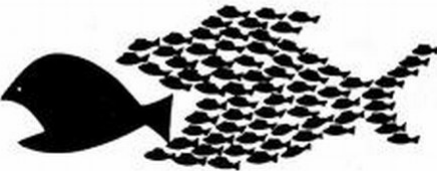


STRATEGY & STRUGGLE



**ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM
IN THE 21st CENTURY**

SOLIDARITY FEDERATION



Distributed by Brisbane Community Action
<http://www.ibcat.tk>

PREFACE

Since this document was first circulated, it has provoked both discussion within the Solidarity Federation - where in its current form it represents a minority viewpoint - and also in the wider libertarian class struggle milieu, with reports of discussions from the Netherlands to Eastern Europe to the United States.

We encourage our critics to publish their critiques, for the purpose of furthering the necessary debate over how best to build a libertarian working class movement. For our part, based on comrades criticisms, further historical and primary research and reflections on our own activities in our town and workplaces, we have begun the process of drafting a new, much more comprehensive document to build on the ideas set forth in this pamphlet. Let this document too be subject to intellectual criticism and the cauldron of practice, in order to contribute to new and more effective strategies and tactics.

Brighton SolFed
May 2009

INTRODUCTION

"The spirit of anarcho-syndicalism (...) is characterised by independence of action around a basic set of core principles; centred on freedom and solidarity. Anarcho-syndicalism has grown and developed through people taking action, having experiences, and learning from them (...) the idea is to contribute to new and more effective action, from which we can collectively bring about a better society more quickly. That is the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism."

– **Self Education Collective (2001)**1

Anarcho-syndicalism is a specific tendency within the wider workers' movement. As a tendency, it has a history of its own dating back over a century. In contemporary discussions many - self-identified advocates and critics alike – take the tradition as it was 50, 70 or 100 years ago as definitive of the tradition as a whole. There is also the fact that the

tradition is a plural one, and its core principles have allowed varied, sometimes conflicting practices at differing times in its history. The anarcho-syndicalism of the CNT of 1930 was not the same as the CNT of 1980. The anarcho-syndicalism of the Friends of Durruti was different yet again. As was that of the FORA. And so on.

What this underlines is the need to clarify exactly what anarcho-syndicalism means in practical terms in a 21st century context. That is the purpose of this pamphlet. This aim will be pursued by way of introducing the current industrial strategy of the Solidarity Federation (SF), with some historical context as well as theoretical clarification of the meaning of a 'revolutionary union', different organisational roles and the relationship between the form and content of class struggle. This theoretical clarification is solely for the purpose of informing contemporary practice, and not some mere intellectual exercise.

So we see anarcho-syndicalism as a living tradition that develops through a critical reflection on our experiences and adaptation to new conditions. It may well be the ideas presented here are not unique to any one tradition of the workers' movement and may find resonance with those who do not identify as anarcho-syndicalists - if anything this is evidence of their validity. This pamphlet is written to contribute to new and more effective action, from which we can collectively bring about a better society more quickly; it is written in the spirit of anarcho-syndicalism.

CLASSICAL ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

"Through the taking over of the management of all plants by the producers themselves under such form that the separate groups, plants, and branches of industry are independent members of the general economic organism and systematically carry on production and the distribution of the products (...) Theirs must be the task of freeing labour from all the fetters which economic exploitation has fastened on it."

- **Rudolph Rocker (1938)**2

Anarcho-syndicalism emerged in the late 19th century from the libertarian wing of the workers' movement. Stressing solidarity, direct action and workers' self-management, it represented a turn to the labour movement and collective, class struggle in contrast to the concurrent tendency of individualistic 'propaganda by the deed' – assassinations and terrorist bombings – that had become popular with many anarchists following the massacre of the Paris Commune in 1871.

Classical syndicalists, including many anarcho-syndicalists sought to unite the working class into revolutionary unions. Like the 'One Big Unionism' of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) the goal was to build industrial unions until such a point as they could declare a revolutionary general strike as the prelude to social revolution. However, unlike the IWW on the one hand, and Marxists and social democrats on the other, anarcho-syndicalists rejected the separation of economic (trade union) and political (party) struggles.

They stressed that workers themselves should unite to fight for their interests whether at the point of production or elsewhere, not leave such struggles to the specialists of political parties or union officials or still less neglect political goals such as the overthrow of capital and the state in favour of purely economic organisation around wages and working hours.³ Furthermore they stressed that workers should retain control of their organisations through direct democratic means such as sovereign mass meetings and mandated, recallable delegates.

The goal of these unions - as suggested in the Rudolph Rocker quote above – was to expropriate the means of production and manage them democratically without bosses. As such, the dominant tendency saw building the union as 'building the new society in the shell of the old.' The same directly democratic structures created to fight the bosses would form the basic structure of a new society once the bosses were successfully expropriated.

Consequently, building the union was seen as one and the same as building both the new society and the social revolution that would bring it

about. Class struggle became not just a question of (self-)organisation, but of building the organisation. As the union grew to a sufficient size and influence, strikes could be launched, culminating in the revolutionary general strike that would bring about libertarian communism.⁴ There was almost a blueprint for social revolution that simply needed to be implemented.

