

SYNDICALISM: An International and Historical Perspective

by Dek Keenan



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This paper will introduce syndicalism both as an historical international phenomenon and as a contemporary international model and movement. It presupposes very little knowledge of, but hopefully some substantial interest in, the subject on the part of the reader.

What does Syndicalism mean to us as labour movement activists? It may mean the million workers in the Spanish CNT fighting with a new world in their hearts during the Spanish Civil War. It may mean the legendary Industrial Workers of the World organising the One Big Union across craft and trade, race and gender lines. It may mean a vast movement of workers across Latin America during the first half of the 20th Century. It may mean Starbucks baristas fighting today to build unions in coffee houses in New York and Santiago. But it very possibly means none of these things.

Because syndicalism constitutes one of the least understood currents in the workers movement. And yet syndicalism was the driving force of immense and powerful labour movements across the globe in the first decades of the 20th Century; from Argentina to Japan and from Australia to Portugal workers gathered under its flag. And today it represents a small, but growing, part of the international labour movement; albeit one that remains unduly obscure and marginal.

Of course, for speakers of a Romance language syndicalism will be recognised as simply the word for 'unionism'. So, when we talk of syndicalism in the context of this paper we are actually talking about revolutionary syndicalism and, later on, anarcho-syndicalism. Revolutionary syndicalism or revolutionary unionism (I will for brevity use the term syndicalism to indicate revolutionary syndicalism throughout this paper) emerged in the latter part of the 19th century as an alternative vision to the dominant unionism which had developed and which were aligned with social democratic political parties or which simply

followed a class collaborationist line. Syndicalists, aware of the failure of this form of unionism to defend the interests of workers and generally informed by socialist ideas, of both anarchist and Marxist origin (Darlington, 2013), looked to establishing workers' organisations that would provide both day to day resistance to the bosses and a structure able to establish a new society based on a collectivised system of worker-managed production and distribution. In the United States and Canada this vision tended to be described as Revolutionary Industrial Unionism rather than syndicalism, but this can be understood as a 'local' variant of syndicalism re-named to reflect a notion of advanced industrial development (Dubofsky, 1969).

Syndicalists took diverse routes in building such organisations, sometimes based upon federations of small trade and even craft unions, sometimes upon national industry-wide unions and sometimes co-ordinated in one big union (e.g. Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the United States and globally). What they shared, however, were the following common characteristics.

1. The centrality of class conflict. That the task of abolishing capitalism was the task of the working class alone and that the vehicle for that task was the revolutionary union.
2. That direct action rather than parliamentary activity was the key tool for both winning concessions and of creating a new society.
3. The belief that the state is not the friend of the working class.

This irreconcilability of class interests led syndicalists to reject notions of what in modern parlance would be 'partnership'. Rather, the syndicalists saw not only the inevitability of class conflict but welcomed it, considering themselves combatants in a class war that would have to be won by one or other of the contending classes. The centrality of class conflict is reflected in two key texts from the period considered the 'Golden Era' of syndicalism: the Charter of Amiens (1906) and the Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World (1908).

The Charter of Amiens, conceived by what is considered the seminal syndicalist organisation - the French General Confederation of Labour, established in 1895 - was both a proclamation of the independence of the union movement from political parties and of its aim as being the abolition of capitalist society through class war.

Outside of all political schools, the CGT groups together all workers conscious of the fight to be carried out for the disappearance of the salaried and of employers.

met with a wholly inadequate response on the part of large sections of the international trade union movement. This reflects the general crisis in trade unionism and the need for new thinking and new approaches. The question is whether syndicalism can provide this.

At present, syndicalism is represented by, usually, relatively small unions, smaller 'union-initiatives' and by tendencies in the wider labour movement either working inside non-syndicalist unions or independently. Most, though not all, syndicalists currently reject the idea of 'syndicalising' the mainstream unions through working within them at a rank and file level. A broader awareness of syndicalist models, even amongst union activists, is often minimal or non-existent. And yet, they are pushed by the circumstance of the greatest onslaught against the working class since the 1920s, to utilise unconsciously syndicalist methods, to rediscover the potential of direct action. Conscious syndicalists need, therefore, to encourage (and rapidly!) awareness of the bigger syndicalist vision and the means by which it could be achieved amongst an ever-larger number of labour movement activists and the broader working class. The syndicalist ethos of working class self-emancipation through direct action appears more vital than ever before and the labour movement of tomorrow must embrace that ethos if it is to renew itself on the global stage.

