

Concerning *Black Flame*

Introductory digression on syndicalism, Jean Maitron, Malatesta and *Black Flame* ¹

I have been confronted over the years with a number of topics on which I have been thinking: the relationship between anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism, political organization and mass organization, etc.. This subject interests me even more since I myself have been a CGT activist since 1972: I have assumed mandates for a long time, at the level of my workplace, my union, and at the national level². It is true that the CGT in the early 70s had not much to do with what it was in the early 20s. In 1972 communism weighed heavily on the confederation, but the structures of the organization had remained the same and the historical memory of the heroic period was still very much alive.

Well afterwards, looking back on the experience I had lived, I realized that it gave me a considerable advantage to understand the events and choices that our veterans of the early 20th century had made — an understanding probably inaccessible to an academic.

Moreover, in the 1970s there still were many old militants who had known the 20s and 30s, and who had lived the debates that agitated the CGT at that time, but also the CNT in Spain or the Russian anarchist movement. Some of these old comrades were still very active and were with us in daily action. They trained us, they told us countless things that will never appear in the history textbooks and that we foolishly failed to note.

I only realized this recently, while reading again some passages of Jean Maitron's book on the anarchist movement³. There is, for example, a passage where he is indignant at the conception that the anarchists and the syndicalists had of democracy in the CGT. “The anarchists and their revolutionary syndicalist comrades therefore have an aristocratic conception of democracy,” he says, because

1 This text consists of extracts from a larger document in French, *Commentaires sur “Black Flame”*, unpublished.

2 At the print workers Federation.

3 Jean Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*. Tel Gallimard. Jean Maitron (1910-1987) is a French historian specializing in the labour movement and the anarchist movement. He is not mentioned in *Black Flame*.

they favour the principle of “one union, one voice” instead of proportional representation at congresses.

In my opinion, this shows a profound misunderstanding of what anarchism and syndicalism were at that time. Maitron does not understand that this conception of law is fundamentally different from that inspired by the partisans of parliamentary democracy.

For the revolutionaries of the CGT, the basic organization was the union, where the workers were organized. A non-union worker was a “human zero”, in the words of Émile Pouget. Some would say that it was an “elitist” vision. I do not think that it is from this viewpoint that Pouget held these remarks. This is probably a ruthless view of things, but it is the expression of an ethics radically different from that of the bourgeoisie, founded on the individual. For the syndicalists, the non-unionized individual is alone in front of the boss: he *really is* a “human zero”: totally powerless. But this non-union “human zero” will still benefit from the advantages resulting from a strike led by others.

Then Maitron reproaches anarchists and syndicalists for their conception of “active minorities”, also described as “elitist”. The words of Alexandre Luquet, member of the Confederal Bureau before 1914, held at the Bourges congress of the CGT in 1904, particularly shock Maitron: “The truth is that it is always minorities who are most active,” said Luquet. But what he says is perfectly true in *all unions*. If there were no “active minority”, there would simply be no unions! And this also applies to so-called “reformist” unions. It is always a minority of activists who is active in the labour movement, be it reformist or revolutionary, and it is perfectly true that “it is the minority of workers who are unionised”. And it is an extremely trivial remark to say that “the big battalions (...) get started with difficulty and it is necessary to lead them”. So what? Maitron simply does not understand anything about the labour movement.

I think of another case of total incomprehension of the workers' ethics, but coming from a well known anarchist militant: Malatesta. During his debate with Pierre Monatte at the anarchist congress in Amsterdam, Malatesta was indignant that workers could use violence against non-strikers during a strike, while they were exploited like the others. In addition to the extreme naivety of his remarks, it also reveals the ignorance of an essential principle of proletarian morality: *one does not break a strike*. For Malatesta, the strike-breaker may be “exploited like the others”, but he is no less a traitor to his class. This class solidarity – for it is actually a question of class, not of “mankind as a whole” – this class solidarity is the consciousness that workers have (or should have) to belong to a community.

Malatesta would certainly have been extremely shocked to observe the conduct of the British miners' strike, which lasted almost a year from 1984 to 1985, or to witness the picketing at Murdoch's Wapping plant in 1986.

Both strike movements experienced scenes of extreme violence against the scabs and it would not have been prudent to tell the strikers that the scabs were exploited like the others (even if some way they were, for the strikers were fighting

against the deterioration of wages and working conditions that Murdoch wanted to impose on them, which the scabs accepted while going to work. The scabs were like Emile Pouget's "human zeros".)

I should point out that this proletarian ethics is often very acute in many quite reformist organizations which are, if necessary, capable of conducting very long strikes like that of the British miners which lasted almost one year (1984-1985), and that of the French daily *Le Parisien Libéré*, which lasted 28 months (1975-1977).

Having closely followed the strike of the British miners, I could see the extreme animosity that existed towards the scabs. I also noted that there was no "hierarchy" between those who had declared themselves strikebreakers from the beginning, and those who, exhausted by months of strike, returned to work after nine or ten months. All were scabs to an equal degree. On this point, the managers of the mines did not show themselves sentimental: when, after the defeat of the miners, they started to massively fire them, strikers and scabs found themselves in the same carts, much to the surprise of the latter, in front of the ingratitude of the bosses.

During the *Parisien libéré* strike, each newspaper worker paid part of his salary to support the strikers. Those who eventually evaded this duty were definitively blacklisted by their comrades.

All this would probably have greatly shocked Malatesta.

Concerning *Black Flame*

I shall make five remarks, which I summarize here, but which I shall develop more completely elsewhere.

1st Comment

Michael Schmidt and Lucien van der Walt, the authors of *Black Flame*, write that syndicalism was born in the 1860s at the time of the First International. I understand what drives them to such a statement: There is indeed a real proximity between syndicalism and the practise of the Jura Federation as described by Bakunin. But it is historically inaccurate to say that syndicalism was born in 1860, or 1870. The analogies between two facts do not make an identity. The expression "syndicalism" (syndicalisme révolutionnaire in French) applies to a specific historical phenomenon, and tracing its birth back to an earlier period under the pretext of similarities creates unnecessary confusion, which does not contribute strictly to the debate.

The analogies that may exist between the practices of the Jura Federation and

revolutionary syndicalism are indisputable, but the differences as well. First, there is a difference in scale. The Jura Federation in the best period had hardly more than 1200 members, and towards the end it had only 400, while the CGT had several hundreds of thousands of members. Then the Jura Federation was mainly established in the watch industry while the CGT included workers in many sectors of activity.

We must therefore avoid mythifying the Jura Federation, even if its struggle and the values it defended were universal.