This approach appeared to be vindicated with the outbreak of the Spanish revolution in 1936 in which the anarcho-syndicalist CNT played a prominent role. In Barcelona, factories, public transport and other workplaces were taken over and self-managed by their workers. In the countryside land was collectivised and libertarian communism proclaimed. However the revolution ended, tragically, in defeat, but not before the paradoxical spectacle of the CNT providing anarchist ministers to the government while it ordered insurgent workers off the streets.

The experience of Spain led to many criticisms of classical anarcho-syndicalism in addition to those which had already been made during its development in the early 20th century. To these criticisms we will now turn.

CRITICISMS OF CLASSICAL ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

"The modern proletarian class does not carry out its struggle according to a plan set out in some book or theory; the modern workers' struggle is a part of history, a part of social progress, and in the middle of history, in the middle of progress, in the middle of the fight, we learn how we must fight..."

– **Rosa Luxemburg (1918)**⁵

Criticisms have come from many quarters. We will focus here on four in particular which have relevance to developing anarcho-syndicalist practice as they share our goal of libertarian communism (unlike say, social democratic criticisms). Addressed in order of their severity, these four criticisms are: those which emerged from within - at the height of the Spanish revolution in the form of the Friends of Durruti group; those from

the platformist tradition that grew out of the lessons of the 1917 anarchist revolution in the Ukraine; those which came from the council communist tendency in the workers' movement, and in particular Rosa Luxemburg; and finally those which, for want of a better term emanate from the contemporary 'ultra-left' and Gilles Dauvé in particular.

The Friends of Durruti's criticisms

The Friends of Durruti (FoD) were a group of rank-and-file CNT militants during the Spanish revolution in 1936-7. Their main criticism was that having defeated the army and taken the streets and workplaces, the CNT didn't know where to go. *"The CNT did not know how to live up to its role. It did not want to push ahead with the revolution with all of its consequences (...) it behaved like a minority group, even though it had a majority in the streets."*⁶ The CNT simply started self-managing the workplaces and collaborating with the remnants of the state, rather than decisively smashing the state and moving towards libertarian communism. For the FoD, the CNT lacked two things: *"a program, and rifles."*

Platformist criticisms

In many ways platformist criticisms are similar to those of the FoD; whilst supporting the structures of anarcho-syndicalist unions they stress the need for a specific libertarian communist organisation to argue for a communist program within such mass organisations. This organisation would be a single 'general union of anarchists' and be founded on four organisational principles; theoretical unity, tactical unity, collective responsibility and federalism.⁷

In contrast to classical anarcho-syndicalism, contemporary platformism seeks not to build mass organisations, but to insert into them and influence them in an anarchist direction. For example the position paper on trade unions by the influential platformist Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) states that *"no matter how conservative they can become, it does not alter the fact that they are the most important mass organisations of the working class (...) activity within them is an extremely important ongoing activity."*⁸ Consequently, they advocate reforming the

existing Trade Unions towards anarcho-syndicalist structures of mandated recallable delegates, rank-and-file control etc.⁹

Council communist criticisms

For Rosa Luxemburg, anarcho-syndicalists had an undialectical view of revolution where they could build up their organisation, the one big union, set the date for the revolutionary general strike and that would be it. There was no space for spontaneity, or for learning from struggle and adapting the forms accordingly; the anarcho-syndicalist union was taken as a given. She contrasted the anarchist general strike to the mass strike, a more spontaneous expression of class struggle not called by any one group.

Her ruminations on the mass strikes in Russia – which she claimed were *“the historical liquidation of anarchism”*¹⁰ - led her to formulate a ‘dialectic of spontaneity and organisation.’ For Luxemburg, organisation was *born in the midst of class struggle*, she held the anarcho-syndicalists put the organisation before struggle; they thought building the union was the same as building the revolutionary struggle, since it was the union that would call the revolutionary general strike.

Ultra-left criticisms

Communist writer Gilles Dauvé has been particularly critical of anarcho-syndicalism. Whilst the Friends of Durruti and the platformists saw the failures of anarcho-syndicalism as stemming from the absence of a clear communist program, and Rosa Luxemburg and the council communists from a proscriptive disconnect from unforeseen, spontaneous developments of the class struggle, Dauvé argues the problems are far more fundamental. He writes that

“You can’t destroy a society by using the organs which are there to preserve it (..) any class who wants to liberate itself must create its own organ’, H. Lagardelle wrote in 1908, without realizing that his critique could be applied as much to the unions (including a supposed revolutionary syndicalist French CGT on a fast road to bureaucratisation and class collaboration) as to the parties of the Second International.

Revolutionary syndicalism discarded the voter and preferred the producer: it forgot that bourgeois society creates and lives off both. Communism will go beyond both.”11

Furthermore he argues that *“the purpose of the old labour movement was to take over the same world and manage it in a new way: putting the idle to work, developing production, introducing workers’ democracy (in principle, at least). Only a tiny minority, ‘anarchist’ as well as ‘marxist’, held that a different society meant the destruction of the State, commodity and wage labour, although it rarely defined this as a process, rather as a programme to be put into practice after the seizure of power.”12*

CONTEMPORARY ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

"Not only did the great determination and ingenuity on the part of the [Puerto Real] workers bring results, but that of the communities too. Mass assemblies both in the yards and surrounding localities involved workers, their families, neighbours and all supporters. Initiating and maintaining entire communities' involvement in mass assemblies alone was fine achievement."

