

INTRODUCING ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

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What Is Anarcho-Syndicalism?

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean.”

– Lewis Carol, *Through the Looking Glass*

Anarchism is the theory and practice of individuals living without the interference of human authorities: without being bossed around by a church, government, military, or even a business boss. Syndicalism is the theory and practice of people working together as a union, most typically a labor union (syndicate is the French word for labor union). What does anarcho-syndicalism mean? Can these two seemingly opposite concepts, people acting without bosses and people acting as a group, be combined? Could it mean a group of people working to create anarchy, or individuals working to create a union of individuals? Or is it just a muddle, an attempt to mix oil and water, that goes against the nature of things?

Of course words mean what people want them to mean. Anarcho-syndicalism, in the 19th century, came to mean both a method of people organizing themselves and a type of society they hoped to create. The society they desired was anarchist. In an anarchist society people voluntarily cooperate to work together for their own good and the community. Each individual remains free from coercion by bosses. The way they hoped to get to this society was through gaining workers’ control of production, of industry, agriculture, and trade. The way they could gain control of production was by organizing anarchist labor unions.

Anarchist labor unions have only a shell of resemblance to the type of labor unions that existed in the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States. In an anarchist labor union decisions are made democratically. There are few paid union officials and they are paid ordinary wages. There is no top-down hierarchy that orders around local affiliates. The union may appoint a committee to negotiate with an employer or to do other tasks, but the committee is of volunteers who have no permanent power or position in the union. The union is not usually organized according to craft, so that the workers at a given business belong to a variety of unions. Rather, all the workers at a workplace belong to the same union. Finally, the goals are different. Anarchist labor unions believe that capitalists should not run society, should not even run businesses. The businesses should be owned,

controlled, and managed by the workers themselves. The practice of wage slavery should be abolished. Anarcho-syndicalism is about more than just how labor unions should function: it is about how society is organized and our relationship with nature.

Anarcho-syndicalism, in order to be a true theory of society, economics, and politics, must correctly describe reality. It must be able to develop as it experiences and interacts with reality, and of course as reality itself changes. Anarcho-syndicalists strive to see the social and natural situation as it really is, but do not accept the situation as it is. The destruction of the environment and the destruction of humanity, two trends that have accelerated throughout the 20th century, both demand that human society be changed. Anarcho-syndicalism is the theory of meaningful political, economic, and social change for the 21st century.

The Development of Anarcho-Syndicalism

“When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, Sir?” – John Maynard Keynes

Today’s problems, and tomorrow’s, developed out of the past. The solutions to our problems also have a history. Volumes have been written on the history of anarcho-syndicalism; here only the most pertinent history will be reviewed.

While the antecedents of anarcho-syndicalism go back to the dawn of civilization and could be found scattered around the globe, modern anarcho-syndicalism developed in Europe concurrently with the industrial revolution and then followed the industrial revolution to the United States and other countries as they developed. Unlike Marxism, anarcho-syndicalism was not the creation of any one particular intellectual. Though highly influenced by anarchist theorists and organizers such as Bakunin and Proudon, anarcho-syndicalist theory and practice was worked out by the self-organization of agricultural and industrial workers.

The industrial revolution was characterized by the substitution of machine work for the work of animals and humans. While this process began in ancient times, in the 19th century it became the dominant trend in the world, with the burning of coal providing the energy to run the machines. This was accompanied by urbanization, the shift from farm life and farm work to city

life and city work. The dominant social class of the pre-industrial period, the nobility, which had owned most land and had also been the military class, had lost power to a rapidly expanding class of capitalists. These capitalists, who owned the factories or controlled trade and banking, used money to control politics. Slavery and serfdom were abolished in most of the world during the 19th century, but the former slaves, serfs, and free farm workers found the only place for them in the economy was as factory workers. Working conditions and pay were terrible; people found they had become wage slaves.

Naturally these wage slaves wanted to improve their condition in the world. Several ideas attracted them. For individuals there was the hope that they might start a business of their own, or work their way up into management, or lord it over the workers as a policeman or private security person. Most people knew this option was available to only a small percentage of the workers and did not want to become the exploiters of their former friends. Some sought solace in Christianity or other religions, which taught them to accept their sad fate as natural. The four major political trends that attracted those who hoped to act as a community to escape wage slavery were reformism, democratic socialism (both Marxist and non-Marxist), authoritarian socialism (Marxism-Leninism), and anarcho-syndicalism.

Reformism sought improvements within the existing political and economic framework. Reformists sought to blunt the hard edges of capitalist exploitation; people were to become better-paid wage slaves. Democratic socialists sought to gain control of the government through the electoral process and then have government own major industries; the workers would own their industries through the medium of a democratically elected government. Authoritarian socialists wanted to gain the same ends through armed revolution followed by a dictatorship which would own the factories in the name of the working people. Anarcho-syndicalists wanted to abolish the government as well as wage slavery. They sought to create a society in which the workers owned their own farms and factories; functions formerly carried out by government could be done by various factory and farm groups working cooperatively together.

The lines between these groups were somewhat blurred; they shared some common ideas and often worked on the same causes. All could agree that an 8 hour day and 40 hour work week was a good cause to rally behind at a time when people were forced to work 60 to 80 hours a week. An individual

worker or group of workers might typically believe that any of these four trends would be an improvement over being slaves to the capitalists.

All of these trends had labor unions. The reformists tended towards craft unions, which organized the more skilled workers for higher wages; in the USA these eventually became the AFL (American Federation of Labor). The democratic socialists supported labor unions but used them mainly as a source of votes and money in their quest to gain political office. The authoritarian socialists tended to see labor unions as fighting units for their revolutionary take-over of the government. For anarcho-syndicalists the labor union was the germ of the new society. Instead of favoring craft unions they favored industrial unions, which put all workers in a given industry in the same union. It was important to the anarcho-syndicalists that the workers learn to run their factories, for they would someday do exactly that. National and international federations of industrial unions would both build the power to eventually abolish wage slavery and act as the main organs of cooperation in the new society.

Anarcho-syndicalism was the dominant radical workers' trend until the Bolshevik (Marxist-Leninist) Revolution in Russia consolidated power around 1920. Marxism had been particularly strong in Germany and England, the two most industrialized nations. But anarcho-syndicalism had been strongest in France, Spain, Italy, Australia, and the Americas. The largest anarcho-syndicalist organization in the United States was the Industrial Workers of the World, founded in 1905. In Europe the anarcho-syndicalist national organizations were united in the International Workers Association (IWA). Again, it should be noted that the lines dividing radical trends are quite porous. A labor union might be fundamentally in sympathy with anarcho-syndicalism but officially be reformist; a local union dominated by anarcho-syndicalists might have Marxists and socialists in it, and vice versa.

To everyone's surprise the first country to set up what appeared to be a workers' society was Russia. This was surprising mostly because there weren't very many factory workers in Russia, and it had not even had much of an industrial revolution, in which one would expect the capitalists to overthrow the Czar and set up a democracy. The Czarist government actually lost power to the Soviets, which were elected assemblies representing all the political trends. The Bolsheviks, better known now as Marxist-Leninists, staged a military coup against the Czar and the Soviets and established a

bureaucratic government which then closed down the Soviets. The socialists and anarcho-syndicalists had been outmaneuvered; they either joined the Bolsheviks or were imprisoned and killed or exiled.

