

The New Unionism

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Syndicalism is the latest victim of journalistic enterprise. The book mart is being flooded with works dealing with the new phase of the labor movement. In innumerable articles, pamphlets, and books we are supposed to get the genesis, the true meaning, and the aim of the new Unionism. What an army of interpreters, expositors, and annotators! Like mushrooms after rain the journalistic sympathizers appeared on the scene after the recent strikes in England and America. Syndicalism must indeed be a healthy growth if it can withstand such a parasitical invasion.

The unhappy reader wading through this jungle of printed leaves gathers, unfortunately, very little information. Most of the books consist merely of a mass of more or less cleverly written-up misstatement and misinformation. Unable to comprehend a militant movement of intelligent, conscious workers, these well-wishers describe Syndicalism as the discovery of some great thinker or philosopher. Ignorant of the fact that the movement existed in the brains and hearts of the proletarians ere Messrs. Berth, Lagardelle, Leone, *e tutti quanti* appeared on the stage, these bourgeois scribes attribute it to some hero or other, and multiply their ignorance by quoting one another.

Yet far more dangerous for the evolution of the Syndicalist movement are those writers who are well-informed on the subject, but who interpret it from a partisan, prejudiced standpoint. By ignoring certain facts, or if they cannot ignore them, by perverting or distorting them, they give a far worse survey of the movement than the ignorant penny-a-liner who does not know better.

A past-master of this cheap art of misinformation is Mr. André Tridon, whose book, *The New Unionism*, has just appeared. Tridon can claim the distinction of having succeeded in producing the most dishonest book on Syndicalism which has so far appeared on the book market. In a polemic with Robert Allerton Parker in the St. Louis *Mirror* concerning the mental dishonesty of his work, Tridon informs us that he is an ex-Anarchist: he, too, has had the Anarchist measles, having graduated to Anarchism from Monarchism and Catholicism for purely sentimental reasons. 'Tis too bad. He forgets to inform us what reasons led him into journalistic prostitution. No wonder he finds that Rousseau, Proudhon, Tolstoy, and Stirner have no message for the *practical man*. No, dear André, they have not.

To be sure, even by studying the Anarchist movement most diligently and by perusing the Anarchist literature minutely, one would search in vain for marks left through the activity of Mr. Tridon, but then such characters as Tridon are omnipotent; he may have influenced the Anarchist movement indirectly, by astral activity. As an exponent of the new Unionism he is in the company of ex-priests and ex-gold-mine-swindle-promoters who imagine they have discovered a new gold mine in Syndicalism. Still, Tridon may dislike the Anarchists as much as he likes: that is his privilege; but he is mistaken if he thinks that he can treat them as a negligent quantity by fighting them with the methods of the ostrich: by ignoring, hiding, and minimizing their activity and their influence in the revolutionary labor movement. The trouble with André is that he is too well-informed. Were he less well-informed he would not destroy his arguments with his own statements.

“To give credit to the Anarchists,” declares Tridon, “for the development of Syndicalism reveals a deep ignorance of Syndicalism’s status of the present day.” Really? Now let us see what the same Tridon has to say on this subject on page 70 of his book: “To [Fernand Pelloutier](#) more than to any other leader is due the present revolutionary connotation of the word Syndicalism. In the course of his short life (1867-1901), he showed himself an unremitting foe of parliamentary action. In 1897 he coined the word which now sums up the methods of New Unionism, ‘Direct Action’ ... all his life Pelloutier adhered to this militant policy. When Millerand came forward with a programme of reforms, Pelloutier attacked savagely what he called ‘the half-baked projects of that self-styled socialist.’ Although suffering from tuberculosis in an advanced stage, he did not hesitate in the last years of his life to court persecution. His book *La vie ouvrière en France* called upon his head governmental thunder and he died a pauper in 1901.”

On the next page Tridon writes: “Fernand Pelloutier did his best to gather the Anarchists into the syndicates,” and on page 189, “at the very time (1903) Pelloutier’s efforts were bearing fruit and the Anarchist elements introduced by Pelloutier were on the point of imposing their views and tactics upon the more conservative Federations of Unions.”

To the Anarchists must be given then some credit, *n’est-ce-pas?* Though Tridon succeeds in writing his confession in such a manner that the average reader may well remain in ignorance as to Pelloutier’s Anarchist beliefs and activity.

And how does Tridon’s denial of Anarchist influence on Syndicalism compare with the declaration of Georges Yvetot, then the Secretary of the section of *Bourses du Travail* at the Congress of the French Federation of Labor at Toulouse: “I am reproached with confusing Syndicalism with Anarchism. It is not my fault if Anarchism and Syndicalism have the same ends in view. The former pursues the integral emancipation of the individual; the latter the integral emancipation of the workingman. I find the whole of Syndicalism in Anarchism.”