Schmidt and van der Walt are very anxious to show that syndicalism has not “emerged” in France in the 1890s but that “it was Bakunin, not Sorel forty years later, who was the key theorist of syndicalism, and that a whole first wave of syndicalism took place in the 1870s and 1880s” (p. 16). This statement seems confusing to me because it mixes two levels of reflection: the emergence of a class movement and the theorization that is made afterwards.

A class movement such as revolutionary syndicalism appears when the conditions that make it possible and necessary come together. The theorization that is made after the fact is another thing. We are not going to waste our time debating whether Bakunin or Sorel are the “theoreticians” of revolutionary syndicalism. Sorel was a shooting star who got interested in syndicalism for a very short time and who quickly became interested in something else; besides, he was an observer who was totally outside the movement he was describing. Which was not the case of Bakunin. Bakunin has described very clearly not only the functioning but also the objectives of a movement that foreshadows what revolutionary syndicalism will be a generation later.

Creating an artificial and somehow “organic” link between syndicalism as it appeared in France in the 90s, calling it a “second wave” whose “first wave” would have appeared within the IWA in the 70s is an ideological posture, it is not a historical approach because too many documents from the 1890-1910 period emanating from the anarchist movement itself contradict the idea that “syndicalism, in essence, is an anarchist strategy”. The “convergence” between anarchism and trade unionism has been a gradual one, it has been the work of only a part of the anarchist movement, the other party vigorously criticizing the involvement of anarchists in union activity.

2nd Comment

Schmidt and van der Walt think that syndicalism is not different from anarchism and that it is only a “strategy” of anarchism – whether conscious or unconscious. Syndicalists may accept this proximity to anarchism or refuse it, but Schmidt-van der Walt consider that syndicalism is, whatever one may say, a “strategy” of anarchism.

Although I do not deny that there are many “bridges” between the two currents,

I am totally opposed to this assumption – at least as far as France is concerned. Perhaps things are different for the Brazilian case, which I do not know well enough⁴. It is possible that, as João Carlos Marques puts it, revolutionary syndicalism was a strategy instrumentalized by the anarchists rather than an independent ideology⁵.

One can indeed imagine that the process of formation of an autonomous and spontaneous practice and theory of the working class in Brazil did not unfold in the same way as in Europe and that the anarchist movement – and the immigrants who introduced anarchism in Brazil – proceeded to the introduction of revolutionary syndicalism in the working class in a voluntarist way. In this case, one might say that syndicalism is a “strategy” of anarchism, but it is only a hypothesis. I do not think, however, that things have happened that way. As far as I know, Brazilian revolutionary syndicalism was constituted in two ways that do not exclude each other:

- a) Endogenously by the influence of causes identical to those which contributed to the formation of this current in France (the same causes produce the same effects);
- b) under the influence of the example of the French CGT – as shown by many texts of Brazilian labour congresses.

As far as Schmidt and van der Walt are concerned, it is clear that their theory is presented as a general theory, valid everywhere.

It is undeniable that the anarchists played a considerable and even preponderant role in the French CGT until 1914, but they were not the only ones. Moreover, by claiming that syndicalism is a “strategy” of anarchism, Schmidt-van der Walt postulate that anarchism was a homogeneous movement, which was far from being the case. It would be necessary to ask of *which* anarchism revolutionary syndicalism is supposed to be the “strategy”: the French anarchist publications of the late 19th century reveal that an important, if not the majority, part of the anarchist movement was totally hostile to trade unionism⁶.

3rd Comment

Another point of disagreement concerns the relationship between syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism. According to Schmidt and van der Walt, syndicalism refuses, or is reluctant to admit, its relationship with anarchism, while anarcho-syndicalism claims it. In addition, anarcho-syndicalism seems to be a sort of radical

4 Originally this text was written at the request of Brazilian comrades.

5 « *A Voz do Trabalhador: cultura operária e resistência anarquista no Rio de Janeiro (1908-1915)* », p. 75.

6 See Mauricio Antonioli, *Bakounine entre syndicalisme révolutionnaire et anarchisme*, éditions Noir&Rouge.

form of revolutionary syndicalism. I do not share this approach at all.

This thesis of Schmidt and van der Walt is totally subjective and does not rest on anything actual. It corresponds to an ideological, utopian construction of the relations between syndicalism and anarcho-syndicalism, a vision of things such as the authors of *Black Flame* would like them to be, but on *nothing historically based*.

The history of the use of the term “anarcho-syndicalism” is complex and varies from country to country. The term was used in Russia during the 1905 revolution by Daniil Novomirski and others, such as Maria Korn, Georgi Gogeliia-Orgeiani, Daniil Novomirski, as an attempt to apply the organizational forms and strategy of the French CGT to the Russian context ⁷.

During the Russian revolution there were very harsh oppositions between anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists, which naturally does not fit with the dogmatic construction of Schmidt and van der Walt who consider the latter as a “strategy” of the former.

In France one finds the term “anarcho-syndicalist” (but not “anarcho-syndicalism”) in the mainstream newspapers as well as was in the labour movement at the beginning of the 20th century but it did not designate a doctrine nor a movement but only anarchists who were individually engaged in union activity. Two other terms are used interchangeably with “anarcho-syndicalist”; “syndicalist anarchist” and “syndicalo-anarchist”. They are perfectly synonymous but never designate a doctrine or a movement⁸.

Then, after WWI the term was used in a pejorative way by the communists to point out these syndicalists who refused to endorse the repression of the Russian communists against the workers' movement and who refused to join the Red International of Trade Unions created by the Bolsheviks. The term became a “positive” concept and was openly claimed in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

If until 1920 revolutionary syndicalism was indeed the reference of many organizations, like the Spanish CNT, the French CGT-SR and many others, the creation of the Communist International and the Red International of Trade Unions provoked a real break, and it was from this fracture that anarcho-syndicalism was born.

