"An introduction to National-Syndicalism"

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Introduction

This leaflet is a publication of the National-Syndicalist Platform (NSP). The National-Syndicalist Platform was founded to advance the national syndicalist idea, and in a broader sense the anticapitalist struggle in the Netherlands. In this leaflet you will find a short introduction to national-syndicalism, its essence and its origination.

Especially during this time of the general crisis of capitalism and the uprise of proletarian resistance in the whole of Europe the thesis of national-syndicalism has become just as relevant as it was in the beginning of the last century. Hopefully the theory and practice of national-syndicalism can also provide an essential source of inspiration in the struggle against capitalism and plutocracy during the 21st century.
Syndicalism and Nationalism

At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Marxism had to compete with the different difficulties that came forth from the struggle against capitalism. From this ideological crisis many revisionist tendencies arose, which pursued their own revision of socialism. One of these tendencies centralised around the French marxist philosopher Georges Eugene Sorel.

In the course of time Sorel became, because of his practice experiences within the French syndicalist movement, a convinced "revisionist" and eventually provided the intellectual basis for national-syndicalism - Sorel's directive was therefore "back to Marx".

According to Sorel human actions arose from irrational faith and rational methods. Believing in something (in the case of Sorel the general strike) can be very effective, even if this (general strike) still needs to take place. This belief, he called the myth. Myths can be just as effective as the reality; If the masses are convinced of their own abilities, the system will eventually be overthrown. With this he introduced the idea of the social myth, with which he inspired anarchists, socialists as well as nationalists.

For Sorel the working class was no longer an obvious fact. He was sharply aware of the different developments within capitalism that would lead the working class to be merged into a bourgeois middle class. However, to make a fist against capitalism, the myth of the proletariat, and thus the general strike, must remain intact - even strengthened. In this Sorel saw task of the general strike as the myth of revolutionary syndicalism; To unite a fragmented working class by means of a proletarian unity.

At the beginning of the 20th century Sorel sought rapprochement to the integralist nationalists of Action Francaise and later on to the Cercle Proudhon. From this time on nationalists and syndicalists started to influence each other. Both rejected the bourgeois values of the French revolution, the parliamentary democracy, liberalism, internationalism and pacifism.
Also they shared the admiration for heroism, vitalism and violence. Also outside of France, in countries such as Italy, these new ideas gathered more and more support among revolutionary syndicalists, such as Arturo Labriola, Agostino Lanzillo, Angelo Oliviero Olivetti and Sergio Panunzio, who tried to create a synthesis between the Italian national cause and that of revolutionary syndicalism.

Arturo Labriola and Italian syndicalism

Quickly a small group of Italian syndicalists, led by Artuto Labriola, formed their own fraction within the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). They accused the reformists within the Party of only defending the industrial proletariat in Northern Italy, and not the peasant masses in the South - who formed the majority of the Italian population. They suggested that the socialist revolution could only come about by the organisation of the entire working class, who were, organized within militant syndicats, able to take over the production process from the bourgeoisie. During a congress in Ferrara in 1907 it was decided that the revolutionary syndicalist movement from now on would leave the Party politics of the PSI, to target syndicalist politics as an independent proletarian organization.

These revolutionary syndicalist were convinced that a well organized proletarian avant-garde (vanguard) could always enter into a conflict with the bourgeoisie and win it. The idea of a militant and revolutionary syndicalist avant-garde first came into practice during the general agricultural strike on the 1st of Mai in Parma. This strike formed the climax of a conflict between the peasants and the association of landowners. The Chamber of Labour in Parma became the nerve centre of the syndicalist movement and develop itself into a centre of true proletarian solidarity.
The strikers were supported by all members of the militant syndicats through financial donations. There was a high degree of discipline and organization, which eventually enabled over a 33,000 workers to paralyze everything for 3 long months. The strike ended only in June, when incidents with scabs led into a confrontation with the army, that occupied the Chamber of Labour and the strike money-box. The socialist movement reacted by dismissing the revolutionary syndicalists from its ranks and the PSI banned them from all political activities.