Anarcho-syndicalism as a world-wide radical movement went into serious decline after Lenin's successful coup. Workers had been frustrated by decades of failure; they were impatient to put an end to capitalism. Lenin's vanguard party model of organizing and governing had particular appeal to people with big egos and aggressive personalities. The workers seemed to be in power in Russia. The anarchist opinion that the Bolsheviks could be characterized as a new class ruling over the workers was dismissed by many as mere capitalist propaganda. Vanguard party led, dictatorial socialism became known as Communism. In the USA most democratic socialists became Communists and many of the workers in the IWW became Communists as well.

Anarcho-syndicalism was caught in a pincer-movement. Capitalists controlled the newspapers and had the resources to thwart anarcho-syndicalism. In Russia the anarcho-syndicalists were secretly murdered (as were most non-Leninist radicals), and around the world people were attracted to the new Communist doctrine. Russian agents were sent around the world to help establish Communist Parties. Communist propaganda pretended that the workers were in charge in the Soviet Union; but it was the dictator of the moment who was in charge. Then fascism (capitalism with an open dictatorship rather than a representative democracy) became a major phenomena. Italy went fascist in 1922; Germany in 1932; and Spain in 1936. It was in Spain that anarcho-syndicalists would fight their greatest battle to date.

The Spanish Revolution and Civil War was a complicated phenomena which is worth reading an entire book or two about. In the 20th century Spain had become a semi-industrialized nation, one of the poorest in Europe. Governments had fluctuated between liberal and conservative democracies and right wing military dictatorships; many people were still loyal to the royal family. In 1936 a republic existed which was making some attempts to reform the economy and social system. The republican government was dominated by parties that might be characterized as liberal capitalists, reformist democrats, and democratic-socialists. The military, the Catholic Church, the fascist party, the monarchists and some of the capitalists decided to overthrow the Republic and establish a dictatorship (they actually could not decide in advance who

would be dictator). In several regions of Spain the anarcho-syndicalists of the CNT were the strongest social organization; they did not participate in the government, but were pushing for an anarcho-syndicalist revolution.

The military coup attempt might have succeeded immediately, but the ordinary people fought back. In the anarcho-syndicalist regions like Catalonia and the socialist regions of southern Spain, as well as in Madrid, the fascists and their allies were initially defeated. A civil war followed. During the civil war the socialists and anarcho-syndicalists showed they could run their areas fine without capitalists or other bosses. But over the course of two years the Republican side lost the civil war to the fascists. While the reasons for this were complex, the main reason was that Mussolini and Hitler sent large amounts of aid to the Fascists, while the US, British and French governments refused to give or sell military aid to the Republican side. After the civil war the new dictator, General Franco, with the aid of the Catholic church, rounded up over a million Anarcho-syndicalists and socialists and shot them in cold blood. Soon after that World War II started when Stalin and Hitler invaded Poland.

Between World War II and the collapse of the dictatorship Soviet Union in the 1980's, anarcho-syndicalism was a very weak political trend, with only a few thousand conscious adherents world-wide. It often found itself splintered into small groups arguing about theoretical fine-points. But since 1990 it has revived rapidly and has even been picked by some capitalist intellectuals as the main threat to capitalism today.

The Present Situation And The Near Future

“But we all have one thing in common here: a great big corporate, banking, media, government, military, environmental disaster that affects us all.” —

Anarchist Farm by Jane Doe

People have learned a great deal in the 20th century. Most notably, we have learned that the global ecosystem has a limited capacity to sustain human life.

Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, we live in a world in crisis. The world's human population is already greater than the earth can sustain in the long run, yet it continues to grow. Consumption by the richest segments of the world's population is astounding (and growing) while billions of people live

in equally astounding deprivation of such basics as food, water, housing, and dignity. The world's forests have been stripped of trees and her oceans of fish. Agriculture is in a constant state of critical care, sustained by torrents of artificial fertilizer and pesticides. The ozone layer is deteriorating and global warming is accelerating while multinational corporations order governments to take no action.

Like a vampire grown strong on its victims' blood, capitalism dominates the world's economy, governments and military. The international capitalist class, a group of people not numbering more than 10 million people, controls some six billion wage slaves. Their philosophy, Neo-liberalism, the worship of money, dominates the mass media. In addition to controlling almost every national government on earth they have created a group of organizations, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization, that constitute, for practical purposes, a world government. These capitalists have at their disposal almost all of the world's money, its means of communications, and its advanced weaponry up to and including nuclear weapons.

They see their main problem as controlling the rest of us. This risk of losing control has four major components. One is religions particularly Islam and Catholicism (or Christianity, if you want to include the Protestants and Orthodox). Another component is the coalition of mostly small, mostly single-issue groups that seek to protect the environment, labor, and democracy. The third component is the greatly-weakened Leninist/Communist method of organization. The final threat is anarcho-syndicalism.

Catholicism is traditionally an ally of capitalism in our era, just as it was an ally of the nobility in the previous era. Yet it is not entirely subject to the capitalists. It still has its own agenda, the conversion of everyone into its fold. For capitalists it is a contradictory blessing: it keeps poor people away from secular radicalism, but it also sometimes defends those poor people from capitalist predation. Catholicism has always favored capitalism over anarcho-syndicalism. While the church knows both are atheistic, capitalists are more willing to pretend to be Christians, and have money to donate to the Catholic hierarchy. Islam's position is similar to Catholicism, but it has no central authority, so it is more difficult to control. Also Islam is a traditional enemy of the Christian capitalist/industrialist countries of Europe.

Single-issue groups usually achieve their goals, if they do, by taking advantage of capitalism's cost consciousness and internal conflicts. Which is more expensive, putting pollution control devices on factories, or paying for medical care costs created by the pollution? Which is more expensive, a national brain-washing campaign and huge political donations, or letting some reform become law in the United States? Is the United States too protective of its environment? Cheaper to move the factories to Mexico than to risk losing a fight with the non-profit organizations and the voters. But when capitalists want to (are willing to spend the money necessary) they can always defeat non-profit organizations. The end-run around the US congress to the World Trade Organization is the most glowing recent example of the power of the international capitalist class.

In the near future we can only expect conditions to get worse. Even when a national or world economy is expanding the benefit goes entirely to those who already occupy the economic high ground. When the US stock market bubble of the 1990s collapses the misery for the lower and middle classes here may be the worst since the Great Depression.

Sadly, the destruction of the earth's ecosystem is not likely to slow down significantly even during a severe worldwide recession. A one-third reduction of the world's economy, with concurrent reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, other pollution, forest destruction, etc., would still be swallowing up the little that is left faster than the earth can regenerate itself. In addition, when economic conditions are poor, corporations demand and receive concessions from governments, such as being able to cut forests even faster, postpone investment in pollution control technologies, etc.