– **Solidarity Federation (1995)13**

There are numerous examples of contemporary anarcho-syndicalist practice, from the small group organising in Germany and the Netherlands described in FAU Bremen’s ‘Notes from the class struggle’ pamphlet,14 to the McDonalds Workers Resistance network here."

[#footnote15_0b6s6c4">15](#) to recent struggles in Spain, Australia and elsewhere. However, we will focus on two examples that go beyond the limits of the classical anarcho-syndicalism we have considered thus far, and illustrate elements of contemporary practice which are emphasised in the SF’s industrial strategy. These two examples are the struggles around the shipyards in Puerto Real, Spain in 1987, and the Workmates collective that existed amongst track maintenance workers in London in the early part of this decade.

Puerto Real

When the Spanish government announced a programme of 'rationalisation' at the Puerto Real shipyards, the workforce came out on strike. The CNT was at the forefront in spreading the action to the surrounding population. Not only was the government defeated, but a number of pay and condition improvements were secured. The most noteworthy development was the spread of mass assemblies both in the shipyards and the surrounding communities. These assemblies were the sovereign bodies of the struggle, controlling it from the bottom up. People decided for themselves, rejecting control by unaccountable politicians, union officials or 'experts' and ensuring control remained in the workplace and locality.

These bodies reflected the kind of 'dialectic of spontaneity and organisation' that Rosa Luxemburg declared anarchism "liquidated" a century ago for lacking. The CNT did not seek to get everyone in the shipyards and surrounding communities to join it and then declare a strike (although their levels of membership and longer-term agitation certainly contributed to their influence), but when the rationalisations were announced they sought instead to initiate mass assemblies open to all workers regardless of union membership, whilst arguing for the core anarcho-syndicalist principles of solidarity, direct action and rank-and-file control.

Workmates

Workmates began as a handful of militants working in various track maintenance and engineering jobs on the London Underground in 2002. These included track installers, track welders, crossing makers, carpenters, ultrasonic rail testers, track vent cleaning gangs, along with lorry drivers. In February 2003, a meeting attended by around 150 workers voted unanimously to move from being a loose collective of RMT members and set up a delegate council along anarcho-syndicalist lines.¹⁶ Each 'gang' of workers (typically between 8 and 12) elected a recallable delegate and mandated them to sit on the delegate council.

LUL used a large number of casualised agency staff, most of whom were non-unionised. These workers were also included in the Workmates collective, which was independent of the RMT and open to all workers at LUL (minus scabs and management). The initial struggle Workmates was involved with was resistance to the privatisation of LUL and concomitant attacks on working conditions this entailed. While LUL was privatised, Workmates subsequently scored several victories over working practices after mass meetings organised work-to-rules and delegates consulted with their gangs to plan further action.17

However, there were also some defeats. These, coupled with high staff turnover meant that the levels of participation and struggle were not sufficient to sustain the delegate council structure. Consequently Workmates waned back to being a residual network of militants rather than an independent union, however a legacy of canteen mass meetings whenever a dispute arises remains, and the levels of solidarity are still high, as demonstrated by the level of support for a militant recently victimised by management in the depot where workmates is centred, which helped force an embarrassing climb-down.18

ON FORM AND CONTENT (THE PRIMACY OF STRUGGLE)

"Communist revolution is the creation of non-profit, non-mercantile, co-operative and fraternal social relations, which implies smashing the State apparatus and doing away with the division between firms, with money as the universal mediator (and master), and with work as a separate activity. That is the content... this content won't come out of any kind of form. Some forms are incompatible with the content. We can't reason like the end was the only thing that mattered: the end is made out of means."
– Gilles Dauvé (2008)19

Anarcho-syndicalism is commonly associated with particular organisational forms, namely revolutionary unions, mass meetings and mandated, recallable delegate councils. But it cannot be forgotten that these forms are necessarily the *expression* of some content. This is much like how a pot-maker can fashion many forms from a single lump of clay,

but cannot fashion anything without the clay to start with. Structure requires substance, content precedes form. However we are not philosophers interested in such niceties for their own sake, but for their practical implications. So what is this content to which anarcho-syndicalism seeks to give form?

Simply, it is class struggle. Conflict between classes is immanent to capitalism, since capital is defined by our exploitation. We understand class struggle as *a process of self-organisation* to collectively advance our concrete, human needs as workers. Since these needs are in conflict with the needs of capital accumulation, the rejection of inhuman conditions carries with it the seed of a future human community; libertarian communism, the revolution described by Dauvé above. With the Workmates collective, we have an example of this content – a certain level of militancy – being given an anarcho-syndicalist form; a form which subsequently dissipated as the level of militant participation ebbed with high staff turnover and several telling defeats.