In 1912 the revolutionary syndicalists founded their own union, the Unione Sindicale Italiana (USI), which, before the end of the year, gathered over 100,000 members. This Union adopted the traditional anti-militarist line of syndicalism, which lasted until the "Red Week" (Settima Rossa). The "Red Week" began on 7 June 1914, when leftwing militants went onto the streets to demonstrate against the militarism of the Republican Party during the build up to World War One.

At their headquarters in Ancona the police and carabinieri fired at the protesters, which resulted in three deads and many wounded. After this a general strike was declared, that spread out through all of Italy. In Milan leading syndicalists, such as Filippo Corridoni, led protests which usually degenerated into violence. In some places these protests took the shape of a full peoples uprising. Eventually the army was forced to intervene so that the bourgeois order in Italy could be restored and to suppress the threatening civil war.
The War

Italy was not yet recovered from the shock of the "Settima Rossa", when she was once again confronted with the threat of war. Although Italy in 1914 did not yet participate in the first World War, all elements within the revolutionary syndicalist movement agreed that if Italy would participate in the war, it should be on the side of France and Great Brittain (the Entente).

For the revolutionary syndicalists the alliance of the Prussian empire with Austria-Hungary was the ultimate manifestation of the reaction. With this reasoning it would be the revolutionary syndicalists, who would lead the leftist intervaintionalist camp once the war would break out. This caused unrest within the antimilitarist USI, which pled for an Italian neutrality in the conflict and who threatened the government with a revolutionary general strike if it would plunche Italy into a war.

In 1914 several revolutionary syndicalists led by Alceste de Ambris began a severe campaign against the neutralism of the USI and called upon the Italian government to support France and Great Brittain in their war against the Prussian and Austria-Hungarian reaction. De Ambris even compared the war with the French revolution. This led to a big break within the USI, where the majority led by the anarchist Armando Borghi continued to advocate neutralism and antimilitarism.

As a reaction a part of the revolutionary syndicalists left the USI and in the beginning of October they founded the Fascio Rivoluzionario d'Azione (association of of revolutionary action). Most of the leaders within the Fascio Rivoluzionario d'Azione conscripted conform their ideas into the army to fight at the front when Italy in 1915 really started to participate in World War One. A small number of leaders remained behind to lead the revolutionary syndicats. After the war broke out the ideological development of Italian revolutionary syndicalism had reached an irreversible point; The synthesis of syndicalist socialism and radical nationalism, that started to develop since 1914, went through a massive evolution.
In 1917 this led towards a process in which this syndicalist socialism evermore developed a national character and increasingly began to drop off its marxist origin. In the last years of the war Alceste De Ambris published the journal Il Rinnovamento, which in time would develop itself into the most important organ of the national-syndicalist tendency.

**From Marxism to Corporatism**

From the intellectual tendency surrounding Alceste De Ambris, the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (Italian Union of Labour) was founded in 1918 in Milan. During the critical years of the "Bienno Rosse" (the red tidal wave of factory occupations in 1919-1920) the Unione Italiana del Lavoro became the intellectual centre of the national-syndicalist tendency.

In March 1919 in Dalmine (Bergamo) the first active occupation took place at the metalcompany Franchi en Gregorini. The leadership was in hands of an old interventionalist and Mussolini-supporter. The occupiers were mostly members of the Unione del Lavoro. It was a special event when Mussolini after he visited the factory spoke praising words about this "creative strike". Also in his journal, Popolo d'Italia, he had stressed the importance of this new method of strike. The formation of a workerscouncil was a laudable aim untill the bourgeois class was put aside from the management of production. After three days the factory was cleared with the support of the police.

The syndicalist leaders of the occupation held the manipulations by the PSI-leadership accountable for the defeat. When in 1920 the national-syndicalists managed to take over control over the northern industrial belt, they were fully aware of the dangers and consequences of a military intervention by the authorities.
From this they drew the conclusion that success could only be ensured if the workers would be able to take over the whole industrial sector. Only through this the State, and thus its capacity for reaction, could be neutralized in favor of the proletarian nation. They saw partial "general strikes" as "ineffective" and believed they would furthermore lead towards more repression, because the syndicalists would not be able to strike a fatal blow against the State apparatus. This led to the introduction of a more corporatist (class collaborationist) model, which was fundamentally different from the marxist (class struggle) model, that formed the theoretical starting point of national-syndicalism about 20 years before.