4th Comment

I do not approve of the concept that Schmidt and van der Walt develop about

7 See two unpublished Soviet historians cited by Alexandre Skirda: S.N. Kanev: “history questions”, 9, 1968, Moscow; E.N. Kornoukhov: “The activity of the Bolshevik party against the petty-bourgeois anarchist revolutionaries in the period of the preparation and victory of the October revolution”, “Lenin, the party, October”, 1967. (Cf. The remarkable work by Alexander Skirda: *Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*)

8 See: “De l’origine de l’anarcho-syndicalisme”, <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article603>

the “Broad Anarchist Tradition”, which consists in labelling as “anarchist” currents or movements that certainly present analogies or affinities with anarchism, but which it is not correct to define as such. This is very much like the manipulative practices we observe among revolutionary Marxists, who claim to take credit for initiatives taken by others. One can hypothesize the function of the Broad Anarchist Tradition concept.

a) It makes it possible to challenge the idea that anarchism was never anything but a minority phenomenon, “the poor cousin of other Left traditions” (p. 9). By resorting to a broader “tradition”, the “perimeter” of the movement is widened;

b) It challenges the idea that anarchism (to which revolutionary syndicalism is supposed to be organically attached) is an originally European or even French phenomenon: “We demonstrate that mass anarchism and syndicalist movements emerged in a number of regions, notably parts of Europe, the Americas, and East Asia” (p. 9).

Nobody denies that anarchism and syndicalism “emerged in a number of regions, notably parts of Europe, the Americas, and East Asia” since the same causes produce the same effects: but these causes and effects do not necessarily occur simultaneously everywhere. Schmidt and van der Walt are stuck in a contradiction: on the one hand they try to contest the idea that revolutionary syndicalism is a European “invention”, but at the same time they designate Bakunin as its “founder”.

Let us take the case of Chinese anarchism. No one disputes that there was a major anarchist movement in China, but it appeared between 1905 and 1910 drawing from both Taoist and Buddhist texts and from Kropotkin and Elisée Reclus. Li Shizeng (1881-1973) discovers anarchism in Kropotkin's writings. The “Manifesto of the Anarcho-Communist Society” of Shifu dates from 1914. Nothing authorizes us to say that Chinese anarchism is the import of Western political thought. It is the result of conditions peculiar to Chinese society and of various cross-cultural influences linked to the international circulation of ideas. But we cannot deny that there is a chronological gap between the emergence of anarchism in France and Europe, and its emergence in China. Anarchism did not pop out in elaborate form like a devil from its box, simultaneously all over the planet. There is some demagoguery to say the opposite. Whether it pleases or not, its first appearance as *a doctrine* dates from 1840 when Proudhon declared that “property is theft”, and as a movement in the late 1860s⁹.

The so-called “Broad Anarchist Tradition” has the advantage of greatly – and artificially – expanding the “perimeter” of anarchism. It would have been more accurate, and less manipulative, to simply speak of “anti-authoritarian tradition” or “anti-authoritarian current”.

9 For a scientific approach of the international history of anarchism, see: Gaetano Manfredonia, *Histoire mondiale de l'anarchie*, Éditions Textuel & Arte éditions, 2014.

Fifth Comment

Finally, a last point that I would like to emphasize, on which I partially agree with Schmidt & van der Walt. They rightly dispute the choice made by P. Eltzbacher who incorporates into the anarchist “pantheon” a number of authors on the sole ground that they were against the state. These are the “Seven Sages”: Godwin, Stirner, Proudhon, Tucker, Tolstoy, Bakunin and Kropotkin. If Bakunin and Kropotkin are recognized by Schmidt and van der Walt as “anarchists”, the others are rejected. I am ready to give them reason for Stirner, Tucker and Tolstoy, but the cases of Godwin and Proudhon deserve to be examined.

Godwin is certainly not anarchist, but it would be absurd to dismiss him as a precursor. I fully agree with Schmidt & van der Walt's refusal to seek at any price anarchist authors even in Greek antiquity, and to consider as “anarchist” the slightest questioning of the State; but their rigid attitude prevents them from considering the possibility that anarchist thought might have had precursors. This leads them to have a non-historical vision. One has the impression that anarchism was born around 1850-1860, out of nothing, which is of course not true.

In my opinion, anarchism fits right into this uninterrupted flow of thought that, since the Middle Ages, stubbornly challenges the notion of immanence and aims to free critical thinking¹⁰. This does not mean that anarchism identifies itself with each of the stages of this long evolution, strewn with heroic thinkers who have been imprisoned, terrorized, bruised, tortured, burned alive, but that anarchism has its place at the end of this evolution.

However, I share Schmidt and van der Walt's view that anarchism is a political doctrine (they rarely qualify it as an “ideology”), that it was born of the industrial revolution, within the working class, as a product of its struggles against economic exploitation and political and religious oppression.

Proudhon is very curiously treated by Schmidt & van der Walt. He is denied the status of anarchist by right, although a certain role is not denied him: *Black Flame* intends to examine “the relationship between anarchism *and other ideas*, particularly the views of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, classical Marxists, and economic liberalism...”. [*Emphasis added.*] There is anarchism on the one hand, and “other ideas” on the other, and Proudhon is one of the “other ideas.” The review of the bibliographical sources mentioned by the authors of *Black Flame* explains everything: There is no work of Proudhon in their bibliography, simply a collection of selected texts, not particularly recent¹¹. As for possible studies *on* Proudhon, one 96-page

10 This gradual evolution of philosophy towards the negation of God and of the “first cause” has been perfectly seen by Bakunin.

11 Edwards, S., ed. *Selected Writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1969.

book, published in 1934! And two absentees: the sociologists Georges Gurvitch¹² and Pierre Ansart¹³, to speak only of these two authors, who seem to me totally unavoidable if we speak of Proudhon today.

The anarchist movement should stand out from what I call an “ideological vision of history”. By this I mean a vision which starts from a certain number of pre-established assertions and which tries to bring reality within the framework of these presuppositions. It seems to me that *Black Flame* very often falls into this fault when it comes to doctrinal issues. This disadvantage does not prevent the book from being extremely interesting, but it reduces, in my opinion, its scope and normative value.

Digression on anarchism and syndicalism

My work is based on a periodization that probably diverges from that which is generally accepted.

1871-1890

The French Republic which was set up after the crushing of the Paris Commune was much less tolerant than the Second Empire. Every attempt to reconstitute any sort of working-class structure, even the most benign, was followed by arrests and court-martials. However, the repression failed to prevent the reconstruction of class organisations. And while the bourgeois newspapers made their front pages with anarchist terrorism, the discreet work of the militants continued to build their unions.

The survivors of the IWA and the working class militants were, so to speak, “orphans” of an International organisation, so the activists who claimed the legacy of the IWA participated in the international socialist congresses organized by the

12 George Gurvitch :

- *Proudhon, sa vie, son œuvre*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1965.
- *Les fondateurs français de la sociologie contemporaine : Saint-Simon et Proudhon*, Paris, Centre de documentation universitaire, 1955.
- *Dialectique et sociologie*, Flammarion, 1962.

