3rd Volume of Session, 1912. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 535–5, 547, 551–2.

Family Differences

There were limits, however, to the resemblances within the syndicalist family, or rather, to the range of features that the French shared with their foreign counterparts. French and non-French alike could see shared values in the common advocacy of those direct actionist principles that had found their most impressive programmatic and organisational expressions in France. But families encompass differences as well as similarities. A sense of familial belonging could downplay differences between the remaining national syndicalist organisations on the continent (setting aside here simple propaganda groups) on the one hand and the CGT on the other. In at least one notable particular, those differences could override similarities, and would prompt the exemplar, the CGT, to dissociate itself from the national union associations elsewhere that had drawn inspiration from it.

One difference was the interplay between the goal of worker unity and programmatic neutrality. For the French, worker unity and political neutrality (if a policy that aimed at a union-led transformation of socioeconomic and political institutions can be so characterised) went hand in hand. Political neutrality was a means of uniting workers, of casting the net of union membership as widely as possible in the interests of inclusiveness. The CGT as an organisation abstained from electoralism and parliamentarism and from relations with political parties and groups. Political neutrality required not that unionists surrender their political convictions, say regarding socialism or anarchism, but that they keep those convictions—or religious ones for that matter—outside the unions, where attention was to focus solely on the economic class struggle. To be sure, some influential antipolitical *cégétistes* like Pouget regularly dismissed voting and parliamentarism. But the CGT had no formal or procedural objection to its members supporting socialism outside of the unions, working in or entering electoral contests, winning offices in municipal or cantonal administrations, or even—in some instances—in parliament. Within the CGT, political socialists, notably among the leaders of the large affiliates of miners, railway workers and textile workers, were significant adversaries of the syndicalists. The engagement of union activists in socialist politics was common enough that it prompted a reassertion of the formal autonomy of the CGT as an organisation through a 1911 ruling that at least officials of the *Confédération* itself (some affiliated unions had similar rules) could not sit in parliament. Syndicalism in France meant the neutrality of the CGT vis-à-vis parties and an extra-parliamentary policy, which meant that even political socialists within the CGT could vote for the *Charte d'Amiens*, as they clearly did, although others simply abstained.

The goal of worker unity informed the CGT's programmatic neutrality. National syndicalist bodies elsewhere, on the other hand, existed alongside reformist unions, with whom they had often broken to present a radical alternative.⁴³ The founding congress of the USI in Modena in 1912, confirming the break with the existing *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro*, nevertheless formally declared that "it reaffirmed first of all the principle of workers' unity".⁴⁴ For national syndicalist organisations outside of France, unity was an ideal, but it was not the highest objective: establishing or sustaining a revolutionary alternative, often seen as a prerequisite to a truer unity, took priority.

A second and related difference has already been noted: that only in France was the premier labour organisation in the country syndicalist. The mantle of neutrality validated union autonomy but also reduced obstacles to the CGT's attempt to embrace as many workers as possible and permitted syndicalists, socialists, anarchists, and the politically independent or indifferent to work together as unionists. By drawing revolutionaries and reformists alike into occasionally uneasy coexistence within its ranks, the CGT was able to become the largest trade union association in the country. This meant, first, that the CGT had no large social democratic trade union rival with which to compete and, second, that to some degree the competition between reformists and radicals took place within the CGT itself, with bread-and-butter unionists, political socialists, and syndicalists vying to influence policy. Defenders of proportional representation within the CGT sometimes argued that the allocation of equal votes to unions regardless of membership effectively permitted a revolutionary minority to retain leadership in the *Confédération*, a complaint they addressed not only to a French but to an international audience.⁴⁵ Although large affiliates were by no means uniformly reformist, nor small ones uniformly revolutionary, voting procedures apparently favoured radical voices. Foreign detractors of the CGT, in any event, were inclined to argue that syndicalists were a minority within the organisation that spoke for them. To underline the point that a majority of French workers were not organised (but, despite variations, this was true of virtually every country in pre-1914 Europe), and that of organised

⁴³ Not every syndicalist movement sought to found revolutionary unions opposite existing reformist ones. In Britain, the predominant goal was to amalgamate and radicalise the numerous and often long-standing unions.

⁴⁴ Amadeo Osti Guerrazzi, ed., *L'Utopia del sindacalismo rivoluzionario: I congressi dell'Unione Sindacale Italiana 1912-1913* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2001), 173.

⁴⁵ See Bruce Vandervort, *Victor Griffuelhes and French Syndicalism 1895-1922* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 93-4.

workers in France a majority were not in the CGT, and of those within it a majority were themselves purportedly reform-minded, a British observer described the syndicalists in France as “a minority within a minority within a minority”.⁴⁶ Looking back over eighty years, one careful analyst found the reformists to have been a minority, albeit a powerful one, in the CGT.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, the fact remains that although reformists and revolutionaries could disagree within the CGT over various issues, proportional representation among them, they continued to agree on the necessity of the independence of the unions, a distinguishing “mark” of the prewar CGT.⁴⁸ The largest trade union association in France, despite its heterogenous composition, continued throughout the prewar period to espouse the principles of the *Charte d’Amiens*.

While the CGT had no large trade union rival with which to compete, national syndicalist bodies elsewhere—in Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Germany and Sweden—all confronted appreciably larger and hostile trade union opponents, most importantly social democratic ones, but frequently also denominational ones. Syndicalist associations were everywhere revolutionary minorities, sometimes tiny ones as in Germany, sometimes very substantial ones as in Italy, largely undiluted by the reformism they saw as characteristic of the social democratic unions with whom they were locked in struggle, not to mention the social democratic parties also arrayed against them. If party-union relations were complicated in France, where the CGT kept the Socialist Party at a formal arm’s length while political socialists joined in contesting policy within the CGT, such relations were often much more complicated and embittered in other countries. To cite the example of a single year, in 1908 the Italian Socialist Party expelled the syndicalists, the pro-syndicalist Swedish Young Socialist League, following the expulsion of two of its members from the Swedish Socialist Party, broke away to found an anti-parliamentary party, and the German *Freie Vereinigung* resolved to adopt syndicalism after a concerted effort of the social democrats to break it.

A third difference was the pronounced radicalism of the national syndicalist associations outside France, intensified by the fact that they tended to draw the most militant to their ranks and by the relentless opposition they endured both within the labour movement and from the

⁴⁶ Arthur D. Lewis, *Syndicalism and the General Strike* (London: Unwin, 1912), 15. Sombart (*Sozialismus*, 269) expressed a wildly exaggerated version of the situation in the CGT by suggesting that “a determined revolutionary minority is terrorizing a numerically strong reformist majority”.

⁴⁷ Vandervort, *Victor Griffuelhes*, 246.

⁴⁸ Julliard, “La charte d’Amiens,” 14.

wider society itself. Reformists and political socialists played a role within the CGT, seeking to imprint its policies, but such voices were rare in the organisations outside France. Those organisations may have espoused extra-parliamentarism, but the steady opposition they confronted often gave a powerful anti-party and anti-parliamentary tenor to their pronouncements. To many observers the CGT's antimilitarism and antipatriotism seemed radical, but one cannot escape the impression that these causes were even more conspicuous among the non-Gallic bodies, both through conviction and the need to distinguish themselves from what they saw as their collaborationist opponents. The identity of syndicalist organisations outside France was shaped not only by the doctrine they embraced and by their militancy, but by their role as a minority revolutionary opposition to a social democratic majority. This role contributed to fostering an ethos of self-consciousness and self-reliance that helped them to survive as beleaguered minorities in peacetime and to resist the appeal of nationalism in wartime.

Youthful rebelliousness often reinforced militancy. There is of course no necessary correlation between age and radicalism. Many veterans of the labour movement embraced syndicalism. In the decade preceding the World War I the young were nevertheless often conspicuous supporters of syndicalism. Young Socialist organisations had come into being in every Scandinavian country and each of them came to embrace direct action. Tullio Masotti applauded the support of the young socialists in promoting syndicalism in Italy.⁴⁹ Masotti himself, who became its Secretary, was well under thirty when the USI was founded. His fellow militants were also often young, sometimes barely adults, but more characteristically nearing thirty and already with radical pasts in their working lives. These often itinerant young militants have been characterised as “halfway between knights errant and permanent functionaries”.⁵⁰ In Switzerland younger anarchists were much more likely than older ones to shift their support to the syndicalism that Pierre Monatte defended against Errico Malatesta at the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam in 1907.⁵¹ Dismayed that “the ease of Parliament seemed to have emasculated” many of the major labour readers he met at the 1908 conference of the British Trades Union Congress, the young syndicalist stonemason Fred Bower observed that “action, action and again action was what we younger men

⁴⁹ Masotti, *La Pratica sindacalista*, 28.

⁵⁰ Gianinazzi, “Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire en Italie,” 102.

⁵¹ Erich Gruner, “Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire, une ramification du mouvement syndical en Suisse,” *Arbeiterschaft und Wirtschaft in der Schweiz 1880–1914*, Andreas Balthasar *et al.*, eds., vol. 3 (Zurich: Chronos, 1988), 181–96, 191.

wanted". Albert Jensen, visiting England in 1913, wrote admiringly to the Norwegian syndicalists that the well-known activist Tom Mann had been in his mid-fifties when he had taken up the syndicalist cause. But it was not a mature advocate like Mann that the Fabian socialist Beatrice Webb had in mind when she complained to her diary in late 1912 that in Britain "the angry youth, with bad complexion, frowning brow and weedy figure, is now always a Syndicalist; the glib young workman whose tongue runs away with him to-day mouths the phrases of French Syndicalism instead of those of German Social Democracy".⁵²

Diverging Internationalist Views

A fourth difference would prove decisive in driving a wedge between the syndicalists of France and those outside it: that by virtue of being the largest trade union association in France, the CGT held membership in the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres, founded in 1903.⁵³ The Secretariat, dominated by social democratic unions and headquartered in Berlin, admitted a single trade union centre from each country. National syndicalist unions outside France, as minorities, were barred from it. This difference would prove to be a stumbling block to international syndicalist unity, but that was not immediately apparent. The French, notably Pierre Monatte's *La Vie ouvrière*, followed with interest syndicalist movements elsewhere and opened their press to them. Within the Secretariat, moreover, the CGT promoted syndicalist principles. When the Secretariat refused the CGT's request to put the issues of the general strike and antimilitarism on the agenda, the French boycotted its 1905 (Christiania [Oslo]) and 1907 (Amsterdam) conferences. The CGT agreed to sponsor the 1909 conference in Paris, where it unsuccessfully called upon the Secretariat to open its meetings to all trade unions. In Budapest two years later, it supported the fruitless bid of the American Industrial Workers of the World to secure admission to the Secretariat, which had instead recently admitted the American Federation of Labor. The CGT, moreover, had protested the use of annual reports by other affiliates of the Secretariat to upbraid the syndicalist minorities in their own countries.⁵⁴

⁵² Fred Bower, *The Rolling Stonemason: An Autobiography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1936), 199; Jensen in *Direkte Aktion*, July 12, 1913; Beatrice Webb, *Beatrice Webb's Diaries 1912–1924*, Margaret I. Cole, ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1952), 7.

⁵³ See Susan Milner, *The Dilemmas of Internationalism: French Syndicalism and the International Labour Movement 1900–1910* (New York: Berg, 1990).

⁵⁴ *L'Humanité*, November 1909.

Some syndicalists outside France began to ask whether the time had come to break out of their domestic isolation and, with French support, to embark on a new and distinctively revolutionary international course. France's Pierre Monatte was present when the Dutch of the NAS, on the occasion of the International Anarchist Congress in Amsterdam in August 1907, organised separate sessions in which syndicalist-inclined representatives of eight countries came together to discuss common interests and arranged to launch Cornelissen's *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste*. In 1907–1909 interest in promoting common aims and ties found voice in countries that already had syndicalist organisations, as in The Netherlands and Germany, and in those that did not yet, as in Sweden and Portugal.⁵⁵ In November 1909 the Dutch returned to the themes of the isolation of the revolutionary unions, the need for closer international bonds among them, and the special role of the French in the syndicalist family, adding: “We are waiting for France, we know that, but that may well go on so long that in the meantime major interests are neglected”.⁵⁶ When the French responded a month later, they appeared to attach as much importance to the expansion of syndicalism in other countries as to their own role within the Secretariat. Candidly admitting the CGT's weak influence there, *La Vie ouvrière* observed that the French

Ought to devote themselves to another task: to help syndicalist ideas to penetrate into the social democratic countries. There is no country where a revolutionary minority, weak or powerful, does not affirm itself, often outside of the national central organisation. It is necessary, while remaining in the International Secretariat and participating in its conferences, not to lose sight of these minorities animated by conceptions similar to ours. It is necessary that we follow their movement and their development as they will follow ours.⁵⁷

The attempt to balance and reconcile the CGT's commitment to the Secretariat and its interest in the syndicalist family outside France became increasingly difficult after 1909, as the desire to act in unison gained momentum among established and newly-formed syndicalist organisations. Pressure mounted on the CGT. But it was more or less bound, by inclination and by domestic circumstances, to the Secretariat. At its 1908

⁵⁵ See for example on The Netherlands, *De Arbeid*, 27 Nov. 1909; Sweden, Axel Holmström in *Brand*, nr. 6, 1907; Portugal, Merten, *Anarchismus und Arbeiterbewegung in Portugal*, 80–1.

⁵⁶ *De Arbeid*, November 27, 1909.

⁵⁷ *La Vie ouvrière*, December 20, 1909, 337.

Marseilles congress, the reformists, unhappy that the CGT had boycotted the Secretariat's 1905 and 1907 conferences, insisted on French participation, intimating that the issue could split the CGT. A compromise resolution called for the CGT's return to the conferences, but in order to work to win a wider hearing for antimilitarism and the general strike and to democratise the Secretariat's procedures. This formula proved viable, for it satisfied reformists by the presence of the CGT in the Secretariat and revolutionaries by its professed radicalizing purpose there. This compromise on international policy defused one potentially divisive domestic issue at a time when the CGT would face another, a period of self-analysis and reappraisal of structure and policy known as the "*crise du syndicalisme*", much-discussed in 1910–1911. An unrelated change of CGT leadership during 1909—from Victor Griffuelhes to Louis Niel (one of those who insisted at Marseilles on the CGT's return to the Secretariat) to Léon Jouhaux - facilitated the shift in international policy. Jouhaux's more conciliatory CGT, which would host the Secretariat's 1909 conference in Paris, would not entertain a return to the boycott policy of Griffuelhes's CGT. The CGT also became increasingly vocal on themes of national and international labour unity. Just as the CGT sought to incorporate as many workers as possible in France, it could argue that it worked to convey its message within the Secretariat, in which the majority of organised workers were indirectly represented, in the interests of wider labour unity. The CGT was increasingly inclined, moreover, to advise militants beyond France to penetrate and convert existing reformist trade unions in their own countries rather than promoting separate revolutionary ones. This was also the advice that Jouhaux gave to William Foster, the delegate of the Industrial Workers of the World to the 1911 Budapest conference of the Secretariat. That year the CGT provided another example of the value it attached to penetrating existing unions elsewhere. It launched a German-language newspaper in Paris with the aims, first, of drawing German workers temporarily in France into the CGT and, second, of instilling in them syndicalist values to carry back into the reformist unions in Germany.⁵⁸

From 1909 onward the CGT reaffirmed its place in the International Secretariat and increasingly turned its attention at home to questions of internal restructuring and renewal in the face of stalled growth. In 1910 its membership may have surpassed 500,000; in 1913 it had fallen to perhaps 300,000.⁵⁹ But members of the wider syndicalist family, ironically, could

⁵⁸ *Der Syndikalist*, March 1911.

⁵⁹ Reliable CGT membership figures are difficult to pin down. William E. McMechan ("The Building Trades of France, 1907–1914," Ph.D. thesis, University

see signs of radicalisation, transformation, and progress in the international labour movement. They drew encouragement and confidence, first, from the international strike wave that began in 1910, reaching a magnitude unseen for a generation, in which Cornelissen and others saw the influence of syndicalism.⁶⁰ They drew encouragement, second, from a seemingly steady geographical expansion of distinctively syndicalist trade unions (in Spain and Sweden in 1910, and in Italy in 1912), of propaganda groups (in Britain, Denmark, and Hungary, for example) and of syndicalist journals. When in February 1913 the Dutch and the British proposed that the time had come for syndicalists to meet in an international congress of their own, these audiences were receptive.⁶¹ But the proposal proved highly contentious. The issue of international policy would pose a strong challenge to the idea of a transnational syndicalist movement, of a European syndicalist family with common interests and aspirations.

But what did the geographical spread of syndicalist movements outside France mean? How did specifically syndicalist unions fare, either in absolute numbers or in relationship to their larger union rivals? None of the bodies in Germany, The Netherlands, or Sweden could claim over 10,000 members on the eve of the war. In Germany, where the massive social democratic unions could claim well over two million members in 1914, the *Freie Vereinigung* could count only about 6,000, its numbers having declined from over 17,000 since the concerted effort of the social democrats to break it in 1907–1908. The building trades—often represented in syndicalist movements—were conspicuous in the *Freie Vereinigung*, but it comprised such trades as metalwork, textiles, brushmaking and musical instrument construction as well. Only the increasing radicalisation that accompanied and followed the war would convert the *Freie Vereinigung*, with miners and metalworkers then in the forefront, into a mass movement.⁶² In The Netherlands the NAS expanded by nearly 300% between 1906 and 1914, when textile and construction workers were its

of Wisconsin, 1976, 915) suggests 542,370 in 1910 and 296,222 in 1913. Vandervort (*Victor Griffuelhes*, 246–7) suggests just under 500,000 in 1909 and just over 340,000 in 1912. Estimates vary, but CGT membership was ebbing by 1911.

⁶⁰ Cornelissen, “Die neueste Entwicklung des Syndikalismus,” *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, January 1913, 125–48.

⁶¹ The NAS in the *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste*, February 16, 1913; the British in *Syndicalist*, February 1913.

⁶² See Hans Manfred Bock, “Anarchosyndicalism in the German Labour Movement: A Rediscovered Minority Tradition,” Van der Linden and Thorpe, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 59–79; figures: 61.

largest components, but with support from municipal workers, and those in metal and tobacco, as well as tailors and seamen. But the NAS's recently-created (1905) social democratic rival, the *Nederlands Verbond van Vakereenigingen*, expanded by over 440% in the same period. The NAS membership constituted 17% that of the *Verbond* in 1906, but only 11.5% in 1914, and Protestant and Catholic union organisations were also larger than the NAS.⁶³ The *Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation*, founded in Sweden in 1910 and dominated by stonemasons in its early years, expanded between 1911 and 1914 by about 380% compared with about 120% for the social democratic *Landsorganisation*. But the *Landsorganisation's* larger base in 1911 meant that its membership margin over the *Centralorganisation* increased from about 112,000 in 1911 to about 135,000 in 1914.⁶⁴ The joint membership of the unions represented in the efforts in 1906 and 1913 to establish a syndicalist organisation in Belgium constituted 8.3% and 6.7%, respectively, of that of their social democratic counterparts.⁶⁵ Numerically stronger revolutionary organisations emerged in Spain and Italy. In Spain the CNT, still largely Catalanian-based before the war, drew conspicuous support from construction and textile workers, but from many other trades as well, including metal and agricultural workers, leather and footwear workers, printers and bookbinders. In September 1911, with nearly 30,000 members, the CNT constituted about one-third the membership of its social democratic counterpart. But the CNT soon thereafter fell under a judicial ban.⁶⁶ In the wake of World War I the CNT, with some 700,000 members, would emerge as Spain's largest union organisation. In Italy at the end of 1913 the 101,729 members of the USI, strongest in the Po Valley, constituted between one-third and one-half the membership of the social democratic *Confederazione*. The numerically largest occupational groups in the USI were agricultural and construction workers, but it

⁶³ Calculated from Henny Buiting, "The Netherlands," *The Formation of Labour Movements 1870–1914*, Marcel van der Linden and Jürgen Rojahn, eds. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), vol. 1, 57–84, 75.

⁶⁴ Calculated from Lennart K. Persson, "Revolutionary Syndicalism in Sweden Before the Second World War," Van der Linden and Thorpe, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 81–99, 85.

⁶⁵ Calculated from Moulaert, *Le Mouvement anarchiste en Belgique*, 330–1.

⁶⁶ See Santigao Castillo, "Spain," Van der Linden and Rojahn, *The Formation of Labour Movements*, 1:207–40; figures (CNT), 239, social democrats, 235.

rivalled the social democrats even more powerfully in industry, notably among metalworkers.⁶⁷

Family Quarrel

To the French, sensitive to ebbing CGT membership and well aware of the numbers represented by their nominal partners in the International Secretariat (over seven million workers in 1913⁶⁸), the collective strength of the foreign syndicalists looked meagre. What captured the attention of the non-Gallic syndicalists, on the other hand, was the geographical spread of their movement, the numerical expansion of their individual organisations (except for Germany), the proliferation of syndicalist journals, and widespread worker restlessness and rebelliousness. But because they remained minorities locked in struggle with the dominant labour movements in their respective countries, cut off from one another, they could only welcome the prospects of making international contact with their fellows elsewhere. The congress proposed for 1913 would provide a forum and constitute an act of self-assertion and validation, a means of breaking the isolation they felt, while the possibility of an International of their own promised even more formal and durable contact and mutual support. The revolutionary prestige and standing of the French, they believed, would enhance the gathering. But a congress would also constitute an affirmation of syndicalism as genuinely international, would rid it of the charge of being a distinctly Gallic movement merely imitated elsewhere, and would bestow recognition and revolutionary legitimacy upon the widespread members of the syndicalist family, reinforcing their respective national campaigns.

The CGT strongly resisted the idea of an international gathering, however, even more the possible emergence of a Syndicalist International in the face of the International Secretariat. The French now argued that labour unity must be uppermost, that foreign syndicalists should neither divide the labour movements in their own countries, nor threaten the unity of the international movement by challenging the Secretariat. As *La Vie ouvrière* put it, “the existence of two workers’ organisations in the same

⁶⁷ See Carl Levy’s reflective assessment, “Currents of Italian Syndicalism before 1926,” *International Review of Social History*, 45 (2000): 209–50; Charles L. Bertrand, “Revolutionary Syndicalism in Italy,” in Van der Linden and Thorpe, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 139–53; and Gianinazzi, “Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire en Italie”. Levy (219) says that the USI was one-half the size of the *Confederazione* in 1913, Bertrand (144) and Gianinazzi (112) one-third.

⁶⁸ Milner, *Dilemmas of Internationalism*, 87–8.

country can only make the struggle against owners more difficult”, adding that “we think that national divisions are a nearly absolute hindrance to any serious international movement”.⁶⁹ The French argued that their first international duty was to remain in the Secretariat, convert it into a more democratic forum, and to carry the CGT’s message to the millions of workers it represented. But French leaders were also deeply aware that the congress proposal carried a potential threat to the domestic unity of the CGT itself: while reformists expected it to participate in the Secretariat, revolutionaries might urge it to join a new and revolutionary labour International should one emerge from the congress. CGT leaders could not welcome an international syndicalist congress.

The CGT’s response appeared to constitute an invitation to national syndicalist organisations outside France to disband. It repudiated their *raison d’être*: to constitute a revolutionary, direct actionist alternative to the reformist unions within which they had concluded it was impossible to work. Some of them argued that the French, lacking a social democratic rival of their own, inadequately appreciated their foreign counterparts’ difficulties of working within hostile environments in which “their need for education is thwarted [and] freedom of thought is systematically stifled.”⁷⁰ Others argued that the purpose of the congress was not to found a new International, but rather to bring dispersed syndicalists into closer contact and to elaborate “the international physiognomy” of syndicalism. Syndicalism was shaped by local circumstances, not by derivation from a French model. Essentially action-oriented, it remained inevitably diverse; it could not be codified in a syndicalist orthodoxy. But certain of its manifestations—direct action, the general strike, antimilitarism—were the common elements of syndicalism. A congress could reaffirm them not as imitation of a Gallic model, but on the basis of an internationally shared experience. The CGT should support this effort; its abstention would seriously undermine the authority of the congress.⁷¹

Non-French syndicalists similarly challenged the claim that the CGT could transform, even revolutionise, the International Secretariat or its affiliates from within. The French themselves acknowledged in their 1912 Le Havre congress that they had made no progress in this regard. Griffuelhes on that occasion tried to dignify the CGT’s isolation in the Secretariat by attributing it to the fact that the French were so far in advance of its other affiliates.⁷² But to foreign syndicalists the Secretariat

⁶⁹ *La Vie ouvrière*, September 5, 1913, 270, 268.

⁷⁰ *La Vie ouvrière*, April 5, 1913, 405.

⁷¹ *La Vie ouvrière*, September 5, 1913, 262–7.

⁷² Milner, *Dilemmas of Internationalism*, 163.

was incorrigibly reformist and, despite French claims, beyond redemption. In the words of Alceste de Ambris, non-reformists were barely tolerated within it, “like dogs in a church”. The Belgians warned that instead of radicalizing the Secretariat, the reformist majority would end by domesticating the CGT and dissipating its ideal of social emancipation. In Stockholm, *Syndikalisten* later dismissed French participation in the Secretariat as “comic” and arguments about transforming social democracy elsewhere through biennial conferences of handfuls of trade union officials as “exceedingly lame”. From within the French movement itself Christiaan Cornelissen lodged the most painful charge, namely, that the French position on the international issue demonstrated that the pioneers of syndicalism had lost their revolutionary impetus. Some foreign critics now muttered of French betrayal. From Belgium came the complaint that the French had failed in a familial duty: “Is it thus that older brothers should act? While you ought to aid us in our work of purifying the workers’ movement, you scornfully reject us; worse than that, you ignore us”.⁷³

Such arguments did not sway the CGT, which first campaigned against and then boycotted the International Syndicalist Congress that opened in London in September 1913.⁷⁴ Although twelve countries were represented in London, the absence of the leading member of the syndicalist family remained conspicuous. As the *New Statesman* put it, the congress “came very near to playing *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark”.⁷⁵ The absence of the CGT—and solicitude for its internal unity—shaped the congress decisions as well. The delegates decided to postpone a Syndicalist International, establishing instead an International Syndicalist Information Bureau to sit in Amsterdam. To some of its supporters, the name was irrelevant, a linguistic ploy. Whatever name it took, the Swedes observed, “it is nevertheless a fact that the new Red International is a reality”, adding: “if one can avoid a fatal split in France through a difference in name, then all is well”. Others believed a schism in the CGT to be inevitable, that only by means of it could the French movement

⁷³ De Ambris, *La Vie ouvrière*, September 5, 1913, 266; *Syndikalisten*, Julnummer 1913; Cornelissen, *Bulletin internationale du mouvement syndicaliste*, September 21, 1913; L. Walter of Liège, *La Vie ouvrière*, April 5, 1913, 405–6.

⁷⁴ On the congress and debates surrounding it, see Wayne Thorpe, *The Workers Themselves: Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913–1923* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), ch. 2.

⁷⁵ *New Statesman*, October 11, 1913.

recapture its militant momentum. As the German Fritz Kater put it, “the revolutionaries must sooner or later come over to us”.⁷⁶

A Glance Beyond 1914

The distance between the French CGT and those syndicalist movements in Europe that had long invoked its example would not be fully bridged after 1913. The great majority of supporters of workers’ direct action in Europe had accepted the French as the elders of the movement, as in the vanguard in having embodied the values, elaborated the principles, and institutionalised the practices of syndicalism. They looked to the French not as having produced a model to be uncritically reproduced elsewhere, but as the prime examples of an international movement of which they considered themselves to be a part, as pioneers from whom they could draw inspiration, mentors from whom they could draw useful lessons. But while most of Europe’s syndicalists regarded themselves as members of a single family united by virtue of endorsing a series of common principles, national circumstances divided them. By 1913 the national syndicalist unions outside France were beginning to realise that as embattled militant minorities, isolated nationally and marginalised internationally, they had for all of their very real particularities, more in common with one another than any of them did with the CGT. Their respective responses to war in 1914 appeared to confirm this fact. War would put an inescapable test to the antimilitarism that socialists and syndicalists alike endorsed. Every national syndicalist organisation in Europe that had been represented at the 1913 London Congress opposed the war, whether in belligerent countries like Germany or Italy, or in neutral countries, like Spain, Sweden and The Netherlands.⁷⁷ As the Germans put it, in refusing to sacrifice their antimilitarism on the altar of national unity, “international syndicalism is our holy family”.⁷⁸ The exception was again France, where the *cégétistes*, heirs to a tradition of revolutionary patriotism, rallied to the cause of

⁷⁶ *Syndikalisten*, October 18, 1913.

⁷⁷ A minority within the USI, it should be noted, broke with the organisation to support Italy’s intervention in the war. On the syndicalists and war, see Wayne Thorpe, “The European Syndicalists and War, 1914–1918,” *Contemporary European History* (2001): 1–24; Ralph Darlington, “Revolutionary Syndicalist Opposition to the First World War: A Comparative Reassessment,” and Wayne Thorpe, “El Ferrol, Rio de Janeiro, Zimmerwald, and Beyond: Syndicalist Internationalism, 1914–1918,” both in *Revue Belge de philologie et d’histoire*, 84 (2006): 983–1003, 1005–1023.

⁷⁸ *Die Einigkeit*, July 25, 1914.

national defence. So did the majority of those social democratic unions that belonged to the Secretariat and the social democratic parties that belonged to the Second Socialist International. It is an irony worth noting that within the organised labour movement, those syndicalist trade unions barred from the formal Internationals of the period supported labour internationalism during the war, while the organisations that enjoyed membership in those Internationals tended not to do so.

Syndicalists elsewhere could welcome the emergence and growth of an antiwar minority in the CGT from the end of 1914 onward. The uneasy unity that the French had been able to safeguard before 1914 would not survive war, radicalisation, the Russian Revolution and the new appeal of communism. Postwar France would witness a CGT split in three, with one CGT enrolled in the International Federation of Trade Unions (the former International Secretariat), a second CGTU (*Unitaire*) enrolled in Moscow's new Profintern, or Red International of Labour Unions, and a third and much smaller CGTSR (*Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire*) enrolled in a new Berlin-based Syndicalist International.⁷⁹ The Syndicalist International had been established primarily by organisations that had been represented in the 1913 London Congress, but only in December 1922, after their own prolonged postwar flirtation with Moscow.⁸⁰ Associations in fifteen European and fourteen Latin American countries would eventually affiliate with it. A syndicalist family, of sorts, had been united internationally, but belatedly, when their own collective postwar membership had peaked and receded. As for the labour movement in France, or the international one, those real or imaginary families were more divided than ever.

⁷⁹ Important works have been devoted to each of these three trade union Internationals in recent years: Geert van Goethem's major study of *The Amsterdam International: The World of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913–1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Reiner Tosstorff's definitive study, *Profintern: Die Rote Gewerkschafts-internationale 1920–1937* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004); and Vadim Dam'e's massive *Zabytyi internatsional: Mezhnarodnoe anarkho-sindikalistskoe dvizhenie mezhdumirovymi voynami*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obrozhenie, 2006, 2007).

⁸⁰ Syndicalist-communist relations in the era of the formation of the Communist International and the Profintern are discussed in Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism*; Tosstorff, *Profintern*; and Thorpe, *The Workers Themselves*.

PART II

MILITANTS

CHAPTER TWO

FROM GUSTAV SCHMIDT TO GUS SMITH: A TALE OF LABOUR INTEGRATION (HULL, 1878–1913)

YANN BÉLIARD

In a book about anarchism, it may seem odd to include a chapter about an activist who did not call himself an anarchist and who never used any other “-isms” apart from “trade-unionism” and “socialism” to identify his creed. When he died, one obituary presented him as “a familiar figure at the meetings of the Hull Trades Council and the Hull Labour Party”, with no reference to the black flag.¹ Yet the few anarchists left in contemporary Hull like to think of Gus Smith (alias Gustav Adolf Schmidt) as belonging to their family.² The texts he left behind reveal a definite ideological continuity: an admirer of Malatesta and Kropotkin in the 1880s, he was to express unreserved enthusiasm for syndicalism in the years of Great Labour Unrest (1911–1913). Who then was the real Gus Smith? Almost one century after his death, though he has been forgotten on both shores of the German Sea, here is a labour activist whose bizarre political identity is worth interrogating.

Why was that skilled cabinetmaker, who devoted so much of his time to defending the interests of his fellow craftsmen, so obsessed with “the organising of the unorganised”, i.e. the thousands of casual workers employed on the docks of Hull?³ Why did this pillar of the local Socialist Club join neither the Independent Labour Party (ILP) nor the Social-Democratic Federation (SDF)? This study would like to show that his

¹ “Obituary,” *Monthly Labour Journal*, July 1913, 5. That periodical (henceforth referred to as MLJ) was published by the Hull Trades and Labour Council from 1893 to 1918.

² Guy Cheverton, conversation with author, August 19, 2002.

³ MLJ, October 1904, 1.

complex positioning had to do with exile and acculturation: a German worker with revolutionary ideas settling in late-Victorian Hull could not have been so successfully integrated in the local labour movement if he had not adapted to the *doxa* and the customs prevalent in his new home—a process symbolised by the transformation of “Schmidt” into “Smith”. But it will also argue that the process was not one-sided: by translating his political convictions into a new language, Schmidt/Smith in turn shaped the local labour movement in an original way. Neither herald of anarchism nor champion of labourism, he stood somewhere in-between, in an intriguingly hybrid space, which was not without contradictions or weaknesses. At a moment in the development of labour history when local explorations are rediscovered as possible stepping-stones towards the understanding of transnational realities⁴ and when the biographical approach is being resurrected to shed new light on collective destinies⁵, the time seems appropriate to examine the strange case of Mr Gus(tav) S(ch)mith(/d). The file is not a thick one. But it leaves no doubt as to the significance this immigrant managed to achieve locally, in the militant milieu and beyond.⁶

The Club Freiheit years (1880s)

Gustav Schmidt was born on February 26, 1854 in Delitzsch, a small town in the province of Sax.⁷ In his teens, he left his hometown for nearby Leipzig, the industrial capital of the region, to train as a cabinetmaker. For five full years (1868–73), his apprenticeship took him from one German city to another, until he decided, having not yet reached the age of twenty, to leave Germany for Scandinavia. He spent two years in Norway (1874–75). Upon returning to his *Heimat*, he was forced to do his military

⁴ See Shelton Stromquist, “Thinking globally, acting locally: Municipal Labour and Socialist Activism in Comparative Perspective, 1890–1920” and Christian Koller, “Local Strikes as Transnational Events: Migration, Donations, and Organizational Cooperation in the Context of Strikes in Switzerland (1860–1914),” *Labour History Review* 74: 3 (2009): 233–256 and 305–318.

⁵ See volumes 11 (2003), 12 (2005) and 13 (2010) of the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, edited by David Howell and Keith Gildart for Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ The present chapter is a revised and extended version of the passage devoted to Gus Smith in Yann Béliard, “The Origins of the Great Labour Unrest: Class Relations in Hull, 1894–1910” (PhD diss., Paris 13 University, 2007), 470–474.

⁷ “Our Portrait Gallery,” MLJ, November 1906, 3. Though the portrait is not signed, it can safely be attributed to the founder and editor of the *Journal*, printer Frederick W. Booth, who had known Schmidt since the early 1890s.

service. Eleven months later he deserted, escaping first to Holland, then to Britain. By 1877, he was working as a cabinetmaker in London, but he only stayed there for a short time. In 1878, at the age of twenty-four, his peregrinations led him further up north, all the way to Kingston-upon-Hull, East Yorkshire, which turned out to be the wanderer's terminus. 1878 was the year when Bismarck passed the first anti-socialist laws, making it impossible for a deserter with radical leanings to travel back to his country. As is so often the case when dealing with the itineraries of migrant workers, love played its part in the choice of a new home: Schmidt married a local girl in 1881, never to move from Humberside again.

A young man eager to see the world and ready to defy the law to preserve his freedom of movement, Schmidt was probably not affiliated to any labour organisation while in Germany or in Norway. Logically enough, it was not until he gave up his roving life and settled down that he accomplished his first constructive gesture as an activist, with the foundation of the "Hull Liberty Socialist Club" in the early 1880s. The club, formed with the help of half a dozen other German exiles, was to last for about a decade.⁸ Situated in the town centre, on Blanket Row, close to the river Humber, it was officially registered as a *Bildungs Verein*, i.e. as a cultural association.⁹ Was the innocuous label a disguise for less avowable, subversive or proto-terrorist activities? The authorities were conscious of the political character of the club. But its essential function seems to have been "sociable" more than "agitational", as was so often the case with micro-communities of anarchists in exile. If the next door neighbours were ever bothered, it was above all by the late night arguing, singing and beer-drinking in which Schmidt and his comrades occasionally indulged.

Enquiring into the kind of socialism that prevailed inside the Club Freiheit is nonetheless necessary. Many signs point in the anarchist direction. The name of the club itself was borrowed from *Die Freiheit*, "the international organ of German anarchists", a weekly paper printed entirely in red ink and edited in London by Johann Most (1846-1906) between 1879 and 1882. *Freiheit* was also the name of the circles founded by a great admirer of Most's, Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958), who lived in England from 1895 to 1918 and was particularly active in the north. Even

⁸ Raymond Brown, *Waterfront Organisation in Hull 1870-1900* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1972), 49.

⁹ *Bulmers' Gazeteer. An Alphabetical Directory of Trades and Professions for Hull* (1892). See also Julius Motteler papers, 1032/2, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.

more than such echoes, Schmidt's writings prove his attachment to the anarchist current. In one of his last contributions to the official organ of the Hull Trades and Labour Council, he recounted an 1891 meeting in London starring Malatesta, Michel and Kropotkin as the main speakers.¹⁰ He even remembered arguing, during the debate, that going on strike was not enough: the workers needed to lockout the bosses, start running the factories for themselves and organise the production and the distribution of goods through their unions. The text of a speech made by Schmidt in March 1892 in front of the Hull Branch of the National Secularist Society confirms his fundamentally anarchist tendencies, since it ends with a reproduction of Most's *Hymn to the Proletariat*.¹¹

That said, the Club Freiheit seems to have been open to all varieties of socialism. In 1889–90, for example, the club subscribed to the *Sozialdemocrat*, the Marxist weekly published by the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland (SPD). When writing to the editor to renew the subscription, Schmidt naturally concluded his letter with “revolutionary greetings”, which is rather ironic as the recipient was no other than the future theorist of reformism, Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), who lived in London from 1888 to 1901.¹² An open-minded secretary, happy enough as long as the atmosphere inside the club remained fraternal, Schmidt made a point of keeping it alive, inviting his “Genossen” (“comrades”) and “Mitbürger” (“fellow-countrymen”) to regular meetings, in the name of “Das Committee”, making sure to specify what the “Thema” and who the “Reverend Bürger” (i.e. the orator) would be.¹³ Representing a “safe haven” where “a self-sufficient culture of defiance” could express itself, the Club Freiheit resembled the German anarchist circles of New York City rather than the Chicago model, in the sense that it made little impact on the local labour movement.¹⁴

From the cabinetmakers' strike (1890) to the dockers' lockout (1893)

In 1890, Schmidt founded another organisation, which would outlive the Club Freiheit and be presided by him until he reached his deathbed: the

¹⁰ MLJ, June 1912, 2.

¹¹ Presentation given by “Gustave Smith” to the Hull Branch of the National Secularist Society, Sunday March 6, 1892. Max Nettlau papers, 2987, IISH.

¹² J. Motteler papers, 1032/1&2.

¹³ Pre-printed invitation form, September 13, 1889. J. Motteler papers, 1032/1.

¹⁴ Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

Hull Furnishing Trades Society. That creation resulted from the cabinetmakers and other related professions going on strike for better pay and working conditions. Encouraged by the strike wave among gasworkers, dockers and general labourers that had begun the year before, they held on for several weeks, with marked support from the Trades Council, before the struggle was victorious. At the head of their demonstrations around town, the president of the Cabinetmakers' Union (a follower of Will Thorne named Charlie Reynolds) had been noticed. But Schmidt, because a fair proportion of cabinetmakers were of German origin, played an equally crucial part in the fight.¹⁵ From then on, he became known by locals as Gustav Smith, or simply "Gus" Smith. In May 1890, Smith (as he shall be referred to from this point onwards) organised the first local meeting ever in favour of the eight hour day. Thousands of workers gathered on Drypool Green, the stretch of grass in East Hull from which most demonstrations departed. Three years later, in 1893, during the lockout that paralysed the port for seven weeks, Smith once again called the local working-class to action, that time by inviting hundreds of dockers' wives to meet up on Corporation Field, the other favourite spot for labour gatherings. Though the fight did not save the closed shop system that had been established in 1889 (the dockers' union was destroyed and did not re-emerge until 1900), Smith was by then known way beyond the small circle of German refugees.

It may seem difficult to understand how a foreign worker such as Smith was able to attract so much sympathy among the local labour movement. On top of being an alien, he held extremist views that were at odds with the liberal opinions professed by the main leaders of the Trades Council, Fred Maddison and W.G. Millington. Several factors must be taken into consideration. Firstly, both Maddison and Millington could only feel gratitude towards the man who had attracted a whole new sector of the local working-class into the body they presided. Secondly, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the national breakthrough of New Unionism and the socialist revival that accompanied it meant that an advocate of revolution, even in 'Lib-Lab' Hull, could be tolerated: when Smith spoke up for the class struggle or the collective ownership of the means of production, he could be heard by at least a fraction of the local activists.¹⁶

¹⁵ Alongside the Germans, many workers in the furniture industry were Russian Jews, who had fled the pogroms of the early 1880s. Brown, 1972, 49–50.

¹⁶ The leftward trend was reflected locally by two precedents: in 1885, a radical worker named Billany had run in the Parliamentary election; in 1895, the Independent Labour Party presented a candidate in West Hull, docker Tom MacCarthy, to challenge liberal MP and shipowner C.H. Wilson.

Thirdly, Smith was an “ordinary chap”, a loving husband and father, who was evidently making every effort to be admitted into the Hull microcosm. With its uncanny expressions and innumerable spelling mistakes (“goo” for “go”, “tread the subject” for “treat the subject”, “Great Britton” for “Great Britain”, etc.), his 1892 manuscript is testimony to the strenuous time he had trying to master the English language. But it is also illuminating as to his will to become fully integrated, since it is signed “Gustav Smith” instead of the usual “Gustav Schmidt”.¹⁷ As his role inside Hull’s labour movement grew, Smith had less and less time and energy for the all-German club he had founded: there are no traces of the Club Freiheit after 1893, a fading away that can also be accounted for by the repeal of Germany’s antisocialist laws in 1890.¹⁸

To have an insight into Smith’s ideas in the early 1890s, the twenty-two pages of his presentation to Hull’s secularists are particularly precious. Meticulously written, the text is an attempt at defining “the people”. Using the notion of “usefulness” as the discriminating criterion, Smith reverses what he calls the Lords’ vision of society. It is the so-called “respectable trading and middle classes” who are described by him as parasites, whereas he glorifies “the mob, the rabble, the common workingman”. His long list of “producers” (fishermen and railwaymen, miners and garment workers, teachers and scientists, etc.) is hardly surprising. But his description of the other side is more unexpected, as it includes more aristocrats (“monarchs of states great or small” and “land sharks”) than capitalists (briefly referred to as the “moneycracy”). Besides, to please his audience as much as himself, he attacks clergymen (“the murderers of common sense”) but his sharpest arrows are reserved for “the hangers on” of the privileged classes”, i.e. “soldiers”, “lawyers” and even “domestics”. Such an emphasis on the individual responsibility of those perverted workers rather than on the structural constraints weighing upon their shoulders can of course be related to Smith’s anarchist sensibility. However, his belief in the people’s capacity to overthrow the rich is the message that stands out, especially as it is expressed with a dose of humour. “Put them all in a balloon, and send them off to the moon. What would we suffer?” The workers without the rich would be as happy as “a dog who lost his fleas”.

¹⁷ M. Nettlau papers, 2987.

¹⁸ Not only did it incite some of his comrades to return to their homeland but it cut the flow of political migration across the North Sea.

A revolutionary in the “progressive” decade (1895–1905)

In the years following the defeat of the dockers against the Shipping Federation (1893) and that of the ILP against the liberals (1895), the Hull Trades Council adopted a “progressive” policy in which Smith could have no part. The field of industrial action, castigated as self-destructive, was virtually abandoned, the focus being set instead on having labour men elected onto the Board of Guardians, the Board of Education and the Town Council, where they were to collaborate closely with the liberals as part of the same “Progressive Party”. On May Day 1895, representatives of the Trades Council, of the ILP and of the SDF had appeared side by side on the platform. But the following year, to avoid the expression of socialist ideas breaking up its collaboration with the liberals, the Trades Council decided that there should be no May Day gathering at all—a public disappearance of the labour movement that lasted until 1901. From 1895 to 1905, Smith’s role inside the Trades Council was therefore that of a muckraker.

His insistence was upon reviving trade-unionism among port workers, as Booth reported in October 1904: “We were glad to hear the remarks of Mr Gustave Smith at a recent meeting of the Trades Council, when he submitted a resolution which had for its object a more extended system of propaganda work”.¹⁹ Though Booth seemed to endorse Smith’s exhortation as his own (“We have long been of the opinion that the members of the Trades Council have neglected the work that lies nearest of them”), he was a Lib-Lab at heart and one of the men with whom Smith would often argue.²⁰ But whatever the divergences between them, Booth was apt at painting a colourful picture of his opponent:

Mr Gustav Smith (...) made an eloquent plea for the re-appointment of the Organising and Propaganda Committee. (...) A dozen years ago the prominent officials were not too respectable to preach that real Gospel of Labour at street corners upon Sunday mornings. (...) Religious bodies undertook open-air work, but they were chiefly concerned with the hereafter. He (Mr Smith) was quite as much concerned about the “here” as the “after”.²¹

¹⁹ MLJ, October 1904, 1.

²⁰ *Idem*.

²¹ F.W. Booth (writing under the pseudonym of “Peter Progress”), “Among the Workers,” *Hull Times*, January 5, 1907. That weekly column is referred to below as ATW.

Smith was himself “especially devoted to propaganda work” and “a frequent speaker at the meetings held in Paragon Square”, the open space in front of the station where socialists sold their press and trade unionists addressed the passer-by.²² He was also the one to come to the fore when other militants’ right of speech was threatened. In 1905, when the City Council tried to ban the gatherings that the SDF and the ILP were used to holding on Drypool Green, Smith convinced the Trades Council and its city councillors to resist the ban, and they won. However, in Hull as in the rest of the country, the years just before and after the Anglo-Boer War were unfavourable to socialist propaganda. Smith occupied a marginal position, aloof from the mainstream of the local labour leaders, his anticlerical and even antireligious streak constituting one more point of friction with a majority that swore by nonconformist Protestantism.

Citizen, guardian—and reformist? (1905–1910)

In 1906, for the first time, an independent labour group was formed inside the House of Commons. The 29 MPs whose campaign the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) had sponsored decided to name themselves the “Parliamentary Labour Party” and were soon reinforced by a number of miners who had been elected under the liberal label. In Hull, a similar breakthrough had taken place in 1905. The ILP tendency inside the Trades Council had overthrown the Lib-Lab old guard, leading to the dissolution of the “Progressive Party” and the formation of an autonomous labour group on the City Council. Though Smith did not belong to the ILP and nourished limited trust in electoral methods, the atmosphere was once again tolerable for him and, shortly after celebrating his fiftieth birthday, he stepped forward once again, embracing several new endeavours. He took part in the revival of the Hull Socialist Club, a circle (founded in 1896) that had served as a refuge for radicals of various creeds in times of “evolutionary” consensus.²³ “Not merely a Socialist, but a Sociable Club”: the circle’s motto made it the spiritual kin of the late Club Freiheit. Smith also participated in the activities of the local Clarion Fellowship, which had its headquarters at the Socialist Club. Whenever the Clarion Van visited Hull or the neighbouring town of Beverley, one could be sure to find Smith among the propagandists, side by side with followers of

²² “Obituary,” MLJ, *op. cit.*

²³ In 1905, with more than one hundred members (book readers as well as snooker players), the club had to revamp its premises. Smith made a very concrete contribution by covering all the floors in Balmoral House, Jarratt Street, with linoleum.

Clarion founder Robert Blatchford and militants who were sometimes miles away from his political standpoint, for example Walter Litchfield, the pillar of the local co-operative movement.²⁴ The Socialist Club and the *Clarion* Fellowship shared several characteristics Smith could easily relate to: independence from “orthodox parties” (i.e. the conservative and the liberal parties), belief in “the Gospel of socialism”, and the absence of rigid barriers between activists.

The mood of friendly collaboration that Smith found so pleasant both in the Club and in the Fellowship also permeated the Trades Council. Freed from the liberal tether, it became once again a lively institution, where debates were welcome and resolute action against the local politicians or employers not automatically discarded. Many trade-unionists who had long deserted the Thursday evening fortnightly meetings came back to their seat, and Smith was one of them. So exhilarating were the times that Smith, who had never been fond of electioneering, was no longer hostile to the fight for labour representation. One year after having been made a British citizen (his naturalisation took place in 1906, almost thirty years after his arrival in England), he agreed to stand in the March 1907 election for the local Board of Guardians, the organ in charge of Poor Law application and workhouse administration. The Trades Council, that had so often opposed Smith’s views, offered him whole-hearted support, now that he seemed to embrace a more reasonable approach of political action.²⁵ Both “Schmidt” and another SDF candidate were elected. The victorious campaign was followed by a banquet, where all the currents inside Hull’s labour movement were represented, from the Ruskin League to Christian socialism. Undoubtedly integrated in the activist milieu, had Most’s disciple come to adopt the gradualist vision of social change so widespread under British skies?

It would be both unfair and untrue to describe “Citizen Smith” as a traitor to the rebellious dreams of Schmidt the younger. What Smith, now a mature and respected militant, was seeking to do was continue the struggle for socialism using all means possible—a pragmatic conception which, in a country so imbued with parliamentarianism, could hardly exclude participation in elections. Smith’s perspective was not to achieve reforms through institutional work, but simply to promote partnership between militants of diverging ideological tendencies. His hope was that the Trades Council, through its campaigns (electoral and otherwise), would develop into a tool solid enough for the eventual seizing of power

²⁴ MLJ, June 1904, 1–2.

