Anarcho-Syndicalism: History and Action

By Direct Action Movement

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Introduction

Anarchism Though anarchism as a socio-political philosophy has only come into existence in the nineteenth century, there have been anarchists in both thought and deed before then. The Digger movement in the English Civil War certainly contained elements of anarchist thought in its philosophy. So had William Godwin in his book, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. These people strived for the same objectives as anarchists do today.

We see (as they did in their own times) gross injustice all around us, the rich exploiting the poor, gorging themselves while millions go hungry or live on poverty level benefits. The government which is supposed to represent all of us go hand in hand with the military and the bourgeoisie only to oppress and exploit those unfortunate enough not to belong to the ruling classes. If one dares to protest against this injustice one gets labelled as a subversive.

We believe in a free society where everyone is equal no matter what race, class, sex, or denomination. In order to achieve this the state and all its institutions (government, army, police, judges, prisons, civil servants, etc.) need to be overthrown. For it is they who created this injustice in order to enrich themselves.

But one must not confuse us with Marxists, for they firmly believe in a "workers' state" which will control the economic process of production and distribution, all of course directed by the "infallible" party. Anarchists on the other hand believe that government, even if it is a so-called "workers' state" is unnecessary for our well being and needs to be done away with. If one is to be totally free then nobody should rule over another person, because power corrupts and nobody is free from corruption. It means that people can govern their own lives by deciding what they want to do and not what somebody else wants them to do (as long as those decisions or actions do not infringe another person's freedom). For only then shall we create a truly free and equal society.

Syndicalism The syndicalist movement arose from the belief that the socialist movement had lost its revolutionary force and that it had become nothing more than a respectable and reformist gathering. The degeneracy of the labour movement is attributed to the influence of parliament and to the opportunism of parliamentary political action. The tendency among parliamentary socialists to moderate led to the need for an alternative workers' movement.

The syndicalists aim to overthrow capitalism by the force of a general uprising of the working masses. They seek to establish a revolutionary working class organisation based not upon a political but upon a trade union basis. They aim to achieve this by first organising a trade, then to federate kindred trades, and finally to combine all unions and federations to form one great working class organisation. This however does not mean that they adopt old trade union methods. They want to organise on a parallel level so that there are no trade union bosses or shop stewards whom more often than not are more interested in their own ambitions than in those of the workers they are supposed to represent. Syndicalism wants to free the workers of the trade union bureaucracy in order to allow the workers to manage their own affairs. The general strike — not the ballot — is one of the main weapons with which the syndicalists hope to bring about the economic emancipation of the workers. In other words, to control the production and distribution of the products themselves.

Anarcho-Syndicalism As anarcho-syndicalists we believe in the same objectives as syndicalists do, but we want to stress that we are not merely concerned with supporting workers in their day to day struggles for better wages and working conditions but we try to ensure that the main objective — social revolution — is

not forgotten. Without this one would only become reformist and fall into the same trap which the Labour Party finds itself today.

During the early part of the twentieth century the syndicalist movement found itself more and more engrossed in the trade union struggle and unable to deal with the much broader issues of their times. With the outbreak of the First World War and the betrayal of the working people by the "socialists" who wholeheartedly supported the war, it was only natural that the syndicalists and the anarchists should come closer together. It was from this time that the term anarcho-syndicalist came into popular usage.

As was said earlier on, anarcho-syndicalism combines the more relevant aspects of syndicalism and the revolutionary aspirations of anarchism, to bring forth a movement more fitted to face the ever-increasing power of the state.

We wish to achieve this by not only organising inside workplaces and thereby narrowly confining ourselves to the trade union struggle, but to give our support also to peoples struggles concerning other issues. Furthermore we think it necessary to stress that we are anarchists as well as syndicalists for otherwise the movement would be open to infiltration by those authoritarian socialists (i.e. Trotskyists and Stalinists) or even fascists who are always ready to manipulate any popular organisation for their own political ends.

Direct Action Movement

The DAM was formed in March 1979 by a number of class struggle anarchists (including members of the Syndicalist Workers Federation) who felt it was time to leave behind the irrelevant, disorganised nature of most of the British anarchist movement and go on to create a national working class anarchist organisation. The re-emergence of anarcho-syndicalism internationally, and especially of the CNT (National Confederation of Labour) in Spain, were also of no small importance in the founding of the DAM.