In Portuguese:

- *Proudhon*, Georges Gurvitch, 1983, Editora Edicoes 70, Rio de Janeiro.
- *Proudhon e Marx*, 1980, Editora Martins Fontes, Rio de Janeiro.

13 *Sociologie de Proudhon*, PUF, 1967

Socialisme et anarchisme : Saint-Simon, Proudhon, Marx, PUF, 1969.

Naissance de l'anarchisme, PUF, 1970.

Proudhon, Le Livre de poche, 1984.

social-democracy.

For most of the grass-roots socialist activists, that was not a problem, but the social-democratic leaders strove by all means to exclude them. After several failed attempts, they succeeded in 1896 at the London Congress of the Second International. During this period there was indeed a nucleus of anarchist militants in the unions, but most of the movement was outside, and often they were hostile to the presence of anarchists in the labour movement.

This period is extremely important because all the constitutive themes of revolutionary syndicalism will be put in place. Naturally the repression against the Paris Commune provides the basis for the anti-statism and anti-militarism of revolutionary syndicalists. The stifling moral order imposed by the Catholic Church will nourish their opposition to religion. The attempts of the bourgeois radicals to get their hands on labour organizations for electoral purposes will explain anti-parliamentarism. All these combined cases will explain the originality of revolutionary syndicalism.

1890-1902

Jean Grave's publication, *Le Libertaire* gathered, at least until 1899, the anarchists who were vigorously hostile to trade unionism. This anti-unionism was based on the idea that it was useless to claim better wages, for instance, because the wages of a worker could not be below what was necessary for him or her to live, and could not either exceed this sum¹⁴. The workers joined the unions so as to be able to obtain a greater share of the incompressible part that the capitalists granted the working class, which was an injustice for the others. In short, the idea was that capitalism had a fixed global mass that it could devote to wages, and that if part of the working class got better, it was to the detriment of the others.

The result was that to unionise was “to do bourgeois, reactionary work”¹⁵. The worker, therefore, should be discouraged from entering the trade unions, which were an “element of weakness from a revolutionary point of view”; if he did, he would become a “ferocious conservative, authoritarian and almost governmental”. The unionised workers were the “worst enemies of the revolution”¹⁶.

These ideas were shared by a very substantial part of the anarchist movement of the time, deeply imbued with the themes of individualism and insurrectionism.

Those who had the favours of the militants of *Le Libertaire* were “the raging, the impatient, the revolutionaries: the black mass, the mass of the unemployed and

14 H. Dhorr, « La Loi des salaires », *Le Libertaire*, n° 77, 29 avril-4 mai 1897.

15 H. Dhorr, « La Loi des salaires », *Le Libertaire*, n° 78, 5-11 mai 1897.

16 Imanus, « Les Syndicats », *Le Libertaire*, n° 17, 7-14 mars 1896.

the famished who must serve as starting point to the anarchist claims”¹⁷.

In another article of *Le Libertaire*, the “social base” of the anarchist movement is constituted by the “unemployed, vagabonds, beggars, prostitutes, downgraded”, qualified as “revolutionaries of tomorrow”: “By claiming the unemployed, the individualist and anti-union anarchism will have an economic base and will have a social significance.”¹⁸ It is therefore with these socio-professional categories, of which I do not dispute the worthiness, that these anarchists intended to reorganize the society of tomorrow. Jean Grave had no doubt that in such a society, these downgraded people would produce the food with which he fed himself, the coal with which he warmed himself, the clothes with which he dressed himself ...

When Kropotkin finally came to the conclusion that the terrorist attacks had been a dismal failure, he published in *La Revolte* (September-October 1890) a series of articles in which he wrote that it was necessary “to be with the people who no longer demand the isolated act, but men of action in its ranks”¹⁹. The wording is rather singular, because it suggests that the people had, at one moment, “demanded” isolated acts, and that now they have changed their minds. This raises an interesting question: who is competent to know what the people are “demanding”? It is doubtful that the “people” ever “demanded” for “isolated acts” – euphemism for terrorist acts. Kropotkin's formulation serves only to evacuate any serious reflection on the resounding failure of the terrorist period and also the implicit complicity of certain anarchist intellectuals, including Kropotkin himself, in supporting these acts.

Now, Kropotkin advocates joining the unions (which allows Schmidt and van der Walt to say that Kropotkin advocated syndicalism), but what he has in mind is the British trade union model, that is something very far from syndicalism). Kropotkin's remarks were very badly received by anarchist circles, and aroused violent criticism, according to a police report of October 23, 1890. Here is what this report says: “... Numerous protests were heard; some shouted 'treason!', individual or collective letters, some coming from abroad and very lively in tone, were sent to the newspaper.”²⁰

These protests are indicative of the degree of disaffection of much of the anarchist movement towards trade union action. Admittedly, such reactions can not incriminate the entire anarchist movement: indeed, many anarchists had *already* been involved in the labour movement, often for a long time. But it clearly shows

17 E. Girault, « Les Sans-travail », *Le Libertaire*, n° 82, 3-9 juin 1897.

18 G. Paul, « L'Anarchie et les sans-travail », *Le Libertaire*, n° 23, 7-14 avril 1907

19 « Le 1^{er} mai 1891 », *La Révolte*, n° 6, 18-24 octobre 1890. Cité par Jean Maitron, *Le mouvement anarchiste en France*, Tel Gallimard, t.I.

20 Cité par Jean Maitron, tome I, p. 266.

that the anarchist movement was incapable of having any coherent strategy towards the workers and the trade union world.

In spite of all that, the period between 1890-1892 and 1902 can be considered as the properly “anarchist” period of the labour movement, particularly in the “Bourses du travail” (Labour Exchanges), which were not founded by anarchists but in which they quickly played a leading role.

The “Bourses du travail” were geographical structures established on the locality. They were formed naturally in many cities to meet the need of workers to organize themselves locally to fight and exchange information, but also to promote popular education, but until 1892 they were not organised in a federation.

The anarchists had nothing to do with the creation of this federation. Which was formed as the result of a split in the National Federation of Unions, a Guesdist-Oriented organisation.²¹ Tensions had arisen between the supporters of the general strike and the Guesdists, who were opposed to it. The anti-Guesdists therefore created in 1892 the “Fédération des Bourses du travail”, Federation of Labour Exchanges. But within this new organization harsh conflicts broke out between the many socialist currents that coexisted there. That is why the direction of the organization was entrusted to an anarchist, Fernand Pelloutier: the anarchists appeared as those who were able to moderate conflicts.