²⁵ “The candidate bearing the foreign-sounding name of “Schmidt” is no other than our good old time friend Mr Gus Smith.” ATW, March 16, 1907.

by the working-class. That strategic choice led him to ask the Trades Council for a revision of its statutes. He was indeed in favour of opening the door to representatives of “all Labour and Socialist bodies”, not only to trade-union delegates, so as to allow other hard-boiled socialists, such as Fabian doctor Joseph Nelson or pawnbroker Ernest Gaunt, to fully participate in the council’s debates and decisions. In January 1910, the revised statutes proposed by Smith were adopted unanimously by the Trades Council.²⁶ His usual “tactful and kindly way” had succeeded in “attracting rather than repelling his hearers” and that personal victory could only confirm his feeling that the council was becoming a stronger and more radical body, with potential for revolutionary initiative.²⁷

Some signs were not so encouraging. The Trades Council was more easily united around strictly electoral goals than around industrial action. In July 1910, only six months after the adoption of the new statutes, Smith was the only delegate on the council’s executive committee to vote in favour of a motion inviting its secretary to preside a meeting organised by the dockers’ union. The reason for the committee’s refusal was that the main speaker at the meeting, Tom Mann, would surely “subject the Labour Party to adverse criticism”.²⁸ Of course the members of the committee were right in their prediction: by 1910, more and more activists were tired of the Labour Party’s dependency on the liberals and Mann, recycling themes borrowed from the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) and the American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), was eager to translate that disappointment into extra-parliamentary praxis. The episode is therefore symbolic of Smith’s difficulties in winning over his fellow trade-unionists to his point of view. His calls for unity could be heard, but not his appeals to “rock the boat”, as neither Booth nor carpenter Alfred Gould, the leader of the ILP branch, had any intention of abandoning the parliamentary path for that of “direct actionism”. By trying to transform the British labour movement from the inside instead of attempting to build revolutionary unions from scratch, Smith was walking in Mann’s footsteps. But judging from the Hull experience, the metamorphosis of the British trade-unions into revolutionary organs could not be expected to take place overnight.

How conscious Smith was of the limitations of his work inside the Trades Council is uncertain. But he clearly did not see the construction of a socialist party as an alternative. In 1908, on the May Day that followed his successful campaign under the SDF flag, he gave his speech not in the

²⁶ ATW, January 29, 1910.

²⁷ “Obituary,” MLJ, *op. cit.*

²⁸ ATW, July 16 1910.

name of the social-democrats, but of the Trades Council, and appeared on the platform side by side with representatives of the National Women's Labour League (NWLL) and of the ILP. It was not until May Day 1909 that he agreed, once more, to represent the SDF.²⁹ Whether his eclecticism was incompatible with the sectarian features of the SDF or whether he was too individualistic to bear any discipline greater than the very loose one ruling Trades Council activities, Smith spent the years 1905–1910 as a freelancer, present on more fronts than can be mentioned.³⁰

1911–1913: Between trade-unionism, socialism, labourism...

In 1911, British society was shaken by an unprecedented strike wave that affected railways, ports, factories – and even schoolyards. Gone down in history as the Great Labour Unrest, that agitation could not but revive veteran Smith. From January to June 1912, he produced five penetrating texts, which form his political testament, as he was to meet his death only one year after the last of those essays was published. A striking feature is the titles that Smith chose for his reflections. The first one he entitled “How the World Moves”, the four others “Where are We Now”, two headings that echoed “How the world wags” and “Where are we today?”, both regular columns in Hyndman's *Justice*—as if Smith's connections with the social-democratic current had come to overshadow the anarchist tinge. Out of the five papers, two were actually printed on the first page of the *Monthly Labour Journal*, i.e. used as editorials. Thanks to the turbulent social climate, a handful of young British Socialist Party (BSP) activists, such as Cornelius Shearsmith and Will Grainger, were exercising growing influence inside the Trades Council and publishing articles that the editor of the *Journal* would surely have censored a few years before.³¹ Smith's belated ascension was also linked to the relative decline of the Trades Council as the “brain and spine” of the local labour movement, and its gradual replacement by the newly constituted Hull branch of the Labour

²⁹ “He reaffirmed their determination to emancipate themselves from wagedom, and their resolve to establish an International Co-operative Commonwealth, based on the collective ownership of the means of life.” *Hull Daily Mail*, May 3, 1909.

³⁰ Particularly sensitive to questions of international solidarity, he was the main speaker at an open-air meeting held in May 1910 to denounce the suppressing of civil liberties in Finland by Tsar Nicolas II. ATW, June 4, 1910.

³¹ The British Socialist Party (BSP), founded in 1911, was the continuation of the SDF under a new name. In 1908, the SDF had already changed its name to “Social-Democratic Party” (SDP).

Party.³² In 1912, the Booths and the Goulds could therefore tolerate more easily the expression of dissent in their periodical.

Smith's tribunes came in the form of a dialogue between two labour activists: himself, barely disguised as a "mate" named "George" who had served for eleven months in the German army, and a certain "Tom", much younger than him but curious of all matters political and bursting with good will ("an intelligent, kind yet determined looking working-man"). While the three shortest texts can be described as denunciations of the social order, the two longest ones allowed Smith to expand more positively on his fundamental beliefs. Unsurprisingly, Smith was ruthless in his attacks on what he called the "damnable system of exploitation".³³ "No working man is free", he argued, depicting a world where tailors were oft without decent clothing, and masons without decent lodging.³⁴ His critique of the liberal and conservative journalists (the "press cossacks") was just as trenchant. Because they invariably portrayed workers on strike as "hooligans", whereas most of them were "thrifty Methodists", he insisted on the urgency of a labour daily.³⁵ Smith also accused strike-breakers of being nothing less than "lick-spittles and traitors".³⁶ He even compared the clerks employed to blackleg the railwaymen's strikes to "Judases", a biblical allusion that he knew the average chapel-going trade-unionist would grasp.³⁷ His point of view on soldiers, however, was less marked by anarchistic morals than twenty years before. His basic analysis was still the same.³⁸ But the best way of preventing military repression, according to Smith the elder, was to treat the soldiers as "our sons and brothers" and educate them politically.³⁹

Over the years, had discouragement mellowed Smith's positions? He answered the question in his April 1912 essay, which opened with young Tom asking him how he felt about the stagnation of labour representation

³² Yann Béliard, "The Trades and Labour Council of Kingston-upon-Hull: The Changing Faces of a Militant Network, c.1870–1914" (paper presented at the CRIDAF—Centre de Recherches Interculturelles sur les Domaines Anglophones et Francophones—seminar, Paris 13 University, December 16, 2006).

³³ Gus Smith, "Where are we now?," MLJ, February 1912, 5–6.

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ Gus Smith, "How the world moves," MLJ, January 1912, 5–7.

³⁶ Idem.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Mocking "Silly Billy", i.e. Kaiser Wilhelm, and the absolute obedience he had demanded from his troops in a famous speech given at Potsdam in 1891, Smith drew a parallel with the more and more frequent use of soldiers to crush British strikes. Gus Smith, "Where are we now?," MLJ, May 1912, 3–4.

³⁹ Idem.

on the City Council.⁴⁰ “There is joy in fighting”, old-timer George exclaimed: trade-unionists were no longer compelled to forward their claims “cap in hand” and the labour councillors were now a proudly autonomous group. More strangely for an activist who well into his thirties had belonged unequivocally to the anarcho-communist branch of the labour movement, Smith presented the foundation of a Hull and District branch of the Labour Party as a major conquest. In his eyes, it constituted, perhaps more clearly than a Trades Council still centred on economic questions, an open house where trade-unionists and socialists were equally welcome and could at last work in harmony. “Trades Unionism coupled with Revolutionary Socialism”, that was the way forward for the labour movement—which, according to him, did not exclude co-operation and labour representation. For anybody aware of the future evolution of the Labour Party towards class collaboration, his praise may sound as wishful thinking, if not as sheer confusion. Smith himself underlined, in his next dialogue, that voting for Labour candidates could not uproot capitalism.⁴¹ He could sometimes not resist writing that he believed in the strike more than in parliamentary action. But to reassure the not-so-radical readers of the *Journal*, he admitted that both weapons should be used and that no instrument should be cast aside by the workers in their march towards freedom, as long as the aim remained the management of the economy by the workers’ unions.

... and syndicalism

Smith’s last essay was an avowedly pro-syndicalist editorial, a cautious eulogy in which he never ventured so far as to call *himself* a syndicalist.⁴² He simply stated that if the British labour movement took the syndicalist turn, he would not be displeased, provided other tendencies were not ostracised. Any theory or method could be fruitful if it helped to improve “class conscienceness” (sic) and to cement “the brotherhood of men”. The advantage he saw in syndicalism in comparison with industrial unionism was that it was not as “sectarian”, since it did not seek to create entirely new unions outside of the existing ones, but to bring about their amalgamation and federation. He also praised the use of direct action,

⁴⁰ The Town Council had become the City Council in 1897. Kenneth Gillett and Edward MacMahon, *The History of Hull* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), 390.

⁴¹ Inside the present system, he explained, it would take one hundred years for Labour to gain the majority. And even if it did, and tried to implement progressive laws, the army would soon crush the Labour MPs.

⁴² Gus Smith, “Where are we now?,” MLJ, June 1912, 1–3.

which enabled workers to obtain concrete advances on the spot. Finally, to those who rejected antiparlamentarianism, Smith replied that the anarchists and the industrial unionists, from whom he distinguished himself, were far more allergic to elections than syndicalists. In his eyes, parties could be useful to the working-class, provided they agreed not to spend their time quarrelling with each other—a transparent allusion to the SDF-ILP feuds. Smith’s “broad-church” approach was evidently designed to preserve the collaborative spirit prevailing among Hull activists.

In May 1913, Booth informed his readers that Smith was sick and that, for the first time in years, the “willing horse” would not take part in the spring campaign of open-air meetings.⁴³ Suffering from “gastric carcinoma”, Smith was admitted first to a Co-operative Convalescent Home, where he stayed for a week or two, then to the Hull Infirmary, where he underwent an operation from which he did not recover. He died of exhaustion at 3 o’clock in the morning, on Monday June 23, 1913, at the age of 59. The funeral took place on the Wednesday in the Western Cemetery, where many a worker “followed him to his last resting place”.⁴⁴ On his grave was laid “a token of respect” from the Hull Trades Council, in the form of an “S” covered with deep red sweet peas.⁴⁵ A personal tragedy for his relatives and his friends, Smith’s death was also an immeasurable loss for the labour movement in Hull. It is indeed impossible not to wonder about the role Smith might have played in August 1914, when the British and the German empires declared war upon each other. A “Hull man” of German origin, Smith the dedicated internationalist would almost certainly have contributed to the expression of antiwar sentiment and the constitution of a local opposition to the patriotic consensus advocated by employers, politicians and labourists alike.⁴⁶ His premature passing away left the Trades Council politically disarmed and its *Journal*, after embracing the TUC’s and the Labour Party’s calls for a social truce, rapidly ceased to exist.

⁴³ Gus Smith, “Where are we now?,” MLJ, May 1913, 3–4.

⁴⁴ MLJ, February 1914, 2.

⁴⁵ *Idem*.

⁴⁶ Inside the BSP, one of the strongest poles of resistance to Hyndman’s nationalist stance was formed by the London social-democrats of foreign origin. Martin Crick, *The History of the Social-Democratic Federation* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), 261–83.

Conclusion

“A hopeful enthusiast in the movement, who looked at life with a cheery smile”; “rich in simple pathos and humour, (...) a man who would not be turned from his purpose”: the posthumous descriptions of Smith’s personality stressed his unlikely ability to combine inflexibility with open-mindedness.⁴⁷ The importance of such psychological traits cannot be overestimated, if one is to make sense of the man’s amazing itinerary, from anarchist deserter to pillar of Hull’s trade union movement. Without such adaptability, Gustav Schmidt could never have become Gus Smith.⁴⁸ Understandably, Booth admired Smith for being “that type of man that never made enemies”.⁴⁹ Yet in retrospect, that quality can also be read as a flaw. “An indefatigable worker for the cause of Progress and Reform”: that is how Gus Smith’s wife is said to have portrayed her husband to the “representative gathering” present at his funeral.⁵⁰ To find the notions of progress and reform associated with the memory of man who spent so much of his life fighting the illusion that capitalism could be progressively reformed may be discomfoting.⁵¹ But it says a lot about the blurry character of his doctrine.

His syncretistic outlook may have been helpful in most situations, but its results in the long run need to be examined. By remaining outside of the two major socialist groupings, the ILP and the SDF/SDP/BSP, Smith shaped neither one nor the other.⁵² By refusing to build a revolutionary network as such, be it on De Leon’s or on Lenin’s model, Smith ended up devoting his talents to the solidifying of a Trades Council that, as the 1914 crisis would reveal, could not be used for revolutionary purposes, and not even for the self-defence of the workers. With hindsight, it is hard not to

⁴⁷ “A Hull Socialist. Death of Mr Gus Smith,” *Hull Daily Mail*, June 23, 1913.

⁴⁸ His biography reinforces, “from below”, the point made by Dominik Geppert and Robert Gerwarth in *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain. Essays on Cultural Affinity* (London: Routledge, 2008), back cover: “Anglo-German relations before 1914 were characterized not only by rivalry and antagonism, but also by a remarkable degree of mutual admiration and cultural cross-fertilisation”.

⁴⁹ “Obituary,” MLJ, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ *Idem.*

⁵¹ “A consistent worker for Socialism and Trade Unionism,” without encompassing the breadth of his philosophy, would have been closer to the truth. “Our Portrait Gallery,” MLJ, November 1906, 3.

⁵² The Hull branch of the ILP remained under the influence of Alf Gould, who was vocal in the defence of “labour independence” but refused to call himself a socialist, while the Hull branch of the SDF/SDP/BSP always lacked the proletarian backing that a figure like Smith might have attracted.

see Smith's bet that militancy inside the existing trade-unions would pull them to the left and transform them into the cells of a new social order as a risky one indeed. For the leaders of the Hull Trades Council, however tolerant of his eccentricities, were from the start unwilling supporters of the 1911 strike wave, considering the workers' upsurge as a worrying phenomenon, not the promise of a better future. Favouring "principles over party", Smith managed to avoid social isolation, but not to overcome a certain political impotence.⁵³ It could have made sense for him to take part in the Labour Party adventure if he had worked, at the same time, on the construction of some smaller but more reliable association. But he did not compensate for his secondary role inside Hull's embryonic Labour Party by the creation of stronger links with syndicalists or revolutionary socialists in the wider world.

Whatever reservations one may formulate as to Smith's strategy, he still appears as an exceptional figure in the history of Hull's labour movement. In the late-Victorian and Edwardian age, no-one else was as persevering in the propagation of the socialist ideal and no-one was as inspiring to the younger generation of revolutionaries that appeared in the city during the years of Great Labour Unrest. In the absence of Gus Smith, the port workers would have revolted all the same, but there would have been no Shearsmith, and no Grainger either.⁵⁴ Many of the activists who had been acquainted with him were fully conscious of that: "A delegate, in making a touching reference to the late Mr Gustav Smith suggested that the Trades Council should take into its early consideration the perpetuating of his memory in some permanent form".⁵⁵ Six months later, the Trades Council had collected one pound and one shilling for the erection of a "memorial to Gus Smith" – a memorial that is nowhere to be seen in contemporary Hull.⁵⁶ As for Smith's grave, though it is easy to locate on the map of the Western Cemetery, it is unrecognisable on the ground.

But memorials and tombstones matter little, compared with Smith's lifetime achievements. A Schmidt among the Schmidts, a Smith among the Smiths, he bore the most common name that could be, an appropriate one for a man so devoted to his class. To a far greater extent than the 1848 generation of German refugees, who always remained strangers to their

⁵³ In 1910, Smith was unable to counter the Trades Council's decision whereby the socialist candidates it supported should appear as "Labour Party" candidates only, with no reference to "socialism".

⁵⁴ Béliard 2006, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ "Obituary," MLJ, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ MLJ, February 1914, 5.

host country, he came to play a prominent part in Hull's public life and embodied the very notion of proletarian internationalism.⁵⁷ "We, the workers of Great Britain", he wrote in the months preceding his death. And no one in Hull would have challenged the way he included himself in the working-class community that had adopted him. Under the pen of labour historians, the term "integration" has often connoted subordination, capitulation and corruption. But Gustav Schmidt's story is one of integration in a more complex, and nobler, sense of the word.

⁵⁷ Christine Lattek, *Revolutionary Refugees: German Socialism in Britain, 1840-1860* (London: Routledge, 2004).

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROOTED COSMOPOLITAN: ERRICO MALATESTA, SYNDICALISM, TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MOVEMENT

CARL LEVY

Introduction

Errico Malatesta (1853–1932) was effectively the leader of Italian anarchism from the 1890s to the 1920s, but his life spans the Risorgimento, Liberal Italy and Fascism. He lived between the eras of Bakunin and Mussolini and knew them both. Italian anarchism was never as significant as its Spanish version, but anarchism, syndicalism and the wider political culture of *sovversivismo* (“subversivism”) were central to the pre-Fascist socialist and labour movements.¹ By the early twentieth century Italian anarchists relied more heavily on the informal prestige of leaders than did the socialist movement to keep the sinews of their organisations together. In this respect, Errico Malatesta’s relationship to the anarchists in Italy was rather similar to Garibaldi and Mazzini’s role in the political organisation of the Risorgimento.²

¹ Carl Levy, “‘Sovversivismo’: The Radical Political Culture of Otherness in Liberal Italy,” *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 12: 2 (2007): 147–161.

² The best biography of Malatesta is Giampietro Berti, *Errico Malatesta e il movimento anarchico italiano e internazionale 1872–1932* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2003). The only biography in English is Vernon Richards, *Errico Malatesta: his life and ideas*, 3rd edition (London: Freedom Press, 1984).

Like Mazzini and Garibaldi, Malatesta lived most of his adult life in exile.³ His interventions occurred during the great periods of social tension (the 1890s, 1913–1914 and 1919–1920), and his arrival home followed a ritual that had its roots in the political culture of the Risorgimento. Thus, in 1919, even as an old man, his arrival was a charismatic moment during the *Biennio Rosso*, when he was acclaimed the “Lenin of Italy” or the “Socialist Garibaldi”. Although the socialist party overshadowed the anarchist movement, Malatesta embodied the radicalism and populism of the Italian Left.⁴ Malatesta worked to unify anarchists around a non-dogmatic form of “anarchism without adjectives”, and he constantly sought alliances with the socialists, syndicalists and Republicans of Italy. He envisaged a socialist pluralism of the left, but in many respects he was still attached to the Neapolitan Mazzinian republicanism of his youth.⁵ Although he embraced anarchist collectivism and later anarcho-communism, the Mazzinian ideal, the ethical movement, and the role of pedagogic politics remained deeply embedded in his political language and the way he did politics.

I have been writing a biography of Malatesta which differs from earlier attempts in Italian or English, because it emphasises the interlacing of homeland and exile and stresses the importance of the binominal: local patriotism and cosmopolitanism.⁶ In this respect his biography is a prime exemplar of the nomadic political left, which emerged in that antebellum era of globalisation between the late nineteenth century and 1914. This biography of Malatesta will contribute to the political and social histories of Italy but more importantly to the burgeoning field of diaspora studies and the study of cultural and political hybridity between host nations, economic and political migrants and homelands.

This chapter will examine Malatesta’s relationship with the international labour movement and syndicalism and thus pursues the same theme. The proto-syndicalism of the 1880s and 1890s and self-conscious syndicalism after 1900 were invaluable organisational and ideological

³ For his life in exile see Carl Levy, “Malatesta in Exile,” *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Annali*, Vol. XV, 1981, 245–270 and “Malatesta in London: The Era of Dynamite,” in “A Century of Italian Emigration to Britain 1880–1980s,” ed. L. Sponza and A. Tosi, *The Italianist* (special supplement), 13, (1993): 25–42.

⁴ Carl Levy, “Charisma and Social Movements: Errico Malatesta and Italian Anarchism,” *Modern Italy*, 3:2, (1998): 205–217.

⁵ Misato Toda, *Errico Malatesta da Mazzini a Bakunin: la sua formazione giovanile nell’ambiente napoletano (1868–1873)* (Naples: Guida, 1988).

⁶ Carl Levy, *The Rooted Cosmopolitan: Errico Malatesta and Italian Anarchist in Exile*.

environments where anarchists could recover their strength after the failure of insurrectional and terrorist strategies, which nearly destroyed the anarchist movement in most of Europe in the 1890s.⁷ As is well known, Malatesta was an early pioneer of the syndicalist strategy even if he remained suspicious of the full-blown ideology, syndicalism.⁸ First we must turn to the relationship between his personal life and his sociology of labour and organisation.

Labour Movements, the Working Class and Syndicalism: Biography and Sociology

Most observers agree that Malatesta was a “consistent anarchist”, an anarchist who endorsed Max Weber’s ethics of ultimate ends, and even if he could be a pragmatic tactician, George Slocombe, of George Lansbury’s syndicalist-tinged pre-war insurgent *Daily Herald*, remembered him as “the only perfectly consistent anarchist I have ever known”.⁹ Even his adversaries in the forces of law and order, such as the police spy “Virgilio”, explained his libertarian consistency as his desire to be a leader without appearing to exercise authority, who allowed his closest associates to explain necessity to the rank and file while he “wrapped himself in mystery”.¹⁰ This consistency too, is evident in oratory, which eschewed the histrionic and pseudo-scientific rhetoric of the leader, much in fashion amongst the contemporary Italian Left, and thus his quiet Socratic style

⁷ For overviews of antebellum syndicalism and what has been called “class-war” anarchism see, Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame. The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism, Counter-Power*, Volume 1 (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009) and the earlier Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, ed., *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990).

⁸ For overviews of Malatesta’s views on syndicalism see, Levy, 1981; Maurizio Antonioli, “Errico Malatesta, organizzazione operaia e il sindacalismo (1889–1914),” in Maurizio Antonioli, *Azione diretta e organizzazione operaia. Sindacalismo rivoluzionario e anarchismo tra la fine dell’Ottocento e il fascismo* (Manduria-Bari-Rome: Piero Lacaita, 1990), 203–264.

⁹ George Slocombe, *The Tumult and the Shouting* (London, Toronto: W. Heinemann, Ltd, 1936), 22–23.

¹⁰ A.C.S., C.P.C. (Errico Malatesta), F. 2949, b. 286, 31568-1, report from “Virgilio”, 20 October 1901. For more on the spy “Virgilio”, see Pietro di Paola, “The Spies who Came in from the Heat: The International Surveillance of the Anarchists in London,” *European History Quarterly*, 37:2 (2007): 189–215.

disappointed the adoring crowds who overwhelmed the rallies to welcome him back as the “Lenin of Italy” in early 1920.¹¹

Malatesta was born into a middle class family which owned a tannery and other property and he was educated in a private school run by a religious order, later entering the University of Naples as a medical student. But he dropped out to pursue his revolutionary politics and followed a narodnik-like path. In his dotage Malatesta recalled that his generation of revolutionaries felt a moral imperative to abandon the lifestyle and employment of the middle classes:

Labour was declared a social duty for everyone and...the condition of the workers was considered the only one compatible with a truly human morality. Many Internationalists coming from the middle classes, in order to be coherent with their ideals and better to approach the people, began to learn a manual trade. We saw the working class, in the industrial and agricultural proletariat, as the great factor of social transformation, the guarantee that it would really be done for the advantage of everyone and would not give rise to a new privileged class.¹²

Although Malatesta’s attempt to get an apprenticeship at the Guppy engineering work in Naples was stopped because he was blacklisted as a subversive, soon after he was trained as a mechanic by the Florentine Internationalist, Francesco Natta. Between stints as a revolutionary journalist, and into his seventies, he usually earned his living as an electrician and gas-fitter. For as Malatesta wrote to the long-time editor of a trilingual Swiss anarchist newspaper, Luigi Bertoni, for him it was not merely a matter of scruples that he did not live as a professional revolutionary, indeed he felt frustrated that he wasted his time doing jobs “that were often brutal and useless, for the benefit of the bourgeoisie”, instead of “dedicating more time to our cause”. No, the decision to live as a worker was a practical one, for he asked, how could he be seen to be in earnest in his opposition to the paid and permanent secretariats of the trade unions, if he or others merely reproduced a similar division of labour in the anarchist movement itself? “And in order to do this, it is necessary that no one is able to say or insinuate, that I do just like the others.”¹³ Thus his

¹¹ Levy, 1998, 212.

¹² Errico Malatesta, preface to Max Nettlau, *Bakunin e l’Internazionale in Italia* (Geneva: Edizioni del “Risveglio”, 1928), reprinted in *Scritti*, Volume III (Geneva, Edizioni del “Risveglio”, 1936), Reprinted (Carrara: “Il Seme”, 1975), 329–330.

¹³ I.I.S.H., Luigi Bertoni Papers, No, 2, Letters from Errico Malatesta, London, June 12, 1912.

biography gives us a hint at his sociological theories of organisation, including labour organisations to which I will now turn.

Malatesta crafted an anarcho-communism, breaking with a largely Marxist economics and sociology, which had dominated his thought to the 1880s. With the help of his fellow Neapolitan, Francesco Saverio Merlino (who later deserted anarchism for an interesting variety of libertarian social democracy and market socialism), the pair challenged the Marxian falling rate of profit and the immiseration thesis, highlighted the independent importance of the state, bureaucracy and ethics in politics and noted the lack of a credible Marxist agrarian programme (shadowing criticisms made by Edward Bernstein and Georges Sorel contemporaneously).¹⁴ Malatesta's anarcho-communism was anti-positivist and anti-determinist, and in this sense he challenged the wildly optimistic positivism of the Italian socialists and more tellingly the biological analogies which underlay Kropotkinite anarcho-communism. For Malatesta there was no biological guarantee that human society would follow the laws of the survival of the fittest or the laws of mutual aid. So unlike Peter Kropotkin or Luigi Galleani, the very popular Italian Kropotkinite anti-organisationalist anarcho-communist, Malatesta did not believe that anarchism would spontaneously arise on the ruins of capitalist society.¹⁵ Modern industrial and urban life demanded continuity: a city under a general strike would probably not last a week without the first signs of famine, he told the Russian and the Italian. Lecturing a group of Italian workers at London's Italian anarchist club in 1909, Malatesta explained to an anti-organisationalist and individualist shoemaker that his individualism was an illusion, because he was dependent on the capitalist organisation of the market. So if presently organisation meant the monopoly by industrialists and capitalist banks, organisation would provide a new system of society in the future: "but it is always a phenomenon of organisation, monstrous if you wish, because it is based on the slavery of the worker, but we are still dealing with organisation."¹⁶ Thus Malatesta's anarchism was based on a functional conception of the

¹⁴ For a good biography of Merlino see, Giampietro Berti, *Francesco Saverio Merlino: dall'anarchismo socialista al socialismo libero: 1856–1930* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1993).

¹⁵ For a good discussion of Malatesta's thoughts on science, organisation and revolution, see Paul Nursey-Bray, "Malatesta and the Anarchist Revolution," *Anarchist Studies*, 3:1 (1995): 25–44.

¹⁶ A.C.S., C.P.C (Errico Malatesta), F. 2950, report from "Virgilio" at the Communist Club-Italian Section, Charlotte Street, Soho, London, February 3, 1909.

division of labour. He believed that in a socialist society the parasitical functions embodied in the capitalist state and its infrastructure would be replaced by the purely administrative duties carried out by delegates whose mandates were strictly connected to functional duties.¹⁷ Even an anarchist city needed a functioning water supply and electricity.

Politically this meant that Malatesta was a firm advocate of an anarchist party and sought to revive the First International in the 1880s, a new anarcho-socialist party in the 1890s and more successfully, if rather briefly, the *Unione Anarchica Italiana* between 1919 and the advent of Fascism.¹⁸ But since Malatesta's form of organisationalism was libertarian, it was voluntary and consensual. This of course led to two paradoxes in his thought. First, how could one assure the continuity and consistent effectiveness of voluntary organisations? This is of course a central issue for the historian of anarchism. Anarchist political organisations tended to be more ephemeral than their socialist counterparts because of the lack of the majority rule, but more recent work invoking the study of political sub-cultures, sociability, the repertoires of social protest and informal networks have demonstrated the durability of anarchism in Italy and elsewhere from the 1870s to after the First World War.¹⁹ But for our purposes it was non-anarchist, if potentially libertarian, organisations—the Chambers of Labour (in France or Italy)—which combined state-support with the voluntary aspects of labour organising and which served as the main institutional camouflage under which anarchists flourished after 1900. And it was here that anarchist “converts” to a syndicalist strategy or syndicalism, with the help of Malatesta's persuasion, played a significant role in the history of the global labour movement after 1900.²⁰

¹⁷ Irving Horowitz, *The Anarchists*, 2nd edition (New York: Dell, 1970), 46–47.

¹⁸ For English overviews of the history of Italian anarchism from the 1960s to the 1940s, see Carl Levy, “Italian Anarchism, 1870–1926,” in *For Anarchism. History, Theory and Practice*, ed. David Goodway (London: Routledge, 1989), 24–78 and Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993). A detailed account of Malatesta's organisational activities in the 1890s are found in Davide Turcato, “European Anarchism in the 1890s: Why Labor Matters in Categorizing Anarchism,” *Working USA*, 12:3 (2009): 451–466 and Davide Turcato, “Collective Action, Opacity and the ‘Problem of Irrationality’: Anarchism and the First of May, 1890–92,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, forthcoming.

¹⁹ I cover this vast and exciting literature in “Social Histories of Anarchism,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 2010, forthcoming.

²⁰ For an overview of Italian syndicalism before 1926, see Carl Levy, “Currents of Italian Syndicalism before 1926,” *International Review of Social History*, 45:2 (2000): 209–255, and also see Antonioli, 1990.

Secondly, if anarchism was voluntarist, voluntary and consensual, how could he justify the use of violence?²¹ The revolution necessitated an act of violence, hopefully a short and surgical form of violence, for he felt that a syndicalist general strike would fail because starvation and repression by the forces of law and order or by vigilantes who would smash it. Thus he pleaded with the Milanese and Turinese factory workers occupying their plants in September 1920, to seize the opportunity for a relatively bloodless revolution by restarting production and distribution on libertarian lines.²² And of course if he renounced the terrorism of the 1890s, he never foreswore assassination of political leaders, when in the case of King Umberto or Mussolini, this would prevent or overthrow a dictatorship.²³ But even if violence of the revolutionary act could be endorsed in order to open the possibilities of a post-revolutionary society, anarchism could not be forced on the populace by a Leninist dictatorship of the proletariat or even a Bakuninist secret society of revolutionary pilots. By middle age he criticised Bakunin's various secret fraternities, and in old age he denounced the ultra-organisationalist Platformist programme of Nestor Makhno and his supporters, which promoted an oxymoronic Leninist-Anarchist party. Thus in 1929, he wrote to Makhno that "vanguardism" contradicted the essence of the anarchist project:

The important thing is not the victory of our plans, our projects, our utopias, which in any case need the confirmation of experience and can be modified by experience, developed and adapted to the real moral and material conditions of the age and place. What matters most is that the people, men and women lose the sheep-like instincts and habits, which thousands of years of slavery have instilled in them, and learn to think and

²¹ For an interesting discussion of this conundrum see, N. Whelehan, "Political Violence and Morality in Anarchist Theory and Practice: Luigi Galleani and Peter Kropotkin in Comparative Perspective," *Anarchist Studies*, 13:2 (2005): 147–168 and Samuel Clark, *Living without Domination* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

²² For an overview of Malatesta's activities during the *biennio rosso* (1919–1920) and the factory occupations (September 1920), see Paolo Finzi, *La nota persona Errico Malatesta in Italia Dicembre 1919–Luglio 1920* (Ragusa: La Fiaccola, 1990) and Levy, 1998, 214.

²³ For Malatesta on the assassination of Umberto see Berti, 2003, 304–331 and on Italian anarchism and assassinations see Carl Levy, "The Anarchist Assassin and Italian History, 1870s to 1930s," in *Assassinations and Murder in Modern Italy. Transformations in Society and Culture*, ed. Stephen Gundle and Lucia Rinaldi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 207–222.

act freely. And it is to this great work of moral liberation that the anarchists must specially dedicate themselves.²⁴

Thus before and after the revolution the anarchists had to be educationalists. To that extent they had to make anarchists, in the manner that William Morris (another libertarian who Malatesta knew but failed to appreciate, and the blindness was mutual) meant when he said the aim of the Socialist League was to make socialists. Malatesta envisaged in the short or medium-term a social republic, an aim which drove his alliances with the “subversive Left” (anarchists, syndicalists, socialists and republicans) during the Red Week of 1914 or during the *biennio rosso* (1919–1920), which then rather dubiously also included interventionist followers of D’Annunzio. In the aftermath of a successful revolution, Malatesta argued that the anarchists, as the loyal opposition to state-forms of socialism, should be allowed to experiment with their libertarian forms of social organisations, which would gradually win over the population, and thus during the Russian Revolution, he argued that Makhno’s anarchist experiment should have been allowed to prosper and not crushed by the imperious will of Trotsky and the Red Army.²⁵

A pedagogical approach also informed Malatesta’s critique of syndicalism. Malatesta anticipated Robert Michels’s criticism of oligarchical organisation of any party or trade union and he argued that syndicalism would fall prey to the same tendencies; albeit he did not embrace Michels’s overly neat pessimistic and determinist take on human nature—indeed for Malatesta there was no such thing as an essential human nature. Malatesta argued for libertarian ginger groups in trade unions of any political persuasion. Thus these groups would push for the decentralisation of power, the rotation of leadership and preservation of the apolitical nature of trade unions: his model was the Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) of pre-1914 Britain and he argued publicly with syndicalists such as Pierre Monatte during a famous exchange in Amsterdam in 1907 at the International Anarchist Congress or in private letters during the *biennio rosso* (1919–1920) with the Italian anarchist Armando Borghi who proposed to give the *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI) an anarchist colouration.²⁶ Naturally, that meant that council

²⁴ Errico Malatesta. “Gradualism,” *Pensiero e Volontà* (Rome), 2:12, 1 October 1925, translated in *The Anarchist Revolution: Polemical Articles 1924–1931*, ed. Vernon Richards (London: Freedom Press, 1995), 82–87.

²⁵ I discuss Malatesta’s alliance strategy in Levy 1981 and Levy 1993.

²⁶ Levy, 1981, 272–279 and Antonioli, 1990. For an English translation of the famous encounter in Amsterdam, see Maurizio Antonioli, ed., *The International*

communism was no cure, but merely a vehicle for a variety of political viewpoints, and thus he was suspicious of Antonio Gramsci and his colleagues' belief that "correct" council communism would necessarily lead workers to their unorthodox form of Marxism. On the other hand, a fellow anarchist such as Maurizio Garino, skilled engineer activist in the Turinese FIOM (the socialist metalworkers' trade union) and the workers' councils and a close collaborator of Gramsci, was a prime example of an anarchist militant acting in the same manner as the comrades of the ISEL had done in the antebellum British trade union movement.²⁷

Malatesta's criticism paralleled Lenin's criticism of the economism of the trade unions. Thus Malatesta berated the members of the USI in Liguria who manufactured cannons, or the syndicalist telegraphers and telephonists who sought to have women workers sacked when the First World War ended.²⁸ He warned the landless labourers unions, the heart and soul of the Italian Socialist party, that their policies of rigorous socialisation of the land would turn the sharecroppers and small peasants against them. And indeed the fascist wave of the Po Valley washed away thirty years of dense organisation in a matter of a few months in the spring of 1921: as predicted by Malatesta, Italy witnessed a war of the poor against the poor, landless labourers against slightly wealthier sharecroppers and peasants presided over and aided and abetted by extremely wealthy landlords, the educated middle classes and the security forces.²⁹ In a similar vein he employed Hilaire Belloc's concept of the Servile State (*Lo Stato Servile*), which he imported from Britain to criticise the rise of the rudimentary welfare state in both Britain and Italy, which in the latter covered organised workers (a small minority), making them dependent on the state as a client group, and creating a privileged and passive stratum of workers to lord it over the labouring poor and the peasantry.³⁰

If Malatesta shared with Lenin a critique of economism, they also apparently shared voluntarism. But this is misleading. Tactically Malatesta and Lenin were both voluntarists, which is why Malatesta criticised the determinist psychology behind the purveyors of the general strike. Indeed Malatesta's support for the general strike was more akin to Rosa Luxemburg's notion of a rolling series of strikes that were intermingled

Anarchist Congress: Amsterdam (1907), translation and English edition by Nestor McNab (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2008).

²⁷ The context is discussed in Levy, 1999.

²⁸ Malatesta, 1975, vol. 1, 134–139.

²⁹ Malatesta, 1975, vol. 1, 33, 51–52, 73–82, 85–86.

³⁰ Errico Malatesta, "Le due tendenze libert  o schiavit ?", *Volont *, 1:1, June 29, 1913; Malatesta, 1975, Vol. 1, 123–124.

with insurrectionary outbursts culminating in the mutiny of the armed forces and the fall of the old regime.³¹ The Russian Revolutions, which brought Lenin to power, were partially based on this dynamic. However Lenin's first premises were diametrically opposed to Malatesta's. Underneath Lenin's tactical voluntarism was a rigid Bolshevik Marxist orthodoxy, which brooked little dissent. Lenin still endorsed "scientific socialism"; it was just that Lenin's variety differed from various other models. Malatesta, as we have seen, criticised "scientific anarchism": he separated politics and ethics from science. Malatesta's voluntarism was consistent: consistent in his life-choices, consistent in his endorsement of flexible tactics and consistent in his political ideology. Indeed the best way to characterise Malatesta's politics and political theory is as a form of anarchist methodological individualism, as suggested by Davide Turcato recently.³² While Malatesta was not a conscious follower of Max Weber (the pioneer of methodological individualism), the connection is not so far-fetched: Michels was one of Weber's wayward star pupils, but he was impatient with Michels for a boneheaded positivist literalism and determinism, which had little in common with the Weberian method.³³ Similarly, as we have seen, Malatesta was critical of anarchism corrupted by the determinism of naïve positivism.

For Malatesta the relationship of labour to anarchism was important because going to the workers in the 1890s was a way out of the dead-end of small-scale insurrections and urban terrorism.³⁴ That is why he was so impressed by the Great Dock Strike in London in 1889 (and a series of other dock strikes which followed it elsewhere in Europe). Here was an unconscious form of radicalism which shook the capital of the capitalist world to its foundations. Thus the bywords of early twentieth-century syndicalism were there before his eyes: direct action, the general trade union of all workers, the boycott from Ireland, and from Scotland

³¹ John Peter Netti, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) abridged edition, 151–158.

³²In general see Davide Turcato, "Making Sense of Anarchism: The Experiments with Revolution of Errico Malatesta. Italian Exile in London, 1889-1900" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2009), 368–380.

³³ Francesco Tuccari, *I dilemma della democrazia moderna. Max Weber e Robert Michels* (Bari: Laterza, 1993); Carl Levy, "Max Weber, Anarchism and Libertarian Culture: Personality or Power Politics?," in *Max Weber Between Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Sam Whimster (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

³⁴ Errico Malatesta, "Nostra tattica," *L'Agitazione* (Ancona), 1:25, November 25, 1897.

“ca’canny” (i.e. sabotage), which he duly explained to Italian readers.³⁵ Malatesta loved to tease reformists by reminding them that the suffrage or labour rights had been won through direct action. In a moving obituary for Emily Davidson, who threw herself in front of the King’s horse at the Epsom Derby, he saluted the British suffragettes even if he disagreed about their final ends.³⁶ Thus the great strikes of the 1890s embodied his form of anarchism because they happened outside constraints of big battalions of old-fashioned bureaucratic craft unions and the choreographed niceties of standard negotiations.

In the second wave of labour militancy, the syndicalist wave just before 1914, Malatesta emphasised the role of smaller ginger groups of libertarian activists who did not use sectarian values as a device to create new hierarchies within putatively revolutionary organisations. Thus politics began with the individual but an individual who realised that his or her full potential could only be realised in consensual and voluntary organisations, and thus Malatesta’s libertarian methodological individualism is in full view.

Diaspora, Migration, Syndicalism and the Anarchism of Malatesta

For too long, the role of the Italian diaspora in an era of *Belle Epoque* globalisation has been little understood or invoked. Thus the main theme in my biography of Errico Malatesta is the interlacing of exile with homeland and the cross-fertilization of ideas and forms of organisation within the Italian diaspora and between the Italians and other national groups of exiles and migrants. Using the international context, in the 1960s and 1970s the pioneering works of Eric Hobsbawm, Franco Andreucci and Georges Haupt traced the evolution and dissemination of Marxism into a recognizable ideology (scientific socialism).³⁷ More recent

³⁵ Levy, 1981, 272–273

³⁶ Errico Malatesta, “Le suffragette,” *Volontà*, 1 :3, June 22, 1913.

³⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, “The Fortunes of Marx’s and Engels’s Writings,” in *History of Marxism*, Vol. 1, *Marxism in Marx’s Day*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982); Georges Haupt, in Hobsbawm, *ibid*; F. Andreucci, “The Diffusion of Marxism in Italy during the Nineteenth Century,” in *Culture, Identity and Politics. Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, ed. Raphael Samuel and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: RKP, 1983); F. Andreucci, *Il marxismo collettivo. Socialismo, marxismo e circolazione delle idee dalla seconda alla terza internazionale* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986).

studies by Maurizio Antonioli,³⁸ Wayne Westergaard-Thorpe,³⁹ Constance Bantman,⁴⁰ Davide Turcato,⁴¹ Pietro Di Paola,⁴² Ralph Darlington⁴³ and myself⁴⁴ have used the international dimension to explore the emergence of anarchism and syndicalism as full-blown, self-conscious ideologies. But more interesting for my biography is Benedict Anderson's life of the anarchist and nationalist Filipino novelist José Rizal, whose nomadic life traces how an activist performed a reverse form of globalisation from the colonial world to the colonising metropolis.⁴⁵ Further José Moya, who has studied the multi-ethnic anarchism of communities of Argentina and is presently writing a study of the "Anarchist Atlantic", the criss-crossing of the Atlantic by anarchists from Spain, Italy and Lithuania to the New World and back again, is another signal project,⁴⁶ as is Kevin Shaffer's project of outlining the network in which Cubans spread anarchism from their island to Caribbean shores.⁴⁷ The very recent and exciting work of

³⁸ Antonioli, 1990.

³⁹ Wayne Westergaard-Thorpe, *'The Workers Themselves': Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour: The Origins of the International Working Men's Association, 1913–1923* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989); Wayne Thorpe, "The European Syndicalists and the War, 1914–1918," *Contemporary European History*, 33:2 (2001): 195–216; Wayne Thorpe, "El Ferrol, Rio de Janeiro, Zimmerwald, and Beyond: Syndicalist Internationalism, 1914–1918," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 84, 4 (2006), 1005–1023

⁴⁰ Constance Bantman, "Internationalism without an International? Cross-Channel Anarchist Networks, 1880–1914," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 84 :4 (2006) : 961–982.

⁴¹ Davide Turcato, "Italian Anarchism as a Transnational Movement, 1885–1915," *International Review of Social History*, 52:3 (2007): 407–444.

⁴² Di Paola, 2007.

⁴³ Ralph Darlington, "Revolutionary Syndicalist Opposition to the First World War: A Comparative Reassessment," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 84:4 (2006), 983–1004; Ralph Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Analysis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Ralph Darlington, "Syndicalism and the Influence of Anarchism in France, Italy and Spain," *Anarchist Studies*, 17:2 (2009): 29–54.

⁴⁴ Levy, "Social Histories," forthcoming.

⁴⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags. Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005).

⁴⁶ José Moya, *The Anarchist Atlantic*, forthcoming. See also Davide Turcato, "The Hidden History of the Anarchist Atlantic: Errico Malatesta in America, 1899–1900," unpublished paper, 2010.

⁴⁷ Kevin Shaffer, "Havana Hub: The Role of *Tierra* and Libertarian Journalism in Linking Cuba and Caribbean Anarchist Networks, 1903–1915," Seventh European

Illham Khuri-Makdisi, who will give us the first account of interchange of radicalisms and anarchism in the great cosmopolitan cities of the Ottoman empire and its surrounds, will outline an “Anarchist Eastern Mediterranean”.⁴⁸ Whereas David Hirsch, Michel Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt have supplied us with global perspectives on anarchist diasporas in the Global South before 1914.⁴⁹ Donna Gabaccia and associates have embarked on a series of comprehensive studies of the Italian diaspora mapping the making of Italians abroad and the interaction of hybrid political cultures between host nations, economic and political Italian migrants and the homeland, in which the anarchists and syndicalists are a subset of a broader phenomenon. Indeed they demonstrate that national identity was discovered only when immigrants were labelled as “Italians” in their host countries. Errico Malatesta lived at that junction of this globalised civil society where anarchist identity and Italian identity were concurrently in the process of formation.⁵⁰

Thus to understand the relationship between the international and internationalist currents of the labour movement and Malatesta’s anarchism one must situate his life within a grid of the variety of exilic experiences and the heritage and repertoires of a century of political diaspora, which preceded Malatesta’s life. There are three—but not mutually exclusive—models of Italian diaspora. There is first of all the political and intellectual diaspora, which is manifest from the late eighteenth century and is now masterfully covered by Maurizio Isabella.⁵¹ Secondly, the longstanding “tramp” of skilled artisans from selected areas of Italy to various host European countries, as described in Lucio Sponza’s account of the phenomenon in nineteenth-century London.⁵² The anarchist

Social Science History Conference, University of Lisbon, February 27–March 1, 2008.

⁴⁸ Illham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860–1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁴⁹ Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009; Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt, ed., *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940. The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2010),

⁵⁰ Donna Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 2000) and Donna Gabaccia and Fraser Ottanelli, ed., *Italian Workers of the World: Labor Migration and the Formation of Multiethnic States* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁵¹ Maurizio Isabella, *Risorgimento in Exile. Italian Émigrés and the Liberal International in the Post-Napoleonic Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵² Lucio Sponza, *The Italian Immigrants in Nineteenth Century Britain: Realities and Images* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988).

diaspora follows in the footsteps of the Risorgimento and carries forward the traditions of the previous two forms discussed. There is even some evidence of continuities of Risorgimento exile customs and spaces of sociability in London or Paris.⁵³ Certainly, as I mentioned, Malatesta's relationship to his followers is analogous to Mazzini's or Garibaldi's, and hosts as well as domestic Italian opinion placed him in that context. Finally, there is the great migration of Italians and others from the 1880s to 1914, which coincided with and reinforced the spread of anarchism and syndicalism around the globe.

Exile shaped three generations of Italian anarchists from the First International to the downfall of Fascism; it circulated new ideas and forms of labour organization back home; it allowed Italians to play a major role in the formation of other nations' socialist and labour movements. The suppression of the International in the 1870s began the first mass exile of anarchists from Italy. They established small communities in the Balkans and the Levant (the interaction of the Italian colonies in Alexandria and Tunis and the local Egyptian and Tunisian labour movements is finally being seriously studied), in France, Switzerland, Spain and London. Many travelled to the western hemisphere, where notable communities arose in Latin America, particularly Argentina but also in Peru and Brazil. In the United States anarchist influence existed in the midst of the large centres of immigration, amongst the miners of Illinois and Pennsylvania, the textile workers of Paterson, New Jersey and Lawrence, Massachusetts and the great cities: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco. Later, many Italians were active in the formation and development of the IWW; and in South America, Italian anarchist communists and syndicalists started the labour movements of Argentina, Brazil and Peru single-handedly. In France and Switzerland the Italians worked through local anarchist movements or started Italian language groups. Even in the Balkans the Italians appeared as the first advocates of anarchism.⁵⁴

In the early twentieth century a new mobile proletariat of labourers, transport workers and some skilled artisans spread the idea of syndicalism and the IWW. They were part of the vast labour migration between Europe, the Americas and the so-called "White Dominions" of the British

⁵³ Pietro di Paolo, "Italian Anarchists in London (1870–1914)" (PhD diss., University of London, 2004), especially the first chapter. For "the globalization of Mazzini", see C. A. Bayly & Eugenio F. Biagini, ed., *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism 1830–1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁴ See the references in footnotes 47–50 and Levy 1981 and Levy 1993.

Empire. This reached a crescendo just as a series of international strike waves surged through the global economy and clustered around the period of the Russian Revolution of 1905 and between 1911 and 1914. In this migratory movement, Italians interacted with Spaniards, Russians, Scandinavians, Chinese, Arabs, Britons, Irish and Yiddish-speaking Jews.⁵⁵ The peregrinations of Francesco Saverio Merlino, Pietro Gori (poet, lawyer, vagabond and sociologist), Luigi Galleani and less known militants were key moments in the history of anarchism in Argentina, Spain or Cuba. Exile extended their horizons and created hidden organisational and financial mobilisation networks, which explains to a great extent why the movement could suddenly snap back to life in Italy after years of torpidity. Malatesta's international travels and his long-term exiles in London are part and parcel of this phenomenon.

Malatesta filled the roles of exilic intellectual revolutionary, tramping artisan and global labour organiser. Malatesta was an erstwhile Garibaldian "freedom fighter" in Bosnia (1876) and Egypt (1882); he was an anarchist and trade union organiser in Argentina, 1885–1889 and the USA and Cuba (1899–1900), and appeared in Switzerland, Spain, France, Malta, Romania, the Levant (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey), Romania and Belgium. But his main base was the capital of the capitalist world, London, where he played all three roles and was in the middle of a network of Italian anarchists who spanned the globe and reinforced the contacts he had already established in his ceaseless wanderings. London also served as base in which global and Italian issues could be discussed. Thus exile networks of Italian, Spanish, Russian, Georgian, American, Spanish, German, Russian, Polish, Lithuanian and Jewish comrades were interlaced with domestic London circles of socialists, Fabians, trade unionists and journalists. But Malatesta was always linked to Italian networks though a dense skein of followers, those self-educated artisans who married the traditions of the tramp with the globalised patterns of migrations in the era of mass syndicalism, who had deep roots in the anarchist sub-cultures of La Spezia, Ancona, Rome etc. And they were joined by intellectual stars such as Francesco Saverio Merlino or Pietro Gori who at times through force of circumstance mimicked their life styles without entirely disposing of the public distinction and intellectual skills which were backed up by large quantities of cultural capital. In London the circle grew or shrank depending on the conditions back home.⁵⁶ Due to generalised political repression in continental Europe, the 1890s were a

⁵⁵ Carl Levy, "Anarchism, Internationalism and Nationalism in Europe, 1860–1939," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 50:3 (2004): 330–342.

⁵⁶ Levy, 1981; Levy 1993; di Paola, 2004; di Paola 2007.

heyday for the cosmopolitan circles of London, but even when the numbers of exiles shrank after the general liberalisation of politics in Europe after 1900, London served as a clearinghouse for ideas and forms of action and a cockpit of decision-making for the Italian and other national anarchist movements.⁵⁷ The meetings of the First International in London in the 1860s or the Revolutionary Socialist congress of 1881 are well known but there are many other examples worth exploring. The drive for an anarchist-socialist party in Italy in the turbulent 1890s and its half legal, half insurrectional policy had a large London input. The “conversion” of the French anarchists to syndicalism, that is the exchange between Malatesta, Emile Pouget and Fernand Pelloutier, has been recently studied afresh by Constance Bantman.⁵⁸ The mobilisation of libertarian socialists, proto-syndicalists and anarchists against the SPD model of parliamentary socialism was cemented by the committee of dissidents before, during and after the meeting of the Second International in London in 1896. The International Committee, which was established after the International Anarchist Conference in Amsterdam in 1907, was based in London. London witnessed the first, stormy conference of the Syndicalist International in 1913. But there were myriad more private circles such as the aptly named “Cosmopolitans”, who met in Tom Mann’s Covent Garden pub at the turn of the century, and who included Malatesta, Kropotkin, Cherkesov, Cunninghame-Grahame and assorted other British radicals and foreign exiles. Here Malatesta’s description of his recent escape from an Italian prison island and safe return to London was recounted, to be followed the next week by Cunninghame-Graham on Winstanley the Digger. Here the traditions of the artisanal tramp and modern global patterns of radicalism, modern socialism and Painite radicalism were mixed in a happy confusion.⁵⁹

Indeed, Malatesta himself was saved from deportation from Britain in 1912 through the mobilisation of both traditions. Streams of demonstrators gathered in Trafalgar Square to demand justice for this new “Hero of Two

⁵⁷ H. Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London* (London: Croom Helm, 1983); John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club. How a Bombing in Fin-De-Siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror* (London, JR Books, 2009); Alex Butterworth, *The World that Never Was* (London: Bodley Head, 2010).

