Sorelianism is advocacy for or support of the ideology and thinking of French revolutionary syndicalist Georges Sorel. Sorelians oppose bourgeois democracy, the developments of the 18th century, the secular spirit, and the French Revolution, while supporting classical tradition. Sorel believed that the victory of the proletariat in class struggle could be achieved only through the power of myth and a general strike. To Sorel, the aftermath of class conflict would involve rejuvenation of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

With the seeming failure of Syndicalism, in 1910 he announced his abandonment of socialist literature and claimed in 1914, using an aphorism of Benedetto Croce that "socialism is dead" due to the "decomposition of Marxism." Sorel became a supporter of Maurrassian integral nationalism beginning in 1909, which he considered as having similar moral aims to syndicalism despite being enemies materially. In this sense, Sorelianism is considered to be a precursor to fascism. However, he became disillusioned with these ideas with the first world war, and from 1918 until his death in 1922 he would be a supporter of the then Russian revolution and Communism, which he considered a revival for Syndicalism.

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Concepts

General strike and syndicalist society

Rejecting the Marxist elevation of history as determined, Sorel considered the challenge of the new social sciences to be new moral criterion. Proudhon had believed that a just society could only come about through action, and in particular opposition to an enemy following this line Sorel believed that class war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would result from a general strike, which, together with the betterment of living conditions, he considered distinct from the mere aim of state distribution, and as the material and moral essence of Marxism and Socialism.

However, he had problems with Proudhon, and Sorel seems to have sought to detach it of its idealism, as Proudhon had detached justice from power play; that is, from class relations. Otherwise only minimally influencing him, in admiration of Nietzsche Sorel held that an imperialist working class would establish a new aristocracy, "organizing relations among men for the benefit of its sovereignty" and as a sole source of law. However, he believed that proletarian violence would strengthen the bourgeoisie and focused on the moral regeneration of society and the rescue of civilization rather than only the working-class, considering socialism a means for revolutionary transformation of society rather than a movement of the proletariat or a movement with a specific social structure.
Individualism and myth

Sorel believed there to be a close relation between conflict and freedom. Inspired by liberal institutions and the pluralist writings of William James, Sorel denounced imitation of the military corps, extolling a warrior-individualism which he compared to the "American spirit", "animated with the spirit of liberty.” He opposed the "splendid isolation" of totalitarian movements connecting all activities to party fronts.

Sorel considers the myth of the general strike a social basis for authority providing coherence to syndicalism. Against Nietzsche's Superman he compares the general strike with the "apocalyptic myths" or "Yankee Protestantism" of the practical, individualistic American settler ready for any venture. He considered that neither the former nor the latter impinge upon the freedom of the individual.

Against the idea of centralized Imperium he espouses a Proudhonian balance and devotion to the weak based on family love, which he believed needed to be part of the warrior ethic. Combined with an ethic of laboujit was this that would enable freedom.

Class conflict and class rejuvenation

Sorel advocated the separation of groups in society, including support of the syndicalist model of a society where the proletariat workers would be autonomous and separate from bourgeois industrialists. Sorel refused the idea of negotiation between the classes during the period of struggle between the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. However, Sorel believed that it was the proletariat's task to awaken the bourgeoisie from intellectual stupor to recover its morality, "productive energy”, and “feeling of its own dignity” that Sorel claimed had been lost because of democratic ideal.

Hence, Sorel believed that both the end result of class conflict would in the end result in the rejuvenation of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Revision of Marxism, claims of "decomposition of Marxism" by Blanquism and positivism

Sorel focused on the ethical dimension of Marxism, claiming its utility for historical analysis and a means for transforming society. However, Sorel criticized the deterministic, materialist, and mechanist components of Marxism. Sorel criticized vulgar interpretations of Marxism for being unfaithful to Marx's real intentions. Sorel claimed that Marx was not materialist at all, noting that Marx did not regard psychological developments of people as part of the economic process. Sorel noted that Marx described the necessary ideological superstructure of societies: law, the organization of the state, religion, art, and philosophy. As a result, Sorel claimed that "no great philosophy can be established without being based on art and on religion.”

Sorel claimed that although Marx had initially denounced Pierre-Joseph Proudhon while supporting Blanquism, that Marx later synthesized ideas from both Blanquism and Proudhonism together. Sorel claimed that Marxism had undergone a crisis in the 1880s and the 1890s when major socialist parties were being founded in France. Sorel viewed non-Proudhonian socialism as being wrong-headed and corrupt, as being inherently oppressive. Sorel claimed that a "decomposition of Marxism", as referring to the major goals and themes of the ideology was being caused by Marx's Blanquist elements and Engels' positivist elements.

Proudhonism was in Sorel's view, more consistent with the goals of Marxism than Blanquism which had become popular in France, and Sorel claimed that Blanquism was a vulgar and rigidly deterministic corruption of Marxism.

Sorelianism and French integral nationalism

Interest in Sorelian thought arose in the French political right, particularly by French nationalist Charles Maurras of Action Française and his supporters. While Maurras was a staunch opponent of Marxism, he was supportive of Sorelianism for its opposition to liberal democracy. Maurras famously stated "a socialism liberated from the democratic and cosmopolitan element fits nationalism well as a well made glove fits a beautiful hand". In the summer of 1909, Sorel endorsed French integral nationalism and praised Maurras. Sorel was impressed by the significant numbers of "ardent youth" that enrolled in Action Française. Sorel's turn to
nationalism resulted in his disregarding of Marx in favour of the views of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.[21] In 1910, Sorel along with *Action Française* nationalists Édouard Berth and Georges Valois agreed to form a journal titled *La Cité française* that would promote a form of national-socialism; however, this was abandoned.[22] Afterwards, Sorel supported another nationalist newspaper, *L’Indépendance* and began writing anti-Semitic content claiming that France was under attack from "Jewish invaders".[23] In 1911, on the issue of Sorelian syndicalism, Valois announced to the Fourth Congress of *Action Française* that "It was not a mere accident that our friends encountered the militants of syndicalism. The nationalist movement and the syndicalist movement, alien to another though they may seem, because of their present positions and orientations, have more than one common object."[24]

During his association with French nationalism, Sorel joined Valois in the *Cercle Proudhon*, an organization that Valois declared to provide "a common platform for nationalists and leftist antidemocrats".[24] The organization recognized both Proudhon and Sorel as two great thinkers who had "prepared the meeting of the two French traditions that had opposed each other throughout the nineteenth century: nationalism and authentic socialism uncorrupted by democracy, represented by syndicalism".[24] *Cercle Proudhon* announced that it supported the replacement of bourgeois ideology and democratic socialism with a new ethic of an alliance of nationalism with syndicalism, as those "two synthesizing and convergent movements, one at the extreme right and the other at the extreme left, that have begun the siege and assault on democracy".[24] *Cercle Proudhon* supported the replacement of the liberal order with a new world that was "virile, heroic, pessimistic, and puritanical—based on the sense of duty and sacrifice: a world where the mentality of warriors and monks would prevail".[25] The society would be dominated by a powerful avant-garde proletarian elite that would serve as an aristocracy of producers, and allied with intellectual youth dedicated to action against the decadent bourgeoisie.[26]

**Sorelianism and Fascism**

Upon Sorel's death, an article in the Italian Fascist doctrinal review *Gerarchia* edited by Benito Mussolini and Agostino Lanzillo, a known Sorelian, declared "Perhaps fascism may have the good fortune to fulfill a mission that is the implicit aspiration of the whole oeuvre of the master of syndicalism: to tear away the proletariat from the domination of the Socialist party, to reconstitute it on the basis of spiritual liberty, and to animate it with the breath of creative violence. This would be the true revolution that would mold the forms of the Italy of tomorrow."[27]

**Notable adherents**

Aside from Sorel himself, there were a number of adherents of Sorelianism in the early 20th century. Sorel was a mentor to Hubert Lagardelle who, like Sorel, supported the segregation of social classes and who despised the bourgeoisie, democracy, democratic socialism, parliamentarism, social democracy, and universal suffrage.[28] Antonio Gramsci was influenced by the Sorelian views of social myth.[29] Based on influence from Sorel, Gramsci asserted that Italy and the West have suffered from crises of culture and authority due to the "wave of materialism" and the inability of liberalism to achieve consensus and hegemony over society.[30] Sorel influenced Greek philosopher Nikos Kazantzakis in Kazantzakis' belief of strife as being creative while viewing peace as decadent.[31] José Carlos Mariátegui was a Sorelian who claimed that Vladimir Lenin was a Sorelian and Nietzschean hero.[32]

Benito Mussolini, when he was a Marxist, held various positions towards Sorelianism at times. Mussolini stated that he became a syndicalist during the 1904 Italian general strike; his close contact with syndicalists dates to 1902.[33] Mussolini reviewed Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* in 1909 and supported Sorel's view of consciousness as being a part of a protracted struggle, where people display uplifting and self-sacrificing virtues akin to the heroes of antiquity.[34] Mussolini also supported the Sorelian view of the necessity of violence in revolution.[34] He followed Sorel in denouncing humanitarianism and compromise between revolutionary socialists and reformist socialists and bourgeois democrats.[34] By 1909, Mussolini supported elitism and anti-parliamentarism, and became a propagandist for the use of "regenerative violence".[34] When Sorelians initially began to come close to identifying themselves with nationalism and monarchism in 1911, Mussolini believed that such association would destroy their credibility as socialists.[35]

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Georges Eugène Sorel (2 November 1847 – 29 August 1922) was a French philosopher[1] and theorist of Sorelianism[2][3] His notion of the power of myth in people's lives (in particular, national myth) inspired socialists, anarchists, Marxists, and Fascists[4] It is, together with his defense of violence, the contribution for which he is most often remembered[5]

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Biography

Born in Cherbourg as the son of a bankrupted wine merchant, he moved to Paris in 1864 to attend the Collège Rollin, before entering the École Polytechnique a year later.[6] He became chief engineer with the Department of Public Works, stationed briefly in Corsica, and for a longer period in Perpignan. In 1891, he was awarded the Légion d'honneur.[7] He retired in 1892 and moved to Boulogne-sur-Seine, near Paris, where he stayed until his death.