The decline of National-Syndicalism

In 1919 Benito Mussolini founded the Fascio di Combattimento with which Italian fascism was born. Although Mussolini during the "Red Week", as a convinced socialist still believed that socialism would be able to overthrow the status quo, he came to the conclusion during the outbreak of World War One in 1914 that these ideas would no longer be able to be put into practice - this because of his disappointment in the international proletariat, who didn't launch a socialist worldrevolution against the World War. From that moment on the revolutionary subject must be the national proletariat. Therefore the name national-syndicalism.

However, in the summer of 1920 Mussolini definitively broke with his revolutionary past and abruptly took distance from his socialist (and partial syndicalist) origin. Within this new concept of fascism the future of the proletariat was bound to that of the productive bourgeoisie. However, this could only take place within a system that maintained capitalism. If the "national interest" meant that socialism had to be fought and economic growth must serve to ensure Italy’s position in the world, then this meant that fascism would be the defender (apologist) of the bourgeoisie.
The fascist Party (PNF), which was founded in 1921, showed little similarities with the original program of the national-syndicalist Fasci which preceded her. Indeed an opportunist swivel to the right had always been a trusty recipe for electoral political succes (as well as parliamentary careerism).

Although in 1919-1920 the revolutionary syndicalists and socialists, who had followed Mussolini since long time, still made up the most important core of the fascist movement, in no time it was taken over by the liberal bourgeoisie, the State bureaucracy, parts of the army as well as the Catholic church. The national-syndicalists were silenced in favor of a collaboration with the reaction. "All within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state", became the new creed of the reactionary totalitarian State. The concept of the State (etatism) became with this the new ideal which was pursued by fascism.

Through this the masses were captured in national-syndicalist retorics, however without the corresponding essence; The national-syndicalist spirit and ideology. All which was presented as "national-syndicalism" became disturbed by the reactionary elements of the fascist regime. Many national-syndicalist activists eventually payed for this betrayal with their lives.
National-Syndicalism in the 21st century

It's hard these days to discuss the national-syndicalist idea. Historians, the media and the most vindictive people, whether they are "rightwing" or "leftwing" identify national-syndicalism with reactionary fascism. Through this they do injustice to a great and sincere idea which has not yet lost its relevance, even in the 21st century.

National-Syndicalism is the total idea towards the political, social and economic life. It's based upon the ideas of the Frenchman Georges Sorel (1847-1922), founder and most leading theoretician of revolutionary syndicalism.

In contradiction to the marxist doctrine, it advocates a socialism which condones (a limited) individual property and respects it to some extent. It doesn't seek to ruin society, but wants to use (a limited) private property within a framework of national and social disciplines. This within an overall conception of a rational economic organisation in favor of the working class and the nation. National-Syndicalism wants to create a new society and bring forth the birth of a new and progressive form of society based on the fusion of nationalism and socialism.

Both nationalism and socialism wish to recreate the social foundations, that are being destroyed by liberalism (individualism), through a whole new political, social and economic structure. It's the proletariat which will be the enthusiastic proponents of this new order. National-syndicalism is not "left", nor "right" in the traditional (parliamentarist) sense of the words: It builds on authority depending on the needs of the working class. It's this fusion between the nation and the proletariat which is necessary for the survival of the nation as such. It strives for a society which belongs to the working class and which is "national". It struggles for a new political and economic regime, which is syndicalist in its purest essence. The modern world needs to ripped out of the hands of the plutocracy!
All this implies that national-syndicalism is based on the concept of class struggle:

1. *As a given fact and hard economic reality within the current capitalist system.*

2. *As an indispensable weapon of the exploited and oppressed in the economic struggle against the bourgeoisie (the capitalist ruling class).*

3. *As the revolutionary catalyst in the struggle for power and for overthrowing the ruling system.*

National-syndicalism has the view that this takeover of power can only be realized through the extraparliamentary path; that is the path of direct action. Here lies a special task for the general strike as an instrument to overthrow the current capitalist system.