⁵⁸ Constance Bantman, “The Militant Go-between: Émile Pouget’s Transnational Propaganda (1880–1914),” *Labour History Review*, 74:3 (2009): 274–287.

⁵⁹ See *Freedom* (London) for reports about the discussion group held at Tom Mann’s pub, The Enterprise (Long Acre, Covent Garden, London) in the years 1899–1900.

Worlds” (the first being Garibaldi), echoing a script learnt or handed down within this political culture from the Risorgimento. Thus in the crowd we see Malatesta’s proud Lib-Lab trade union neighbours from Islington where he lived for most of his exile, the anarchist community of East End Jewish anarchists led by the gentile German anarchist and close friend of Malatesta, Rudolf Rocker, the Spaniards Tarrida del Marmol and Ricardo Mella (the tortured Spanish anarchists had shown their wounds in a grotesque display in the Square little over a decade previously), suffragettes, Irish nationalists and of course the brief but burgeoning syndicalist movement led by Mann and the strange Guy Bowman, and never far behind was that force of nature, “the boy preacher” from Clerkenwell turned anarchist, a son of eighteenth-century rationalist radicalism, Guy Aldred.⁶⁰ And it was through the networks around Malatesta particularly his close Anconan friend, Emidio Recchioni, that the funds for his newspaper *Volonta* were raised and the strategy for the antimilitarist and anti-dynastic *Settimana Rossa* (Red Week) were hatched. Malatesta’s contacts with the Russian and Yiddish anarchists and radicals also set off another circle of international contacts. He knew early Bolsheviks in London through Silvio Corio and his partner Silvia Pankhurst, and after 1914 a group of London anti-war radicals established contacts with key actors in the Russian Revolution, the pan-European anti-war network established during the war and a little later the early and open-ended Third International.⁶¹

Conclusion: Cosmopolitanism, Patriotism, Nationalism and Popular Imperialism

We have seen how London was a focal point of global solidarity and an international exchange of ideas and forms of organisation. I have mentioned how this shaped Malatesta’s labour-oriented anarchism. But there were limits to internationalist syndicalist strategies and ideologies and well before the First World War shattered this illusion, Malatesta clearly saw the new forms of popular chauvinism by the turn of the century. Global labour solidarity was limited by the rise of particularistic national and imperial chauvinism. After his tour of North America and Cuba, Malatesta noted the rise of national and imperialist sentiment amongst the popular classes on both sides of the Atlantic in the shadow of

⁶⁰ I describe this demonstration in detail in my forthcoming biography of Malatesta, *The Rooted Cosmopolitan*.

⁶¹ Levy, 1981, 250–256.

the Spanish-American War, the Boer War and Crispi's mobilisation of war fever (before that went disastrously wrong at Adowa and during the food riots in Milan two years later in 1898). He commented bitterly on how London's working classes were either debauched by cheap beer in their public houses or reduced to unthinking jingoes by the tabloid press.⁶² But was this the same working class, his Islingtonian neighbours, who rallied to his cause in 1912? Malatesta's methodological individualism allowed him to embrace the concept of cognitive dissonance *avant la lettre*. He never tired of invoking the image of the crowds in the early days of the French Revolution who came out in the street to demand justice from their king led astray by his evil courtiers, only in the course of events to demolish the *ancien régime*. Or the events in Naples in which the popular classes enraged by the recent mass lynching of Italian immigrant labourers in southern France in 1893, stormed the French consulate only to turn on their own government and its forces of law and order during a decade characterised by mass misery and social unrest. Davide Turcato has recently noted these comments, but perhaps his interpretation is overly optimistic. Malatesta meant that individuals were capable of going either way, toward revolution or reaction, and that it was the duty of the conscious militant to shape events and advance argument to push the tide of opinion in his or her direction: there was no automatic mechanism to determine the outcome.⁶³ Thus during the lead-up to the Libyan War of 1911–1912 (which led to a chain of events that nearly caused Malatesta's deportation from his London refuge, the subject of the solidarity demonstration previously discussed) or during the First World War, he engaged in long-running public and private debates over the nature of imperialism, nationalism and patriotism, or love of one's *paese*. An in-depth discussion of these three interlinking themes will have to await another occasion, however Malatesta never abandoned his quest for an internationalist solution and at the height of the First World War, when the London anarchist movement was riven by the desertion of Kropotkin and Cherkesov to the Allied cause and the Italians split between interventionists and anti-interventionists, Malatesta announced his *Mondiale*, a united front of all socialists and anarchists who opposed the war from a revolutionary and libertarian perspective, an erstwhile rival to the soon to be Third International. The *Mondiale* of course did not have a state to back it up as the Third International would have, neither did it have a dense network of bureaucratically well-developed political parties

⁶² Levy 1981, 255.

⁶³ Turcato, PhD, 2009, 385–386.

as the Second International or its successor after 1918 had. No, Malatesta's *Mondiale* relied on the network of international movements in civil society, which drew their inspiration from pre-war syndicalism, their reincarnation in the councilist and shop stewards' movements of the war years themselves and disenchanted footsoldiers and intellectuals from pre-war pacifism and the socialist parties.⁶⁴ From London Malatesta was once again able to activate these networks, despite censorship and the barricades of the battle-lines, and although this may have been the last hurrah of the antebellum era of globalised anti-state cosmopolitan radicalism, it is a crucial and little-known aspect in the history of the radical surge of 1917 to 1924 which affected Europe and the globe and echoes other movements past or future: 1848, 1968, 1989.

⁶⁴ Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists* (1999), 102–14, and much more developed in Levy, forthcoming, *The Rooted Cosmopolitan*.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERNATIONALISM
IN THE BORDER TRIANGLE:
ALFONS PILARSKI AND UPPER SILESIAN
ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM
DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS*

DIETER NELLES

The rejection of nations and states could hardly have been more pronounced in any political movement of the twentieth century than it is in anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. That rejection is outlined in the following terms in the declaration of principles of German syndicalism drafted by Rudolf Rocker in 1919:

Syndicalists reject all arbitrary political and national boundaries; they discern in nationalism only the religion of the modern state and reject in principle all attempts to obtain a so-called national state unity, behind which is hidden the government of the propertied class. They acknowledge only differences of a regional nature and demand for every ethnic group the right to be able to look after their own affairs and their particular cultural needs in their own way and in accordance with their own predispositions in agreement and in a spirit of solidarity with other groups and popular associations.¹

* I am grateful to Knut Bergbauer, Hartmut Rübner and Feliks Tych for providing me with valuable material.

¹ “Prinzipienerklärung der Freien Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands (Syndikalistin) (FAUD) angenommen im Dezember 1918,” reprinted in Hans Manfred Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918 bis 1923. Ein Beitrag zur Sozial- und Ideengeschichte der frühen Weimarer Republik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993), 363–67, especially 367.

This paper examines how Upper Silesian anarcho-syndicalists attempted to realise their ideals in a region whose history in the twentieth century was marked more than most by border disputes. After the First World War, it was decided that the disputed parts of the frontier region between Poland and Germany would be controlled according to the Versailles Peace Treaty of 1919 on the basis of plebiscites. Between the end of the war and the date of the proposed plebiscite in the border area of Upper Silesia, several violent conflicts took place between, on the one hand, Polish-speaking inhabitants who demanded their annexation to Poland, and on the other, German paramilitary police units, as well as the so-called fascist '*Freikorps*'. Three uprisings occurred among the Polish-speaking people of Upper Silesia: 16–26 August 1919, 19–25 August 1920 and 3 May–5 July 1921. On the day of the census, 20 March 1921, with a turnout of 97.5 percent (707,045 voters), 59.4 percent of Upper Silesians voted for the German option and 40.6 percent (479,232 electors) in favour of Poland. However, the easternmost part of Upper Silesia, which included a majority of ethnic Poles, subsequently came under Polish rule, while the mostly German-speaking western part remained part of Germany.

It is little known that in Upper Silesia during the Weimar Republic there existed a small but very active and militant anarcho-syndicalist movement, for which this constellation of a political-geographical frontier region combined with a socioculturally mixed population proved especially important. The constellation of tensions between the theory and practice of the anarcho-syndicalist movement is reflected in the biographies of its leading representatives.

Before the First World War, only a small minority of anarchist and syndicalist groups were present in Upper Silesia. Several anarchists lived in the cities of Breslau and Görlitz. The police authorities described Franz Nowak (pseudonym 'Gypsy'), born in 1883, as the leading activist of the *Anarchististische Föderation Deutschlands* (Anarchist Federation of Germany) and of the syndicalist *Freie Vereinigung Deutscher Gewerkschaften* (Free Association of German Unions) since 1907. Nowak intended to amalgamate the closely linked anarchist groups of Silesia.² Against the combined front of capital, clergy and state, the far less radical social-democratic trade unions already found themselves in a difficult

² See Ulrich Linse, *Organisierter Anarchismus im Kaiserreich von 1871* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1969), 265; Landesarchiv Berlin Pr. Br. Rep. 30 C Tit. 95 No. 16404 and Franz Nowak, "An die Genossen Südost-Deutschlands!," *Der Freie Arbeiter* 7 (1910), No. 45.

position.³ Yet Augustin Souchy, one of the best known German anarcho-syndicalists, was born in the city of Ratibor, the son of one of the oldest social democrats in Silesia.⁴ The syndicalist movement in the region traced its origins back to the extensive strike movements of 1918–19, partially violently repressed by the brutal paramilitary ‘*Freikorps*’. This policy of repression was supported by Otto Hörsing, a leading social-democratic union official, established as imperial and state commissioner for Upper Silesia from March 1919. For this reason many workers followed the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), which became the strongest workers’ party in the district at the beginning of 1919. In May 1919 the KPD called for the creation of a revolutionary trade union association. This was founded the following August under the name *Freie Arbeiter Union*, or Free Workers’ Union (FAU), and in 1920 affiliated to the FAUD/S, the *Freie Arbeiter Union (Syndikalisten)*, or “Free Workers’ Union of Germany (Syndicalists)”.⁵

In this way, anarcho-syndicalist ideas were primarily spread by Franz Nowak, who made the concept of social revolution accessible to the growing movement. Precise information about the social composition and membership figures of the Upper Silesian FAUD are not available. In February 1921 building trade workers, miners and workers in the steel and the transport industries (railway employees, notably) became predominant in the local branches. Ratibor was the seat of the Agitation Commission and also remained a centre of syndicalism until 1933.⁶ In addition, across the border, a Czechoslovakian FAU was launched, which was incorporated

³ On the trade unions and social-democrats, see Franciszek Hawranek, “Deutsche und polnische Sozialdemokratie in Oberschlesien,” *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (cited as *IWK*), 15 (1979): 105–114; Reinhard Krämer, “Zur Gewerkschaftsbewegung in Oberschlesien von den Anfängen bis zur Teilung (1869–1922),” *IWK* 29:4 (1993): 471–90.

⁴ Augustin Souchy, “*Vorsicht Anarchist!*” *Ein Leben für die Freiheit. Politische Erinnerungen* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand 1977).

⁵ Cf. Wolfgang Schumann, *Oberschlesien 1918/19. Vom gemeinsamen Kampf deutscher und polnischer Arbeiter* (Berlin DDR: Ruetten & Loening, 1961); Rainer Eckert, *Arbeiter in der preußischen Rheinprovinz, Schlesien und Pommern 1933 bis 1939 im Vergleich* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 182–3; Ralph Schattkowsky, “Die Kommunistische Partei Oberschlesiens 1918/19 bis 1922,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 30 (1988), 26–33. On the FAUD in general see Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus*, and Hartmut Rübner, *Freiheit und Brot. Die Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Anarcho-syndikalismus* (Berlin/Köln: Libertad, 1994).

⁶ Cf. “Syndikalistischer Kongreß in Oberschlesien,” *Der Syndikalist* 3:11 (1921).

into the organisational structures of Upper Silesia.⁷ According to Schumann, the Upper Silesian FAUD had grown to approximately 20,000 members by March 1921, whilst the FAUD's Berlin Administrative Commission at that time registered merely 1,083 members for the whole of Silesia.⁸ Two things are responsible for this substantial discrepancy. On the one hand, the communist-oriented wing of the FAUD in Upper Silesia, which—according to police figures—comprised 15,000 members, split away in 1920/21 to form with other allied organisations in the Ruhr District and central Germany the '*Union der Hand- und Kopfarbeiter*' (Union of Workers of the Hand and of the Brain).⁹ Secondly, the Upper Silesian FAUD was affected in particular by the nationalistically charged class conflict growing in 1919. For reasons of principle, the syndicalists had spoken out against any participation in the plebiscite held in 1921.¹⁰

In this way, not only did they become isolated from a considerable proportion of both German and Polish workers, but they also became the target of the nationalistic propaganda of their political opponents. As the union's organ *Der Syndikalist* explained:

The torches of war and putsch are blazing in Upper Silesia. The Polish and German workers are about to have their skulls and bones broken for the Polish and German capitalists and for the Polish and German states. [...] On the German side they called us syndicalists 'Polish shock troops'. The Polish nationalists, on the other hand, called us 'German patriots behind a mask of international fraternisation'. And a howl of rage arose when we decided not to participate in the plebiscite. The trade union bureaucrats insulted us, calling us 'traitors of the homeland'. [...] Syndicalist meetings

⁷ According to their own information, two local associations had about 1,000 members at the end of 1922. Cf. Wayne Thorpe, "*The Workers Themselves*". *Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913–1923* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 244, 247, 313; *Der Syndikalist* 4:51 (1922).

⁸ Cf. Schumann *Oberschlesien 1918/19*, 124; Hans Manfred Bock, "Anarchosyndikalismus in Deutschland. Eine Zwischenbilanz," *IWK* 25:3 (1989): 293–358, 315. The membership of the socialist *Freien Gewerkschaften* (Free Trade Unions) reached 134,000 in 1921, the *Christlichen Gewerkschaften* (Christian Trade Unions) numbered 50,000 and the liberal Hirsch-Dunker'schen Trade Unions 30,000, whilst the Polish Trade Unions claimed a membership of 120,000. Cf. Krämer "Zur Gewerkschaftsbewegung in Oberschlesien," 490.

⁹ Cf. Bock, *Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus* (footnote 1), 181, and Larry Peterson, *German Communism, Workers' Protest, and Labor Unions. The Politics of the United Front in Rhineland-Westphalia 1920–1924* (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Springer, 1993), 88–89.

¹⁰ Hence the resolution of the Upper Silesian FAUD formulated by Alfons Pilarski: see *Der Syndikalist* 3:11 (1921).

were avoided more and more, because the workers did not want to listen to the truth.¹¹

And according to their own accounts, the syndicalists were above all brutally oppressed by the *Freikorps*:

Upper Silesia has turned completely into a playground of all nationalistic parties and the *Orgesch* gangs from the whole of.¹² And in this way the assaults and pogroms against the socialists who did not want to have anything to do with states and the nationality question accumulated. Slogans and horror stories are spread amongst the ignorant and nationalistically stirred up workers in order to incite them against the syndicalists. [...] All that can be heard now is the scream for blood. They want to exterminate us syndicalists and to some extent the party communists as well. [...] It is the nationalist beast which runs riot which has been unleashed in Upper Silesia. [...] All the battalions of murderers we already knew can be seen again in Upper Silesia. [...]. We syndicalists have our hands bound. Our class comrades have been blinded and any attempt by us to enlighten them has been made impossible.¹³

Under these conditions, as an Upper Silesian syndicalist declared, “of the workers who came to the FAUD in droves in 1919–20, only the class-conscious and clear-thinking syndicalists were left over.”¹⁴ By 1924 most local groups of the FAUD had been dissolved and, by the time of the great inflation, their leading shop stewards had been sacked; of the organisations in Polish Upper Silesia and Czechoslovakia, only a few comrades remained.¹⁵ In 1925, Theodor Bennek, the chairperson of the Agitation Commission in Upper Silesia, reported: “The system of bilingualism, the clericalism, nationalism and terror of the *Orgesch* gangs made Upper Silesia a difficult field of agitation.” In the last few years, he continued, the movement “had had a very hard time of it”. Many of the most reliable

¹¹ “Brief aus Oberschlesien”, *Der Syndikalist* 3:16 (1921).

¹² The “*Orgesch*”: the “*Organisation Escherich*”, the civil guards that grew into the reserve militia for the German Army under the command of the rightist Major Dr. Forstrat Georg Escherich.

¹³ “Weißer Terror in Oberschlesien,” *Der Syndikalist* 23 (1941).

¹⁴ “Reichskonferenz der FAUD,” *Der Syndikalist* 6:19 (1924). In 1923, the national question in Rhineland and in Saarland became something of a difficult issue for the syndicalists because they had refused to support the policy of passive resistance to the French occupying forces. Cf. Dieter Nelles, “Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus—Neuere Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der Forschung,” *IWK* 31 (1995): 348–356, 354.

¹⁵ Cf. Bolek, “Aus Polnisch-Oberschlesien,” *Der Syndikalist* 12:26 (1930).

cadres had left Upper Silesia because of unemployment. Nevertheless, it had occasionally been possible “to recruit new members and to exert an influence on the whole movement”. The movements of the jobless and the freethinkers were particularly supported by syndicalist cadres. According to Bennek, the reason why these activities did not result in greater membership figures was that “the acceptance of the need to organise collectively did not yet have a solid foothold amongst the Upper Silesian workers.”¹⁶ This situation would not change.

The Upper Silesian workers’ willingness to organise often stood in inverse proportion to their militancy in terms of collective action. A real interest in labour organisations developed only occasionally, when these appeared promising and useful as an instrument for the immediate improvement of their living conditions. The FAUD endured the Weimar Republic as a marginal organisation on the far left of the labour movement, often dependent on isolated individual activists. However, the FAUD in fact enjoyed a much greater influence than might have been expected from its membership figures, thanks to the very committed and capable officials at its disposal.¹⁷

Besides Nowak and Bennek, mentioned above, Alfons Pilarski stands out as an important figure, and was referred to by the police as the “spiritual leader” of the FAUD.¹⁸ Born in 1902, Pilarski combined three talents which proved essential for just such a small organisation as the FAUD, being widely regarded as a rousing speaker, a gifted journalist and a skilled graphic artist.

Pilarski and his Upper Silesian comrades attached great importance to propaganda. Up until 1925 the regional FAUD had its own campaigning organ, *Die Arbeiterstimme* (*The Workers’ Voice*), which, however, had to

¹⁶ “Siebente oberschlesische Bezirkskonferenz in Ziegenhals,” *Der Syndikalist* 7:24 (1925).

¹⁷ Nowak remarked that the labour movement in Silesia perhaps depended more on “particular individuals” than in other parts of Germany. “Reichskonferenz der FAUD,” *Der Syndikalist* 6:19 (1924). In 1933 the FAUD registered 100 members in Upper Silesia and local branches in Beuthen, Gleiwitz, Hindenburg, Katscher and Ratibor. Cf. “Statistik über die Industrieföderations-Mitgliedschaft der FAUD (AS)”, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (cited as: GStA), Rep. 219, No. 140; Stapo Oppeln an Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt, 24.2. 1938, in: Bundesarchiv Berlin (cited as: BAB), R 58, No. 319, sheets 189–194.

¹⁸ GStA, Rep. 219, No. 72, sheet 29. (Editors’ note: Pilarski’s first name will be given throughout this chapter as Alfons. However, after his escape to Poland in 1932, Pilarski adopted the name Tomasz (Thomas)—see chapter eight.)

cease publication for financial reasons.¹⁹ Instead the weekly *Die Freiheit* (*Freedom*) was printed from 1928 in Breslau (Wrocław). Pilarski was its political editor, whilst Bennek took responsibility for reporting on the part of Upper Silesia. The paper, introduced as “the only revolutionary newspaper in the east”, was a novelty for the libertarian press.²⁰ Written in an aggressive tone and a popular style, this left-wing tabloid notoriously concentrated on the exposure of scandals.²¹ It therefore immediately set a new record: the authorities seized two of the first seven issues and banned the paper for four weeks.²² Apparently well received by its readers, the paper reached a level of circulation exceeding “7,000 and more”, which is very high for a radical provincial paper.²³

In addition to the publication of *Die Freiheit*, it was also Pilarski who took the initiative of creating something quite unusual in German anarcho-syndicalism, the so-called ‘*Schwarze Schar*’ (Black Cohort). This antifascist combat organisation was launched in October 1929 by members of the FAUD), its “particular task” being “to protect proletarian events and to do everything within their power to fight fascism”.²⁴ The novelty of the *Schwarze Schar* consisted in the black uniforms worn by their members, which led to heated debate within the anarcho-syndicalist movement. The activism of the *Schwarze Schar* could be seen in much increased propaganda work in Ratibor and the surrounding area.²⁵ November 1929

¹⁹ “Siebente oberschlesische Bezirkskonferenz in Ziegenhals,” *Der Syndikalist* 7:24 (1925).

²⁰ *Der Syndikalist* 10:17 (1928).

²¹ Only a few issues of *Freiheit* have been preserved. Cf. Ralf G. Hoerig/Jochen Schmück, “Datenbank des deutschsprachigen Anarchismus,” DadA, Dok. No.: DA-P001709, www.free.de/dada-p/P0001709.HTM. See the headlines of 1928/29 Raiffeisen-Pleite, “Sexual-Verbrechen eines Lehrers”, “Intimes aus Breslauer Kriegervereinen”, “Breslauer Pfarrer als Sittlichkeitsschnüffler”, “Ein Casanova beim Breslauer Landgericht”, “Ein Breslauer Pfarrer treibt Nacktkultur”, „Perversitäten der Kirche”.

²² *Der Syndikalist* 10:19 (1928).

²³ *Der Syndikalist* 12:5 (1930).

²⁴ “PAB-Konferenz Oberschlesien. Es geht vorwärts!,” *Der Syndikalist* 12:19 (1930).

²⁵ Members of the *Schwarze Schar* dressed in uniforms consisting of black shirts, black berets with cockades, waist belts and shoulder straps including belt buckles. The cockades of the berets were decorated with the antimilitarist symbol of the broken rifle. If not cited otherwise see for the *Schwarze Schar*: Ulrich Linse, “Die „Schwarzen Scharen”—eine antifaschistische Kampforganisation deutscher Anarchisten,” *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstands und der Arbeit* 9 (1989): 47–66; Ulrich Linse, “Militante Abwehr gegen den Nationalsozialismus 1929–

witnessed the formation of a *Schwarze Schar* group in the city of Beuthen, followed by further sections in Katscher, Gleiwitz and Bobrek-Karf during 1930–31. “Everywhere the S.S. [*Schwarze Schar*] are not just stronger than the FAUD, but also stronger than the communist workers’ resistance”, a report of the Upper Silesian FAUD remarked in 1930, recommending that this “successful strategy” be continued.²⁶ The *Schwarze Schar* themselves reckoned that they mobilised up to 1,500 participants at their meetings, whereas the police estimated an average of 300-400 people.²⁷ The example of the Upper Silesian *Schwarze Schar* demonstrated that a few capable and convinced syndicalists could exert a crucial influence on broader antifascist activities.²⁸

The question of national affiliation played no role in either the FAUD or the *Schwarze Schar*. According to Paul Czakon, a leading FAUD militant, “many Polish deserters” had joined the union in Beuthen.²⁹ It was perhaps no coincidence that it was Upper Silesian anarcho-syndicalists who initiated the *Schwarze Schar*. With their experience of the ‘*Freikorps*’, they had understood quite clearly in 1921 that “the nationalist

1933. ‘Schwarze Scharen’ und Kampfgemeinschaften gegen Reaktion und Faschismus,” manuscript 1991. The *Schwarze Schar* also paid particular attention to the fight against the anti-abortion laws. In a spectacular trial in 1930, the FAUD activist Albrecht had been condemned to a three-year prison sentence for performing more than 100 illegal abortions. Cf. Dieter Nelles, “Anarcho-syndicalism and the Sexual Reform Movement in the Weimar Republic,” IISG Research Papers 40, *Free Love and the Labour Movement* (Papers presented at the workshop Free Love and the Labour Movement, Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 6–7 October), Amsterdam 2001, 27–32, especially 31.

²⁶ “PAB-Konferenz Oberschlesien. Es geht vorwärts!,” *Der Syndikalist* 12:19 (1930). At this time the statement related only to the local branches of Beuthen and Ratibor, whilst those of the FAUD in Gleiwitz and Hindenburg rejected the *Schwarze Schar*, because it was regarded with suspicion, as a sort of military organisation. The members of the Gleiwitz group obviously revised their opinions.

²⁷ Cf. Versammlungsberichte, GStA, Rep. 219, No. 72, 82, 140; “Der Kampf um Oberschlesien,” *Der Syndikalist* 13:40 (1931).

²⁸ Whilst the FAUD increasingly lost members due to the worldwide economic crisis, the *Schwarze Schar* reversed this trend in some places. The FAUD in Ratibor claimed 18 members in 1931 and 32 members in 1932, the figures for Gleiwitz increased from 13 to 16. In Katscher a local branch of the FAUD was not founded until 1931. Cf. Zahlen in: GStA, Rep. 219, No. 140.

²⁹ Cf. *Protokoll über die Verhandlungen des 18. Kongreß der FAUD (AS), abgehalten vom 29. Mai bis 1. Juni 1930 im „Atlantik“, Berlin Gesundbrunnen, Berlin 1930, 72.*

beast, once provoked, would not be held back by borders”.³⁰ As early as 1930 Pilarski expressed the opinion that the triumph of fascism would set back the labour movement by about 30 years.³¹ With this assessment in mind, the Upper Silesian anarcho-syndicalists prepared themselves for a violent confrontation with the Nazis. The *Schwarze Schar* in Ratibor, for example, had a machine gun and several pistols at their disposal. In May 1932 the police discovered a “secret stock of explosives” placed in storage by a member in the city of Beuthen. As a consequence, in March 1933, Georg Bierowski, Max Basista, Roman Kaluza and Alois Kaczmierzak from Beuthen were arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison.³² Paul Czakon, the head of the FAUD in Beuthen, as well as Alfons Molina and Bernhard Pacha, also subjects of the investigations in this case, managed to escape to Spain thanks to the cross-border networks of the anarcho-syndicalists. They obtained false papers produced by their comrade Leo Marek from Kravarn in Czechoslovakia, who as well as making excellent false passports, could also forge railway tickets.³³

Pilarski also seems to have been implicated in this investigation, and he therefore migrated to Poland in September 1932.³⁴ For him, forced emigration was not the drastic experience it could be for other fugitives. On the one hand, because of his strongly internationalist self-conception as an anarcho-syndicalist, and on the other hand because he spoke Polish fluently. Due to the fact that he was permitted to stay legally, he soon settled.³⁵ As the recipient of a scholarship from the Polish Institute for

³⁰ “Weißer Terror in Oberschlesien,” (footnote 14); Interview with Heinrich Friedetzki conducted by Dieter Nelles, April 29, 1990. Cf. Also “Sie werden kaputt gemacht und merken das nicht mal! Ein Gespräch mit Heinrich Friedetzki,” *Direkte aktion* 121, May/June 1987.

³¹ Interview Friedetzki (footnote 30).

³² Cf. Urteil gegen Bierowski u.a., in Bundesarchiv-Zwischenarchiv Dahlwitz Hoppegarten (cited as: BA-ZW), Z/C 5296.

³³ They were accompanied by Pilarski’s younger brother Richard, who, however, did not go to Spain, but stayed in Paris (footnote 30).

³⁴ According to Gerhard Reinicke in Berlin, Pilarski lived for some time in Berlin and planned with other Upper Silesians an assassination attempt against Hitler. Interview Gerhard Reinicke with Dieter Nelles, May 10, 1990. The aforementioned Pacha remained illegally in Berlin until the handover of power to Hitler, and then followed his comrades to Spain. Cf. Wiedergutmachungsakte Bernhard Pacha, Stadtarchiv Remscheid.

³⁵ For the exiles of German anarcho-syndicalists, see Rudolf Berner, *Die unsichtbare Front. Bericht über die illegale Arbeit in Deutschland (1937)*, ed., annotated and introduced by Andreas G. Graf und Dieter Nelles (Berlin: Libertad, 1997), 71–129.

Research in National Affairs, he studied in Warsaw in 1933–34. Between 1934 and 1936 he found employment as a district secretary in the headquarters of the Central Trade Union Confederation, *ZZZ* (*Centralny Wydział Zawodny*) in the Dabrowa Basin. Jędrzej Moraczewski, the first Prime Minister of Poland in 1918–19, was the chairperson of the *ZZZ*, which totalled 130,000 paid-up members in 1937.³⁶ Within the *ZZZ*, a conspiratorially organised syndicalist wing existed, led by Pilarski.³⁷

Pilarski maintained loose contact with his comrades in Ratibor and with Augustin Souchy in Paris. Soon after the handover of power to Hitler several members of the FAUD ended up imprisoned in Nazi detention camps.³⁸ Comrades from Ratibor brought illegal publications from Poland and Czechoslovakia to Germany, which were also distributed in the towns of Beuthen, Gleiwitz and Hindenburg.³⁹ With the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, contacts between those who remained in Germany and the anarcho-syndicalists living in exile became closer. The armed revolt of the Spanish proletariat against the *coup d'état* of the military under the command of General Franco not only stopped the advance of fascism in Europe, but it was at the same time the beginning of an unprecedented social revolution—a historical fact that is often forgotten—and one which was led and carried out particularly by the anarcho-syndicalist trade unions.

Czakon, Molina and Pacha took part in the uprising along side their Spanish comrades and fought later in anarchist units.⁴⁰ Souchy, who was

³⁶ Cf. Rafał Chwedoruk, “Polish Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism in the Twentieth Century,” elsewhere in this volume; Feliks Tych, “Lebenslauf Alfons Tomasz Pilarski,” manuscript, 2 pages; Albert de Jong, “Der Syndikalismus in Polen,” *IAA-Pressdienst* 2 (1939): 16–18.

³⁷ Pilarski to Souchy, January 1937, IISH, Amsterdam, Archiv Federación Anarquista Iberica - Propaganda Exterior (cited: FAI-PE), Film 80.

³⁸ Georg Bennek—not related to the family of Theodor Bennek—from Ratibor was imprisoned between March 1933 and June 1934; Johann Onderka from Hindenburg between April and June 1933. Cf. Stapo Oppeln to Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt, February 24, 1938, in Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), R 58 No. 319, 189–193.

³⁹ Interview with Heinrich Friedetzki (footnote 30). Whether the arrest of five anarcho-syndicalists in 1935 must be seen in this context is not verified. The brothers Ignatz and Johann Stoklossa were imprisoned from May 1935 to December 1936; Johann Onderka from May to December 1935. Theodor Bennek was detained in Sachsenhausen concentration camp from October 1935. Cf. Stapo Oppeln to Geheimes Staatspolizeiamt, February 24, 1938, BAB, R 58, No. 319, 189–193.

⁴⁰ Cf. Dieter Nelles, “Deutsche Anarchosyndikalisten und Freiwillige in anarchistischen Milizen im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg,” *IWK* 33 (1997): 500–519.

for some years the secretary of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workingmen's Association (IWMA), progressed to become a kind of foreign minister on behalf of the Spanish anarcho-syndicalists. In this function, among other things, he assisted numerous foreign journalists, politicians and writers in Barcelona and undertook many journeys abroad in order to organise solidarity actions for the Spanish Republic. Souchy needed capable international associates and, having discussed plans with Czakon, decided to ask Pilarski to move to Spain. Ultimately, this plan failed because of the resistance of the executive of the ZZZ, who wished to avoid losing such a competent colleague as Pilarski. Until the war Pilarski edited the newspaper *Front Robotniczy* (*Workers' Front*) and in June 1939 he was co-opted as a member of the executive committee of the ZZZ.⁴¹ However, instead of Alfons Pilarski, three other Upper Silesian anarcho-syndicalists set off to Spain in the summer of 1937: Heinrich Friedetzki, Max Piechulla and Alfons's brother Richard Pilarski,⁴² assisted by Leo Marek (mentioned above) and Johann Essler from Witkowitz (Czechoslovakia) whom Souchy had provided with the necessary information and documents as well as pamphlets and newspapers obtained from Spain.⁴³

Affected by the defeat the labour movement had suffered in its fight against fascism, Pilarski subjected some central principles of anarcho-

⁴¹ Souchy to Pilarski, December 18, 1936, in IISG, Film 80.

⁴² Richard Pilarski, the younger brother of Alfons, remained in Paris since anarchist comrades from Perpignan failed to help him and his comrades cross the frontier between France and Spain illegally. Because they were not in a position to fight in an anarchist unit any more and did not want to stay as emigrés in Paris or Sweden either, Friedetzki and Piechulla volunteered for the International Brigades. Their distrust of the German communists was justified. A dossier of the intelligence apparatus of the KPD based in Spain states: "In Spain he [Piechulla] was kept under surveillance because of a suspicion that he and Friedetzki had been sent to Spain with certain tasks ordered by the German Gestapo." Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisation der DDR im Bundesarchiv, Berlin (cited: SAPMO), RY 1, I 2/3/89, sheet 11. Friedetzki and Piechulla was in captivity in March 1938. It underlines their internationalist self-conception that Friedetzki declared himself as Czech and Piechulla as Polish. Interview with Friedetzki (footnote 30); Gestapo-file Friedetzki, BA-ZW, NJ 3494.

⁴³ Cf. Leo Marek to Augustin Souchy, January 7, 1937, in IISG, Archiv FAI-PE, Film 80. According to this letter Nowak [Gypsy] also wanted to travel to Spain. It is possible that Nowak was living in Czechoslovakia at the time since he does not appear on the Gestapo's lists anymore.

syndicalism to a thorough revision.⁴⁴ The ZZZ's "patriotic-revolutionary mentality", he wrote to Souchy in 1937, should not be fought against, "because that would be just as great a mistake as squandering our forces by committing them to combating religion".⁴⁵ During the congress of the IWMA in October 1938, as a Polish delegate Pilarski resolutely opposed the position of the Dutch delegate Albert de Jong, who denounced every war between democratic and fascist states as "imperialist" and argued that a "certain fear" about "the growing power of national socialism" should not result in syndicalists "speaking out in favour of antifascist war". To applause from the Spanish delegation, Pilarski argued for the "armed defence" of Czechoslovakia and "against democratic illusion but for democratic rights and the formation of an antifascist front, taking this to its logical consequences". In addition, he pleaded for "a more differentiated application" of the anarchist "opposition to the state" and to a certain extent for the "recognition of ambitions for national independence" in central Europe.⁴⁶

During the war Pilarski clandestinely fought the German occupying forces within an illegal syndicalist organisation and participated in the Warsaw Uprising, in which he suffered severe wounds.⁴⁷ Only "thanks to a fortunate coincidence", he noted in 1975, did he and his family escape death in Auschwitz. Nowak and Franz Wrobel, a veteran of the FAUD from Bismarckhütte, were killed in the concentration camps of Groß-Rosen and Flossenbürg shortly before the war ended.⁴⁸ Friedetzki survived the concentration camps of Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück, whilst Piechulla was imprisoned under the Franco regime until 1943. Because he was considered Polish he was allowed to leave for London. Czakon fought in the French Resistance.

When possible, the former comrades got in contact with one another after the war. In the early years Pilarski corresponded with the leading anarcho-syndicalist theoreticians Rudolf Rocker, who was living in the

⁴⁴ In the 1920s Pilarski had represented a rather dogmatic standpoint. On grounds of principle, he had protested against the FAUD's participation in the plebiscite on the expropriation of the princes. Cf. Alfons Pilarski, "Front gegen den Reformismus," *Der Syndikalist* 8,8 (1926).

⁴⁵ Pilarski to Souchy, January 1937, IISG, Archiv FAI-PE, Film 80.

⁴⁶ Helmut Rüdiger, "Kurzer Bericht über den Kongreß der IAA 1938," IISG, estate Emma Goldmann, XXXVI Annex, sheets 25124-25135

⁴⁷ Cf. Chwedoruk (footnote 36)

⁴⁸ Pilarski to Max Piechulla, August 1973, in IISG, estate Souchy, No. 18.

USA, and Helmut Rüdiger in Stockholm.⁴⁹ In 1947 he joined the Polish Workers' Party (PPR, *Polska Partia Robotnicza*) and later the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR, *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*), news of which was received critically by his German comrades living abroad. Rüdiger complained harshly about Pilarski going too far in his reconciliation with Polish nationalism. He could understand the "nationalistic reactions of other peoples against Germany" and had accepted the "extensive annexation of German land by Poles without objection". But no "national interest" can demand that eight million people be driven out of their homes"; no socialist can declare their solidarity with such a thing.⁵⁰

In January 1950 Pilarski was excluded from the party for political reasons. He was arrested in April 1954 and imprisoned until November 30, 1954. From 1956 he worked as head of advertising in the state headquarters of the national book-trade. After his retirement in 1969, Pilarski lived on a "shabby pension", but was nevertheless happy in a "tiny two-room flat". He had always refused "honours and decorations" and did not join the Polish Veterans Association.⁵¹

As can be seen from his correspondence with Piechulla, who was living in Canada, Pilarski was in close contact at the beginning of the 1970s with the Upper Silesian comrades living in Poland and the German Democratic Republic. He also kept in touch with Souchy in Munich and travelled in the capitalist west. However, more frequent visits to the west and also return visits failed because of the "bureaucracy of our democracy, greedy for foreign currency", as Pilarski put it. Before the First World War it was easier for travelling journeymen to cross borders than it was for tourists towards the end of the twentieth century.⁵²

Writing to Piechulla, Pilarski summed up his political life as follows:

In any case, since my departure from Germany in 1932, I (like my like-minded friends here) have fulfilled my revolutionary duty in the most varied manners and forms, in accordance with the ideals of libertarian socialism, which I—now 71 years old and rejected by the ruling party as a 'political activist'—still consider as the only human form of social organisation worth fighting for, even though, on the grounds of my

⁴⁹ In 1946 Pilarski intended to edit Rudolf Rocker's *magnum opus Nationalism and Culture* in a publishing cooperative, which he established in Lodz. Cf. IISG, Rocker Archive, No. 179.

⁵⁰ Helmut Rüdiger to Werter Genosse [Pilarski], January 31, 1947, in IISG, Rüdiger Estate, No. 57.

⁵¹ Pilarski to Max Piechulla, August 1973, in IISG, Souchy Estate, No. 18

⁵² Pilarski to Piechulla, February 1975, *ibid.*

experiences, I am far from regarding the shaping of the new society [...] as a scientifically predictable process.⁵³

Being one of the few remaining witnesses, Pilarski had thought in the 1950s of writing a contribution to the history of the Polish syndicalist movement. Presumably he did not put this intention into practice. This is a shame, because the activities of Pilarski and the Upper Silesian anarcho-syndicalists no doubt represent a marginal chapter in the history of European anarcho-syndicalism, but one which in my opinion is nevertheless noteworthy and deserves to be studied in greater detail.

⁵³ Pilarski to Piechulla, August 1973, *ibid.*

CHAPTER FIVE

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: ÁNGEL PESTAÑA'S ENCOUNTER AS CNT DELEGATE WITH THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION IN 1920*

REINER TOSSTORFF

What happened in Russia? What would I see in this country? What surprises would await me in this crucible where capitalism began to be melted down to forge with the melted material a new social world? What would I see? Would I succeed in understanding it? I learned much on this travel and these lessons served my ideas a lot.

—Ángel Pestaña, *Lo que aprendí en la vida*, Madrid n. d., 126

The visit to Russia by Ángel Pestaña, the delegate of the Spanish syndicalist confederation of labour, CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo), in 1920 ended with one of the early negative political assessments of the development of Soviet Russia. The visit gained its significance from the fact that Pestaña himself made public his impressions after his return. This was to make a decisive contribution to a negative image of the soviet development within international syndicalism and specifically to lead to the break of the CNT with Moscow. He had made a first report on his actions as representative of his organisation, and its introduction was marked “Barcelona prison, November 1921”, but it was

* This contribution takes up one aspect of my researches into the history of the Red International of Labour Unions. For details see my book: *Profintern: Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920–1937* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schönigh, 2004). Its genesis was shaped by the encounter and the debates between syndicalists and Bolsheviks, in which Pestaña's visit forms just one episode. For a brief survey see also my article “The syndicalist encounter with Bolshevism,” *Anarchist Studies* 2 (2009): 12–28.

probably not published until the beginning of 1922.¹ This was followed soon afterwards by a more analytical text in which he concerned himself with a theoretical discussion of the bases of the Bolshevik revolution.² Two years later he published two substantially extended and revised books, the first once again an account of his journey but this time foregrounding his experience of everyday life under the revolution and omitting the reports of political meetings, the second once again an analytical text.³

This is the basis on which his visit has often been discussed in the scholarly literature, in particular in the classic accounts of the radical left in Spain after 1917 by Meaker, Bar and most recently by Francisco J. Romero Salvadó.⁴ His reports were also republished in the final phase of the Franco dictatorship, at a time when censorship had already formally been lifted—albeit in truncated form, with no indication of the omissions.⁵ Romero Salvadó evidently used the truncated version of Pestaña's first

¹ Ángel Pestaña, *Memoria que al Comité de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo presenta de su gestión en el II Congreso de la Tercera Internacional el delegado Angel Pestaña* (Madrid: F. Peña Cruz, n. d.).

² Ángel Pestaña, *Consideraciones y juicios acerca de la Tercera Internacional (Segunda parte de la Memoria presentada al Comité de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo)* (Barcelona: n. p., 1922).

³ *Setenta días en Rusia. Lo que yo vi* (Barcelona: Tip. Cosmos, 1924) and *Setenta días en Rusia. Lo que yo pienso* (Barcelona: López, 1924).

⁴ Gerald H Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left in Spain, 1914–1923* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); Antonio Bar, *La CNT en los años rojos (Del sindicalismo revolucionario al anarcosindicalismo, 1910–1926)* (Madrid: Akal, 1981), and most recently Francisco J. Romero Salvadó, *The Foundations of Civil War. Revolution, social conflict and reaction in liberal Spain, 1916–1923* (London: Routledge, 2008). Among the numerous further references to Pestaña, the following should be mentioned: Xavier Paniagua, “Las repercusiones de la revolución rusa en el movimiento libertario español,” *Anales del Centro de Alzira de la UNED* 1 (1980): 61–88, esp. 77–81; María-Cruz Santos Santos, “La revolució russa i l’anarquisme català. La influència d’Angel Pestaña,” in *Actes. Congrés internacional d’història Catalunya i la restauració, Manresa, 1, 2 i 3 de maig de 1992* (Manresa: Centre d’estudis del Bages, 1992), 335–338; Juan Avilés Farré, *La fe que vino de Rusia. La revolución bolchevique y los españoles (1917–1931)* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1999), 153–68.

⁵ Ángel Pestaña, *Informe de mi estancia en la U.R.S.S. (Documento para la Historia obrera)* (Madrid: ZYX, 1968); Ángel Pestaña, *Consideraciones y juicios acerca de la Tercera Internacional (Segunda parte de la Memoria presentada al Comité de la Confederación Nacional del Trabajo)* (Madrid: ZYX, 1968).

publication, the report of the organisational and political contacts in Moscow, when he translated it into English.⁶

What follows is an attempt to retrace Pestaña's time in Moscow within a broader context, taking into consideration the other actors, and that means not least taking account of further eye-witness reports and of archival material. Reasons of space dictate that I here concentrate on a single aspect, the efforts made to create a revolutionary grouping of trade unions, which first led to the formation of the International Trade Union Council and, in the following year, to the foundation of the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU). It is therefore unfortunately necessary to leave on one side his analyses of the reality of society as a whole in Russia, that is, of the revolutionary process in the country.

Pestaña arrives in Moscow: Negotiating the creation of the International Trade Union Council (June–July 1920)

In the wake of the October Revolution and against the background of the major social and political crisis in Spain, the CNT had at its congress in Madrid in December 1919 decided on membership of the Communist International that had been founded in March in Moscow. But it was not until the spring of 1920 that it was possible to dispatch a representative, Ángel Pestaña, who had been one of the most important spokesmen of the CNT in its stronghold, Barcelona, during the great struggles from 1917 onwards.⁷

He reached Moscow at the end of June, where the most varied foreign visitors had already arrived in this new 'Mecca of world revolution'. In addition, several of them were, like Pestaña, directly representative of organisations and had mandates for participation in the Second Congress of the Communist International, which had been called for mid-July. But what had not been known in Spain was that the Bolsheviks had already also had discussions with foreign trade union representatives—from Great Britain and Italy. These had resulted in an initially very vaguely

⁶ "Report on the action taken by the delegate Angel Pestaña at the second congress of the third international which was presented by him to the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo," *Revolutionary Russia* 1 (1995): 39–103. See also his introduction: "The views of an Anarcho-Syndicalist on the Soviet Union: The defeat of the Third International in Spain," *ibid.*, 26–38.

⁷ On Ángel Pestaña, 1886 to 1937, watchmaker by profession, see the collection of essays with a substantial introduction by Antonio Elorza: Ángel Pestaña, *Trayectoria sindicalista* (Madrid: Tebas, 1974), and also the biography A. M. de Lera, *Ángel Pestaña. Retrato de un anarquista* (Barcelona: Argos, 1978).

formulated declaration of intent to form an international revolutionary trade union centre. There was not even any clarity about the concrete organisational form it was to take, but it was to form an alternative to the reformist (i.e. in its leadership social democratic) International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), known from its headquarters as the Amsterdam International.⁸

The meetings which Pestaña now joined were partly informal, as far as the discussions of a trade union alternative with the syndicalist representatives were concerned, and partly formal, as regards the preparation of the Comintern Congress in its Executive Committee. In the process, differences emerged not only between syndicalists and communists but also within the ranks of the syndicalists. That being said, the syndicalists were to be united by their aversion to any kind of subordination of trade unions to party leadership (or the Communist International) just as they were by a mistrust of Bolshevik demands for a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and for the tactic of factional work within the reformist trade unions.

For Pestaña the starting point was marked by the session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern on June 28, where he began by taking up the mandate to which the CNT was entitled as a result of its declaration of membership.⁹ On the agenda was a manifesto concerning the creation of an alternative to Amsterdam, presented by the Bolshevik trade union leader Alexander Lozovsky.¹⁰ It was the result of discussions with the representatives of the Italian confederation of trade unions.

⁸ For its history see Geert van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International: The World of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913–1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). For the international politics of syndicalism, which was in part active as a kind of revolutionary current within the ranks of the IFTU but predominantly stood for an organisational alternative, see Wayne Thorpe, *The Workers Themselves: Syndicalism and International Labour: The Origins of the International Working Men's Association, 1913–1923* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989).

⁹ Information about the course of events at this Executive Committee session are to be found in Pestaña, *Memoria*, 23–33, and in the diary of the French socialist (and future PCF leader) Marcel Cachin, *Carnets 1906–1947*, vol. 2: *1917–1920* (Paris: CNRS, 1993), 506–511. There are also references in Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow* (London: Pluto, 1971), 38f., and it is mentioned in a chronology of the Moscow discussions assembled by Jack Tanner, the delegate of the British shop stewards: “A Brief Summary of Discussions & Negotiations re Industrial Red International,” Jack Tanner Papers, Nuffield College Oxford University, Box 6, File 2, 59–62.

¹⁰ See in this context my brief biography “Alexander Lozovsky: Sketch of a Bolshevik Career,” *Socialist History* 34 (March 2009): 1–19.

Lozovsky's statement gave rise to the expected objections and protests of the syndicalists. The British shop stewards delegate Jack Tanner objected to a passage according to which revolutionaries should not leave the reformist trade unions. In this he also gained support from the German anarcho-syndicalist Augustin Souchy and from Pestaña. But while Tanner merely insisted that the dictatorship of the proletariat should not be limited exclusively to the Communist Party and wanted trade union organisations to be granted equal rights within it, Souchy and Pestaña, on whom anarchism had left its mark, rejected the idea on principle. Similarly the idea of subordinating the revolutionary trade union movement to political leadership provoked their opposition.

This led to fierce counter-arguments. The syndicalists, it was said, comprised in many cases only minority organisations. And there were strong demands that the dictatorship of the proletariat and the hegemony of the Party should be accepted. In view of the violent collision of the arguments, the Bolshevik speakers made an effort not to deepen the divisions and called for the cooperation of the various strands of the revolutionary workers' movement. They insisted that it was wrong to separate Party and trade unions as the opportunists of the Second International had done. Moreover there seemed to be evidence that more and more syndicalists were accepting the necessity for political action. Further debate of the text was in the end postponed for a special discussion.

This however showed that the discussion was going round in circles. Tanner called the process "usual procedure". All the same, Lozovsky had to give way to Pestaña on one point when the latter protested—as he had done earlier—against a sentence in the text which said that the apolitical (ie. syndicalist) trade union leaders had during the war become the lackeys of imperialism. He had to agree that that did not apply to the CNT, nor to the corresponding trade unions of Portugal and South America. There was thus agreement at least that this passage should be altered.¹¹ Pestaña, it is true, then declared that, despite the objections he had voiced, he felt committed to the resolution of the CNT in favour of membership and

¹¹ See Pestaña, *Memoria*, 36f. He speaks there of an "unforgivable disloyalty" on the grounds that that had not been carried out, in particular because on the occasion of the final resolution in the middle of July he had returned to the matter and Lozovsky had explicitly assured him that the change had been inserted (39). Here, however, he was mistaken, as well as on other details, for Lozovsky certainly did make a corresponding amendment to the text. (A. Losowski, *Der Internationale Rat der Fach- und Industrieverbände [Moskau gegen Amsterdam]* (Berlin: Seehof, 1920), 74. Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow*, 50, also mentions this intervention by Pestaña, which he supported.

would add his vote to a majority decision. However they would be sure to discuss all the arguments once again after his return.¹²

Despite the proposals for compromise that were made, e.g. by the British shop stewards,¹³ the discussions had evidently run into the sand. Finally, on July 1, a large number of the delegates, in particular those from France and Italy, but also including Pestaña, set off on a tour of Russia under the guidance of Lozovsky. It was not until two weeks later that they returned to Moscow.¹⁴

But despite the absence of most of those involved, the preparatory work continued. This is shown by a note of Lenin's, which he composed in the first half of July.¹⁵ But as far as the political and organisational principles were concerned, things had begun to go the Bolshevik way. After his return, on July 14, Lozovsky made a report to the soviet trade union leadership,¹⁶ and there was widespread agreement that it was impossible to reach a common platform with the syndicalist opponents of the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁷

Once again the trade union delegates met.¹⁸ Lozovsky announced that since no result had yet been achieved the decision had been taken that only those organisations could speak that had already officially joined the Comintern (i.e. those from Russia, Yugoslavia, Italy, Georgia, Bulgaria, France and Spain). Lozovsky explained to Pestaña that his amendment concerning the attitude of the syndicalist trade unions in the World War had been incorporated. But when the latter again proposed the deletion of the passage about the dictatorship of the proletariat and taking power Lozovsky explained to him that he could make no further concessions on this matter.