So while class struggle has primacy over the particular forms it takes, which are only means to advance our concrete needs and ultimately establish a society based on those needs, we do seek to give this struggle particular forms. These forms cannot be created from scratch, but we can seek to give disparate content a particular form, in turn focussing and developing that content. This is where the pot-maker analogy breaks down, because some forms sustain and expand the struggle while others strangle and suppress it. The relationship is *dialectical* in that the particular form the struggle takes in turn affects the development of the struggle. Since it is the class struggle that will create libertarian communism, we must always give it primacy over the needs of particular organisational forms. This was a lesson drawn by the Friends of Durruti when they found themselves facing expulsion from the CNT for advocating revolutionary struggle against the state of which it had become a part.

SOME NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS

"The most important thing that I would to point out, is that [in Puerto Real] we managed to create a structure whereby there was a permanent assembly taking place. In other words decisions within this particular conflict were made by those people who were directly involved in the conflict."

– **Pepe Gomez, CNT (1995)20**

Before we can proceed further, we will need to make three conceptual distinctions. The reasons for such precision will become apparent in the following sections, as well as for properly understanding the Industrial Strategy which completes this pamphlet.

Permanent/non-permanent organisations

Pepe Gomez above describes the assemblies in Puerto Real as “permanent”, yet he also notes how they were an expression of a “particular conflict.” Perhaps ‘*regular*’ captures this meaning better in English. We would define a permanent organisation as one which endures between cycles of struggle – political parties, trade unions and anarchist propaganda groups are all permanent organisations. We would define non-permanent organisations as those which are inexorably the expression of a certain level of struggle and cannot outlive it without becoming something else entirely. The assemblies described by Pepe Gomez would fit into this category. For us therefore *regular* meetings do not equal *permanent organisation*.

Mass/minority organisations

We call a *mass organisation* one which is open to essentially all workers in whatever area it operates (we would call a *popular* organisation one open to all people, regardless of class). We call a *minority organisation* one which maintains specific, usually political criteria of membership which preclude some from joining. A trade union is an example of a mass organisation. A political group such as the Solidarity Federation is a minority organisation, since it requires agreement with specific, revolutionary aims and principles which are necessarily minority views outside of revolutionary upsurges. Some of the anti-war groups in 2002-4,

at least those which organised via open public meetings as was the case in Brighton would be examples of a popular organisations.

Revolutionary/pro-revolutionary organisations

The final distinction we must draw is between *revolutionary* and *pro-revolutionary* organisations. We call revolutionary organisations those which are actually capable of making a revolution. These are necessarily mass organisations since no minority can make a revolution on behalf of the class – the pitfalls of such Leninist vanguardism are well known and don't need repeating here. We call pro-revolutionary organisations those which are in favour of revolution but which are in no position to make it themselves. Propaganda groups would be an example of this. We do find the term 'pro-revolutionary' less than ideal, and in fact something like 'agitational' might be better. However this doesn't immediately capture the relationship of the organisation to revolution that we are trying to convey.

ORGANISATION AND ORGANISATIONAL ROLES

"To organise is always a necessity, but the fixation on your own organisation can be perilous. Against that we believe in the diversity of groups and organisations, that arises from different situations and fulfil different needs in the flow of class struggle. Some are more temporary, while others are continuous."

– Riff Raff (1999)21

We can use the distinctions in the previous section to identify four ideal types of organisation. Of course many different forms of organisation are possible, but only some are of interest to anarcho-syndicalists since only some offer the potential to develop the class struggle both in the here-and-now and ultimately in the direction of social revolution and libertarian communism. Now while these are *ideal types* and therefore not all actually existing organisations fit neatly into one category or the other, they do identify the *real tensions* present in organisations that try to defy the logic inherent to their particular organisational form. We will discuss real-world examples below to help illustrate the argument.

Mass, permanent organisations

Mass, permanent organisations are by definition de-linked from the levels of militancy of their members and class struggle more broadly. Therefore, they are not expressions of the *self-organisation* of workers sought by anarcho-syndicalists, but for the *representation* of workers as workers. We therefore recognise that neither trade unions or so-called mass workers' parties are revolutionary organisations. In the case of trade unions, their structural role as representatives of labour power within capitalism compels them to offer disciplined workforces to the employers.

If they cannot offer the promise of industrial peace, they are in no position to negotiate. Such social partnership is inherent to the idea of mass, permanent workers representation, de-linked from class struggle. Furthermore, they divide up the class by trade and in addition to their structural limitations are bound by a host of laws just to make sure they fulfil this function, such as restrictions on secondary action and the notice needed for industrial action, all on pain of the sequestration of funds and imprisonment of officials.

If levels of militancy are low, trade unions work hand-in-hand with management to impose cuts and restructuring. If levels of struggle are higher, they will posture more militantly and operate as a *limited expression* of that struggle in order to appear to workers to really 'represent' their interests, calling tokenistic one-day strikes and suchlike. There are numerous recent examples.²² As and when such struggles begin to take on a self-organised character and go beyond the institutional and legal limits of the trade union form - by the development of mass meetings, wildcat action, flying pickets etc – two things can happen. The trade union will either come into conflict with the workers (as in the isolation of the Liverpool postal wildcat during the national strikes of 2007²³), or effectively cease to exist as a permanent organisation as it is superseded by the structures of mass meetings and the like, which as expressions of the level of militancy represent a non-permanent, potentially revolutionary supersession of the mass/permanent trade union form.