It was during this period, in 1895, that the CGT was created, but it was only an embryo of trade union organization, without any real strength,

To mechanically link the foundation of revolutionary syndicalism to the founding of the CGT in 1895 is a mistake. At this date, the new organization is very weak, small, not very active, without real structuring and still tainted by the Guesdist influence of the National Federation of Trade Unions. At its foundation, “the CGT seemed stillborn,” writes Jacques Julliard²², adding that the day after its founding congress in Limoges, “it was not without difficulty that the CGT succeeded in constituting an embryo of organization”! We are far from the mythology of revolutionary syndicalism usually conveyed in texts intended to support this or that thesis.

At the risk of thwarting the construction developed by Schmidt and van der Walt, the militants and leaders of the Fédération des Bourses du travail were very

21 Although not having participated in the Commune, Guesde went abroad to avoid repression. Settled in Geneva, he became associated with James Guillaume, who converted him to anarchism. Guesde adhered to the Jura Federation, militated for the autonomy of sections in the columns of his newspaper, *Le Réveil International*. It was not until he returned to France in 1876 that he would move closer to Parisian Marxist circles. As a socialist leader, he was a supporter of the union's submission to the political party – a sort of pre-Leninist, in short. His current was powerful within the CGT.

22 In : *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme*. Le Seuil, 1971.

reluctant to the CGT at its creation. For several years, they showed an open opposition to the new organization. It is only in 1902, when the two federations merged to form a Confederation, that one can consider that the CGT was really constituted.

At the Congress of Montpellier in 1902 the CGT virtually became a “double organisation” with a vertical structure (industrial unions) and a horizontal, geographical structure (the Labour Exchanges). I would add that this double structure, which defines revolutionary syndicalism and later anarcho-syndicalism, is very much in keeping with Bakunin's scheme.²³

It is (to my knowledge) during this Congress that we find for the first time the expression “revolutionary syndicalism”²⁴. It appears also in socialist publications at the end of 1903 and the beginning of 1904. We find the expression used once at the Congress of Bourges (1904) and once at the congress of Amiens (1906).

Of course I don't mean that the labour movement as a whole was “anarchist” strictly speaking: there were other currents of ideas, but undeniably the anarchists were the driving force. The attacks launched against them by the reformists at the Congress of Amiens (1906) attest to this thesis. It goes without saying that revolutionary syndicalism existed in fact before existing in words. The sources of syndicalism are already germinating in the debates that took place within the First International and in the documents that mention these debates.

1902-1908

The years 1902-1908 mark the ascendant period of syndicalism. The revolutionary strategy was adopted at the Congress of Bourges, in 1904, during which it was decided to organize a general strike to obtain the 8-hour day. Within the unified CGT (that is CGT+Fédération des bourses du travail), a movement was forming, standing out clearly from anarchism to form a separate doctrine.

We can say that the “birth” of syndicalism can be situated between 1902 at the Congress of Montpellier, where the expression “syndicalisme révolutionnaire” was

23 Voir : René Berthier, « Bakounine : une théorie de l'organisation », <http://monde-nouveau.net/spip.php?article378>

24 See the minutes of the debates of the Congress of Montpellier, 1902: “Very sincerely, Bouchet believes in the superiority of the strictly syndicalist revolutionary action on half-union, half-political action ...” (p. 220) “... We are convinced that the profound discussions they will bring will show to everybody the ever-growing force of revolutionary syndicalism and the increasingly enlightened awareness of the legitimacy of workers' demands ...” (p. 40). See: http://www.ihs.cgt.fr/IMG/pdf/09_-_1902_-_Congres_Montpellier.pdf

used for the first time²⁵, and January 1, 1905 when in a socialist publication, *Le mouvement socialiste*, Victor Griffuelhes, General Secretary of the CGT, wrote an article entitled “Revolutionary Syndicalism”, giving it an “official” character. (Griffuelhes was not an anarchist but a former Blanquist.)

In a way, 1908 marks the beginning of the end of syndicalism. Several extremely violent strikes supported by the CGT, during which workers were killed, failed. The repression came down hard. For a short time almost all of the Confederal Committee was in prison, which the reformists took advantage of to fill the empty spaces. The revolutionaries, however, managed to restore the situation but for a short time. While the syndicalists had benefited from the extreme division of the socialist movement (there had been up to six socialist parties competing for the favours of the proletariat!), a unified socialist party had been formed in 1905, constituting a new pole of identification for the working class and proposing an electoral strategy that was less likely to lead the army to fire on the workers. The Confederal leadership realized that the time had come to prioritize negotiations over direct action.

At that time a fracture had been created within the syndicalist movement. There were the partisans of the maintenance of syndicalist traditions, who reaffirmed the principle of direct action and the usual tactics of this current, and those, with Pierre Monatte, who could be described as “modernists”, who wanted to adapt the strategy to the evolution of the capitalist system.

We will find later this fracture, and the same men, after the Russian revolution, when it was about promoting or rejecting the adhesion to the Red International of Trade Unions: anarcho-syndicalism will be one of the consequences of this fracture.

However, the anarchists remained very present in the CGT but, through the elections, they were gradually removed from the main mandates by the reformists. The attentive reading of the minutes of the Amiens congress reveals a clear decline of the revolutionary movement. The comments of the reformist opponents to the Confederal leadership, after the Amiens congress, show that the “charte d'Amiens” (a congress resolution, in fact) was a serious failure for the anarchists. It is significant that two great figures of the anarchist movement, Pouget and Delesalle, left the CGT in 1908.

1906. The Amiens Congress

The Amiens Congress held in 1906 is often presented as the founding act of revolutionary syndicalism. I do not share this opinion at all. I think on the contrary that the provisions voted at Amiens represent the *negation* of syndicalism: it is on the contrary the beginning of the decline of syndicalism. The full reading of the minutes of the Congress shows a reality that is far from the myth that has been

25 But a closer examination of the texts can bring up earlier occurrences.

made, but at the same time we see a much more appealing reality. We see a revolutionary current, certainly still powerful, but cornered, on the defensive against representatives of powerful reformist federations that had recently joined the CGT. The reality we perceive is not that of the myth that was built after the facts. We see that the oppositions to the Confederal policy (that is to say syndicalist) are extremely vigorous, that the blows sent are sometimes quite low. Revolutionary syndicalists were facing powerful opponents; they were closely followed and harassed by the reformist socialists whose forces were far from negligible, and they defended themselves step by step.