Since its founding the DAM has grown slowly, finding its feet. Of course the DAM has encountered all the difficulties an organisation being set up almost from scratch could expect, difficulties that multiply up against the weak tradition that anarcho-syndicalism has had in Britain. Given the general ignorance among British working people of what anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism really are, it is hardly surprising that in the four years since its founding the DAM has not become the biggest thing to hit the British political scene since sliced bread (or the Labour Party).

But we are in the position today of having groups and members in towns across England and Wales active in a number of areas — producing anarcho-syndicalist propaganda, workplace organisation, unemployed groups, anti-militarism, supporting workers in struggle, etc. The DAM's organ for putting its ideas to others is its paper *Direct Action*. At present this appears irregularly, but it is hoped to publish it more regular as the organisation grows. Many DAM members are active trade unionists, some are shop stewards, and they try to propagate anarcho-syndicalist ideas in the factories and offices. It should be pointed out that the DAM comes from an entirely different tradition than the Marxists, middle-class-led left. In fact unemployed workers are proportionately the largest group within the organisation.

Internationally the DAM is the British section of the International Workers Association, and therefore has contacts with anarcho-syndicalist groups and unions in other countries. The DAM International Commission publishes a quarterly journal of international news called *No Frontiers*. We regard international contacts between workers' organisations as very important. Capitalism is becoming more multinational every day. For all its talk of patriotism, fatherland, national sacrifice, etc., the capitalist class is international, and so must the workers be in order to be able to defeat it. With our world in the hands of megalomaniac militarists with the power to blow us all to armageddon, these contacts take on even more importance. The only force able to halt the march towards the next horrendous war is the organised working class, and this mobilisation will only succeed if it is international, disarming the States around the world. Let two World Wars and the farce in the Falkland Islands be a lesson to us, so we don't have workers massacring each other again to protect the interests of ruling classes... Next time there might not be a working class left after it is all over.

Anarcho-syndicalism has a small following and little influence in this country, and it is precisely to remedy this that the DAM exists. We are working class people striving for the liberation of our class. The history of the workers' movements shows us in which direction we must move if we are to free ourselves from capitalism. We

must organise, or we are nothing. But we must take care to organise well. We need *libertarian organisation*, in fact. In libertarian organisation the power remains always in the hands of the rank and file, and everything is structured to as much as possible prevent the bureaucratic tendencies that all organisations throw up. There are enough sell-outs by self-seeking, compromised leaderships in the history of the workers' movement and by the weak-kneed reformist unions we have in Britain today for us to want to get it right this time.

So, the DAM is working towards the end that anarcho-syndicalist ideas begin to group large sections of the working class. When the seed has borne fruit the way will be open for the setting up of anarcho-syndicalist, self-managed, independent unions in this country. These will be the tools with which we can push the employing class onto the defensive, and, when the time comes, with which we can take control of the running of society ourselves, for *our* needs.

But all this is in the future. The DAM is a propaganda group, and the task now is to bring to other workers' attention just what happened in Spain in 1936 or Italy in 1919-1920. To say that workers' control is still the goal we must aim for, here, in Britain in the 1980s. To make it plain that the working class movements which have gone closest to creating the new society have talked the language and used methods of libertarian communism and anarcho-syndicalism, either consciously (Spain in the 1930s, Italy 1919-1920, Russia 1917-19), or unconsciously (Hungary 1956, Poland 1980).

At this point the uncommitted reader or cynic might say: "What happened in Spain in 1936 is all very well, but this is Britain in the 1980s, surely things are different now, anarcho-syndicalism is out of date."

But is it? Anyone with eyes to see will know that the class system upon which capitalism rests has not magically disappeared. In fact, the system's injustices are becoming more blatant every day. Working class agitation in the past won from the bosses better standards of living, health care, shorter working hours, some civil rights, etc. Some workers gave their lives for these reforms (usually won by revolutionaries rather than reformists incidentally). But the superstructure of the system has remained basically unchanged: workers and marginals on one side, the ruling class on the other; those with power and wealth, those forced to exist a life of toil or drudgery. In short nothing has really changed, we still need a revolution.

Throughout the last decade we have witnessed the gradual worsening of the situation. Wealth is being transferred even more from the working class (who produce it all) to the ruling class in order that we should subsidise one of their recurrent crises. The same old story, the rich get richer while the poor get poorer (so capitalism can keep staggering on), and this daylight robbery is being effected almost without meeting any resistance (apart from those spontaneous shows of defiance that were the riots of 1981). The Right scream about the unions, Tony Benn, and the Militant Tendency, dressing up in revolutionary colours but are fairly harmless reformists. These "representatives" of the people can not be all that dangerous judging from the near impunity with which the capitalists are throwing workers onto the dole, increasing the exploitation of those still with jobs, and generally further impoverishing the working class. No, truth is that the working class in this country is hopelessly disorganised and lacking in confidence in its capability to confront the ruling class, and all the trendy left politicians in the world are no substitute for real working class organisation. Who would have believed a decade ago when one million unemployed made the headlines that today the capitalists would be forcing over four million onto the dole and slashing the real value of our wages without meeting any real resistance?