Beginning in the second half of the 1880s, he published articles in various fields (hydrology, architecture, physics, political history, and philosophy) displaying the influence of Aristotle, as well as Hippolyte Taine and Ernest Renan. In 1893, he publicly affirmed his position as a Marxist and a socialist. His social and political philosophy owed much to his reading of Proudhon, Karl Marx, Giambattista Vico, Henri Bergson[8][9] (whose lectures at the Collège de France he attended), and later William James. Sorel's engagement in the political world was accompanied by a correspondence with Benedetto Croce, and later with Vilfredo Pareto. Sorel worked on the first French Marxist journals, L'Ère nouvelle and Le Devenir social, and then participated at the turn of the century in the revisionist debate and crisis within Marxism. He took the side of Eduard Bernstein against Karl Kautsky. Sorel supported acquittal during the Dreyfus affair, although, like his friend Charles Péguy,
he later felt betrayed by what he saw as the opportunism of the Dreyfusards. Through his contributions to Enrico Leone's *Il Divenire sociale* and Hubert Lagardelle's *Mouvement socialiste*, he contributed around 1905 to the theoretical elaboration of revolutionary syndicalism.\[^{10}\] In 1906, his most famous text, *Reflections on Violence*, appeared in this last journal. It was published in book form in 1908, and was followed the same year by *Illusions du Progrès*.

Disappointed by the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), Sorel associated himself for a period in 1909-1910 with Charles Maurras' *Action française*, while sharing neither its nationalism nor its political program. This collaboration inspired the founders of the Cercle Proudhon, which brought together revolutionary syndicalists and monarchists. Sorel himself, with Jean Variot, founded a journal in 1911 called *L'Indépendance*, although disagreements, in part over nationalism, soon ended the project.\[^{11}\]

Ferociously opposed to the 1914 Union sacrée, Sorel denounced the war and in 1917 praised the Russian Revolution, which was later printed in an official Soviet Union publication, Russian Soviet Government Bureau, calling Lenin "the greatest theoretician of socialism since Marx and a statesman whose genius recalls that of Peter the Great."\[^{12}\] He wrote numerous small pieces for Italian newspapers defending the Bolsheviks. Less than one year later in March 1921, Sorel turned his praise towards a rising Fascist leader in Italy, writing that "Mussolini is a man no less extraordinary than Lenin. He, too, is a political genius, of a greater reach than all the statesmen of the day, with the only exception of Lenin…"\[^{13}\] Inexplicably, Sorel found it necessary to heap praise on both a Russian Bolshevik and an Italian Fascist leader almost concurrently.

Sorel was extremely hostile to Gabriele D'Annunzio, the poet who attempted to re-conquer Fiume for Italy, and did not show sympathy for the rise of fascism in Italy, despite Jean Variot's later claims that he placed all his hopes in Benito Mussolini. After the war, Sorel published a collection of his writings entitled *Matériaux d'une Théorie du Prolétaire*. At the time of his death, in Boulogne sur Seine he had an ambivalent attitude towards both Fascism and Bolshevism.

Although his writing touched on many subjects, Sorel's work is best characterized by his original interpretation of Marxism, which was deeply anti-determinist, politically anti-elitist, anti-Jacobin,\[^{14}\] and built on the direct action of unions, the mobilizing role of myth—especially that of the general strike—and on the disruptive and regenerative role of violence. Whether Sorel is better seen as a left-wing or right-wing thinker is disputed;\[^{15}\][^16] the Italian Fascists praised him as a forefather, but the dictatorial government they established ran contrary to his beliefs, while he was also an important touchstone for Italy's first Communists, who saw Sorel as a theorist of the proletariat. Such widely divergent interpretations arise from the theory that a moral revival of the country must take place to re-establish itself, saving it from decadence;\[^{17}\] yet whether this revival must occur by means of the middle and upper classes or of the proletariat is a point in question. His ideas, most notably the concept of a spontaneous general strike, have contributed significantly to anarcho-syndicalism.

**Political writings**

"Sorel began his writing as a marginal Marxist, a critical analyst of Marx's economics and philosophy, and not a pious commentator. He then embraced revisionism, became for several years the 'metaphysician of syndicalism', as Jaurès called him, flirted ardently with royalist circles, and then reverted to his commitment to the proletariat. When the Bolsheviks came to power, he completed his cycle of illusions by saluting Vladimir Lenin\[^{18}\] as the leader who had realized his syndicalist myth.\[^{19}\]"

"The syndicalist or militant trade union movement, which burst into prominence in France around 1900, inspired Sorel to write his *Reflections on Violence*. The turmoil engendered by strikes was universally condemned even by parliamentary socialists, who favored negotiation and conciliation. To justify the militancy and to give syndicalism an ideology, Sorel published the series of articles that cemented his legacy by 1912 as "the leading figure amongst the French Syndicalists."\[^{20}\] This book was published in Italian, Spanish, German, Japanese and English.

Two of its themes have become a part of social science literature: the concept of the social myth and the virtue of violence. To Sorel the Syndicalist's general strike, the Marxist's catastrophic revolution, the Christian's church militant, the legends of the French Revolution, and the remembrance of June Days are all myths that move men, quite independent of their historical reality. As one of Sorel's disciples (Benito Mussolini)\[^{21}\][^24] said, men do not move mountains; it is only necessary to create the illusion that mountains move. Social myths, says Sorel, are not descriptions of things, but "expressions of a determination to act."\[^{25}\]"
Myths enclose all the strongest inclinations of a people, of a party, or of a class, and the general strike is “the myth in which Socialism is wholly comprised.”[26] For Sorel the general strike was a catastrophic conception of socialism, the essence of the class struggle, and the only true Marxist means of effecting the revolution. Nowhere does Sorel endorse indiscriminate, brutal violence; only violence “enlightened by the idea of the general strike”[27] is unconditionally defended. Only violence in the Marxist class war, as Sorel conceived it, is fine and heroic and in the service of the “immemorial interest of civilization.”[28] In fact, Sorel makes no justification of violence by philosophical argument, but uses long excursions into history and current events to suggest that ethical codes are relative to their time and place. Consistent with his position he could describe the Declaration of the Rights of Man as “only a colorless collection of abstract and confused formulas, without any practical bearing.”[26]

### Relation to Marxism

Sorel had been politically monarchist and traditionalist before embracing orthodox Marxism in the 1890s. He attempted to fill in what he believed were gaps in Marxist theory, resulting in an extremely heterodox and idiosyncratic view of Marxism. For instance, Sorel saw pessimism and irrationalism at the core of Marxism and rejected Karl Marx’s own rationalism and “utopian” tendency. Sorel also saw Marxism as closer in spirit to early Christianity than to the French Revolution. He did not view Marxism as “true” in a scientific sense, as orthodox Marxists did, but believed Marxism's "truth" lay in its promise of a morally redemptive role for the proletariat, within a terminally decadent society.

Sorel’s was a voluntarist Marxism: he rejected those Marxists who believed in inevitable and evolutionary change, emphasizing instead the importance of will and preferring direct action. These approaches included general strikes, boycotts, and constant disruption of capitalism with the goal being to achieve worker control over the means of production. Sorel's belief in the need for a deliberately conceived "myth" to sway crowds into concerted action was put into practice by mass fascist movements in the 1920s. The epistemic status of the idea of "myth" is of some importance, and is essentially that of a working hypothesis, with one fundamental peculiarity: it is an hypothesis which we do not judge by its closeness to a "Truth", but by the practical consequences which stem from it. Thus, whether a political myth is of some importance or not must be decided, in Sorel's view, on the basis of its capacity to mobilize human beings into political action;[30] the only possible way for men to ascend to an ethical life filled by the character of the sublime and to achieve deliverance. Sorel believed the “energizing myth”[31] of the general strike would serve to enforce solidarity, class consciousness and revolutionary élan among the working class.[32][33] The "myth" that the fascists would appeal to, however, was that of the race, nation, or people, as represented by the state. Historian Zeev Sternhell mentions frequently Sorel[34] as one of the men who led the way to the fusion of the left-wing revisionists and of the right-wing ultranationalists into what later became fascism. Sorel’s vision of socialism was "a-Marxist, anti-Marxist, eventually post-Marxist revisionist".[35] Sternhell says that "the socialism designed as 'ethics socialism' by Sorel, Robert Michels and Arturo Labriola [...] will play a huge role in the evolution of the socialist nationalist synthesis, in the eve of 1914 and in the interwar".[36]

### Antisemitism

Shlomo Sand and Zeev Sternhell agree that Sorel was antisemitic. Sternhell says in "Neither Right nor Left" (Ni droite ni gauche, l'idéologie fasciste en France) that antisemitism was a cornerstone of Sorel's revolutionary syndicalism.[37] Sand says that Sorel can be legitimately said to be antisemitic, as he proved his Judeophobia through his writings and public declarations.[38]

### Anti-capitalism

In his most famous work Reflections On Violence (1908), Sorel warned about the political trend that conservatives and parliamentary socialism could become allies in a common struggle against capitalism.[39] Sorel's view is that the conservatives and parliamentary socialism had common goals, because they both want the nation to be a centrally controlled, organic unit where all the parts are working together as a whole. Also, the parliamentary socialism of the left wants economic nationalism, and huge tariff-barriers in order to protect their interior capitalists and this works well together with the cultural nationalism of the conservatives. Sorel warned about the creation of corporatism, where the workers movements and the employers organizations would be forced to merge with each other, thus ending the class-struggle, and because he felt that parliamentary democracy was moving in that direction at the beginning of the last century, Sorel said that the workers had to stay away from the socialist parties, and use strikes and violence as
their primary weapon against the middle and upper classes in parliament. That way, the workers would not only fight harder for their share of the values produced by capitalism, but also help to protect capitalism against the semi-feudal, corporative dystopia and oligarchy that the socialists and the conservatives are working towards.

**Thoughts on economics and parliamentary democracy**

In his *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel says that parliamentary socialism, and its middle-class of bureaucrats and newspaper-intellectuals does not understand social science, economics, or any other matter important for good rule as well as the traditional liberal and capitalist elite that ruled before the mediocre middle-class became a powerful force in parliament. "How did these mediocre and silly people become so powerful?" Sorel asks. His theory on this is that the mediocre middle-class became powerful when the working-classes, people without property, were given the right to vote at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. Thus, the working classes now created a problem for themselves by creating a political elite that is more stupid and less competent than the people who had a monopoly of power before them. He proposed that this problem could be fixed only by a collective withdrawal and boycott of the parliamentary system by the workers. Thus, the workers must return to strikes and violence as their main political tool, so Sorel says. This gives the workers a sense of unity, a return to dignity, and weakens the dangerous and mediocre middle-class in their struggle for power and their attack on capitalism.

**Anti-elitism**

Sorel rejected political elitism because the middle-classes tend to co-opt all organizational hierarchies, and turn them into gentlemen's clubs for people who like to talk theory and write long newspaper articles. This point was made by Sorel in *Reflections on Violence*, and was later developed further by Robert Michels and his *Iron Law of Oligarchy*.[40]

**Sorel's antirealism**

Isaiah Berlin identifies three anti-scientific currents in Sorel's work,[41] but Sorel's attack on science is neither general nor piecemeal. Rather than "attacks", as is clear from the quotations below, Sorel explains how we should view "science" in relation to what he called "the real thing".