It is the only body through which syndicalists, who constitute a minority within it, are working on an international level with non-syndicalist unions. Given its recent emergence, what comes of this initiative remains to be seen, but it appears to have interested a large number of unions, including some from the WFTU and the ITUC with 60 union bodies being represented at its founding meeting in Paris in March 2013.

► Syndicalism as a model for the 21st Century

So, what does syndicalism, this ‘ghost’ from the beginning of the last century, hold for the international labour movement in this one? Considering the common characteristics outlined at the beginning of this paper – syndicalism has turned out to be profoundly realistic in its assessment of what challenges the global working class faces and how it might overcome them.

The era of partnership, at least where one of the partners was not openly abusive, appears to be greatly over. The post-World War 2 consensus, which gave rise to the hegemony of a tamed, business-oriented trade unionism, has been shattered, as capitalism can no longer afford the luxury of even acquiescing unions. Lip service is still often paid to partnership and social dialogue by capitalists in regions of relatively high union density and established patterns of collective bargaining but the reality for the majority of the world’s working population, however, is the class war that syndicalists highlighted as a fundamental characteristic of the capitalist system.

The ‘wild’ capitalism of the early 21st Century in many respects resembles the period when syndicalism first emerged. Today, many political parties of the democratic left have embraced neo-liberalism whilst Leninist parties who remain tied to their ‘democratic centralist’ model of top-down politics continue to proffer a failed ‘alternative’ of state ownership and party dictatorship to an ever-shrinking audience. The task of the liberation of the working class, including from the would-be liberators of the working class, remains the task of the working class alone. National parliaments have proven to be little more than local executors of the decisions of transnational capital. The state is exposed as far from being a neutral arbiter between the contending classes, but rather a self-perpetuating arm of capital itself. What is won from the state and capital today is generally won by the direct activity of people themselves.

Direct action, it would appear, remains the best and, increasingly, only viable weapon left in the armoury of the workers. The ongoing crisis and the austerity under which ever larger numbers of working people are suffering has been

The Congress regards this declaration as a recognition of the class struggle which, on the economic plain, sets the workers in revolt in opposition to all forms of exploitation and oppression – material as well as moral – put in place by the capitalist class against the working class.

Charter of Amiens, 1906

The Preamble of the IWW in 1908 echoes this when it opens with ‘The working class and the employing class have nothing in common... between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.’ (Preamble of the IWW, 1908).

Although there is no specific mention of political independence, the rejection of tutelage by political parties of the left was built into the IWW from 1908 onwards, the union having suffered from debilitating infighting and intrigue during its first three years of existence. What is clear is the characteristically openly class-antagonistic nature of the document.

The emphasis upon the primacy of direct action was elevated to the status of principle rather than simple tactic. Direct action in the form of strikes, working to rule, go-slows and even sabotage were seen as central to worker self-emancipation, not simply weapons in their armoury. Workers’ power was considered to lie in their control over their working lives, not the number of representatives they could send to parliament or local government.

The CGT militant Pouget, claimed that direct action

...is the plain and simple fleshing-out of the spirit of revolt: it fleshes out the class struggle, shifting it from the realm of theory and abstraction into the realm of practice and accomplishment. As a result, direct action is the class struggle lived on a daily basis, an ongoing attack upon capitalism. (Pouget, 1908)

Syndicalism, whether influenced predominantly by anarchist or Marxist thinking, expressed, with few exceptions, antipathy to statism. The notable exceptions, such as the National Syndicalism associated with Italian proto-fascism and Spanish fascism are examples of this, wherein the nation (and therefore inevitably, the nation-state) replaced class as the central focus of activity.

Schmidt and van der Walt (2009) have argued that the anti-statism of syndicalism, (2009) is owed entirely to anarchist theoretical influence. Although this influence, particularly in the case of the French CGT, cannot be

underestimated, other factors should be taken into consideration. One of these is the composition of many early syndicalist unions. Syndicalist organisations, often in contrast to exclusivist craft and trade unions, tended to organise workers regardless of status: indigenous and immigrant, male and female. Many of these workers did not have the vote and electoral politics were almost entirely alien or irrelevant to them. What is clear is that the vast majority of syndicalist unions saw the state as part of the problem, rather than the solution, and were either highly critical or entirely dismissive of parliamentary politics (Darlington 2013, Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009). Whilst this led their critics to accuse them of apoliticism, syndicalist activists tended to be amongst the most highly politicised of workers.