If anything, in today's world of massive unemployment, low wages, general poverty, and no hope, anarcho-syndicalism is more relevant than ever. Our world is more industrialised, not less. We still shoulder the injustices of the class system. So, the industrial organisation of labour is as imperative as it ever was. Surely the Polish workers' movement of 1980-81 was proof of the effectiveness of syndicalist organisation. Even if the syndicalism of the Polish worker was of an unconscious and imperfect nature, Solidarność for a while grasped the Polish State in a strangle-hold, frightening the wits out of the Kremlin bureaucrats and Western bankers alike in the process. It was because the syndicalism was not sufficiently strong or conscious that priests and back-pedalling leaders could water down the movement, thereby letting the Polish State off the hook and allowing it time to regroup its forces for the repression. But this does not lessen the validity of the Polish Summer as proof of the effectiveness of syndicalist organisation in a modern, industrialised country not unlike our own. When our turn comes we will not be entering the unknown, we will have the benefits of the lessons we can draw from the triumphs and defeats of our forebearers.

If you accept then that anarcho-syndicalism is still relevant, the question becomes one of adopting anarcho-syndicalist theory and practice to our situation, which is where the Direct Action Movement-International Workers Association comes in. We are not interested in little cliques crying to the wind. There are enough such organisations in Britain today. We are interested in forging a working class movement sufficiently conscious and combative to resist and eventually bury the boss class once and for all. Will you be with us comrade?

The Early Movement

Between 1900 and 1914, there was a drop in industrial growth and a worsening of trade with other countries; profits, rent, and prices rose while wages fell by ten per cent. The result of these adverse economic trends was mass unrest, and if this resulted in the growth of political parties, i.e. the Socialist Labour Party, the British Socialist Party, and the Labour Representation Committee at one end of the scale, at the other end it meant that some people sought other new and more vigorous means of bringing down the system.[1] At the same time the values of the political system were also queried. The struggle for better wages and conditions inevitably led to dissatisfaction with orthodox politicians, trade unions, and the methods they used.

The growth of the Trade Unions after the struggles of the 1890s led to a demand by many employers for their incorporation into the system by means of the collective bargaining and conciliation machinery, an effective means of absorption by the State, and one by no means offensive to the average union official. Obviously this served to compromise the trade unions in the eyes of the militants. For these militants syndicalism provided a ready answer; many sought nothing but the reorganisation of the union on industrial rather than trade lines, but others saw a means not only of ameliorating the vile conditions of the era, but a means of achieving a socialist society without the tiresome pantomime of Parliament. They saw in syndicalism the means of running the future revolutionary society without the political intermediaries.

> A successful General Strike implies a previous special preparatory movement to that end, and above all, a form of labour organisation fundamentally different from that of the present trades unionism — a form of organisation not only better adapted to the task of fighting more effectively the every day battles of the workers with the capitalists, and of preparing for the General Strike, but by its very structure capable of becoming the instrument through which the industries of the country may be taken over and run as a going concern by the proletariat.[2]

Even with the deteriorating standards of living, syndicalism did not come easily. From 1904 the message came from bands of enthusiasts around the country, they were by no means united and one author had detected three different strands of activists. These were the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), the Industrial League, and the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism, a propaganda organisation designed to foster revolutionary unions on the lines of the American Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). This was seen as an alternative to the existing unions. In 1909 the B.A.I.U. was wound up and there appeared the Industrial Workers of Great Britain, an alternative union. The I.W.G.B. had some success in Scotland. Before this a split in the B.A.I.U. had led to formation of the Industrial League. This proposed a rejection of the political line of the S.L.P., and proposed propaganda work within the existing unions as a means of building a mass movement. The third aspect of the Syndicalist Movement was the anarcho-syndicalist group; this because of its constant opposition to political parties and the state, drew members from both the S.L.P. and the League. As far back as 1904 Sam Mainwaring, an anarchist, launched a magazine called the *General Strike*; though this did not last long, other initiatives were being taken. In 1907 the union organiser John Turner, an anarchist, edited the *Voice of Labour*. This publication wanted a more vigorous attitude amongst T.U. officials, "less political adventurism", and an increase in revolutionary propaganda, then the road would be open to the millennium. Guy Aldred fell out with Turner, and established the Industrial Union of Direct Actionists, to build revolutionary industrial unionism. Outside the anarchist movement, anarchists were active in trade unions and in the Industrial League, as well as working alongside activists from the I.L.P. and other left parties.