**Science is not reality**

He dismissed science as "a system of idealised entities: atoms, electric charges, mass, energy and the like – fictions compounded out of observed uniformities... deliberately adapted to mathematical treatment that enable men to identify some of the furniture of the universe, and to predict and... control parts of it." [1; 301] He regarded science more as "an achievement of the creative imagination, not an accurate reproduction of the structure of reality, not a map, still less a picture, of what there was. Outside of this set of formulas, of imaginary entities and mathematical relationships in terms of which the system was constructed, there was ‘natural’ nature – the real thing..." [1; 302] He regarded such a view as "an odious insult to human dignity, a mockery of the proper ends of men", [1; 300] and ultimately constructed by "fanatical pedants", [1; 303] out of "abstractions into which men escape to avoid facing the chaos of reality" [1; 302]

**Science is not nature**

As far as Sorel was concerned, "nature is not a perfect machine, nor an exquisite organism, nor a rational system." [1; 302] He rejected the view that "the methods of natural science can explain and explain away ideas and values...or explain human conduct in mechanistic or biological terms, as the...blinkeyed adherents of la petite science believe." [1; 310] He also maintained that the categories we impose upon the world, "alter what we call reality...they do not establish timeless truths as the positivists maintained", [1; 302] and to "confuse our own constructions with eternal laws or divine decrees is one of the most fatal delusions of men." [1; 303] It is "ideological patter... bureaucracy, la petite science... the Tree of Knowledge has killed the Tree of Life... human life [has been reduced] to rules that seem to be based on objective truths." [1; 303] Such to Sorel, is the appalling arrogance of science, a vast deceit of the imagination, a view that conspires to "stifle the sense of common humanity and destroy human dignity"[1; 304]
Science is not a recipe

Science, he maintained, "is not a 'mill' into which you can drop any problem facing you, and which yields solutions", [1; 311] that are automatically true and authentic. Yet, he claimed, this is precisely how too many people seem to regard it.

To Sorel, that is way "too much of a conceptual, ideological construction", [1; 312] smothering our perception of truth through the "stifling oppression of remorselessly tidy rational organisation." [1; 321] For Sorel, the inevitable "consequence of the modern scientific movement and the application of scientific categories and methods to the behaviour of men", [1; 323] is an outburst of interest in irrational forces, religions, social unrest, criminality and deviance – resulting directly from an overzealous and monistic obsession with scientific rationalism.

And what science confers, "a moral grandeur, bureaucratic organisation of human lives in the light of…la petite science, positivist application of quasi-scientific rules to society – all this Sorel despised and hated", [1; 328] as so much self-delusion and nonsense that generates no good and nothing of lasting value.

**Works**

- *Questions de Morale* (Paris, 1900).

**See also**

- Charter of Amiens (1906), a cornerstone of the French workers' movement
- Sorelianism
Notes


14. "One can say that optimists are, in general, extremist theoreticians. The consequences of this have been well put by Georges Sorel in writing of the Jacobins: 'If, unfortunately they find themselves armed with great political power allowing them to realize an ideal that they have conceived, optimists may lead their country to worse catastrophes. They are not long in recognizing, indeed, that social transformations are not achieved with the facility they had expected; they attribute their disappointments to their contemporaries, rather than explain the march of events in terms of historic necessity; thus they end by attempting to remove those people whose evil desires seem to them dangerous to the welfare of mankind. During the error, the men who spilt most blood were exactly those who had the keener desire to enable their fellow-creatures to enjoy the golden age of which they had dreamed, and who ha[c] the strongest sympathy for human misery Optimistic, idealistic, and sensitive, as they were, these men showed themselves the more inexorable as they had a greater thirst for universal well-being.' -Michels, Robert (1949). "The Sociological Character of Political Parties." In: First Lectures in Political Sociology. University of Minnesota Press, p. 140.


23. “Young Benito Mussolini became a Socialist ad in 1908, at the age of 25, went to Trento as a journalist, and worked for a little with the Socialist irredentist leader Cesare Battisti; he was soon expelled by the Austrian authorities and it is not uninteresting that the FlorentineVoce published an article he then wrote on the Trentino. It is sometimes said that Mussolini's visit to Trento brought Nietzsche into his life, though he had certainly been influenced by him earlier; his journalistic efforts showed the influence, above all, of Georges Sorel, and his behaviour that of Sorel's friend, Pareto.” — Wiskemann, Elizabeth (1947). "The Origins of Fascism." (https://archive.org/stream/italy030855mbp#page/n61/mode/2up) In: Italy. Oxford University Press, p. 54.


27. Reflections on Violence, p. 278.


34. in Ni Droite, ni gauche (Neither Right nor Left), book originally published in 1983


36. Ni droite ni gauche, p. 192


39. “There is only one thing which may indeed retard this rapid course toward the unknown, to the ‘mythic’ Social Revolution. This is readiness on the part of the ‘middle classes’ to yield and to make peace, combined with readiness to negotiate on the part of the ‘working class aristocracy’ their acknowledged leaders. This is the only issue that Georges Sorel is particularly afraid of, as it is likely to soften the warlike spirit of the working class, and thus to postpone their victory in the struggle.” — Miliukov Paul (1920). *Bolshevism: An International Danger* [https://archive.org/stream/bolshevismintern00mili#page/n5/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/bolshevismintern00mili#page/n5/mode/2up). London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 24-25.


**Further reading**


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**External links**

- Works by or about Georges Eugène Sorel at Internet Archive
- Georges Eugène Sorel, 1847-1922
- *Cahiers Georges Sorel* "Mil neuf cent. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle"


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Fascist syndicalism (related to national syndicalism) was a trade syndicate movement (syndicat means trade union in French) that rose out of the pre-World War II provenance of the revolutionary syndicalism movement led mostly by Edmondo Rossoni, Sergio Panunzio, A. O. Olivetti, Michele Bianchi, Alceste De Ambris, Paolo Orano, Massimo Rocca, and Guido Pighetti, under the influence of French Marxist Georges Sorel[1] who was considered the “‘metaphysician’ of syndicalism.”[2] The Fascist Syndicalists differed from other branches of syndicalism in that they generally favored class struggle, worker-controlled factories and hostility to industrialists, which lead historians to portray them as “leftist fascist idealists” who “differed radically from right fascists.”[3] Generally considered one of the more radical Fascist syndicalists in Italy, Rossoni was the “leading exponent of fascist syndicalism.”[4], and sought to infuse nationalism with “class struggle.”[6]

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### Revolutionary syndicalism to national syndicalism

Sometimes considered the “father” of revolutionary syndicalism or at least “the leading figure amongst the French Syndicalists”,[6][7] Georges Sorel supported militant trade unionism to combat the corrupting influences of parliamentary parties and politics, even if the legislators were distinctly socialist. As a French Marxist who supported Lenin, Bolshevism and Mussolini concurrently in the early 1920s,[8][9] Sorel promoted the cause of the proletariat in class struggle, and the “catastrophic polarization” that would arise through social myth-making of general strikes.[10] The intention of syndicalism was to organize strikes to abolish capitalism, not to supplant it with State socialism, but rather to build a society of worker-class producers, which Sorel regarded as “truly true” in Marxism.[11]

In his 1908 book, Reflections on Violence, Sorel provided the justification for syndicats as an effort to organize workers in violent uprisings, to convince workers not to be ashamed of acts of violence, and that they should be scornful of “politics, the Republic and patriotism.”[12] In this Sorelian sense, the violence associated with Marxist class struggle, could be interpreted as fine, heroic and in the service of the “immemorial interest of civilization.”[13] Many European socialists joined the ranks of the revolutionary syndicalists, including Benito Mussolini, who claimed that he had succumbed to revolutionary syndicalism by 1904, citing that it occurred during a general strike, although he had been involved with syndicalism earlier.[14]

By 1909, Sorel became disappointed over the compromising policies of socialist parliamentarians, the movement towards democratic socialism and the decadence of the proletariat who were seduced by the “mirage of enormous economic benefits.”[15] In Sorel’s opinion, the proletariat was neither responding to his expectations of revolutionary change nor the dreams of Marx’s “magnificent epic.”[16] This reassessment of Marxism led Sorel to adopt Benedetto Croce's aphorism that “Socialism is dead.”[17] During this period, many of Sorel’s criticisms and writings about socialism were in response to the profound “crisis of Marxism.”[18], where he, according to Antonio Labriola expounds on it with gusto and converted this “crisis into one of socialism”[19]
To Sorel, the integrity and intellectualism of Marxism was decomposing, and the “heroic proletariat” appeared to have been either non-existent or shown to be as “much corrupted by utilitarianism as the bourgeoisie.” According to Sorel, the power of democratic-republican governments was debasing the revolutionary initiative of the worker class which forced him to search for other alternatives, including a nationalism, but one devoid of any monarchism. In order to resolve this crisis of socialism, Sorel turned toward an anti-democratic socialism that encompasses a radical nationalism, while still holding to his support of worker-owned factories, but under a heretic Marxism divested of it “materialistic and rationalistic essence.”

In 1909, Sorel published an article in Enrico Leone’s *Il Divenire sociale*, an influential journal of revolutionary syndicalism in Italy, which was later reprinted and championed by Charles Maurras in the *L’Action française* entitled “Antiparliamentary Socialism.” Sorel was not the first to drift towards nationalism and syndicalism. During the years of 1902 to 1910 a cadre of Italian revolutionary syndicalists had embarked on a mission to combine Italian nationalism with syndicalism. They were later to become “founders of the Fascist movement,” and “held key posts” in Mussolini’s regime. Generally, Italian syndicalism finally coalesced into national syndicalism during World War I and the months following the 1918 armistice.

Maurras welcomed Sorel’s support in that they both were concerned over French socialism reaching the path of no return in its rush towards “democratization,” coalescing into a formidable Social Democracy movement. To Maurras, the purity of socialism had to abstain from being captured by seduction of democracy, declaring that “socialism liberated from the democratic and cosmopolitan element fits nationalism well as a well made glove fits a beautiful hand.” But such thoughts were not unusual for many European socialists during this period, such as Philippe Buchez and Ferdinand Lassalle who “despised democracy and exalted the nation.” Due to his aversion to democracy, Sorel and the syndicalists rejected political parties and democratic institutions as well as the “Marxist dictatorship of the proletariat,” but remained dutiful to Karl Marx’s opposition to democracy and elections. Earlier, Marx had confessed that his revolutionary activities in the Revolution of 1848 was “nothing but a plan of war against democracy.”

In an attempt to save Marxism, Sorel gravitated towards the creation of a synthesis of populism and nationalism that also included “the crudest of anti-Semitism.” By this time, Sorel and other syndicalists concluded that proletarian violence was ineffectual since the “proletariat was incapable of fulfilling its revolutionary role,” an assessment that persuaded many to see the nation-state as the best means by which to establish a proletarian-based society, which later congealed into the fascist concept of proletarian nationalism.