National-syndicalism is the alternative for the contemporary capitalist economic regime and the bourgeoisification of socialism. It recognizes marxism as an amazing instrument to analyse the capitalist economy, however not as the bringer of revolutionary change. In name of "freedom" and "democracy" the original revolutionary marxism was replaced by the reformist social-democracy. This marked the end of the original revolutionary thought.

National-syndicalism strives for a syndicalist socialism. It recognizes socialism as an aspiration for an equal and harmonious society, as a means to transform the nation. It doesn't view socialism exclusively as the product of capitalism and social forces, but also as a product of human nature characterized by a determination of just and moral values. Therefore, it is also the product of the human will and values like a sense of social justice. It originates from men itself with its endless diversity of intellectual, ethical and emotional responses.
Socialism can not combat bourgeois-egoism with merely workersmaterialism. It's a feeling as well as a science. It's enough if socialism just believes in her future.

It's not only a gathering of abstract ideas or a logical deduction of the current economic situation. It's the ability to provide a myth which shows the socialist vision of the future: the masses must believe. The root of all our actions is our instinct. The essential motivation of the workingclass movement is rather a matter of selfrespect than a matter of material interests. The national-syndicalist movement will suppress the regime of capital and bring forth the heroic values of the proletariat triumph over the despicable materialistic values of capitalism that currently smothers Europe. This revolt of force and blood against the rule of money will eventually lead to the total collapse of the plutocracy. The day will come that the rule of money will be destroyed by a serious resurrection of heroic national and proletarian values and a truly revolutionary sentiment.
The seven foundations of the National-Syndicalist Platform

1. National-syndicalism represents social justice and the right of the individual to work for his own and his family as long as this doesn't harm the general interest. If the power of creation of the individual is destroyed, the progress is destroyed. Therefore national-syndicalism would never intervene in the small bussiness (agrarian or artisan).

2. Basis industries (like heavy industry, especially the steelindustry, petrochemical as well as the energy sector) are being syndicalized (= socialized). The management is chosen by all who work within the company. Workers will choose a council, which replaces the old management.

3. Syndicalism represents workers' power over the industry. The term "worker" can be interpreted in different ways. In some political circles also technicians, operators, etc. (in general all who are employed) are refered to as the working class. We use the term "worker" as a reference to a social position. It's from the ranks of the workers that the daily leadership (management) of the company is chosen. The workers' delegates choose the management (on the basis of the rotation principle) from their midst. The B.O.'s (business organisations) are the basis for the workersorganisation at company level. This is the national-syndicalist organisation at company level.

4. Control over the industry means full industrial democracy. The "State" (council government) will only intervene in this area if the people are exploited by forcing prices to gain undue profit. Fully chosen by the workers as a whole, it will act in the interest of the working class. The interest of the collective always has precedence over the interests of a part of it; This by reducing any attempt by speculators to use the stock exchange against the workers and by handing over banking and financial institutions to the proletariat.
5. Each worker, working within the industry will get the received prevailing wage standard as basic pay in the respective branch of industry, which will increase as national productivity increases. As a supplement workers shall also benefit from the profits made within the industry; the share of the individual worker will be determined on the basis of his service years and his share in the production process.

6. National-syndicalists are unanimous when they argue that the Unions (= Syndicats) cannot be changed without the full assent of the workers. The organisation of workers by company (B.O.'s) is the basis of national-syndicalism and the support which is needed to serve the future interests of the working class. Therefore Unions will play a crucial role, because they are indispensable to give shape to the workers' control of industry.

7. At all times the working class will have the right to apply the weapon of strike to ensure her social rights. However, when the industry effectively is administered by the workers, strikes and comparable actions will become obsolete and conflicting with the interests of the working class.
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National syndicalism

National syndicalism is an adaptation of syndicalism to suit the social agenda of integral nationalism. National syndicalism developed in France, and then spread to Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

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France

French National syndicalism was an adaptation of Georges Sorel's version of revolutionary syndicalism to the monarchist ideology of integral nationalism, as practised by Action Française. Action Française was a French nationalist-monarchist movement led by Charles Maurras.