The whole of the trade union movement was in a turmoil of ideas, the incorporation of the left parties and the trade unions within the state led to an enormous loss of confidence in them by the working class. It was said after the 1908 T.U.C. conference,

> There I met most of the heads of the Labour Movement. Earnest and impatient, I sensed a laziness in many of my confreres who had arrived. The ease of Parliament seemed to have emasculated them....Action was what we younger men wanted.[3]

By now a definite Syndicalist movement had been born, although there were differences as to what was wanted in the way of union organisation, there was little doubt as to how the promised land would be arrived at. Direct Action was the watchword and the strike, preferably a general one, was the way most syndicalists saw as the way to defeat capitalism and the state.

In 1910 there arrived in Britain an orator of whom it was said, "His personality can hold a crowd of 5,000 labourers and make them act as one." This was Tom Mann, who helped found the Industrial Syndicalist and the Syndicalist Education League.

From 1910 to the outbreak of war in August 1914 there were 72 million days lost through strikes. In 1912 there were 41 million, and had it not been for the war there would have been, according to one source, "one of the greatest industrial revolts the world has ever seen".[4]

The struggle started in the North East of England where a series of strikes led to a lockout in the shipyards. In 1910 the Durham miners, traditionally moderates, struck for three months against an agreement already signed by their union. A victory was gained by the railwaymen after a three day strike in mid-summer. In that year also, there took place a "lock-out", which, though not sought by the Lancashire Cotton Workers, was a reprisal against "militant tactics". Between August 1910 and August 1911 miners' strikes in South Wales led to 30,000 men being out at one time or another.

Freedom, the anarchist paper, spoke of "the stupendous struggle which is growing on all sides between capital and labour". The size of the struggle is indicated by the police and troops being sent to the South Wales coalfield. This resulted in the shooting of a striker at Tonypandy. In return there were attacks on the homes of colliery officials and their persons. At one place attempts were made to blow up the manager's house. Magistrates were another target. But it was the police who bore the brunt of the miners' displeasure, as one man put it; "they were there to beat us and they were the government men".

In 1911 it was the turn of the Transport Workers to strike; these have been described as both "insurgent" and "largely unofficial". In Southampton the seamen went on strike; this spread to every port in the country and when dockers came out in sympathy, plus demands of their own, the atmosphere reached boiling point. Mass pickets clashed with the police in Hull; here the strike spread to the mills and it was the pickets outside that fought the police who had been reinforced by police from Leeds, Birmingham, and London. The military were thought to be untrustworthy and in the town fires were started and there was some looting. By August the trouble spread to Liverpool; seamen and dockers were out and the strike spread to the transport workers, railway porters, and tramway men. The Government moved in troops and moored two gunboats in the Mersey. The police attacked a peaceful crowd and batoned it. "Those who tended the wounded were struck, those who were already wounded were struck, and children were not forgotten in that mad charge," said *Freedom*. Fighting took place in the streets, and martial law was declared; during these clashes two men were shot dead and others injured.

The year 1912 is considered the peak of the "Syndicalist Revolt", and thereafter the struggle is considered to have declined, but the pitch of the struggle in 1913 took on a different form. In 1910 the strike wave jumped to 10 million days lost in a year through strikes. This was kept up in 1911, 1913, and 1914, up to the outbreak of the war. In 1912 the strike wave certainly peaked at 40.8 million days lost through strikes, but in 1913 there were more individual strikes as against the mass strikes of the miners in 1912. The momentum was kept up even though the employers were fighting back through the use of legislation and the lock-out. In 1913-14, one of the more obvious features of the strike was the number of unskilled workers who were getting drawn into the conflict.

The outbreak of war was a serious blow to syndicalism; many militants found it impossible to resist the call to the colours, but the Government's attempts to direct labour gave impetus to the struggle, and the ever-increasing identification of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions with the State gave greater cause for people in industry to organise their own contest, and it was in these days that the Shop Stewards' movement grew.[5] But things went beyond that, and the folly of relying on the unions led men to seek other ways of

organising and one of the major attempts to develop the fight was the calling of a conference in Manchester 1916 on workers' committees.