Many revolutionary syndicalists followed Sorel and his Sorelian socialism towards the allure of a radical nationalism after he praised Maurras and displayed his sympathies for French integral nationalism in 1909. The appeal that Charles Maurras presented was his nationalistic approach against bourgeois democracy, the Enlightenment, and “its liberalism, its individualism, and its conception of society as an aggregate of individuals.” This trend continued and by 1911, revolutionary syndicalists had acknowledged that two important antirational political currents had come together, forging “a new nationalism and revolutionary socialism.” This coalescence finally surfaced as a major facet of Italian Fascism, where Mussolini himself confessed: “What I am, I owe to Sorel.” The Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell, considered a leading expert on fascism, asserted that this integration of syndicalism with unpatriotic nationalism was a factor in why “Italian revolutionary syndicalism became the backbone of fascist ideology.”

**Fascist syndicalism and productivism**

Mussolini was one of the first to comingle the phrase fascism with syndicalism, remarking in the early 1920s that “Fascist syndicalism is national and productivistic… in a national society in which labor becomes a joy, an object of pride and a title to nobility.” Most Italian syndicalists viewed social revolution as a means for rapid transformation to provide “superior productivity;” and if this economic abundance failed to occur, there could be no meaningful social change. The emphasis by syndicalists towards the importance of “productivism” had been originally initiated by Sorel in 1907, who argued that “Marx considers that a revolution by a proletariat of producers who [have] acquired economic capacity.” When Carlo Cafiero developed a compendium for the initial volume of Capital in Italian, Marx reminded his colleague that “material conditions necessary for the emancipation of the proletariat” must be “spontaneously generated by the development of capitalism (*den Gang der kapitalistischen Produktion*).
The support for the theory of productionism expanded among Fascist syndicalists after Lenin expropriated most of the private sector in Soviet Russia, causing the economy to collapse, high unemployment and an environment where “most of the mills and factories were at a standstill; mines and collieries were wrecked and flooded.”[46] The extraordinary high unemployment rate in Soviet Russia alarmed most syndicalists, who believed that such a condition was impossible under a proletarian state.

After the Soviet economy fell and Lenin introduced his New Economic Policy (NEP), Italian syndicalists continued to move further away from orthodox Marxism, determined to revise it to fit the changing times and to embolden its strategic goals. They argued that the Russian Bolsheviks had failed to adhere to Engels’ 1850 admonition about the dangers of trying to establish a social revolution within an economically backwards environment.[47] This drift had emerged years before the economic malaise of Soviet Russia, prompting most Italian syndicalists to transcend the errors and drawbacks that “they believed they found in orthodox Marxism.”[48] Developed to bring about worker control of the means of production by direct action, the intellectuals of syndicalism came to the realization that Italy’s primitive economy could facilitate neither equality nor abundance for society. Without a mature industry developed by the bourgeoisie, they came to understand that a successful social revolution required the support of “classless” revolutionaries.[49] Mussolini, along with Italian syndicalists, Nationalists and Futurists, contended that those revolutionaries would be Fascists, not Marxists or some other ideology.[50] According to Mussolini and other syndicalist theoreticians, Fascism would be “the socialism of ‘proletarian nations.’”[61]

Fascist syndicalists also became preoccupied with the idea of increasing production instead of simply establishing a redistributive economic structure. Sergio Panunzio, a major theoretician of Italian Fascism and syndicalism, believed that Syndicalists were productivists, rather than distributionists.[52] In his criticism of the Bolsheviks’ handling of their economy, Panunzio also asserted that Russian Soviet state had become a “dictatorship over the proletariat, and not of the proletariat.”[53]

Rossoni and the fascist syndicatists

When Rossoni was selected as the secretary-general of the General Confederation of Fascist Syndical Corporations in December 1922, other Italian syndicalists began to affirm the “Fascist syndicalism” catchphrase in their aim at “building and reorganizing political structures… through a synthesis of State and labor.”[54] Rossoni and his Fascist syndicalist cadre were soon regarded as “radical or leftist elements,” who sought to protect the economic interests of “workers and to preserve their class consciousness.”[55] Rossoni strove to build a “collective interest in the economy,” that would subject employers to Fascist discipline while providing a more substantial role for workers to make economic decisions.[56]

In an effort to set the basic revolutionary direction of the Fascist state, Rossoni argued that Fascist syndicalism should be at the forefront, proclaiming in Mussolini’s Il Popolo d’Italia newspaper that “only the Fascist syndicates could complete the revolution.”[57] In his early anti-capitalist polemics, Rossoni claimed that capitalism “depressed and annulled production rather than stimulating and developing it” and that industrialists were “apathetic, passive, and ignorant.”[58]

By early 1923 industrialists and factory owners were becoming alarmed by the Fascist syndicalists’ verbal assaults on the business community and capitalism, provoking a number of them to wonder if it was “now wise to pay the Communists to fight the Fascists”.[59] As the unrelenting attack continued, Rossoni by 1926 was steadfast in his accusations that depicted industrialists as “vampires” and “profiteers.”[60] Rossoni not only targeted big industrialists for their collective avarice, but also focused his criticisms against the “offensive greed of small shop-keepers.”[61]

In some cases, Rossoni’s pro-labor stances worried industrialists due to his philosophic interpretation of Marx’s “dynamic law of history,” which lead him to support the eventualty of workers’ control of factories.[62] He argued that industrialists had a legitimate right to assume their positions, but only until “such time as workers, organized into new syndicates, had mastered the requisite competence to take command.”[63] The Fascist syndicalists’ hostility towards employers caused political troubles for Mussolini’s regime before and after he established a one-party dictatorship in early 1925. But despite the controversies, Rossoni held on to his position until he was forced to resign in 1928, probably due to fears over his almost 3 million-strong union membership that had greatly surpassed the National Fascist Party membership.[64] Although independent labor unions in Italy were not nationalized until April 3, 1926, under Alfredo Rocco’s Syndical Laws, Fascist syndicates by 1922 had become a “major recruitment competitor for the socialist and Catholic worker organizations.”[65] After peaking to a membership of over 2,000,000 members by 1920, the
independent General Confederation of Labor was reduced to 400,000 members by mid-1922. Other unions fared just as poorly. The Catholic syndicates of the Popolari had 1.2 million members in 1921, but by the later part of 1922, it was down to 540,000. Nonetheless, Rossoni was treated as a valuable leader in Mussolini's administration, becoming a member of the Grand Council of Fascism from 1930-1943 and other high positions.\[67\]

Much of the increased membership in Fascist syndicates stemmed from the deteriorating economic conditions that occurred during the long factory strikes in the early 1920s that had been spearheaded by revolutionary socialists. The occupied factories suffered financial problems, a shortage of cash to pay wages, and a slump in productivity levels.\[68\] When factory workers started to abandon factories, “red guards” were employed to keep workers at their work stations, in some cases forcing workers to “work under threat of violence.”\[69\] What also contributed to the success of the Fascist union organizations was their strong affiliation to the Fascist party a policy that was not taken up by the Italian Socialist Party and other labor confederations.\[20\]

There were a number of variants of Fascist syndicalism, ranging from the more moderate to the radical. One of the more radical fascist syndicalist was the philosopher Ugo Spirito. Considered as a “left fascist,” Spirito supported the struggle for a populist type of “corporativism”, a sort of proprietary corporation that provided the features of “collective ownership without undesirable economic centralization.”\[71\]

Besides Rossoni, Sergio Panunzio and A. O. Olivetti were considered the “most coherent” Italian syndicalists who have been classified as the “Fascist left” by historians.\[72\] They identified Fascism and syndicalist ideology as a replacement for parliamentary liberalism so as to modernize the economy and advance the interests of workers and common people as well as “modernize the economy.”\[73\] To Rossoni, corporations were viewed as the best institutions to promote “economic justice and social solidarity” among producers.\[74\]

Luigi Razzo, who headed a Fascist trade union confederations (agriculture workers), thought that economy organizations represented the most important political element for the Fascist regime because they would provide workers with a “serious role in decision-making—especially in regulating the economy.”\[75\] Through this “fascos corporativism” the true economic nation would have the means to govern itself as economics and politics grew closer towards a convergence.\[76\] This unification of politics and economics was the “core of the left-fascist conception” for most fascist syndicalists, who upheld fascism as a political idea and principle, but not as an economic system.\[77\] The Fascist state’s duty was to discipline production and economic activities, organized under economic groupings and collective interest, while no longer allowing the economy to operate on its own.

**Mussolini and his fascist regime**

Mussolini had been responsive to Rossoni in his effort to stop cuts in real wages, maintain the 8-hour week, and create a new “Charter of Labor” that would complete the Fascist labor legislation to guarantee the rights of workers, which resulted in vague gains for labor.\[78\] But Mussolini had been more forceful in similar pro-labor approaches in the past. In the 1919 Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) strike at the Franchi e Gregorini metallurgical plant in Dalmine, he supported workers’ occupation of factories. Calling them “creative strikes,” Mussolini insisted that workers “have a right to ‘parity’” with factory owners, and to engage in strikes to achieve it.\[79\] His main caveat was that the strike should not interrupt production, and that workers show both a willingness to participate as equals in the production process and the competence to discharge obligations in pursuit of the strike.\[80\]

Despite the official policy of Mussolini to uphold class collaboration, the “left corporativists” in Italy continued to see class differences as inevitable, believing class-based organizations essential if corporations were to genuinely involve workers.\[81\] Mussolini had decided to move in another direction, concluding by late 1917 that orthodox Marxism was largely irrelevant for revolutionaries in industrially backward nations.\[82\] Mussolini and Fascist intellectuals reasoned that if the bourgeoisie could not fulfill their historical obligations and advance a nation’s industry infrastructure, then the task had to be relegated to the popular masses and elite vanguard, which would require a commitment to class collaboration so as to serve the community’s productive potential through proletariat and bourgeoisie producers.\[83\] Mussolini described this collaboration between classes as a new democracy—“a sane and honest regime of productive classes.”\[84\] Mussolini’s opposition to class struggle echoed an earlier sentiment of Marxist reformers and Social Democrats, including Eduard Bernstein, who maintained that “socialists needed to stress cooperation and evolution rather than class conflict and revolution.”\[85\][86]
Some contend that “Mussolini’s far-left syndicalism” had merged with the far-right nationalism of Gabriel D’Annunzio, birthing a new revision of fascism by 1922.[87] Others assert that up to late 1921, Mussolini still preferred to rename his Fascist Revolutionary Party (PFR) the “Fascist Labor Party” in an effort to retain his reputation as being loyal to the left-wing tradition of supporting trade unionism,[88] especially if he and his fascist leaders could win the support of the General Confederation of Labor (CGL).[89] Mussolini abandoned his proposed labor coalition with the socialists at the Third Fascist Congress (Nov. 7-10, 1921) in a conciliatory manner to appease the violent squadristi militias who strove to curtail the power of revolutionary socialists and labor unions. Nonetheless, by 1934, Mussolini began to reverse many of his market-maturity positions and boasted that he had put three-fourths of the Italian economy in the “hands of the state.”[90] After he was confined in Northern Italy as a puppet government for the Nazis in 1943, Mussolini sought to return to his previous left-wing syndicalist roots and promote “socialization,” under the Italian Social Republic. In early 1944, Mussolini’s “socialization law” called for additional nationalization of industry that would pursue a policy where “workers were to participate in factory and business management.”[91]

Also see

- Fascist manifesto
- Italian Fascism

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82. A. James Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism*, University of California Press, 1979, p. 126
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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 Variat, Pierre Gilbert and Georges Valois). *La cité française* never got off the ground because of Georges Valois's animosity toward Jean Variat.