If the world continues on its present trends we can expect near total ecological collapse some time in the 21st century. When and exactly how that will happen, we can only guess.

Anarcho-syndicalism, properly implemented on a worldwide scale, can increase the supply of necessities to people most in need while reducing the destruction of the earth to the point the earth can heal. Just as important, it can do this in a humane manner that allows individuals and communities greater social and cultural freedom. The question is, can we get there fast enough, or even at all? Can we create an anarcho-syndicalist society before the earth is destroyed by capitalism?

A Vision of an Anarchist, Sustainable Society

What would an anarcho-syndicalist society and world look like?

At first it would have to be a world under repair. Without economic, political, or religious bosses, many people will doubtless have trouble adjusting. Work will have to be readjusted, with whole categories of work, like most office work, lawyering, banking, and insurance thrown out. That means people learning new skills, like growing and distributing food in ways that are safe for people and the earth. It may mean making do living or working in buildings that were built in a stupid manner for the wrong purpose under the old system. It will certainly mean some people giving up status symbols like SUVs and other ecologically disastrous toys.

While there would be a great deal more freedom and the ability to delivery food and services according to need, not privilege, we will have to move rapidly towards an ecologically sustainable economy. This would mean voluntary birth control to begin reducing the world's population to a sustainable level. It would mean a greater emphasis on local food production using less (and later no) pesticides and minimal mechanization. So excess paper-pushers will join in food production, a task they have been taught to disdain, but that in practice is quite enjoyable. Farm workers deserve the best treatment in the new society: short work days and reasonable comforts.

There is no reason for long work days (except in exceptional circumstances) or long work weeks. There is no reason for sexual suppression as long as you have birth control and are careful about sexually transmitted disease. There is no reason for human cruelty in a society where people are free and no one is manipulating the economy for their own benefit.

We can restore our forests and other wild areas while retaining enough well-treated farmland to sustain a human society. We can restore our sense of wonder in the natural world. Life can go on without bosses. Sure, people will argue. Jealousy won't disappear. Children will test the limits set by adults, and some adults will be annoyed. Some people will tell stories of the good old days when you could drive to a mall in a SUV and by cheap junk made by wage slaves in third world nations. Problems will present themselves and need solving. Some people will try to shirk their share of the work. But governments, capitalists, and popes are not solutions to these problems. The

bosses all multiply problems for most people in order to have easy lives for themselves. Happiness is never guaranteed by nature, but we'll be much better off without bosses.

In an anarchist society we will party! We'll have free time to have a good time. We can get enough rest to tackle the tasks that we have decided we need to do. We will be saying the truth when we say: Free At Last!

But given how screwed up things are now, how can we even begin to get there? How can we build an anarcho-syndicalist movement that will take us to an anarcho-syndicalist society?

Elements Of Salvation: Complex Communities And Unions

“Harmony in such a society is obtained not by submission to law or obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely contributed for the sake of protection and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being.” — Peter Kropotkin

Anarcho-syndicalist theory and practice has developed quite a bit during the 20th century. Throughout much of its early history anarcho-syndicalism did not take the environment into account. Anarcho-syndicalists claimed they could build more factories and cut more forests than capitalism could. One anarcho-syndicalist group even claimed they could build more and better nuclear reactors than the capitalists! Other areas of theory and practice have developed but kept the same basic commitments. For instance, anarcho-syndicalism has always upheld racial equality and the equality of women, but our understanding of those principles is far deeper now.

We have also moved beyond the belief that one particular structure, the industry-wide labor union, is the only basis for organizing. The industrial model was made necessary by the modern fragmentation of older community structures. In, say, 1890 it was not unusual for all the workers at a particular factory to live in the same ghetto or factory town. The geographical community and the industrial community coincided. That is seldom the case today. Industrial unions are still important, and an aspect of them must be international in character. A shoe factory in Taiwan and a shoe factory in Malaysia, both making shoes for the same international company, have

workers that should be in contact with each other (in affiliated unions). But the factory workers in Taiwan have much in common with the other factory workers in their own city. And what of the workers who sell the shoes in stores in the United States? Should shoe store clerks belong to the international union that organizes shoe factory workers, or should they belong to the local, national or international union that organizes sales clerks? Or to the union of workers employed by the corporate conglomerate that makes things or sells services entirely unrelated to shoes?

That was a trick question. Unfortunately both anarcho-syndicalist and mainstream unions have fallen into disarray at times arguing over the choices presented. But fortunately we are learning to use a new model, the **network**. It does not replace previous models, but it allows them to work together to achieve genuine international solidarity for all people in the working class. With international solidarity we can defeat the capitalists and establish an economically and ecologically sound society. A network of anarcho-syndicalist unionists of all types will eventually become the old IWW ideal of the “One Big Union.”

Consider the communities a woman working at a shoe factory in Taiwan might belong to. She is a citizen of her neighborhood, city or town and nation. The factory itself is owned by a national or international corporation that specializes in manufacturing; she is part of the community of workers for it. The shoes she makes are a name brand designed and marketed by a different international corporation; she is also part of the community of workers who work for this corporation. She is herself a consumer, who may buy foods grown on American farms and ride a bus to work running on gas produced by Arabic oil refinery workers. She may have children and thus belong to the worldwide community of mothers and working women; she is likely to have an extended family. She may belong to a religious group that transcends national borders, or other groups of people based on something besides commercial production.

The core of a person’s community are the people who can be seen face to face, whom one can trust as friends based on experience. That would tend to be family members, friends you grew up with, neighbors, and people you actually work with regularly. These are the networks most working people have without consciously trying to build them. At larger workplaces and in smaller

communities it is not uncommon to find groups of workers who are family members, neighbors, or were friends already prior to their employment.

In the past anarcho-syndicalism theory has tended to focus on industry-wide (industrial) unions and ignored other networks and communities. Yet in practice families and friends have been just as important in the actual organizing of anarcho-syndicalism education and labor groups, as a study of events leading up to the Spanish Revolution illustrate.

Recall that anarcho-syndicalism unions are not the top-down hierarchies that people are so used to being subjected to in AFL-CIO unions, religions, businesses, and governments. An international union of shoe factory workers, in the anarcho-syndicalism model, might not even have a central office. If it had a central office it would be primarily to facilitate communications between the locals of the union so that they could work together on an international basis and work as well with related groups, like a consumers union and a shoe store workers union.

In ability to deliver immediate substantial material solidarity when needed, it is the members of your community who are in your geographic area that count the most. When numbers of conscious anarcho-syndicalists are relatively small, all of them in a city might meet or otherwise communicate on a regular basis. When a good portion of the population have become anarcho-syndicalists, neighborhood groups might come into existence. A neighborhood might send workers to several or even dozens of workplaces; whatever the workplace dissimilarities, the neighborhood (and even extended families) as a community can provide the knowledge and solidarity to help with any problems that arise. Given the recent rapid decrease in the cost of international communications, especially by Internet, a local group or union can more easily solicit international solidarity as well. Was a union organizer fired? Consumers and salespeople, factory workers and community organizers might know that a few hours later!