► **Syndicalist Internationalism in Peace and War**

Attempts at establishing a syndicalist international began relatively late; the first International Syndicalist Congress taking place in 1913, at the height of Britain's 'syndicalist revolt' and in the middle of the Dublin Lockout, itself led by the syndicalist-influenced Irish Transport and General Workers Union. The Congress was initiated by the Industrial Syndicalist Education League, which at the time constituted Britain's largest syndicalist organisation. A similar call-out was made by the Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat (NAS) of Holland, which called for the creation of an international co-ordinating body that would be free of the influence of the politicians of the Second International. Whilst both initiatives received widespread support from syndicalist organisations throughout Europe and in the United States, the French CGT was opposed. Their opposition was based mainly upon their commitment to revolutionising the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC), the 'exclusivist and reformist' (Thorpe, 1979) trade union co-ordination dominated by the German trade unions and social democratic in spirit and affiliation. The potential for the establishment of a syndicalist alternative on the international plane exposed tensions within the CGT between those who favoured maintaining an intransigently revolutionary union and the strengthening forces of those moving towards reformism. Whilst the latter were intent upon remaining in the social democratic mainstream, the former were aware that the creation of an alternative international could weaken their own position within the CGT and their rejection of the Congress was the most emphatic.

The International Syndicalist Congress, held at Holborn Town Hall, London, from September 27th until October 2nd, 1913 attracted representatives of all significant European syndicalist organisations (with the exception of the CGT)

unions such as the French CNT, and Spain's CSSO, but involves large 'minority' unions from several countries which come from a 'base' or rank and file unionist tradition. This tradition includes the Solidaires and SUD unions of France, unions in the 'Cobas' (or co-ordination of the base) tradition such as the Unicobas and CUB of Italy as well as independent 'alternative' unions such as the Spanish Confederacion Intersindical and the Intersindical Alternativa de Catalunya. This 'modernised' syndicalism is more loosely ideologically defined than that of the IWA. It involves unions who, although committed to a combatitative approach that is critical of traditional, service union models, would not sit easily amongst the expressly libertarian and revolutionary organisations of the IWA. The aim of the network is probably less to establish an alternative to the IWA as it is to establish an alternative to the European Trade Union Congress (ETUC). Its focus appears to be to widen the involvement of independent fighting unions, regardless of specific ideological factors. This has led to the involvement of unions such as the LAB of Euzkadi and USB of Italy, who are also members of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the Stalinist (or post-Stalinist) trade union international. Patently, the hierarchical, party-oriented politics of the WFTU have little in common with the historic tradition or present day praxis of syndicalism, 'orthodox' or 'modern'.

One area in which the European Network of Alternative and Base Unionism has managed to bring together the 'unionism of struggle' and anarcho-syndicalism has been the establishment of a co-ordination of railworkers in Europe based upon the SUD-Rail, the CUB of Italy, the Rail Maritime and Transport (RMT) union in the UK and also the CGT-E. The militant and politically independent RMT is the only mainstream UK union to have engaged with syndicalists in Europe so far.

► **International Union Network of Solidarity and Struggles** (www.encontrointernacional.com)

The International Union Network of Solidarity and Struggles is the final thread of international syndicalist activity and represents an arena where syndicalists are attempting to reach out to other militant unionists who may come from different traditions. Initiated by the CSP Conlutas Sindical e Popular of Brazil, the CGT-E, Solidaires and the ODT, the Network is an attempt to create a global pole of independent, class struggle unionism that involves worker organisations from Europe, Africa and Latin America. It does not, presently, consider itself a new union 'International'. The Network's founding conference addressed itself to all union organisations that recognised the need for 'fighting unionism, workers' democracy, workers' self-organisation and social transformation'.

community organizations with varying levels of success. The names of some of the organisations are familiar – the CNT, USI, FOR A, COB, FAU and ZSP echo the names of mass syndicalist unions of the past and the first three they can claim an almost unbroken organisational continuity. The IWA is a federation with a high level of ideological agreement, based upon the Statutes of Revolutionary Unionism which outline the anti-capitalist and anti-statist vision of worker's self-mangement that is at the heart of anarcho-syndicalist 'orthodoxy'. Capable of considerable international mobilisations of solidarity amongst its affiliates and supporters, the IWA probably represents the most organised, coherent and focused of the international syndicalist co-ordinations and could be considered a revolutionary syndicalist alternative to the international union federations such as the International Trade Union Confederation etc. Joint activity with non-IWA syndicalist organisations, although taking place amongst some national and local affiliates, is not replicated on an international level.