As far as the statutes and regulations of the Council were concerned, the majority of the provisions (not all were in the form of resolutions) were not contentious. And there was agreement on the timing of a congress. Disagreement remained with regard to the place. While Pestaña

¹² See Pestaña, *Memoria*, 35f.

¹³ Tanner Papers, Box 6, File 2, Sheet 71.

¹⁴ See here Cachin, *Carnets*, vol. 2, 13–555, which reproduce impressions of the various visits as well as discussions with other delegates, and Pestaña, *Lo que yo vi*, 43–59.

¹⁵ *Leninskii sbornik*, vol. XXXVII (Moscow: Politizdat, 1970), 220f.

¹⁶ *Otchet VTsSPS (Mart 1920g.-Aprél' 1921g.)* (Moscow: V.Ts.S.P.S., 1921), 199.

¹⁷ Thus the soviet trade union leader Mikhail Tomsky in his report to the meeting of the communist faction in the Central Council of Trade Unions on Oct. 16, 1920 (M. Tomskii, *Stat'i i rechi*, vol. 6, [Moscow: V.Ts.S.P.S., 1928], 52–73, here 60f.).

¹⁸ See here Pestaña, *Memoria*, 38–40.

introduced Sweden or Italy into the discussion, Lozovsky proposed Russia since Russian delegates were unable to travel to other countries. With that argument he finally won the day. There were also major clashes over the decision that only trade unions that were in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat could take part in the congress. Pestaña objected that this was to give too narrow a political framework for possible participants. The aim, he said, was for as many as possible to take part, including those who had other views on this subject. But here too he remained in a minority. So, on July 15 1920¹⁹ the International Trade Union Council was founded, and that meant in practice a new trade union international in opposition to the IFTU.

The founding declaration²⁰ began with a long preamble in which the premises of the foundation of the Council were sketched out. The position of the proletariat since the end of the War, it said, demanded an ever clearer leadership of the proletariat. The struggle must be engaged internationally in the context of industrial instead of craft unions. Mere reforms could not resolve the situation. In the War the majority of trade union leaders who had up to then declared themselves to be politically neutral or apolitical had become supporters of imperialism. It was the duty of the working class to bring together the trade unions into a revolutionary confederation and work hand in hand with the political organisations. The dictatorship of the bourgeoisie must be countered by the dictatorship of the proletariat, which alone was able to break the resistance of capitalism. The IFTU was incapable of realising all these principles.

Three conclusions followed from this. First, there was decisive condemnation of any withdrawal from the reformist trade unions. Rather, the “opportunists” should be driven out of the trade unions. Second, communist cells should be formed in all trade unions. Finally, it was necessary to form an International Trade Union Council from the affiliated member associations “in order to lead the process of revolutionising the trade union movement” and this would act in close cooperation with the Comintern—which was expressed in mutual representation on the Trade Union Council and the Comintern Executive Committee.

¹⁹ The date according to Losowski, *Der Internationale Rat*, 61, and *Bericht des Internationalen Rates der roten Fach- und Industrieverbände für die Zeit vom 15. Juli 1920 – 1. Juli 1921* (Moscow: Pressbureau des I. Kongresses der Roten Gewerkschaften: 1921), 22.

²⁰ Reprinted with minor variations as a result of different translations in Losowski, *Der Internationale Rat*, 58–60 and 74f., and *Bericht des Internationalen Rates*, 21f.

This declaration also bore the signature of Pestaña for the CNT, corresponding to the decision in favour of membership, to which he felt bound.

Pestaña at the Second Comintern Congress (19 July–7 August 1920)²¹

In the meantime the meeting of the Comintern Congress took place, attended by Pestaña, together with numerous other syndicalists, as an official delegate of the CNT and the only person from the whole of Spain.

There was already a clash over the first item on the agenda, which concerned the role of the Communist Party.²² While Grigory Zinovev, who was giving the report on this question, emphasised the necessity of a revolutionary party, Pestaña, Tanner and Souchy declared it redundant. Revolutionary trade unions, they said, were the essential instruments of the class struggle. The bourgeoisie was aware of that and was for that reason particularly harsh in its persecution of the syndicalists. Lenin and Trotsky attempted in their replies to build bridges to the syndicalists by saying that the latter's idea of the active role of the "determined minorities" was not very different from the Bolshevik conception of the communist avant-garde party. They misunderstood the term "party" because they only ever associated it with the conception of social-democratic parliamentary parties.

On the suggestion of the chair of the Congress a commission was then appointed to revise the theses that had been presented, but significantly without a syndicalist spokesman.²³ It can have been no surprise when their unanimous acceptance was announced on the following day, and this was repeated in the plenary session.²⁴ This may sound surprising since the syndicalist representatives had a vote here; unfortunately the minutes of the session provide no explanation, but the syndicalists may well have followed Pestaña in abstaining (which was however not recorded in the minutes). He justified this in his report to the CNT by saying that this was

²¹ For the course of events at the Congress see *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress 1920*, ed. John Riddell, 2 vols. (New York: Pathfinder, 1991).

²² The discussion can be found in: *Workers of the World*, vol. 1, 143–78; and a brief account with a report on his line of argument in Pestaña, *Memoria*, 49–56.

²³ *Workers of the World*, vol. 1, 178.

²⁴ Zinovev's report on the commission and the theses, *ibid.*, 182–200.

a party-political matter whose discussion was of no concern to him. Only on the question of trade unions did he take part in the vote.²⁵

But for this the discussion was first transferred to a commission, over whose composition there was a further clash between Pestaña and the chair of the Congress, who insisted on his authority to make the decision. As far as Pestaña was concerned, this was a further sign of a ‘culture of organisation’ that was alien to the—Spanish—syndicalists.²⁶ In the event prominent syndicalists—namely Pestaña and Tanner (Souchy had just an advisory vote)—were to be found in the trade union commission.²⁷

This is not the place to retrace the whole sequence of debates. Those in the plenary sessions at least are available in published form in the proceedings.²⁸ Suffice it to observe that there were head-on collisions in the commission. One point of contention was the question of the leadership of the trade unions by the party and of revolutionary work in the broad reformist trade unions instead of the creation of independent revolutionary (minority) organisations. But already here the Bolshevik line won the day.²⁹ But what made things particularly difficult for Pestaña was that the syndicalist opposition now came mainly from English-speaking delegates. The Congress had originally wanted to conduct debates only in German and French, but now it was mainly English that was spoken, with no translation into French. This was a disaster for Pestaña, since he only spoke French. His sole intervention on this agenda item was therefore merely a protest. He did not want to vote without a translation.³⁰ In the end, after renewed discussion by the commission with numerous minor

²⁵ See Pestaña, *Memoria*, 63f.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 55–57.

²⁷ An overview of the composition of the commissions in: *Workers of the World*, vol. 2, 844f.

²⁸ *Workers of the World*, vol. 2, 590–625.

²⁹ See Pestaña’s account, *Memoria*, 64–67.

³⁰ *Workers of the World*, vol. 1, 421. In his report to the CNT Pestaña once more complained bitterly about this (*Memoria*, 61): “From this moment on (...) there were whole sessions where not one translation into French was made.” These translation problems seem to lie behind a sequence of inaccuracies, confusions and mistakes on the part of Pestaña. Thus he says emphatically that the famous “21 conditions of membership” never existed, these had consisted only of a few points. “With hand on heart I can say that the Congress did not discuss them.” Only on his way back to Berlin did he hear of them, he says. (*Memoria*, 61)

amendments, the resolution was accepted with a large majority. Pestaña's laconic comment: "I did not want to vote. For what reason!"³¹

The International Trade Union Council becomes organised (August 1920)

Shortly before the end of the Comintern Congress Lozovsky invited those signatories of the July 15 call for its foundation who were still in Moscow to begin on the task of organising the Trade Union Council, and involving the syndicalist representatives who had not yet become members. Right at the beginning of the meeting of August 6³² there developed a clash between Pestaña and Lozovsky when the latter referred again to the resolutions of the Comintern Congress concerning the subordination of the trade unions to the leadership of the Comintern. Pestaña insisted that the CNT was not in agreement with such requirements for the restriction of trade union autonomy. Lozovsky responded by proposing to leave the final decision to a broad, truly representative congress. Everyone should work towards convening it. Pestaña, too, declared himself ready to join in.

Lozovsky first presented the soviet trade union leader Mikhail Tomsky as the real soviet representative in the Trade Union Council. Even if he lacked Lozovsky's international experience, the impression he made, for example on Pestaña, was more positive. "Tomsky showed himself from the first moment to be more conciliatory than Lozovsky."³³ Perhaps this was merely because the clashes over the preparation of the founding declaration were past. In any case Tomsky showed signs of readiness for compromise when it came to questions that were of special importance for the syndicalists.

One of these concerned the place where the conference that was to be called should meet. Pestaña responded with Italy or Sweden when Tomsky proposed Moscow. Tomsky declared himself prepared to investigate. Admittedly there are no signs of any investigation in the archives of the RILU.

³¹ Pestaña, *Memoria*, 67; *Workers of the World*, vol. 2, 709–28. The theses themselves were for some obscure reason published earlier in the proceedings, 625–34.

³² The minutes in the RILU collection in the Comintern archive in Moscow: RGASPI 534/3/2/1. An account in Pestaña, *Memoria*, 69–71.

³³ Pestaña, *Memoria*, 71f.

It was not until the following session on August 11 that the selection of the Bureau took place, consisting of Tomsy, the Frenchman Rosmer and one still to be nominated representative of the Comintern, with Tomsy as General Secretary.³⁴ Perhaps the most significant thing about this session was the introduction of measures to heal the breach with those syndicalists and industrialists that had refused to be involved with the Council. It was agreed to invite to the congress all the trade unions whose views were close and at least declared their support for revolutionary class struggle. This was the basis on which Tomsy and Pestaña were to speak to the representatives who were still in Russia. Finally an ambitious plan was worked out to encourage delegates to be sent to the planned congress. Thus Pestaña was to compose a call addressed to the workers of the Iberian peninsula and Latin America.³⁵ It was also agreed to produce a bulletin in four languages and to publish pamphlets.

However the existing contradictions immediately became evident again when the representative of the Italian syndicalists, Armando Borghi of the *Unione sindacale italiana* (USI), arrived very late. The USI had joined the Comintern in 1919, like the CNT, but now wanted to belong to the Trade Union Council as well, whereas the left-reformist *Confederazione Generale del Lavoro* (CGL) was the official co-founder. The USI now claimed the right to be sole representative of Italy.³⁶ But this claim to exclusivity, which was supported by Pestaña, failed, as did his proposal that the Council should create a bond of political solidarity with the USI. But at least the USI was now for the first time a fully fledged member.

Things moved more slowly on the other hand when it came to the attempt to address calls to the workers of the various countries. Pestaña's commission was renewed. But in his report too he simply refers to it, without explaining why he had not carried it out by the time he left.³⁷

The growing tensions between the "intransigent" syndicalists and the communists were then to lead to a dramatic climax when it came to the question of adopting further calls. Since their final formulation was only worked out after the session it was decided that they would be circulated

³⁴ The minutes in RGASPI 534/3/2/2. An account in Pestaña, *Memoria*, 72.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

³⁶ In addition to the information in the minutes of the two sessions which dealt with the USI question—RGASPI 534/3/2/3f.—see also Pestaña, *Memoria*, 73–76, and the various accounts by Borghi, reprinted in Maurizio Antonioli, *Armando Borghi e l'Unione Sindacale Italiana* (Manduria: Lacaita, 1990), 302–05 and 311–19.

³⁷ Pestaña, *Memoria*, 76f.

for signing.³⁸ Pestaña received from one of Tomsky's messengers a manifesto with several carbon copies. Among these papers there was however an additional document that had not previously been discussed "on the organisation of propaganda". It provided for the establishment of propaganda bureaux in every country. What provoked the protest of the syndicalists was the requirement that these bureaux should work closely with the communist party, that the elections should admittedly take place at conferences of revolutionary trade unionists, but that the Party should approve them. Pestaña had even at first signed this document by mistake. But when his attention had been drawn to it by Borghi and Souchy he immediately withdrew his signature. They all protested in the strongest terms, which the messenger had to communicate to Tomsky. Interestingly, this document is missing in the RILU archives. According to the surviving minutes it was not even discussed at a session of the Trade Union Council or its Bureau. There is nevertheless no reason to doubt this account.

According to Pestaña's record of events this incident was the immediate reason why he and Borghi hastened their departure from Russia, which then took place a few days later at the end of August or beginning of September. The breach between Bolsheviks and syndicalists which had been so laboriously patched up was thus opened up again. After the return of the various delegates to their home countries there began an intensive debate in the different organisations about their relationship towards the Trade Union Council and about sending delegates to the planned international congress.

Pestaña's return and the path of the CNT from Moscow to Berlin (1921/22)

The meeting in Moscow in the summer of 1920 was, if in an unintentional and completely informal way, the first international discussion between syndicalists since the London Congress of 1913.³⁹ The delegates of the various organisations would meet in Pestaña's room in the delegates' hotel and discuss their attitude⁴⁰ while the Bolsheviks courted

³⁸ This incident is—with minor variations—recounted in Pestaña, *Memoria*, 77–81, as also in his further report *Consideraciones y juicios*, 27f., and by Borghi, e.g. reprinted in Antonioli, *Armando Borghi*, 318f.. The document was then published—with the deleted signature of Pestaña—in: *Sempre! Almanacco No. 2 (1923) di 'Guerra di Classe'*, 136.

³⁹ Wayne Westergard-Thorpe, "Towards a Syndicalist International: The 1913 London Congress," *International Review of Social History* 1 (1978): 33–78.

⁴⁰ Antonioli, *Armando Borghi*, 307.

them intensively. It was almost obligatory to make visits to Lenin, who sought close contact with the syndicalists.⁴¹ But this charm offensive was to have no effect on a substantial section of the syndicalists.

The reports that were published after the delegates' return to the West played an important part in the rejection of cooperation with the Bolsheviks. In the case of Pestaña things were complicated. In the middle of October he returned from Russia first to Berlin for extensive discussions with the leadership of the German syndicalists and then proceeded to Italy. Arrested in Milan, he was deported to Spain two months later. Arrested again after his arrival in Barcelona in the middle of December, he spent the whole of 1921 in prison, where he wrote the reports referred to at the beginning of this paper.⁴²

It was thus only after more than a year that he was able to publish an account of the events of his travels and to reach an explicitly negative verdict on his experiences with the Bolsheviks.⁴³ In this connection it is no longer possible to be sure whether he reached this conclusion only through lengthy reflection in the 'relative peace' of the prison, or whether that was his attitude immediately on his return. For the impression had at first arisen that he had returned from Moscow with enthusiasm. This, for example, is what was reported by one of the most important leaders of the Catalan CNT, Salvador Seguí, in a newspaper interview following a discussion.⁴⁴

This delay played a considerable part in ensuring that the participation of the CNT and USI in the International Trade Union Congress that took place in Moscow in 1921, ie. the founding congress of the RILU, was uncontentious. On the contrary, since it was now a question of a revolutionary *trade union* international instead of a *party* international, the sending of delegates in the spring of 1921 actually gained a great deal of support.

Admittedly there were a number of points on which the CNT delegation were part of a syndicalist minority at the founding congress of the RILU, but the end result was that it supported the new organisation. Subsequently there was strong dissent, especially on the part of the anarchists, but also coming from the 'pure' syndicalists, who rejected

⁴¹ For Pestaña's visit see his account in *Lo que yo vi*, 191–198.

⁴² In addition to a number of references in Pestaña's texts, see Meaker, *The Revolutionary Left*, 298f.

⁴³ Borghi did not publish any such detailed accounts as Pestaña but gave only a single report to the USI, which was printed in their periodical in October, 1921. (He also wrote about the events decades later in his memoirs).

⁴⁴ Bar, *La CNT*, 613.

cooperation with 'politicians'. In the autumn of 1921 they went on the offensive. Against the background of the general situation of the CNT, which was characterised by severe persecution, they would soon succeed in turning their minority into a majority. In this the publication of Pestaña's reports played a decisive role.

In June 1922 a conference of the CNT met in Saragossa, at a time when the repression was temporarily somewhat relaxed. After controversial reports on the course of the RILU founding congress it was particularly the appearance of Pestaña that made an impression. Building on his experiences in the summer of 1920, he now turned definitively against the Comintern and its 'trade union international'. The overwhelming majority was agreed that disagreement over questions of principle meant that there was a gulf between the RILU and the CNT. Membership of the Comintern had been, it was said, more a question of sympathy with the revolution than agreement with Bolshevik principles. But since this had been decided on at the congress of 1919 and so could not be revoked simply by a conference, it was decided to suspend relations and pass the final decision on for discussion in the individual trade union organisations. But there was no doubt about the mood at the base. In practice a breach had taken place. The CNT was now to play a decisive role in the efforts to create an independent syndicalist international, which indeed—with anarchist influence—came into being as the International Working Men's Association at a conference in Berlin at the end of 1922.

Pestaña had thereby made an important contribution to the final rejection of the Bolshevik revolution by a significant section of the syndicalists and thus to the development of anarcho-syndicalism. Not only had the theoretical and political concepts that he had put forward in Moscow shown themselves to be irreconcilable with those of the Bolsheviks (and of the Communist International as a whole). There was also his concrete experience of the reality of the Russian Revolution in the face of the unrealised promises and above all in the face of the increasing repression, especially of the Russian anarchists and syndicalists. But more than anything else this concerned his concrete organisational experience of the attempts to form a trade union international. No doubt his difficulties with a country and a language that he did not know played their part. This explains some misunderstandings in his reports. And he too will have been affected by the atmosphere of the milieu in which he moved, only to distance himself more clearly from it when he gained physical distance. But even if only one aspect of his experiences could be the subject of analysis here, namely the organisational and political level, and, for example, all his observations and analyses on the general situation of

Russian workers and peasants had to be omitted for reasons of space, it is evident that there were no matters of principle on which agreement could have been found. This could not fail to have consequences for the organisation on whose behalf Pestaña had travelled to Russia.

PART III
MOVEMENTS

CHAPTER SIX

THE 1896 LONDON CONGRESS: EPILOGUE OR PROLOGUE?

DAVIDE TURCATO

The London Congress of 1896, which determined the anarchists' final exclusion from the congresses of the Second International, is usually considered the epilogue of a story that began with the First International. In this narrative the anarchists' congressional opposition seems backward-looking, unchanging, disruptive and doomed. In contrast, I look at the London congress as 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 can be seen as forward-looking, novel, and constructive. It was part of a process that resulted 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.

By "resurgence of labour-oriented anarchism" I refer both to 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 dominated by individual deeds and culminating in the Trial of the Thirty, and an era in which anarchists acted as conscious minorities amidst workers. As Jean Maitron argues, syndicalism, "led and inspired in large measure by the anarchists, was precisely a reaction against that infantile disorder of anarchism that was terrorism."¹ In 1894 the anarchist movement was at a low ebb in Italy, too, after repression at the hands of the Crispi government had disbanded its ranks. That year Errico Malatesta and others began reconsidering anarchist tactics, lamenting the ineffectiveness and isolation into which anarchists had fallen. The nature of the process was perceptively captured by the

¹ Jean Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, vol. 1 (Paris: François Maspero, 1975), 259.

socialist Jean Jaurès: “[Anarchism] more and more rejects not only propaganda by the deed, but also individual action... It enters unions, it accepts delegations and representation in congresses...” This description points to a line dividing anarchists in France and Italy alike: 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. Anarchists of the latter current shared Jaurès’s prophecy about labour-oriented anarchism: “One more step and it will accept representation in Parliaments...”² Anti-organisationism, however, should not be confused with individualism. For example, Italian anti-organisationists were as committed to working-class solidarity and communism as their organisationist opponents.

By speaking of resurgence I emphasise a link with a tradition of working-class anarchism that goes back to the origin of anarchism as a movement: Bakunin’s federalist international. Regarding that resurgence as a cross-national parallel process requires abandoning a national framework of analysis. Within this framework, as F. F. Ridley notes, it has been often suggested that “syndicalism was something especially French, born of, or reflecting, the peculiar character of the French people.” Partly subscribing to this view, Ridley sketches a simplistic transition from illegalism to syndicalism:

The anarchists found themselves isolated and helpless: they had come to a blank wall where no further progress seemed possible. Their leaders recognised the futility of individual action and of the bomb as a revolutionary weapon.³

However, “leaders” who believed in labour struggles had done so for a long time, while “leaders” who opposed organisation kept doing so long afterwards. Moreover, this division did not exist only in France, but also in Italy, Spain, and other countries. In brief, anarchist currents co-existed and had cross-national scope. Awareness that distinctions did not so much follow national lines as tactical-theoretical ones promotes explanations based on competing reasons rather than on national tempers.

² *Le Peuple*, August 9, 1896, quoted in Jacques Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d’action directe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 136.

³ F. F. Ridley, *Revolutionary Syndicalism in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 11, 43.

London had a role in this parallel process long before the 1896 congress. With its colony of anarchist exiles, this city was the headquarters of continental anarchism. Daily contacts among militants of different countries favoured cross-pollination of ideas and involvement in each other's national movements. A brief sketch of contacts and mutual influences between Émile Pouget, Fernand Pelloutier, and Errico Malatesta in 1894–6, the formative years of labour-oriented anarchism, gives a sense of how intertwined their lives, activities, and intellectual development were, and how much action relevant to their homelands took place in London.⁴ Malatesta settled in London in 1889. That year's Great Dock Strike made a profound impact on him. Pouget sojourned there in 1894–5. Not only was he deeply influenced by British unionism, but he also lived in close contact with Italian comrades. Upon moving to London, he lived in Malatesta's same dwellings. Both contributed to the anarchist periodical *The Torch*. The issue of August 1894 contained articles from both, but the one who advocated the revolutionary general strike was Malatesta.⁵ At that time Pouget planned his own periodical, *Le Droit à l'Aisance*, with Malatesta's collaboration.⁶ Instead, he eventually resumed his former Parisian publication, *Le Père Peinard*, whose office was the place of another Italian anarchist, Francesco Cini. In 1895, after Pouget's return to France, he and Pelloutier spread the new syndicalist tactics among anarchists. Pelloutier supported his arguments by referring to the ideas of the Italian anarchist Francesco Saverio Merlino and to the programme for an anarchist federation issued by Malatesta in London a few months earlier. The programme was one of the first results of Malatesta's own tactical evolution over the past two years.⁷

By 1896 the rise of revolutionary syndicalism was well under way in France. At the 1894 union congress of Nantes the Marxists had been defeated on the issue of the general strike. The London congress was looked upon as the next opportunity to further proceed in that direction. As

⁴ Further details can be found in my article "European Anarchism in the 1890s: Why Labour Matters in Categorizing Anarchism," *Working USA* 12:4 (September 2009): 459–463.

⁵ E. Malatesta, "The General Strike and the Revolution," *The Torch* (London), n.s., no. 3 (August 1894): 6–8.

⁶ *De Fakkelt* (Ghent) 1:17 (19 August 1894); Max Nettlau, *Geschichte der Anarchie, Band 5. Anarchisten und Syndikalisten, Teil 1* (Vaduz: Topos Verlag, 1984), 46.

⁷ Fernand Pelloutier, "La Situation Actuelle du Socialisme," *Les Temps Nouveaux* (Paris) [hereafter *LTN*] 1:10 (July 6, 1895); "International Federation of Revolutionary Anarchist Socialists," *Liberty* (London) 2:14 (February 1895): 112.

Jean Maitron remarks, “the split that occurred in Nantes has its extension and completion at the London international congress of 1896.” The same sense of continuity transpires from Pelloutier’s enthusiastic battle-cry for the congress:

The unions that in 1894 excluded the Guesdist general staff from the Nantes congress, that in Limoges have acclaimed the general strike for the second time... will know how to rid Europe... of a faction all the more unbearable as it lacks real strength.⁸

The same perception of the congress as a promising stepping stone in a renovation process is evident from the debates among Italian anarchists before the congress. Writing in September 1895 from the United States, Aldo Agresti and Pietro Gori emphasised the novelty of the organised opposition that anarchists intended to mount in London and of the inclusive tactics of which that opposition was part. Agresti remarked that congress participation was in step with the tactics required to make strides among workers. However, it was necessary to abandon the past method of participating in small, isolated groups that left the congress as soon as quarrels broke out. The anarchists’ task was to seek alliances with anti-parliamentarian forces and British trade unions, gain admittance to the congress, and present motions that were both unambiguously anti-parliamentarian and broad enough to obtain the widest possible consensus. Gori had a resolution approved by a local anarchist group, in which it was claimed that anarchists would play into the hands of parliamentary socialists by “crouching in the dogmatic barrenness of sectarian orthodoxy and withdrawing from the people.” Accordingly, anarchists were urged to “spread among the working masses, in addition to the principles of anarchist communism... the idea of the general strike, as the initial impulse to the people on the path of armed insurrection...”⁹

Before crossing the Atlantic, Gori and Agresti had sojourned in London, where they were able to exchange ideas with fellow Italian anarchists, such as Malatesta. The latter expressed his views in a July 1896 article for the *Labour Leader*. In contrast with Marxist charges, Malatesta made it clear that anarchists did not neglect political questions. Rather, they believed that “the people cannot take possession of their own property without passing over the bodies of its armed police”, and therefore they occupied themselves in the political struggle against

⁸ Maitron, 291; *L’Action Sociale*, February 15, 1896, quoted in Julliard, 138.

⁹ “Il Congresso Operaio Internazionale del 1896,” *La Questione Sociale* (Paterson, New Jersey) 1: 5 (September 15, 1895).

government. However, Malatesta continued, politics was a great source of division. Conscious workers who could be easily united in the economic struggle were broken up by politics into many fractions. Consequently, “an understanding between all the workers who fight for their emancipation is not possible, save on economic ground.” Malatesta recalled that in the old International there were plenty of insults between Marxists and Bakuninists, but in fact both sought hegemony in the International. In the struggle between centralism and federalism class struggle and economic solidarity were neglected, and the International perished in the process. Anarchists had presently little influence on the labour movement, partly due to their own errors. However, they would “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.”¹⁰

The article illuminates both commonalities and differences with the syndicalists. Commitment to both the labour movement and insurrection was affirmed. The necessity of political struggle was asserted along with the necessity to keep it separate from the economic struggle. The argument was presently opposed to the Marxists, but it was the same argument that Malatesta would turn against the syndicalists at the 1907 Amsterdam congress. Finally, there was the same syndicalists’ commitment to the spirit of the First International. At the same time, the new tactics of the Italian anarchist-socialists were based on a criticism of the old International’s errors, which were ascribed to Marxists and anarchists alike. The implications of the article did not escape the attention of Pelloutier, who privately argued over it with Malatesta.¹¹

Meetings to organise the anarchist presence at the congress started in London a year before the congress. On July 28, 1895 the Freedom Group convened to discuss a line of conduct. Kropotkin reported that the unanimous opinion was to participate *en masse*.¹² In the following months, the initiative was taken by the British anarchists, but it was fraught with dissension and ineffectiveness. A notice was circulated by late August about a recent London meeting of Anarchist-Communist groups. The notice, signed by F. S. Paul, of the *Torch* group, stated that “the prevailing

¹⁰ E. Malatesta, “Should Anarchists Be Admitted to the Coming International Congress?,” *The Labour Leader* (London) 8: 119 (July 11, 1896).

¹¹ Errico Malatesta to Augustin Hamon, July 11, 1896 and July 17, 1895 [*recte* 1896], Hamon Papers, file no. 109, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis [hereafter Hamon Papers].

¹² P. K. [Peter Kropotkin], “Le Congrès Ouvrier de 1896,” *LTN* 1:14 (August 3–9, 1895).

opinion was that all means should be tried to gain admittance to the Congress.” The reference to a “prevailing opinion” indicates that disagreement had arisen.¹³ Then, the *Torch* of September 18 published a manifesto addressed to all workers, asking them to pressure their unions to have their congress delegates vote for general admission. Communications were to be addressed to F. S. Paul.¹⁴

The initiative of the *Torch* was a false start, for internal dissension among British anarchists deprived it of support. At a meeting held on September 26 it was decided to relieve F. S. Paul of his post.¹⁵ The next we know dates from three months later. A conference of London anarchists held on Boxing Day appointed a committee, which met for the first time on January 1, 1896. Its secretary was James Tochatti, the editor of *Liberty*. The committee resolved that “a direct appeal to Trade Unions, on the lines of the one circulated prior to the Zurich Congress, should be issued, and as early in the month as possible.” In February *Liberty* had to acknowledge that the agitation in Great Britain was “in a very backward state” compared to the continent.¹⁶ At any rate, between February and April 1896 initiatives were taken in London, too, including a fundraising concert and public meetings, the last and largest of which took place in Clerkenwell on April 29.¹⁷

While the committee was wrapping up its propaganda activity, three months away from the congress, other anarchists in London believed that much work still remained to be done. By late June a new “Anarchist and Anti-Parliamentary Committee” was formed. Its most active member was Malatesta. In his correspondence he explicitly expressed dissatisfaction with the previous committee, which had worked hastily and had folded prematurely.¹⁸ While the previous committee had focused on manifestos, public meetings, and domestic propaganda, Malatesta devoted himself to a more inconspicuous and practically-minded activity, liaising with anarchists abroad, especially in France, through a web of personal contacts. Throughout July 1896 a frequent correspondence went on with Augustin Hamon, who, in turn, was in close contact with Pelloutier. This

¹³ “Correspondances et Communications,” *LTN* 1:18 (August 31–September 6, 1895).

¹⁴ “England. The International Socialist Workers Congress of 1896,” *The Torch* (London) 2:4 (September 18, 1895).

¹⁵ *Liberty* (London) 2:22 (October 1895): 172.

¹⁶ “The International Workers’ Congress. Anarchist Committee,” *Liberty* (London) 3:1 and 2 (January and February 1896): 9, 16.

¹⁷ “The International Workers’ Congress,” *Liberty* (London) 3:5 (May 1896): 53.

¹⁸ Malatesta to Hamon, July 17, 1895.

correspondence provides valuable insight into the labour-oriented anarchists' expectations and congress preparations.

There was evident convergence between the congressional tactics of French syndicalists and Italian anarchist-socialists. The common watchword was "gaining admittance," which Agresti had already launched almost a year before the congress. In a letter of March 1, 1896 to Christiaan Cornelissen, Pelloutier likewise urged:

It will thus be necessary to send or have admitted to the London Congress as many delegates with *regular* mandates as possible, so as to create, if not a majority, at least a minority strong enough to discourage those who would want to resume the Zurich Congress.

Delesalle made the same point in *Les Temps Nouveaux* of June 27.¹⁹ Malatesta further elaborated on the subject in his letters to Hamon. It was necessary for anarchists to carry union mandates so as to unquestioningly gain admittance, but also mandates from anarchist groups so as to be in a position to question the Zurich resolution.²⁰ Hence, formal requirements were to be taken seriously. Only those who held valid cards would be admitted to the first session. They were the ones who would decide who else would be admitted.²¹ Similarly to Agresti, Malatesta's tactics were informed by pragmatism, moderation and inclusiveness. He questioned the Allemanists' idea of resisting by force, which would have alienated the sympathy of the British delegates, and he regarded unity of action as paramount, to the point of even preferring that "a stupid course of action be taken" rather than acting in disparate ways.²² As a result of such tactical orientation, the common effort of French and Italian labour-oriented anarchists was chiefly directed to securing valid union mandates and to seek an understanding with other anti-parliamentarian forces, as witnessed by Pelloutier's contacts with Cornelissen and by Malatesta's letters to Jean Allemane and Eugène Guérard, not to mention his close contacts with British socialists such as Tom Mann and Keir Hardie.²³

¹⁹ Fernand Pelloutier to Christiaan Cornelissen, Paris, March 1, 1896, Cornelissen Papers, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam (consulted at http://www.pelloutier.net/lettres/lettres.php?id_lettre=29 on November 24, 2009); P. Delesalle, "Le Congrès de Londres," *LTN* 2: 9 (June 27, 1896).

²⁰ Malatesta to Hamon, London, July 3, 1896, Hamon Papers.

²¹ Malatesta to Hamon, London, July 8, 1896, Hamon Papers.

²² Malatesta to Hamon, July 11, 1896.

²³ Malatesta's letters to Allemane and Guérard are mentioned in his correspondence with Hamon; see for example Malatesta to Hamon, London, July 3, 1896.

A mention should also be made of the ties with the Spanish anarchist movement, which was the third column of labour-oriented anarchism in Europe, despite its absence from the London congress. Pelloutier asked Spanish comrades “to collect *regular* mandates” and send them either to him or to the London committee.²⁴ Hamon was in contact with José Prat. Malatesta’s steady correspondence with Ricardo Mella and Ernesto Álvarez, the editor of *La Idea Libre* in Madrid, illustrates both the interest of Spanish anarchists in the congress and the hardships they faced in 1896. Since March, agitations in view of the congress had been vigorous in Spain. Both Mella and Álvarez had mandates, but the Corpus Christi bombing of 7 June in Barcelona and the ensuing repression thwarted their plans. Eventually, Malatesta received mandates from Barcelona on behalf of thirty unions, including the railway workers’ national union. He regretted that the mandates had not been distributed to different delegates, but he acknowledged that the difficulty of communication made that impossible.²⁵

The congressional tactics of labour-oriented anarchists may seem overly preoccupied with petty formalities and sly manoeuvring rather than principles. However, concern with procedural details signalled a momentous change of direction. The previous anti-parliamentary committee had made appeals to unions to send pro-admission representatives, as anarchists had already done before the Zurich congress. In contrast, the effort of syndicalists and anarchist-socialists was to ensure that anarchists be directly entrusted with union mandates. As Agresti had urged, this was a radical break from the Zurich tactics: direct involvement in the congress proceedings replaced indignant protest, and inclusiveness replaced intransigence.

Labour-oriented anarchists were committed to organisation and were ready to fight the congressional battle on its proper ground. Though the struggle with the Marxists was a clash of ideas, it took the form of an wearisome battle over mandates, letterheads, stamps, cards and voting systems. The labour-oriented anarchists’ willingness to deal with such details proceeded from their determination to regain prominence in the labour movement. This was no small step: organisation was the most divisive issue in the anarchist movement and procedural formalities were the acid test of one’s attitude in this regard. Many anarchists dreaded them as the outward symbols of the authoritarianism inherent in organisation. Their anti-organisationist bias kept them from fully supporting the labour-

²⁴ Pelloutier to Cornelissen, March 1, 1896.

²⁵ Malatesta to Hamon, London, July 3, 8, 9, 20, and 21, 1896, Hamon Papers.

oriented anarchists' congressional struggle and hindered its effectiveness. For example, Italian anarchists in London received incomplete mandates from their homeland. "The comrades who delegated us," Malatesta remarked to Hamon, "have quite anticipated that the missing stamps would be a difficulty, but they tell us, all the same, that they do not care about formalities."²⁶

Malatesta also reported a telling debate with Kropotkin, Max Nettlau and others, about a voting system to be proposed at the congress. He lamented that the question was left unresolved and he added:

There are many anarchists (possibly the majority) on which the mere word *voting*, no matter how and why, has the same effect that the devil would have on a bigot. They would prefer to leave even the most important and necessary thing undone, rather than going through a vote... Thus, at the congress as anywhere else, they would rather not vote or join any discussion about the question of voting.²⁷

Ten days before the congress, Malatesta conveyed to Hamon his frustration over the gap between what could have been done and what was actually done by the anarchists:

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.²⁸

The anarchists' internal division is obscured in congress accounts. These usually contain reports of the first tumultuous sessions—in which such anarchists as Delesalle, Malatesta and 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 international anarchism, such as Elisée Reclus, Petr 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. Again, the line had to do with the respective attitudes toward organisation and set apart the protagonists of labour-oriented anarchism from its mere sympathisers. Three influential examples, Petr Kropotkin, Elisée Reclus and Jean Grave, illustrate the point.

²⁶ Malatesta to Hamon, July 17, 1895.

²⁷ Malatesta to Hamon, July 11, 1896.

²⁸ Malatesta to Hamon, July 17, 1895.

Kropotkin was one of the earliest advocates of anarchist mass participation in the congress. Yet he did not participate. This was no accident, but a firm resolution on Kropotkin's 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 into the hands of their opponents. He also reported Kropotkin as saying that he accepted "no delegation, no congress, except for those of an academic type, where each one goes on his own, and therefore he would be very embarrassed in a congress of delegates."²⁹ Reclus's attitude is also telling. His biographer Marie Fleming argues that he was with the syndicalists in spirit but lacked enthusiasm about the question of admission.³⁰ At the mass meeting of July 28 he spoke explicitly: "We Anarchists have no laws, no regulations, no congresses, no binding resolutions among ourselves..."³¹ Augustin Hamon publicly regretted the absence of these two outstanding anarchists, bitterly remarking in *Les Temps Nouveaux*: "whoever [the social-democrats] exclude, it will be neither Kropotkin nor Reclus. They will not attend the congress, having refused any mandate, although they could have had one."³² The case of Jean Grave shows that even congress participants could still hold an anti-organisationist bias. In May he expressed agreement with a comrade who stated that "[he] would enter with deepest disgust a place where [his] admission was regarded as an act of charity."³³ Yet he held a congress mandate and actually attended the congress, while still holding that "congresses are nothing but little parliaments."³⁴ In fact, he did not take part in the French delegation's vote on the anarchists' admission.³⁵

In that vote, which technically concerned a congress rule that prevented amendments to the standing orders, anti-parliamentarians obtained a one-vote majority. Socialists, such as Jean Jaurès and Émile

²⁹ Malatesta to Hamon, July 11, 1896.

³⁰ Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1988), 171.

³¹ "Report of the Holborn Town Hall Meeting," *Freedom* (London) 10:107 (August–September 1896): 96.

³² "Le Prochain Congrès," *LTN* 2 :13 (July 25, 1896).

³³ "Le Congrès des Marxistes," *LTN* 2 :3 (May 16, 1896).

³⁴ "Pourquoi les Anarchistes Sont Allés au Congrès de Londres," *LTN* 2 : 20 (September 12, 1896).

³⁵ Augustin Hamon, *Le socialisme et le Congrès de Londres* (Paris: Stock, 1897), n. 69.

Vandervelde, complained that the scales were tipped by Malatesta's vote, in representation of Amiens metal workers.³⁶ However, Malatesta was not the only "infiltrator" in the French delegation, whose final composition speaks to the liaison work that went on between London and Paris and points to the cross-national integration and cooperation among labour-oriented anarchists. Besides Malatesta, there were at least six other London residents in the delegation: the old Internationalist Paul Robin; the British James Tochatti, William Banham and Tom Reece; and the Italian anarchist-socialists Aldo Agresti and Isaia Pacini. Some of these were entered as representatives of the *Parti Ouvrier Socialiste Révolutionnaire*, a sign that an agreement had occurred between anarchists and Allemanists.³⁷ The much scantier Italian delegation also bears witness to both the transnationalism of Italian anarchism and its cross-national mutual involvement with French anarchism: Pietro Gori carried a mandate from Italian workers of North America; Francesco Cini, a London resident, from the Rome bakers; Pelloutier from the Italian Federation of Labour Chambers; and Louise Michel from an anarchist-communist association in Lombardy.³⁸

After the anarchists' expulsion from the congress, an anarchist conference took place on July 29–31 at St. Martin's Town Hall. Due to time constraints, only one of the ten agenda items, the "peasant question," received an extensive discussion, which showed that syndicalists and anarchist-socialists, in the persons of Pouget and Malatesta, were not only united by tactics, but also by theoretical affinity. They jointly opposed views expressed by Domela Nieuwenhuis, who argued that revolutionary communists were to persuade farmers "of their irresistible final ruin in their competition with cultivation carried on a large scale by landlords," and by the French delegate Leon Parsons, who declared "the agricultural population only thus far worth our attention, as they had lost the land and become proletarians like the rest of the workers, and in consequence became a revolutionary force." For Pouget, such speeches showed that even some anarchists were "still filled with the fallacious Marxist ideas." Anarchists, he countered, "must not wait for an impossible development sketched out by Marx; but take matters as they really are." He stressed the importance of the peasant question, "for all revolutions in which the peasants did not take part, failed." As for collectivisation, it would only

³⁶ *Congrès International Socialiste et des Chambres Syndicales Ouvrières. Londres 26 Juillet – 2 Août 1896* (Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1980), 208; Émile Vandervelde, *Souvenirs d'un Militant Socialiste* (Paris: Denoël, 1939), 145.

³⁷ Hamon, n. 69.

³⁸ Pietro Gori, *Scritti scelti*, vol. 2 (Cesena: L'Antistato, 1968), 206–210.

come experimentally and gradually, as peasants realised its benefits. Malatesta elaborated the same themes. Anarchists were still adhering too strictly to Marx's theories that Marxists had abandoned. Why wait for the proletarianisation of the peasants? The economic conditions that tended toward proletarianisation could change: "anything, such as the invention of a new electric motor decentralising machine power, might turn the whole course of events another way." Peasants could only be persuaded of the benefits of collectivisation by example. In the meantime, political exploitation was to be pointed out to them, notwithstanding their ownership of the instruments of production. In brief, Pouget's and Malatesta's views were marked by the same voluntarism and emphasis on social indeterminacy, in contrast to economic determinism. Both the priority given to the industrial proletariat and the authoritarian idea of forced collectivisation were rejected in favour of a pragmatist view of rural evolution based on gradualism and experimentalism.³⁹

The anarchists did not win at the congress, but they did come out well before a significant part of the British press, which reported their battles sympathetically.⁴⁰ 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 harshly criticised the "intolerance and contempt" with which the congress proceedings had been conducted.⁴¹ Pelloutier remarked with satisfaction that, as a consequence of the congress events, all militants of syndicalist action would "exploit the stupid intolerance of the minority to widen the gulf that already separated unions from politicians." As for the Italians, immediately after the congress the London group of anarchist-socialists that had attended it as Italian or French delegates published a single-issue *L'Anarchia*, in which they expressed both disappointment and the wish that the congress would "mark the date of a new direction in the anarchist movement, that which aims at the organisation of the oppressed masses."⁴² Indeed, that single issue has been widely considered the programmatic manifesto of the new orientation. Within months, Malatesta, Gori and Agresti would all be in Italy. Malatesta's weekly *L'Agitazione* soon became the driving force of a

³⁹ "Report of Anarchist Conference," *Freedom* (London) 10: 107 (August–September 1896); Hamon, 174–5.

⁴⁰ Carl Levy, "Malatesta in London: The Era of Dynamite," in *A Century of Italian Emigration to Britain. 1880s to 1980s. Five Essays*, ed. Lucio Sponza and Arturo Tosi, supplement to *The Italianist* 13: 2 (1998), 34.

⁴¹ R. Blatchford, "At the Conference," *The Clarion* (London) 243 (August 1, 1896): 244.

⁴² "Il Congresso Internazionale," *L'Anarchia* (London), August 1896.

new phase of Italian anarchism, marked by theoretical and tactical renewal and numerical growth.

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, at the same time that the debate on the respective revolutionary strategies unfolded. The co-existence of the two sides of that relation is illustrated by a few episodes.

In September 1897 the new direct action tactics of boycott and “go canny” were unanimously approved by the Toulouse congress, thus making their official entry into the French syndicalist movement. *L’Agitazione* gave ample space to the event, urging Italian workers to adopt the same tactics. These might seem petty means of struggle, the article argued, but they were not to be disparaged, for they were conducive to greater achievements.⁴³ This was no episodic appreciation, but the essence of the anarchist-socialists’ new tactics: gaining influence among workers through a long and patient work of intervention in labour struggles for immediate economic gains. In their new orientation, anarchist-socialists encountered strong opposition. *L’Avvenire Sociale* of Messina, the self-proclaimed “voice of all autonomous, individualist, libertarian groups,” flatly declared themselves “sure of the *vacuity* of legal economical struggle, of labour resistance and organisation, etc.” In brief, organisation continued to be the watershed between engagement and disengagement with labour.⁴⁴

Two years later, Pelloutier restated his affinity with anarchist-socialists, paying a personal tribute to Malatesta. In December 1899 he wrote a “Letter to the anarchists,” declaring that his ideas found a perfect illustration in Malatesta, who could “combine so well an indomitable revolutionary passion with the methodical organisation of the proletariat.”⁴⁵ Ironically, a few months earlier the Italian anarchist had published an anonymous pamphlet, *Contro la Monarchia* (Against the monarchy), which marked his greatest distance ever from syndicalist tactics. Based on the bitter experience of 1898, when harsh repression following popular bread riots had abruptly interrupted the anarchists’ constructive work, Malatesta set the insurrectionary overthrow of the Italian monarchy as a priority for an alliance of revolutionary parties. This was no repudiation of his commitment to the labour movement, but a response to the lesson of experience.

⁴³ “L’anarchismo nel movimento operaio,” *L’Agitazione* (Ancona) 1:30 (October 7, 1897).

⁴⁴ “Dissensi veri o falsi,” *L’Agitazione* (Ancona) 1:42 (December 30, 1897).

⁴⁵ Julliard, 415.

Back in London, Malatesta's tactics in the 1900s remained characterised by complementary commitments to labour struggles and insurrection, in contrast with the syndicalist focus on the general strike alone. A paradigmatic example of Malatesta's critical dialogue with syndicalism was an Italian-French bilingual periodical that he co-edited in London in 1902. The title was *Lo Sciopero Generale—La Grève Générale* (The General Strike), but the masthead of the Italian part also bore a quote from Malatesta: "Popular insurrection is the necessary means to abolish tyranny." As Malatesta had maintained since 1889, a programmatic article argued that "the revolt of folded arms is but the first step of a revolutionary attitude that finds its natural outcome in popular insurrection." A further article proposed the formula of the "armed strike."⁴⁶ Meanwhile, other anarchist-socialists in Italy exhibited more marked syndicalist leanings. In particular, Luigi Fabbri's pamphlet *L'Organizzazione operaia e l'anarchia* (Workers' Organisation and Anarchy) is a synthesis of syndicalism and anarchist socialism, with great emphasis on the vexed question of organisation.⁴⁷

In sum, when the Amsterdam congress took place in 1907, not only was the divergence between Malatesta and the French syndicalist Pierre Monatte hardly new, but also, conversely, there was a long-standing affinity between the two currents. The real watershed of the anarchist movement was not that between syndicalists and anarchist-socialists, but still the one that separated both from the opponents of organisation. Significantly, Malatesta thus pictured the atmosphere that preceded the congress:

This congress met under a bad omen. Many comrades, possibly the majority, had looked upon its preparation with indifference or hostility; some considered it no more than a useless chat; others feared it as an attempt at centralisation and monopolisation...⁴⁸

The divisions of 1896 among anarchists were still alive. And so were the affinities. Monatte opened his speech by saying: "One would need to be blind not to see all that anarchism and syndicalism have in common..."

⁴⁶ "Per incominciare," *Lo Sciopero Generale* (London) 1:1 (March 18, 1902); "Lo sciopero armato," *Lo Sciopero Generale* (London) 1:3 (June 2, 1902).

⁴⁷ Luigi Fabbri, *L'Organizzazione operaia e l'anarchia (A proposito di sindacalismo)*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Il Pensiero, 1906).

⁴⁸ E. Malatesta, "Le Congrès d'Amsterdam," part 1, *LTN* 13:21 (September 21, 1907).

Syndicalism and anarchism have reacted to each other, to the greater benefit of each.” Malatesta followed suit in his speech:

I wish to state straightaway that I will only deal here with those areas in which I am in disagreement with the previous speakers, and in particular Monatte... I am sure that on hearing me criticise what there is to be criticised in syndicalism none of you will be tempted to take me for an enemy of organization and workers’ action; were that to happen it would mean you do not know me very well!⁴⁹

Far from being mere tokens of politeness, these statements provide the key to interpret the congress.

As Maurizio Antonioli remarks, there is a common perception in contemporary historiography that “the Amsterdam Congress marked the decisive separation between ‘orthodox’ anarchism and a syndicalism that no longer had anything anarchist about it.”⁵⁰ If the congress was such a showdown, it was not perceived in these terms by its participants, who approved by a large majority all the motions concerning syndicalism. As Malatesta commented, it took a great deal of penetration to uncover the differences. “Nevertheless,” he continued, “two quite real tendencies have appeared, however much the difference exists more in predicted future developments than in people’s present intentions.”⁵¹ Still, as in London in 1896, the major divide in the anarchist ranks was with those who had remained outside the congress.

In contrast to the bad presages, Malatesta declared, the congress had “exceeded the hopes of the most optimistic.”⁵² The real significance of the congress was in the fact that an international anarchist congress had taken place and that the advocates of organisation and labour involvement had finally had a forum in which they could debate their ideas. This was a sign that labour-oriented anarchism had come a long way: it had reached a phase of maturity and regained a prominent role in the anarchist movement. The Amsterdam congress of 1907 was a milestone in a process that had its prologue in the London congress of 1896.

Recognising this process contributes to a reconstruction of the history of anarchism that looks beyond national movements and abstract debates

⁴⁹ *The International Anarchist Congress* (s.l.: Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici, [2007]), 42, 51.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵¹ E. Malatesta, “Le Congrès d’Amsterdam,” part 3, *LTN* 13:23 (October 5, 1907).

⁵² E. Malatesta, “Le Congrès d’Amsterdam,” part 1, *LTN* 13:21 (September 21, 1907).

about blueprints of the anarchist society. By acknowledging the affinity and mutual influence between French syndicalism and Italian anarchist socialism, we become aware that anarchist currents had a cross-national scope and that the evolution of national anarchist movements is best studied in a transnational dimension. And by appreciating the weight of the controversy on organisation we can recognise that the issues that most concerned anarchists, and therefore divided them, were not their theoretical utopias for the future, but their practical means of struggle in the present.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FROM TRADE UNIONISM TO *SYNDICALISME* *RÉVOLUTIONNAIRE* TO SYNDICALISM: THE BRITISH ORIGINS OF FRENCH SYNDICALISM

CONSTANCE BANTMAN

The French and British trade union organisations of the 1880–1914 period are usually presented as antagonistic, British trade unionism being financially powerful and predominantly conservative, connected in turn with the Liberal Party and the Independent Labour Party set up in 1893, while French unions were numerically weak, fiercely independent from political power, and preached revolutionary methods. This opposition is epitomised by the contrast between the powerful and conservative Trade Union Congress and, on the other hand, the CGT, the French trade union confederation set up in 1895, with its adamant rejection of political alliances formalised by the iconic 1906 *Charte d'Amiens*. These oppositions are often taken to reflect profound differences in the political orientations of skilled workers (with the contrast between France's radical artisans and Britain's labour aristocracy), and in the maturity of industrial development (between France's decentralised and workshop-based production system and Britain's more advanced industrialisation).