To summarize, anarcho-syndicalism needs to have flexible organizing tactics. This requires a flexible organizing structure, the network. An anarcho-syndicalist might belong to a workplace union, to a geographically based group, and even to special interest groups (people interested in feminist issues, people united to save the rainforests, etc.) Groups are connected in a network fashion, by communications rather than by a system of authority.

Groups and local unions in a particular industry will probably want to have an international union for that industry, but are not required to do so. Network interconnections occur at multiple levels, notably at the level of the individual person, the workplace union, and the international union. An anarcho-syndicalist union can be any group of like-minded people working together for their own liberation, the liberation of people around the world, and the good of the earth we all depend on for life.

In addition, there is still need for the pre-network anarcho-syndicalist organizing structure, the federation. Federations are more formal structures than networks. In a federation a local group joins with other local groups that have a common purpose by sending delegates (usually this is done at regular intervals, such as once a year) to an assembly that makes recommendations back to the local groups. Some more active federations might have permanent offices. Sometimes there is more than one level of federation, as in the IWW model where each industry local belongs to an international industrial union (organized by type of industry), and at the next level all the industrial unions meet together to consider overall policies. Problem solving that involves geographical regions usually requires a different federal structure, with local groups of all unions federating to tackle local problems, and then further federating with other localities to deal with regional or even international problems.

Getting There: Anarcho-syndicalism In Your Core Community

"I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do something I can do." —*Helen Keller* (IWW member)

As this essay is being written the number of people belonging to anarcho-syndicalist organizations is not large (it is probably between 30,000 and 200,000, world-wide, depending on how you count) . There are two international anarcho-syndicalist organizations, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW; the Wobblies) and the International Workers Association (IWA; in Spanish, AIT). There are some local and national organizations like the SAC (Central Organization of Swedish Workers) that are not affiliated with the IWW or IWA. There are many organizations and unions that are influenced by or organized somewhat along anarcho-syndicalist lines.

But most people working consciously for anarcho-syndicalism, even if they join the IWW or IWA, will begin as relatively isolated individuals or as a very small group of friends. Taking the most conservative estimate that as the 20th century ends there are 10,000 conscious, active anarcho-syndicalists and 6 billion people in the world, there is only one anarcho-syndicalist for every 600,000 people. How can anarcho-syndicalism reach enough people to save humanity and indeed nature itself from calamity? Even most people reading this essay will be just finding out about anarcho-syndicalism, rather than being committed to showing how it works to other people.

Fortunately the experiences that lead to Anarcho-Syndicalism are the experiences of the entire human species. Everyone has some experience that can be connected in some way to the theory and practice of anarcho-syndicalism. Of course everyone will also have many ideas and experiences that are contradictory to anarcho-syndicalism. As a teacher and organizer you will show people how to build on the good that is already there.

Syndicalism implies working together with people. Most people like that, especially when the group is creating something that the individuals themselves can enjoy. Capitalists tell us we cannot work together in a union for higher wages, safe working conditions, and human dignity. Yet they themselves work together, as groups of stockholders, groups of managers, etc. People can work together in their neighborhoods to make them better places, more sanitary, and safer. People can also act as individuals, if that suits them. Groups may not be good in and of themselves: gangs of criminals, like gangs of capitalists, may do far more harm to people than individual criminals or capitalists. However, you should learn to point out examples of where people work together voluntarily for the common good. This should be contrasted with groups of people being bossed around, whether for a good reason or not.

Anarchism implies being able to make decisions without a boss. Most people have been trained to believe that only by following the bosses' orders can society function. Yet Neo-Liberalism, the philosophy of the capitalist bosses, proclaims that anarchy is the best policy. Neo-Liberalism theorizes that if each person acts selfishly in the marketplace, without any interference from government or ethical considerations, free market forces will create a robust economy where everyone is better off. We know that these beliefs are hypocritical, a mere justification for a system in which the rich get richer and almost everyone else becomes poorer. There is no such thing as a free market.

All markets have costs; all markets consist of people making decisions, some with much more power than others. But yes, people can work together well without a boss. They do this through consensus, the process of communicating with each other and doing work in the real world and seeing the results. Through experience the group can learn to work together in an efficient and effective manner. We know from experience that we can do better if we get the bosses off our backs.

This is all well and good, and as you become more experienced with anarcho-syndicalism and with the world you'll be able to become increasingly effective at talking to people about anarcho-syndicalism theory and practice. You'll learn to illustrate principles in terms of people's own experiences.

But each individual has only limited time and energy; how can you best get the ball rolling? Should you start in your workplace, or in your neighborhood, or perhaps with your friends or family?

Your first investment should be in yourself. Spend some time evaluating what you know, perhaps even finding out about things that you aren't clear on. Make sure you are already walking your talk: that you insist on human dignity, that you think of all men and women as equals, that you are helpful and community spirited. Listen to what people have to say; encourage them to talk to you, especially about any complaints they have and about their hopes for the future.

Based on that, decide which individuals you know are most likely to become conscious anarcho-syndicalists with the least amount of effort on your part (which may be quite a bit of effort!). Don't be surprised if your initial results are not encouraging. Most working people have been discouraged and disappointed by politics in the past. Most know that union and community organizers are punished by businesses and governments, especially in the United States. In the long run anarcho-syndicalism is necessary for our survival and prosperity, but in the short run its main benefit is dignity, its main result harassment by the bosses.

It is good to start a formal group as soon as you have 3 or 4 people wanting to work with you. No doubt the best place to be able to start is in a workplace, but if you start a neighborhood group that will set you up to choose who to educate and organize next. In some circumstances an ecological group

organized on anarcho-syndicalist principles is a good starting point; this is often true of students or when a community is confronting poisoned water, air, or food. Sometimes a specific project will provide your initial focus, such as a project to stop ethnic harassment or improve the dignity of women. Practical project like cleaning up a neighborhood, or providing necessary services, can also form a good nucleus for further organizing.

Enemies Of The Earth And Their Strategies

"It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees." — Emiliano Zapata

The four great enemies of humanity, the earth, and anarcho-syndicalism are capitalism, authoritarian religions, Marxism-Leninism, and industrialism. Of these capitalism is the greatest enemy.

Capitalism, as rationalized by the Neo-Liberal philosophy, takes two primitive and usually harmless phenomena, the benefits of trading and the benefits of accumulation, and elevates them to the status of icons (gods). These two gods prop up the great god Capital, which the capitalists believe gives them the right to rule over other people, steal with impunity, destroy the environment, and in general do whatever they want without regard to anyone's needs but their own. Capitalists like to pretend that theirs is an ideology of honest work and productivity, but it is really an ideology of theft and special privilege.

Capitalism loudly proclaims the free market, but there is no such thing as a free market. There are markets, sure, but the point of capitalist business practices is to control those markets. In particular capitalists like a "free market" in labor. They form corporations to pool their capital and dictate wages to working people when those people walk around the labor market trying to sell their wares, their labor. Capitalists say that labor unions should be illegal; or made harmless by regulation. Labor unions give workers the same power of combination that the capitalists have grabbed for themselves. A labor union is in a better position to negotiate a fair price for what it sells, peoples' labor, than is an individual worker. But anarcho-syndicalists goes far beyond that. We reject the idea that some small group of people, people who for the most part have distinguished themselves as social parasites and predators, are to be the owners and the vast majority are to be their wage-slaves.