From the conference came a manifesto stating: "Being composed of delegates of every shop and untrammelled by obsolete rules or laws, we claim to represent the true feelings of the workers. We can act according to the merits of the case and the desire of the rank and file." The object of the Workers Committee was defined as "The furtherance of the interests of the working class organisation as a partisan effort to improve the position of Labour in the present and to assist in the abolition of the wages system." They made no mention of political parties and if they did not reject outright trade union officials, at least they moved in the right direction.

It was at this time that events began to shape the future, the success of the Russian people in their revolution began to excite the Labour movement; talk of Workers Councils, Soviets, and so on began to colour the utterance of syndicalists and orthodox politicians alike. The orthodox organisations formed a united socialist council for the purpose of calling the Workers and Soldiers Council Convention in Leeds. There W.C. Anderson called for the formation of Workers and Soldiers Councils.

In the meantime within the syndicalist movement things were changing. Under pressure from events and in response to the needs of the struggle, the theory was being developed of the working class organising itself outside the trade union movement.

Pre war it was a matter of the type of union a man had joined, i.e. a trades union or an industrial union (encompassing every one within a given industry). Now the issues were changing. During the war the Shop Stewards Movement had arisen, in the latter years came the call for factory committees within the workshop. This posed the question of the use of the trade union and the officials. Though the British syndicalists tolerated the union and its officials there was always the Russian example. In that country too factory committees had arisen, and the failure of the Trade Unions to rise to the challenge of the Revolution had caused friction between the two. Only the intervention of the Bolshevik Government caused the decline of the anarchist-backed Factory Committees.

In Britain the notion was propagated by J.T. Murphy, later his ideas were developed and expanded by Gallagher and Cambell in their pamphlet "Direct Action, an outline of workshop and social organisation." This was an attempt to spread the committee idea into social life away from the factory floor, not divorced from, but complementary to, the Factory Committee.

In 1919 industrial and social conflict had reached great heights as the working class fought to improve their economic position. A fierce national struggle was expected in January or February of that year and great bitterness was felt when the national trade union leaders failed to support it.

Eventually the economic climate changed for the worse and the economy collapsed. The Syndicalist Movement had already lost momentum and things became worse as militants became confused and lost direction. The conversion to Bolshevism in 1920 of Gallagher led the way for others, in one historian's view: "he was persuaded by Lenin to change his views particularly on Parliament and the Communist Party's affiliation to the Labour Party."[6] Eventually Murphy, Gallagher, Cambell, and Tom Mann plus thousands of lesser known militants forsook the ideas of syndicalism to follow the Bolshevik chimers.

Why did syndicalism fail?

Two main causes were the First World War and the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. As late as the 1940s many working class people were of the opinion that the Great War had been started as a way of getting rid of revolutionary unrest among the working class, and there is no doubt that many militants got caught up in the patriotic fervour. The propaganda machine of the State might have been crude but it was effective. Though industrial unrest was rife during the war, it was sectional, i.e. skilled men refusing to be conscripted, and though the leadership remained revolutionary the loss of so many militants weakened the struggle.

The triumph of Lenin and his political allies in Russia gave the impression that success lay in political organisation and that the unions were there only to marshall the cannon fodder of leftwing aspirants to government; eventually only the anarcho-syndicalists were left and it was through tenacity that syndicalism lived on.

The Rebirth of Anarcho-syndicalism

The International Workers Association IWA/AIT is the international organisation of anarcho-syndicalists. It was set up in 1922 when it became obvious that the Russian Revolution had been aborted by the Bolshevik Party. It was formed as a real revolutionary alternative to the "Red Trade Union International".

In the inter-war years the IWA had an international membership of several millions and sections in 25 countries, but as fascist dictatorships came to power in Europe the revolutionary anarcho-syndicalist unions in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Portugal were smashed and driven underground. They felt the full weight of fascism because they were in the forefront of the battle against fascism and reaction. The devastation of fascism, the Second World War, and the cold war all played havoc with the IWA, reducing it to a shadow of its former self.

Only lately have the anarcho-syndicalist organisations been able to reform themselves in many countries where they are now legal or tolerated. Today, the IWA is expanding and renewing itself in many regions. Much of this expansion is due to the rebirth and growth of the CNT, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist union. The CNT at its peak during the Spanish Revolution had a membership of over 2 million. During this time, in spite of the violent attacks of the fascists and so-called communists, the Spanish working class were able to take the first steps towards a society without capitalism, where agriculture and industry were operating under workers' control.

