

LEON TROTSKY: FROM "COMMUNISM AND SYNDICALISM"

The trade union question is one of the most important for the labour movement and, consequently, for the Opposition. Without a precise position on the trade union question, the Opposition will be unable to win real influence in the working class...

1. The Communist Party is the fundamental weapon of revolutionary action of the proletariat the combat organisation of its vanguard that must raise itself to the role of leader of the working class in all the spheres of its struggle without exception, and consequently, in the trade union field.

2. Those who, in principle, counterpose trade union autonomy to the leadership of the Communist Party, counterpose thereby – whether they want to or not – the most backward proletarian section to the vanguard of the working class, the struggle for immediate demands to the struggle for the complete liberation of the workers, reformism to Communism, opportunism to revolutionary Marxism.

3. Prewar French syndicalism, at the epoch of its rise and expansion, by fighting for trade union autonomy actually fought for its independence from the bourgeois government and its parties, among them that of reformist-parliamentary socialism. This was a struggle against opportunism – for a revolutionary road.

Revolutionary syndicalism did not in this connection, make a fetish of the autonomy of the mass organisations. On the contrary, it understood and preached the leading role of the revolutionary minority in relation to the mass organisations, which reflect the working class with all its contradictions, its backwardness, and its weaknesses.

4. The theory of the active minority was, in essence, an incomplete theory of a proletarian party. In all its practice, revolutionary syndicalism was an embryo of a revolutionary party as against opportunism, that is, it was a remarkable draft outline of revolutionary Communism.

5. The weakness of anarcho-syndicalism, even in its classic period, was the absence of a correct theoretical foundation, and, as a result a wrong understanding of the nature of the state and its role in the class struggle; an incomplete, not fully developed and, consequently, a wrong conception of the role of the revolutionary minority, that is, the party. Thence the mistakes in tactics, such as the fetishism of the general strike, the ignoring of the connection between the uprising and the seizure of power, etc.

6. After the war, French syndicalism found not only its refutation but also its development and its completion in Communism. Attempts to revive revolutionary syndicalism now would be to try and turn back history. For the labour movement, such attempts can have only reactionary significance.

7. The epigones of syndicalism transform (in words) the independence of the trade union organisation from the bourgeoisie and the reformist socialists into *independence in general*, into *absolute* independence from all parties, the Communist included.

If, in the period of expansion, syndicalism considered itself a vanguard and fought for the leading role of the vanguard minority among the backward masses, the epigones of syndicalism now fight against the identical wishes of the Communist vanguard, attempting, even though without success, to base themselves upon the lack of development and the prejudices of the more backward sections of the working class.

8. Independence from the influence of the bourgeoisie cannot be a passive state. It can express itself only by political acts, that is, by the struggle against the bourgeoisie. This struggle must be inspired by a distinct program which requires organisation and tactics for its application. It is the union of program, organisation, and tactics that constitutes the party. In this way, the real independence of the proletariat from the bourgeois government cannot be realised unless the proletariat conducts its struggle under the leadership of a revolutionary and not an opportunist party.

9. The epigones of syndicalism would have one believe that the trade unions are sufficient by themselves. Theoretically, this means nothing, but in practice it means the dissolution of the revolutionary vanguard into the backward masses, that is, the trade unions.

The larger the mass the trade unions embrace, the better they are able to fulfil their mission. A proletarian party, on the contrary, merits its name only if it is ideologically homogeneous, bound by unity of action and organisation. To represent the trade unions as self-sufficient because the proletariat has already attained its “majority,” is to flatter the proletariat is to picture it other than it is and can be under capitalism, which keeps enormous masses of workers in ignorance and backwardness, leaving only the vanguard of the proletariat the possibility of breaking through all the difficulties and arriving at a clear comprehension of the tasks of its class as a whole.

10. The real, practical and not the metaphysical autonomy of trade union organisation is not in the least disturbed nor is it diminished by the struggle of the Communist Party for influence. Every member of the trade union has the right to vote as he thinks necessary and to elect the one who seems to him most worthy. Communists possess this right in the same way as others.