Capital in our era has become almost totally international in its outlook. McDonalds and Citigroup can be found in almost every country on earth. But working people are divided, unable so far to form powerful international relations of solidarity. Such capitalist institutions as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization must be destroyed if humanity and Nature are to survive into the 22nd century.

The destruction of the environment by capitalism threatens all humanity. Capitalism cannot reform itself because it is a theology based on lies; liars will lie to themselves rather than see the reality confronting the world today. Capitalists are in denial. They are out of touch with reality, a condition psychologists call insanity. They tell the truth on occasion only to further their general practice of lying. The earth is becoming one vast toxic dump for their pesticides; they are eating every blade of grass, turning the whole world into a desert. They promise working people wealth, some day. Wealth that is impossible, because the earth simply cannot support it. Theirs is the wealth of things. The wealth of overgrown pack-rats. The wealth of anarcho-syndicalists must be based on a sustainable future, in cooperation with nature, based on human love, not greed for things. Capitalism can be summed up in one word: More. It is the philosophy of More for Me, even if it means less for everyone else. Ours is also a philosophy of more, but of more justice, fairness, love, and cooperation with Nature.

Leninism, and authoritarian Marxism in general, takes this understanding of relation between working peoples and capitalists and turns it on its head. Leninism postulates that the working class is bound to seize political power, and therefore if you want to rule over people what you need to do is form a Leninist party. The Party pretends to represent the working people, but sets up an internal dictatorship that mirrors its plans for a future government. It uses the working people to obtain power, destroys the old aristocracy of money, then becomes the new aristocracy over the people. Anarcho-syndicalists call Leninism a proto-bourgeois ideology, because the Leninists are attempting to replace the old bourgeoisie with themselves, the new bourgeoisie. This is why Leninists have to share, with Fascists, the ideology of the Leader and his vanguard party. Working people, in a free society (with the differences in wealth abolished), would not choose dictatorship as a form of social organization.

Anarcho-syndicalism was much more popular than Marxism and Leninism prior to 1918. What happened? At a crucial point in the Russian revolution Lenin outmaneuvered the people, who favored anarcho-syndicalism. Basically he did this by lying. [The details can be found in *The Bolsheviks and Workers Control 1917-1923* by Maurice Brinton.] The effect was catastrophic. The Leninists took credit for the defeat of the Czar and the capitalists in Russia. Around the world political organizers decided to emulate Lenin. There is a very real tendency of political organizers to think that they should be in power; Lenin's promise of power tempted them from genuine working class organizing to proto-bourgeois organizing. This happened all over the world. In the United States it resulted in a majority of anarcho-syndicalists, who were in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) to leave that organization and join with former Socialist Party members to form what would become the Communist Party USA.

Although Leninism has been pretty well exposed for what it is at this point, especially since the fall of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, Leninism and similar authoritarian ideologies that appeal to working class people are still dangerous. As the global ecosystem disintegrates, bringing unprecedented misery to people, the current revolt against capitalism and globalization will strengthen. People with authoritarian personalities, accustomed to authoritarian solutions, may be attracted to Leninism and its right-wing sibling, Fascism. Therefore it is important for anarcho-syndicalists to have a fairly deep understanding of Leninism in order to counter its influence.

Religion is the organized form of the tendency of humans to deny the reality of Nature. Religions are based largely on people's fear of death and a promise of an afterlife. By encouraging people to be out of touch with reality religions promote wage-slave subservience to capitalists and their program of destroying the environment. Some religious groups are openly hostile to anarcho-syndicalism because of the social organization it implies. Others are hostile mostly because most anarcho-syndicalists, seeking the truth about Nature, mostly reject religious cults and their ideas. However, the rejection of all religious beliefs is not as important as seeing the necessity of organizing society on cooperative lines.

Religions, are great in their variety, and the people who subscribe to them are remarkable in their variety as well. Authoritarian, hierarchically organized

religions are far more dangerous than the spiritual belief systems themselves. We must study the individual cases and do what we can to help people out of these traps. There are tendencies in some religions that can be appealed to as having a common ground with us. In general, anarcho-syndicalist organizations should welcome members who adhere to our general principles, whatever their religious beliefs. Strategies may vary greatly. In societies where many people have come to accept Nature, or where people are divided up among many sects, we may be able to go about our organizing while keeping peaceful, respectful relationships with the various religious groups. Religious tolerance is a principle that should be practiced by all, but we also have a right to defend ourselves against attacks by religious bigots.

Industrialism is the ideology of production, the theory that more production is better for the world. It is subscribed to by both capitalists and Leninists. It is raised here because, in the past, anarcho-syndicalists have sometimes fallen under its influence. We must consciously reject it today.

Everything occurs in a context. The overall context is Nature. Nature is everything; everything is nature. Our human home exists on this planet earth, which we must share the earth with the rest of the ecosystem. Life must be kept in balance. The society that produces the most crap (cars, air-conditioners, whatever) is not the best society. Industry has its price, and the price of even the current level of industry is too high for the earth. We must make our society sustainable, if necessary by partial or full de-industrialization. This can be done while improving human happiness if we learn to accept Nature and focus on what really makes humans happy: society, friendship, and rewarding activity. However, de-industrializing the earth will be quite a trick; it must be done with care. The details of such an endeavor cannot fit in this short, introductory essay.

Everything is Nature and Nature is everything. A factory is part of nature. Even false concepts are part of nature, since human minds are parts of nature. But while Nature is Everything, it is not all-powerful in the same way that religious people imagine their gods to be. Once a species is extinct, for instance, there is no way to re-create it. Once an ecosystem is destroyed, Nature has no magic wand to restore it. Nature has many limits; the atmosphere is only so high, it contains only so much oxygen, and if green plants are destroyed what oxygen there is will disappear and then all animals

will die as well. We learn the limits and laws of nature through experience; science is the deliberate, systemic learning of the laws of nature.

Anarcho-syndicalists live in the natural world and should not make up fantasies as the religions do. We accept that before we were born we did not exist, but that before we were born nature (and our ancestors) did exist. We accept that at death we come to our natural ends, but that nature and society will continue after our deaths. We not only accept these facts, we take joy in them. Accept these facts, and you are free. Life is a free gift to you from nature.

Since we love life, human life, and see that we share this gift of nature with plants and animals, we wish to protect life. We have learned that you cannot turn a land into a desert and then expect to harvest plentiful fruit. Ecosystems must be protected. We must keep ourselves, our human race, in harmony with nature or people will suffer. There are limits to the amount of food we can extract without harming the environment; there are limits to the number of people who can live on this earth, and there are limits to how much in the way of material things each person can have. These limits are set by Nature and natural law. Every anarcho-syndicalist should study as much about nature and natural law as is possible. With this deep knowledge we can build better lives, a better society, and a sustainable future.