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").

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. 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. 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. 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.

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. Benito Mussolini declared in 1909 that he had converted over to revolutionary syndicalism by 1904 during a general strike.

Enrico Corradini promoted a form of national syndicalism that utilized Maurassian nationalism alongside the syndicalism of Georges Sorel. 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. 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. 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". The ANI held ties and influence among conservatives, Catholics, and the business community.

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." 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." An early leader in Italian trade unionism, Rossoni and other fascist syndicalists not only took the position of radical nationalism, but favored "class struggle." 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

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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 for 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 antiparlementaires". 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

Anarcho-syndicalism is a theory of anarchism that views revolutionary industrial unionism or syndicalism as a method for workers in capitalist society to gain control of an economy and with that control influence in broader society. Syndicalists consider their economic theories a strategy for facilitating worker self-activity and as an alternative co-operative economic system with democratic values and production centered on meeting human needs.

The basic principles of anarcho-syndicalism are solidarity, direct action (action undertaken without the intervention of third parties such as politicians, bureaucrats and arbitrators) and direct democracy, or workers’ self-management. The end goal of syndicalism is to abolish the wage system, regarding it as wage slavery. Anarcho-syndicalist theory therefore generally focuses on the labour movement.

Anarcho-syndicalists view the primary purpose of the state as being the defense of private property, and therefore of economic, social and political privilege, denying most of its citizens the ability to enjoy material independence and the social autonomy that springs from it. Reflecting the anarchist philosophy from which it draws its primary inspiration, anarcho-syndicalism is centred around the idea that power corrupts and that any hierarchy that cannot be ethically justified must either be dismantled or replaced by decentralized egalitarian control.

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Origins

Hubert Lagardelle wrote that Pierre-Joseph Proudhon laid out fundamental ideas of anarcho-syndicalism and repudiated both capitalism and the state in the process since he viewed free economic groups and struggle, not pacifism, as dominant in human affairs.

In September 1903 and March 1904, Sam Mainwaring published in Britain two issues of a short-lived newspaper called The General Strike, a publication that made detailed criticisms of the “officialism” of union bureaucracy and publicized strikes in Europe making use of syndicalist tactics.
In 1910, the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) was founded in the middle of the restoration in Barcelona in a congress of the Catalan trade union Solidaridad Obrera (Workers' Solidarity) with the objective of constituting an opposing force to the then-majority trade union, the socialist UGT and "to speed up the economic emancipation of the working class through the revolutionary expropriation of the bourgeoisie". The CNT started small, counting 26,571 members represented through several trade unions and other confederations. In 1911, coinciding with its first congress, the CNT initiated a general strike that provoked a Barcelona judge to declare the union illegal until 1914. That same year of 1911, the trade union officially received its name. From 1918 on, the CNT grew stronger and had an outstanding role in the events of the La Canadiense general strike, which paralyzed 70% of industry in Catalonia in 1919, the year the CNT reached a membership of 700,000. Around that time, panic spread among employers, giving rise to the practice of pistolerismo (employing thugs to intimidate active unionists), causing a spiral of violence that significantly affected the trade union. These pistoleros are credited with killing 21 union leaders in 48 hours. In 1922, the International Workers' Association (IWA) was founded in Berlin and the CNT joined immediately, but with the rise of Miguel Primo de Rivera's dictatorship the labor union was outlawed once again the following year. However, with the workers' movement resurgent following the Russian Revolution, what was to become the modern IWA was formed, billing itself as the "true heir" of the original International. The successful Bolshevik-led revolution of 1918 in Russia was mirrored by a wave of syndicalist successes worldwide, including the struggle of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the United States alongside the creation of mass anarchist unions across Latin America and huge syndicalist-led strikes in Germany, Portugal, Spain, Italy and France, where it was noted that "neutral (economic, but not political) syndicalism had been swept away". The final formation of this new International, then known as the International Workingmen's Association, took place at an illegal conference in Berlin in December 1922, marking an irrevocable break between the international syndicalist movement and the Bolsheviks.

- The Italian Syndicalist Union 500,000 members
- The Argentine Workers Regional Organisation (FORA): 200,000
- The General Confederation of Workers in Portugal: 150,000
- The Free Workers' Union of Germany (FAUD): 120,000
- The Committee for the Defense of Revolutionary Syndicalism in France: 100,000
- The Federation du Combattant from Paris: 32,000
- The Central Organisation of the Workers of Sweden (SAC): 32,000
- The National Labor Secretariat of the Netherlands: 22,500
- The Industrial Workers of the World in Chile: 20,000
- The Union for Syndicalist Propaganda in Denmark: 32,000

The first secretaries of the International included the famed writer and activist Rudolph Rocker, along with Augustin Souchy and Alexander Schapiro. Following the first congress, other groups affiliated from France, Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Poland and Romania. Later, a bloc of unions in the United States, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Cuba, Costa Rica and El Salvador also shared the IWA's statutes. The biggest syndicalist union in the United States was the IWW and considered joining, but eventually ruled out affiliation in 1936 by citing the IWA's policies on religious and political affiliation. Although not anarcho-syndicalist, the IWW were informed by developments in the broader revolutionary syndicalist milieu at the turn of the 20th century. At its founding congress in 1905, influential members with strong anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist sympathies like Thomas J. Hagerty, William Trautmann and Lucy Parsons contributed to the union's overall revolutionary syndicalist orientation.
Although the terms anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism are often used interchangeably, the anarcho-syndicalist label was not widely used until the early 1920s: "The term 'anarcho-syndicalist' only came into wide use in 1921–1922 when it was applied polemically as a pejorative term by communists to any syndicalists…who opposed increased control of syndicalism by the communist parties". In fact, depending on the translation the original statement of aims and principles of the IWA (drafted in 1922) refers not to anarcho-syndicalism, but to revolutionary syndicalism or revolutionary unionism.

The Biennio Rosso (English: "Red Biennium") was a two-year period between 1919 and 1920 of intense social conflict in Italy following the World War I. The Biennio Rosso took place in a context of economic crisis at the end of the war, with high unemployment and political instability. It was characterized by mass strikes, worker manifestations as well as self-management experiments through land and factories occupations. In Turin and Milan, workers councils were formed and many factory occupations took place under the leadership of anarcho-syndicalists. The agitations also extended to the agricultural areas of the Padan plain and were accompanied by peasant strikes, rural unrests and guerilla conflicts between left-wing and right-wing militias. According to libcom.org, the anarcho-syndicalist trade union Unione Sindacale Italiana (USI) "grew to 800,000 members and the influence of the Italian Anarchist Union (20,000 members plus Umanita Nova, its daily paper) grew accordingly [...] Anarchists were the first to suggest occupying workplaces.

Many of the largest members of the IWA were broken, driven underground or wiped out in the 1920s–1930s as fascists came to power in states across Europe and workers switched away from anarchism towards the seeming success of the Bolshevik model of socialism. In Argentina, the FORA had already begun a process of decline by the time it joined the IWA, having split in 1915 into pro and anti-Bolshevik factions. From 1922, the anarchist movement there lost most of its membership, exacerbated by further splits, most notably around the Severino Di Giovanni affair. It was crushed by General Urriburu's military coup in 1930. Germany's FAUD struggled throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s as the Brownshirts took control of the streets. Its last national congress in Erfurt in March 1932 saw the union attempt to form an underground bureau to combat Adolf Hitler's fascists, a measure that was never put into practice as mass arrests decimated the conspirators' ranks. The editor of the FAUD organ Der Syndikalist, Gerhard Wartenberg, was killed in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Karl Windhoff, delegate to the IWA Madrid congress of 1931, was driven out of his mind and also died in a Nazi death camp. There were also mass trials of FAUD members held in Wuppertal and Rhenanie, many of these never survived the death camps. Italian IWA union USI, which had claimed a membership of up to 600,000 people in 1922, was warning even at that time of murders and repression from Benito Mussolini's fascists. It had been driven underground by 1924 and although it was still able to lead significant strikes by miners, metalworkers and marble workers, Mussolini's ascent to power in 1925 sealed its fate. By 1927, its leading activists had been arrested or exiled.

Portugal's CGT was driven underground after an unsuccessful attempt to break the newly installed dictatorship of Gomes da Costa with a general strike in 1927 that led to nearly 100 deaths. It survived underground with 15–20,000 members until January 1934, when it called a general revolutionary strike against plans to replace trade unions with fascist corporations, which failed. It was able to continue in a much reduced state until World War II, but was effectively finished as a fighting union. Massive government repression repeated such defeats around the world as anarcho-syndicalist unions were destroyed in Peru, Brazil, Colombia, Japan, Cuba, Bulgaria, Paraguay and Bolivia. By the end of the 1930s, legal anarcho-syndicalist trade unions existed only in Chile, Bolivia, Sweden and Uruguay. However, perhaps the greatest blow was struck in the Spanish Civil War, which saw the CNT, then claiming a membership of 1.58 million, driven underground with the defeat of the Spanish Republic by Francisco Franco. The sixth IWA congress took place in 1936, shortly after the Spanish Revolution had begun, but was unable to provide serious material support for the section. The IWA held its last pre-war congress in Paris in 1938, with months to go before the German invasion of Poland.
received an application from ZZZ, a syndicalist union in the country claiming up to 130,000 workers—ZZZ members went on to form a core part of the resistance against the Nazis and participated in the Warsaw uprising. However, the International was not to meet again until after World War II had finished in 1951. During the war, only one member of the IWA was able to continue to function as a revolutionary union, the SAC in Sweden. In 1927, with the "moderate" positioning of some cenetistas (CNT members) the Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI), an association of anarchist affinity groups, was created in Valencia. The FAI would play an important role during the following years through the so-called trabajón (connection) with the CNT; that is, the presence of FAI elements in the CNT, encouraging the labor union not to move away from its anarchist principles, an influence that continues today.