The conquest of the majority by the Communists in the directing organs takes place quite in accordance with the principles of autonomy, that is, the self-administration of the trade unions. On the other hand, no trade union statute can prevent or prohibit the party from electing the general secretary of the Confederation of Labour to its central committee, for here we are entirely in the domain of the autonomy of the party.

11. In the trade unions, the Communists, of course, submit to the discipline of the party, no matter what posts they occupy. This does not exclude but presupposes their submission to trade union discipline. In other words, the party does not impose upon them any line of conduct that contradicts the state of mind or the opinions of the majority of the members of trade unions. In entirely exceptional cases, when the party considers impossible the submission of its members to some reactionary decision of the trade union, it points out openly to its members the consequences that flow from it that is, removals from the trade union posts, expulsions, and so forth.

With juridical formulas in these questions – and autonomy is a purely juridical formula – one can get nowhere. The question must be posed in its essence, that is, on the plane of trade union policy. A correct policy must be counterposed to a wrong policy.

12. The character of the party's leadership, its methods and its forms, can differ profoundly in accordance with the general conditions of a given country or with the period of its development.

In capitalist countries, where the Communist Party does not possess any means of coercion, it is obvious that it can give leadership only by Communists being in the trade unions as rank-and-file members or functionaries. The number of Communists in leading posts of the trade unions is only one of the means of measuring the role of the party in the trade unions. The most important measurement is the percentage of rank-and-file Communists in relation to the whole unionised mass. But the principal criterion is the general influence of the party on the working class, which is measured by the circulation of the Communist press, the attendance at meetings of the party, the number of votes at elections and, what is especially important the number of working men and women who respond actively to the party's appeals to struggle.

13. It is clear that the influence of the Communist Party in general, including the trade unions, will grow, the more revolutionary the situation becomes.

These conditions permit an appreciation of the degree and the form of the true, real and not the metaphysical autonomy of the trade unions. In times of "peace," when the most militant forms of trade union action are isolated economic strikes, the direct role of the party in trade union action falls back to second place. As a general rule, the party does not make a decision on every isolated strike. It helps the trade union to decide the question of knowing if the strike is opportune, by means of its political and economic information and by its advice. It *serves* the strike with its agitation, etc. First place in the strike belongs, of course to the trade union.

The situation changes radically when the movement rises to the general strike and still more to the direct struggle for power. In these conditions, the leading role of the party becomes entirely direct, open, and immediate. The trade unions – naturally not those that pass over to the other side of the barricades – become the organisational apparatus of the party which, in the presence of the whole class, stands forth as the leader of the revolution, bearing the full responsibility.

In the field, extending between the partial economic strike and the revolutionary class insurrection are placed all the possible forms of reciprocal relations between the party and the trade unions, the varying degrees of direct and immediate leadership, etc. But under all conditions, the party seeks to win general leadership by relying upon the real autonomy of the trade unions which, as organisations – it goes without saying – are not "submitted" to it.

14. Facts show that politically "independent" unions do not exist anywhere. There never have been any. Experience and theory say that there never will be any...

The theoreticians of the "independence" of the trade union movement have not taken the trouble up to now to think of this question: why their slogan not only does not approach its realisation in practice anywhere, but why, on the contrary, the dependence of the trade unions upon the leadership of a party becomes everywhere, without exception, more and more evident and open...

15. The consummate expression of outdated syndicalism is the so-called Syndicalist League. By all its traits, it comes forward as a political organisation which seeks to subordinate the trade union movement to its influence. In fact the League recruits its members not in accordance with the trade union principle, but in accordance with the principle of political groupings; it has its platform, if not its program, and it defends it in its publications; it has its own internal discipline within the trade union movement. In the congresses of the Confederations, its partisans act as a political faction in the same way as the Communist faction. If we are not to lose ourselves in words, the tendency of the Syndicalist League reduces itself to a struggle to liberate the two Confederations from the leadership of the socialists and Communists and to unite them under the direction of the Monatte group.