Consequently, we hold that not only are permanent mass organisations not revolutionary, but that in the final analysis they are *counter-revolutionary* institutions (note, we are not saying trade *unionists* are counter-revolutionary, the institutions are). The counter-revolutionary nature of trade unions does not arise from bad leadership, bureaucratisation and a lack of internal democracy, rather the leadership, bureaucratisation and lack of internal democracy arise from the logic of permanent mass organisations representing workers as workers. As revolutionary forms are necessarily the expression of class struggle and so necessarily non-permanent, the de-linking of form from content represents a counter-revolutionary inertia.

Of course it does not follow that we reject membership or activity within the trade unions, as their ultimately counter-revolutionary nature does not mean revolution would break out tomorrow if they suddenly ceased to be. Rather, the unions only act as a brake on struggles when they develop a degree of self-organisation in contradiction to the permanent form. Until that point, they do act as a limited expression of struggles precisely to secure their role as representatives. Consequently as workers we think it makes sense to be union members in workplaces where a trade union is recognised.

But as anarcho-syndicalists we hold no illusions in reforming them in accordance with our principles; instead arguing for, and where possible implementing, an anarcho-syndicalist strategy of mass meetings, mandated recallable delegates, delegate councils and secondary solidarity action regardless of the wishes of the union. Reforming the trade unions would be a waste of time, because the very level of self-organisation required to force such reforms would render the reforms themselves redundant, since we'd already be doing the things independently we were lobbying to be allowed to do. In workplaces where there is no recognised union, we advocate alternative structures, which will be discussed below.

Minority, permanent organisations

These are the kinds of organisation familiar to us today. There are two distinct pro-revolutionary roles for minority permanent organisations of

interest to anarcho-syndicalists: propaganda groups and networks of militants. We see these as two distinct roles that organisations can fulfil. This could be attempted as a single organisation – as is the case with the SF’s current attempts to operate a dual structure of locals and industrial networks – or separate organisations, each focusing on its own role. We will elaborate our preference in the following ‘how we see it’ section, for now it is sufficient to understand that within a given type of organisation there can be distinct roles. We do not find it useful to refer to any kind of minority organisation - even an industrial/workplace one - as a union as in English in particular this has the connotations of mass organisations, for which we reserve the term.

Minority, non-permanent organisations

This type of organisation essentially mirrors minority/permanent ones, except that they will be created out of the needs of the class struggle at given times and places rather than being something we could have a general strategy for building. Examples would be the Friends of Durruti as a hybrid propaganda group/network of militants, and arguably workplace groups like McDonalds Workers Resistance,²⁴ the informal social networks of ‘faceless resistance’ described by the Swedish communist group Kämpa Tillsammans,^{here." href="#footnote25_tw4qn0m">25} or some of the groups of anti-war activists that formed during the upsurge in anti-war sentiments in 2002-3. On account of their varied and non-permanent nature the only strategic approach to such organisations we can offer is to support them where they form and to try and create them in our own workplaces or localities as and when conditions permit.

Mass, non-permanent organisations

Mass, non-permanent organisations are a product of a certain level of class struggle, and therefore they cannot simply be built piecemeal by recruitment. For us, these organisations are the only type that are potentially revolutionary, as they are the mass expression of heightened class conflict. The organisations we can build in the present are the pro-revolutionary, minority ones, which can network, propagandise and agitate to develop the class struggle and give it anarcho-syndicalist forms as it develops. We think failure to recognise the fundamental difference

between mass revolutionary organisations and minority pro-revolutionary organisations can only lead to practical confusion and demoralisation. Only if we recognise the relationship of organisation to class struggle can we be clear about what is possible and practical in the here and now and also how this gets us closer to the mass, revolutionary unions we want to see (more on which in the following section 'how we see it').

Reprise

It must be borne in mind that these four organisational types are to a certain extent idealised ones. In reality, groups exist that are in fact combinations of them. However these ideal types represent *real* tensions. For instance the paradox of a mass, directly democratic revolutionary organisation in times when the majority of workers are not pro-revolutionary places real limits on the size of attempts to create revolutionary unions in the here and now. Take for example the split between the Spanish CNT and the CGT over participation in state-run class collaborationist works councils.

The departure of the Swedish SAC from the International Workers Association (IWA) for similar reasons also reflects this paradox: internal democracy in a mass organisation when the majority of workers are not pro-revolutionary means the organisation has to sacrifice either internal democracy or its revolutionary principles – either way breaking with anarcho-syndicalism - the only other alternative being implausibly successful internal education to turn all members into pro-revolutionaries. Furthermore, the very co-existence of revolutionary organisations with the state is a necessarily unstable, temporary situation of dual power, they either make a revolution, are repressed, or accommodate themselves to legal existence as a regularised trade union.

Consequently while the organisational types we have described are not definitive of all actually-existing organisations, they do demonstrate the distinct types that exist and the tensions present within organisations that try to combine them. The paradox is only resolved with increased levels of class struggle and class consciousness – hence revolutionary unions are necessarily non-permanent products of struggle, and attempts to

maintain them beyond the struggle of which they are an expression will see them lapse into a counter-revolutionary role. Without militant struggle they couldn't but become organs for the representation of workers within capitalism, not the ultimate abolition of the working class.

