

Anarcho - Syndicalism or Class Struggle

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This is an executive summary of a forthcoming article.

Purpose

The influence of Anarchism and Syndicalism has a long history in the American Left. Anarchism as a doctrine has been in existence since the early 1800's. As capitalism evolved into imperialism in the late 1800's a new anarchist trend developed: Anarcho-Syndicalism, a fusion of anarchism and trade unionism, which relegated the working class to the economic arena and denied a role for political struggle.

Today syndicalism is once again very strong in the revolutionary movement, witness identity politics and single-issue organizing for example. This doctrine obscures the class struggle and confuses it. Thus hindering the working class from utilizing its best weapon against the system of capitalism - the class struggle.

Specific form in U.S.

In the 1960's a new form of Anarcho-Syndicalism arose. Previously Anarcho-Syndicalism was trade unionism. Now Anarcho-Syndicalism would be applied to the social struggles of the African Americans, Chicanos, Women's Movement and other oppressed peoples. By the late 1960's many of the more thoughtful members of these movement had begun to gravitate towards Marxism and organize study groups. Subsequently they organized different revolutionary -minded organizations, however they brought the Anarcho-Syndicalist outlook of the movement with them.

What was this outlook? "... Men oppressing women, whites oppressing blacks, bosses' oppressing workers, and it is from these observations that the entire political program of syndicalism was constructed." Which is: "Women will overthrow men,

blacks will overthrow whites, workers will overthrow bosses, and students will overthrow the administrations and so forth.” (1) Thus the class struggle is misinterpreted as varying social struggles and as such is categorized as belonging in the arena of the fight for bourgeois reforms instead of revolution.

The specific form of Anarcho-Syndicalism that developed in the United States was influenced by two factors, the philosophy of pragmatism and a belief that the spontaneous movement or class struggle is initiated from the outside, rather than being the objective product of the contradictions between the capitalists and the workers.

Pragmatism relies on individual experience rather than social experience, alleging each experience to be particular and unique instead of general and similar. It attacks the laws of nature, society and motion. In the end it blames the individual and not the economic system. (2) Anarcho-Syndicalism has been the main form of pragmatism within the revolutionary movement in the U.S.

United with the pragmatic approach is the belief that the working class has to be excited into action from the outside. Anarcho-Syndicalists don't see that the class struggle is part of the objective process. They believe that agitators create movements rather than movements are the result of deep economic and social changes in the economic system, which then allows organizing and agitation to be effective.

In contrast scientific socialism enables revolutionaries to analyze society and map out a strategy for the working class to take state power in order to abolish private property and organize a new equalitarian society free of want and hunger. The role of revolutionaries is to point out that the enemy is the capitalist system and the capitalist class and not merely individual employers, policemen, border patrol agents, or politicians. It does so by participating in the daily struggle for survival in all its social and political dimensions.

Without the revolutionaries educating the workers in the process of the struggle, they (the workers) cannot elevate and merge the various fights into one mighty coherent class struggle with a strategy for victory.

Since the beginning of the revolutionary movement in the US, Anarcho-Syndicalism has been a recurring deviation. Its principal expressions have been the struggle of the early Anarchists versus the Marxists, its emphasis of trade unionism and today the social struggles in opposition to the class struggle, its belief in practice being primary and separated from theory, that outside contradictions are primary over inner contradictions and lastly emphasis of action over socialist education.