SYNDICALISM

Syndicalism is a social and political program advocating an economic system based on equal ownership of production and democratic rule by federated trade unions. Peculiar to the industrial proletariat, the syndicalist agenda inspired by Proudhon, Bakunin and Sorel acquired political weight with the creation in 1895 of the French CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail), most influential in the years leading up to the First World War. Unlike state socialism, liable to degenerate into a disguised economic aristocracy of its bureaucratic elite, syndicalism emphasizes the horizontal ties at work in co-operative confederations and mutual aid. Replicating the bottom-up organization of workplace democracy at the level of society requires a decentralization of political decision-making and the least amount of central planning compatible with the existence of nation-states. Syndicalist ideals typically breed a reformist activity (congruent with political action in the parliamentary system) exemplified by workers’ unions around the world and occasionally the radical, anti-party version known as anarcho-syndicalism or (after 1922) revolutionary syndicalism. The most powerful such organizations have been the CGT, the Spanish FAI (Federacion Anarquista Ibérica), the Italian USI (Unione Sindacale Italiana), the Swedish SAC (Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation) and, since the 1920s, the US-based IWW (Industrial Workers of the World).

Lucien van der Walt, Michael Schmidt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (AK Press, 2009).

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