OUR NOTION OF REVOLUTION

"A libertarian communist economy, a system without the market and where everyone has equal rights to have their needs met, has always been the aim of anarcho-syndicalists. Workers' self-management would amount to little in a world of inequality with decisions being dictated by the market."

– **Solidarity Federation (2003)**26

Anarcho-syndicalists are libertarian communists. Without this communist perspective, anarcho-syndicalism would amount to little more than democratic trade unionism for a self-managed capitalism. Communists recognise that capitalism is not simply an undemocratic mode of management, but a *mode of production*. Making it more democratic doesn't make it any more responsive to human needs so long as money, commodity production and exchange persist. Consequently, against Rudolph Rocker's classical position quoted earlier in this pamphlet, our notion of revolution is not simply the taking over of production in order to self-manage it democratically, but a simultaneous process of *communisation* – restructuring social production around human need.

This entails not the *liberation* of the working class envisaged by Rocker, but our *abolition* as a class and with it the negation of all classes. It also implies not the democratisation of work but its abolition as a separate sphere of human activity. Much activity - waged or not - that is potentially rewarding in itself is reduced to repetitive, alienating work by the requirements of capital accumulation. We don't want democratically self-managed alienation, but its abolition. Furthermore - and this is of practical import to anarcho-syndicalists – whole sectors of the economy need to be abolished altogether, while those that remain need to be radically

transformed in terms of the division of labour and the nature of productive activity itself.

This is significant, since while for example mass assemblies of call centre or financial services workers will likely be a part of any revolutionary upsurge, outbound call centres and finance have no place in a libertarian communist society. In parts of the UK these sectors account for nearly half of all employment. But at some point these assemblies would be deciding to dissolve themselves as part of the process of reorganising production around human needs, a process which *constitutes* social revolution. This once again demonstrates the limitations of the classical approach stressing the goal of self-management alone and reaffirms the need to state clearly and unequivocally that we are communists and that *social revolution is a process of communisation*.

HOW WE SEE IT

"We want a society based on workers' self-management, solidarity, mutual aid and libertarian communism. That society can only be achieved by working class organisations based on the same principles - revolutionary unions (...) Revolutionary unions are means for working people to organise and fight all the issues - both in the workplace and outside."

– **Solidarity Federation Constitution (2005)**27

As we have seen, an anarcho-syndicalist union isn't just a really democratic trade union, but an altogether different beast with an altogether different purpose. Permanent mass organisations such as trade unions exist as things which organise workers. By contrast, the revolutionary unions advocated by anarcho-syndicalists are *an expression of a process of workers' self-organisation* at its higher points. Therefore if we want to see these organisations, we have to agitate to build the class struggle itself, and for it to take these forms as and when class militancy develops sufficiently. 'Building the union' per se literally makes no sense, and represents a fetishism of form that forgets that the form can only ever be an expression of content, of class struggle.

For us, a revolutionary union is necessarily non-permanent because it is an expression of a given wave of class struggle. It cannot outlive the struggle of which it is an expression without becoming something fundamentally different, something *counter-revolutionary*, precisely because anarcho-syndicalist unions are *defined* by militant participation, direct action, solidarity and rank-and-file control. The particular form such unions entail is mass assemblies open to all workers (minus scabs and managers), and mandated recallable delegates forming delegate councils to co-ordinate the struggle. Federation by region and/or industry would also be advised as the numbers of such assemblies grew.

In order to develop the class struggle in a direction where such revolutionary unions are possible, we see two distinct organisational roles to enable anarcho-syndicalists to engage in direct action in the here-and-now. These are libertarian communist propaganda groups (of which anarcho-syndicalist propaganda groups are a subset), and networks of militants (of which *industrial* networks are a subset, on which we will focus).

In contrast to a platformist 'general union of anarchists' or left communist 'single proletarian party' we take a more pluralist approach to propaganda groups. While we are opposed to needless duplication of effort and resources, we are also opposed to the false unity that often accompanies attempts to unite everyone into one single political organisation. If there are real political differences between groups, they should organise independently. This does not however preclude practical co-operation on concrete projects of common interest. Consequently, while we clearly believe strongly in our ideas and seek to persuade others of them, with regard to propaganda groups we advocate an approach of non-sectarian pluralism and fraternal co-operation wherever possible to spread libertarian communist ideas and develop the class struggle.

In terms of propaganda, our goal is twofold: both to win other pro-revolutionaries to our positions and tactics, and to promote anarcho-syndicalist tactics and libertarian communist ideas amongst the wider class. The most obvious means of the former is the production of

pamphlets and engaging in debates with the wider pro-revolutionary milieu – if we are confident in our ideas we should not fear an open confrontation of them with others. The latter goal of spreading our ideas amongst the wider class entails activities like producing and distributing strike bulletins on picket lines or distributing propaganda at workplaces facing redundancies, as well as maintaining accessible online information and holding public meetings.