Spanish Revolution

On 1 June 1936, the CNT joined the UGT in declaring a strike of “building workers, mechanics, and lift operators”. A demonstration was held, 70,000 workers strong. Members of the Falange attacked the strikers. The strikers responded by looting shops, and the police reacted by attempting to suppress the strike. By the beginning of July, the CNT was still fighting while the UGT had agreed to arbitration. In retaliation to the attacks by the Falangists, anarchists killed three bodyguards of the Falangist leader José Antonio Primo de Rivera. The government then closed the CNT's centers in Madrid and arrested David Antona and Cipriano Mera, two CNT militants.

George Orwell wrote of the nature of the new society that arose in the communities:

I had dropped more or less by chance into the only community of any size in Western Europe where political consciousness and disbelief in capitalism were more normal than their opposites. Up here in Aragón one was among tens of thousands of people, mainly though not entirely of working-class origin, all living at the same level and mingling on terms of equality. In theory it was perfect equality, and even in practice it was not far from it. There is a sense in which it would be true to say that one was experiencing a foretaste of Socialism, by which I mean that the prevailing mental atmosphere was that of Socialism. Many of the normal motives of civilised life– snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc.– had simply ceased to exist. The ordinary class-division of society had disappeared to an extent that is almost unthinkable in the money-tainted air of England; there was no one there except the peasants and ourselves, and no one owned anyone else as his master

— George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, ch. VII

Some of the most important communities in this respect were those of Alcañiz, Calanda, Alcorisa, Valderrobres, Fraga or Alcampel. Not only were the lands collectivized, but collective labours were also undertaken, like the retirement home in Fraga, the collectivization of some hospitals (such as in Barbastro or Binéfar) and the founding of schools such as the School of Anarchist Militants. These institutions would be destroyed by the Nationalist troops during the war.

The Committee held an extraordinary regional plenary session to protect the new rural organization, gathering all the union representatives from the supporting villages and backed by Buenaventura Durruti. Against the will of the mainly Catalan CNT National Committee, the Regional Defence Council of Aragon was created. Following Largo Caballero's assumption of the position of Prime Minister of the government, he invited the CNT to join in the coalition of groups making up the national government. The CNT proposed instead that a National Defense Council should be formed, led by Largo Caballero; and containing five members each from the CNT and UGT and four "liberal republicans". When this proposal was declined, the CNT decided not to join the government. However, in Catalonia the CNT joined the Central Committee of the Anti-Fascist Militias, which joined the Generalitat on 26 September. For the first time, three members of the CNT were also members of the government.
In November, Caballero once again asked the CNT to become part of the government. The leadership of the CNT requested the finance and war ministries as well as three others, but were given four posts, the ministries of health, justice, industry and commerce. Federica Montseny became Minister of Health, the first female minister in Spain. As minister of justice, Juan García Oliver abolished legal fees and destroyed all criminal files. Shortly afterwards, despite the disapproval of the anarchist ministers the capital was move from Madrid to Valencia. On 23 December 1936, after receiving in Madrid a retinue formed by Joaquín Ascaso, Miguel Chueca and three republican and independent leaders, the government of Largo Caballero, which by then had four anarchists as ministers (García Oliver, Juan López, Federica Montseny and Joan Peiró), approved the formation of the National Defense Committee. It was a revolutionary body that represented anarchists as much as socialists and republicans. Halfway through February 1937, a congress took place in Caspe with the purpose of creating the Regional Federation of Collectives of Aragon. 456 delegates, representing more than 141,000 collective members, attended the congress. The congress was also attended by delegates of the National Committee of the CNT.

At a plenary session of the CNT in March 1937, the national committee asked for a motion of censure to suppress the Aragonese Regional Council. The Aragonese regional committee threatened to resign, which thwarted the censure effort. Though there had always been disagreements, that spring also saw a great escalation in confrontations between the CNT-FAI and the Communists. In Madrid, Melchor Rodríguez, who was then a member of the CNT and director of prisons in Madrid, published accusations that the Communist José Cazorla, who was then overseeing public order, was maintaining secret prisons to hold anarchists, socialists and other republicans; and either executing, or torturing them as “traitors”. Soon after, on this pretext Largo Caballero dissolved the Communist-controlled Junta de Defensa Cazorla reacted by closing the offices of Solidaridad Obrera.

The next day, CNT’s regional committee declared a general strike. The CNT controlled the majority of the city, including the heavy artillery on the hill of Montjuïc overlooking the city. CNT militias disarmed more than 200 members of the security forces at their barricades, allowing only CNT vehicles to pass through. After unsuccessful appeals from the CNT leadership to end the fighting, the government began transferring Assault Guard from the front to Barcelona, and even destroyers from Valencia. On 5 May, the Friends of Durruti issued a pamphlet calling for “disarming of the paramilitary police… dissolution of the political parties…” and declared “Long live the social revolution! – Down with the counter-revolution!”, though the pamphlet was quickly denounced by the leadership of the CNT. The next day, the government agreed to a proposal by the leadership of the CNT-FAI that called for the removal of the Assault Guards and no reprisals against libertarians that had participated in the conflict in exchange for the dismantling of barricades and end of the general strike. However, neither the PSUC or the Assault Guards gave up their positions and according to historian Antony Beevor “carried out violent reprisals against libertarians” By 8 May, the fighting was over.

These events, the fall of Largo Caballero’s government and the new prime ministership of Juan Negrín soon led to the collapse of much that the CNT had achieved immediately following the rising the previous July. At the beginning of July, the Aragonese organizations of the Popular Front publicly declared their support for the alternative council in Aragon, led by their president, Joaquín Ascaso. Four weeks later, the 11th Division under Enrique Líster entered the region. On 11 August 1937, the Republican government, now situated in Valencia, dismissed the Regional Council for the Defense of Aragon. Lister’s division was prepared for an offensive on the Aragonese front, but they were also sent to subdue the collectives run by the CNT-UGT and in dismantling the collective structures created the previous twelve months. The offices of the CNT were destroyed and all the equipment belonging to its collectives was redistributed to landowners. The CNT leadership not only refused to allow the anarchist columns on the Aragon front to leave the front to defend the collectives, but they failed to condemn the government’s actions against the collectives, causing much conflict between it and the rank and file membership of the union.

In April 1938, Juan Negrín was asked to form a government and included Segundo Blanco, a member of the CNT, as minister of education; and by this point, the only CNT member left in the cabinet. At this point, many in the CNT leadership were critical of participation in the government, seeing it as dominated by the Communists. Prominent CNT leaders went so far as to refer to Blanco...
as "sop of the libertarian movement"[38] and "just one more Negrínist"[39] On the other side, Blanco was responsible for installing other CNT members into the ministry of education and stopping the spread of "Communist propaganda" by the minis"[40]. In March 1939, with the war nearly over, CNT leaders participated in the National Defense Council's coup overthrowing the government of the Socialist Juan Negrín.[41] Those involved included the CNT's Eduardo Val and José Manuel González Marín serving on the council, while Cipriano Mera's 70th Division provided military support, and Melech Rodríguez became mayor of Madrid.[42] The Council attempted to negotiate a peace with Franco, though he granted virtually none of their demands.

Post-World War II era

After World War II, an appeal in the Fraye Arbeter Shtime detailing the plight of German anarchists and called for Americans to support them.[43] By February 1946, the sending of aid parcels to anarchists in Germany was a large-scale operation. In 1947, Rudolf Rocker published Zur Betrachtung der Lage in Deutschland (Regarding the Portrayal of the Situation in Germany) about the impossibility of another anarchist movement in Germany. It became the first post-World War II anarchist writing to be distributed in Germany. Rocker thought young Germans were all either totally cynical or inclined to fascism and awaited a new generation to grow up before anarchism could bloom once again in the country. Nevertheless, the Federation of Libertarian Socialists (FFS) was founded in 1947 by former FAUD members. Rocker wrote for its organ, Die Freie Gesellschaft, which survived until 1953.[44] In 1949, Rocker published another well-known work. On 10 September 1958, Rocker died in the Mohagen Colony. The Syndicalist Workers' Federation was a syndicalist group active in post-war Britain[45] and one of the Solidarity Federation's earliest predecessors. It was formed in 1950 by members of the dissolved Anarchist Federation of Britain.[46] Unlike the AFB, which was influenced by anarcho-syndicalist ideas but ultimately not syndicalist itself, the SWF decided to pursue a more definitely syndicalist, worker-centred strategy from the outset.[45] The Confédération nationale du travail (CNT, or National Confederation of Labour) was founded in 1946 by Spanish anarcho-syndicalists in exile with former members of the CGT-SR. The CNT later split into the CNT-Vignoles and the CNT-AIT, which is the French section of the IWA.

At the seventh congress in Toulouse in 1951, a much smaller IWA was relaunched again without the CNT, which would not be strong enough to reclaim membership until 1958 as an exiled and underground organization. Delegates attended, though mostly representing very small groups, from Cuba, Argentina, Spain, Sweden, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Britain, Bulgaria and Portugal. A message of support was received from Uruguay, but the situation remained difficult for the International as it struggled to deal with the rise of state-sanctioned economic trade unionism in the West, heavy secret service intervention as Cold War anti-communism reached its height and the banning of all strikes and free trade unions in the Soviet Union bloc of countries.[12] At the tenth congress in 1958, the SAC's response to these pressures led it into a clash with the rest of the international. It withdrew from the IWA following its failure to amend the body's statutes to allow it to stand in municipal elections[46] and amid concerns over its integration with the state over distribution of unemployment benefits.[47] For most of the next two decades, the international struggled to prebuild itself. In 1976 at the 15th congress, the IWA had only five member groups, two of which (the Spanish and Bulgarian members) were still operating in exile (though following Franco's death in 1975, the CNT was already approaching a membership of 200,000)[22]

The Direct Action Movement was formed in 1979, when the one remaining SWF branch, along with other smaller anarchist groups, decided to form a new organisation of anarcho-syndicalists in Britain[48] The DAM was highly involved in the Miners' Strike as well as a series of industrial disputes later in the 1980s, including the Ardbride dispute in Ardrossan, Scotland, involving a supplier to Laura Ashley, for which the DAM received international support. From 1988 in Scotland, then England and Wales, the DAM was active in opposing the Poll Tax.[49] In March 1994, DAM changed to its current name, the Solidarity Federation, having previously been the Direct Action Movement since 1979 and before that the Syndicalist Workers' Federation since 1950. Presently the Solidarity Federation publishes the quarterly magazine Direct Action (presently on hiatus) and the newspaper Catalyst.
In 1979, a split over representative unionism, professional unionism and state-funded schemes saw the CNT divided into two sections, the CNT as it is today and the Confederacion General del Trabajo. After Franco’s death in November 1975 and the beginning of Spain’s transition to democracy the CNT was the only social movement to refuse to sign the 1977 Moncloa Pact, an agreement amongst politicians, political parties and trade unions to plan how to operate the economy during the transition. In 1979, the CNT held its first congress since 1936 as well as several mass meetings, the most remarkable one in Montjuic. Views put forward in this congress would set the pattern for the CNT’s line of action for the following decades: no participation in union elections, no acceptance of state subsidies, no acknowledgment of works councils and support of union sections.