Many people have already begun this process, including many who have never heard of anarcho-syndicalism or met a member of an anarcho-syndicalism organization. Love of Nature, and its political expression, environmentalism, put people on a course towards anarcho-syndicalism. It is true that many environmentalists have not yet adopted anarcho-syndicalism as a social philosophy, but their acceptance of Nature will create a strong pull in that direction.

Elements of Salvation: Anarcho-syndicalism in the Real World

“We at once see that those animals that acquire the habit of mutual aid are undoubtedly the fittest.” — Peter Kropotkin in *Mutual Aid, a Factor of Evolution*

Anarcho-syndicalism already exists in the real world.

One of the traditions of white settler culture in the United States of America was communal barn building. At barn raisings the entire community would come and help out, often erecting an entire barn in a single day. Unfortunately this particular tradition is more remembered than practiced today, but many other examples can be found. In a society that says people are, and should be, motivated only by money, many volunteer fire departments exist in rural communities and small towns. In a society where “non-profits” like the Red Cross pay their managers yuppie salaries, people volunteer. Even most religious groups have some core practices in common with anarcho-syndicalism. With the exception of the paid parasites who run the religions, people form communities where some of the most basic tasks of society, like caring for those who cannot care for themselves, is done without pay.

People don't like to feel alienated. Most people don't like to feel that they are mere money-grubbers, or not liked by their community. Capitalists even take advantage of people's natural cooperative sentiments to further capitalist ends. I worked at a bank as a teller for a while. Much of the training as a bank teller was in “customer relations.” We were there to serve the customers. And why not? It wasn't the customers who only paid us \$7.00 an hour. It made us feel better that at least we were helping people. Of course if we had tried to form a union, or even asked for more pay without a union, the bank would have fired us. They wanted us to work for the common good, while the stockholders grabbed the profits. In effect the stockholders wanted us to help build their barns, but did not want to help build our barns.

When I was younger I misinterpreted this lesson in life. Corporations, to benefit their stockholders, cheated me out of the products of my labor. So I often did my job poorly, or even sabotaged my employers. I was sometimes mean and unhelpful to customers; what did it matter to me if they ended up hating the corporation that employed me? The problem was this attitude came to permeate my life. I became spiteful to people to whom I should have been friendly. In trying to hurt the capitalists, I became like them: I wanted to give nothing and get something for it. You can't beat capitalism by adopting its welfare psychology. Capitalists want to socialize their costs (pawn them off on society) while privatizing any profits. Anarcho-syndicalism should lead to a desire to privatize the costs of society while socializing (sharing) the goods that are produced. But in the real world people often develop bad attitudes

because of the way they are treated by their capitalist bosses (or parents, or teachers). Then they carry over that anti-cooperative attitude to the rest of their lives, often adopting the capitalists' predatory mindset. You see this sometimes in anarcho-individualists (anarchists who define self-gratification to be the highest end), and it will be a problem for anarcho-syndicalists even though it goes against our philosophy.

We have to build an anarcho-syndicalist society out of our current situation. We can build it from the principal pillars that already exist: our closeness to Nature and love of life, the human joy in cooperation, and the practice of mutual aid. Anarcho-syndicalist organizations like the IWW and IWA provide good examples of how these pillars already have begun to function. However, since few people's lives have been touched by these organizations yet, I will use more common, if less consciously anarcho-syndicalist, illustrations of mutual aid.

Anarcho-syndicalists take joy in cooperation and mutual aid. Many people think any anarchist system is all about individuality and selfishness. But one of the ways we manifest our individuality is through voluntary cooperation with members of our community. Things that individuals want to do can be impossible with one set of hands, possible with a helper, and easy if many people pitch in and help. Mutual aid is a form of cooperation where aid is given to someone in need.

Many communities in the United States and around the world have been destroyed by the economic practices of large predatory corporations. Many functions that every community needs (food storage and distribution, trading useful commodities like tools and building supplies) can be done through local cooperation. That keeps money (or the value of human labor) in communities, rather than draining it off to benefit the super rich. Local cooperation keeps small, humane-sized communities economically healthy. The same principles can be applied even to any human productive activities that require a larger scale of cooperation than might be possible in a small town or rural area.

It will always be necessary to deal with predatory individuals and groups. Predatory instincts arise out of the nature of humans and society. I doubt they will disappear just because we set up an anarcho-syndicalist society. But at least human predators won't be running the world as they are today. Mutual

aid and cooperation are the basis of how we will take power away from the corporate and government predators. When that transition is made, keeping further predatory instincts in check should require considerably less effort than defending ourselves against them requires at present.

How do we build on the elements of anarcho-syndicalism that already exist in the world? This question is being asked when global capitalist organizations are putting great effort into destroying our remaining cooperative instincts. Labor unions and social groups, including charitable and activist groups, are the main examples of cooperation and mutual aid today. The problem is that in most areas of the U.S. the population ranges from openly anti-union to utterly apathetic. Partly this is from bad experiences with the AFL-CIO, but mostly it is a result of pervasive anti-union propaganda. With regard to labor unions, two tactics have been tried repeatedly: reforming the AFL-CIO, and building the IWW. Neither has been very successful to date.

We must continue to expand our resource base and bring more people into our networks, groups, and anarcho-syndicalist unions. That's easy to say, but how do you do it? Since our basic principles have not changed in 100 years, do we have to look to our principles as well as our practices? What have we been doing wrong? Mainly, we failed to respond to changes in the economy and tactics used by capitalist predators and their Marxist cousins.

Additionally, the realistic, naturalistic, action-oriented organizations that looked at reality and dealt with it (the IWW of 1905-1925 and CNT up until its defeat in the Spanish Civil War (1937), gradually turned into tradition-bound groups with religious, hair-splitting mindsets. In the 1990's the IWW has become more realistic and action-oriented, but since it had such a small number of members in 1990 it has a very long way to go.

As more people realize the world has serious problems, like environmental destruction, poverty created by globalization, and the destruction of our communities and human values, we must be able to demonstrate that anarcho-syndicalism is the best way to solve these problems. Anarcho-syndicalists have sometimes assumed that this process is a sort of revolution versus reform shouting match. For that reason, the reason that they already know *the answer*, they don't feel they need to know details about how the capitalist system functions. But most people, confronted with economic and political problems, cope in a haphazard manner, looking for the best immediate solution for themselves. They may see that the system is not fair or good for

them, but they mainly are open to the idea that some specific reform would fix their problem. We need to be able to explain why the system has not been reformed (for the good of the people; it is often and easily reformed for the good of the wealthy and their corporations) and cannot be reformed. The legal and economic structure of the United States has made reform impossible; we need to be able to explain that in enough detail to give people a clear view of the situation.

We need to know enough about the details of the current system to argue effectively that the only solution for working-class people (including micro-business owners) is to form defensive, cooperative, mutual aid groups. These will allow people to survive their short term difficulties while preparing them to fight for the radical changes necessary for long term survival.