As to industrial networks, we see membership of these as less determined by ideas and more by economic position (being a militant in a particular industry). Of course a level of theoretical and tactical agreement is required – networks are not apolitical - but we do not see this as being as high as for propaganda groups. For example it would be foolish not to organise with other militants because they have a different understanding of revolution, or are yet to be convinced of its necessity, but nonetheless support direct action, mass meetings and rank-and-file control of struggles.

Consequently we believe membership of a political organisation should not be a precondition of joining an industrial network as it represents an unnecessary barrier to the establishment and growth of such networks. Therefore we see the development of such networks as a concrete project for practical co-operation with other pro-revolutionary groups and non-aligned individuals who also see the need for them. The role of these networks would be to produce industrially specific propaganda and agitate industrially for direct action, solidarity and rank-and-file control. In the immediate term this means invisible, ‘faceless resistance’, but the goal is to foster open conflict controlled by mass meetings of all workers.

This may seem to represent a separation of political and economic organisation alien to anarcho-syndicalism. We do not agree. Both organisational roles address both ‘economic’ and ‘political’ issues of interest to the class, whether wages and conditions or border controls and the availability of abortions. The only separation is one which is a material fact of capitalist society – we share an economic position with fellow workers who may well be militant without sharing all our political

ideas. We simply say this should not be a barrier to common action, only that it should be recognised and organisations structured accordingly. We believe the propaganda group/industrial network roles are a means of achieving this.

Finally, we should say that the list of activities given as examples for each type of organisation is not exhaustive. There are for example times when either type could engage in forms of direct action either to support its members or to support other workers in struggle who for whatever reason cannot take certain forms of action themselves. London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP) would also be an example of a group that engages in direct action both outside the workplace and beyond just propaganda." href="#footnote28_ixzzr6h">28 The possibilities thrown up by the class struggle cannot all be known in advance, and it would be foolish to try and prescribe exactly and exhaustively what each organisation should do. Instead, we seek only to describe the *kinds* of organisation that can advance the class struggle and move us closer to libertarian communism.

SOLIDARITY FEDERATION INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Solidarity Federation seeks to create a militant opposition to the bosses and the state, controlled by the workers themselves. Its strategy can apply equally to those in the official trade unions who wish to organise independently of the union bureaucracy and those who wish to set up other types of self-organisation.

Rank and file control

Decisions should be made collectively. This means they are made by mass meetings, not by officials in union offices. These mass meetings include all those in the workplace, regardless of union membership. It will not, however, include scabs or managers.

Anyone we elect to negotiate with management should have a mandate from the workforce that gives them clear guidance on what is and is not acceptable. Mass meetings of workers need to be able to recall all delegates.

Direct action

Direct action at work means strikes, go-slows, working-to-rule, occupations and boycotts. We are opposed to the alternative which is 'partnership' with bosses. Workers can only win serious concessions from management when industrial action is used or when bosses fear it might be.

Solidarity

Solidarity with other workers is the key to victory. Workers should support each others' disputes despite the anti-trade union laws. We need to approach other workers directly for their support. 'Don't Cross Picket Lines!'

Control of funds

Strike funds need to be controlled by the workers themselves. Officials will refuse to fund unlawful solidarity action. Union bureaucrats use official backing and strike pay to turn action on and off like a tap.

Unions use a large proportion of their political funds on sponsoring parliamentary candidates. Backing the Labour Party is not in the interests of workers. We should also not fall into the trap of backing so-called 'socialist' candidates. The Parliamentary system is about working class people giving up power and control, not exercising it.

Social change

The interests of the working class lie in the destruction of capitalist society. The whole of the wealth of society is produced by the workers. However, a portion of this is converted into profits for the shareholders and business people who own the means of production. When workers make wage demands, they are simply trying to win a bigger share of what is rightfully their own.

This means that trade union organisation around traditional bread and butter issues is not enough on its own, although it is vital. As well as a structure of mass meetings and delegates there also needs to be a specifically anarcho-syndicalist presence in any workplace organisation.

This will necessarily involve only a minority of workers in the present time. The role of anarcho-syndicalist militants is not to control the workplace organisation but to put forward an anarcho-syndicalist perspective in the meetings of the workplace organisation and attempt to gain broad support for our aims and principles, through propaganda work.

Preamble

Solidarity Federation's ultimate aim is a self-managed, stateless society based on the principle of from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs. It is a society where we are no longer just used as a means to an end by bosses wanting to make money from our labour.

In the medium term and as an essential forerunner to such a society, SolFed promotes and seeks to initiate anarcho-syndicalist unions. To this end, SolFed seeks to create a militant opposition to the bosses and the state, controlled by the workers themselves. Its strategy can apply equally to those in the official trade unions who wish to organise independently of the union bureaucracy and those who wish to set up other types of self-organisation.

Details of the strategy

Mass meetings should be seen as an alternative structure to official union structures that are dominated by full-time bureaucrats. Decisions are made collectively in these assemblies. The work of these assemblies in different workplaces should be co-ordinated by delegate councils.

In the most militant workforces regular mass meetings will be held and this is obviously the ideal we are aiming at. This may not be possible in other workplaces where it will only be possible to organise such meetings when a dispute arises.