This rebirth of the CNT was a factor that encourages the revival and growth of other IWA sections throughout Europe. This revival inspired anew interest in anarcho-syndicalist ideas, and the moral bankruptcy of "communism" also helped to turn the thoughts of thousands of workers towards a sympathetic examination of anarchist theory and practice.

The CNT is organised on a federal decentralised basis, and this was to prove one of its major strengths during the years of vicious repression during the Franco dictatorship. The members of eighteen different national committees were jailed or disappeared and in many cases executed. Four decades of fascist repression drove the organisation underground and reduced its membership to about 20,000.

Historically the CNT was organised according to the federative principles of anarcho-syndicalism; from the bottom up. There are no paid officials and the members of the national coordinating committee are changed frequently and rotated around the regions. These factors have combined to prevent the formation of a bureaucracy and the tendency towards reformism which characterises social democratic unions in Western Europe.

Inspired by the example of the CNT, other sections began to reactivate themselves. In Italy the Union Sindicale Italiana, which had played a crucial part in Italian revolutionary struggles, e.g. "the Red Week" in 1919 and the factory occupations in 1920. It attained a membership of 800,000 but was almost destroyed when Mussolini came to power.

In Germany Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands had 200,000 members until it was suppressed by Hitler. This section has been reorganised in Federal Germany and in part owes a debt to the activities of Spanish "guest workers" who were economic and political exiles in Western Germany. Nor was the Far East exempt from this upsurge in anarcho-syndicalism. Japan now has one of the most active and vigorous sections of the IWA which is an example to us coming from a country which is usually held up to us for emulation by our own boss class.

There has been the belief in some quarters that there is a submerged tradition within the Labour movement which can be justly described as "syndicalist". Hobsbawn, in an article in *New Society*, tried to grapple with this idea, but he was not able to do justice to it, confusing the demands of many present-day "Marxoid" groups with syndicalism.

In this sense anarcho-syndicalism is seen as being something that is a product of the creativity of workers as workers, and a direct result of their working lives and experience. This "syndicalism" is an ongoing feature of industrial life, to be seen in a variety of ways, whether it is the informal resistance to work discipline or the recurrent demand that workers in struggle should be able to control their own struggle.

There has been a tendency to equate rank and file activity or militant trade unionism with syndicalism. [T]he old syndicalists would have certainly approved of these actions in themselves, even if they are lacking an overall view of the struggle for a free communist society.

The awareness that there was a submerged syndicalist tradition in the labour movement which had been separated from the anarcho-syndicalist or "political syndicalism" was one of the reasons which led to the formation of the Direct Action Movement. It was felt that this tradition, although unconscious of its nature and origins, had just as much right to call itself syndicalist, as did the more "anarcho" variety.

Since the decline of syndicalism as a significant current within the British labour movement, there have been a number of organisations which have endeavoured to keep the ideals of anarcho-syndicalism alive. Amongst them were such organisations as the Union of Anarcho-syndicalists and the Anarchist Federation of Britain (AFB) which was later to become the Syndicalist Workers Federation (SWF) and was active for over twenty years. The SWF was the British section of the IWA. In addition there was the Anarchist Syndicalist Alliance (ASA) which was active for a time in the seventies and helped keep the ideas alive in some quarters.

The Direct Action Movement grew out of a series of anarcho-syndicalist conferences held during 1978 and 1979. These conferences were called at the initiative of the SWF. The SWF realised that it was only one of a number of organisations which either held anarcho-syndicalist views or else had a position very near to it. This was an attempt to coordinate the disparate condition of British anarcho-syndicalists into one organisation.

There was a desire both to unite and to put anarcho-syndicalist ideas and terms into a language that spoke directly to people. There was an attempt to go back to basics and explain what we meant without using jargon or employing words and phrases on the assumption that everyone knew what was meant by expressions like "Social General Strike" or "Lock Out the Boss Class".

Endnotes

1. See Wilf McCarney's "Dare to be a Daniel" (1945) for his account of organizing a syndicalist union in the hotel/restaurant industry in London during this period. —Syndicalism.org eds.

2. Industrial League pamphlet, by G. Nerve, 1910.

3. Fred Bower of Liverpool.

4. No source given for this quote. —Syndicalism.org eds.

5. See Tom Brown's "Syndicalism and Shop Stewards" (1962) for more on the shop stewards' movement. —Syndicalism.org eds.

6. Also unsourced. —Syndicalism.org eds.

Additional Information

Taken from The Sparrows' Nest Library and Archive.