The League does not act openly in the name of the right and the necessity for the advanced minority to fight to extend its influence over the most backward masses; it presents itself masked by what it calls trade union "independence." From this point of view, the League approaches the Socialist Party which also realises its leadership under cover of the

phrase “independence of the trade union movement.” The Communist Party, on the contrary, says openly to the working class: here is my program, my tactics and my policy, which I propose to the trade unions.

The proletariat must never believe anything blindly. It must judge by its work. But the workers should have a double and triple distrust toward those pretenders to leadership who act Incognito, under a mask who make the proletariat that it has no need of leadership in general.

16. The right of a political party to fight to win the trade unions to its influence must not be denied, but this question must be posed: In the name of what program and what tactics is this organisation fighting? From this point of view, the Syndicalist League does not give the necessary guarantees. Its program is extremely amorphous, as are its tactics. In its political evaluations it acts only from event to event. Acknowledging the proletarian revolution and even the dictatorship of the proletariat it ignores the party and rights against Communist leadership, without which the proletarian revolution would always risk remaining an empty phrase.

17. The ideology of trade union independence has nothing in common with the ideas and sentiments of the proletariat as a class. If the party, by its direction, is capable of assuring a correct clear-sighted, and firm policy in the trade unions, not a single worker will have the idea of rebelling against the leadership of the party...

18. After the fetish of “independence” the Syndicalist League also transforms the question of *trade union unity* into a fetish.

It goes without saying that the maintenance of the unity of the trade union organisations has enormous advantages, from the point of view of the daily tasks of the proletariat as well as from the point of view of the struggle of the Communist Party to extend its influence over the masses. But the facts prove that since the first successes of the revolutionary wing in the trade unions, the opportunists have set themselves deliberately on the road of split. Peaceful relations with the bourgeoisie are dearer to them than the unity of the proletariat. That is the indubitable summary of the postwar experiences.

We Communists are in every way interested in proving to the workers that the responsibility for the splitting of the trade union organisations falls wholly upon the social democracy. But it does not at all follow that the hollow formula of unity is more important for us than the revolutionary tasks of the working class.

19. Eight years have passed since the trade union split in France. During this time, the two organisations linked themselves definitely with the two mortally hostile political parties. Under these conditions, to think of being able to unify the trade union movement by the simple preaching of unity would be to nurture illusions. To declare that without the preliminary unification of the two trade union organisations not only the proletarian revolution but even a serious class struggle is impossible, means to make the future of the revolution depend upon the corrupted clique of trade union reformists.

In fact the future of the revolution depends not upon the fusion of the two trade union apparatuses, but upon the unification of the majority of the working class around revolutionary slogans and revolutionary methods of struggle. At present the unification of the working class is only possible by fighting against the class collaborationists (coalitionists) who are found not only in political parties but also in the trade unions...

24. ... The Left Opposition considers that to influence the trade union movement, to help it find its correct orientation, to permeate it with correct slogans, is impossible except through the Communist Party (or a faction for the moment) which, besides its other attributes, is the central ideological laboratory of the working class.

25. The correctly understood task of the Communist Party does not consist solely of gaining influence over the trade unions, such as they are, but in winning, through the trade unions, an influence over the majority of the working class. This is possible only if the methods employed by the party in the trade unions correspond to the nature and the tasks of the latter. The struggle for influence of the party in the trade unions finds its objective verification in the fact that they do or do not thrive, and in the fact that the number of their members increases, as well as in their relations with the broadest masses. If the party buys its influence in the trade unions only at the price of a narrowing down and a factionalising of the latter – converting them into auxiliaries of the party for momentary aims and preventing them from becoming genuine mass organisations – the relations between the party and the class are wrong. It is not necessary for us to dwell here on the causes for such a situation. We have done it more than once and we do it every day. The changeability of the official Communist policy reflects its adventurist tendency to make itself master of the working class in the briefest time, by means of stage-play, inventions, superficial agitation, etc.