Furthermore: in describing the different shades of opinion in the Confederal Committee of the French Confederation, Tridon declares: “It is the Left which has steadily directed the destinies of the Confederation since the fusion of 1902.” The Left, which is composed of Anarchists and whose most prominent member is Yvetot! Tridon quotes Yvetot repeatedly, yet he never mentions the fact that Yvetot is an active Anarchist and that in addition to his work as editor of *La Voix du Peuple*, the official organ of the Confederation, he is a diligent contributor to various Anarchist publications. The same contemptible ostrich policy Tridon follows in quoting Pouget, Pierrot, Faure, the Italian de Ambris, the German Friedeberg, the Hollander **Cornelissen**, and other Anarchists active in the Syndicalist movement. “The various New Unionist groups keep in touch with one another through the publication of *Le Bulletin International du mouvement Syndicalists*, edited, by Christian Cornelissen, a well-known sociologist,” writes Tridon. Quite true, but why hide the fact that Cornelissen is not only a well-known sociologist but an active Anarchist as well? *Le Père Peinard* was according to Tridon a “revolutionary” organ, and its editor, Pouget, became after his days in exile a “convert to Syndicalism.” What ingenuity in keeping Anarchists in obscurity! Pouget “converted” to Syndicalism! Here indeed ignorance is bliss!

In his over-anxiety to annihilate Anarchism our good André makes one blunder after another. So when he states apodictically: “**Kropotkin** recently wrote a preface for Pouget and Pataud’s book on Syndicalism. It does not imply that Syndicalism is being modified by Kropotkin; it means that after all these years Kropotkin is realizing the positive trend of the new movement.” Can any one explain to us poor mortals what interest Kropotkin could have in “modifying Syndicalism”? Too bad Pouget and Pataud didn’t ask André to write the preface to their work instead of Kropotkin.

The joke is on Tridon when he quotes Cornelissen’s repudiation of the so-called intellectual interpreters of Syndicalism with approval. Cornelissen writes: “Instead of studying the French movement through its official organ *La Voix du Peuple*, or through pamphlets written by militant Syndicalists, the authors of articles on Syndicalism prefer to quote French and Italian writers who are outside the movement, and with whom the French unions have nothing to do.” Now these remarks of Cornelissen are directed precisely against such scribes as Tridon, and especially they point at Berth, Lagardelle, Leone, and other writers of the Neo-Marxian school, the very same men Tridon accepts as his authorities. Indeed, the first chapter of his book commences with a lengthy quotation directed against Anarchism from Berth’s book, *Le Nouveaux Aspects du Socialisme*. He is quite enraptured with the silly harangue of that Neo-Marxian blatherskite.

As long as Tridon stands on the soil of France, Italy, or Spain he is familiar with the subject of his book notwithstanding his clumsy attempts to ignore the work of Anarchists. But once he leaves the Latin world he finds himself in a *terra incognita*. He makes pitiful attempts to describe the new Unionism in other countries. Speaking of Austria, he informs us that the “Austrian Syndicalists are absolutely independent in their action from the Anarchists and Socialist groups. The three groups refused to combine in organizing the anti-war manifestation which took place on November 10, 1912, in Vienna.” This will be “some news” to Comrade Grossmann, the editor of the Anarchist organ *Wohlstand für Alle*, at the same time official organ of the syndicalist *Freie Gewerkschafts-Vereinigung*. At the invitation of the French Confederation Comrade Grossmann goes nearly every year to France to explain to the German workers in Paris the purpose and

tactics of Syndicalism, and he was the principle speaker on the occasion of which Tridon speaks. In truth Syndicalism and Anarchism mean the same to Austrian workers as far as they are educated. As to Bohemia there is no revolutionary movement whatever which is not inspired by Anarchists. The organ of the miners, *Hornické Listy*, is edited by Anarchists.

Our comrades in Holland too will be surprised to learn that “the Dutch Syndicalists are being attacked by both the Anarchists and the Socialists.” It depends on which Syndicalists Mr. Tridon means. In the Anarchist papers, *Vrye Socialist*, *Toekomst*, *Recht voor Allen*, *Arbeider*, *Vryheidsvann*, *Nar de Vryheid*, and *De wapens neder*, he would look in vain for attacks on the real revolutionary Syndicalists.

We learn from Tridon that Sabotage was applied by the Japanese workers in the course of several strikes which took place in 1912, but he fails to inform his readers of the work of Denjiro Kotoku, Suga Kano, and their fellow-workers who died on the gallows because of their propaganda and for spreading the idea of Syndicalism and Direct Action.

The movement “in other countries” our author dismisses with a few lines, but his courage revives the very moment he enters the United States. But this excursion requires another chapter. Here André becomes rhapsodical — the prophet of the I.W.W. “The most radical Syndicalist body on earth,” cries our modern Sir Galahad, “the American I.W.W. owes absolutely nothing to Anarchism.” No, it sprang pure from Nirvana. I wonder what the hundreds of Anarchists working loyally and energetically in the ranks of that organization think of Tridon’s statement, born of ignorance and of hatred of the Anarchist movement in America? But there is a humorous phase to the situation. No matter how hard André works, the members of the I.W.W. do not seem to appreciate his efforts. Last winter he offered his great knowledge of the labor question to the I.W.W. local in New York. But lo! who didn’t care were the members of the organization. The nicely advertised lectures had to be cancelled. Does he expect they will read his book?

Additional Information

Taken from [HathiTrust](#).

The full text of the book that Havel is reviewing, *The New Unionism*, can be found at the [Internet Archive](#).