In spite of these partly debatable alleged ideological and socioeconomic differences, the years between 1880 and 1914 saw an intense exchange of ideas and tactics between France and Britain, as trade union organisation and ideology underwent rapid changes on both sides of the Channel. The British organisations evolved from the reformist and elitist culture of the mid-Victorian social consensus into larger, more democratic and combative

“new unions”.¹ In France, the trade union movement remained very weak during the 1880s, until the development of the CGT and its formal rejection of parliamentary politics at the turn of the century, triumphant at first, then increasingly problematic.² In both countries, these years witnessed a succession of periods of strength and decline, in ideological and numerical terms. For these two rapidly-changing movements, developments occurring across the Channel provided both an example and a counter-example through which they could define and reinvent themselves.

This chapter maps out these ideological transfers within the revolutionary branch of the international labour movement, insisting on the personal networks underpinning these exchanges and on the processes of reinterpretation and adaptation such cross-influences required. It focuses on the “ideological” level, rather than the grassroots and organisational levels³: it is a study in transnational exchanges of ideas and debates, which leaves aside the question of the actual impact of these ideas on their intended audiences, the workers. This is an altogether different debate, which has caused much controversy over the past 30 years, starting with Peter Stearns’s divisive *Syndicalism and French Labor. A Cause without Rebels*.⁴ Debates between syndicalist writers and journalists, and reflections on foreign models, understood in their broader socioeconomic contexts, thus form the core of the present study. While influences operated in both directions, French ideological imports from Britain are examined more closely, mainly because the existing historiography generally overlooks the British influence over French syndicalists, thus re-emphasising the reformist nature of British trade unionism and the

¹ Sidney Pollard, “The New Unionism: its Economic Background,” in *The Development of Trade Unionism in Great-Britain and Germany 1880–1914*, ed. H.-G. Husung and W.J. Mommsen (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), 32–52; Eric Hobsbawm, “New Unionism reconsidered,” in Husung and Mommsen, *The Development*, 13–31.

² *Le Congrès de la Charte d’Amiens* (Paris: Éditions de l’Institut CGT d’histoire sociale, 1983); Bruce Vandervort, *Victor Griffuelhes and French Syndicalism, 1895–1922* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1995); Jacques Julliard, *Clemenceau briseur de grèves* (Paris: Julliard, 1965); Nicholas Papayanis, *Alphonse Merrheim. The Emergence of Reformism in Revolutionary Syndicalism 1871–1925* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985).

³ Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 71.

⁴ Peter Stearns, *Syndicalism and French Labor. A Cause Without Rebels* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971).

international ascendancy of the CGT.⁵ For instance, after the British influence in the French anarchists' advocacy of joining trade unions was mentioned by Jean Maitron in *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France*,⁶ it was taken up by historians without further investigation⁷: this is an attempt to provide such an investigation.

Three periods of intense cross-Channel ideological exchanges occurred between 1880 and 1914. First, 1886–1890, when the French anarchists became increasingly interested in organisation and trade unionism, partly through the example of Britain's New Unionism. Secondly, 1890–1897, when the French anarchists interested in syndicalism actively promoted trade union permeation, again through multiple references to Britain. Thirdly, the years 1910–1914, when Britain's Great Labour Unrest was examined by the French syndicalists, at a time when the CGT was looking for a way out of its own crisis.

The 1880s: Learning the Lessons of British Strikes

French trade unions remained few and far between and banned until 1884, when professional organisations were legalised and then quickly multiplied. In those years, the country counted just a few hundred anarchists, but their small groups were very vocal and visible. Most of them favoured uncompromising revolutionary strategies, in the shape of propaganda by the deed—*la propagande par le fait*—which advocated individual gestures ranging from petty theft to political assassination as the surest way to publicise and further the anarchist cause. Individual action and initiative, especially of the violent kind, were preferred to collective organisation.

Anarchists decried trade unions as reformist instances, but from the mid-1880s, some influential anarchist journalists and militants sought to fight the dominant anti-organisational and individualistic tendencies which had gained ground in anarchist circles and threatened to completely isolate them from the workers.⁸ They called for more groundwork propaganda

⁵ As evidenced for instance by Michel Pigenet and Pierre Robin, ed., *Victor, Emile, Georges, Fernand et les autres... Regards sur le syndicalisme révolutionnaire* (Bouloc : Éditions d'Albret, 2007), which considers the CGT almost exclusively in its splendid isolation.

⁶ Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914)* (Paris: SUDEL, 1951).

⁷ See for instance Henri Dubief, *Les Anarchistes* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1972).

⁸ Gaetano Manfredonia, "L'Individualisme anarchiste en France, 1880-1914" (PhD Diss., Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, 1984), 90–105; Anthony Lorry,

among the working class in place of the grand gestures of propaganda by the deed. Some militants were involved in the budding trade union movement: as early as 1879, a young man called Emile Pouget, later to become known as the editor of the cult anarchist paper *Le Père Peinard*, founded the *Syndicat des employés du textile* and a trade newspaper.⁹ Ten years later, the now-famous Pouget was a regular at the meetings of the *Cercle Anarchiste International*, which gathered in Paris's 15th *arrondissement* and discussed tactics such as the general strike, as well as the relations of anarchists with professional associations like the *Bourses du travail*.¹⁰ In the Paris suburb of Saint-Denis, where anarchists were especially active, a *Syndicat des Hommes de Peine* was set up. It was a libertarian group meant to defend wages rather than a trade union, but it helped bring anarchists closer to the organised labour movement.¹¹ After 1890, the launch of the May Day demonstration and the growing interest in the general strike within other socialist groups acted as catalysts and the anarchists became openly interested in trade unionism. After weeks of debates, many anarchists joined in the first demonstration; opposing the socialists' use of May Day as a means of political pressure, they saw it as an opportunity for riotous and revolutionary provocation.¹² However, their participation testified to their growing involvement in the workers' militancy and marked the first step towards a greater concern for day-to-day workers' organisation.

Despite this spark of interest in trade unionism, British unions, the most powerful in the world at the time, were not given much attention. When mentioned, they usually came under attack for championing arbitration and peaceful resolution rather than the strike or other more aggressive tactics. Things took a different turn after 1886, when Britain entered a phase of social unrest which saw mass demonstrations of unemployed workers and riots, starting with the large-scale agitation of

“Recherche sur les anarchistes et les syndicats en banlieue nord de Paris (1880-1912)” (Master’s Diss., Université Paris XIII, 1995).

⁹ Constance Bantman, “The militant go-between: Émile Pouget’s transnational propaganda, 1880–1914,” *Labour History review* 74:3 (2009): 274–87.

¹⁰ Archives de la Préfecture de Police de Paris (APPo), BA 1506, reports dated March 1889–June 1890; The Bourses du Travail are local associations grouping workers from different industries and are usually described as the French equivalent of the British Labour Councils.

¹¹ Lorry, “Recherche sur les anarchistes et les syndicats,” 20.

¹² Michelle Perrot, “The First of May 1890 in France: the Birth of a Working-Class Ritual,” in *The Power of the Past : Essays for Eric Hobsbawm*, ed. Pat Thane, Geoffrey Crossick, Roderick Floud (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 143–71.

Bloody Sunday in 1887. Two strikes drew great public support, demonstrating and reinforcing the workers' new determination, while symbolising the arrival of new categories of workers on the militant stage.¹³ In 1888, it was the matchmakers' strike, preceded by the setting up of a 700-strong Union of Women Matchmakers. A successful strike, it led to significant improvements in the workers' pay and conditions. In August 1889 came the dockers' strike, which captured the attention of observers across the world. It was regarded by many as a lesson in solidarity, because it had started as a sympathy strike but 130,000 workers had stopped work across the London docks in a matter of weeks. The strikers also received crucial funds from Australia, which enabled them to keep the stoppage going at a critical time.

In the aftermath of these events, new unions were formed, characterised by both quantitative and qualitative changes, with the unionisation of women and unskilled workers. National unionisation figures went from 750,000 in 1889, to 1.5 million in 1892, before breaking the 2-million mark by the end of the 1890s.¹⁴ Large industrial federations were created, symbolised by the Dockers' or the Gasworkers' Unions. In tactical terms, new unionism meant the use of mass strikes and industrial solidarity, including at the international level. It resulted from the activism of a younger, more militant and politicised generation, with the emblematic figures of Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, John Burns or Will Thorne. They had come to politics with the socialist revival of the late 1870s—a movement whose ideas finally seemed to stir the workers into action.

The French anarchists were among the many observers who reflected on this militant breakthrough. Emile Pouget applauded "*la grève épatante de Londres*"—London's "superb strike" in his *Père Peinard*, concluding that "when there are that many of you, you only have to be really up for it".¹⁵ But while he praised the fighting spirit of the workers, he still resented their unions, pointing out that "English workers rely too much on their associations. There may be thousands of them, but nothing will ever equal initiative and courage".¹⁶ In true anarchist fashion, Pouget was especially critical of the parliamentary orientation of trade unions and the reformist outcome of the strike:

¹³ Sidney Pollard, "The New Unionism".

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Père Peinard*, September 1, 1889. My translation (as for all passages adapted from French, unless otherwise stated).

¹⁶ *Père Peinard*, November 22, 1889

It's bloody annoying to see a movement which had started off so well finish so badly. The strikers have dilly-dallied and let themselves be hypnotised by three or four smooth-talkers trying to become popular enough to enter Parliament.¹⁷

Despite such reservations, his interest in these events marked the first steps of his future elaboration and advocacy of syndicalism based on his interpretation of the British example.

A far more enthusiastic follower of the strikes was the eminent Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, exiled in London at the time, who saw the strike as “the image of a people organising during the revolution”—that is to say, the illustration of his theories on mutual aid and the spontaneous organisation of workers.¹⁸ For him, the strike was also evidence of the bargaining power of organised workers and therefore the inevitability of the revolution. At the time, Kropotkin was the main theoretical influence on both the French and the British anarchist movements. He had been based in London since 1886, where he was at the centre of the editorial team of *Freedom*, a high-brow anarchist monthly. He had also retained strong links with the French movement and was especially close to Jean Grave, the editor of the Paris-based anarchist weekly *La Révolte*, a similarly theoretical and demanding journal, which Kropotkin himself had launched in Geneva with fellow exiles Elisée Reclus and Nicolai Chaikovsky, before entrusting it to Grave. Kropotkin was therefore in a very propitious position to act as a go-between transmitting ideas back and forth across the Channel. In September 1889, he enthused about the dockers' strike in *La Révolte*, in an article entitled “*Ce que c'est qu'une grève*”—what a strike is:

No other strike has had the same profound meaning for the revolutionary socialist idea. The term of general strike is often heard. Now we can see that in order to achieve it, it is not indispensable for all the workers to stop work on the same day. They just have to block the factories' supply channels.¹⁹

Like Pouget, Kropotkin was greatly disappointed with the reformist outcome of the strike and the “comparatively trifling”²⁰ demands of the

¹⁷ *Père Peinard*, September 15, 1889.

¹⁸ Peter Kropotkin, *La Grande Grève des Docks* (Bruxelles : Temps Nouveaux, 1897).

¹⁹ *La Révolte*, September 7, 1889.

²⁰ “The Use of the Strike,” *Freedom*, April 1890.

workers, but the conclusion to be drawn by the anarchists was self-evident:

And why should the anarchists not put all their efforts where they are certain to be heard by the worker, ready to hear and understand them? Of course, the aim is not to go ahead and organise strikes, excite workers into revolt, plot uprisings—this is just unrealistic. But we could join in the strikes when they break out and form relations among the strikers, take part in their meetings, give speeches.²¹

In the wake of the strike, *La Révolte* launched a pro-organisation campaign and completely turned its back on insurrectional tactics. This was taken up in Britain by its sister paper, *Freedom*: ideological transfers were underpinned by the transnational connection of Grave and Kropotkin and, ironically, the evolution of some French anarchists towards syndicalism was partly prompted by the example of the supposedly reformist British workers.

Syndicalist Propaganda and the Role of Internationalised Militants

In the early 1890s, hundreds of French anarchists found themselves forced into exile in Britain as they fled the fierce repression of anarchist terrorism in France. Amidst the overwhelming inertia and deprivation of this forced exile, these two or three years spurred the development of what would come to be referred to as syndicalism by the mid-1890s.

One decisive influence came from Italian militants, chiefly Saverio Merlino and Errico Malatesta, who had championed organisation for some years. Malatesta had developed the concept of association as early as 1889, forming with others a group aimed at organising Italian catering workers in London.²² There were also British anarchists with an interest in publicising anarchism among the trade unions, who were not many but very dynamic: a handful of militants in the anarchist Socialist League were also trade unionists carrying out propaganda among the workers, and especially in the East End, such as John Turner, David Nicoll, Joseph Lane or Sam Mainwaring in Wales.²³ The permeation of trade unions by

²¹ “Les grèves,” *La Révolte*, October 5, 1889.

²² Pietro DiPaola, “Italian Anarchists in London 1870–1914” (PhD Diss., University of London, 2004) 69, 166. See also Davide Turcato’s contribution in this volume.

²³ “The Strike Committee,” *Commonweal*, January 15, 1887.

anarchists was discussed regularly from 1892 onwards at the Club Autonomie, the forum of international anarchists in London. Its most enthusiastic exponents were Malatesta, Kropotkin and the British anarchist trade unionist Charles Mowbray. For instance, the Franco-British-Italian anarchist paper, *The Torch*, reported on a speech by Mowbray in November 1892: “Anarchists ought to enter the trade unions to show the workers their true aims. He himself had in a few weeks made a perfect revolution in his own trade society, the Amalgamated Society of Tailors”.²⁴ Kropotkin made a similar point in unambiguous terms, stating that “if we mean to be victorious we must permeate the trade unions and other associations of workers with our ideas. Only by this means can we make the Social Revolution effective when it comes”.

The Torch provided another forum for the international discussion and diffusion of these ideas. Initially founded by the well-to-do “Rossetti children”, Helen, Olive and Michael, it received collaborations from French militants, like Pouget, Augustin Hamon and Louise Michel. In 1893, Fauset McDonald opened a debate on the relevance of joining trade unions, which was then taken up by Olive Rossetti and Saverio Merlino.²⁵ The paper officially supported entry into the trade unions as of 1894, having published debates on the topic since 1892. Once more, the Italian connection proved especially important, and through these new exchanges these London years played a key role in the reinvention of French anarchism. This, again, was rather ironic, as the popular press peddled rumours that the French colonies in London were solely concerned with terrorism, when they were in fact working their way out of it.²⁶

Pro-unions mottos were taken up in the French exile press and made their way back to France and across the Atlantic, where these publications were read.²⁷ For the French anarchists, infiltrating unions was doubly pertinent. They were legal, at a time when anarchists still faced harsh state persecution. Moreover, organisation and contact with the workers were seen as a way out of the dead end where propaganda by the deed had taken anarchism. The Franco-Italian revolutionary Charles Malato, another London exile, developed these themes in *Le Tocsin*:

²⁴ “Chicago,” *The Torch*, November 15, 1892.

²⁵ “Organisation of Anarchists,” *The Torch*, June 16, 1893; “Methods of Propaganda,” *The Torch*, July 15, 1893; “Correspondence,” *The Torch*, August 15, 1893.

²⁶ Joseph Conrad’s *Secret Agent* (1907) is the classic tale of French anarchist terrorism in London.

²⁷ The November 1894 issue of *Père Peinard* lists subscribers in both North and Latin America.

Like you, we know how slow-paced, narrow and fussy workers' unions are. However, they are the centre of the economic forces which must transform the old world. Infiltrate them, not so much in order to dissolve them as to transform them entirely, raising a whole army of rebels in them".²⁸

The key actor for the development of these new ideas and their adaptation to the French context was Pouget. In London, he kept away from the disreputable Club Autonomie, the Soho haunt of international anarchists, but was in contact with the thinkers and activists who were discussing anarcho-syndicalism. His ideological evolution can be followed through *Le Père Peinard*, which he relaunched in London in September 1894. In the first issue, he called for the entry of anarchists into trade unions, based on a revolutionary interpretation of British trade unions. He praised their fighting spirit, exemplified by their use of sabotage and the strike. Above all, the British model was used to develop what would later become the fully-fledged idea of trade union independence from political power, so dear to French syndicalists: as late as 1897, Pouget still reflected that

The English, who are a hell of a lot more practical, do not give a damn about the state: they march against the capitalists. And they are all the better for it! When will the French proles be plucky enough to take their example?²⁹

At this stage, the new propagandist motto was confined to small circles of theorists and activists. Next came its diffusion in the press and in the organisations concerned, a process which was completed over a decade. In 1895, Pouget returned to France and resumed his syndicalist propaganda, referring constantly to the example of British trade unions and their independence from the State, observing that

What makes the strikers so powerful is that they have kicked out all politicians, and counted on themselves only, not the state. The English are giving us a great lesson in initiative. If only we knew how to make the most of it!³⁰

He also imported new militant strategies from Britain, along with the idea that trade unions should be aggressively militant, with a view to daily

²⁸ *Le Tocsin*, September 23, 1894.

²⁹ "Ça ronfle en Angleterre," *Le Père Peinard*, July 26, 1897.

³⁰ "La Grève des mécaniciens en Angleterre," *Le Père Peinard*, December 19, 1897.

struggles and general improvements in working conditions but also to the general strike and eventually the revolution. He applauded the English eight-hour working day—although “it doesn’t mean that the proles don’t get exploited there”³¹—and in the early twentieth century, this “*semaine anglaise*” (“English week”) would become one of the CGT’s main objectives. In other words, through Pouget, many of the key militant mottos of the CGT were derived from British inspirations. This is best illustrated by his advocacy of sabotage, whose British origins he repeatedly flagged, and which officially became part of the CGT’s programme after its 1897 Toulouse congress.³² As his fellow anarchist and partner in exile Augustin Hamon later wrote:

Someone searching for the genesis of contemporary French syndicalism would see in this social phenomenon another British influence. One of the authors of this syndicalism is indeed M. Émile Pouget who, during his rather long stay in London, was directly and indirectly subjected to the English influence.³³

The British example was also discussed by Fernand Pelloutier, the leading exponent of the *Bourses du travail* as a libertarian institution, who saw it in a more critical way, and in Paul Delesalle’s review *L’Ouvrier des deux mondes*.

Within a few years, revolutionary syndicalism became the dominant influence over French syndicalism. The 1894 Nantes Congress of the *Fédération Nationale des Syndicats et Groupes Corporatifs* adopted the general strike, which meant that the French Marxist party, the Guesdists, lost control of the emerging trade union movement. Against the Guesdists’ endeavours to import into France the German party-union model, the Nantes congress initiated the process of political separation of French unions. This partition between the political and non-political branches of the labour movement was formalised at the international level in 1896, when the opponents of parliamentary action—primarily anarchists—were expelled from the Second International during its London congress. The support shown by the British socialists of the Independent Labour Party and the most advanced trade unionists on this occasion—in particular James Keir Hardie and Tom Mann—reinforced the French anarchists’

³¹ “La sociale en Angleterre,” *La Sociale*, November 10, 1895.

³² *La Sociale*, April 18, 1897; Émile Pouget, *Le Sabotage* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1910).

³³ Augustin Hamon, *Le Molière du XX^e siècle: Bernard Shaw* (Paris: Eugène Figuière et Cie, 1913), 50.

view of British unions as libertarian institutions, fostering further collaborations. They attended a support meeting held by the excluded antiparliamentarians and Keir Hardie's declaration, "I am not a bigot of State socialism, no bigot for the use of political machinery"³⁴, naturally won the anarchists' approval. Pouget's expectation that "English trade unions and socialists have too much of a soft spot for freedom to stoop low enough to exclude someone and play into the hands of the ambitious" had proved right.³⁵

In the following years, French anarchists gained control of the CGT: Pouget became the *Confédération's* first secretary, while Fernand Pelloutier led the *Fédération Nationale des Bourses du travail*. In 1902, the CGT merged with the anarchist-dominated *Bourses*. This process culminated with the 1906 *Charte d'Amiens*, which famously proclaimed the independence of the CGT from "all political sects", a statement levelled at the Guesdists as well as at the anarchists. By then, the British reference had long been obliterated, replaced by the idea that France was once more the revolutionary beacon for all nations. By then also, the initial anarchist influence had evolved into "*syndicalisme révolutionnaire*", a complex revolutionary practice drawing on many sources, whose proponents belonged to a new generation and rejected pure anarchism.

The French brand of syndicalism, despite these foreign influences, was derived from its specific national context. It was a new incarnation of the French revolutionary tradition, with its deep-seated animosity towards the State and the conviction that the revolutions of the nineteenth century should be brought to their logical conclusions. Syndicalism itself was the offspring of several influences: Proudhonism (with its emphasis on economic action, workers' autonomy and federalism), Blanquism (the advocacy of revolutionary action and insurrection, anarchism (anti-statism) and Allemanism (the use of the insurrectional general strike, and the ideal of a federalist socialism based on trade unions).³⁶ The syndicalist project of a decentralised economy controlled by the producers was consistent with the permanence of small local unions and the great diversity in the workers' conditions in France. In a country marked by the uneven pace and geographic variations of industrialisation, the ideological eclecticism of syndicalism can also be explained by the need to be "inclusionary rather than exclusionary" and to offer "a great ideological

³⁴ *Freedom*, August–September 1896.

³⁵ "Le congrès de Londres," *La Sociale*, July 5, 1896.

³⁶ Bruce Vandervort, *Victor Griffuelhes*; Wayne Thorpe, *The Workers Themselves'. Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913–1923* (Dordrecht, Boston: Kluwer Academic and IISG, 1989), 21–28.

and organisational platform".³⁷ Last but not least, of course, syndicalism has often been interpreted as the necessary compensation for the numerical weakness of French trade unions³⁸ and the far-reaching divisions of French socialism.³⁹

The Great Labour Unrest and the CGT

Across the Channel, the decade between 1897 and 1906 was a time of difficulties for British socialists. The breakthrough of New Unionism was followed by an employers' backlash and a near-death blow was dealt to unions by the Taff Vale judgment of 1901, which made them financially liable for strikes (although the decision was reversed by the Trades Disputes Act of 1906). The political crisis came to a head after the 1906 election, as the Progressive Alliance between the Labour Party and the Liberal Party seemed to achieve too little, too slowly, spurring extra-parliamentary protest. It became a widely-recognised fact even for outside observers that "the gospel of Syndicalism is beginning to spread... Constitutional methods have failed. Other weapons must be looked for".⁴⁰ In this context, the CGT's revolutionary syndicalism—referred to as "syndicalism" in the British context—provided food for thought to some militants, and none more so than Tom Mann, who sought to make British unions more combative and less reliant on parliamentary action. The syndicalist papers *The Voice of Labour*, *The Industrial Syndicalist* and *The Industrial Syndicalist*, helped by active Franco-British contacts, worked to propagate the French ideas of direct action and political independence. The process came to fruition in 1910, when the first strikes of what came to be known as the Great Labour Unrest broke out, although there again the connection between the diffusion of radical ideas and the radicalisation of militancy remains hard to establish.

Less well-known is the fact that at that stage, the reinvigorated British labour movement once more came to influence the French. In fact, even at the time of the *Charte d'Amiens*, the CGT faced serious difficulties, with a combination of corruption scandals, the toll taken by police repression, its isolation on the international scene and the mounting battle between its

³⁷ Barbara Mitchell, *The Practical Revolutionaries. A New Interpretation of the French Anarchosyndicalists* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 11.

³⁸ Mitchell, *Practical Revolutionaries*.

³⁹ Wayne Thorpe and Marcel van der Linden, "The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism," *Revolutionary Syndicalism. An International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 12–5.

⁴⁰ "The coming postal strike," *Penny Illustrated Paper*, May 18, 1912.

revolutionary and reformist wings.⁴¹ The confederation's weakness and lack of representativeness created a sense of unease, exposed by the semi-failure of the great May Day demonstration of 1906 which had been eagerly hyped as the kick-off of the general strike.

This is how, as summarised by Jean-Louis Auduc, "the English movement came to achieve and implement the ideals of French syndicalism, at a time when the latter found it increasingly difficult to theorise them and put them into practice".⁴² Indeed, with these lingering doubts over French revolutionary syndicalism, British events were seen as a possible source of inspiration. For several years, Tom Mann's propaganda had been reported on in the pages of *Le Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste* and *La Vie ouvrière*, two of the main French-language syndicalist papers.⁴³ Both chronicled Mann's increasing rejection of parliamentary politics and collective bargaining whilst in Australia, and his apology of industrial unionism.⁴⁴ In the pages of the *Bulletin*, Britain was increasingly represented as a good synthesis between reformism and militant direct action. From its foundation in 1909, Mann was also a regular contributor to *La Vie ouvrière*, which opposed the reformists and parliamentarians of the CGT. Britain was used both as a model and a counter-example in the CGT's internal fights. For instance, the British syndicalist Watkins wrote an article where he emphasised the many faults of compulsory arbitration, through the example of British railways.⁴⁵ His conclusion shows how British developments were transposed to the French context: "To Guérard and Millerand, [rail workers] will say...we have seen at work the panacea you are offering us. The English rail workers have been its victims and they don't want it anymore". Interestingly, the British reference was also used by the reformists of the CGT, such as Léon Jouhaux—showing the ideological malleability of foreign references, and especially of the British "model", with its formidable blend of parliamentary and revolutionary tactics.

⁴¹ Julliard, *Clemenceau*; Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement. The Socialism of Skilled Workers 1830–1914*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976); Jacques Julliard, "La Charte d'Amiens, cent ans après. Texte, contexte, interprétations," in *Mil Neuf Cent, revue d'histoire intellectuelle* 24 (2006) : 5–40; Nicholas Papayanis, *Alphonse Merrheim*.

⁴² Jean-Louis Auduc, "Le Mouvement syndical anglais à travers la presse syndicaliste française, 1911–1914" (Master's Diss., University Paris I), 7.

⁴³ *Bulletin international du mouvement syndicaliste*, July 4, 1909.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, August 1, 1909.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, July 20, 1911.

When the near-revolutionary Great Labour Unrest started, it was greatly commended. The traditional contempt towards British reformism gave way to new interpretations stressing the workers' revolutionary inclinations:

Now, let's also stop with the ever-same examples of those content and therefore docile English unions, holding reformism as their ideal and rejecting the direct action of the working masses! The miners' strikes in Wales [...] have led to violent protest [...] and even to orders of sabotage always thought to occur only in France, where there is a strong and lively syndicalist movement.⁴⁶

In August, *Le Bulletin* wrote: "this is all our revolutionary doctrines being put into practice"⁴⁷, a statement which summarises its general stance. The dilemmas of the British syndicalists were acknowledged—bore from within to try and gain influence within the TUC, or opt out and set up a purely syndicalist organisation as in the United States?—but Britain had certainly come a long way since the revolutionary sneers it elicited three decades before.

Conclusion

The study of syndicalist transfers points to different conceptions of the state on both sides of the Channel and thus to different levels of worker integration.⁴⁸ It also shows that national generalisations depicting France as revolutionary and Britain as reformist are overly simplistic and historically false. Nonetheless, an important dividing line is that the rejection of parliamentary methods was never as deeply rooted and ideological in Britain as it was in France, because of the lesser influence of anarchists in the elaboration of syndicalism and because the call for greater state involvement and workers' protection was an important strand of the pre-war strikes.⁴⁹ This is why, despite obvious similarities and cross-influences, direct action as it was enacted during the Great Labour

⁴⁶ Ibid., November 13, 1910.

⁴⁷ Ibid., August 13, 1911.

⁴⁸ Stéphane Sirot, "De l'unité socialiste à l'autonomie ouvrière," *Nouvelle Fondation* 1 (2006): 112.

⁴⁹ Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900–1914. Myths and Realities* (London: Pluto Press, 1976); George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: Constable & Co, 1936); G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, *The Common People* (London: Methuen, 1961 (1938)), 450–80; Keith Aikin, *The Last Years of Liberal England, 1900–1914* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1972).

Unrest should certainly not be equated with the CGT's own motto of political independence. However, both movements were rooted in the same context of the rise of socialist parties and the sense of disappointment they ended up creating, either because of their internal divisions as in France, or the slow pace of their reforms, as with Britain's Progressive Alliance.⁵⁰ In both countries, the syndicalist breakthrough testified to the first crisis of parliamentary socialism.

Revolutionary syndicalism also makes for an interesting case study in the transnationalisation of labour history. Far from being retrospective historical constructs, transnational influences and transfer processes were realities for contemporaries engaged in strategic reflection involving foreign ideological imports:

I think it is not only useless but illogical to expect to introduce French and American syndicalist methods in England: just as no one would hear of German methods. Just as impossible as to introduce French habits and methods and French temper in public life. In France the labour movement was neglected over politics, and the syndicalists had and still have to make the greatest noise possible, to bluff in every way, to make themselves heard [...]. The English unions, old and firmly established, have no need to be noisy [...]. All the workers of any [illeg.] are organised in England and have far more real power than the French syndicalists have.⁵¹

It appears from such declarations that the restraints imposed by the national context and socio-economic structures were taken into account when discussing the feasibility of importing foreign models. So, one may wonder, why was there such a tardy acknowledgment of this wealth of exchanges by historians?

⁵⁰ Thorpe and Van der Linden, "The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism," *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 12–15; Maurice Moissonier, "Le syndicalisme français à l'heure du Congrès d'Amiens," in *Le Congrès de la Charte d'Amiens*, 52–3.

⁵¹ Letter from Nettlau to Keell, March 22, 1910, Freedom Archive, IISG.

CHAPTER EIGHT

POLISH ANARCHISM AND ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

RAFAŁ CHWEDORUK

Scientific research into Polish anarchism and generally the radical left has always been poorly developed in Poland. One of the reasons for this was political constraints. However, almost every tendency within the Polish labour movement—whether democratic socialism or communism or syndicalism—developed in ways which were different from the western experience.

One example of the specific nature of the Polish labour movement was the parallel existence of anarchism, whose main trend was anarcho-syndicalism and, originally, Polish syndicalism. Whereas anarchists simply attempted to emulate the ideas and methods of anarchism from other countries, the roots of Polish syndicalism were different from those in the countries of Western Europe. Polish syndicalism stemmed from neither socialist ideas nor the labour movement. What happened in Poland was a rare evolution from nationalism to Sorelism, and then to a radical left which was close to anarcho-syndicalism. Temporarily, this trend achieved a certain significance in the Polish labour movement in the 1930s and 1940s.

Polish syndicalism was based on various ideological and historical inspirations: the ideas of Georges Sorel¹ and Georges Valois², the

¹ About Sorel see Jack J. Roth, *The Cult of Violence. Sorel and the Sorelians* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980); Jeremy R. Jennings, *Georges Sorel: The Character and Development of His Thought* (London: MacMillan, 1985); Arthur L. Greil, *Georges Sorel and the Sociology of Virtue* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1981).

² About Valois see Allen Douglas, *From Fascism to Libertarian Communism. Georges Valois against the Third Republic* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

experiences of the French CGT (Confédération du Travail) and the Spanish CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo), as well as nationalism and the so-called national labour movement, a form of which, apart from Poland, also existed in Czechoslovakia, as represented by the Czech National Socialist Party.³ The Polish variation of syndicalism stemmed therefore from similar roots to those of national socialism and also fascism; it incorporated France's Sorelism and revolutionary syndicalism, and finally it came close to the anarcho-syndicalism of the FAUD (Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands) and the CNT.

As Ulrich Klan and Dieter Nelles rightly argue—and other researchers confirm—the ideas of Sorel did not exert a great influence on anarcho-syndicalist ideas and movements in many countries, including France⁴ Sorel is more often perceived as a forerunner of fascism. As Edouard Berth, one of the more distinguished disciples of Sorel, observed, Sorel, while being an ordinary spectator of the labour movement (because according to his own theories no one else but the proletariat itself was eligible to be the actor), was a spectator with a special commitment and passion.⁵ However, in Poland, Sorelism did exert a real influence on the labour movement. Sorel's followers, although of intellectual origins, decided to be more than just spectators.

Explaining anarchism's weakness as a social movement in Poland

In the nineteenth century, when anarchism was growing as an independent political movement, the Polish territory had been partitioned

³ For more about Czech national socialism see Josef Harn's, "*O vyvoji programů českého národního socialismu,*" *Politické programy českého národního socialismu 1897-1948*, (Prague: Historický ústav, 1998); on Austrian national socialism before the NSDAP see Bruce F. Pauley, *Der Weg in den Nationalsozialismus. Ursprünge und Entwicklung in Österreich* (Vienna: Österreichische Bundesverlag, 1988), 35–40.

⁴ Ulrich Klan, Dieter Nelles, "*Es lebt noch eine Flamme*". *Rheinische Anarcho-Syndikalistin/-innen in der Weimarer Republik und im Faschismus* (Grafenau-Doeffingen: Trotzdem-Verlag 1990), 28. Apart from Poland, Sorelism exerted some influence on the Italian labour movement—see Willy Gianninazzi, "Chez les soreliens italiens," in Michel Chazrat, ed., *Cahiers l'Herne Georges Sorel*, (Paris: Le Seuil, 1986), 201—but in principle the Italian and Polish cases were completely different both in content and form.

⁵ Edouard Berth, "Georges Sorel," *Clarté*, September 15, 1922, in Chazrat (1986), 359.

by three invaders: Russia, Prussia and Austria. Within each partition, anarchism took on a different shape. In the relatively liberal Austria reformist tendencies prevailed in the labour movement, and among anarchists the dominant trend was anarcho-syndicalism. In the Russian partition, only a violent revolutionary struggle was possible; whereas in the German partition the socialist and anarchist movements attracted marginal support. Besides, all modern political trends had to focus their attention on the question of Polish independence and national self-determination.

As a result, ideologically, the labour movement had from the beginning been divided into two trends. The bigger one attracted quite extensive social support and combined the ideas of socialism, democracy and Polish independence. It echoed the well-known arguments of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who were enthusiastic about an independent Poland and saw in the restoration of Poland the condition for a successful socialist revolution in Europe. Twentieth-century Polish syndicalism was located near this Polish Marxist and independence-oriented socialism. The second trend of the Polish labour movement in all three partitions was radically internationalist and opposed the independence of Poland, which explains its isolation in society. Rosa Luxemburg was the symbol of this movement. It was in this tradition that the post-1918 anarchism originated. But two world wars rolled over Poland during the twentieth century, which strengthened the significance of the national question in Polish politics, and weakened all ideologies praising internationalism.

The problem that the Polish labour movement faced was constraints on political liberties, first under the regimes of the invading monarchies, in the years 1926-39 under the semi-dictatorship (with the opposition political parties operating legally), then under Nazi occupation, and finally, after 1945, under the Communist dictatorship which destroyed all left-wing traditions except Communism itself.

Another significant question was the country's social structure. Polish territory was of a mainly agricultural character and the development of industrial capitalism was limited. The working class made up a social minority, with only a part having a developed social awareness—mainly skilled workers supported the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). The working class was politically divided between left and right. The conflict between the workers and the bourgeoisie was not very significant in Polish society. Also, the character of national culture was not favourable. The Roman Catholic Church, which was very conservative and ruthlessly hostile to any political trends that were independent from it, exerted considerable influence. Moreover, society was dominated by the ethos of the gentry and

that of the peasants, which were connected with rural life. Low social self-organisation was a disadvantage. To this day, Polish society has remained post-traditional, i.e. one combining different types of society.

The beginnings of anarchism on Polish lands

Tendencies close to anarchism were strong among Polish socialists in the 1880s. They believed in a worldwide revolution. Poles were also active in the First International,⁶ but one can say that in the dispute between the followers of Marx and Bakunin, they were distant from both parties. It is worth noting a small organization called the Solidarity Workers' Party, founded by Kazimierz Puchewicz, whose programme was close to the syndicalism of years to come.⁷

In the Austrian partition, anarchism began to develop in Cracow, a town which was an oasis of liberties in the nineteenth century. Anarchism spread among dissidents from the Polish faction of the Social Democratic Party operating in the Habsburg state. They published a periodical entitled *The Workers' Cause*, attempted street campaigning and concentrated on the protection of workers' rights and a critique of the Socialists. The programme was a simple copy of western-style anarcho-syndicalism. The leader was the ex-socialist psychiatrist Augustyn Wróblewski.⁸ However, despite the widespread and acute social conflicts, anarcho-syndicalists failed to develop a wider activity and stayed in the background of the Socialist movement. The main theoretician of revolutionary syndicalism until 1918, which explicitly incorporated Western European ideas, was Józef Zieliński (1861–1927), who wrote several ideological pamphlets in Polish (in the period 1902–1914), but issued in France.⁹

⁶ E.g. Andrzej Notkowski, *Ludwik Waryński* (Wrocław: ZN im. Ossolińskich, 1989), 94.

⁷ "Statutes of the Solidarity Workers' Party," in Feliks Tych, ed., *Polskie programy socjalistyczne 1878–1918* (Warsaw: KiW 1975), 201–204. Similar pre-syndicalist organisations existed in other countries, e.g. the Italian Workers' Party—see Wayland Hilton-Young, *The Italian Left. A Short History of Political Socialism in Italy* (London-New York: Green and Company, 1949) 18–20.

⁸ Augustyn Wróblewski, "Jestem anarchistą," *Sprawa Robotnicza*, April 15, 1912.

⁹ The titles of Zieliński's brochures themselves indicate their classic anarcho-syndicalist content: *General Strike*, *Hypocritical Socialism*, *Combatant Trade Unions*, *Is Anarchism possible in Poland?* (*Strajk powszechny*, *Obłudny Socjalizm*, *Bojowe Robotnicze Związki Zawodowe*, *Czy w Polsce anarchizm ma rację bytu*). All these texts were published in Paris.

However, in the Russian partition at the time of the 1905-1907 revolution, the Polish territory was a venue for numerous strikes and street fighting, in which socialist parties played the main role. Anarchism sprang up at their margins with such organizations as Revolutionary Avengers.¹⁰ The ideological level of these groups remained theoretically undeveloped. It was then that the negative stereotype was developed on Polish soil due to illegalism.¹¹ This caused a huge gap to open between the socialist parties and the anarchists. The outbreak of World War One brought the complete collapse of the Polish anarchist movement.

Anarchism in the 1920s—no hope for autonomy

Ironically, the creation of an independent democratic Polish state in 1918 caused a very difficult situation for anarchism. The Republic of Poland was the work of the socialist movement and Józef Piłsudski, who had a socialist background. It was a parliamentary democracy with social legislation that made it one of the most modern countries in Europe. In central and southern Poland, most of the working class supported the socialist movement, which included many heroes from the struggle for national independence. The main political conflict was between the so-called national-independence left and the nationalist right which resented democracy and social legislation. In December 1918, several left-wing groups established the Communist Party. Following Rosa Luxemburg's ideas, it opposed the idea of an independent Poland and boycotted the first democratic elections in 1919. In the war between Poland and Soviet Russia in 1920, the Communist Party supported Lenin's country. It was never legalised and remained socially isolated.

The activists involved in the restoration of Polish anarchism shared the dilemmas of western anarcho-syndicalists, many of whom at that time were debating whether or not they should co-operate with Lenin's Communists and their International. Polish anarchists' opposition to the Socialist Party and Piłsudski¹² helped the mutual permeation of anarchism

¹⁰ Tomasz Szczepański, *Ruch anarchistyczny na ziemiach zaboru rosyjskiego w dobie rewolucji 1905–1907* (Mielec: Inny Świat, 2000); Wincenty Kołodziej, *Anarchizm i anarchiści w Rosji i Królestwie Polskim* (Toruń: Adam Marszałek, 1992), 38–75.

¹¹ For more on illegalism, see Daniel Grinberg, *Ruch anarchistyczny w Europie Zachodniej 1870–1914* (Warsaw: PWN, 1994), 299–305.

¹² See the file on Jan Straszewski in: The Archive of New Records, Warsaw, vol. 5579, ch. 1–14. See also “Die internationale Reaktion gegen Russland,” *Der Syndikalist* 1920, no. 28. On the relations between the IWMA and the communist

and Communism. Once the Third International and anarchism parted company, however, groups of anarchists sprang up in Poland and cut off their links with the Communist Party. However, although several works by Kropotkin were published in Polish, these anarchist groups did not form a cohesive structure.¹³

In 1926, part of the Polish army loyal to Piłsudski and backed by the PPS and its trade unions overthrew the coalition government of the nationalist right and some centrist parties. It was the first and the last time that the Communist Party endorsed Piłsudski. Anarchists were the only left-wing formation not to support the coup, and they continued to consider all governments after 1926 as fascist.¹⁴

Social support swung dramatically to the left and the anarchists took advantage of it. After many meetings, the Anarchist Federation of Poland (AFP) was created in July 1926, bringing together representatives of different anarchist trends. However the organisation's statutes brought no new ideas and simply reproduced old anarchist conceptions. The programme called for direct action and economic struggle as opposed to political struggle. The AFP was explicitly revolutionary, regarding all political parties as enemies and fighting the socialist movement particularly ferociously.¹⁵

The AFP first attracted public attention on the occasion of the Sacco-Vanzetti campaign.¹⁶ They tried to work among the working class, publishing the periodicals *The Anarchist Voice* and *Class Struggle*. However, serious repression fell upon the anarchists who, along with the pro-Russian Communists, were recognised by the decidedly anti-Russian government as forces hostile to Polish national independence. At least a

movement see Wayne Thorpe, "Syndicalist Internationalism," in Marcel van den Linden, Wayne Thorpe (eds.), *Revolutionary Syndicalism an International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990).

¹³ In Paris, anarchist immigrants published the periodicals *Najmita* (The Mercenary) and *Walka* (The Struggle).

¹⁴ "Dlaczego robotnicy nie powinni iść do wyborów?," *Głos Anarchisty*, January and February, 1928.

¹⁵ AFP. Conference materials 24–26 July 1926, Łódź Regional Office, Archive of New Records, vol. 271; "Walka Klas. Stanowisko Sekretariatu AFP," *Głos Anarchisty* April, 1927.

¹⁶ See "W obronie Sacco i Vanzetti," *Głos Anarchisty* October, 1926. On Polish anarchism in the years 1919–1929 see "History of Polish Anarchist Movement 1919–1929," *Die Internationale*, April 1930.

dozen or so people were imprisoned for being members of the illegal AFP.¹⁷

Anarchists failed to reach the working class. Several hundreds were active in the AFP; sociologically, they were very similar to the 3,000-strong Communist Party. AFP members and supporters came almost exclusively from the Jewish minority.¹⁸ In Poland the Jewish community was concentrated in the liberal professions, the middle classes and the petite bourgeoisie, and, unlike in Western Europe, it made up a sizeable lumpenproletariat. Politically, religious conservatism dominated in this ethnic minority. Anarchists and Communists could count on young dissidents from conservative Jewish quarters, who were not interested in taking part in the Polish socialist movement and could easily indulge in the temptations of political radicalism.¹⁹ This is why the AFP was not a workers' organisation, and was probably dominated by people who could be referred to as "declassed" in Marxist terms. What is significant is that the most important representatives of Polish anarchism and the AFP had relations with the Communist movement. Interestingly, the Polish anarchist Josef Goldberg, known as Jerzy Borejsza, was a friend of Buenaventura Durruti during his stay in France; yet after World War Two, in the Stalinist era, he became Culture Minister in Poland.²⁰

The year 1931 brought an end to the classic disputes of the time between anarcho-syndicalists and anarcho-communists, which had started in 1923.²¹ But at the same time Polish anarchism suffered another crisis and the AFP nearly ceased all activity. Polish anarchism repeated the sins

¹⁷ Trials at Regional Court's, Prosecutor's Office in Cracow, Archive of New Records, vol. 134, ch. 17.

¹⁸ Among the founders were members of the Jewish socialist party Poalej-Syjon, see Silesian Regional Office, Archive of New Records, vol. 25557/28, ch. 94–96. The first illegal anarchist publications in the 1920s were published in Yiddish.

¹⁹ More about this process in Poland in Stanisław Krajewski, "Żydowsy komuniści-problem dla nas?," *Jidele* special issue (2000), spring 2000, 151.

²⁰ Barbara Fijałkowska, *Borejsza i Różański. Przyczynek do dziejów stalinizmu w Polsce* (Olsztyn: WSP, 1995), 28. However in the ideological field they distanced themselves from Leninism—see *Do anarchistów i syndykalistów wszystkich krajów. My polscy anarchiści za granicą* [proclamation], (To anarchists and syndicalists of all countries! We the Polish anarchists in exile), May 1930, in Łódź Regional Office, Archive of New Records, vol. 271, ch. 44. In one of the texts the Communist Party was accused of "counter-revolutionary and pro-German questioning" of the western borders of Poland—see K. Staszewski, "Polityka zagraniczna," *Walka Klas* June, 1933.

²¹ "IAA im Jahre 1931," *Pressdienst* April 10, 1932.

of Communism: ideological dogmatism, sectarianism and hostility to the rest of the left. It was no accident that salvation came from abroad.

In September 1932, one of the FAUD leaders, Thomas Pilarski, came to Poland with the help of Polish diplomats.²² He was helped by his ex-colleague from the Silesian Spartacus (the pre-communist Party in Germany), Arka Bożek, who in 1926 was a member of the Piłsudski's political bloc in Poland. Pilarski co-operated actively with the Polish state, for instance as a speaker on the Polish radio in Silesia, broadcasting programmes against the Nazis and German nationalism to Silesians. Pilarski was hated by the NSDAP, and the Nazi diplomacy unsuccessfully complained about him to the Polish government.²³ Pilarski started work in the pro-government and syndicalist-dominated Union of Trade Unions (ZZZ) and was quickly promoted. It was on his advice—and in agreement with the IWMA—that young people left the weakening AFP to join the ZZZ.²⁴ Many anarchists thus belonged to the youth organisations affiliated to the ZZZ. Far-reaching pragmatism was what characterised Pilarski. His main inspiration was anti-fascism and his objective a common front of the left against international fascism. Anarchists in the ZZZ promoted the idea of uniting this union with the socialist trade unions. Pilarski and his associates radicalised the pro-government union on social affairs on the one hand, and were extremely cautious in their relations with the government on the other.

Therefore Polish anarchism practically began to execute the so-called “boring from within” strategy of entering a formally non-anarchist trade union. A similar tactic had been applied by French anarcho-syndicalists at the turn of the century and similar discussions were held in other countries, such as the USA.²⁵

Polish syndicalism—Sorelism in Central Europe

The creation of a uniquely Polish trend in the labour movement derived from several factors. First, the general intellectual mood at the turn of the century: the concepts of Bergson, Nietzsche and others had an

²² On Pilarski's first name (Thomas/Alfons), see chapter four, footnote eighteen.

²³ In Poland, Pilarski supported the work of Polish intelligence against the Third Reich—see Krystyna Żurawska, 7 V 1945, Collection of workers' movement files, Archive of New Records, vol. 509/128, ch. 525.

²⁴ Letter from T. A. Pilarski to S. Szwedowski, National Library, Warsaw, manuscript 16266/3.

²⁵ See Philip Foner, *The IWW 1905–1917. History of the Labour Movement in the United States*, vol. IV, (New York: International Publishers, 1965) 426.

impact on Polish territory. In the socialist movement this led to discussions about the reinterpretation of Marxism in the spirit of subjectivism. As a result, Polish Marxism was far from dogmatic.²⁶ Original theoreticians came to the fore, including Edward Abramowski, who believed himself to be a socialist and cooperativist, although he is now regarded rather as an anarchist. Abramowski preached the ideas of moral revolution pre-empting social and economic change.²⁷ Another example is Jan Waclaw Machajski, who was regarded as anarchist by his contemporaries and believed that Marxism was a bourgeois weapon against the real working-class movement.²⁸

The second key factor was the direct influence of Sorel's ideas on Polish left-wing intellectuals. The radical, revolutionary sentiment in central Poland, a certain disappointment at the failure of the 1905 revolution, the crisis of the socialist parties, the critique of mainstream Polish culture, all created a space for Sorelism.²⁹ The actual founder of Polish syndicalism as an idea was Stanisław Brzozowski, an eccentric philosopher and literary critic. Having acquainted himself with Sorel's writings in the years 1909–11, he advocated what he called a "philosophy of labour" and perceived the proletariat as the heroic founder of a new society. He based his reasoning on radical anthropocentrism. Like Sorel, Brzozowski knew many intellectual fascinations, and syndicalism was one of them, though not an accidental one. There is no question that Brzozowski was the founder of the first consistently anti-Engelsian interpretation of Marxism. His illness and premature death ended the complicated way of this Polish thinker.³⁰

²⁶ In the PPS the interest in Sorel was insignificant and confined to several articles in the press—see Marek Waldenberg, "Sorel en Pologne", *Charzat* 1986, 232–233, 240.

²⁷ On E. Abramowski see Andrzej Walicki, *Stanislaw Brzozowski and the Polish beginnings of "Western Marxism"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), 209–212.

²⁸ The best known English language writer about Machajski was Maxwell Shatz; see Maxwell Shatz, *Jan Waclaw Machajski: a radical critic of the Russian Intelligentsia and socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

²⁹ In Central Europe the best known interpreter of Sorel was the Hungarian Istvan Szabó—see Andres Bözöki, Miklos Sükösd, *Anarchism in Hungary: Theory, History, Legacies*, (New York: Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, 2006), 131–143.

³⁰ For more about Brzozowski in English, see Walicki 1989; in German, Holger Politt, *Stanislaw Brzozowski—Hoffnung wider die dunkle Zeit*, "Opera Slavica," *Neue Folge* 31 (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1996). It is worth noting there were no conservative interpretations of Sorel in Poland.

It was the ideas of Sorel, Brzozowski and Abramowski that exerted an influence on Stefan Żeromski, one of the most famous Polish writers in history, and the most important left-wing writer in the history of the Polish labour movement. Right after World War One, disappointed with the rising domination of the right in Poland, he published two syndicalist texts.³¹ Soon, the syndicalist movement would refer directly to Brzozowski's and Żeromski's ideas.

A third factor in the development of a unique form of syndicalism was the specific character of Polish nationalism. Contrary to what it may seem, it had democratic roots, close to the left. The 1880s had seen a rebirth of Polish conspiracy organisations dedicated to fighting for the restoration of an independent Polish state, based on rural classes, democracy, and the co-existence of nations. Some of them were socialist in character, combining national and socialist ideas, but all of them attacked the Polish upper class.

Towards a syndicalist organisation: from Zet to ZZZ

Among these secret organizations was the “Zet” Polish Youth Union³², which organised young people in patriotic work. It set up the National Youth Organisation (OMN), which played a similar role among secondary school students. By the end of the nineteenth century, a broad national democratic movement had been established, comprising political parties and different social organisations on all the partitioned territories and in exile. It combined the romantic idea of independence with grass-roots organizing. Zet was part of it. Its ideology was based on the formula of the three justices: national, political and social.