► **Red and Black Co-ordination**

(RBC - www.cnt-f.org/international/-Coordination-Red-Black.html)

The Red and Black Co-ordination has existed as a much looser network of European revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalist unions since the early 2000s. Prior to this period, syndicalist unions unaffiliated to the IWA had minimal international contact. The initiative for this co-ordination came from the Spanish CGT and unions that had left or had been excluded from the IWA, notably the French CNT, the Swedish SAC and the USI of Italy (following schisms, there are two USI unions, one affiliated to the IWA). The Red and Black Co-ordination do not claim to constitute a 'rival' to the IWA within the international syndicalist movement but rather an alternative. The RBC holds twice-yearly meetings where recent areas of discussion have included joint campaigns against utilities privatisation, job outsourcing and immigrant solidarity. The co-ordination has built links with independent unions such as the ODT (Democratic Organisation of Labour) in North Africa and has recently launched a solidarity campaign for political prisoners in Morocco. Other than the above-mentioned unions, regular participants in the co-ordination include the CSSO (Workers Solidarity Union Confederation) of Spain, ESE (Libertarian Workers Union) of Greece and the OZZIP (Workers Initiative) union of Poland, whilst the European Regional Administration of the IWW enjoys observer status.

► **European Network of Alternative and Base Unionism**

(www.resistenzaeu.blogspot.co.uk)

The Spanish CGT is also central to the European Network of Alternative and Base Syndicalism, which is a broader network containing anarcho-syndicalist

as well as delegates from Cuba and Argentina. Whilst some local unions affiliated to the CGT attended the Congress, the absence of the union that had been regarded as the guide and inspiration for syndicalists worldwide undermined its hope of constituting an alternative to the ISNTUC. Of the 9 agenda topics only 2 were fully addressed: what the meeting stood for and what would come out of it, organisationally. The Declaration of Principles agreed after lengthy and heated discussion were emphatically radical, anti-capitalist and markedly anti-statist. They read as follows:

That this Congress, recognising that the working class of every country suffers from capitalist slavery and State oppression, declares for the class struggle and international solidarity, and for the organisation of the workers into autonomous industrial Unions on a basis of free association.

Strives for immediate uplifting of the material and intellectual interests of the working class, and for the overthrow of the capitalist system and the state.

The declaration continues with a call for the socialisation of the means of production by the trade unions (as opposed to nationalisation) and explicitly rejects representative politics in favour of direct action on the economic plane. In this declaration the anti-statism of the syndicalist movement was explicit and put clear water between the syndicalist 'international' and their reformist counterparts.

However, this embryonic 'international' was unable to advance beyond the paper stage, establishing an International Syndicalist Information Bureau based in Amsterdam as in 1914 syndicalists faced the generalised collapse of socialist forces which accompanied the outbreak of world war in July of that year. This collapse saw the dominant labour organisations of the belligerent nations take the sides of their national bourgeoisies and act as recruiting sergeants for the catastrophic events of 1914-1918. The French CGT, which had historically been committed to a pronounced anti-militarist and indeed anti-patriotic perspective, joined the union sacrée ('sacred union') of French interests. Many of the CGT's 'revolutionary' wing were found amongst the most militaristic and patriotic, including the anarcho-syndicalist Christiaan Cornelissen (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009).

The minority syndicalist unions in Europe, with the exception of the 100,000 member *Unione Sindacale Italiana* (USI), maintained an internationalist anti-war position. A pro-Allied ('interventionist') faction of the USI, some of whom would constitute the core of 'National Syndicalism' and later contribute to the

emergence of fascism, successfully split 30,000 members from the USI upon their expulsion. In Britain, the syndicalist Building Workers Industrial Union, established on the very eve of the war, stood out as the only union in total opposition to the conflict, but became increasingly marginalised and a voice in the wilderness (Holton, 1976). In Germany the Freie Vereinigung Deutscher Gewerkschaften (FVdG) (Free Association of German Trade Unions), whilst the only union to oppose the war, was tiny (6,000 members) by comparison with the Social Democratic Party affiliated unions (over 2 million members) and following the banning of its press, was limited in its ability to oppose the war (Thorpe, 2000).