Getting There: General Strategy

“Workers, the storms are approaching. Facing the emergency the FAI advises the workers of the CNT, since it is they who control the factories and production sites, not to abandon them. They should stay close to the machines.” — Buenaventura Durruti

Anarcho-syndicalist resources, today, are miniscule on a global scale. Yet they are not insignificant. Many of the best, most experienced, hardest working activists all over the world are anarcho-syndicalists, and many others are close enough to anarcho-syndicalism to be of great assistance. Anarcho-syndicalism groups exist in the two most predatory nations in the world, England and the United States. They exist in most European nations, in Russia, and other former communist countries. Latin America once was an anarcho-syndicalism stronghold and may well be the first area to build an anarcho-syndicalist society. In Africa several large groups of activists have joined the IWW or AIT (aka IWA) during the 1990's. In Islamic and Asian countries anarcho-syndicalists are beset by even greater problems than in other areas of the globe, but even in these areas the movement grew in the 1990s.

What can be done in a particular country or community at a particular moment depends on local conditions. How we organize during a recession might be different than how we organize during a boom. How we organize successfully in a small town might not work as well in a large city. But general principles and a general strategy should apply.

We need to abandon our failed policy of discouraging workers from voting and participating in the standing political process in democracies. The original idea behind this policy was good, coming out of observations of reality. Political parties diverted workers' energy from the necessary task of building anarchist labor unions. But that was at the beginning of the 20th century. Today it is a tradition out of touch with reality, especially in the USA. Apathy reigns, and the apathy about politics has spilled over into apathy about unions. That apathy has been a powerful weapon against workers, anarcho-syndicalism, and the environment. Workers should be encouraged to know as much as possible. Real knowledge comes from practice. Workers should be encouraged to vote, just as they must be encouraged to attend union meetings and help organize the unorganized. At the same time they have to be educated about the meaning and potential of voting. What does it mean to vote for a pro-labor Democrat, what would change if there were a majority of pro-labor Democrats in Congress? What would it mean if the Green Party or Labor Party (or some other pro-worker third party or bunch of independent workers) were elected? Can the current system of government dissolve itself in favor of an anarcho-syndicalist society?

By abandoning the electoral field anarcho-syndicalists have allowed the capitalists to adjust the legal and economic system to make organizing workplaces almost impossible. We decided in 1910 to concentrate our energy on workplace organizing, thinking this would lead to a revolution. It did not, and now it is harder to organize workplaces than ever. By aiding those in the electoral politics arena who want to help unions (both AFL/CIO and anarcho-syndicalist) it should be possible to change the legal rules under which organizing takes place. If the right of workers to unionize without interference from their employers were a reality, it would be far easier to achieve our goal of organizing all workers and to abolish wage slavery altogether. The election of anarcho-syndicalists or sympathisers to local offices, in particular, can allow us to build base areas where we are protected from the worst practices of capitalists and their governments.

U.S. anarcho-syndicalists must be (and already are) active in issues like the environment, women's rights, reparations for the economic damage from Jim Crow, slavery, and anti-union activities, American Indian rights, and reparations for the people the US has murdered or harmed in the 3rd world, like the Vietnamese, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, Hawaiians, etc. Sometimes this means voting. Sure direct action is great, and so are

demonstrations. But to encourage people to go to a demonstration against the destruction of a forest, and then telling people not to vote when there is a choice between an environmentalist politician and anti-environmentalist politician, is stupidity, not anarcho-syndicalism. (I must explain that some anarcho-syndicalists, the ones with the high-priest, dogmatic mindsets, will say that anyone who advocates voting in a government-sponsored election, for any reason, cannot be an anarcho-syndicalist).

We must, at the same time, re-invigorate the practice of direct action. Direct action is when we do what is right regardless of the capitalists' laws and the possible legal consequences. Direct action need not be illegal; it may be as simple as forming a food coop rather than shopping at Safeway or Walmart (which mostly sell poisoned food. To find poison-free food in a corporate store in the USA, look for food marked "organic.") Direct action is the building of the anarcho-syndicalist system. We are the workers, the people who actually produce the world's food, clothing, shelter, labor-saving devices, and entertainment. We can make a new society in much the same manner as we make a new bicycle. If someone is kicking you in the head when you are trying to make a bicycle, what would you do? You'd have to stop him from kicking, and if he isn't someone open to rational, peaceful discourse, you need to get together with your friends, restrain the guy, and maybe put him in an insane asylum. Which is where the capitalist predators belong: their actions, ideology, and policies are insane. They are destroying the earth. You have a right to take direct action to restrain them. Tell your friends. (The IWW has some good pamphlets on direct action at the workplace. Earth First! and ELF have good ideas for environmental direct action. And feel free to be creative.)

We need to create and build upon liberated zones. These are areas where solidarity is so high that the capitalists and their government have no real power. They might be city neighborhoods, small towns, or rural areas. At the same time we need to beware of ghettoizing ourselves. Liberated areas that do not expand will ultimately be crushed or become irrelevant.

Workplace organizing will remain the core of anarcho-syndicalist strategy, but we must benefit from a re-definition of work and workplaces. Housework and child-rearing are work. Keeping your residential neighborhood clean, safe, and environmentally friendly is work. All of our work is interconnected. There is

no particular reason that a business establishment should have priority over organizing on some other basis, such as a local community.

Workplace organizing is very well discussed in pamphlets published by the IWW, so I'll just outline the basics here. I'll start with the current National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and AFL/CIO framework, with which some readers may be familiar. To become a union a majority of workers must vote for the union in an NLRB sponsored election. If they win the employer is supposed to negotiate in good faith (but there aren't any real penalties for not doing so). The union usually signs a contract regarding hours and working conditions.

Anarcho-syndicalist unions may follow this NLRB procedure, but we don't feel obligated to follow it. It's flawed in a vast number of ways. Corporations usually feel it is better to fire any union organizers and (perhaps) pay the minor fines for doing so rather than allowing a vote to ever take place. Corporations aren't required to have a vote to incorporate, they merely have to notify the state; why should workers be required to have an election to form a union? Since the AFL-CIO acts as a dues-collection machine to give executive-style salaries to top union official, and most workers are too-short sighted to pay dues unless a union-negotiated contract makes it worthwhile, when elections are lost the workers are left unorganized.

An anarcho-syndicalist worker is in a union whether it is legally recognized or not. One syndicalist at a workplace is a union waiting to grow. A group of syndicalists at a workplace, who may not be legally recognized, have the long term goal of abolishing wage slavery, as well as the short-term goal of reducing the boss's power by setting up a solid union. Such a union may prefer not to sign a contract if the contract diminishes the worker's right to strike or otherwise do whatever they feel is right and just. Bosses have no rights, in our eyes: they are the inheritors and possessors of stolen property. They may be human beings, if we were born in their places we might be in their places, but they are human beings who are thieves. One of our jobs is to get our property back.

**They Aren't Trying To Kill You, They Are Trying To Kill Everyone
(Including Themselves)**

“The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. We carry a new world here, in our hearts.”
— Buenaventura Durruti

Historically, anarcho-syndicalism is rooted in the theory and practice of class warfare. But we now know things are not that simple. The concept of class warfare should not be abandoned: there should be no doubt that the ruling class is making war upon the rest of us, and upon nature. But we should not allow either the concept or the reality of the situation to blind us to its complexity.