Unexpectedly, during the 1905-1907 revolution, the right-wing nationalist party leader Roman Dmowski directed this movement against the revolution and towards co-operation with Russia. Military clashes with left-wing organisations followed in central Poland. Dmowski believed that Germany was in fact Poland's main enemy, which was why one should choose to co-operate with Russia. This led to a split within National Democracy. The consistent advocates of Polish independence and opponents of conservatism left Dmowski. Among them were peasants' and workers' parties, as well as the Zet and OMN youth organisations.

³¹ For more about Żeromski and his syndicalist-Sorelian inspirations in English see Edmund I. Zawacki, “The Utopianism of Stefan Żeromski,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* XXI (1943): 101–112.

³² Zet is one of the most mysterious organisations in twentieth-century Poland. On its history, see Przemysław Waingertner, *Ruch zetowy w II RP. Studium myśli politycznej*, (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2006).

During World War One they started to co-operate with the national independence left backing Piłsudski and they came to be a firm element of the broad left and centre alliance supporting this politician.

After World War One Zet played a role in the fight for Polish borders. The secret Patriotic Union and many other organisations were established by Zet. Zet wished to be present in all fields of social life. Ironically, it was—in the early days—a movement with no clear ideology: it stood for a chaotic mixture of nationalist, patriotic, democratic, solidarity and socialist slogans; and from 1912 it endorsed the idea of nationalising key industries. But the binding element of this movement was the fight against right-wing Polish nationalism, which was ultra-Catholic on the one hand and liberal in the economic sense.

Zet tried to reach different social strata, including workers and peasants, in order to integrate them into the Second Polish Republic (founded in 1918) through the idea of social justice. The 1919-26 parliamentary crisis, which saw a lot of corruption and party squabbles, as well as the economic crisis and social injustice, set the stage for an ideology which was both left-wing socially and anti-parliamentary.

The leaders of syndicalism also played an important role in creating this ideology. Kazimierz Zakrzewski was a young historian on a scholarship in Paris. There, he encountered Sorel's ideas and also the practice of the CGT under the leadership of Léon Jouhaux. He returned to Poland as an advocate of syndicalism and as such he published his writings until about 1924. Another key figure was Jerzy Szurig, who was connected with the socialist movement and fought in the Polish volunteers' legion in France during World War One. He also came to be a syndicalist, but primarily from a socialist perspective³³

In 1926 Zet endorsed the coup that Marshal Piłsudski carried out against the right-wing government. The new government had no clear ideology. Piłsudski was no longer a socialist, but he kept his distance from nationalism and conservatism. The Zet activists wanted to set the government in a socially more radical direction, whereas Piłsudski's associates wanted to create workers' organisations affiliated with the government in order to be independent of the PPS. To this end Zet officials registered a parallel organisation called the Union for Republican Development (ZNR)³⁴.

³³ For more on L. Jouhaux, see Bernard Georges and Denis Tintant, *Léon Jouhaux. Cinquante ans de syndicalisme* (Paris: PUF, 1962).

³⁴ For more about the ZNR, see Przemysław Waingertner, "*Naprawa,*" *Z dziejów obozu pomajowego* (Warsaw: Semper, 1999).

At that time syndicalist ideas began to dominate within Zet ZNR workers' groups were established, the periodicals *Syndykalista* (The Syndicalist) and *Solidarność Pracy* (Solidarity of Labour) were published. As a result, in 1928, the General Federation of Labour (GFP) was founded—its name a reference to the CGT. Its program was purely syndicalist.³⁵ The GFP had about 40,000 members and thanks to the government's support it was able to develop without obstacles.³⁶ The syndicalists and the state authorities argued for the unity of all trade unions, which would counter the political divisions between workers. This is why the Union of Trade Unions (ZZZ) was established in 1931, uniting the GFP and smaller non-syndicalist unions. It became one of the biggest trade union federations, with around 170,000 members at its peak. GFP officials held the chief positions in the ZZZ. With time, the ZZZ became ideologically a syndicalist union. The leader of the ZZZ, Jędrzej Moraczewski, who had briefly been Prime Minister in 1918 and was a PPS member for many years, also advocated syndicalist ideas. The ZZZ operated a well-established press, for instance with the nationwide daily *The Workers' Front*.³⁷ Zet's youth organisations united and in 1927 they formed the Polish Democratic Youth Union (ZPMD), which soon became explicitly syndicalist and more radical than the ZZZ.

The ideology of Polish syndicalism

The ideology promoted by Polish theoreticians of syndicalism, whose key representative was Professor K. Zakrzewski, was thus eclectic and original. One can find elements of Sorel's ideas and those of his followers, such as Georges Valois and Brzozowski, as well as elements of Polish nationalism, the syndicalism of the French CGT and Spanish CNT, but also ideas widespread in the German conservative, revolutionary and national-socialist movements at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, Marxism understood as historical and philosophical materialism was rejected.

³⁵ Jerzy Szurig, *Założenia programowe Generalnej Federacji Pracy* (=The programme of General Federation of Labour) (Warsaw: Kadra, 1929).

³⁶ Ruch zawodowy. Streszczenie wykładów Adama Kellera w Szkole Oficerów Policji w Warszawie 1930/1931, (=Trade Union Movement. The Summary of Adam Keller's Lecture in Police Officers' School in Warsaw 1930/1931), Lublin Home Office, Lublin State Archive, vol. 212, ch. 9–12.

³⁷ For more about ZZZ history see Seweryn Ajzner, *Związek Związków Zawodowych 1931–1939* (Warsaw: KiW, 1979); in English, see "The ZZZ," *Rebel Worker* 4/5 (1989).

The ideological attitude was based on a heroic axiology which championed the ideas of individual service and sacrifice for the sake of idea and community. Creative heroism was juxtaposed with a passivity typical of a bourgeois society. One can say that this was an attempt at psychologising socialism: the subjective side of the historical process and the importance of consciousness were emphasized, rather than only objective factors.

Polish syndicalism also featured a strong collectivism. The supremacy of community over the individual was strongly emphasized. This had a universal dimension in the subjugation of a citizen to the national community, as well as a class dimension in the supremacy of class interest over the individual's selfishness.

Polish syndicalists identified the notions of people and nation. They argued that the Polish nation was a proletarian nation and that it consisted largely of lower classes, so that the measure of Poland's strength should be the work of the people, not the affluence of the bourgeoisie and landowners. One can say that starting from national or nationalist principles, they came to syndicalist and socialist conclusions.

The ideological core of Polish syndicalism was the critique of liberalism, which was believed to be the ideology of the bourgeoisie, stressing political liberalism, individualism and capitalism. Polish syndicalists recognised the heritage of the French revolution, but found that in the nineteenth century, liberalism had become a conservative force. In rejecting liberalism, they were referring in the first place to capitalism. In criticising it they used traditional socialist arguments, but also some nationalist elements, such as the critique of transnational—and especially Anglo-American capital and, in the Polish context of Upper Silesia, German capital. Polish syndicalists were also close to the concepts of the so-called proletarian nation, prevalent among the fascist right.

The critique of liberalism also meant a rejection of the parliamentary system. A specific criticism was levelled at political parties, which were said to artificially divide the working class with abstract ideologies created by an alienated party elite, demoralising the proletariat. Syndicalism organized workers on a purely economic base. However Polish syndicalism never took on the anti-intellectual character which was present in French syndicalism. But at the same time, unlike Sorel, the rhetoric of Polish syndicalism was not anti-democratic.

Accused by the socialist movement of taking on a liberal stance and cosmopolitanism, syndicalists devoted a lot of effort to proving them wrong. They rejected the idea of membership of any international organisation.

One can say that they attacked nationalism with socialist arguments, and socialism with nationalist arguments.

Their attitude to anarchism is well illustrated by the words of Zakrzewski: “Proletarian anarchism, which emphasises the necessity of complete and immediate abolition of the state apparatus, is an extreme and utopian variation or, rather, a distortion of the syndicalist ideology.”³⁸

Polish syndicalists were also explicitly anticlerical.³⁹

Syndicalists believed that revolution was the only way to respond to the crisis brought on by nineteenth-century liberalism and capitalism, but they never defined it clearly.⁴⁰ They referred to the 1926 coup as “The May Revolution”.

Up to the mid-1930s Polish syndicalism was original in combining socialist anti-capitalism with anti-liberal elements of fascism, especially in its French version, close to the ideas of Georges Valois. Zakrzewski wrote about two anti-liberal revolts which resulted in an anti-liberal revolution. The first one, in 1917, had been the work of the proletariat. The second one, in 1919, was the war veterans’ revolution, for instance in Italy.⁴¹ Both were defeated. Therefore, in order to overcome a moribund liberalism, these revolutionary forces should be combined: the homogenous working class and uncompromised war heroes were the basis of the revolution. In the Polish context, Piłsudski embodied the idea of an alliance of workers and war veterans. Hence the ambivalent attitudes towards fascism and communism. Until 1930 it was possible to find such opinions; for instance Zakrzewski wrote about the Italian fascist revolution and fascism as a universal form of anti-liberal revolution. However, over time, syndicalists came to regard fascist regimes as reactionary and capitalist, and therefore as betrayals of their own ideas. They condemned communism for its ideological dogmatism and above all for the nature of Polish-Russian relations, though they appreciated the anti-liberal aspects of internal life in the Soviet Union.

The future model of society in syndicalist thought was an attempt at combining the anti-statism inherent in syndicalism with the idea of strong

³⁸ Kazimierz Zakrzewski, “Dwa kierunki,” *Głos Powszechny* May 9, 1937.

³⁹ Henryk Ułaszyn, *Zasięg antyklerykalizmu w Polsce* (Poznań: ZPMD, 1933).

⁴⁰ The lack of clarity of revolutionary self-identification should be no surprise, since there is doubt as to whether the French CGT was indeed revolutionary during its syndicalist episode—see Paul Mazgaj, *The Action Française and Revolutionary Syndicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1979), 9.

⁴¹ Kazimierz Zakrzewski, *Od Lenina do Hitlera* (Warsaw: “Przełom”, 1931), 39–40. In Poland the main veterans’ groups were connected with Piłsudski and fought against right-wing parties.

state authority which the post-1926 governments advocated in Poland. The state was supposed to be strong through the power of the people and their consciousness. Trade unions were regarded as the basis of social organisation, holding local power as well as organising production and distribution. Besides parliament, there would be a social economy chamber elected by the unions and the state, in charge of economic policy. The management of production at state level and in factories would be in the hands of workers. This system was called non-liberal democracy; it carried obvious influences of anarcho-syndicalism as well as corporatism, although the latter was officially what syndicalists fought against. The paradoxes and mixing of syndicalism with elements of conservatism were also obvious in the question of the elites: on the one hand Polish syndicalists remained radical egalitarians, but on the other they believed that in creative work a new elite would be born, mainly a workers' elite. Here, Sorelism and inspirations from Pareto's theories were combined with visions of proletarian purity and a specifically syndicalist, anti-establishment populism. The syndicalists, inspired by Sorelism, perceived the social structure not only as divided into classes, but also into creators and parasites. The latter category was denied a place in the new society.

The syndicalists also paid a lot of attention to peasants. Like Polish socialists, they hesitated between the concepts of supporting petty farmers and attracting petty owners to the labour movement, and the vision of centralising and nationalising the land⁴².

The social constituency of Polish syndicalism

With the help of state authorities, the ZZZ developed quickly into the largest trade union federation. As was the case with the socialist unions, the biggest of its member unions were mainly metalworkers and miners. The state authorities' friendly attitude was what attracted two very different groups of workers to the ZZZ. On the one hand it was a workers' elite—skilled workers with good salaries employed in state-owned factories. On the other hand, the ZZZ attracted the least skilled workers directly threatened with unemployment. The ZZZ's opponents accused this federation of clientelism and of offering employment in return for

⁴² More about Polish Sorelian syndicalist ideas in English see Wojciech Roszkowski, "Syndicalist Theory in Poland between the two World Wars," in Ilaria Zilli, ed., *Fra spazio e tempo. Studi in onore di Luigi De Rosa*, vol. III, Il Novecento (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1995), 527–548.

membership in a pro-government organisation. Be that as it may, at its peak in 1934, the ZZZ had nearly 170,000 members.⁴³

The strongest base of the GFP and ZZZ was in Warsaw, especially in the state companies producing military equipment and tobacco. The second base was Upper Silesia, which was the theatre of Polish-German confrontation. Here, the ZZZ attracted workers who were dissatisfied with the Christian Democrat opposition and therefore competed for support with the socialist unions.⁴⁴

From 1930 onwards, several ZZZ members of parliament belonged to pro-government parties, but they did not belong to the elite most involved in syndicalism.

The ZPMD, the Polish Democratic Youth Union, was one of the biggest students' organisations in Poland. While fighting the nationalist right dominant in universities, it co-operated with other left-wing and centrist organisations. It published several regional periodicals in academic centres.⁴⁵

Like the socialist movement and Zet, the ZZZ created many affiliated organisations. The largest one was the Stefan Żeromski Workers' Institute for Education and Culture (RIOK), which conducted intensive syndicalist propaganda and organised workers' cultural initiatives. The RIOK's cultural and educational work resembled the work carried out by the socialist organisations and the German anarcho-syndicalists of the FAUD.⁴⁶

The ZZZ took on a pro-government stance, fought against the right-wing opposition and competed with the left. But in social and economic matters it was independent, and over the years it became increasingly distant from the government's policy which limited social legislation. The ZZZ also took part in many strikes, especially in Silesia. Over time, its conflict with the government grew deeper.

⁴³ Ludwik Hass, *Organizacje zawodowe w Polsce 1918–1939* (Warsaw: Wyd. CRZZ, 1963); Jan Malański, *Pracownicze związki zawodowe w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1934), 82–88.

⁴⁴ Zbigniew Hojka, *Polski ruch zawodowy w województwie śląskim (1922–1939)* (Katowice: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2006), 184–186, 231, 234–236.

⁴⁵ Program ZPMD. Dla Polski, 1936 rok, in National Library Warsaw, manuscript. 3814; Andrzej Pilch, *Studencki ruch polityczny w Polsce w latach 1932–1939*, (Warsaw-Cracow: PWN, 1972), 32–35, 58–59, 94,

⁴⁶ Adam Światło, *Oświata a polski ruch robotniczy 1976–1939*, (Warsaw: KiW, 1981), 604–623. About FAUD's activity in this field see Hartmuth Rübner, *Freiheit und Brot. Die Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschland. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Anarchosyndikalismus*, (Berlin/Köln: Libertad Verlag, 1994), 169–265.

The ZZZ was subject to triple infiltration. On one side, its policy caused ever greater irritation on the part of the state authorities, which attempted to influence the union through its supporters from outside the union. Moreover, the illegal Communists tried to work within secretly, and finally the anarchists headed by Pilarski were more and more active in the ZZZ and RIOK.⁴⁷

Piłsudski's death in 1935 was followed by an ideological decomposition of the ruling block. The conservative forces which were distant from the left began to prevail. A symbol of its radical attitude and independence was the ZZZ's 4th Congress in 1937. To the astonishment of many, the participants used for the first time official socialist symbols and sang the Red Flag, a PPS song. They also adopted a resolution of solidarity with the Spanish Republic, while the Polish Government had adopted a neutral position. The ZZZ programme had now become explicitly syndicalist; for instance the remnants of class collaborationism were dropped.

ZZZ publications featured reports from Spain. The leading Polish syndicalists praised the CNT, clearly criticising the "ideological" anarchism of the FAI.⁴⁸ They were closer to the position of the so-called *treintistas* and the Syndicalist Party of 1930–36.⁴⁹ As one of the texts stated, "Syndicalism does not reject political movements; it only works for more emphasis to be put on trade unions, as they are more coherent than political parties."⁵⁰ Polish syndicalists advocated the idea of a People's Front, that is to say an agreement of syndicalists, all trade unions, the socialist and peasants' parties against the fascist menace, rejecting the Communists.

The government, which was becoming increasingly conservative, decided to cause a split in the ZZZ and the ZPMD. In 1937, part of the membership left, not so much for ideological reasons as out of fear of losing the privileges associated with government support. As a result of

⁴⁷ Stefan Szwedowski, *Ruch zetowy. Syndykaliści* (=S. Szwedowski, *The Zet Movement. The Syndicalists*), National Library Warsaw, manuscript 15626.

⁴⁸ E.g. Kazimierz Zakrzewski, "Sezon letni," *Front Robotniczy*, June 20, 1937; Henryk Halpern, "Kataloński eksperyment," *Front Robotniczy*, September 6, 1937; Władysław Głuchowski, "Prawda o Hiszpanii," *Front Pracownika Umysłowego* November 3, 1936.

⁴⁹ For more on the "treintistas" see Robert W. Kern, *Red Years/Black Years. A political History of Spanish Anarchism 1911–1937* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1978), 103–130; Walther L. Bernecker, *Anarchismus und Bürgerkrieg. Zur Geschichte der Sozialen Revolution in Spanien 1936–1939* (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe, 1978), 23, 38–41.

⁵⁰ Zygmunt Ziółtek, "Właściwe metody walki robotniczej," *Front Robotniczy* July 5, 1936.

the split the ZZZ shrank to 40,000 members. Its publications were regularly censored by the state. Activists were threatened with prison and faced many repressive administrative measures.⁵¹ The authorities refused to legalise the Syndicalist Youth Association. The ZPMD members who were loyal to syndicalism operated within RIOK; among them was a group of anarchists. With Thomas Pilarski's assistance, the ZZZ established relations with Sweden's SAC, which was supposed to co-ordinate Polish affairs on behalf of the IWMA.⁵²

As a result, before World War Two, the syndicalist movement in Poland had taken on a clearly left-wing character. It was a small but combative trade union and, with the leadership's consent, an anarchist group worked within its structure. Apart from the Sorelian inspiration, their interest in antifascism and syndicalism in the spirit of the *treintistas* played an ever-greater role.

Syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists against Nazism— climax and resolution

The syndicalists connected with the Zet movement were one of the first organisations of the wartime resistance movement. As early as in October 1939 the Polish Syndicalist Union (ZSP) was created by ZZZ activists led by Szerig and Zakrzewski. At the same time, ZSP leaders played an important role in the combatant resistance, and especially in its informational and propagandist work. Between 2,000 and 4,000 people became ZSP members—less than in the three largest underground parties, but more than many other small political parties. The strongest parties operated in Warsaw and in the area of the Central Industrial Zone between Warsaw and Cracow, while the subsidiary Socialist People's Polish Party of Freedom (SLPPW) operated in Lviv. Syndicalists published almost ten newspapers and periodicals, some of an ideological character, as well as creating their own fighting units which carried out numerous resistance activities. In 1942, like most Polish political parties, these units became part of the Home Army (AK) which answered to the Polish Government in London.

⁵¹ Urząd Wojewódzki Kraków. Sprawozdanie sytuacyjne 1937 rok (=Cracow Home Office, Annual Report 1937), Archive of New Records, vol. 1559/10, ch. 17; Relacja Wincentego Balasińskiego (=Memories of Wincenty Balasiński), 28 X 1965, CA KC PZPR, in: Archive of New Records, Relacja 8, ch. 3.

⁵² Précisions du Rapport du Secrétariat de l'AIT, in : Archive of New Records, vol. 455/1, ch. 41. About SAC see George Woodcock, *A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962), 433–438.

The ZSP had a decidedly left-wing vision of social and economic relations. It was combined with an anti-German attitude. This dual characteristic was reflected in such slogans as “national classless society” or “it’s not the bourgeois masters, but ... workers, peasants and intellectuals who will take in hand the sword of King Chrobry”.⁵³ The ZSP remained loyal to the Polish government in exile until the end. However it refused to enter the political structure of the Polish Underground State, composed of representatives of the Peasants’, Socialist, Nationalist and Christian Democratic parties. At the same time it criticized harshly the policies of the authorities prior to 1939. Its enemies were the pro-Russian Communists and the nationalist right. Apart from its anti-Communism, which was widespread in Polish politics at that time, the ZSP also strongly criticized western capital. The ZSP was involved in the creation of alliances of the socialist left, liberal democratic parties of the intelligentsia, and the syndicalists themselves. This was meant to be the third force in Polish politics. The syndicalists were the most anti-Communist faction in this alliance. The leading ZSP officials were murdered by the Nazis.⁵⁴

The syndicalists not connected with the conspiratorial *Zet* and the *ZZZ* anarchists did not become members of the ZSP. They founded the “Freedom” Syndicalist Organisation (SOW) in 1940 (known under this name from 1942). The leading roles were played by anarchists, including Pilarski from 1942.⁵⁵

One can say that the SOW was the synthesis of Polish syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism. This was represented in the quotations in their publications, from Piłsudski, Brzozowski, as well as Bakunin and Malatesta. Unlike the ZSP, the SOW saw the future of Poland in a more international context. For example, they used the term European Union as the vision of a post-war community of nations. Like ZSP, they took part in developing “the third force” in Polish politics. SOW combatant units

⁵³ Outline of SLPPW programme, National Library, Warsaw, manuscript 15628. King Chrobry’s sword, a reference to the Polish king of the tenth and eleventh centuries, was a symbol of Polish nationalism.

⁵⁴ See more about ZSP during the war in Rafał Chwedoruk, “Polscy syndykaliści lat II wojny światowej. Działalność i myśl polityczna,” *Zeszyty Historyczne* vol. 154 (2006): 52–102.

⁵⁵ Pilarski played an important role in the “N” campaign—the Polish underground propaganda addressed to German soldiers.

operated mainly in the environs of the city of Kielce. Generally, this organisation comprised several hundred people.⁵⁶

The Warsaw Uprising of 1944 was the apex of Polish syndicalism. As part of the Home Army, ZSP created the 104th Syndicalist company, a 200-member strong formation which played an important role in the combat. Its soldiers wore black and red bands. In the second part of the uprising, the 104th company combined with groups of SOW soldiers to create the Syndicalist Brigade in September 1944. A black and red flag was hung on the building this unit captured. The Syndicalist Uprising Alliance was its political representation. However the combined ZSP and SOW forces failed to develop a common approach to a potential agreement with the Communists. SOW was ready to accept subjugation to Communist authorities, whereas the ZSP's leader Stefan Szwedowski consistently refused.⁵⁷

In February 1945, the ZSP was officially disbanded. For some time its commanders hoped to continue conspiratorial work against the Polish Communist Government, but in the face of repression and a lack of social support they gave up their concepts. They were trapped, like all of the non-Communist left. They accepted the social reforms introduced by the Communist Party, nationalising industries, dividing the land, and restoring Poland's western territories. But at the same time they saw Communists as Russian agents, and the Polish left including the syndicalists stemmed from anti-Russian traditions. They did not accept the authoritarian tendencies of Communism either.⁵⁸

Anarcho-syndicalism after World War Two

Activists connected with the Zet movement were not allowed to perform any functions in the state after World War Two. Many of them faced arrest. Few of them joined parties supporting the Communists, the Democratic Party (SD), and the PPS (dissolved in 1948). However with

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that a small anarchist organisation existed in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw—see “Supplement B,” Paweł L. Marek, *Na krawędzi życia. Wspomnienia anarchisty 1943–1944* (Cracow: Dąb, 2006), 298.

⁵⁷ For more about syndicalists in the Warsaw Uprising see “Brygada Syndykalistyczna w Powstaniu Warszawskim” (Relacja Dowódcy), (=“The Syndicalist Brigade in the Warsaw Uprising” (Memories of the Commander)), National Library, Warsaw, manuscript 15636.

⁵⁸ Chwedoruk, 2005.

the end of Stalinism in 1956, the authorities did allow syndicalist veterans to organize themselves in an official organisation of veterans.⁵⁹

The fate of anarcho-syndicalists was completely different. Pilarski and Paweł Lew Marek undertook work in the Communist trade unions and in the party.⁶⁰ They believed that in this way they would have some influence on the situation of the working class in Poland. In Łódź, a legal publishing co-operative, operated and dominated by anarchists and syndicalists, published works by Kropotkin. Attempts were made to legalize an anarchist organisation, which obviously ended in a fiasco.⁶¹ In 1953 Pilarski was arrested and anarchists were removed from involvement in public work. In many cases they worked in co-operatives. Pilarski maintained a correspondence with anarchists living in Sweden.

After Szwedowski and Pilarski died in the 1970s, the continuity of syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism in Poland was severed. Syndicalist ideas returned to Poland in a different fashion in the 1980s. The large Solidarity trade union, which was a form of anti-Communist revolt, was accused of anarcho-syndicalism by the authorities. When “Solidarity” was illegal in the 1980s, many opposition groups were created and among them the Polish Syndicalists’ Group, comprising about a dozen members⁶². A punk-rock subculture continued in Poland from the late 1970s, drawing directly on British models. Anarchist slogans were popular, even though there were no references to classical anarchism. In 1981, the illegal Movement for an Alternative Society (RSA) was founded. The anarchism of the 1980s concentrated on cultural issues rather than social and economic ones, such as the fight against censorship.⁶³ It was not until the second half of the 1980s that an interest in strikes and

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ see Okręgowy Komitet Związków Zawodowych Robotników i Pracowników RP w Krakowie do UW w Krakowie, 25 III 1945, Komitet Wojewódzki PPR w Krakowie, (Letter of The Regional Committee of Workers and Office Workers in Cracow to Cracow’s Home Office, 25 III 1945, The Provincial Committee of The Polish Workers Party in Cracow), Cracow State Archive, vol. 29, ch. 22.

⁶¹ Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza Słowo. Plan wydawniczy na drugą połowę 1947 roku (=The Publishers Cooperative’s “Word”. Plan of publishing in the second half of 1947), Ossolineum Library, Wrocław, vol. 15958. After the war an analogous situation took place in Communist Bulgaria—see Dončo Dačkalov, *Anarhizm’’at v B’lgariã i borbata na partiãta protiv nego* (Sophia: Partizdat, 1973), 195–201.

⁶² See *Syndykalista Polski* 1, December 1984. It contains general references to the tradition of pre-World War Two syndicalism.

⁶³ For more about Polish anarchism in the 1980s and 1990, see Radosław Antonów, *Pod czarnym sztandarem. Anarchizm w Polsce po 1980 roku* (Wrocław: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004).

workers' issues reappeared. Anarchism also grew more and more ideological. One could find texts about Durruti in illegal punk publications. In the second half of the 1980s it was explicitly declared that the fight against the system should be waged "on the basis of syndicalism".⁶⁴

That Polish anarchism evolved, symbolically, from the Sex Pistols to Durruti was a phenomenon. In a country that fought against Communist dictatorship, the anarchists were almost the only ones to condemn both this dictatorship and the capitalism of the west. In 1989 and after, they accused the elites of Solidarity of betraying the workers' ideals.⁶⁵

After 1989 anarcho-syndicalism was the most important trend in the anarchist movement. Different communities declared allegiance to it, and there were attempts at founding Free Trade Unions. Anarcho-syndicalism "rejects all that hampers people—states, political parties, reformist trade unions..." stated the contemporary advocates of historical syndicalism.⁶⁶ In the twenty-first century, young anarchists established the Polish Syndicalists Union (ZSP).⁶⁷ In a way, therefore, this was a return to the historical tradition of the radical left in Poland.

In each country anarchism has its varying specific features. In the Polish case the most original aspect was the coexistence of anarchism with Sorelian syndicalism, which had non-socialist roots. The second aspect was Polish anarchists' collaboration with the Polish state through the ZZZ trade union confederation and during WWII through anti-Nazi military and political movements.

⁶⁴ Janusz Waluszko, "Wolna Trybuna," *A Capella* 5, 1987.

⁶⁵ Piotr Rymarczyk, "Dzieje pewnej zdrady," *Rewolta* 2, 1989.

⁶⁶ R. Górski, M. Przyborowski, eds., *ABC anarcho-syndykalizmu* (Kraków-Słupsk-Mielec: Inny Świat, 1998), 3.

⁶⁷ From the end of the 1980s, young anarchists became more interested in the history of Polish anarchism.

CHAPTER NINE

HOW AND WHY THE FRENCH ANARCHISTS RALLIED TO THE CGT-FO (1947–1950)

GUILLAUME DAVRANCHE

On 12–13 April 1948, the Mutualité Hall in Paris saw the founding congress of a new trade union confederation: the *Confédération Générale du Travail-Force Ouvrière* (CGT-FO), which came to be known simply as *Force Ouvrière*, or FO. It was the outcome of the third and last great schism within the CGT. The first had taken place in 1921, when its reformist wing, with Léon Jouhaux, had taken hold of the CGT's leadership, causing a break with the Communists and anarchists who had gone on to set up the *CGT unitaire* (Unitary CGT, or CGTU). Five years later, some of the anarchists, disappointed with the impossible cohabitation with the “Muscovites”, had initiated a rather unsuccessful third confederation, the *CGT syndicaliste révolutionnaire* (Revolutionary Syndicalist CGT or CGTSR). The CGT and CGTU were reunited (for the first time) in April 1936, at the time of the Popular Front.

The second split, which had occurred in 1939, was in fact an exclusion rather than a break—the exclusion of the Communists who had refused to disown the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Four years later, during the Occupation of France, reunification talks had been held in secret at Le Perreux-sur-Marne in the Paris suburbs. By virtue of the Perreux-sur-Marne agreement, the reformists had a majority within the Confederation's bureau, with five secretaries (Bothereau, Neumayer, Saillant, Buisson and Gazier) against three for the Communists (Racamong, Raynaud and Frachon); the ageing Léon Jouhaux became general secretary. These proportions were supposed to reflect the balance of power in 1936.

In fact, however, the war and the Resistance had changed things: the “party of the 75,000 executed” (as the French Communist Party was known because of its role in the Resistance), although a minority within the Confederal Bureau, found itself in a dominant position within the

Confederation as a whole, which in 1945 counted 5 million members and was at the peak of its power.

Stalinist-reformist collusion in “national unity”

The years 1945-47 formed a strange parenthesis in the history of the French workers' movement. The Resistance was followed by “national unity”. The Socialists and Communists, sharing power with the Christian Democrats, had declared that class war was suspended. The French Communist Party (PCF) promoted social peace, issuing slogans such as “Work first, demands second”, and even “Strikes are the weapon of the trusts”.¹ But the workers were hungry. Life was hard in a France desperately in need of reconstruction, and the CGT had to devote all its energies to trying to prevent wildcat strikes and struggles which nevertheless broke out here and there.

It is true that within the Confederation, the reformists, disappointed after losing the majority, came together around the *Amis de Force ouvrière* (Friends of Force Ouvrière), the bulletin edited by Robert Bothereau. Generally, though, the Communist-reformist alliance functioned well until late 1947. Only a few minority movements denounced what they regarded as the murder of syndicalism.

The first crack in the great Confederation appeared in May 1946, when the anarcho-syndicalists seceded. In December, they founded the *Confédération Nationale du Travail* (CNT, or National Labour Confederation—a tribute to their Spanish comrades) which would attract several thousand members.

In the meantime, on 30 July 1946, a strike broke out in the postal sector and was maintained against the will of the union's Communist leadership. These strikers then seceded from the CGT and founded the *Fédération syndicaliste des PTT* (Post and Telecommunications Syndicalist Federation). The series of strikes which similarly broke out between early 1946 and late 1947 resulted in the creation of new autonomous or independent unions (*syndicats autonomes*), notably in the partly nationalised sectors of the SNCF, the Paris metro and various firms in the metalworking industries (Jeumont, Unie, Télémécanique, Arsenal Aéronautique and elsewhere).² These independents called themselves

¹ Pierre Bois, “La grève des usines Renault,” *La Révolution prolétarienne* (May 1947).

² Édouard Dolléans, vol. 3 of *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1953).

Comités d'action syndicaliste (CAS, Syndicalist Action Committees) and set up a coordination between themselves. The creation of the *Syndicat Démocratique Renault* (SDR, Renault Democratic Union) at the company's car factory in Billancourt in the aftermath of the April–May 1947 strike followed a similar pattern. The SDR, however, controlled as it was by a Trotskyist group, remained isolated from the CAS.

Along with the CNT, these CAS were the first to seek to recreate an independent and combative syndicalism. They were profoundly anti-Stalinist, but tended also to be suspicious of the reformists, given that the FO mandarins seemingly preferred to remain the pampered hostages of the Communists in the CGT's Confederal Bureau.

The Cold War leads to a split

And yet, the cooperation between reformists and Communists was abruptly interrupted. The creation of autonomous unions outside the CGT had already made the position of the *Amis de FO* within the Confederation vulnerable. But what drove them to a split was the Marshall Plan.

In September–October 1947, at the summit of Szklarska Poręba in Poland, the Italian and French Communist Parties had been ordered to apply the so-called Zhdanov doctrine (according to which the world was divided into two camps, an imperialist one led by the USA and a democratic one led by the USSR). One week later, the National Confederal Committee of the CGT rejected a motion by Robert Bothereau, which described the American aid offered to France as “useful”, by 832 votes to 101. The following month, the Communists launched a series of strikes against the Marshall Plan—political strikes or “Molotov strikes”, as they were known (from the name of the Soviet Foreign Minister who had threatened France and Britain with ructions if they agreed to the US plan), in other words strikes motivated less by French workers' aspirations than by Moscow's wishes.³

On 18 December 1947, the national conference of the *Amis de FO* decided to break away from the CGT. The leaders, who with the exception of Bothereau were against such a split, found themselves forced to resign from the Confederal Bureau the following day (with the sole exception of Louis Saillant, who stayed on as the Stalinists' “useful fool”). For the revolutionary minorities, this decision did not make the FO mandarins

http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/dolleans_edouard/hist_mouv_ouvrier_3/hist_mouv_ouv_3.html (accessed March 2008)

³ According to Pierre Monatte in *La Révolution prolétarienne*, May 1948.

look any better: those who had had no difficulty cooperating with the Communists when it was a matter of strike-breaking could no longer do so when the issue was whether Moscow's interests should prevail over those of the USA. In any case, the creation of the breakaway FO, openly reformist and pro-US, caused a huge stir in the French trade union movement.

In the context of the Cold War, every political tendency found itself forced to "take sides" between the US and the USSR: the SFIO (the Socialist Party) and the Gaullists supported Washington, while the PCF and the Trotskyists defended Moscow. As for the *Fédération Anarchiste* (FA, Anarchist Federation), which in 1945 had unified the French libertarian movement, it defended the strategy known as the "third front": neither Stalin, nor Truman. For them, the priority was to keep alive a social movement independent from the two rival imperialisms. The CNT, where the FA was the prevalent influence, was pivotal to this strategy, although some FA militants were also members of the CGT or of autonomous unions. Every week, a whole page of the FA's organ, *Le Libertaire*, was given over to the Federation's trade union commission led by Maurice Joyeux (a member of the CNT Metalworkers' Federation, occasionally using the pseudonym Montluc) and Jean Boucher (CNT Book Industry Federation, sometimes writing under the name of Normandy). It continually promoted the CNT.

The CNT turns to the autonomous unions without success

When the *Amis de FO* split and there was talk of a new confederation, the FA immediately grasped just how much of a threat this competition posed for the CNT, which had thus far represented the only revolutionary alternative to the CGT. The following week, in the pages of *Le Libertaire*, the FA's national committee called on its supporters to "abandon BOTH Frachon's pro-Stalin confederation and Jouhaux's reformist confederation, in order to support the action of [...] the CNT", to which "the syndicalists from autonomous organisations of a revolutionary character must be rallied".⁴

This meant that the CNT was turning—albeit a little late—to the autonomous unions. The CNT quickly offered to negotiate with the CAS for these to join the CNT, but the CAS were already in the middle of dealings with FO. Camille Mourguès's *Fédération syndicaliste des PTT* and Laurent's Railwayworkers' CAS soon decided to link up with the

⁴ *Le Libertaire*, December 25, 1947.

Amis de FO and set up a new confederation. But the metalworkers' CAS still hesitated. On 2 January 1948, its leaders (Hervé, Juliot and Racine) met up with the CNT delegates (Jacquelin, Juhel, Snappe and Fontenis). After the discussion, the CAS refused to join under the black and red flag; instead, they proposed to the CNT the joint creation of a revolutionary pole within the confederation which the *Amis de FO* wanted to launch. No agreement was reached.⁵

On March 31, 1948, Maurice Joyeux attended a congress of anti-Stalinist metalworkers in Puteaux (an industrial western suburb of Paris). Around a third of the participants were *Amis de FO* and two thirds were independents. The latter suggested creating a democratic trade union organisation, independent from political parties, governments and the state, in accordance with the principles of the *Charte d'Amiens*, with workers' self-management as their aim. They asked for the organisation not to be named CGT-FO and not to be affiliated to the *Fédération Syndicale Mondiale* (World Federation of Trade Unions or WFTU), where the power squabbles between what they saw as Soviet and US imperialisms were being fought out.⁶ They demanded that the term of office of union representatives be capped at three years.⁷ The *Amis de FO* refused. Disappointed with the CNT and disappointed with the *Amis de FO*, the metal industry branches of the CAS thus remained autonomous.

In the weeks between the FO split (December 1947) and the founding congress of the new trade union confederation (April 1948), *Le Libertaire* ceaselessly warned off young workers drawn to FO, focusing its attacks on Léon Jouhaux. As Paul Lapeyre wrote furiously: "He's an unprincipled has-been who's caused nothing but shit: Jouhaux starts with the same letter as Judas."⁸ But these attacks and Joyeux's increasingly overt praise of the CNT were to no avail.

Several FA trade unionists who had been members of the CGT up to this point decided to take an active though critical role in the creation of the new organisation. This was the case, for instance, of Charles Ridet in Grenoble who, in *Le Libertaire*, stated that

⁵ J. Loncle, "Histoire d'un courant anarcho-sindicaliste français: la CNT de 1945 à 1995" (MA diss., Université de Bourgogne, 2002), 29.

⁶ The *Fédération syndicale mondiale* or World Federation of Trade Unions, set up in late 1944, eventually split in early 1949. The anti-Stalinist trade unions then founded the *Fédération syndicale internationale* (International Trade Union Federation), with the FSM/WFTU remaining under Communist influence.

⁷ E. Dolléans, vol. 3 of *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier*, *op. cit.*

⁸ Paul Bordeaux (pseudonym of Paul Lapeyre), *Le Libertaire*, February 19, 1948.

if the house is habitable, it will shelter all tendencies [...]. We don't want any high priests or out-of-touch bureaucrats in the union. We want a return to a flexible syndicalism—vigorous, in touch with the masses and federalist. This is the only guarantee sought by the revolutionaries.⁹

In the region of Maine-et-Loire, where the FO's *Union Départementale* was led by militants such as Raymond Patoux, close to revolutionary syndicalism, the FA's leader Gabriel Tharreau, who was also the CNT's secretary, thought it necessary to team up the CNT and FO together. In the 1 January 1948 issue of *Le Libertaire*, he explained that negotiations had started in Maine-et-Loire with a view to setting up a new organisation.

Revolutionary minorities in the CGT-FO

When, on April 12–13, 1948 in the Mutualité Hall in Paris, the founding congress of the new trade union confederation took place, there were heated debates as to what its identity should be. Anti-Stalinism was the only common denominator for the few dozen delegates in attendance. As for the rest, the question was open. The majority, consisting of the *Amis de FO*, were undeniably pro-US and reformist. But they were faced with three minorities who would come together to fight for a new orientation: the *Union des cercles d'études syndicalistes* (Union of Syndicalist Study Groups—UCES), the former autonomous unions and the anarchists.

The UCES had been launched by union officers from the Engineers' and Technicians' Federation dissolved by the CGT in March 1945. Strangely enough, this current, which is virtually unknown today, claimed to be dedicated to revolutionary syndicalism. In fact, it was mainly hostile to a brand of reformism with no ideal underpinning it. Fascinated by the American Fordist model, it advocated co-determination (*co-gestion*), adumbrating the future “syndicalism of expertise” (*syndicalisme d'expertise*)¹⁰ of the CFDT thirty years later, always keen to give advice on management to the state and to employers. The UCES was spearheaded by André Lafond, from the Railworkers' Federation, and Raymond Le Bourre, from the *Fédération du Spectacle* (Entertainment Industries Federation). Its bulletin, *L'Action sociale*, was influential among a number

⁹ *Le Libertaire*, January 15, 1948.

¹⁰ “Syndicalism of expertise” or sometimes “syndicalism of experts” refers to a view of the union as a source of advice and expert knowledge, especially on legal matters, and therefore as a resource for workers.

of leaders of autonomous unions and UD secretaries such as Patroux (Maine-et-Loire) and Hervé (Indre-et-Loire).

As for the autonomous unions, they represented a broader and more blue-collar constituency than did the *Amis de FO*, but their strategy for the trade union movement remained quite vague. At the founding congress of the new CGT, their representatives were Camille Mourguès from the PTT, and Laurent of the Railworkers.

Syndicalists who were members of the FA or close to it were also at the congress. These included, for example, Alexandre Hébert, Suzy Chevet and Albert Périer. The ideas they brought to the congress are explored below.

There was also a fourth minority, but it did not take part in the founding congress: the revolutionary syndicalists around *La Révolution prolétarienne*. This historic review was led by the ageing Pierre Monatte, a leading figure of the pre-1914 CGT. Even though it became increasingly pro-US, it pleaded for the new confederation to be independent of any party and ideology. Militants like Roger Hagnauer and Charles Ridet were representative of this current.

During the congress debates, the minorities put forward three types of demands.¹¹

Firstly, the CGT-FO should not be called CGT-FO. *Force-Ouvrière*, they argued, was only the name of a specific tendency, while their goal was to build an independent and pluralist trade union organisation. The name suggested as an alternative to CGT-FO was *Confédération syndicaliste des travailleurs de France* (CSTF, Syndicalist Workers' Confederation of France)¹². The anarchists supported this suggestion.

Secondly, the new organisation should not be affiliated to the FSM. The anarchist Albert Périer, from the Angers Technicians' Union, even suggested joining the anarcho-syndicalist *Association internationale des travailleurs* (AIT, or IWMA, the International Working Men's Association, relaunched in Berlin at the end of 1922), which had "proved its value during the heroic era of syndicalism".¹³

Thirdly, the confederation's Administrative Commission should be elected by the congress, "the direct expression of the shopfloor", as Alexandre Hébert (of the Nantes railworkers) put it, rather than by the National Confederal Committee made up of the secretaries of the

¹¹ *Actes du 1^{er} congrès de la CGT-FO, 12-13 avril 1948 à Paris*. Consulted (March 2008) in the archives of the CGT-FO, 141 avenue du Maine, 75014 Paris.

¹² One of the minority leaders, André Lafond, from the UCES, suggested the name *Confédération syndicaliste du travail*.

¹³ *Actes du 1^{er} congrès de la CGT-FO, 12-13 avril 1948 à Paris, op. cit.*

Departmental Unions and Industrial Federations and, most often, of reformist leaders. The anarchist Suzy Chevet, from the Ministry of Labour's Civil Servants' Union, defended this option.

Along with these three demands, which gained a consensus among the minorities, the anarchists raised a fourth, and were alone in putting it forward: they demanded that the new organisation should remove from its preamble the recognition of "the democratic state as the only form of state in which syndicalism can live free". Alexandre Hébert argued that, in a period of widespread nationalisations, the state tended to replace the employers, and that syndicalists should thus regard it as an enemy, as they did the employers.

The minorities argued their case, but to no avail. The outcome of the votes was unambiguous: 80% approved the name CGT-FO for the new organisation, 82% approved its preamble, 77% approved its statutes and 69% were in favour of joining the WFTU.¹⁴

Going beyond the CNT

The CGT-FO's founding congress thus finished without any hitches in a triumph for the reformist leadership. Comments flew at the *Fédération Anarchiste*. In *Le Libertaire*, Maurice Joyeux's judgment was final: "The revolutionary syndicalist minority was crushed in the confrontation. Those who still hoped—in good faith—to rebuild a renovated CGT can now fully take in how deluded they were."¹⁵ Despite this, however, and for the first time, Joyeux's tone changed. Unusually, he did not conclude his article with a rousing call to rally to the CNT, "the one and only working-class organisation". Indeed, the acronym CNT did not even appear in his article, which finished by stating that:

It is still possible—although harder than it was five months ago—to create the necessary organisation, the indispensable organisation, the revolutionary organisation which is the only way to defeat the Stalinists, and this is why our [i.e. the FA's] trade union commission think that it is vital as soon as possible to bring syndicalists together in a large conference, which will determine the outlines of a syndicalism independent of parties, castes and state—a mature syndicalism.

Maurice Joyeux and Jean Boucher thus sketched out a new departure. The CNT had been going through a difficult phase since the autonomous

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ *Le Libertaire*, April 15, 1948.

postal and railway workers had chosen to rally to the FO rather than to the black and red flag. But in the opinion of Joyeux and a number of comrades, there was still time to make up for this with the still autonomous metalworkers' CAS, by opting for a more flexible strategy—no longer trying to persuade them to simply join the CNT, but working together towards a recomposition which would result in a new organisation, distinct from both the CGT and the CGT-FO. This was the continuation, with a different tactic, of the “Neither Stalin nor Truman” strategy, rejecting both the “Kominform-CGT” and the “Wall Street-CGT”. From then on, the FA’s most influential militants would work on disseminating this position within the CNT.¹⁶

The CNT’s Confederal Bureau, having been won over to this strategy, made contact with the metalworkers’ CAS and the CGT-FO’s revolutionary minority as early as June 1948. A “national conference for trade union unity” was scheduled for the autumn. In August, the CNT called for “action cartels” to be set up in every workplace. The second confederal congress, which met in Toulouse between 24 and 26 September, approved this strategy and called unambiguously for a new “confederation” to be set up, based on class struggle, direct action, anti-capitalism and “the substitution of trade union organisms for state organisms”¹⁷—typical revolutionary syndicalist phraseology. In conclusion, the congress “addresses directly all the autonomous unions and syndicalist minorities who are in agreement with these goals and principles, asking them to join the CNT in working for the creation of this confederation”.¹⁸ This course of action was then successfully defended by Joyeux at the fourth congress of the FA in Lyon three weeks later. The FA then gave up on supporting exclusively the CNT, and now adopted as its position the convergence of all the trade unions “which have remained free of enslavement by the political parties”.¹⁹

This new orientation was convergent with a separate initiative by the FO minorities from the west of France. Indeed, a month after the CGT-FO’s founding congress, which had seen their defeat, they had published a manifesto calling for a “grouping” of “all trade unionists, whatever their

¹⁶ Letter from Paul Lapeyre to Georges Fontenis, August 7, 1948, International Institute of Social History, Georges Fontenis Archive, box n°1 (consulted August 2006). By then, some anarchist leaders were already predicting that a vegetating CNT would soon collapse.

¹⁷ Quoted in Loncle, *op. cit.*, 30.

¹⁸ Quoted in Loncle, *op. cit.*, 30.

¹⁹ Georges Fontenis, *Changer le monde* (Toulouse : Alternative libertaire/Le Coquelicot, 2000), 68.

affiliation”, in order to “defend the interests of the workers outside all political, confessional or state influences”.²⁰

All the conditions for success thus seemed to be present, were it not for this jarring note coming from *La Révolution prolétarienne*, in whose pages the veteran Pierre Monatte publicly regretted that the FA was isolating itself by not supporting FO. Maurice Joyeux angrily replied that the National Conference of Syndicalist Minorities alone

can decide on a CONCERTED, SPECTACULAR and simultaneous withdrawal of all the minorities from all the existing confederations—a withdrawal which, because of its scale, could trigger the “psychological shock” required to “kick-start” a possible new trade union confederation.²¹

The creation of the *Cartel d'unité d'action syndicaliste*

On 19 and 20 November came the moment of truth. The national conference of autonomous unions gathered in the rue Scribe in Paris's 9th *arrondissement*. It was attended by the CAS, the CGT-FO's minority (including Le Bourre) and the *Ecole Emancipée* group (literally “The Emancipated School”—a revolutionary tendency within the *Fédération de l'Education Nationale* or FEN, the National Education Federation). But the CGT's minority also attended, with Boucher (Publishing) and the Trotskyists of the *Unité Syndicale* current with Pierre Lambert. Lastly, the CNT was represented by Edouard Rotot and Maurice Joyeux. However, to everyone's surprise, the FO's Departmental Unions from the west of France were absent, even though they had promised to participate back in June.

After two days of discussions, the conference ended in a semi-failure for the anarchists—a semi-failure compounded by a degree of disillusionment as to their allies. The independents' anti-capitalist phraseology could hardly conceal how confused they were, and the fact that some of their leaders were rather keen on De Gaulle. Such was the case of Clément (of the Métro workers) or Racine (metalworkers), with the latter praising the association of labour and capital.²² Moreover, these

²⁰ *Le Libéraire*, May 28, 1948. The “Angers manifesto” was signed by Alexandre Hébert (secretary for Loire-Atlantique), Hervé (secretary for Indre-et-Loire), Lacueille (secretary for Cher), Patoux (secretary for Maine-et-Loire), Tharreau (secretary of the CNT in Maine-et-Loire) and Périer (secretary of the FO Technical Buildingworkers in Maine-et-Loire).

²¹ *Le Libéraire*, 25 June, 1948.

²² Loncle, *op. cit.*, 30.

militants announced the birth of their own structure: the *Fédération nationale des syndicats autonomes* (FNSA, or National Federation of Autonomous Unions).²³ The only thing left to find out was what to propose to the various organisations gathered there.

Two projects were in competition. The CNT called for the “immediate constitution of the new trade union confederation” independent from the two imperialist blocs, and added rather clumsily that this new confederation should affiliate to the anarcho-sindicalist IWMA.²⁴

The Trotskyists were more shrewd, suggesting a “liaison cartel between the various isolated minorities”. The latter solution, being less constraining, eventually prevailed, under the name of *Cartel d’unité d’action syndicaliste* (CUAS—United Syndicalist Action Cartel). Even if the CUAS’s charter took up all the classic themes of revolutionary syndicalism, it was little consolation for the anarchists considering the independents’ blatant opportunism and what was perceived as double-dealing on the Trotskyists’ part. For Rotot and Joyeux, it was obvious that the latter did not want a new confederation within which the anarcho-sindicalists could play a leading role.²⁵ And then, the absence of the UDS from the western region raised questions. What was the real impact of the Angers manifesto? Did it express a sincere orientation, or was it only a “bomb for internal use”, meant to bear upon the internal fights within the CGT-FO, as suggested by Joyeux in *Le Libertaire* two weeks later?²⁶ Albert Périer, cut to the quick, replied by attacking “Paris, which takes itself for the centre of the world”, but without providing a convincing response.²⁷ A few months later, Boucher implied that “careerism” (“*fauteuillite*”) might have deterred the leaders of the western region FO from joining their CUAS colleagues, for “nothing, and we do mean nothing at all, separates the latter from the former”.²⁸

But for want of anything better, the creation of CUAS was welcomed in *Le Libertaire* as a significant step in the right direction. In many workplaces, cartels were created under various names. They often blended with groupings formed spontaneously by the autonomous unions, the CNT or FO even before the CGT-FO’s founding congress. This was notably the case in the Gironde, as well as in the Loire, the Indre-et-Loire, the Aude

²³ Although now largely forgotten, this organisation still exists today under the name of *Confédération autonome du travail* (Autonomous Labour Confederation).