The minutes of the congress show the reformists' offensive against the pretended non-compliance of the "neutrality" rule by the confederal leadership. Whereas originally the concept of union neutrality was understood as the possibility for the union to define its choices independently of the parties, the reformists intended to interpret it as the union's prohibition to adopt any position that could be interpreted as "political": anti-electoral propaganda is violently attacked because it is considered a political position that shocks the beliefs of members who trust political parties. In the same way anti-militarism is attacked because it shocks the opinions of the nationalists.

The resolution of the Amiens congress

The resolution passed at Amiens at the 1906 Congress, which acquired over time a mythical character, did not become the "charter of Amiens" until 1910. This resolution is a 152-word document that still remains extremely radical today in view of what trade-unions have become. It asserts that the union brings together all workers "apart from any political school"; it has for objective "the disappearance of wage labour and of capitalists"; it recognises the class struggle; it intends to fight "against all forms of exploitation and oppression, both material and moral". It says that in the immediate future it aims to obtain "reduced hours of work, and increased wages". Integral emancipation "can only be achieved through capitalist expropriation", which is why trade unionism "advocates a general strike as a means of action".

Perhaps the most important point of the document, in terms of principles, is this: "the union, now a resistance group, will in the future be the production and distribution group, the basis of social reorganization". The union has therefore a "double task, daily and future". Moreover, "all workers, whatever their opinions or their political or philosophical tendencies", have the duty "to belong to the essential group that is the union".

The resolution affirms "complete freedom for the union member to participate, outside the corporate group, in such forms of struggle corresponding to his philosophical or political conceptions", but in return the union asks him, in reciprocity, "not to introduce into the union the opinions he professes outside".

Finally, the resolution concludes: "Economic action must be exercised directly against employers, since the Confederate organizations do not, as trade union organizations, have to worry about parties and sects which, outside and besides

it, can freely pursue social transformation.”

As we see, all the specific anarchist themes have been removed: the struggle against the state, against religion, anti-militarism, anti-parliamentarism.

The vote of the famous “charte d'Amiens”, in fact a resolution, by an overwhelming majority of delegates²⁶ – *including the anarchists, therefore* – reveals in itself the extent of the concessions that had been made to the reformists, who fully understood that this was a defeat for the *anarchists*, not for the syndicalists. The question is: why did an *overwhelming* majority vote this resolution, including the anarchist delegates?

The reason is simple: there was then a real threat of splitting on the part of the reformists, and it was necessary to avoid it at all costs. The working class was at the time imbued with the idea that division was a catastrophe, that the workers needed “One big union”. Rightly or wrongly, the anarchists made concessions: although the resolution of Amiens stipulates that the union will be the organ of the organization of the future society, it drops all that made the anarchist specificity of the French syndicalist movement: it was no longer question of fighting against the state, of anti-parliamentarism. of anti-militarism. In retrospect, there is every reason to believe that the resolution of Amiens resulted from a compromise between the socialists and the “modernist” fraction of the syndicalist movement against anarchism. Reading the minutes of the two congresses of the Socialist Party that followed reveals that the leaders of the Party were *extremely satisfied* with the results of the CGT Congress of 1906.

Presented as a compromise with a fraction of the reformist movement to block the Guesdists, the resolution of Amiens establishes in fact the division of labour between party and union *which is the basis of the Guesdist doctrine*.

1909-1914

The years 1909-1914 show a revolutionary current on the defensive, which still maintains itself by its driving force. It still holds the confidence of many workers, but it is in decline and has to face at the same time the ferocious repression of the government, a succession of serious failures in the struggles, and serious internal crises provoked by the reformists whose power grows in the CGT.

1912: the CGT and the War

It is customary to say that the choice of the CGT not to call for a general strike at the outbreak of WWI marks the bankruptcy of syndicalism. The choice made by the Confederal leadership not to oppose the war in 1914 is the result of a number of

26 The resolution was adopted with 834 votes in favor, 8 against and 1 blank.

complex factors, among which, mainly:

- The systematic refusal of German Social-Democracy to envisage joint action with French syndicalists and socialists in the event of a conflict between the two countries. Until the eve of the war the leaders of the CGT tried to negotiate with the German workers' representatives a joint action, without success;
- The rise of Reformism within the CGT, the scale of which we tend to underestimate.

In 1912 the Confederal leadership succeeded in organizing a general strike against the war – an initiative of which there was no equivalent in Germany. On the contrary, the German Social-Democrats voted in 1913 for exceptional war credits of a considerable amount. The general strike, to which the reformists had vigorously opposed, had exhausted the reserves of energy of the Confederation and provoked a terrible repression within the syndicalist militants as well as within the anarchist movement. This is not to exonerate the leaders of the CGT but to emphasize that the general strike against the war, if it had taken place, could not be unilateral: it was to be triggered by the two countries. Now everyone knew at the time that the German socialists would never take such an initiative.

The grip of Reformism on the CGT in 1914 was such that it was no longer possible to call it “syndicalist”²⁷.

1917-1922: Revolutionary syndicalism and the Russian revolution

Revolutionary syndicalism regained some strength after the war, and especially after the Russian revolution. The anarchist and syndicalist movements enthusiastically supported the Russian revolution. But when the information on the repression of the workers' movement organized by the Russian communists began to filter, the anarchists generally condemned the regime²⁸. The syndicalist movement literally split in two. One part, with Pierre Monatte, supported the Russian communists, advocated the CGTU's membership — a split of the CGT — to the Red International of Trade Unions, the trade union counterpart of the Communist International. Another part of the syndicalist movement, with Pierre Besnard, refused to support the Russian communists, withdrew from all initiatives related to the Red International of Trade Unions.

This withdrawal led to the founding of the second International Workers' Association in Berlin in 1922: this date that can be considered as that of the actual (offi-

27 The debates on the general strike in case of war are developed in René Berthier, *Kropotkine et la Grande guerre*, Editions du Monde libertaire.

28 See David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917 to 1945*, Paperback

cial?) founding of *anarcho-syndicalism*.

However, the founding documents of this International never refer to anarcho-syndicalism but to *syndicalism*. Once again, the facts precede the words, but we can say that it is indeed anarcho-syndicalism: contrary to the CGT resolution of Amiens, it does not declare itself neutral in relation to political parties but in *opposition* to them; unlike the resolution of Amiens, which writes off the struggle against the state, against parliamentary strategy and against the army, the founding document of the IWA declares itself opposed to parliamentary activity, to nationalism, to militarism, to the state. This declaration of principles teaches us an important thing: in 1922 the term “anarcho-syndicalism” was not yet in common use.