Classes as concepts imply dividing lines and shades of gray. There is little point to saying exactly how much a family must own in assets before it is in the ruling class. The IWW traditionally limits membership to persons who do not have the power to hire and fire workers; while usable as a guideline, this rule does not exactly include every member of the working class or exclude every member of the ruling class. In modern societies almost everyone works for the ruling class either directly or indirectly. Is a \$100,000.00 per year computer programmer with no employees under her a better candidate for an anarcho-syndicalist group than the assistant manager at a convenience store making \$14,000 per year who is allowed to fire cashiers?

Is an ardent environmentalist in the ruling class more of a danger to the earth than a pro-corporate, anti-environmentalist worker?

Despite the complexity, seeing the big picture means seeing the necessity for worker control of industry (that is, any economic human activity). This means distinguishing the current class of owners of corporations. They are enemies, in the minimal sense, in that they have no interest in giving up their ownership or the privileges that come with it. They become enemies in the maximal sense when they try to thwart the power of working people or make environmentally unsound decisions. But keep in mind that the workers themselves, out of ignorance, are capable of making bad environmental decisions. Environmental awareness is essential to the anarcho-syndicalist movement and to the future society we will create. There will be many enemies of the environment within the working class; they must be converted or defeated, just like the ruling class itself.

We know there are other issues that make the reality of class warfare a complex issue. Notably there is the question of women's liberation. In countries where racism is present, or religious intolerance, these realities will weigh heavily on the question of how to best build anarcho-syndicalism and defeat the ruling class. Even the stratification of the working class itself, often seen in the envy of unskilled labor for the perks of skilled laborers, must be taken into consideration. But the primary question is: how do we build anarcho-syndicalism to the point where it can defeat the ruling class?

The key is to keep in mind that everyone, even the ruling class itself, is objectively the enemy of the ruling class. The ruling class, the owners of the giant corporations and their political servants, aren't just trying to kill those workers who are in open rebellion. They are trying to kill everybody. Capitalists aren't trying to kill themselves on purpose: but their short-sighted greed will have the same effect. The ruling class had long ago proven it was incapable of economic or political fairness or human compassion. In the 20th century it proved that it was willing to destroy the very earth that humanity lives on in order to make a short term profit. And for what? Nature, the heritage not just of all mankind but of all living creatures, has been destroyed so that socialite princes and princesses could snort cocaine, drive \$100,000 cars, act as manikins for \$10,000 dresses, and buy expensive political offices.

Sadder still, nature has been destroyed so that a small proportion of the world's workers, living mostly in imperialist nations, could commute to mind-numbing work in gas-guzzling cars from mind-numbing suburbs.

The ruling class may on occasion (especially under pressure from voters in affluent, "democratic" societies) ameliorate the harm they do to the environment, as has been seen with clean air and water standards being established in the U. S. A. and other nations. But they have neither a plan nor a desire to turn their industrial machine around and drive away from the cliff of oblivion. In the 1990s the problems of deforestation, global warming, use of poisons (pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides), etc., have become worse, not better. Despite the destruction of the earth, many working class people suffer from hunger and debt-slavery because the distribution of income and wealth has become worse, not better.

Do not expect many members of the ruling class to admit that their system cannot be made to work (though some already admit that it does not work).

But they are trying to kill everyone. Part of that effort is trying to censure information about the environment and its relation to the economic system and the government. It is one of the tasks of conscious anarcho-syndicalists to make sure that people know the truth about reality, including that there is still hope. There are solutions to the world's problems. But we must overthrow the ruling class, its system of corporate dominance, and its authoritarian governments if we and our earth are to live.

Getting There: International Strategy

“I used to dream of becoming a Judith and visioned myself in the act of cutting off Holofernes' head to avenge the wrongs of my people. But since then I had become aware that social injustice is not confined to my own race. I had decided that there were too many heads for one Judith to cut off.” — Emma Goldman

The ruling class is international. Major corporations have sales in most countries and production plants (if they produce actual physical products) in several. They order national governments about like so many Girl Fridays. Through organizations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations, and World Trade Organization they plot their enrichment and the rest of the world's destruction.

Anarcho-syndicalists have always had an international component, but we've never had a genuine international strategy. Internationalism has generally been expressed through solidarity. Workers send money or words of encouragement to strikers or political prisoners; at times international strikes have been coordinated. But we have never said: what would be the best country to concentrate resources in, or the best country to aid in setting up an anarcho-syndicalist group.

Partly this is because we favor keeping power in the hands of the workers, rather than concentrating it in the hands of bureaucrats. Largely it reflects our own failure in the past to take a genuinely internationalist outlook. Reality now demands, however, that we find ways to create and implement an international strategy in an anarchist fashion.

At minimum we should take three obvious steps:

1. We must set up anarcho-syndicalist groups everywhere in the world.
2. We must concentrate some of our forces in one nation, state, or region to make it the first to be liberated and set up as a model anarcho-syndicalist society.
3. We must organize people on an industrial and international basis so that capitalists are not able to circumvent our offensives simply by moving factories and work around.

There are already two anarcho-syndicalist groups, the IWW and IWA, that operate in more than one country. There is also a loose alliance of anarcho-syndicalist groups that have split from the IWA that engage in some cooperation. There has been some cooperation between the IWW, IWA, and unaffiliated groups. Are these groups capable of taking the three first steps outlined above? It remains to be seen. Possibly networks of individuals and local groups will have to take on these tasks, or supplement the efforts of the international organizations.

Talking Points

Talking points are one tool we have for spreading anarcho-syndicalism. They can't substitute for organizing efforts, but they can both strengthen organizing and, if successfully put into circulation, prepare people to organize themselves on anarcho-syndicalist principles.

Talking points have some of the characteristics of propaganda, but our purpose here is to spread an understanding of reality. Talking points are easy to remember and repeat. They form the basis for a deeper insight into the natural world and human society. If people hear the same basic idea expressed in different words each time, they may not remember it clearly. But if they hear the same words repeated, they can grasp it, and if they think it is true, easily spread it themselves.

The anarcho-syndicalist talking points listed here are not meant to be authoritative or exclusive. They are suggested. Some are traditional, others have only come into circulation recently. Certainly this is a short list that should be expanded by anarchists in practice.

Anarchism is the practice of individuals living together without the interference of human authorities.

Anarcho-syndicalism is the solution to the problems of the 21st century.

Abolish wage slavery.

Capitalists are out of touch with reality, a condition psychologists call insanity.

The workers of the world must take possession of industry and economic activity, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.

Corporate property is not private property. Property is a human concept; everything is part of nature, we can only act as Nature's stewards.

Capitalism isn't trying to kill you. It's trying to kill everyone.

Everything is nature, and nature includes everything.

There's no such thing as a free market.

An injury to one is an injury to All.

Industry that destroys more than it creates is of no benefit to humanity.

Anarcho-syndicalism extends the practice of democracy to the workplace and economy.

Contacts

Unfortunately the anarcho-syndicalist groups tend to move around. Here are the basic contacts as of January 1, 2001:

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