In this first congress, held in Madrid,[52] a minority sector in favor of union elections split from the CNT, initially calling themselves CNT Valencia Congress (referring to the alternative congress held in this city) and later Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) after an April 1989 court decision determined that they could not use the CNT initials.[53] In 1990, a group of CGT members left this union because they rejected the CGT’s policy of accepting government subsidies, founding Solidaridad Obrera. One year before, the 1978 Scala Case affected the CNT. An explosion killed three people in a Barcelona night club.[54] The authorities alleged that striking workers “blew themselves up” and arrested surviving strikers, implicating them in the crime.[55] CNT members declared that the prosecution sought to criminalize their organization.[56]

**Contemporary times**

After its legalization, the CNT began efforts to recover the expropriations of 1939. The basis for such recovery would be established by Law 4/1986, which required the return of the seized properties and the unions’ right to use or yield the real estate. Since then, the CNT has been claiming the return of these properties from the State. In 1996, the Economic and Social Council facilities in Madrid were squatted by 105 CNT militants.[57] This body is in charge of the repatriation of the accumulated union wealth. In 2004, an agreement was reached between the CNT and the District Attorney’s Office, through which all charges were dropped against the hundred prosecuted for this occupation.

On 3 September 2009, six members of the Serbian IWA section (ASI-MUR), including then-IWA General Secretary Ratibor Trivunac, were arrested on suspicion of international terrorism, a charge that was heavily disputed by the international and other anarchist groups. Shortly after their arrest, an open letter was circulated by Serbian academics criticizing the charges and the attitude of Serbian police. The six were formally indicted on 7 December and after a lengthy trial procedure Trivunac, along with other five anarchists, were freed on 17 February 2010. On 10 December 2009, the FAU local in Berlin was effectively banned as a union following a public industrial dispute at the city’s Babylon cinema. At the XXIV annual congress of the IWA which was held in Brazil in December 2009, the first time the congress had been held outside Europe, motions of support were passed for the “Belgrade Six” and FAU while members of the Solidarity Federation temporarily took over duties as Secretariat. The International’s Norwegian section subsequently took on the Secretariat role in 2010. As part of the anti-austerity movement in Europe, various IWA sections have been highly active in the 2008–2012 period, with the CNT taking a leading role in agitating for the general strikes that have occurred in Spain, the USI in Milan taking on anti-austerity campaigns in the health service and the ZSP organizing tenants against abuses in rented accommodation.

The largest organised anarchist movement today is in Spain in the form of the Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) and the CNT. CGT membership was estimated at around 100,000 for 2003.[61] The regions with the largest CNT membership are the Centre (Madrid and surrounding area), the North (Basque country), Andalucia, Catalonia and the Balearic Islands.[62] The CNT opposes the model of union elections and workplace committees and is critical of labor reforms and the UGT and the CCOO, standing instead on a platform of reivindicación, that is, “return of what is due”, or social revolution.[65]

The following organizations are either member groups or friends of the IWA.[66] Friends of the IWA are regarded as semi-official fellow travelers politically but have not formally joined and do not have voting rights at Congress. They are often invited to send observers to Congress.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<th>Acronym</th>
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**Theory and politics**

Anarcho-syndicalists believe that direct action—action carried out by workers as opposed to indirect action, such as electing a representative to a government position—would allow workers to liberate themselves.\(^{[67]}\)

Anarcho-syndicalists believe that workers' organisations that oppose the wage system will eventually form the basis of a new society and should be self-managing. They should not have bosses or "business agents"; rather, the workers alone should decide on that which affects them.\(^{[68]}\)

Rudolf Rocker is one of the most influential figures in the anarcho-syndicalist movement.

Noam Chomsky, who was influenced by Rocker, wrote the introduction to a modern edition of *Anarcho-syndicalism: Theory and Practice*. A member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Chomsky is a self-described anarcho-syndicalist, a position that he sees as the appropriate application of classical liberal political theory to contemporary industrial society:
Now a federated, decentralised system of free associations, incorporating economic as well as other social institutions, would be what I refer to as anarcho-syndicalism; and it seems to me that this is the appropriate form of social organisation for an advanced technological society in which human beings do not have to be forced into the position of tools, of cogs in the machine. There is no longer any social necessity for human beings to be treated as mechanical elements in the productive process; that can be overcome and we must overcome it to be a society of freedom and free association, in which the creative urge that I consider intrinsic to human nature will in fact be able to realize itself in whatever way it will.[69]

**Criticisms and responses**

Anarcho-syndicalism has been criticised as anachronistic by some contemporary anarchists.[70] In 1992, Murray Bookchin spoke against its reliance on an outdated view of work:

As "practical" and "realistic" as anarcho-syndicalism may seem, it represents in my view an archaic ideology rooted in a narrowly economistic notion of bourgeois interest, indeed of a sectorial interest as such. It relies on the persistence of social forces like the factory system and the traditional class consciousness of the industrial proletariat that are waning radically in the Euro-American world in an era of indefinable social relations and ever-broadening social concerns. Broader movements and issues are now on the horizon of modern society that, while they must necessarily involve workers, require a perspective that is larger than the factory, trade union, and a proletarian orientation.[71]

Bookchin has said that it prioritizes the interests of the working class, instead of communal freedom for society as a whole; and that this view ultimately prevents a true revolution. He argues that in instances like the Spanish Revolution, it was in spite of the syndicalist-minded CNT leadership that the revolution occurred.[74]

Direct action, being one of the main staples of anarcho-syndicalism, would extend into the political sphere according to its supporters. To them, the labour council is the federation of all workplace branches of all industries in a geographical area "territorial basis of organisation linkage brought all the workers from one area together and fomented working-class solidarity over and before corporate solidarity".[72] Rudolf Rocker argued:

The organisation of Anarcho-Syndicalism is based upon the principles of Federalism, on free combination from below upwards, putting the right of self-determination of every member above everything else and recognising only the organic agreement of all on the basis of like interests and common convictions.[73]

Anarcho-syndicalism therefore is not apolitical but instead sees political and economic activity as the same. Unlike the propositions of some of its critics, anarcho-syndicalism is different from reformist union activity in that it aims to obliterate capitalism as "[anarcho-syndicalism] has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions.
But, without letting themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminently the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital.\[74]\n
While collectivist and communist anarchists criticise syndicalism as having the potential to exclude the voices of citizens and consumers outside of the union, anarcho-syndicalists argue that labour councils will work outside of the workplace and within the community to encourage community and consumer participation in economic and political activity (even workers and consumers outside of the union or nation) and will work to form and maintain the institutions necessary in any society such as schools, libraries, homes and so on. Bookchin argues:

> At the same time that syndicalism exerts this unrelenting pressure on capitalism, it tries to build the new social order within the old. The unions and the 'labour councils' are not merely means of struggle and instruments of social revolution; they are also the very structure around which to build a free society. The workers are to be educated [by their own activity within the union] in the job of destroying the old propertied order and in the task of reconstructing a stateless, libertarian society. The two go together.\[75]\n
### In popular culture

- One of the main characters in Eugene O'Neill’s play *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), Larry Slade is an ex anarcho-syndicalist.
- The 1975 comedy film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* contains a scene wherein King Arthur encounters uncooperative peasants who are part of an autonomous, anarcho-syndicalist commune.
- The 1978 film *Convoy* features truckers leading an anarcho-syndicalist revolution, influenced by Sam Peckinpah’s personal interest in unionism.
- The 28 April 1987 episode of the U.S. series *Max Headroom* entitled “War” featured a terrorist group known as the “White Brigade” dedicated to “neo-radicalistic anarcho-syndicalism”.
- A short song for BBC Radio 6 Music by Jake Yapp featured “Elmo the anarcho-syndicalist. The song lampooned the book *Primetime Propaganda* whose premise is that children’s programs have “secret left-wing messages.”\[76]\n- In the popular alternate history modification Kaiserreich for the games *Darkest Hour: A Hearts of Iron Game* and *Hearts of Iron IV*, when the Soviet Union loses the Russian Civil War anarcho-syndicalism replaces Marxism–Leninism as the main ideology of the far-left after workers’ revolutions in France and the United Kingdom.

### Film

- *Living Utopia* (*Vivir la utopía*, documentary-film from 1997 about anarcho-syndicalism and anarchism in Spain)
- *Noam Chomsky: The Relevance of Anarcho-syndicalism* (interviewed by Peter Jay 1976) (video and text)

### See also

- Anarcho-syndicalists (category)
- General strike
- Kronstadt Rebellion
- Libertarian socialism
- List of federations of trade unions
- Participatory Economics
Wildcat strike action
Workers' self-management

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40. Alexander 1999, p. 361
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42. Beevor 2006, p. 490
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46. SAC had begun contesting municipal elections under the candidatures of libertarian Municipal People
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50. Roca Martínez 2006, p. 108
51. Roca Martínez 2006, p. 109
52. Aguilar Fernández 2002, p. 110
54. Alexander 1999, p. 1094
55. Meltzer 1996, p. 265
Further reading

- Damier, Vadim, Anarcho-Syndicalism in the 20th Century, Black Cat Press, Edmonton, 2009
- Rocker, Rudolf, Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism
- Rocker, Rudolf, Anarchosyndicalism: Theory and Practice
- Rocker, Rudolf (1938), Anarcho-Syndicalism (book) Online here: [2]
External links

- A comprehensive list of Anarcho-syndicalist organisations
- What is revolutionary syndicalism? An ongoing historical series on anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism from a communist perspective
- Anarcho-Syndicalism 101
- Anarcho-Syndicalist Review
- Syndicalism: Myth and Reality
- Revolutionary Unionism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow by Dan Jakopovich
- Anarcho-Syndicalism texts from the Kate Sharpley Library


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A company or "yellow" union is a worker organization which is dominated or influenced by an employer, and is therefore not an independent trade union. Company unions are contrary to international labour law (see ILO Convention 98, article 2). They were outlawed in the United States by the 1935 National Labor Relations Act §8(a)(2), due to their use as agents for interference with independent unions. Company unions persist in many countries, particularly with authoritarian governments.

Some labor organizations are accused by rival unions of behaving like "company unions" if they are seen as having too close and cordial a relationship with the employer, even though they may be recognized in their respective jurisdictions as bona fide trade unions.[1]
Sitdown strike
Work-to-rule

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influence. Under the ILO Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) article 2 effectively prohibits any form of company union. It reads as follows.