²⁴ Joyeux, *Le Libertaire*, November 26, 1948.

²⁵ *Bulletin intérieur de la CNT*, November 1948, quoted in Loncle, *op. cit.*, 27.

²⁶ Montluc, “À l’Ouest rien de nouveau,” *Le Libertaire*, January 28, 1948.

²⁷ Périer, “À propos de l’unité syndicale,” *Le Libertaire*, February 25, 1949.

²⁸ *Le Libertaire*, June 3, 1949.

and the Maine-et-Loire. Thus, in the Gironde, the cartel's bureau included three CNT activists, two independents and one FO²⁹; in Maine-et-Loire, the "coordinating committee" set up in March included five FO activists and four from the CNT.³⁰ As early as June, it had turned into a "confederate syndicalist UD" in FO's sphere of influence, bringing together FO sections with the CNT and some independents. Gabriel Tharreau, along with Patoux, was a member of its administrative committee. In Aude, it was the large Spanish CNT battalions that allied with FO. Anarcho-syndicalist miners and reformist public and civil service employees shared the same union offices and set up the *Union des syndicats ouvriers libres de l'Aude* (Aude Union of Free Workers' Unions—USOLA) to compete with the CGT.³¹

In spite of all this, while syndicalist unification was under way at grassroots level, the CUAS's future seemed in jeopardy from its centrifugal tendencies at the level of the national leadership. Three months after the organisation was launched, Pierre Monatte, in *La Révolution prolétarienne*, no longer hid his scepticism regarding the CUAS:

Deep down, the various revolutionary syndicalist currents did not really wish to unite and amalgamate. Each one—the independents, the CNT, FO—remains convinced that they are completely right and that they should be the rallying point.³²

The CNT's leap

Even if the November conference did not yield the expected results, FA militants did not lose hope that the CUAS might eventually turn into a new confederation in which leadership would be assumed by anarcho-syndicalists. But developments in the CNT would gravitate against this. Its numbers were in decline³³, and the small organisation became increasingly

²⁹ Interview with Aimé Capelle, in Jacques Caroux-Destray, *Un couple ouvrier traditionnel, la vieille garde autogestionnaire* (Paris : Antropos, 1974).

³⁰ Manuella Noyer, "L'Union départementale CGT-FO de Maine et Loire de 1948 à 1956" (MA diss., Université d'Angers, 2003).
http://www.pelloutier.net/dossiers/dossiers.php?id_dossier=250 (accessed March 2008).

³¹ G. Troussel, "Libertaires et syndicalistes révolutionnaires dans la CGT-Force Ouvrière (1946-1957)" (MA diss., Université Paris-I, 2007).

³² Pierre Monatte, *La Révolution prolétarienne*, March 1949.

³³ Loncle, *op. cit.*, 27.

inward-looking. In the end, joining a new confederation appeared potentially more damaging than staying out of it.

As if to confirm these fears, on May 1, 1949, the CNT's Maine-et-Loire UD merged into the FO's UD. The reaction was not long in coming. On 29 May, the CNT's National Confederal Committee decided to break free from the CUAS, to the great disgust of some regional unions (Bordeaux and Toulouse, for example) and the Railworkers' Federation. The Confederation now considered that the cartel strategy "put the vitality and unity of our organisation in serious danger".³⁴

The CNT's about-turn completely destroyed the FA's strategy of bringing together all the revolutionary syndicalist minorities. Maurice Joyeux was extremely disappointed. The CUAS could have worked, he wrote a month later, but unfortunately

Right from its inception, it stumbled upon a clannishness which limited its efficiency. It is as if the syndicalists were unable to raise their understanding to the level of the tragic circumstances with which the syndicalist movement is wrestling.³⁵

From then on, Joyeux gradually withdrew from the FA's trade union committee, leaving Boucher to defend the line.

However, even within the CNT, the CCN's decision provoked some impassioned dissidence. Two of the largest Regional Unions, the 6th (Toulouse) and the 8th (Bordeaux), chose to remain in the cartels which they had created, and the Railworkers' Federation chose to affiliate as a federation to the CUAS. *Le Libertaire* allowed them to express their views in its pages. Carré, the secretary for the 8th Region—who threatened to stop paying their membership fees³⁶—thus called on the CNT to put a stop to "the pettiness and internecine quarrels" and reasserted that the CUAS could be "the embryo of a syndicalist renewal".³⁷ Still in *Le Libertaire*, Fernand Robert, one of the Railworkers' secretaries, attacked the "sectarianism" of his anarcho-syndicalist comrades, which he claimed was inflicting "more damage on syndicalism than all the reformists' slapstick"³⁸, as "the current state of syndicalism does not allow for an all-or-nothing policy."³⁹ As a result of these provocative attacks, Robert

³⁴ *Circulaire confédérale* 11, June 1949. Quoted in Loncle, *op. cit.*, 27.

³⁵ *Le Libertaire*, June 24, 1949.

³⁶ Loncle, *op. cit.*, 28.

³⁷ Carré, "La dernière chance du syndicalisme," *Le Libertaire*, July 1, 1949.

³⁸ *Le Libertaire*, July 8, 1949.

³⁹ *Le Libertaire*, August 19, 1949.

would become the focus of accusations of reformism and treachery within the CNT, an organisation where the atmosphere was becoming unbearable.

The Railworkers' Federation, castigated as the CNT's lame duck, fiercely upheld its strategy, confirmed and developed at its third congress, October 8–9, 1949. The account given by Normandy in *Le Libertaire* explained in extremely careful language that from then on, the Railworkers' Federation would give more space to immediate demands, "in which the revolutionary syndicalist spirit can be felt everywhere", that it had decided to make contacts with the other railworkers' federations ("as recommended by the IWMA statutes, in fact"), that it had confirmed its subscription to the CUAS and that it had decided to put forward candidates in the next elections of staff delegates ("which *ipso facto* entails its representativity").⁴⁰

Due to the acuity of the crisis undergone by the CNT, an exceptional confederal congress was called for October 30 and November 1, 1949. The CCN's decision to split from the CUAS was confirmed, and dissidents were ordered to leave the cartels. The 8th Region conceded, but the Railworkers' Federation persisted.

The second conference of the CUAS: another failure

But now the second conference of the CUAS, scheduled to take place on November 12–13, 1949, was drawing near. The FA saw it as a last opportunity to clarify an increasingly confused situation among the trade union minorities. A week before, Jean Boucher, who was now one of the leaders of the Book Workers' Autonomous Unions (a splinter group from the CGT) analysed what was at stake at the conference for *Le Libertaire*. According to him, many militant workers were leaving the CGT in disgust, some of them reluctantly going over to FO, but most of them disappearing without a trace. However, the CUAS "could not act as the rallying point for these comrades [...] because it was a liaison committee between various organisations rather than a confederation in its own right." The crucial question which would have to be answered was therefore: "Confederation, or no confederation?"⁴¹

A week later, more than 150 people attended the CUAS's national conference. The FNSA was represented, along with the (Trotskyist) *Unité syndicale* current, the *CNT-Rail* federation, the Chemicals industry CGT minority, the FO-PTT minority, the minority CGT Bookworkers, the

⁴⁰ *Le Libertaire*, October 14, 1949.

⁴¹ *Le Libertaire*, November 4, 1949.

autonomous Bookworkers Federation, the autonomous Metalworkers from Tours, the UD-FO from Maine-et-Loire, the *Syndicat national des instituteurs du Rhône* (the Rhône region of the National Union of Primary School Teachers, part of the *École émancipée* tendency) and the *Syndicat démocratique Renault*.

Samson and Toublet had been delegated by the CNT to “denounce the deception which the new confederation in gestation would most certainly be if it ever came into being”.⁴² In the hall, they were unpleasantly surprised when they came across *CNT-Rail* delegates.

Albert Périer, representing the UD-FO of Maine-et-Loire, pursued the idea that the revolutionary minorities could complete their unification within FO, “where we can work things through by talking to each other”.⁴³

In any case, the project of a new confederation was rejected again. The prerequisite for it was a “united front of the real trade union forces”, “from the base up”. And the conclusion – an expert mixture of Trotskyist and libertarian terminologies – declared that “only such a united front would be capable – through direct action – of preparing a true unification of workers within a democratic confederation independent of parties, governments and states”, a confederation whose goal would be “the abolition of wage labour and private or public sector employers”. The project of a confederation was thus postponed indefinitely. This was another defeat for the FA, although they did not let it show. *Le Libertaire* presented the appointment of a Provisional National Committee of Syndicalist Unification as “another step forward” towards the reconstruction of syndicalism.⁴⁴ But a weary CUAS would make no further progress. There would be no “new confederation” and the Cartel would eventually break up, succumbing to its centrifugal tendencies.

As for the CNT, it was faced with generalised crisis, and during the year 1950 it sank into a spiral of sectarian self-destruction. The Railworkers’ secretariat was excluded by the CCN on January 29, 1950 for having continued its participation in the CUAS. The Federation fell apart in the aftermath of this exclusion. Elsewhere, the order to withdraw from the cartels was met with complete incomprehension on the part of grassroots activists. In Bordeaux, Toulouse and Saint-Etienne, the result was a collapse of the membership figures, as activists chose to join FO or the independents.⁴⁵ The crisis also led to a noticeable cooling of relations between the FA and the CNT, which had hitherto been very close. Late in

⁴² *Bulletin intérieur de la CNT* 12, November–December 1949.

⁴³ *Le Libertaire*, November 18, 1949.

⁴⁴ *Le Libertaire*, November 18, 1949.

⁴⁵ Interview with Aimé Capelle, *op. cit.*

November 1949, Jean Boucher stopped editing *Le Libertaire*'s trade union page, from which Joyeux had gradually withdrawn.⁴⁶ He was replaced by Fernand Robert, who had just broken from the CNT. Early in 1950, *Le Libertaire* stopped publishing the list of CNT trade unions' addresses which had been a fixture since 1947.

The debacle of this strategy of creating a new confederation led to recriminations on all sides, and *Le Libertaire*'s trade union page played host to a brief cacophony, forcing Maurice Joyeux to issue a "necessary clarification": "This trade union page belongs neither to the FO minority, nor to the Provisional National Committee of Syndicalist Unification, nor to the CNT"—it belonged to the FA's Trade Union Commission, which would strictly reflect the decisions of FA congresses.⁴⁷

Nonetheless, the stagnation of the CUAS and the CNT's collapse was profoundly disheartening for a number of FA syndicalists, such as Maurice Joyeux. A few years later, he was to be found, along with Fernand Robert and Jean Boucher, in the CGT-FO, which, by force of circumstances, had become the only viable rallying point.

But the upshot was that with neither the CUAS nor the CNT, the FA's "third front" strategy was now deprived of a mass base. French anarchism had become irretrievably caught up in the trap of the Cold War.

⁴⁶ Boucher's final article, under the pen name Normandy, appeared on November 18, 1949.

⁴⁷ *Le Libertaire*, December 9, 1949.

PART IV

INTERPRETATIONS

CHAPTER TEN

ANALYSING REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY*

BERT ALTENA

Introduction

In the last twenty years revolutionary syndicalism has received much attention again. However, not all new investigations are entirely satisfactory. Some remain quite descriptive, while others offer theories explaining the appearance and disappearance of revolutionary syndicalism, but leave the subject of analysis—the syndicalist him- or herself—remarkably absent. This may be caused by a lack of data concerning the beliefs of the syndicalist rank and file, a problem that Hartmut Rübner and Howard Kimeldorf have referred to. According to Kimeldorf this may also explain “why inference, rather than hard evidence, governs so many studies”.¹ Some of the newer studies basically display an (often politically

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¹ Hartmut Rübner, *Freiheit und Brot. Die Freie Arbeiter-Union Deutschlands. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des Anarchosyndikalismus* (Köln: Libertad, 1994), 258;

inspired) attitude towards revolutionary syndicalism, familiar from older studies. This paper focuses on three other problematic aspects of these more recent studies. Firstly, I will discuss the relevance of ideology, a more or less neglected aspect of revolutionary syndicalism in these studies. Secondly, I will debate their emphasis on action and on the consequence of this: revolutionary syndicalism as just a trade-union movement like any other. Thirdly, I will draw attention to the quality of the statistical reasoning behind the most important analyses. A certain emphasis is placed on the Dutch revolutionary syndicalist movement, with which I am most familiar.

Insofar as the older studies tried to go beyond the old genre in labour history of *faits et gestes*, they manifested a remarkable obsession with explaining revolutionary syndicalism. They apparently relied on a paradigm that a group of workers, inevitably rising against capitalism, will develop a movement which naturally will become socialist, if not social-democratic. Thus, the emergence of some kind of social-democratic movement was considered the normal course of events in the labour movement. Usually it was seen as a higher—if not the highest—stage which a labour movement could reach. According to this paradigm, what was abnormal was every sort of labour movement which was not social-democratic: company unions, Christian unions, revolutionary syndicalism, no labour movement at all. Of these movements, particularly revolutionary syndicalism needed an explanation. After all, being part of the socialist movement, taken in a broad sense, these revolutionary syndicalists should have been social democrats. Often one reads a vague echo of Lenin's verdicts on anarchism: "Anarchism is bourgeois individualism in another form." "Anarchism is a product of despair. It is the mentality of the intellectual who is off track or of the *lumpenproletarian*, but not of the proletariat."² A worker, left on their own, in their consciousness will never exceed the boundaries of the workplace. They will never get beyond

Howard Kimeldorf, *Battling for American labor. Wobblies, craft workers, and the making of the union movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 8, 153; Kimeldorf, "In Search of Syndicalism," *Labor Studies Journal* 27:2 (2002): 39–50, 44. Kimeldorf, however falls into the same trap (*Battling*, 22–23) when explaining why Philadelphia's longshoremen were drawn towards the industrial syndicalism and direct action of the Wobblies. See *Battling*, 88, for the case of New York's culinary workers.

² W.I. Lenin, "Anarchismus und Sozialismus," in *Werke*, Band V (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1976), 334–7, 334–5. See of course also, W.I. Lenin, *Was Tun?*, 357–551, esp. 385–6. All quotes from foreign languages are translated by the author, unless otherwise stated.

“economic consciousness” unless they are taught by socialists of bourgeois origins. Anarchist workers, therefore, are the embodiment of “false consciousness”. A revolutionary syndicalist workers’ movement is the opposite of the effective social-democratic movement adapted to the capitalist circumstances of the time. This seems to be the essence of Eric Hobsbawm’s contention that revolutionary syndicalism is a “quasi-revolutionary union strategy and practice”.³

The validity of this often implicit social-democratic or communist paradigm is questionable, though. The degree of union membership differed per country, but in many countries only a minority of the workers was organised in a trade union. This is even more the case when we look at political parties. From this perspective, every organisation of workers seems abnormal and in need of being explained. This paper, therefore, starts from the point of view that revolutionary syndicalism should be considered as normal or abnormal as every other type of labour movement. It might be that social-democracy, with its prominent role for non-working-class socialists, is a much stranger phenomenon than revolutionary syndicalism.⁴

In explaining revolutionary syndicalism, F.F. Ridley, in his study of French syndicalism,⁵ referred to the “Latin temperament” of the French workers. Nowadays hardly anybody invokes elements of a national character anymore. Newer theories which try to explain revolutionary syndicalism are often inspired by some sort of modernisation theory.⁶

³ E.J. Hobsbawm, “I enhver arbejder er der en syndikalist, der forsoeger at kaempe sig ud,” in *Årbog for arbejderbevægelsens historie*, ed. Birte Broch *et al.* (Copenhagen Selskabet til Forskning i Arbejderbevægelsens Historie, 1979), 207–215, 207. See also E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (London: Sphere Books 1991), 134: “Between 1905 and 1914 the typical revolutionary in the west was likely to be some kind of revolutionary syndicalist who, *paradoxically*, rejected Marxism as the ideology of parties which used it as an excuse for not trying to make revolution” [My emphasis]. As we will see, Marxism was not always rejected by revolutionary syndicalists and when it was, it was often for other reasons.

⁴ In this paper the words “revolutionary syndicalism” and “syndicalism” are used interchangeably.

⁵ F.F. Ridley, *Revolutionary syndicalism in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 17–18. Stress on the “Latin” character of syndicalism also in Wilfried Röhrich, *Revolutionärer Syndikalismus. Ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), 46.

⁶ An interesting critique of modernisation theory in labour movement research is Martin Henkel, *Zunftmisbräuche. “Arbeiterbewegung” im Merkantilismus* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1989).

According to this theory, revolutionary syndicalism is fundamentally a short-sighted or irrational form of social protest, which stumbles behind the forward march of history. Usually, historians and sociologists look at the difficulties which certain categories of workers faced when confronted with a changing mode of production.⁷ From the seventies onwards, these historians have concentrated on a limited group of occupations: construction workers, shoemakers and some other categories. Other historians, for instance Melvyn Dubofsky or Erhard Lucas, have highlighted the consequences of migration. They see in the revolutionary syndicalists “uprooted workers” who, separated from their traditional environment, have become undisciplined and easy to radicalise.⁸ In the light of newer research on anarchism, syndicalism and migration, this thesis seems untenable. Bonds with the place of origin usually remained strong, migrants tended to settle in places where they could find compatriots and if they were already syndicalists or anarchists, they just extended their old networks.⁹ A completely different group of researchers

⁷ Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, “The rise and fall of revolutionary syndicalism,” in *Revolutionary syndicalism. An international perspective*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990) [henceforth: Van der Linden and Thorpe, “Rise”], 1–25. V.V. Dam’e, “Istoricheskie sudby anarkho-syndikalizma v Evrope,” *Novaya i noveshaya istoriya* (2005), 21–37, 21.

⁸ Melvyn Dubofsky, *We shall be all. A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969); Erhard Lucas, *Zwei Formen von Radikalismus in der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (Frankfurt/M.: Roter Stern, 1976). For an appraisal of Dubofsky’s book, “Symposium on Melvyn Dubofsky’s *We Shall Be All*,” *Labor History* 40 (1999), 345–70.

⁹ The classic account of the bonds between migrants and their place of origin is of course Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). See also the fascinating article by Davide Turcato, “Italian anarchism as a transnational movement, 1885-1915,” *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007): 407–444. A very penetrating analysis of uprootedness as a result of migration can be found in Jacy Alves de Seixas, *Mémoire et oubli, Anarchisme et syndicalisme révolutionnaire au Brésil: mythe et histoire* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1992), 7–13. In her opinion, migration did not lead to radicalisation, but rather to a painful process full of nostalgia of redefining oneself as a syndicalist in a new world. See also Eric Arthur Gordon, “Anarchism in Brazil: theory and practice, 1890-1920” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1978), 19, who argues that most Brazilian immigrants became syndicalist militants after having worked in Brazil for at least ten years and because of their experiences there. On this matter see also the recent dissertation of Kenyon Zimmer, “The

look at political circumstances. Their explanations range from the failure of socialist parties¹⁰ and socialist trade unions¹¹ to political repression.

As yet the most developed theory has been formulated by Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe. Not only do they deal with the causes of revolutionary syndicalism, but they have analysed the causes of its disappearance as well.¹² To a large extent their analysis of the rise of revolutionary syndicalism centres on work and work relations. Basically, they explain revolutionary syndicalism as the offspring of the second Industrial Revolution, which transformed labour processes and labour relations, made general strikes possible and workers radical. They observe an upsurge in workers' militancy during the decades leading up to the First World War, which improved the climate for revolutionary syndicalism. According to Van der Linden and Thorpe, only in times of revolutionary mood could syndicalism become dominant, otherwise it remained a minority in the trade-union movement. Interestingly enough, they also state that syndicalism first developed in France, especially in busy Paris, neither of which is known for their leading role in the second Industrial Revolution.

These are very general processes, and revolutionary syndicalism clearly did not appear in every place where the second Industrial Revolution manifested itself. Besides, this revolution often created completely new

whole world is our country': immigration and anarchism in the United States, 1885–1946" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2010), e.g. 15–25.

¹⁰ This explanation comes from Hubert Lagardelle and has been taken up by several authors: for France by Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880–1914)* (Paris: Société Universitaire d'Éditions et de Librairie, 1951); for Spain by George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); for Australia by Verity Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism. The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and "Antipodean peculiarities: comparing the Australian IWW with the American," *Labor History* 40:3 (1999): 371–93.

¹¹ Bob Holton, *British syndicalism, 1900–1915* (London: Pluto Press, 1975); Dirk H. Müller, *Gewerkschaftliche Versammlungsdemokratie und Arbeiterdelegierte vor 1918. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Lokalismus, des Syndikalismus und der entstehenden Rätebewegung* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1985).

¹² Van der Linden and Thorpe, "Rise"; Marcel van der Linden, "Vorläufiges zur vergleichenden Sozialgeschichte des Syndikalismus," in *Anarchismus in Kunst und Politik. Zum 85. Geburtstag von Arthur Lehning*, ed. Heribert Baumann et al. (Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 1985), 45–64; Marcel van der Linden, "Second thoughts on revolutionary syndicalism," *Labor History Review* 63 (1998): 182–197.

industries with completely new types of products but without much tradition. To nevertheless explain the strength of syndicalist movements, Van der Linden and Thorpe point to so-called “radiation effects”: Paris became predominantly syndicalist because the workers in the small enterprises there were syndicalist and dominated the Parisian workforce. By contrast, the workers in northern France joined more reformist unions because reformists (although mostly Guesdist!) dominated the scene there. Resembling a tautology, this thesis of “radiation effects” does not do much to help us understand why syndicalism dominated Paris. Other causes making for regional and local differences are sought in the behaviour of employers.

For the sake of my argument, I will start with a reconsideration of the relation between revolutionary syndicalism and anarchism. This will lead to a more adequate, if somewhat elusive definition of revolutionary syndicalism.

Syndicalism and Anarchism

Revolutionary syndicalism presented itself to a world audience for the first time in August 1907 in Amsterdam at an international anarchist congress. The year before, at its national congress, the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) had formulated the famous *Charte d’Amiens*, a fundamental declaration of revolutionary syndicalist principles. In Amsterdam, Amédée Dunois, who over a period of fifteen months had changed from an ardent opponent to a militant supporter,¹³ defended revolutionary syndicalism as a higher stage of anarchism. He argued that syndicalism and antimilitarism elevated anarchism from the level of pure theory to that of practice. Through revolutionary syndicalism, anarchism would become a concrete programme for social change: “We see in it [syndicalism] the most perfect theoretical expression of the different proletarian tendencies.”¹⁴

The young Pierre Monatte supported Dunois. According to him, revolutionary syndicalism implied political neutrality for trade unions. Every craft in every town should be organised in just one union. The means to emancipate the working class could be limited to two words: *action directe*. Of all socialist movements, revolutionary syndicalism was

¹³ Maitron, *Histoire*, 300–301.

¹⁴ [S.n.] *Congrès anarchiste tenu à Amsterdam. Août 1907. Compte-rendu analytique des séances et résumé des rapports sur l’état du mouvement dans le monde entier* (Paris: Delesalle, 1908) [Henceforth: Congrès Amsterdam], 36–7.

the most faithful heir to the First International, precisely because of its adherence to *direct action*. Had not this International stipulated that the emancipation of the working class should be the work of the workers themselves? Moreover, as Christiaan Cornelissen, a Dutch syndicalist living in Paris, would later argue, had not its libertarian wing, the *Fédération Jurassienne*, coined the term “*action directe*” as the opposite of “*action parlementaire*”?¹⁵ Through revolutionary syndicalism, Monatte thought, the labour movement had at last stopped being a movement of talk, limiting itself to books and debates, to theory and negative criticism. It had become a positive power that would change the world:

Quite unlike socialism and anarchism, which have preceded it, revolutionary syndicalism speaks less through its theories than through its actions and you should find it in what it does rather than in books.¹⁶

From the context of this statement it is clear that this idea of a new type of labour movement does not imply that revolutionary syndicalism should be analysed as if it were only about action and not about ideas and indeed ideals. Monatte’s remarks show traces of a passion for action which was typical of a new generation of anarchists, influenced by Nietzsche and Bergson. At the congress, Christiaan Cornelissen added to the words of Monatte, that revolutionary syndicalism and direct action should be revolutionary in intent: “They must never stop trying to transform the present society into a communist and libertarian one.”¹⁷ Cornelissen communicated ideas he had advocated since 1888 when he had joined the socialist movement. During the nineties, these ideas had positioned him between the pure anarchists and the Marxist social-democrats (Cornelissen considered himself a Marxist too). At the Amsterdam congress he had placed himself between a narrow economic trade-unionism and pure, or more individualistic, anarchism.¹⁸

¹⁵ Christiaan Cornelissen, “Internationale brieven,” Tweede reeks XXV, *Het Volksdagblad*, January 4, 1908.

¹⁶ Congrès Amsterdam, 62 and 67–68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁸ Cornelissen’s ideas can be found in Christian Cornélissen, *En marche vers la société nouvelle. Principes. Tendances. Tactique de la lutte de classes* (Paris: Stock 1900); “Directe actie!” “Zelf doen!” (Amersfoort: Wink, 1904). The development of Cornelissen’s revolutionary syndicalism has been traced in *Tussen anarchisme en sociaal/democratie. “Het Revolutionaire Kommunisme” van Christiaan Cornelissen (1864-1943)*, ed. Bert Altena and Homme Wedman (Bergen: Anarchistische Uitgaven, 1985). See also Bert Altena and Homme Wedman, “Sociaal-democratie, ouderwetse vakbonden en nieuw anarchisme: de

Cornelissen's position becomes clear from Errico Malatesta's remarks. The Italian anarchist thought that revolutionary syndicalism could endanger pure anarchism: the trade unions had to be politically neutral, otherwise Christian and social-democratic militants would propagate their own trade unions. This would divide the working class. Besides, the labour movement was only one of the means to establish a much wider goal, anarchist society, and that goal included people other than workers:

The anarchist revolution we want is much bigger than the interests of only one class: it offers complete liberation to a humanity which is now enslaved and does so in a way which is at once economic, political and moral. Therefore, we have to be cautious regarding every means which is unilateral and simplistic.

Malatesta found simplicity in the revolutionary syndicalist idea of the general strike as sufficient to bring about a new society. According to him that goal could only be reached by means of an armed insurrection.¹⁹

The French historian Jean Maitron has seen in this discussion the separation of the anarchist and the revolutionary syndicalist movements, but he dates this separation too early even for France.²⁰ It is true that from 1912 onwards the French CGT started to develop a less broad interpretation of revolutionary syndicalism, narrowing down the concept to pure trade-unionism. Even then, however, the CGT successfully boycotted a proposed law on pensions in a classical antiparliamentarian way.²¹ Moreover, at the same time, a similar process of narrowing the

Internationale Brieven van Christiaan Cornelissen," *Kritiek, Jaarboek voor socialistische discussie en analyse 2009* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2010 forthcoming).

¹⁹ Congrès Amsterdam, 80–85. For a slightly different perspective on the position of Malatesta and an interesting appraisal of the place of syndicalism within the broad anarchist movement: Davide Turcato, "European anarchism in the 1890s: why labor matters in categorizing anarchism," *Working USA: the journal of labor and society* 12 (2009): 451–466.

²⁰ Maitron, *Histoire*, 305.

²¹ Irène Bourquin, «*Vie Ouvrière*» und Sozialpolitik: Die Einführung der «*Retraites ouvrières*» in Frankreich um 1910. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sozialversicherung (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1977); Karin Schniedewind, "Life-long work or well-deserved leisure in old age? Conceptions of old age within the French and German labour movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," *International Review of Social History* 42 (1997): 397–419; Bert Altena, "The State—revolutionary syndicalism—mediators from below," in *Mediators between State and Society*, ed. Nico Randerad (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), 131–151.

objectives of the movement was halted in the Dutch syndicalist movement, the *Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat* (NAS). How broadly the syndicalist movement in the world still defined itself is apparent from the agenda and proposals for the international syndicalist congress held in London from September 27 to October 2, 1913. This agenda included as Point 3 “Anti-Militarism”, and as Points 8 and 9 respectively “International language” and “Religions and morals of the proletariat”. For this last point, the *Polska Groupa Syndykalisci Rewolucyjne* from Krakow had sent in a document, which in the best tradition of social Darwinism tried to connect revolutionary syndicalism with “the natural evolution of humanity”.²²

Each of the various national revolutionary syndicalist movements shows a peculiar mix of different traditions and influences, but at least until the 1930s revolutionary syndicalism can best be understood as part of the broad anarchist movement.²³ Of course, there are scholars who disagree. Peter Schöttler does not consider that the apolitical stance of the French *Bourses du Travail* derived from anarchist influences.²⁴ Gerald Friedman argues that low contribution fees and small strike funds are only proof of the ideas of the syndicalist leaders.²⁵ Marcel van der Linden, maybe inspired by Ridley, prefers a focus on action to one on ideology: “What counts is what the movement does in practice, and not how it justifies what it does”.²⁶ Such an *a priori* assumption ignores the

²² Wayne Westergard-Thorpe, “The provisional agenda of the international syndicalist congress, London 1913,” *International Review of Social History* 26 (1981): 92–104. See also Thorpe, “Towards a Syndicalist International: the 1913 London Congress,” *International Review of Social History* 23 (1978): 33–78, and Thorpe, *The Workers Themselves. Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913–1923* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 66–87. Christiaan Cornelissen also would continue to write about morals and ethics from a revolutionary syndicalist point of view: Christian Cornelissen, *Les générations nouvelles. Essai d'une éthique moderne* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1935).

²³ Michael Schmidt and Lucien Van der Walt disagree on this point. To them the syndicalist movement is equivalent with what they call the “broad anarchist tradition”, but in their use this phrase refers to an anarchist movement without any individualist anarchists. See Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, *Black Flame. The revolutionary class politics of anarchism and syndicalism*, vol.I: *Counter-Power* (Oakland CA: AK Press, 2009), 8–22.

²⁴ Peter Schöttler, “Politique sociale ou lutte de classes: notes sur le syndicalisme “apolitique” des Bourses du Travail,” *Le Mouvement Social* 116 (1981): 3–21, 16.

²⁵ Gerald Friedman, “Strike success and union ideology: the United States and France, 1880–1914,” *The Journal of Economic History* XLVIII (1988): 1–26, 10. Kimeldorf, *Battling* 129, also separates the rank and file from the “ideologues”.

²⁶ Van der Linden, “Second thoughts,” 183; Ridley, *Revolutionary syndicalism*, 18.

ideological and idealistic aspects of revolutionary syndicalism, which can inspire rather than justify. It seems to be only suited to a quantitative analysis of labour movements, answering questions such as how many strikes occurred, how long they lasted, and how many strikers participated. For this kind of analysis, the thoughts which guide activities are always a nuisance.

Revolutionary syndicalism as a distinct variant of anarchism and a source of inspiration for the syndicalist worker gets lost in this approach. Uprooted because of migration or short-lived labour contracts, the syndicalist worker seems driven by economic modernisation.²⁷ Here, the politically-inspired negative interpretation of revolutionary syndicalism mentioned in the introduction returns in a more sophisticated form. The syndicalist worker appears as part of a herd, primarily driven by primitive emotions, not rationality, or by instinctive reasoning.²⁸ It is significant that in these analyses, all kinds of things are ascribed to syndicalist workers, without actually inquiring about what was going on in their minds. The individual syndicalists whom one can meet in newspapers and archives seldom appear in these studies. Leaving aside these occasionally very rich sources, it is not too difficult to imagine that individual syndicalist workers would have had to defend and develop their convictions at home, on the street, in cafés and on the shop floor. Why shouldn't they have understood syndicalist newspapers? We should also allow for the local and collective build-up of experiences in the class struggle, a struggle usually broader than just the world of work.

This aspect gets lost when revolutionary syndicalists are portrayed as people who only work and react to the world of work. Often they do not seem to have had broader societal or personal concerns at all. For example, religion remains a private matter, just as social-democracy has always preached.²⁹ Richard Evans, in a rarely-used booklet, has shown, however, the wide range of topics workers used to talk about when they met each

²⁷ Ridley, *Revolutionary syndicalism*, 16: "Property, independence, craftsmanship were their ideals. They remained strongly individualistic in outlook and in that sense *petit-bourgeois*. They were not merely concerned with the problem of wage exploitation, as was the industrial proletariat, but with problems of economic freedom and social equality."

²⁸ This seems to be the syndicalist worker we find in Kimeldorf's *Battling*.

²⁹ Such narrow-minded workers appear also in the otherwise impressive article by Klaus Weinbauer, "Labour market, work mentality and syndicalism: dock labour in the United States and Hamburg, 1900–1950s," *International Review of Social History* 42 (1997): 219–253.

other in the pub.³⁰ When ordinary revolutionary syndicalists do take the floor in analyses, they demonstrate that they were capable of defending their convictions against either social democracy or individualistic anarchism. In their clubs, such questions were regularly discussed. In 1907, the minutes of the *Bourse du Travail* of Le Havre reported that “the disputes between Monatte and Malatesta [in Amsterdam] were hotly debated.”³¹

The famous historian of anarchism Max Nettlau has written “that labour, which has become free from artificial obstacles (state, politics) and which does not pay any tribute anymore to a parasite (capital), will show the natural tendency to organise itself freely and efficiently and in a mutual and brotherly way as far as work forces it to. This is the goal of revolutionary syndicalism and at the same time it is anarchism, because it is natural, the situation which intelligent people automatically choose after all obstacles have fallen away.”³² These words are a little categorical, but I agree with Nettlau that revolutionary syndicalism is a much more natural and logical movement than has often been thought. As Maitron has argued, revolutionary syndicalism, moreover, was intimately connected with the life of the syndicalists as a whole.³³ The cultural activities of the revolutionary syndicalists would be incomprehensible if we were not

³⁰ *Kneipengespräche im Kaiserreich. Stimmungsberichte der Hamburger Politischen Polizei, 1892–1914*, ed. Richard Evans (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989).

³¹ “Les débats Monatte-Malatesta faisaient rage”: [Patrice Rannou *et al.*], *Histoire méconnue et oubliée du syndicalisme Havrais, 1907–1939*, Volume 1 (Le Havre: Éditions du Libéraire, 1996), 13. For similar discussions within the German FAUD (*Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands*) see Dieter Nelles, “Zur Soziologie und Geschichte des Anarcho-Syndikalismus im rheinisch-bergischen Raum unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Wuppertals von 1918–1945” (Diplomarbeit, University of Wuppertal, 1989), 124–134.

³² Max Nettlau, “Fernand Pelloutiers Platz in der Entwicklung des Syndikalismus,” *Die Internationale. Zeitschrift für die revolutionäre Arbeiterbewegung, Gesellschaftskritik und sozialistische Neuaufbau* 1:5 (1927), 21.

³³ “For the militants who come together under its banner, revolutionary syndicalism is not a doctrine from outside of them, that one adopts or rejects. It originates from themselves. They have created it by their daily actions.” Maitron, *Histoire*, 298. When Maitron continues with the remark that revolutionary syndicalism was more a kind of practice than a theory, that does not mean that theory was unimportant. See also Wilfried Röhrich: “In striving to develop an ‘authentic’ proletarian consciousness first and foremost in economic action, revolutionary syndicalism attempted at the same time to connect the concrete needs of the workers with the goals of society as a whole.” Wilfried Röhrich, *Revolutionärer Syndikalismus*, 3.

prepared to see in the movement an experiment to connect the lives and actions of individual persons with a total revolution of society. That revolution had more in common with Malatesta's economic, political and moral goals than he feared in 1907.

If for us revolutionary syndicalism is a variety of anarchism, the actions of the syndicalists acquire a significance which goes beyond a Pavlovian reaction. The movement gains a tension which is the result of its being a labour movement and an anarchist movement at one and the same time. We need to see beyond the narrow economic dimensions to which syndicalists are usually confined. Only then will people appear in our studies, next to numbers and depersonalised tendencies.

So what about a definition of revolutionary syndicalism? As with Marxism, it is not easy to give a shorthand one, nor is it very useful. It may even harm our analysis. This, for example, applies when the object of our study, revolutionary syndicalism, was not very precise about itself. Revolutionary syndicalism was not sustained and formulated by anarchist intellectuals like Émile Pouget or Christiaan Cornelissen only (Sorel was hardly seen in syndicalist circles)³⁴, but also by workers.³⁵ The latter, more often than not, had little formal education and little time to educate themselves in an academic way on matters concerning the labour movement, but still they read newspapers, discussed anarchism, trade-unionism and other affairs in their local unions, and often had to cast their votes in referenda concerning decisions of congresses.

I start my "definition" with words of Jacques Julliard, who has written that revolutionary syndicalism did not aspire to "the dissolution of the individual in the group, but on the contrary to extract the individual out of the anonymous group."³⁶ This is the positive core of syndicalism. Furthermore, the political conviction that to realise socialism the economic struggle is of much greater importance than the political one, is very characteristic of all varieties of revolutionary syndicalism. In the primacy of the economic power struggle we can encounter notions from Marx as much as experiences from the class struggle. Verity Burgmann has shown how much the Australian syndicalists were influenced by Marxism.³⁷ In the Netherlands the early champions of revolutionary syndicalism F.

³⁴ George Woodcock, *Anarchism. A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), 303.

³⁵ See also V. Dam'ë, *Anarkho-Syndikalizm v XX veke* (Moscow: Institut vseobščej istorii RAN, 2001), 13.

³⁶ Jacques Julliard, *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985), 13.

³⁷ Burgmann, *Revolutionary industrial unionism*, 42–9.

Domela Nieuwenhuis (who later switched to the anarchism of Kropotkin and Malatesta, if not to a more individualistic anarchism) and Christiaan Cornelissen had learned from Marx that political circumstances are dictated by economic power relations.³⁸ The trade union was the best weapon in the class struggle and on the day of the revolution it would start to organise production. “The workplace will be the government,” Léon Jouhaux, secretary of the French CGT, thought.³⁹ Friedhelm Boll has perceptively argued that this conception leads to “unionisation rather than state control of production”.⁴⁰ How the rest of society should be organised after the revolution was seldom a matter of concern for the workers. Some ideas about the future society could be found in popular utopian books such as William Morris’s *News from Nowhere*, but even eminent anarchists did not always know what to do exactly after the “conquest of bread”.⁴¹ It is of course difficult to reconcile detailed blueprints of a future society with anarchist liberty and spontaneity. This left the revolutionary syndicalist ideals even more in a state of limited elaboration.

Because trade unions were to organise the economy after the revolution, trade-union activities, like strikes, should educate the workers for their future role, not only as workers but as human beings in a broad sense. Revolutionary syndicalism consequently maintained a very tight relation between ends and means. Many syndicalist movements valued quality above quantity. To them, their organisations were ranked below the movement of the workers themselves. The weakness of many a syndicalist organisation did not challenge this conviction. “We want to have workers who can stand on their own feet and act in the organisation with conviction,” was the opinion of the executive of the Dutch NAS. Only then could the movement fight in earnest for the liberation of

³⁸ Bert Altena, “Kritik wegen der Praxis. F. Domela Nieuwenhuis und der Marxismus,” in *Die Rezeption der Marxschen Theorie in den Niederlanden*, ed. Marcel van der Linden (Trier: Karl-Marx-Haus, 1992), 47–84, esp. 67; Altena/Wedman, *Cornelissen*, e.g. XLVII.

³⁹ B. Georges *et al*, Léon Jouhaux, *Cinquante ans de syndicalisme* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), 44.

⁴⁰ Friedhelm Boll, *Arbeitskämpfe und Gewerkschaften in Deutschland, England und Frankreich. Ihre Entwicklung vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Bonn: Dietz, 1992), 469.

⁴¹ In 1909 F. Domela Nieuwenhuis asked Kropotkin: “What should we, anarchists, do when as during the Paris Commune of 1871 the old order has disappeared and the new state of affairs has not yet been established.” Kropotkin thought this was a very important question, which the anarchists had addressed far too poorly. Altena, “Kritik,” 83.

labour.⁴² In order to subordinate the organisation to the workers at large, revolutionary syndicalists refused to have big strike funds. As Gerrit van Erkel, secretary of NAS, insisted:

We always point to the power of organisation [itself] and we do this as a lesson from our experience. Never has a struggle been won because of strike funds, but because of the conviction [of the members] of the power of the organisation.⁴³

The self-awareness and responsibility of the members moreover militated against centralisation of power. Regarding these matters, their tolerance was limited. Consequently, the rights of the smallest organisation hindered the domination of the national federations by the large ones. NAS was a federation of trade unions (local and national ones) and every member-organisation had a maximum of three votes.⁴⁴ Christiaan Cornelissen defended this with the argument that some unions would remain small, because of their trade, which nevertheless could be very important for society.⁴⁵ This reasoning demonstrates an anarchist inspiration. In the French CGT, anarchism also led to a certain contempt for daily organisational routines and for small strikes, which, moreover, tended to exhaust the organisation.⁴⁶ Maybe the lack of radicalism in the demands of the French syndicalists, which has surprised Peter Stearns, could be explained by this contempt.⁴⁷

Revolutionary syndicalism was a complicated movement. Besides being part of the broad anarchist movement, revolutionary syndicalism was also a libertarian form of an older workers' socialism. Contrary to that of non working-class socialists, this socialism did not, in the first place, critically address the liberal bourgeoisie and its convictions, but instead

⁴² *Correspondentieblad NAS*, December 1, 1904. Later this opinion about the value of quantitative strength led to corrections in official statistics in case these exaggerated the size of the NAS. The executive of NAS wanted a struggle with honest weapons: Minutes of the executive July 2, 1908, IISH, NAS archive 4.

⁴³ Minute of a meeting of delegates, January 20, 1901, IISH, NAS archive 21.

⁴⁴ NAS congresverslag 1903, 32. The French CGT had a completely different organisational structure but it was guided by the same principles. In practice small organisations within both federations dominated the few large ones. Georges, *Jouhaux*, 20–1.

⁴⁵ Christiaan Cornelissen, "Internationale brieven," XXXV/2, *Het Volksdagblad*, September 27, 1904.

⁴⁶ Maitron, *Histoire*, 281–282.

⁴⁷ Peter Stearns, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and French labor: A Cause without Rebels* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971).

focussed on the role of workers in the coming socialist society. Their role in production was very important, but their place in society generally was contemplated as well.⁴⁸ From the 1880s onwards this worker-socialism became increasingly enriched by the ideas of anarchist or *anarchisant* militants like Joseph Tortelier in France or Cornelissen in the Netherlands. This observation is of importance to my argument because revolutionary syndicalism was the ideology of a movement which very much wanted to be a workers' movement—that is, a movement which wanted to have no truck with bourgeois, however socialist, unless they recognised that a socialist workers' movement ought to be led by the workers themselves. Revolutionary syndicalism did not turn its attention to the world of the bourgeoisie (to which in many countries parliamentary politics belonged as well), but to that of the workers. Often their pride as craftsmen developed into anti-intellectualism and a certain contempt for ideological and white-collar work in general. This in turn could be sharpened by Bakunin's anti-Marxism.⁴⁹ Jean Maitron has argued that intellectuals behaved uncertainly when confronted with these self-aware syndicalist workers, unless they considered themselves superior. Maitron thought that these mutual prejudices considerably damaged the relations between the various militants in the movement.⁵⁰

Revolutionary syndicalists became very suspicious when the world of politics and the world of the bourgeois came together in the person of the parliamentary social-democrat. Then their anti-intellectualism intensified.

⁴⁸ On the difference between the socialism of workers and that of bourgeois socialists: Bert Altena, "Bürger in der Sozialdemokratie. Ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der Sozialdemokratischen Arbeiterpartei (SDAP) in den Niederlanden 1894-1914," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 20 (1994), 533–48. Robert Michels, who also differentiated between the socialism of "ex-bourgeois" and the "proletarians", looked at the matter from a psychological point of view and thought that the socialism of bourgeois social democrats was an expression of a more intense idealism, whereas the socialism of the workers was rather pragmatic. The psychological make-up of the bourgeois socialists in the socialist movement is a very interesting topic (Michels himself is an intriguing case), but I think that the difference between the socialism of bourgeois socialists and that of the workers is not a matter of intensity but of the frame of reference of these socialisms. Robert Michels, *Political Parties. A sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy* (New York/London: Collier Books, 1962), 238–239.

⁴⁹ Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 91. A similar opinion: John M. Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican working class, 1860–1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 9–10.

⁵⁰ Jean Maitron, "La personnalité du militant ouvrier français dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle," *Le Mouvement Social* 33:4 (1960–1) : 67–87, 84.

Thus, when confronted with the Social Democratic Workers' Party (with its many "gentlemen lawyers")⁵¹ the Dutch NAS was proud to be a strong organisation of workers without much education. Social-democrats were "completely untrustworthy".⁵² The distrust of the CGT concerning social-democratic political parties dated from the 1880s, if not from even earlier days.⁵³ "The Socialist Party has no business whatsoever meddling in workers' congresses," Jouhaux wrote in 1909.⁵⁴ The same distrust can be found among the Australian syndicalists.⁵⁵ Political socialists, moreover, embodied the danger of dividing the workers, who, when left alone, apparently automatically formed a united entity. This was another reason why political movements should be excluded from the workers' movement. On occasions when revolutionary syndicalists had been active within a political socialist movement, for example in Australia, anti-social-democratic feelings could become even stronger. Only a unified labour movement, based on the solidarity of the workers, could be the genuine representative of the proletariat. Therefore: "We only discuss economic problems, no political ones".⁵⁶

Revolutionary syndicalists very much wanted to have their organisations continue to be run by workers and with a bureaucratic apparatus as small as possible. In doing so they contradicted the organisational laws which their friend, Robert Michels, was about to discover.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Gerrit van Erkel at a meeting of NAS-delegates, October 21, 1900, IISH, NAS-archive 21.

⁵² *Correspondentieblad NAS*, September 1, 1903.

⁵³ Georges, *Jouhaux*, 14–6. A deep distrust can already be found in the writings of Proudhon.

⁵⁴ Georges, *Jouhaux*, 35, note 1.

⁵⁵ Burgmann, *Revolutionary industrial unionism*, 54–5; Burgmann, "Antipodean peculiarities," 373.

⁵⁶ Georges, *Jouhaux*, 35, note 1. It is much more fear of the divisive effect of parliamentary socialism, and for that matter of religion as well, that syndicalists avoided politics and religion than "a desire to escape from time- and energy-consuming squabbles between socialist groupings" as Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe have maintained: Van der Linden and Thorpe, "Rise," 13. In this respect the syndicalist movement resembles life on board ships, where political and religious discussions are avoided as well.

⁵⁷ Robert Michels, "Eine syndikalistisch gerichtete Unterströmung im deutschen Sozialismus (1903–1907)," in s.n., *Festschrift für Carl Grünberg zum 70. Geburtstag* (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1932), 343–365.

Researching the causes of revolutionary syndicalism, I: Numbers

First something needs to be said about numbers and origin. Usually the years 1900–1920 are considered to be the heyday of revolutionary syndicalism. There are exceptions, such as Germany, where during the twenties the FAUD enjoyed considerable support, and of course Spain, where in 1919 the CNT had 700,000 members and in 1932 more than a million.⁵⁸ It is important to bear in mind that even when its following was large, revolutionary syndicalism never organised the majority of the workers. Jacques Julliard has established that in 1906, 2.91% of the working population of France belonged to a CGT-affiliated organisation. At that point, the CGT had only 18% of all unionised workers on its books, while in 1911 this percentage had risen to 23%.⁵⁹ Even the huge membership of the Spanish CNT amounts to only 20% of the total working population.⁶⁰ Other syndicalist organisations were significantly smaller. The FAUD had a maximum of 150,000 members⁶¹; the number of American Wobblies in 1917 was about the same,⁶² and in Australia membership reached a maximum of 2,000 (which is about the same proportion of the working population as the IWW had in America)⁶³, and in the Netherlands the NAS had a maximum membership of 12,446 before 1914 (1900) and 51,570 in 1920.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ George Esenwein, *Anarchist ideology*, 205; Temma Kaplan, *Red city, blue period. Social movements in Picasso's Barcelona* (Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1992), 167.

⁵⁹ J. Julliard, *Autonomie ouvrière: études sur le syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), 208.

⁶⁰ Size of working population is taken from B.R. Mitchell, *International historical statistics. Europe 1750–1988* (New York: Stockton Press, 1993), 153.

⁶¹ Nelles, "Wuppertal," 5. In 1932 membership had come down to approximately 7000: Ulrich Klan and Dieter Nelles, *"Es lebt noch eine Flamme" Rheinische Anarcho-Syndikalisten/-innen in der Weimarer Republik und im Faschismus* (Grafenau-Döffingen: Trotzdem Verlag, 1990), 46.

⁶² Melvyn Dubofsky, "The rise and fall of revolutionary syndicalism in the United States," in Van der Linden and Thorpe, *Revolutionary syndicalism*, 203–221, 215.

⁶³ Burgmann, *Revolutionary industrial unionism*, 126.

⁶⁴ *Honderd jaar sociaal. 1891–1991. Teksten uit honderd jaar sociale beweging en sociaal denken in Nederland*, ed. J.M. Peet et al. (Den Haag: SDU, 1998), 784–785. In 1920 all Dutch trade unions together had organised only 25% of the working population!

Researching the causes of revolutionary syndicalism, II: Origins

It was only after the 1906 congress at Amiens that the CGT spread the term *syndicalisme révolutionnaire*. Thus the term “revolutionary syndicalism” emerged at a rather late date in history. In the Netherlands, “*syndicalisme*” seems to have been used for the first time in 1907.⁶⁵ The French origins of the name have led many to believe that revolutionary syndicalism was a French invention, which subsequently was exported to other nations. Avrigh, for instance, argues that in Russia revolutionary syndicalism was imported from France,⁶⁶ but often the movement seems to have had autochthonous roots. Societal phenomena differ from human beings in that they can exist for a long time before receiving a name. Movements which can be called revolutionary syndicalist can be found in several European countries before 1900. During the 1870s in Italy and Spain followers of Bakunin already showed traits characteristic of revolutionary syndicalism.⁶⁷ During the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the northern half of Europe, we find other examples of revolutionary syndicalism. The first region to think of is of course the Jura, the home base of Bakunin and the *Fédération Jurassienne* during the 1870s.⁶⁸ In 1887 the Dutch Social Democratic Federation concluded that trade unions should form the basis of the socialist movement. This reorganisation was inspired by Domela Nieuwenhuis’s interpretation of the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital* several years earlier.⁶⁹ In Germany

⁶⁵ Christiaan Cornelissen, “Internationale brief,” Tweede reeks XVII, *Het Volksdagblad*, June 16, 1907. The term became popular only between 1909 and 1912.

⁶⁶ Paul Avrigh, *Russian Anarchists*, 76–78.

⁶⁷ Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 48–49, 53, 57–81; Esenwein, *Anarchist ideology*, 208–209. Temma Kaplan, *Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868–1903* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 207.

⁶⁸ Rolf Bigler, *Der libertäre Sozialismus in der Westschweiz. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte und Deutung des Anarchismus* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1963).