It should be borne in mind that there was a break in the revolutionary syndicalist movement, part of which decided to support the international strategy of Russian communism by joining the Red Trade Union International; the other part refused to support a repressive “communist” regime on which all information was now available. It is on this question that were based oppositions within the labour movement. The activists who founded the Berlin IWA had no choice: the syndicalists *had* to be organized on an international level; but they *could not* join an international organization that condoned the ruthless repression of the Russian labour movement.

If the Berlin IWA, created in 1922, did not refer to anarcho-syndicalism, it is mainly because the term was an insult in the words of the communists. But it is probably also because the activists who founded the IWA considered themselves as the *real* syndicalists.

The expression “anarcho-syndicalism” will only be progressively integrated into the documents of the trade union movement and become widely used by the end of the 1920s.

Anarchism & Social change

No doubt Schmidt and van der Walt are aware of the extreme complexity of the history of the anarchist movement and of the surprising variety of approaches from which the various authors of the movement have considered the questions of doctrine. No doubt *Black Flame* is an attempt to find consistency in this movement. Other authors have tried: Sébastien Faure, for example, has defined an artificial and very unconvincing typology, but which may have provided a reassuring framework of explanation for generations of militants.

Schmidt and van der Walt provided their own explanatory framework, which is no less artificial and just as unconvincing as Sébastien Faure's. While the first wanted to make a synthesis of the different currents of the anarchist movement, the two South Africans proceed at the same time by exclusion and amalgam: on the one hand they say that what *does not fit* with their own definition of anarchism is

not anarchism, and on the other hand they say that what *they* designate as anarchism is anarchism, whatever the concerned people think.

To a large extent, their approach is even more confused than that of Sébastien Faure.

Gaetano Manfredonia, proposes a “grid” which will perhaps allow us to leave the stalemate in which we are to establish a classification of the different anarchist currents. His book, *Anarchisme et changement social: insurrectionnisme, syndicalisme, éducationnisme-réalisateur* (Anarchism and Social Change, Insurrectionalism, Unionism, Educationism²⁹), takes a radically different perspective from *Black Flame*, and seems to me to provide much more convincing explanations than Schmidt-van der Walt's theses, and much more convincing than the rigid classification established by Sébastien Faure in his “synthesis”. Manfredonia's book provides solutions to the methodological impasses in which the authors of *Black Flame* are committed.

Manfredonia's book sweeps away all the typologies that were referred to until now, whether based on “platformism” or on “synthesism”. Relying on Weber's “comprehensive sociology,” he believes that it is necessary to “break with the usual interpretations of anarchism, which all put forward the history of ideas or the movements” and proposes to turn “resolutely towards the study of militant practices”. It is on the basis of this method that he defines three “ideal” types of libertarian militancy: the insurrectional type, the syndicalist type and the educationist type.

This new ternary typology is far more relevant than the interpretation enunciated by Sébastien Faure in 1928 in the Anarchist Synthesis, and which was at the origin of many clichés ... even if no serious historian used it. Faure founded anarchism on the artificial coexistence of three currents: individualist, communist and syndicalist. This typology responded more to a *desire* for conciliation in the polemic context of the time, than to a serious approach. It was a question of lighting a counter-fire on Makhno and Archinov's Platform, which wanted to renovate anarchism on the basis of the experience of the Russian Revolution.

Concerning the “typologies” applying to the anarchist movement, if we often talk about the “synthesis” of Sébastien Faure, we refer much less to that of Voline, which seems to me more realistic³⁰. Like Sébastien Faure, Voline considers that there is in anarchism three separate “currents”: syndicalism, communist anarchism and individualism, but for Voline, these currents are not rigidly separated. Voline means to define the *main ideas* of anarchism, that is to say the syndicalist principle as “method of the social revolution”, the communist principle as “base of organization of the new society in formation” and the individualistic principle aiming at

29 Atelier de création libertaire, 2007.

30 « De la Synthèse », *La Revue Anarchiste*, Mars-Mai 1924. 25 « De la Synthèse », *La Revue Anarchiste*, Mars-Mai 1924.

See also: *Le débat plate-forme ou synthèse*, in [Voline, Itinéraire : une vie, une pensée](#), n° 13, 1996,

“the total emancipation and the happiness of the individual being”, which is designated as “the true aim of the social revolution and the new society”: no one can be opposed to this last point, on the condition of recognizing that the emancipation of the individual can not be distinguished from collective, social emancipation. There is thus no question of “individualist anarchism” as a specific current of the anarchist movement but of the emancipation of the individual as the goal of the social revolution. It’s not the same thing at all. Voline wanted the anarchist movement to *debate* these questions (*just as Makhno wanted the Platform to be debated*) in order to achieve a real synthesis, that is to say, something different from the mere sum of its constituent elements. Unlike Sébastien Faure, Voline has a dynamic vision of the “synthesis”.

But, as I said, Makhno and Arshinov also wanted the different points of their Platform to be debated. The refusal of the activists of the time to discuss it is more significant of the state of decay of the anarchist movement than of the “authoritarian” character of the Platform itself³¹.

Manfredonia allows a perspective that goes far beyond the Platform/Synthesis antagonism and does not fix the different forms of anarchism in rigid “boxes” as is the case with the “synthesis” of Sébastien Faure. It does not draw a hermetic partition between the different “strategies” but seeks to grasp their coherence. His approach thus seems to me more apt to define what anarchism is in its reality; it offers convincing elements to decipher what coherence there is in anarchism in its diversity – what neither Sébastien Faure in the 1920s with his “synthesis” nor Schmidt and van der Walt more recently, do.

Manfredonia does not speak of “currents” in the anarchist movement, he defines a typology based on standard ideals (insurrectional, syndicalist, educationist) that are combined in varying proportions, according to circumstances and necessities. As a result, bridges can be formed between the different types as needed, without any being petrified in a sealed compartment. And without any of these types claiming to represent anarchism alone.

These different types of activities specific to the libertarian movement are not opposed, they can evolve and interact as circumstances require: insurrectionism, unionism and educationism are not opposed, they can succeed chronologically or cohabit in combinations depending on the needs and the political and social context. In a very schematic way, it could be said that an increase in repression may lead the libertarian movement to tend towards rather insurrectionist tactics, a period of prolonged social peace may encourage educationist tendencies and periods of social conflict predispose activists to adopt trade union action. Anarchism thus appears as an eminently adaptable movement.

With the approach proposed by Manfredonia, one could say that the French libertarian movement before 1914 has passed by an initial insurrectionist phase

31 I wrote somewhere that the “Platform” was not more “authoritarian” than the regulation of a football club and that there was nothing “authoritarian” about applying a decision once it has been taken.