The way out of this situation does not, however, lie in counterposing the trade unions to the party (or to the faction) but in the irreconcilable struggle to change the whole policy of the party as well as that of the trade unions...

27. A new definition of boundaries? New polemics? New splits? That will be the lament of the good but tired souls, who would like to transform the Opposition into a calm retreat where one can tranquilly rest from the great tasks, while preserving intact the name of revolutionist “of the left.” No! we say to them, to these tired souls: we are certainly not travelling the same road. Truth has never yet been the sum of small errors. A revolutionary organisation has never yet been composed of small conservative groups, seeking primarily to distinguish themselves from each other. There are

epochs when the revolutionary tendency is reduced to a small minority in the labour movement. But these epochs demand not arrangements between the small groups with mutual hiding of sins but on the contrary, a doubly implacable struggle for a correct perspective and an education of the cadres in the spirit of genuine Marxism. Victory is possible only in this way.

RUDOLF ROCKER: FROM "ANARCHISM AND ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM"

SOCIALISM AND ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM IN FRANCE

Modern Anarcho-Syndicalism is a direct continuation of those social aspirations which took shape in the bosom of the First International and which were best understood and most strongly held by the libertarian wing of the great workers' alliance. Its development was a direct reaction against the concepts and methods of political Socialism, a reaction which in the decade before the first world war had already manifested itself in the strong upsurge of the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement in France, Italy and especially Spain, where the great majority of the organised workers had always remained faithful to the doctrines of the libertarian wing of the International.

It was in France that the opposition against the ideas and methods of the modern labour parties found a clear expression in the theories and tactics of revolutionary Syndicalism. The immediate cause for the development of these new tendencies in the French labour movement was the continual split of the various socialist parties in France. All these parties, with the exception of the Allemanists, which later gave up parliamentary activities completely, saw in the trade unions merely recruiting schools for their political objectives and had no understanding for their real functions. The constant dissensions among the various socialist factions was naturally carried over into the labour unions, and it happened quite frequently that when the unions of one faction went on strike the unions of the other factions walked in on them as strike breakers. This untenable situation gradually opened the eyes of the workers. So the trade union congress in Nantes (1894) charged a special committee with the task of devising means for bringing about an understanding among all the trade union alliances. The result was the founding in the following year of the Confederation Generale du Travail at the congress in Limoges, which declared itself independent of all political parties. From then on there existed in France only two large trade union groups, the C.G.T. and the Federation des Bourses du Travail, and in 1902, at the congress of the Montpellier the latter joined the C.G.T.

One often encounters the widely disseminated opinion, which was fostered by Werner Sombart in particular, that revolutionary Syndicalism in France owes its origin to intellectuals like G. Sorel, E. Berth and H. Lagardelle, who in the periodical *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, founded in 1899, elaborated in their way the intellectual results of the new movement. This is utterly false. None of these men belonged to the movement, nor had they any appreciable influence in its internal development. Moreover, the C.G.T. was not composed exclusively of revolutionary syndicates; certainly half of its members were of reformist tendency and had joined the C.G.T. because even they recognised that the dependence of the trade unions on political parties was a misfortune for the movement. But the revolutionary wing, which had had the most energetic and active elements of organised labour on its side as well as the most brilliant intellectual forces in the organization, gave the C.G.T. its characteristic stamp, and it was they who determined the development of the ideas of revolutionary Syndicalism. Many of them came from the Allemanists, but even more from the ranks of the Anarchists, like Fernand Pelloutier, the highly intelligent secretary of the Federation of the Labour Exchanges, Emile Pouget, the editor of the official organ of the C.G.T. *La Voix du Peuple*, P. Delesalle, G. Yvetot and many others. It was mainly under the influence of the radical wing of the C.G.T. that the new movement developed and found its expression in the Charter of Amiens (1906), in which the principles and methods of the movement were laid down.