⁶⁹ Jacques Giele, “Socialisme en vakbeweging. De opkomst van socialistiese vakorganisaties in Nederland (1878–1890), deel 1,” *Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van socialisme en arbeidersbeweging in Nederland 1978* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1978), 27–83, 52, 61–62, 67–71; Bert Altena, “Zu den Wirkungsbedingungen des niederländischen Sozialismus,” in *Freiheitsstreben—Demokratie—Emancipation. Aufsätze zur politischen Kultur in Deutschland und den Niederlanden*, ed. Horst Lademacher and Walter Mühlhausen (Münster: LIT, 1993), 245–283, 268–271;

we find revolutionary syndicalism in the oppositional trade unions of the *Lokalisten*. Dirk Müller has shown that even the German trade unions of the 1870s had many revolutionary syndicalist characteristics.⁷⁰ During the 1880s, French labour organisations adopted anti-political resolutions, but also more parliamentary Marxist ones.⁷¹ Even in 1896 in Bohemia anarchists decided that trade unions were the only possible organisation in the struggle of the working class.⁷² The Wobblies claimed to be a purely American movement and declined to be called syndicalist. Nevertheless Dubofsky puts them in the revolutionary syndicalist camp, and rightly so!⁷³ He states that revolutionary syndicalism had adherents amongst the American workers before the Wobblies composed their declaration of principles in 1905.⁷⁴ Howard Kimeldorf seems to agree, when he stresses the syndicalism of the AFL.⁷⁵ Strangely, Belgium, a country with a long tradition of socialist and libertarian labour movements, remained free of revolutionary syndicalism. Even after the founding of a Belgian CGT in 1905, it stayed a movement of no significance at all.⁷⁶ To sum up: it is clear that before 1906 many countries had experienced endemic—embryonic or not—revolutionary syndicalist movements. This does not mean that there were no transnational “radiation effects”. Private networks, migration and the syndicalist press transferred experiences and

Altena, “Kritik,” 67. Both publications by Marx also inspired Christiaan Cornelissen: Altena/Wedman, *Cornelissen*, XIII–XX.

⁷⁰ Müller, *Lokalismus*; Müller, “Der Syndikalismus in der deutschen Gewerkschaftsbewegung vor 1914,” in *Solidarität und Menschenwürde. Etappen der deutschen Gewerkschaftsgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Erich Matthias and Klaus Schönhoven (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1984), 57–69. See also Rudolf Boch, *Handwerker-Sozialisten gegen Fabrikgesellschaft. Lokale Fachvereine, Massengewerkschaft und industrielle Rationalisierung in Solingen 1870-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1985).

⁷¹ Maitron, *Histoire*, 264–269.

⁷² Václav Tomek, “Tschechischer Anarchismus um die Jahrhundertwende,” *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstandes und der Arbeit* 12 (1992), 97–131, 112.

⁷³ Dubofsky, *We shall be all*, 76–84, 170.

⁷⁴ Dubofsky, 82. See also Nicolaas Steelink, *Reis in droomland* (Sittard: Baalproducties, 1998), 148–51. (The original English version of these Wobbly memoirs can be found in the Labadie collection at the University of Michigan)

⁷⁵ Kimeldorf, *Battling*, 157–160.

⁷⁶ Jan Moulaert, *Rood en Zwart. De anarchistische beweging in België, 1880–1914* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, [1994]), 210, 301–340. See also Pieter Ballon, “Le mouvement syndicaliste révolutionnaire à Liège pendant l’entre-deux-guerres,” *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/Revue Belge d’Histoire Contemporaine* XXVIII (1998): 339–62.

ideas between the various movements. There is evidence of this, *pace* the IWW and Dubofsky, in certain places in the United States⁷⁷ and even more so in several Latin American countries for example Chile⁷⁸ and Peru.⁷⁹ Constance Bantman has argued that British syndicalism was basically imported by French anarchist *émigrés*, whereas the French syndicalists borrowed ideas from their British comrades.⁸⁰ We are confronted with a contemporaneous development of syndicalism in several countries and with a criss-crossing of ideas, which should warn against the presentation of France as the origin of revolutionary syndicalism.

This criss-crossing of ideas started around the international socialist congresses, which would eventually become the Second International. Given the fact that in many countries revolutionary syndicalism was established during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it comes as no surprise that a syndicalist opposition made itself felt early at these congresses. It was voiced in 1889 in Paris at the first congress. With each new congress it took a more decisive course towards revolutionary syndicalism, between parliamentary social-democracy on the one hand and individualistic anarchism on the other.⁸¹ In 1896 it was thrown out at the London congress, thereafter requiring considerable effort to get some international revolutionary syndicalist organisation started. Because of

⁷⁷ Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 51.

⁷⁸ Peter DeShazo, *Urban Workers and Labor Unions in Chile 1902–1927* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 90.

⁷⁹ Peter Blanchard, *The Origins of the Peruvian Labor Movement, 1883–1919* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 47, 54.

⁸⁰ Constance Bantman, “Internationalism without an international? Cross-Channel anarchist networks, 1880–1914,” *Labour Internationalism. Different times, different faces*, ed. Magaly Rodríguez García, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire / Belgisch tijdschrift voor filologie en geschiedenis* 84:4 (2006): 961–981, 962, 974; Constance Bantman, “Anarchismes et anarchistes en France et en Grande-Bretagne, 1880-1914: Échanges, représentations, transferts” (PhD diss., Paris XIII, 2007), 474–485; Holton, *British syndicalism*, 30–31, 50; Eric Hobsbawm, “The ‘new unionism’ in perspective,” in *Workers: Worlds of Labor* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 152–176, 154; Richard Price, “Contextualising British syndicalism c.1907–c.1920,” *Labour History Review* 63:3 (1998): 261–77, 264.

⁸¹ A study of the developments in the anarchist and revolutionary camps in and around the Second International remains to be written. First attempts can be found in Altena/Wedman, *Cornelissen* and in Markus Bürgi, *Die Anfänge der Zweiten Internationale. Positionen und Auseinandersetzungen 1889–1893* (Frankfurt/M: Campus, 1996), 547–602.

individualistic-anarchist opposition, the Amsterdam congress of 1907 failed to launch such a new organisation. The London congress of 1913 would have established a syndicalist international, had not the First World War and subsequent disagreements between anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists occurred. In 1923 at last a syndicalist international was founded.⁸²

This historical overview shows that revolutionary syndicalism contains an authentic labour movement, and one with a tradition. The anarchists, who during the 1880s and 1890s saw that their strategy of insurrection and terror did not help their cause, brought to these workers only a sharper theoretical articulation of their beliefs by introducing them to the concepts of direct action, the value of action by the workers themselves, the importance of direct democracy, the general strike. They also gave them a broader cultural perspective.⁸³ They taught the workers to state more clearly what they already thought, to do better what they already practised and they brought to them the perspective of a class society beyond the local sphere in so far as the workers, e.g. through migration, had not acquired this perspective themselves. In so far as they were intellectuals from bourgeois origins, they also proposed more sophisticated assessments of the world of the bourgeois.

The search for historical roots and the syndicalists' own ideal of a "unionised" economy have led some authors to examine guild traditions. In doing so, revolutionary syndicalism can be accommodated within a stage theory of socialism proposed by Geoff Eley, who has seen in the movement a continuation of old associational ideals.⁸⁴ Dirk Müller has established a strong line between the traditional guild organisation and practices of the construction workers of Berlin and the localist convictions and practices they showed from the 1890s onwards.⁸⁵ Barbara Mitchell

⁸² Thorpe, *Workers themselves*. Of that International Vadim Dam'e has written an exhaustive two-volume history: *Zabytyi internatsional. Mezhdunarodnoe anarkho-sindikalistskoe dvizhenie mezhu dvumya mirovymi voynami* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006 and 2007).

⁸³ Hanneke Willemsse has shown beautifully how during the 1930s syndicalism was only a further and very natural development of ideas the leftist workers of Spanish Albalate de Cinca already had: Hanneke Willemsse, *Gedeeld verleden. Herinneringen van anarcho-syndicalisten aan Albalate de Cinca, 1928-1938* (Amsterdam: Historisch Seminarium van de Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1996).

⁸⁴ Geoff Eley, "Reviewing the socialist tradition," in *The Crisis of Socialism in Europe*, ed. Christiane Lemke and Gary Marks (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1992), 21-61, 43-45.

⁸⁵ Müller, *Lokalismus*, 331; Müller, "Syndikalismus," 58-59, 63. Nelles, "Wuppertal," 57. See also Marina Cattaruzza, "Gewerkschaftliche

thinks that French syndicalism had its roots in the *compagnonnages* of the eighteenth century.⁸⁶ It is possible that in some countries there were connections between guild-organisations and early syndicalist labour movements, especially where guilds gradually became trade unions. However, similarities are not always causal links as everybody knows and we have to be aware that in certain circumstances a particular type of behaviour can be the most logical without containing any reminiscences of earlier practices.⁸⁷ If the syndicalists pursued old guild traditions, why then did they abandon the social self-help arrangements of the guilds, or their rules concerning apprenticeship and entry into the trade? In a country like the Netherlands guilds had disappeared long before the first trade unions were founded. Here it seems difficult to establish a connection with the era of guilds. On the other hand Dutch syndicalism was as genuinely Dutch as French syndicalism was French.⁸⁸ Rolf Bigler's conclusion that the

Organisationsprozesse der Werftarbeiter im Kaiserreich: eine komparative Skizze" in *Der Aufstieg der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. Sozialdemokratie und Freie Gewerkschaften im Parteiensystem und Sozialmilieu des Kaiserreichs*, ed. Gerhard A. Ritter und Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1990), 415–438, 421–422.

⁸⁶ Barbara Mitchell, *The Practical Revolutionaries. A New Interpretation of the French Anarchosyndicalists* (New York: Greenwood, 1987), 12; Mitchell, "French Syndicalism: An Experiment in Practical Anarchism," in Van der Linden and Thorpe, *Revolutionary syndicalism*, 25–45, 26.

⁸⁷ Rudolf Dekker, "Labour conflicts and working-class culture in early modern Holland," *International Review of Social History* 35 (1990), 377–420, shows how the medieval "uutgang", where the journeymen left town in a body, disappeared as a practice and was later replaced by the "uutscheyding" or strike. When in the nineteenth century Berlin construction workers left town (Müller, "Syndikalismus", 63), this could have been a repetition of old guild practices, but it might also have been a very rational and effective method. During the 1920s syndicalist construction workers in the Netherlands would use a variant: when on strike, they would establish their own production associations: Frans Becker and Johan Frieswijk, *Bedrijven in eigen beheer. Kolonies en produktieve associaties n Nederland tussen 1901 en 1958* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1976), 195–212; Bert Altena, "'Een broeinest der anarchie'. Arbeiders, arbeidersbeweging en maatschappelijke ontwikkeling. Vlissingen 1875–1929 (1940)" (PhD Diss., Amsterdam University, 1989), 430–435.

⁸⁸ Jan Lucassen sees a continuity between guilds and trade unions in the Netherlands: Jan Lucassen, *Jan, Jan Salie en diens kinderen. Vergelijkend onderzoek naar continuïteit en discontinuïteit in de ontwikkeling van arbeidsverhoudingen* (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1991). For opposite opinions: Dekker, "Labour conflicts" and Bert Altena, "Continuïteit of een nieuw begin? Gilden en vakbeweging in Dordrecht, 1798-1872," in *Mensen van de*

strength of the guilds in Geneva was a formidable obstacle for libertarian socialism in that city also militates against making too strong a connection between guilds and revolutionary syndicalism.⁸⁹

Taking up the possible link of syndicalism with guilds the German historian Rudolf Boch has given another, surprising and rather functionalist, view of social-democracy. According to him it was precisely the older generations of workers in Solingen who subscribed to the idea of a “free association of producers”. However, workers who had migrated to Solingen from the countryside or suffered deskilling became members of the new social-democratic trade unions. These unions disciplined their members to fit into capitalism and taught them to expect help from the state.⁹⁰ Here the members did not create the union, but the union created the members. Another line of reasoning seems to suggest itself in connection with Boch’s remarks. It is conceivable that the socio-economic order brought about by the guilds and guaranteed by towns and the state was later translated into the need for state regulation of the economy. In that case guild traditions would have led to social-democracy. It is difficult to reach definite conclusions on these matters. It seems best, therefore, to assume that revolutionary syndicalism, like every social movement, was informed by existing repertoires of beliefs and actions, but that it was simultaneously the expression of a future-oriented consciousness which was recreated every day. Revolutionary syndicalism was not just an old tradition of days past, but also an answer for the needs of the day, inspired by a vision of a free society tomorrow.

Researching the causes of revolutionary syndicalism, III: The importance of the shop-floor

Though the revolutionary syndicalist movement was no more “abnormal” than the “ordinary” socialist one, it should not be analyzed as if it were only another trade union movement—its links with anarchism preclude that option. This is what many modern analyses of revolutionary syndicalism do not adequately take into account. They concentrate on the shop-floor and address mainly two themes: the characteristics of certain specified occupations and modernisation of the production process as a whole. In this respect Van der Linden and Thorpe point to two groups of

nieuwe tijd. Een liber amicorum voor A.Th. van Deursen, ed. M. Bruggeman *et al.* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996), 462–483.

⁸⁹ Bigler, *Sozialismus*, 255–256. For another explanation see below.

⁹⁰ Boch, *Handwerker-Sozialisten*, 289–92.

workers strongly represented in the syndicalist movements: 1/ casual, seasonal, or project labourers; 2/ miners, railway and factory workers who were confronted with the deskilling effects of the second Industrial Revolution. We have to remember that a great variety of trades can be found with the revolutionary syndicalist movement, which do not necessarily need to have been confronted by the second Industrial Revolution or deskilling: Kimeldorf's lumberjacks and dockworkers or railwaymen, seamen and even in many cases construction workers. This is not a new finding and explanations have been proposed for every trade. For instance, it is said of Argentinean bakers that they changed jobs frequently, just as Van der Linden and Thorpe argued for the construction-workers.⁹¹ Much has been said of the shoemakers, who according to Maitron worked in a trade which provided opportunities to think, all the more as it was customary to read books or newspapers aloud in their shops.⁹² Bigler has borrowed Maitron's line of reasoning for his Swiss watchmakers.⁹³ This explanation seems to be the complete opposite of the migratory worker on short-term labour-contracts, but it cannot account for the presence of textile workers amongst the French revolutionary syndicalists.

Historians of revolutionary syndicalism have paid special attention to construction workers, who indeed took a prominent place in the syndicalist movement. According to Nettlau these construction workers were "mostly strong men coming from the provinces, who liked a fight and so often came to the fore in wild *chasses au renard* (fights with scabs), because usually a bigger occasion did not present itself."⁹⁴ Nettlau provides an essentialist explanation for the syndicalism of the construction workers of Paris, which fits in nicely with the theories of Kerr and Siegel⁹⁵ and is still

⁹¹ Buschak, "Schwalben".

⁹² Maitron, *Histoire*, 118, 446. See also the classic: Eric Hobsbawm and Joan W. Scott, "Political Shoemakers," in Hobsbawm, *Workers*, 103–131.

⁹³ Bigler, *Sozialismus*, 236–237.

⁹⁴ Max Nettlau, *Geschichte der Anarchie. V. Anarchisten und Syndikalisten. Teil I. Der Französische Syndikalismus bis 1909—Der Anarchismus in Deutschland und Russland bis 1914—Die kleineren Bewegungen in Europa und Asien* (Vaduz: K.G. Saur, 1984), 85.

⁹⁵ They compared "the bull of the woods", the lumberjack, to "the mousy bank clerk". According to them heavy work or unpleasant work which demanded little formal education produced "an independent spirit", tough workers who readily went on strike: Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, "The interindustry propensity to strike—an international comparison," in *Industrial conflict*, ed. Arthur Kornhauser *et al.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954), 189–212, 195–196.

propounded today.⁹⁶ It is more usual to infer the preference of these workers for syndicalism from characteristics of their work. For instance, Christiaan Cornelissen thought that the work of bricklayers and carpenters retained more of the creative urge in these construction workers than was the case with workers and the production processes of the second Industrial Revolution.⁹⁷ Dirk Müller's exposition of guild traditions among Berlin construction workers and Van der Linden and Thorpe's stress on the short term of their labour contracts (Müller points to that characteristic as well) have already been mentioned.⁹⁸ According to Van der Linden and Thorpe, at times these construction workers also were faced with deskilling because of joinery works. Because of the short-term contracts, they did not have the opportunity to settle down, so it seems. Strikes (direct action) were not very dangerous to them but were a first choice to defend their interests.⁹⁹ That these "project workers" were very much inclined towards revolutionary syndicalism, Van der Linden and Thorpe infer from the fact that they frequently pop up in syndicalist circles.¹⁰⁰

Apart from artisanal trades, representatives of industrial enterprises such as textile workers, miners and metalworkers such as those on shipyards also featured in the syndicalist movement. It seems difficult therefore to maintain that revolutionary syndicalism was a product of the (pre-industrial) artisanal shop. Whoever wishes to stress the artisanal backgrounds of revolutionary syndicalism has to show that these industries were characterised by artisanal work conditions. This seems possible with the miners—"a peculiarly archaic body of workers" as Hobsbawm points out¹⁰¹—and certainly in the case of shipyards.¹⁰² Workers in shipyards had a fair amount in common with construction workers. They enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in their work, were often highly skilled and worked in subcontracting types of work organisation. This means that they had to be able to estimate how much work a certain task would take. They often

⁹⁶ Van der Linden, "Second thoughts," 187.

⁹⁷ Christiaan Cornelissen, "Internationale brieven," Tweede serie XXXIII, *Het Volksdagblad*, May 4, 1908.

⁹⁸ Müller, *Lokalismus*, 34, 101. Also: Th. Van Tijn, "Verkenningen inzake ideologie in de arbeidersbeweging," in *Historicus in het spanningsveld van theorie en praktijk. Opstellen aangeboden aan dr H. Klompmaker*, ed. C.A. Admiraal *et al.* (Leiderdorp: Leidse Onderwijsinstellingen, 1985), 5–21.

⁹⁹ Van der Linden and Thorpe, "Rise," 7–9.

¹⁰⁰ Van der Linden, "Second thoughts," 184.

¹⁰¹ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 5.

¹⁰² Altna, "Broeïnest", 469–497.

produced unique objects, which gave them an opportunity to identify themselves with what they were making. Like their colleagues in construction, workers at shipyards had a lot of pride in their work, but for a long time they do not seem to have been affected by deskilling.

However, the textile workers continue to pose problems. Those of St Etienne worked in medium-sized or small enterprises.¹⁰³ Their syndicalist colleagues on the left bank of the Rhine were to be found amongst the most skilled and privileged category of the branch: the *Namenbandwebern*.¹⁰⁴ The same cannot be said of the syndicalist textile workers in the Dutch region of Twente, so it seems, or of those in Barcelona. Production there had abandoned the artisanal stage some time before. This should warn us against looking exclusively for factors on the shop-floor, when explaining the popularity of syndicalism.

Leaving the textile workers aside, it does not seem important that the syndicalist workers were “project workers”, but rather that they enjoyed a lot of autonomy on the job. This kept them independent and proud of what they could make, of showing their skills. Dockyard labourers also needed such self-reliance: they too had to estimate the amount of work a task would require and name a price for which they were prepared to take on the job. Furthermore they had to calculate what they had carried in total and how much each of them had carried. Moreover, some of them were not “project workers” because they enjoyed more or less permanent labour contracts. Generally these autonomous workers are not very well suited for a type of trade union which makes them obey either their own leaders or, through arrangements of the unions, the bosses at work or, through ties of the union leadership with them, socialists in parliament and government. Moreover, for them, trade unions often were not the only means to defend interests. These workers could rely on their craft. They mostly did not have a weak position in the labour market, which made it easier for them to move on to another job. In this sense mobility often was not a cause of syndicalism but a proof of independence, of a private defence of interests. Moreover, the independence of the workers may explain why in some countries or some branches of industry where revolutionary syndicalism had a certain appeal, the majority of the workforce was not unionised. This would explain the relative strength of the CGT in France at a time when most of the workers did not carry a union card. Seen in this light, the cause of syndicalism in France was not the general weakness of French trade

¹⁰³ Kathryn E. Amdur, *Syndicalist Legacy: Trade Unions and Politics in Two French Cities in the Era of World War I* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 15–32.

¹⁰⁴ Nelles, “Wuppertal,” 245.

unionism (contrary to Ridley's argument), but the origin of both can be found in the independence and strength of the French worker.¹⁰⁵ In general, revolutionary syndicalism was not a *reaction* to deskilling processes or the second Industrial Revolution, in other words a matter of frustration, but rather a *consequence* of autonomy and pride on the shop-floor.

The "explanations from the shop-floor" pose three other problems. The first is that apart from Spain and some Latin American countries, revolutionary syndicalism was a small minority in most countries and most branches of industry. We should also bear in mind that in many countries even a minority of the total workforce was unionised. This means that the causes of syndicalism which authors (including myself) find on the shop-floor do not "work" with the majority of the workers, which imperils this whole line of argument. If the causes were so important, we should have seen dominant syndicalist movements and a level of unionisation well above 50%. In other words: on the shop-floor we may find necessary causes, but these causes are insufficient to explain syndicalism. Some trades (such as construction workers) may show up strongly among syndicalists, but this says little about the shop-floor (otherwise many more among the construction workers should have become syndicalists). That construction workers figure prominently among syndicalists, for instance, might be explained in another way. One such explanation can be found in the small size of many syndicalist movements, for this undermines the statistical relevance of differences in size between various syndicalist unions. In other words, it might be the case that statistical evidence about the size of syndicalist unions has not much validity.¹⁰⁶

The second problem has been posed by Friedhelm Boll. On the basis of an analysis of the construction workers of London, Hamburg and Paris, he concluded: "Notwithstanding the striking similarity of trade structures and work conditions, particularly the skilled construction workers in the three countries have developed quite different, if not contrary, political

¹⁰⁵ Ridley, *Revolutionary syndicalism*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ The administrative negligence of revolutionary syndicalists poses many additional problems for historians. Even central organs of the movement often did not exactly know how big their organisation actually was. At times local secretaries and treasurers even refused to tell general secretaries of the trade unions or the statistical office of the state the strength of their local organisations. Their anarchism informed these functionaries that the state had nothing to do with the labour movement. On the other hand many syndicalist organisations did not feel an obligation to correct overestimates of their strength.

orientations and concepts of trade unionism.”¹⁰⁷ Howard Kimeldorf investigated similar differences between dockworkers on the west and east coasts of the United States. While those on the east coast were radically leftist, their colleagues in New York were radically rightist. Kimeldorf explains this contrast by looking at labour markets, which are of course related to the world outside work and work-relations, and the recruitment of workers.¹⁰⁸ Apparently, the nature of the shop-floor cannot fully explain a specific type of labour movement.

The third problem is different: when focusing on the shop-floor and on work relations alone, one almost automatically makes revolutionary syndicalism a movement of men. Some authors have started to analyse revolutionary syndicalism as a male movement (whether “virile” or not).¹⁰⁹ Verity Burgmann has shown that a gendered analysis of revolutionary syndicalism can be very stimulating and fruitful.¹¹⁰ However, a gendered approach can also bring back the syndicalist as an unsophisticated and emotive worker¹¹¹; the movement can be depicted all too easily as virile anti-feminist,¹¹² or everything syndicalist can be reduced to “radical manhood”.¹¹³ The stress on manhood was undeniably very common in the workers’ movement at large. The word certainly was the opposite of being effeminate, but it was equally the antonym to slavery. The strength of Burgmann’s analysis is that she shows how in the same organisation crass anti-feminism can go along with feminism, be it at times feminism in a working-class jacket. Indeed, straightforward anti-feminism can be found in syndicalist movements in other countries. The French CGT practised it,

¹⁰⁷ Boll, *Arbeitskämpfe*, 495.

¹⁰⁸ Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 40–1.

¹⁰⁹ Francis Shor, “Masculine power and virile syndicalism: a gendered analysis of the IWW in Australia,” *Labour History* 63 (1992): 83–99. Shor, “‘Virile’ syndicalism in comparative perspective: a gender analysis of the IWW in the United States and Australia,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 56 (1999), 65–77.

¹¹⁰ Burgmann, *Revolutionary industrial unionism*, 92–111.

¹¹¹ Shor, “‘Virile’ syndicalism,” 72: “The IWW often took the lead in appealing to the *primordial instincts* of working men against the assault of the new individualizing techniques of power embedded in scientific management and other changes in industrial capitalism” [my emphasis].

¹¹² See Van der Linden, “Second Thoughts,” 187.

¹¹³ Todd McCallum, “‘Not a Sex Question’? The One Big Union and the politics of radical manhood,” *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (1998): 15–54.

maybe inspired by Proudhon.¹¹⁴ Already in 1866, the French delegation to the First International had written: “Without a family, women are of no use in the world.” One had to wait until 1935 before the CGT adopted a more favourable stance towards women and that after women’s participation in the Paris Commune of 1871 and in the factories during the First World War.¹¹⁵ The French, or the Swedish and German¹¹⁶ syndicalists for that matter, are not representative of all revolutionary syndicalists, as Verity Burgmann has shown. Moreover, revolutionary syndicalism was not exclusively a movement of struggle in the factories, neither did it express itself solely through trade unions. Temma Kaplan also sees “neighborhood women” among the adherents of revolutionary syndicalism in Barcelona. They transformed syndicalism from a trade-union movement into a communal movement. The general strike, which in Barcelona had been employed several times, had taught what these women could contribute to the struggle. This does not mean that the Spanish revolutionaries were all feminists, but their understanding of the gender question was considerably greater than that of the French CGT.¹¹⁷

An alternative research strategy: community

If labour movements cannot be adequately explained by the shop-floor, we have to look somewhere else. Eric Hobsbawm once wrote: “There is nothing which says that if you have a particular social position, that God or destiny has decided that you’re going to end up on the revolutionary left or on the ultraright. It depends upon the situations, and it depends on what you do to mobilise people and organise them.”¹¹⁸ “Situations” and “what you do” put us in a position to have a better look at local structures. For

¹¹⁴ For doubts about the importance of Proudhon for the French labour movement: Maria Fitzpatrick, “Proudhon and the French labour movement: the problem of Proudhon’s prominence,” *European History Quarterly* 15 (1985): 407–430.

¹¹⁵ Maitron, “Personnalité,” 84. See also: Jean-Louis Robert, “La CGT et la famille ouvrière, 1914–1918. Première approche,” *Le Mouvement Social* 116 (1981) : 46–66. Robert cites Péricat, who in 1916 at the congress of the *syndicat des terrassiers* had said: “Women, brought into the world to procreate, have no choice in trying to support themselves but to make shells for killing men. If the female element was less egoistic, the war would have ended a long time ago, but women only think of earning money in order to buy jewellery and toiletries.”

¹¹⁶ Klan/Nelles, *Flamme*, 289–315.

¹¹⁷ Kaplan, *Barcelona*, 24, 61; see also Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Free women of Spain. Anarchism and the struggle for the emancipation of women* (Oakland CA: AK Press, 2005), 61–89; Willemsse, *Gedeeld verleden*, 206–217.

¹¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Socialist Review* 66 (1982): 123.

instance: because of their weak finances and bad organisation, revolutionary syndicalist organisations had fewer opportunities to gain new members and mobilise people than rich trade unions or political parties. In the Netherlands this was one of the causes of the fading away of revolutionary syndicalism: during the 1920s the syndicalists could not compete anymore with Christian or social-democratic trade unions when it came to unemployment insurance funds. On the other hand, “situations” are not arbitrary either. Which “situations” promoted syndicalism and which ones obstructed its rise?

Most analyses explaining revolutionary syndicalism either start from the general evolution of industrial capitalism or remain on a national level. Since circumstances can change in every nation, this choice seems to make sense, but for several reasons I doubt whether a sufficient explanation can be reached when looking only at these levels. Clearly not in every community do construction workers, or for that matter any profession deemed prone to revolutionary syndicalism, produce syndicalist organisations. On the contrary: we find syndicalist workers in particular communities. While revolutionary syndicalism is a minority amongst working-class movements, at times even a tiny minority, the national scope can easily become too broad. Therefore, revolutionary syndicalism should primarily be researched at the local level. Local circumstances, which in some way of course are embedded in national circumstances, contain the factors which cause the independence and pride that are fostered at the shop-floor to affect the character of the local labour movement. Ideologies such as revolutionary syndicalism can guide a labour movement only if they provide an (adequate) interpretation of (the communal) society and propose a sensible strategy of change. Moreover, the “localist” element in revolutionary syndicalism (which might be less prominent within Australian syndicalism) proves that the militants themselves took the local arena seriously. Research at the local level seems to be the only possible way to establish why the textile workers in the north of France rallied behind Marxist Guesdism and their colleagues in St Etienne behind syndicalism. Why were the construction workers of Berlin localistic and inclined towards revolutionary syndicalism, but those of Hamburg not?

The last reason for investigating syndicalism locally has to do with the process of national unification that can be observed everywhere between c. 1800 and 1940. The pace and the thoroughness of this process differed in each country. In this process the importance of the local community gradually gave way to national government and centralised regulation by the state. The extent to which, at the end of the nineteenth century, local

communities were autonomous with respect to important matters like social policy could differ from country to country. This in itself might contain part of the explanation why in some countries revolutionary syndicalism was relatively strong and remained so for a long time. As long as local communities had much autonomy, the “situations” in each locality could be very different. As a general proposal I would maintain that revolutionary syndicalism had the best chance in communities where the independence the workers needed on the shop-floor was not repressed outside the workplace or even was stimulated. This assessment is congruent with Max Nettlau’s explanation of syndicalism, as quoted earlier. I will elucidate this with the findings from my analysis of revolutionary syndicalism in the Dutch town of Flushing.¹¹⁹

Flushing and Middelburg are two towns in the southwest corner of the Netherlands. In 1899 both had about 20,000 inhabitants. Flushing and Middelburg are two towns in the southwest corner of the Netherlands. Flushing has a harbour and is a small industrial town, Middelburg, 6 kilometres away, is the centre of provincial government and the market town for the region. In 1899 both had about 20.000 inhabitants. The economy of Flushing was dominated by one big shipyard, the “Koninklijke Maatschappij ‘de Schelde’” (established in 1875); other jobs were to be found in the harbour, on the ferry to England and in construction. Middelburg had small construction and metalwork enterprises and a middle-sized timber company. As a result of the town’s economy the social structure of Flushing consisted of a broad working-class base, a rather small layer of middle classes (shopkeepers, teachers and clerical workers) and a very small elite. The social structure of Middelburg was much less lopsided and at the same time more differentiated. The town had a rather broad layer of shopkeepers. The educated middle classes were much stronger because of Middelburg’s function as the administrative and judicial centre of the province and its rich collection of educational institutions. Consequently, the elite of Middelburg (gentry, magistrates and some entrepreneurs) was much larger and more strongly represented in the town than its equivalent in Flushing.

The economic basis affected more than just the social structure of the towns. Since Flushing had no function as a marketplace in the region, the local shopkeepers had to earn their living from selling to the working class. Consequently they were rather poor. Because of the preponderance in the community of the working class, education beyond the basic level was underdeveloped. Children from higher classes could easily go to

¹¹⁹ Altena, “Broeiness”.

schools in nearby Middelburg. These children usually came from the small local elite: a couple of directors of the big companies, the odd notary, some general practitioners, some clergymen and the mayor.

This social make-up of the town is important for two reasons. Firstly, Flushing was too poor to support the workers in times of crisis and unemployment. Therefore the workers had to rely on themselves. Secondly, because the middle classes were very weakly developed, it was difficult to establish a connection between the elite and the workers. It was not in keeping with the moral code of the day for the elite to socialise with workers. A connection between the two layers was only possible if intermediate groups could establish it, but the middle classes in Flushing, dependent as they were on the workers, had hardly any contact with the elite. Thus, in Flushing it was very difficult to establish organisations and activities which would cover all strata in the community. Both elite and workers lived in separate spheres. A workers' movement which wanted to remain a movement of only workers did not find any obstacles in this town.

It was a different story in Middelburg. Here, the shopkeepers were much richer and better educated, because the town not only had a broad, well-situated middle class, but also because Middelburg was the marketplace of the region. Many of these shopkeepers depended on wealthy consumers, not on the workers of the town. Because of its schools, law courts and provincial administration, Middelburg's intelligentsia was rather strong. In times of economic crisis the elite and middle classes of Middelburg managed to give substantial aid to the workers. Moreover, all kinds of initiatives helped to integrate the workers into local society. For example, from 1890 onwards Middelburg elites quite successfully practised the "Toynbee-work" (*Toynbee werk*), an initiative to provide lectures and education for workers. This way, members of the elite, like the rich timber trader and later social democrat, F.M. Wibaut, could come into contact with workers. Through the schoolteacher Christiaan Cornelissen, Wibaut even managed to establish contact with the socialist workers in town. Attempts to establish some kind of Toynbee work in Flushing on the other hand failed miserably. The local workers showed too much pride to be taught and entertained by the bourgeois, and Flushing simply lacked people who were able to sustain this type of work.

Because the social structure of Middelburg was much more complex than that of Flushing and because other strata behaved differently, Middelburg did not suit a social ideology such as revolutionary syndicalism, which revolved around notions of "us" and "them" and did not contain a very elaborate analysis of the structure of society. Workers in

Middelburg considered themselves to be at the bottom of the social structure. They were confronted with other strata which could and did offer assistance, when necessary. Efforts at social integration of the working class promised to be much more successful in Middelburg than in Flushing. This changed the attitude of the higher classes of Middelburg too. The people who started the Toynbee work either remained engaged leftist liberals or, in 1895, together with workers, formed a branch of the new Dutch social-democratic party. In 1896 Wibaut went to London to observe the international socialist congress. The Middelburg branch of the social-democratic party was socially heterogeneous, especially after 1897, when Wibaut and his wife became members. Other important members of the branch were teachers, artisanal entrepreneurs and lawyers.

In Flushing the workers not only had to rely on themselves, they also had the opportunity to build a world of their own. In fact, they dominated life in the city. Already in the 1880s we find proletarian theatrical clubs, friendly societies and attempts to set up a workers' co-operative store. Socialism appeared in Flushing much earlier (1879) than it did in Middelburg and it was an entirely working-class affair. It developed in a libertarian direction. For the next forty years the labour movement of Flushing would be dominated by revolutionary syndicalism. It proved extremely difficult to establish a branch of the social-democratic party in this working-class town. Only in 1906 was a tiny and weak branch set up. The revolutionary syndicalists, however, developed a rich culture: choirs, a free thought union with its own library, musical societies and a very good theatrical club, which performed an ambitious repertoire including the famous Dutch socialist playwright Herman Heijermans, but also the German author Gerhard Hauptmann. Ulrich Klan and Dieter Nelles have argued that it was much easier to keep the syndicalist principle intact with the help of cultural activities than on the shop-floor only.¹²⁰ This argument emphasises both the importance of syndicalist culture and of looking at it. Flushing presented no problem to the syndicalists in further developing their cultural activities. Bourgeois cultural life, with its own concerts, plays and libraries hardly existed in the town. For this the local bourgeoisie simply did not have enough cultural baggage and it was too small to maintain a cultural infrastructure of any significance. Besides, for entertainment it could go to Middelburg. The absence of bourgeois culture stimulated syndicalist culture in Flushing even more, for the owner of the

¹²⁰ Klan/Nelles, *Flamme*, 44. See for syndicalist culture also Alan B. Spitzer, "Anarchy and culture: Fernand Pelloutier and the dilemma of revolutionary syndicalism," *International Review of Social History* 8 (1963): 379–389; Rübner, *Freiheit*, 159–169.

local theatre depended on the workers for his living. It was easy to hire this theatre for socialist plays or for a speech by a libertarian activist. As a result, deference and humility were no characteristic of the average Flushing worker.

In these matters the “situation” for the workers of Middelburg was much more difficult. They knew they stood at the bottom rung of the social ladder, they behaved accordingly and showed deference. On Mondays at the shipyard in Flushing the workers of Flushing would joke about their colleagues from Middelburg: “Did you see him with his sleeve?” They meant that the workers of Middelburg from their poor pay had only bought one sleeve, which on Sundays they would put on so that they could hang out of the window with this one sleeve showing and seem respectable. The bourgeoisie of Middelburg could support a decent bourgeois cultural life. Professionals from outside the province came to town to perform, its own intelligentsia was strong enough to deliver educated lectures the whole year round. Workers’ culture seemed poor when compared to the glitter of bourgeois evenings. The owners of theatres in town did not need a working-class audience and therefore it was difficult for the workers in town to hire these places. After 1895 even their own branch of the social-democratic party was dominated by socialists of bourgeois origins. It is a measure of the poor level of working-class cultural activities in Middelburg that at times the syndicalist theatre club from Flushing was invited to perform in Middelburg.

The workers of Middelburg not only found it much more difficult to develop an independent culture of their own, independence was also repressed on the shop-floor. Many of the small employers of Middelburg depended on the wealthier classes for work. Since the local economy stagnated, it was even more important to keep these clients. That caused employers to behave in a fairly servile manner and they in turn imposed servility on the workers, especially when these had to work in the houses of clients. The presence of a relatively large elite and of relatively wealthy middle classes changed relations within the working-class family as well. It was an accepted practice in Middelburg that a working-class woman went out to work in the house of a wealthy family.

It was different in Flushing. Here there were hardly any private clients to be served, but this was compensated for by the big companies. Since these were steadily growing they constantly needed housing for their workers. Employers consequently valued skill, but servile behaviour on the part of their workers towards the clients was not very important to them. The labour market for women was significantly smaller as well. If the family wage was a matter of honour for the workman of Flushing, the

small labour market for women did not undermine this conviction. Flushing offered an ideal breeding-place for “radical manhood”, it seems, but this manhood contained other aspects as well, for example responsibility for the family or the negation of slavery. It may seem a paradox that women played an important role in Flushing’s syndicalism, much more so than in the labour movement of Middelburg. The role assumed by women is another aspect of Flushing’s syndicalist culture. Not only did they represent the family in the neighbourhood or in its relations with the local government, they also fulfilled indispensable functions in syndicalist culture. They sang in the choirs and performed on stage, and in some plays had important roles.¹²¹ Journalists, moreover, often noticed a strong female presence in meetings. This might have been reinforced by the way trade unions collected their dues. If they sent a collector around town, the dues came out of the household budget and that automatically involved the women. If they collected the dues in the pub, they came from the pocket money the men kept for themselves and the trade union remained a man’s affair. Moreover, the women of Flushing involved themselves in strikes (such as the big strike at “de Schelde” of 1928, which lasted for six months)¹²² much in the same manner as did their counterparts in Barcelona.

Flushing and Middelburg resemble Hamborn and Remscheid, which the German historian Erhard Lucas so admirably analyzed¹²³, or Saint-Junien and Limoges.¹²⁴ Lucas’ explanation of the radicalism of the workers from Hamborn, essentially in terms of their being uprooted, does not seem to apply to Flushing. A dominance of revolutionary syndicalism of almost 40 years sustained by autochthonous workers seems hardly congruent with being uprooted. Of much more importance, it seems to me, was that attitudes needed on the job could be developed further in town. I already mentioned that both shipbuilding and construction work often produce unique products. Everybody could see the ships grow above the town for nine months. Every ship was unique. The working-class houses that were being built could resemble each other; at the same time every project had its own peculiarities and problems, which had to be solved on the spot by the workers themselves. Workers on the shipyards even had to

¹²¹ Bert Altena, “Workers’ movement and culture at Flushing, 1875–1928. A Cycle?,” in *Working-class and popular culture*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss and Frits van Holthoon (Amsterdam: Stichting Beheer IISG, 1988), 83–97.

¹²² S.n., *Om niet te vergeten. De staking bij De Schelde in 1928* (s.l., [1982]).

¹²³ Lucas, *Arbeiterradikalismus*.

¹²⁴ Christian Dupuy, *Saint-Junien, un bastion anarchiste en Haute Vienne 1893–1923* (Limoges: PULIM, 2003).

invent new parts and they often developed new production techniques, which they would keep secret. Construction workers and their colleagues on the yards had a lot of “job control” and the town in no way interfered with a further build-up of their pride. The worker in Flushing did not have to display deference towards other strata. Their frame of reference was the opinions of the other workers on the job and in the street. Their cultural activities were the best the town could offer. This is not the kind of worker who easily joins labour organisations in which they are dominated, particularly not if this domination comes from people of bourgeois backgrounds.

In sum: to explain revolutionary syndicalism we have to look at the peculiarities of the job and ask whether an independent mind was needed or could develop, but what is decisive is whether this independence could further evolve in the community at large. Often, as in Hamborn, Saint-Junien or St Etienne, the circumstances in town will resemble those of Flushing, but workers can also be thrown upon their own resources when elites do not take notice of them or even repress them. That is illustrated in Barcelona.¹²⁵ The extent to which workers are left to their own devices, however, is not only determined by “what you do”, but, as we saw, also by the “situation”. The example of the construction workers of Middelburg shows that a broad layer of private clients can be important. When workers can build a world of their own, the choice for syndicalism is a logical, though not a necessary one. This could explain, why syndicalist movements tend to appear in mono-industrial, company towns, as Larry Peterson has argued.¹²⁶ Flushing, moreover, shows that a rich workers’ culture and revolutionary syndicalism are interconnected. The importance of a workers’ culture is not just peculiar to Flushing. Neville Kirk has shown how important in England “‘traditional’ working-class culture” was to “the rise of labour” in general.¹²⁷ Rolf Bigler mentions the rich organisational life of the watchmakers of the Jura¹²⁸ and bearing in mind the example of Flushing the many working-class organisations and clubs

¹²⁵ Kaplan, *Barcelona*; Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology*.

¹²⁶ Larry Peterson, “The One Big Union in international perspective: revolutionary industrial unionism, 1900–1925,” in *Work, Community and Power: The Experience of Labor in Europe and America, 1900–1925*, ed. James E. Cronin and Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 49–87, 70–71.

¹²⁷ Neville Kirk, “‘Traditional’ working-class culture and ‘the rise of Labour’: some preliminary questions and observations,” *Social History* 16 (1991): 203–217.

¹²⁸ Bigler, *Sozialismus*.

of Hamborn would not surprise the readers of Erhard Lucas' book anymore.¹²⁹

Local investigations bring us nearer to an explanation of revolutionary syndicalism and this explanation in a way resurrects Kerr and Siegel's argument about the isolated mass¹³⁰ not as a mass which is geographically segregated, but one which is socially badly integrated into society at large. From this perspective social-democracy and Christian labour movements, as Rudolf Boch has argued, appear as mechanisms of integration. No matter how much social-democracy professed differently, it improved the contact between people from bourgeois backgrounds and workers in important ways. Politically, because of its parliamentarianism, it integrated the workers into the political structures and processes of the country. Because they recruited members from different strata of society, in the nineteenth century social democratic and Christian labour movements are much more remarkable phenomena than revolutionary syndicalism is. They often experienced big tensions within their own ranks, which have to be analyzed further.¹³¹

Local history of revolutionary-syndicalist movements will not lead to easy models, which posit a direct connection between the shop-floor and the labour movement. The number of factors is simply too large. Comparability as a consequence becomes more difficult and that is another obstacle to the formulation of easy explanatory models. That does not deny the importance of comparative research, of course, for it still gives us many heuristic hints and promising hypotheses.

The disappearance of revolutionary syndicalism

The disappearance of social movements is an understudied subject.¹³² Many analyses do not consider the disappearance of revolutionary syndicalism a problem. It should not have existed anyway. Until now, only Marcel van der Linden and Vadim Dam'e have tried to provide a structural explanation.¹³³ Van der Linden focuses on the state, which is remarkable,

¹²⁹ Lucas, *Arbeiteradikalismus*, 94–98.

¹³⁰ Kerr and Siegel, "Interindustry propensity".

¹³¹ But see the exemplary analysis of Steve A. Smith, "Workers, the Intelligentsia and Marxist Parties: St Petersburg, 1895–1917 and Shanghai, 1921–1927," *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996): 1–57.

¹³² The opinion of Doug McAdam *et al.*, "Social Movements," *Handbook of sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 695–738, 728–729 is still valid.

¹³³ Van der Linden, "Vorläufiges," 58–60.

because in his analyses the state does not appear as a cause of syndicalism.¹³⁴ From my argument it becomes clear that the absence of the state (or its repressive role) is important in explaining revolutionary syndicalism. According to Van der Linden, political social reform has given the workers more social security and reduced their inclination towards syndicalism. To him the welfare state posed three equally fatal options for the syndicalists: either give up their principles, be marginalised or discontinue business. Dam'e concurs with this, but also takes into account the effects of further rationalisation and division of labour on the attitude of the workers.¹³⁵ This would mean that together with the further development of capitalist production, the recruitment base for revolutionary syndicalism tends to diminish.

Both this and the feeling of social security have certainly been important causes for the diminishing influence of syndicalism, but there have been other broad societal processes at work too. Two are particularly important. Firstly, the autonomy of local communities disappeared in many countries. The second is the disappearance of the independent, free world of labour. Both processes are affected by the fact that the state assumed a bigger role in society, but the first one has also been affected by other centralising processes, like the introduction of nationwide labour contracts.¹³⁶ Consequently, the local arrangement of affairs became much less important: local communities had to set up their affairs according to centrally decided social policies. For example, local elites had to implement nationally determined policies and local trade unions were confronted with nationally agreed labour contracts. Thus, local autonomy, which was important to the syndicalists, increasingly became a phenomenon of the past. On the other hand, in the context of national negotiations between trade unions, employers and the state, local unions became unimportant. Making deals on a nationwide scale requires national, centralised and maybe even top-down organisations—the very opposite of the syndicalist ideal! Because syndicalists were either not recognised as a partner in the deals or did not recognise these deals themselves, they were marginalised, as Van der Linden pointed out After 1914 in many countries trade unions were incorporated into new social policy structures. That meant that they had to develop expertise in these matters. Educated cadres and well-organised unions were needed. The syndicalists could not provide these experts and structures very well, nor

¹³⁴ This is to be found in the analyses of Vadim Dam'e: "Istoricheskie sudby," *Zabytyj Internatsional II*, 628–629.

¹³⁵ Dam'e, *Zabytyj Internatsional II*, 629–631.

¹³⁶ See for this also Van der Linden and Thorpe, "Rise," 11–12.

did they want to, but this undermined their position compared to other trade unions.

The rising welfare state not only abolished the autonomy of communities, it also made national politics seem important to workers. Next to the state as an instrument of repression, the state as a provider of social arrangements appeared on stage. In countries such as France and the Netherlands, this enhanced the attractiveness of parliamentary politics and social democratic parties. It made syndicalists like Léon Jouhaux reconsider their antiparliamentarian convictions.¹³⁷ Opinions such as Cornelissen's, that social or for that matter educational policies were important to syndicalists, but not a sufficient argument to positively engage in parliamentary politics, apparently failed to convince the majority of syndicalists.¹³⁸ Thus syndicalism lost out to social democracy and lost the feasibility of its own goal: a self-guiding, anarchist society without a state. Intervention in various social domains brought the state into the life of every individual. In towns where workers had previously had to fall back on their own resources, social policy now provided help. It took more and more creativity to make the syndicalist alternative realistic and achievable. In fact, the same thing seems to have happened to syndicalism as what, according to Gareth Stedman Jones, affected Chartism during the 1840s: the ideology of syndicalism lost its power to make sense of the world and find possible links with a better one.¹³⁹

In cultural activities too, the syndicalists were confronted with competitors: sports (which many syndicalists disliked because they diverted from the essential struggle of the workers)¹⁴⁰ or "capitalist" forms of entertainment such as movies and dancing. The radio challenged syndicalist music and theatre with "real" professional culture and made them look poor and amateurish. Possibly the most important factor was that syndicalist culture was intimately intertwined with the movement as a whole. It was always imbued with syndicalist norms and pointed to the big syndicalist goal. As soon as syndicalism as a societal force lost the feasibility of its vision, its culture became hollow because its message

¹³⁷ Altena, "Mediators".

¹³⁸ C. Cornelissen, "Über die theoretischen und wirtschaftlichen Grundlagen des Syndikalismus," in Roffenstein, Gaston *et al.*, *Partei und Klasse im Lebensprozeß der Gesellschaft* (= *Forschungen zur Völkerpsychologie und Soziologie II*) (Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1926), 63–82, 67–68.

¹³⁹ Gareth Stedman Jones, "Rethinking Chartism," in *Languages of Class. Studies in English Working Class history, 1832–1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 90–179.

¹⁴⁰ Klan/Nelles, *Flamme*, 46.

became hollow. Another problem was that new cultural products of anarchist or syndicalist inspiration (Dada for example) were difficult for workers to understand.

These big societal processes undermined syndicalism in such a way that in many countries it almost subsided under the intense debates (during the early 1920s) about affiliation to the Profintern. That these debates could be so harmful proves that syndicalism had already lost much of its attraction. In so far as the syndicalists did not abandon their principles or disbanded, they had to accept marginalisation.¹⁴¹ Marginal movements, however, can still be useful movements.

Conclusion

Revolutionary syndicalism is a workers' movement with deep roots. It flowered during the transformation process between pre-industrial and industrial societies. Syndicalists were not moved by nostalgia, but by the problems of this transformation. Their ideas were future-oriented and their movement was an attempt to educate the workers to become independent bearers of a new, ideal and libertarian society, indeed of a new stage in human civilisation. The workers were to become people who could liberate themselves and in doing so liberate their class, in every respect. That is why syndicalist movements had a big interest in the creation of an independent workers' culture, which was leavened by its ideals. Through cultural activities it was able to communicate those ideals to its adherents and to the world at large. As a kind of worker socialism, revolutionary syndicalism had conceptual limits, however. It had a limited grasp of society outside the world of the worker. For some syndicalists, this world should be dealt with by libertarian organisations other than the trade unions. Workers differed from socialist intellectuals in that they could not spend the whole day in developing, discussing and adapting complex theories about society. For this they lacked the time and the education.

¹⁴¹ I leave undiscussed the problem of optical illusion in the marginalisation thesis: the organisation of the formerly unorganised workers may have a completely different significance (for example during the twenties and thirties unemployment funds of the unions could be subsidised by the state and therefore it could become very attractive to be a union member) and at the same time it can give the impression of a marginalisation of revolutionary syndicalism. As I have argued, compared to the working population as a whole, and often even to the unionised part of it, revolutionary syndicalism has always been more marginal than many analysts seem to think.

Revolutionary syndicalism should be primarily researched at the level of the locality, but the disappearance of the movement was caused by processes which were national. Local investigations will show the richness of the movement and the insufficiency of an approach which sees it only as a trade union. Because syndicalism was not a purely economic movement, but was intimately tied to other libertarian activities, or even incorporated them, it is logical not to analyse it as if it were only a response to the processes of the shop-floor. Syndicalism presents an interpretation of society as a whole and could only make sense to the workers when this interpretation proved useful to them. Even workers were interested in more than just the job and the shop-floor.

Local syndicalist history has to look to the structuring of the local society and the opportunity it provided workers to build their own world. Many possible factors can provide this opportunity, and it appears difficult to further elaborate a model of explanation or still further a historical matrix of labour movements. So this is another nice mess anarchism has gotten us into.

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