Outside of Europe, the Industrial Workers of the World in the United States, Canada and Australia all saw the war as a disaster for the working class but differed in their response. Whilst the Australian and Canadian IWW vigorously agitated against the war effort and suffered repression, seeing the Australian union banned in 1917 and the Canadian union a year later, the IWW in the United States did not officially oppose the war. However, its commitment to not calling a ceasefire in the class war or to support an American version of the Sacred Union led to brutal violence from employers, vigilantes and the state (Thompson and Bekken, 2006).

Whilst the principled stand of syndicalist organisations in Europe and beyond stood out from the majority of their social democratic equivalents, it was, perhaps, to be expected as the syndicalist movement should be understood as part of the intransigent left of the labour movement. Whilst notable anarchists such as Kropotkin and Grave joined many socialist leaders in supporting the war, the majority of anarchists were in opposition. And anarchists had entered, and become increasingly influential within, the syndicalist movement over the previous 20 years. It was no surprise, therefore, that syndicalists were amongst the earliest enthusiasts for the Russian Revolutions in 1917.

► **Syndicalists, the Bolsheviks and the Red International**

For many syndicalists and revolutionary industrial unionists, the Russia of the Soviets and Factory Committees appeared as a living expression of their vision of a worker-managed society and of socialism from below. Early Communist Parties, notably the French and the Argentinean, were largely initiated by the syndicalists of the CGT and the Federacion Obrera Regional Argentina (FOR A) respectively (Berry, 2009, Thompson, 1990). Everywhere, militants who had been active in syndicalist unions and as syndicalists within

► **Industrial Workers of the World** (IWW - www.iww.org)

Despite its identification with the United States, the IWW had been founded as a union with global aspirations. IWW unions emerged internationally within two years of the 1905 foundation of the 'American' IWW. Regional Administrations or industrial unions were established in Canada (1906); and Great Britain (1906); Australia (1907); South Africa (1911); Mexico (1912); New Zealand (1912); Argentina (1919); Chile (1919); Ecuador (1922); Peru (1923); Germany (1924). In 1922 the Chilean IWW joined the IWA and in 1936 the IWW General Administration in the United States voted in favour of affiliation only to reverse the decision the same year (Thompson and Bekken, 2006). Despite this, the IWW has tended to see itself as an 'International' of its own. Today, outside the United States, the IWW has a European Regional Administration that covers Britain, Ireland, Norway, Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

In Britain the union was re-established in the early 1990s and has registered trade union status. The union is embedded in a number of workplaces and industries, notably amongst cleaning workers in London, Pizza Hut workers in Sheffield, Education workers in Scotland and in small private sector workplaces throughout the UK. There are IWW 'outposts' as far afield as Australia and Taiwan, Greece and Uganda. Despite its 'global' reach, the IWW identifies with and acts in solidarity with syndicalist unions in Europe, particularly those in France and Poland. The IWW has also been at the forefront of developing syndicalist praxis in recent years with the development of Solidarity Unionism (Gross and Lynd, 2011), which emphasises the union as a dynamic relationship between workers in workplaces rather than an institution dependent on full-time staff. This direct action based unionism, which emphasises workers organisation and solidarity rather than the seeking of binding contracts, has been notably successful with Starbucks baristas in the United States and Chile.

► **The International Workers Association** (IWA - www.ait-iwa.org)

Under the slogan One World, One Fight, the XXV Congress of the International Workers Association took place in Valencia, Spain in December 2013 and affiliates attended from France (CNT), Germany (FAU), Italy (USI), Spain (CNT), Portugal (AIT-SP), Great Britain (SF), Australia (ASF), Brazil (COB), Argentina (FORA), Norway (NSF), Serbia (ASI), Poland (ZSP), Russia (KRAS) and Slovakia (PA). Of those attending the delegates from Italy, Spain and Poland represented unions with multiple workplace branches whilst the rest would self-describe as 'revolutionary union initiatives' engaged in building embryonic workplace and

the eventual crushing of the CNT under the victorious Franco regime in 1939 and the execution and exile of tens of thousands of union members, the IWMA was reduced to small networks of militants, often in exile, with one remaining functioning mass union, the Swedish Workers Central (SAC).