This new movement in France found a strong echo among the Latin workers and penetrated also into other countries. The influence of French Syndicalism at that time on larger and smaller sections of the international labour movement was strengthened in great degree by the internal crisis which at that period infected nearly all the socialist labour parties in Europe. The battle between the so-called Revisionists and the rigid Marxists, and particularly the fact that their very parliamentary activities forced the most violent opponents of the Revisionists of natural necessity to travel along the path of Revisionism, caused many of the more thoughtful elements to reflect seriously. They realised that participation in the politics of the nationalist states had not brought the labour movement a hair-breadth nearer to socialism, but had helped greatly to destroy the belief in the necessity of constructive socialist activity, and, worst of all, had robbed the people of their initiative by giving them the ruinous delusion that salvation always comes from above.

Under these circumstances Socialism steadily lost its character of a cultural ideal, which was to prepare the workers for the dissolution of the present capitalist system and, therefore, could not let itself be halted by the artificial frontiers of the national states. In the mind of the leaders of the modern labour parties the alleged aims of their movement were more and more blended with the interests of the national state, until at last they became unable to distinguish any definite boundary whatever between them. It would be a mistake to find in this strange about-face an intentional betrayal by the leaders, as has so often been asserted. The truth is that we have to do here with a gradual assimilation to

the modes and thoughts of the present society which necessarily had to affect the intellectual attitude of the leaders of the various labour parties in every country. Those very parties which had once set out to conquer political power under the flag of Socialism saw themselves compelled by the iron logic of conditions to sacrifice their socialist convictions bit by bit to the national policies of the state. The political power which they had wanted to conquer had gradually conquered their Socialism until there was scarcely anything left but the name.

THE ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS: ANARCHO-SYNDICALIST VIEW

These were the considerations which led to the development of Revolutionary Syndicalism or, as it was later called, Anarcho-Syndicalism in France and other countries. The term workers' syndicate meant at first merely an organization of producers for the immediate betterment of their economic and social status. But the rise of Revolutionary Syndicalism gave this original meaning a much wider and deeper import. Just as the party is, so to speak, a unified organization with definite political effort within the modern constitutional state which seeks to maintain the present order of society in one form or another, so, according to the Unionist's view, the trade unions are the unified organization of labour and have for their purpose the defence of the producers within the existing society and the preparing for and practical carrying out of the reconstruction of social life in the direction of Socialism. They have, therefore, a double purpose: 1. To enforce the demands of the producers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living; 2. To acquaint the workers with the technical management of production and economic life in general and prepare them to take the socio-economic organism into their own hands and shape it according to socialist principles.

Anarcho-Syndicalists are of the opinion that political parties are not fitted to perform either of these two tasks. According to their conceptions the trade union has to be the spearhead of the labour movement, toughened by daily combats and permeated by a socialist spirit. Only in the realm of economy are the workers able to display their full strength; for it is their activity as producers which holds together the whole social structure and guarantees the existence of society. Only as a producer and creator of social wealth does the worker become aware of his strength. In solidary union with his followers he creates the great phalanx of militant labour, aflame with the spirit of freedom and animated by the ideal of social justice. For the Anarcho-Syndicalists the labour syndicate are the most fruitful germs of a future society, the elementary school of Socialism in general. Every new social structure creates organs for itself in the body of the old organism; without this prerequisite every social evolution is unthinkable. To them Socialist education does not mean participation in the power policy of the national state, but the effort to make clear to the workers the intrinsic connections among social problems by technical instruction and the development of their administrative capacities, to prepare them for their role of re-shapers of economic life and give them the moral assurance required for the performance of their task. No social body is better fitted for this purpose than the economic fighting organisation of the workers; it gives a definite direction to their social activities and toughens their resistance in the immediate struggle for the necessities of life and the defence of their human rights. At the same time it develops their ethical concepts without which any social transformation is impossible: vital solidarity with their fellows in destiny and moral responsibility for their actions.