We need a three-pronged approach to the business of actually setting up an independent organisation at work.

1. In a workplace with a recognised TUC union, an SF member would join the union but promote an anarcho-syndicalist strategy. This would involve

organising workplace assemblies to make collective decisions on workplace issues. However, workers will still be likely to hold union cards here to avoid splits in the workplace between union members and non-union members.

2. In a non-unionised workplace, independent unions, based on the principle of collective decision-making, should be set up wherever possible.

3. In a non-unionised workplace, that is difficult to organise due to a high turnover of staff or a large number of temps, we should just call workers assemblies when a dispute arises.

SF members will also undertake anarcho-syndicalist propaganda work in each scenario. The principles of our industrial strategy would apply to all three approaches.

NOTES:

1. <http://www.selfed.org.uk/units/2001/index.htm#24>
2. Cited in <http://www.chomsky.info/books/state01.htm>
3. "The anarcho-syndicalists also saw the need to combine the political and the economic struggle into one. They rejected pure economic organisation and insisted that the revolutionary union should have a clear political goal, the overthrow of capitalism and the state." - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/booklets/british-anarcho-syndicalism.htm>
4. "Every strike, whether successful or not, was seen to increase the hostility between the classes and so stimulate further conflict. Strikes encourage feelings of solidarity and are a training ground for further struggles. The climax would be, after a long series of strikes growing in breadth and intensity, the revolutionary 'general strike'." - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/booklets/british-anarcho-syndicalism.htm>
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosa_Luxemburg#Dialectic_of_Spontaneity_and_Organisation [In a Revolutionary Hour: What Next?, Collected Works 1.2, p.554]
6. Quoted in <http://www.spunk.org/texts/places/spain/sp001780/chap8.html>
7. The founding document of the platformist tradition is the 'Organizational Platform of the General Union of Anarchists' - http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story_id=1000
8. <http://struggle.ws/wsm/positions/tradeunions.html>
9. For examples of this reform program see the 'Union Democracy' section of the WSM position paper; "We fight to change the role of the full-time officials (...) For direct

elections to all committees, conference delegations and national officerships, subject to mandation and recall (...) Where revolutionaries can gain enough support to win election to national officerships in large unions, or indeed small ones, this support should not be used to merely elect a candidate. Instead it should be used to fundamentally change the structure of the union in such a way as to return power to the membership and turn the officers into administrators and resource people rather than decision makers.”

10. 10. The Mass Strike, p15.
11. 11. Gilles Dauvé, A contribution to the critique of political autonomy - <http://libcom.org/library/a-contribution-critique-political-autonomy-gilles-dauve-2008>
12. 12. Gilles Dauvé, The eclipse and re-emergence of the communist movement - <http://libcom.org/library/eclipse-re-emergence-giles-dauve-0>
13. 13. For a far more comprehensive account see the Solidarity Federation pamphlet ‘Anarcho-syndicalism in Puerto Real: from shipyard resistance to community control’ - <http://libcom.org/library/anarcho-syndicalism-puerto-real-shipyard-resistance-community-control>
14. 14. Available in print from the Solidarity Federation or online here.
15. 15. See here.
16. 16. For a report on the establishment of the delegate council see here - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/solidarity/03.htm#04>
17. 17. See ‘Workmates Victory’ here - <http://www.solfed.org.uk/solidarity/04.htm#04>
18. 18. See - <http://libcom.org/news/metronet-climb-down-activist-victimisation-15102008>
19. 19. Gilles Dauvé, A contribution to the critique of political autonomy - <http://libcom.org/library/a-contribution-critique-political-autonomy-gilles-dauve-2008>
20. 20. <http://libcom.org/library/anarcho-syndicalism-puerto-real-shipyard-resistance-community-control>
21. 21. See <http://www.riff-raff.se/en/furtherreading/workmove.php>
22. 22. A several are described by a libertarian communist and UNISON convenor here: <http://libcom.org/library/cost-living-pay-increase-struggles-interview-2008>
23. 23. See <http://libcom.org/library/pay-what-went-wrong-2007>
24. 24. See <http://libcom.org/tags/mcdonalds-workers-resistance>
25. 25. See here and here.
26. 26. <http://www.solfed.org.uk/booklets/the-economics-of-freedom.htm#09>
27. 27. <http://www.solfed.org.uk/constitution/#01b>
28. 28. We are thinking specifically of the 2001 Brighton bin men’s strike and occupation, where anarchists in conjunction with a wildcat occupation assisted by locking onto bin trucks to prevent scabs using them, while also helping flyer recruitment agencies that were recruiting scabs. See an account here - The London Coalition Against Poverty (LCAP) would also be an example of a group that engages in direct action both outside the workplace and beyond just propaganda.

STRATEGY AND STRUGGLE:

Anarcho-Syndicalism in the 21st Century.

A pamphlet produced in January 2009 by Brighton Solidarity Federation as a clarification of the meaning of anarcho-syndicalism in the 21st century, and as a contribution to the debate over strategy and organisation.

Distributed by:



<http://www.ibcat.tk>



libcom.org



BRIGHTON SOLIDARITY FEDERATION

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!