(1878-1886), a “trade unionist” reorientation from 1888, a brief return to insurrectionism with the attacks of 1892-1894, then the definitive installation in the syndicalist vision, punctuated by brief irruptions of insurrectionism when the social conflicts sharpened.

The other advantage of this approach lies in the fact that a coherence is created where there seems to be a certain inconsistency. It should be noted that Manfredonia's ideal-types do not include individualism, even though this author is a specialist in individualistic anarchism, on which he has a PHD!

The three types that Manfredonia describes, and their different combinations, constitute in a way the different possible strategies of anarchism adapted to the circumstances that make them necessary. So we are not locked in compartments where everyone claims that it is *only* through insurrection, only unionism or only education that we can achieve human emancipation: the strategy adopted by the anarchist movement can refer depending on the circumstances, to one or more of these ideal-types, and to varying degrees.

It can be considered that the existence of an anarchism claiming to be “individualistic” is meaningless, since anarchism is a global political doctrine that includes a very thorough reflection on the individual. However, one cannot deny that such a current existed, whatever one might think of the conditions of its genesis within the anarchist movement³². But this question is in a way “settled” by its “relegation” to the Educationist type, in which it appears as a marginal element.

Schmidt & van der Walt could at best accept Manfredonia's typology, but not his thesis that anarchism dates back to 1830-1850 with Godwin, among others. On this precise point I think, like Schmidt-van der Walt, that Godwin can not be described as anarchist, but like Manfredonia I think that he can not be excluded from a serious reflection on the *genesis* of anarchism: defining him as a precursor could be a good compromise.

The reservation I would make concerning the conclusion of Manfredonia's book is that he seems to consider it indisputable that the gradualist solution remains the only one possible today. It is true that “the erosion of an autonomous class consciousness of the workers” can suggest that this gradualist option is the only one left to the libertarian movement. But precisely, the task of the libertarian movement is to fight this erosion, to recover the lost ground in the class consciousness of the proletariat.

We know that we cannot “trigger” a revolution in a voluntarist way: it simply happens. The question then is whether the anarchists will be ready or not. The massive development of what Manfredonia calls “libertarian practices” could be an undeniable advantage:

The question then is whether the anarchists will be ready or not. The author seems to consider it indisputable that the gradualist solution remains the only one possible today. It is true that the finding that “the erosion of an autonomous class

32 This question is developed in the main document from which these pages are extracted.

consciousness of the workers” may suggest that this gradualist option is the only one left to the libertarian movement. But precisely, the task of the libertarian movement is to fight this erosion, to recover the lost ground in the class consciousness of the proletariat.

We know that we cannot “trigger” a revolution voluntarily: it simply happens. The question is to know whether the anarchist movement will be ready or not. The massive development of what Manfredo calls “libertarian practices” could be an undeniable advantage: but although these libertarian practices, according to Bakunin, can not suffice in themselves, the greater or lesser preparation of a revolutionary organization and its greater or lesser integration into social struggles can make the difference between success and failure. .

Last point

Anarchism as a political and social movement actually appeared at the period of the industrial revolution, as Schmidt and van der Walt rightly say. But from its appearance as a self-affirming doctrine, that is, with Proudhon, it advocated economic emancipation from the capitalist system, political emancipation from the state, *and* ideological emancipation from God: “God in religion, the State in politics, property in economics, such is the triple form in which mankind, become alien to itself, has never ceased to tear itself apart with its own hands.”³³

But *Black Flame* rarely mentions God and religion, and if incidentally the book evokes the atheism of Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin, atheism nowhere appears as *one of the pillars of anarchism*. Yet Bakunin, their main reference in terms of anarchism, often speaks of atheism; yet, the very first sentence of the program of Bakunin's *Alliance*, of which they speak so much, declares: “The Alliance declares itself atheist” ... This small sentence, though essential for Bakunin, seems to have escaped Schmidt and van der Walt.

Shortly after the Amiens congress, two socialist congresses were successively held, during which we can read the testimonies of the party leaders. The delegates of the Socialist Congress were extremely satisfied. Edouard Vaillant (socialist MP, ex-anarchist) declared that the congress of Amiens was a victory *over* the anarchists. Victor Renard, Guesdist (ex-anarchist also) and leader of the powerful CGT federation of Textile, triumphed by saying that “the anarchists who predominate in the CGT agreed to put on a muzzle”³⁴. A careful reading of the debates at the Amiens congress shows that the enemy of the reformists were the anarchists. Edouard Vaillant, again, declared at this socialist congress: “The members of the General

33 Proudhon, *Système des contradictions économiques*.

34 Cf. « L'anarchosyndicalisme, l'autre socialisme », Jacky Toublet, Préface à *La Confédération générale du travail* d'Émile Pouget, Editions CNT Région parisienne, 1997.

Confederation of Labor have shown, in Amiens, that their conception agreed with ours much more than we thought and the Congress of Amiens came to a conclusion that no one of us could have hoped. That's all we could expect and the decision of Amiens gives us complete satisfaction.”³⁵ This does not fit very well with the commonly accepted idea that the Amiens congress resulted in the elaboration of the charter of revolutionary syndicalism.

These remarks reveal, alongside a powerful reformist movement in the CGT (Victor Renard Textile, Keufer printing federation, and many others), the presence of an anarchist current obviously strong, but who suffered a defeat; and we know that within the revolutionary syndicalist movement there existed a “modernist” faction, that of Monatte and the group around *La Vie ouvrière*, which was opposed to the anarchists. It can be assumed that this “modernist” fraction is likely to have allied with the reformists against the anarchists. Later, Monatte played a key role in the CGT's refusal to participate in the revolutionary syndicalist congress of 1913. After the Russian revolution, he opposed the anarchists who refused to join the Red International of Trade Unions. There is real consistency in this series of positions.

The reason I mention this is to show that the examination of the facts does not fit at all into Schmidt and van der Walt's mythological and ideological construction, according to which syndicalism is “a variant of anarchism”. We cannot reduce revolutionary syndicalism to a form that makes no explicit connection with anarchism, “due to ignorance or a tactical denial”. As we can see, some revolutionary syndicalists knew very well why they were not anarchists, and it was not due to “ignorance or a tactical denial”. Obviously, the theoretical construction of Schmidt and van der Walt lacks the methodological tool to understand this.

René Berthier
March 2018

(To be followed)

35 Minutes du congrès socialiste de Limoges, novembre 1906, pp. 94-95. Cf. <https://bataillesocialiste.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/congres1906o.pdf>

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