Background (1900–1908)

In 1900, Charles Maurras declared in Action Française's newspaper that anti-democratic socialism is the "pure" and correct form of socialism. From then on, he and other members of Action Française (like Jacques Bainville, Jean Rivain, and Georges Valois) interested in Sorel's thought discussed the similarity between the movements in Action Française's conferences and in essays published in the movement's newspaper, hoping to form a collaboration with revolutionary syndicalists. Such collaboration was formed in 1908 with a group of labor unions' leaders led by Émile Janvion. As a result of this collaboration, Janvion founded the journal Terre libre.

Beginning (1909)

The collaboration between the integral nationalism of Action Française and the revolutionary syndicalism of Georges Sorel began in 1909. The connection was formed after Sorel read the second edition of Maurras' book Enquête sur la monarchie. Maurras favorably mentioned Sorel and revolutionary syndicalism in the book, and even sent a copy of the new edition to Sorel. Sorel read the book, and in April 1909 wrote a praising letter to Maurras. Three months later, on 10 July, Sorel published in Il Divenire sociale (the leading journal of Italian revolutionary syndicalism), an essay admiring Maurras and Action Française. Sorel based his support on his anti-democratic thought. For example, he claimed that Action Française was the only force capable to fight against democracy. Action Française reprinted the essay in its newspaper on 22 August, titled “Anti-parliamentary Socialists”.
La cité française and L'Indépendance (1910–1913)

In 1910 Sorel and Valois decided to create a national-socialist journal called La cité française. A prospectus for the new journal was published in July 1910, signed by both revolutionary syndicalists (Georges Sorel and Édouard Berth) and Action Française members (Jean Variot, Pierre Gilbert and Georges Valois). La cité française never got off the ground because of Georges Valois's animosity toward Jean Variot.

After the failure of La cité française, Sorel decided to found his own journal. Sorel's biweekly review, called L'Indépendance, was published from March 1911 to July 1913. Its themes were the same as the journal of Action Française, such as nationalism, antisemitism, and a desire to defend the French culture and heritage of ancient Greece and Rome.

Cercle Proudhon

During the preparations for launching La Cité française, Sorel encouraged Berth and Valois to work together. In March 1911, Henri Lagrange (a member of Action Française) suggested to Valois that they found an economic and social study group for nationalists. Valois persuaded Lagrange to open the group to non-nationalists who were anti-democratic and syndicalists (Valois wrote later that the aim of the group was to provide "a common platform for nationalists and leftist anti-democrats[3]).

The new political group, called Cercle Proudhon, was founded on 16 December 1911. It included Berth, Valois, Lagrange, the syndicalist Albert Vincent and the royalists Gilbert Maire, René de Marans, André Pascalon, and Marius Riquier[4] As the name Cercle Proudhon suggests, the group was inspired by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. It was also inspired by Georges Sorel and Charles Maurras. In January 1912 the journal of Cercle Proudhon was first published, entitled Cahiers du cercle Proudhon.

Italy

In the early 20th century, nationalists and syndicalists were increasingly influencing each other in Italy.[5] From 1902 to 1910, a number of Italian revolutionary syndicalists including Arturo Labriola, Agostino Lanzillo, Angelo Oliviero Olivetti, Alceste De Ambris, Filippo Corridoni and Sergio Panunzio sought to unify the Italian nationalist cause with the syndicalist cause and had entered into contact with Italian nationalist figures such as Enrico Corradini.[6] These Italian national syndicalists held a common set of principles: the rejection of bourgeois values, democracy, liberalism, Marxism, internationalism, and pacifism while promoting heroism, vitalism, and violence.[7] Not all Italian revolutionary syndicalists joined the Fascist cause, but most syndicalist leaders eventually embraced nationalism and “were among the founders of the Fascist movement,” where “many even held key posts” in Mussolini’s regime[8] Benito Mussolini declared in 1909 that he had converted over to revolutionary syndicalism by 1904 during a general strike[9]

Enrico Corradini promoted a form of national syndicalism that utilized Maurassian nationalism alongside the syndicalism of Georges Sorel.[10] Corradini spoke of the need for a national syndicalist movement that would be able to solve Italy's problems, led by elitist aristocrats and anti-democrats who shared a revolutionary syndicalist commitment to direct action through a willingness to fight.[10] Corradini spoke of Italy as being a "proletarian nation" that needed to pursue imperialism in order to challenge the "plutocratic" nations of France and the United Kingdom.[11] Corradini's views were part of a wider set of perceptions within the right-wing Italian Nationalist Association (ANI) that claimed that Italy's economic backwardness was caused by corruption within its political class, liberalism, and division caused by "ignoble socialism"[11] The ANI held ties and influence amongst conservatives, Catholics, and the business community.[11]