1. Workers’ and employers’ organisations shall enjoy adequate protection against any acts of interference by each other or each other’s agents or members in their establishment, functioning or administration.

2. In particular, acts which are designed to promote the establishment of workers’ organisations under the domination of employers or employers’ organisations, or to support workers’ organisations by financial or other means, with the object of placing such organisations under the control of employers or employers’ organisations, shall be deemed to constitute acts of interference within the meaning of this Article.

“National laws

France

The first yellow union in France, the Fédération nationale des Jaunes de France ("National Federation of the Yellows of France") was created by Pierre Biétry in 1902. The yellow color was deliberately chosen in opposition to the red color associated with socialism. Yellow unions, in opposition to red unions such as the Confédération Générale du Travail, rejected class struggle and favored the collaboration of capital and labor, and were opposed to strikes. According to Zeev Sternhell, the yellow union of Biétry had a membership of about a third of that of the Confédération Générale du Travail, and was funded by corporate interests. Moreover, also according to Sternell, there were close relationships between Pierre Biétry and Maurice Barrès and the Action Française. This makes the yellow union of Biétry seem a precursor of fascist corporatism. During the Nazi occupation of France, unions were banned and replaced by corporations organized along the fascist model by the Vichy Regime. The labor secretary of Philippe Pétain's administration from 1940 to 1942 was René Belin. After the war, René Belin was involved in 1947 with the creation of the Confédération du Travail indépendant (CTI), renamed Confédération Générale des Syndicats Indépendants (CGSI) in 1949 as the original acronym was already used by Confédération des Travailleurs intellectuels. The movement was joined by former members of the Confédération des syndicats professionnels française union created by François de La Rocque in 1936. The CGSI declared that it was formed by "des hommes d’origine et de formation différentes [qui] se sont trouvés d’accord pour dénoncer la malfaisance de la CGT communisée" (men of different origins who agreed to denounce the malfeasance of the communist CGT). CGSI developed mostly in the automobile industry for instance in the Simca factory of Poissy.

In 1959, the CGSI became the Confédération Française du Travail (CFT), led by Jacques Simakis. It was declared a representative union on January 7, 1959, but the decision was overturned by the State Council on April 11, 1962 following a lawsuit by the Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens (CFTC) based on the funding of CFT by companies. In 1968, it organized...
demonstrations for the “freedom to work” to oppose the strikes organized by the CGT. In September 1975, Simakis resigned and denounced the links of CFT with the Service d’Action Civique. On June 4, 1977 a commando formed by members of the CFT opened fire on strikers at the Verreries mécaniques champenoises in Reims (then directed by Maurice Papon) in a drive-by shooting, killing Pierre Maitre, a member of the CGT. Two other members of the CGT were injured. Following this incident, the CFT changed its name into Confédération des Syndicats Libres (CSL). In the continuity of the company union of Biétry, the CSL is in favor of the association of capital and labor, is opposed to Marxism and collectivism, and denounces the French Communist Party as a civil war machine. The number of adherents of CSL was never published, but in professional elections, it obtained from 2% to 4% of the votes.[7] In October 2002, the CSL disappeared as a national union as a result of lack of funds. It called its supporters to join the Force Ouvrière union in the professional elections.[8][9] In the automobile industry, the CSL remains as the Syndicat Indépendant de l’Automobile (Independent Automobile Workers’ Union).

United States

Company unions were common in the United States during the early twentieth century, but were outlawed under the 1935 National Labor Relations Act §8(a)(2) so that trade unions could remain independent of management. All labor organizations would have to be freely elected by the workforce, without interference.

In 1914, 16 miners and family members (and one national guardsman) were killed when the Colorado National Guard attacked a tent colony of striking coal miners in Ludlow, Colorado. This event, known as the Ludlow massacre, was a major public relations debacle for mine owners, and one of them—John D. Rockefeller, Jr.—hired labor-relations expert and former Canadian Minister of Labour William Lyon Mackenzie King to suggest ways to improve the tarnished image of his company, Colorado Fuel and Iron. One of the elements of the Rockefeller Plan was to form a union, known as the Employee Representation Plan (ERP), based inside the company itself. The ERP allowed workers to elect representatives, who would then meet with company officials to discuss grievances.[10]

The ERP was accepted by the miners, and its success in providing an alternative to negotiations with the United Mine Workers led other business owners around the country (and even overseas) to consider replicating it.[11] In 1933 the miners voted to be represented by the UMW, ending the ERP at Colorado Fuel and Iron. Company unions, however, continued to operate at other mines in Pueblo, Colorado and Wyoming[12] and the ERP model was being used by numerous other companies[13] (The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was organized in part to combat the company union at the Pullman Company).[14]

In 1935, the National Labor Relations Act (also known as the Wagner Act) was passed, dramatically changing labor law in the United States. Section 8(a)(2) of the NLRA makes it illegal for an employer “to dominate or interfere with the formation or administration of any labor organization or contribute financial or other support to it.”[15] Company unions were considered illegal under this code, despite the efforts of some businesses to carry on under the guise of an “Employee Representation Organization” (ERO).[12]

In the mid-20th century, managers of high-tech industry like Robert Noyce (who co-founded Fairchild Semiconductor in 1957 and Intel in 1968) worked to rid their organizations of union interference. "Remaining non-union is an essential for survival for most of our companies," Noyce once said. "If we had the work rules that unionized companies have, we'd all go out of business."[15]

One way of forestalling unions while obeying the Wagner Act was the introduction of "employee involvement (EI) programs" and other in-house job-cooperation groups. One company included them in their "Intel values," cited by employees as reasons why they didn't need a union. With workers integrated (at least on a project level) into the decision-making structure, the independent union is seen by some as an anachronism. Pat Hill-Hubbard, senior vice-president of the American Electronics Association, said in 1994: "Unions as they have existed in the past are no longer relevant. Labor law of 40 years ago is not appropriate to 20th century economics." Author David Bacon calls EI programs "the modern company union."[17]

In 1995, pursuant to a report from the Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations, Republicans in the U.S. Congress introduced and voted for the Teamwork for Employees and Managers Act of 1995 (known as the "TEAM Act").[18] The bill would have weakened federal regulations against employer establishment and control of employee involvement programs.[19] Although the bill indicated that EI plans should not be used specifically to discredit or prevent union organization, trade unions in the United States vehemently opposed the bill. Jim Wood, an AFL-CIO leader in Los Angeles, said the "Team Act actually would take us backward to the days of company unions."[20] President Bill Clinton vetoed the bill on 30 July 1996.
China

Trade unions in the People's Republic of China are often identified as government unions, by virtue of their frequent close relationship with national planning bodies. Although market reforms are changing the relationship between workers and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (China's sole national trade federation), critics such as U.S. presidential candidate and activist Ralph Nader maintain they are "government-controlled with the Chinese communist party turning them into what would be called 'company unions' in the U.S."[21]

Russia

In many Post-Soviet states, including the Russian Federation, the economic collapse of the early 1990s brought a sharp decline in labor activity. As a result, official union structures often function as de facto company unions.[22]

Japan

Main article: Labor unions in Japan

Company unions are a mainstay of labor organization in Japan, viewed with much less animosity than in Europe or the United States. Unaffiliated with RENGO (the largest Japanese trade union federation), company unions appeal to both the lack of class consciousness in Japanese society and the drive for social status, which is often characterized by loyalty to one's employer.[23]

Hong Kong

Main article: Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions

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The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU), as both a political party and a federations of different trade unions in Hong Kong, has been adapting a political stand which are mostly inclined to the Hong Kong and Beijing Government. Therefore, HKFTU is sometimes classified as a company union, and a Pro-Beijing political party.

Mexico

In the 1930s, unions in Mexico organized the Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores de México, CTM). The state of Nuevo Leon, however, coordinated its workers into sindicatos blancos ("white unions"), company unions controlled by corporations in the industrialized region[24]

Guatemala

In 1997, the government of Guatemala received a loan for 13 million USD from the World Bank to privatize its seaport, electrical grid, and telephone and postal services. Canada Post International Limited (CPIL), a subsidiary of Canada Post, and its partner International Postal Services (IPS), was contracted to manage the privatization process. In anticipation of union resistance, CPIL-IPS agents reportedly used company unions, along with bribery and death threats, to ensure a smooth transition.[25]

Company unions are also prevalent among the maquiladoras in Guatemala.[26]

Theory

Supporters of independent trade unions contend that company unions face a conflict of interest, as they are less likely to propose large-scale pro-worker changes to employment contracts—such as overtime rules and salary schedules—than independent unions.[27] At least one economist advances the idea that in the first part of the 20th century, many companies were hesitant to adopt the company union model for fear that it might lead to support for an independent trade union.[28] A 2002 World Bank publication cites...
research from Malaysia and India which produced conflicting results as to the wage differential provided by trade unions compared to company unions. Malaysia saw improved wages through independent unions, while India did not. The authors indicate the latter "may reflect the specific circumstances that prevailed in Bombay at the time of the study." Marcel van der Linden states that company unions are "heteronomous trade unions that never or rarely organize strikes" and are mainly established to "keep 'industrial peace' and prevent autonomous trade unions."

Proponents of company unions claim they are more efficient in responding to worker grievances than independent trade unions. Proponents also note that independent trade unions do not necessarily have the company's best interests at heart; company unions are designed to resolve disputes within the framework of maximum organizational (not just company) profitability. For example, economist Leo Wolman wrote in 1924: "[T]he distinction ... between trade unions and other workmen's associations is frequently a vague and changing one. What is today a company union may tomorrow have all of the characteristics of a trade union."

See also

- US labor law
- UK labour law
- Employers Group which, as the Merchants and Manufacturers Association, promoted company unions in California

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References


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- Labor code
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- Eight-hour day
### Worker center

#### Syndicalism

**Precursors**
- Guild socialism
- Utopian socialism
- Revolutions of 1848
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- Anarcho-syndicalism
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**Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)**

**International Workers' Association (IWA-AIT) and affiliates:**
- Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT-AIT, Spain)
- Brazilian Workers Confederation (COB)
- Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA)
- Free Workers' Union (FAU, Germany)
- Confederation of Revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalists (CRAS, Russia)
- Norsk Syndikalistisk Forbund (NSF-IAA, Norway)
- Solidarity Federation (SF-IWA, Britain)

**Leaders**
- Daniel De Leon
- Victor Griffuelhes
- Hubert Lagardelle
- Juan García Oliver
- Rudolf Rocker
- Georges Sorel
- Fernand Pelloutier

**Related subjects**
- Criticism of capitalism
- Post-capitalism
- Libertarian socialism
- Criticism of wage labor
- Labor power