By the end of the Second World War the IWMA was in no sense a functioning international union federation. The combination of Communist opposition, fascist and authoritarian regime repression and the post-war 'boom' in capitalism saw the ostensible 'death' of syndicalism by the middle of the 20th century. By the mid-1950s syndicalism looked like an anachronism, an idea that's time had passed, superseded by a new labour movement which had either made a definitive peace with capital or took its lead from Moscow in the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

The IWMA (now known as the International Workers Association) re-emerged with its first post-war Conference in Toulouse, France in May 1951. Although there were representatives from 13 countries, they were mostly the representatives of unions that had been smashed in the preceding period or small anarcho-syndicalist activist groups. The resignation of the SAC in 1956 left the IWA a union international in name only. In the United States, the IWW lost its last functioning unions (amongst metal workers in Cleveland, Ohio) during the Cold War anti-Communist hysteria in 1956 and in 1961 counted less than 200 members nationwide. The international syndicalist movement was never at lower ebb.

Although small syndicalist organisations continued to hold the flame aloft throughout the dark years of the cold war and into the 1960s, they failed to thrive anywhere. Things only began to change during the tumultuous events of the late 1960s, when interest in ideas of liberation, which had been buried under the winter snows of Stalinism, began to develop. The events around Paris in May 1968 appears to have been a turning point in the revival of interest in alternative models of workers organisation. From the mid-1970s and particularly following the re-emergence of the Spanish CNT after the death of Franco, a new momentum began to develop and syndicalist organisations in Europe and beyond began to develop and grow, often from scratch.

It remains to take a look at the contemporary syndicalist movement and its attempts to internationalise its activity. Presently there are five international co-ordinations bringing together syndicalist unions and syndicalist organisations. These are the IWW; the IWA; the Red and Black Co-ordination; the European Network of Alternative and Base Unionism and the International Network of Solidarity and Struggles.

non-syndicalist unions were drawn to the new dawn that seemed to be rising in Russia. When news of the persecution of those to the left of the Bolsheviks (including syndicalists) started to filter through, these syndicalists were faced with the decision of whether to stay with the new Communist movement or to reject Bolshevism. Many stayed, convinced of the approach of the Communist International. Others believed that an engagement with Communist Parties which allowed union independence was possible and sought ways to make this work.

In July 1920, at the 2nd World Congress of the Communist International an initiative was taken to establish an alternative to the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU, previously the ISNTUC). Involved in this project were two leading syndicalists, Tom Mann and Alfred Rosmer. Mann was by far Britain's most well known syndicalist whilst Rosmer was a leading member of the CGT left. The establishment a year later of the Red Labour Union International, known as the Profintern, was a controversial development and created what was effectively a civil war within the international trade union movement as Communists attempted to woo IFTU and the unaffiliated syndicalist unions to the new International.

The majority of European Syndicalist unions plus the Argentinian FOR A and the IWW attended the founding Congress of the Profintern in July 1921. Motions backed by the syndicalists in favour of keeping the Profintern independent of the Communist International and against participation in reformist unions were defeated (Damier, 2009). The pressure on unions to accept the tutelage of the Communist International rapidly alienated the more libertarian and independent-minded of the syndicalists. The Bolshevik leadership found it difficult to hide their contempt for the 'primitive' ideas of the syndicalists, whilst simultaneously recognising their anti-reformist class instincts. Attempts to both cajole the syndicalists whilst building Communist factions within their unions only managed to create antagonism. In the case of the IWW, Moscow's insistence that the union orientate towards the rival American Federation of Labor, combined with attempts by supporters of the Communist Party to 'redirect' the union, led to antagonism as 'relations with the communists slowly but steadily shifted from an original comradely disagreement to open hostility' (Thompson and Bekken 2006: p. 128).