A number of Italian fascist leaders began to relabel national syndicalism as Fascist syndicalism. Mussolini was one of the first to disseminate this term, explaining that “Fascist syndicalism is national and productivist... in a national society in which labor becomes a joy, an object of pride and a title to nobility.”[12] By the time Edmondo Rossoni became secretary-general of the General Confederation of Fascist Syndical Corporations in December 1922, other Italian national syndicalists were adopting the “Fascist syndicalism” phrase in their aim at “building and reorganizing political structures... through a synthesis of State and labor.”[13] An early leader in Italian trade unionism, Rossoni and other fascist syndicalists not only took the position of radical nationalism, but favored “class struggle.”[14] Seen at the time as “radical or leftist elements,” Rossoni and his syndicalist cadre had “served to some
extent to protect the immediate economic interests of the workers and to preserve their class consciousness.[15] Rossoni was dismissed from his post in 1928, which could have been due his powerful leadership position in the Fascist unions,[16] and his hostilities to the business community occasionally referring to industrialists as “vampires” and “profiteers.”[17]

With the outbreak of World War I, Sergio Panunzio noted the national solidarity within France and Germany that suddenly arose in response to the war and claimed that should Italy enter the war, the Italian nation would become united and would emerge from the war as a new nation in a "Fascio nazionale" (national union) that would be led by an aristocracy of warrior-producers that would unite Italians of all classes, factions, and regions into a disciplined socialism.[18]

In November 1918, Mussolini defined national syndicalism as a doctrine that would unite economic classes into a program of national development and growth.[19]

**Iberian Peninsula**

National syndicalism in the Iberian Peninsula is a political theory very different from the fascist idea of corporatism, inspired by Integralism and the Action Française (for a French parallel, see Cercle Proudhon). It was formulated in Spain by Ramiro Ledesma Ramos in a manifesto published in his periodical La Conquista del Estado on 14 March 1931.

National syndicalism was intended to win over the anarcho-syndicalist Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) to a corporatist nationalism. Ledesma's manifesto was discussed in the CNT congress of 1931. However, the National Syndicalist movement effectively emerged as a separate political tendency. Later the same year, Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista was formed, and subsequently voluntarily fused with Falange Española. In 1936 Franco forced a further less voluntary merger with traditionalist Carlism, to create a single party on the Nationalist side of the Spanish Civil War. During the war, Falangists fought against the Second Spanish Republic, which had the armed support of CNT. It was one of the ideological bases of Francoist Spain, especially in the early years.

The ideology was present in Portugal with the Movimento Nacional-Sindicalista (active in the early 1930s), its leader Francisco Rolão Preto being a collaborator of Falange ideologue José Antonio Primo de Rivera.

The Spanish version theory has influenced the Kataeb Party in Lebanon, the National Radical Camp Falanga in Poland and various Falangist groups in Latin America.

The Unidad Falangista Montañesa maintains a trade union wing, called the Association of National-Syndicalist Workers.

**See also**

- Corporatism
- Fascism
- Faisceau
- Nationalist anarchism
- Spanish Trade Union Organisation
- Third Position
- State Capitalism

**References**

2. “A vigorous protest had to be made against this spirit of decadence: no other group except Action française was able to fulfill a role requiring both literacy and faith. The friends of Maurras form an audacious avant-garde engaged in a fight to the finish against the boors who have corrupted everything they have touched in our country. The merit of these young people will appear great in history if we may hope that due to them the reign of stupidity will come to an end some day near at hand”. Originally published in Sorel, Georges (22 August 1909). “Socialistes antiparlamentaires”. L’Action française. Quoted in Sternhell, Zeev, Sznajder, Mario; Ashéri, Maia (1995). The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution (Third printing, and first paperback printing ed.). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. p. 79. ISBN 0-691-03289-0.


17. Lavoro d’Italia, January 6, 1926.


Further reading