Just because the educational work of Anarcho-Syndicalists is directed toward the development of independent thought and action, they are outspoken opponents of all centralising tendencies which are so characteristic of most of the present labour parties. Centralism, that artificial scheme which operates from the top towards the bottom and turns over the affairs of administration to a small minority, is always attended by barren official routine; it crushes individual conviction, kills all personal initiative by lifeless discipline and bureaucratic ossification. For the state, centralism is the appropriate form of organisation, since it aims at the greatest possible uniformity of social life for the maintenance of political and social equilibrium. But for a movement whose very existence depends on prompt action at any favourable moment and on the independent thought of its supporters, centralism is a curse which weakens its power of decision and systematically represses every spontaneous initiative.

The organisation of Anarcho-Syndicalism is based upon the principles of Federalism, on free combination from below upward, putting the right of self-determination of every union above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common conviction. Their organisation is accordingly constructed on the following basis: The workers in each locality join the unions of their respective trades. The trade unions of a city or a rural district combine in Labor Chambers which constitute the centres for local propaganda and education, and weld the workers together as producers to prevent the rise of any narrow-minded factional spirit. In times of local labour troubles they arrange for the united co-operation of the whole body of locally organised labour. All the Labor Chambers are grouped according to districts and regions to form the National Federation of Labor Chambers, which maintains the permanent connection among the local bodies, arranges free adjustment of the productive labour of the members of the various organisations on co-operative lines, provides for the necessary co-ordination in the work of education and supports the local groups with council and guidance.

Every trade union is, moreover, federatively allied with all the organisations of the same industry, and these in turn with all related trades, so that all are combined in general industrial and agricultural alliances. It is their task to meet the demands of the daily struggles between capital and labour and to combine all the forces of the movement for common action where the necessity arises. Thus the Federation of the Labor Chambers and the Federation of the Industrial Alliances constitute the two poles about which the whole life of the labour syndicates revolves.

Such a form of organisation not only gives the workers every opportunity for direct action in the struggle for their daily bread, but it also provides them with the necessary preliminaries for the reorganisation of society, their own strength, and without alien intervention in case of a revolutionary crisis. Anarcho-Syndicalists are convinced that a socialist economic order cannot be created by the decrees and statutes of any government, but only by the unqualified collaboration of the workers, technicians and peasants to carry on production and distribution by their own administration in the interest of the community and on the basis of mutual agreements. In such a situation the Labour Chambers would take over the administration of existing social capital in each community, determine the needs of the inhabitants of their districts and organise local consumption. Through the agency of the Federation of Labour Chambers it would be possible to calculate the total requirements of the whole country and adjust the work of production accordingly. On the other hand it would be the task of the Industrial and Agricultural Alliances to take control of all the instruments of production, transportation, etc., and provide the separate producing groups with what they need. In a word:

1. Organisation of the total production of the country by the Federation of the Industrial Alliances and direction of work by labour councils elected by the workers themselves;
2. Organisation of social contribution by the Federation of the Labor Chambers.

In this respect, also, practical experience has given the best instruction. It has shown that the many problems of a socialist reconstruction of society cannot be solved by any government, even when the famous dictatorship of the proletariat is meant. In Russia the Bolshevik dictatorship stood helpless for almost two years before the economic problems and tried to hide its incapacity behind a flood of decrees and ordinances most of which were buried at once in the various bureaus. If the world could be set free by decrees, there would long ago have been no problems left in Russia. In its fanatical zeal for power, Bolshevism has violently destroyed the most valuable organs of a socialist order, by suppressing the Co-operative Societies, bringing the trade unions under state control, and depriving the Soviets of their independence almost from the beginning. So the dictatorship of the proletariat paved the way not for a socialist society but for the most primitive type of bureaucratic state capitalism and a reversion to political absolutism which was long ago abolished in most countries by bourgeois revolutions. In his Message to the Workers of the West European countries Kropotkin said, rightfully: 'Russia has shown us the way in which Socialism cannot be realised, although the people, nauseated with the old regime, expressed no active resistance to the experiments of the new government. The idea of workers' councils for the control of the political and economic life of the country is, in itself, of extraordinary importance ... but so long as the country is dominated by the dictatorship of a party, the workers' and peasants' councils naturally lose their significance. They are hereby degraded to the same passive role which the representatives of the Estates used to play in the time of the absolute Monarchy.'