By 1922 the syndicalist movement in what was now the Soviet Union, was all but crushed. The main strength of the Russian and Ukrainian syndicalists had been amongst the Donetsk miners, food industry workers, bakers, dock and shipyard workers (Avrich, 2005) The movement, which had started to develop following the 1905 revolution, had been strengthened by the return of many

syndicalists from the United States following the Red Scare of 1919. Many joined the Union of Anarcho-syndicalist Propaganda whose newspaper *Golos Truda* (Voice of Labour) argued for the increased power of the Workers Committees in the factories, workshops and railways against the trade unions, which they considered 'dead' organisations. Bolshevik repression against syndicalists, part of the general clampdown against anarchist 'bandits' and 'terrorists' began as early as Spring 1918, but became more systematic from 1919 onwards, slowly extinguishing syndicalism in Russia for almost 70 years. No syndicalist organisation based in the USSR was able to play a part in the next stage of syndicalist internationalism.

► **Syndicalist Internationalism revived: The IWMA***

Although the prestige of the Russian revolution and the emergence of a worldwide Communist movement saw many syndicalist militants re-orientate towards working in the national Communist Parties, most syndicalist unions experienced a period of growth during the early 1920s. Their growing disillusionment with the Comintern and Profintern amplified the desire for a resumption of the building of a specifically syndicalist international, which had been interrupted by the war. Much of the initiative for this came from the German FAUD (Free Workers Union of Germany), which had become more explicitly anarcho-syndicalist since changing its name from the FVdG (Association of Free Unions). The syndicalist organisations that met in Berlin in December 1922 were united by a common rejection of the model of State Socialism being established in the Soviet Union and, increasingly, an endorsement of explicitly libertarian syndicalism.

The meeting saw delegates of 10 syndicalist organisations representing over a million workers from Italy, France, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Portugal, Argentina, Chile and Denmark establish the International Working Men's Association (IWMA), the name of the original, First, International with which it claimed continuity. In 1923, the Spanish CNT would bring an additional 600,000 members into the IWMA and would constitute the largest union, followed by the 500,000 strong Unione Sindicale Italiana, the 200,000 member FAUD and the 150,000 Confederação Geral do Trabalho of Portugal. Unlike the political 'neutrality' of the Charter of Amiens, the Statutes of the IWMA explicitly called

* *This is of course the International Workers' Association (IWA), for more see below*

for the 'reorganisation of social life on the basis of libertarian communism' and its explicit anti-statism picked up where the International Syndicalist Congress left off.

The IWMA position was, therefore, distinctly anarcho-syndicalist and anti-partyist, although it tended to self-describe as 'revolutionary syndicalist' and its member unions had wide variations in their relationships with anarchist organisations in their respective countries. Once the IWMA was established, the Profintern proceeded from a clumsy wooing of the syndicalists, to an aggressive dismissal of them as a petit bourgeois tendency in the workers movement, an historical footnote. Those syndicalists who remained loyal to the pre-war vision of independence increasingly became dismissed as anarcho-syndicalists, as indeed a majority of them by then were. Orthodox anarcho-syndicalism has since the establishment of the IWMA tended to favour the integration of the political and the economic in the revolutionary union and to reject the idea of the need for specific political organisations outside that union. It should be noted that other syndicalists, including some anarchists, have valued the role of specific political organisations that exist both outside and inside the revolutionary union (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, Schmidt, 2013).

► **Eclipse and Re-emergence**

The IWMA was born just as the revolutionary wave that had engulfed Europe and the world was beginning to subside and Fascist or right authoritarian parties were beginning to take power, first in Italy in 1922, then in Portugal 1926, in the process crushing the syndicalist unions alongside the rest of the labour movement. In 1933 the Nazi Party in Germany rapidly pushed the FAUD underground, into exile or into concentration camps. Outside of Europe, the Latin American syndicalist movement, which had been a major part of the labour movement in Chile, Peru, Brazil and Argentina, was caught between the emergent Communist movement and increasingly dictatorial state repression.

In 1935 the (non-IWMA affiliated) anarcho-syndicalist movement represented by the All-Japan Libertarian Federation of Labour Unions (known as the Zenkoku Jiren) was repressed out of existence by the increasingly militaristic Japanese state (Crump, 1996). In 1936 the largest affiliate of the IWMA, the CNT, was at the forefront of the Spanish Civil War and Revolution. The controversial entry of the CNT into the regional and national government of Spain in November 1936, a move heavily criticised by other IWMA sections (Berry, 2009), gives some indication of the strength and importance of the union at this time. With