

What Syndicalism Means:

An Examination of the Origin and Motives of the Movement with an Analysis of its Proposals for the Control of Industry.

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WHAT SYNDICALISM MEANS.

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BY SIDNEY AND BEATRICE WEBB.

DURING the past year those who read the newspapers have become vaguely aware of a new movement of thought, of strange and dubious import, which is called "Syndicalism." Various of our readers have asked what this unknown movement really is. What relation does it bear to the work of the National Committee for the Prevention of Destitution? Must we regard it as an unrecognised ally in our task, or as offering a rival solution to the problem of destitution, or as a threat of approaching revolution?

Now it is a special difficulty in the way of any fair appreciation of British Syndicalism that (just like British Liberalism or Conservatism, or, for that matter, British Socialism) the movement represents no hard and fast creed or definite formula, but a medley of thoughts and feelings; some pointing to an ultimate ideal form of society, others expressing a preference for particular methods of action, whilst others, again, seem only the outcome of personal or class bias. Any description of Syndicalism can thus hardly fail to seem, to some Syndicalists, an unfair travesty of their views. And it is impossible to piece together the somewhat disjointed teachings of the few English Syndicalist writers and orators, without seeing how closely they follow—often using the very same phrases—the voluminous and often eloquent writings which, since 1892, have been current in the whole Trade Union Movement of France, and which we must therefore include in our survey.

The Syndicalist Movement, in Great Britain, as well as in France, is a reaction from past

optimisms, the culmination of successive disillusionments—the disillusionment of the manual working wage-earner with the present order of things, his disillusionment with orthodox Trade Unionism, his disillusionment with the Co-operative Movement, and his disillusionment with the Parliamentary action advocated by the State Socialists.

The Growth of "Class Consciousness" among the Manual Working Wage-Earners.

Let us take first the disillusionment with the existing social order. The manual working wage-earner has lost faith in the necessity, let alone the righteousness, of the social arrangement to which he finds himself subjected. He sees himself and all his fellow wage-earners toiling day by day in the production of services and commodities. This toil is continued without cessation year in and year out, under the orders of persons of another social class who do not share his physical exertion. He sees the services and commodities that he feels that *he* is producing, sold at prices far exceeding the amount which he receives in wages. He has, of course, been told that this price has to pay large salaries to managers and other officials, and has to cover payments of rent and interest to the owners of the land and the capital. But to-day, in his disillusionment, this statement seems to him merely another way of describing the fact: it does not satisfy him of the reasonableness of the enormous and constant inequality between the wage that he receives and the incomes enjoyed either by the owners of the

instruments of production, or by their managers and agents who rule his life. And this inequality of income is not personal to himself and his employer: it is true of all wage earners and all employers. It results in a society in which one-tenth of the population own nine-tenths of the accumulated wealth; in which one-fifth of the adults take to themselves two-thirds of the annual product, and allow only one-third to be shared among the four-fifths who are manual working wage-earners; in which, as a consequence of this inequality, and in spite of a wealth production greater than the world has ever known, one-third of all these manual working wage-earners have scarcely a bare subsistence, whilst most of the other two-thirds are so little removed from this low level that the slightest interruption or dislocation of industry reduces many of them to destitution. In dramatic contrast with this penury and destitution he sees hundreds of thousands of wealthy families wasting in idleness and senseless extravagance, literally hundreds of millions of pounds annually out of the wealth that is produced. Something is radically wrong with a society that produces this inequality, universally and eternally, without relaxation or redress. To all the wage-earners who think about this matter, to all who are, in fact, "class conscious," the explanation seems simple. Whilst they and their fellows are contributing the whole of the physical toil involved in the production, distribution, and exchange of commodities, they are excluded from the ownership both of the instruments of production and of the products of their labour. But this is not all. The ownership of the land and the other instruments of production carries with it the power of giving orders as to how they shall be used. The manual working wage-earner finds himself spending his whole life in subjection to the arbitrary orders, even to the irresponsible caprices, of the employers and their agents. If they chose to close the mines and quarries, the fields and factories, of which the law gives them the ownership, the wage-earner and his family may starve. And in law and government the position seems much the same. The mere manual working wage-earner feels himself out of it all. To the workman who has become what the Syndicalists term "class conscious"—aware of the economic, legal, and political subjection to which his whole class is condemned—his position seems scarcely distinguishable from that of slavery. The basis of Syndicalism is an acute "class consciousness" of this sort.

The Disappointing Results of Trade Unionism.

Against this control of the owner of the instruments of production the less depressed of the wage-earners have, wherever the Capitalist system has prevailed, spontaneously banded them-

selves together in Trade Unions—that is to say, in organisations formed exclusively of the workers in each trade. More than two centuries ago it was discovered by the more intelligent wage-earners that though each individual operative had to accept the employer's offer or starve, the whole body of the operatives could, by refusing to carry on the profit-making process, compel the capitalist to bargain with them on more equal terms, and even extort from him increased rates of wages and better conditions of labour.¹ But this process, as the economist has always reminded the workmen, has narrow limitations. Nowhere has it proved to be within the power of more than a small minority of the wage-earners (and these not the sections most in need of it), to organise any effective Trade Unionism at all. Nowhere has even this small minority of the best organised workmen succeeded in doing more, by its "collective bargaining" and its "Courts of Conciliation and Arbitration," than increase wages at infrequent intervals by fractional increments. To the man who has taken literally the rhetorical advocacy of Trade Unionism as a remedy, the result seems painfully disappointing. Meanwhile the employer has often recouped himself by increasing the speed of the work, or by otherwise adding to the intensity of the toil. Indeed, though by successful Trade Unionism the superior sections of wage-earners evidently get more, the landlords and capitalists may get no less; for experience has repeatedly shown that better conditions of employment increase the efficiency of labour, and tend even, by pressure on the brains of the employer, to increase the efficiency of capital. To the growing intelligence of the manual workers in the great industries it seems that Trade Unionism, however much it benefits particular sections, has in no way diminished inequality. The four-fifths of the population who are manual workers get no larger proportion of the total product than they did before; the one-fifth who make up all the other social classes get no smaller proportion than they did before. Nor does the Trade Union do anything to prevent unemployment. The most advantageous collective agreement concluded by the best organised Trade Union contains no guarantee of permanence for the workman's home. The manual working wage-earner asks why he should not enjoy as much security of tenure as the civil servant, or even as the manager under whom he works. The Trade Union, in fact, of the orthodox type, assumes and accepts as permanent the very organisation of industry against which the "class conscious" wage-earner is now revolting. The Syndicalist

¹ See the *History of Trade Unionism*, by S. and B. Webb (Longmans, London).

feels that it affords no hope of emancipating the manual workers as a class from their present subjection to the owners of the instruments of production; or of freeing them from the necessity of passing their working lives under the orders of such owners or their managers and officials.

The Desire for the "Abolition of the Wage System."

As they became aware of the necessary limitations of the Trade Union Movement, the more "class conscious" of its members have always desired to take the "next step," and, somehow or other, to secure for the manual workers, not merely a larger share in the product, but (with due participation by all who have contributed by hands or by brain), the whole product of their joint labours, and the complete control over their own employment. This idea has been in the minds of the more intellectual of the wage-earners for a whole century. To the workman it has always seemed a mere application to industry of the principles of democracy. If the workers in an industry can form a Trade Union, and elect their own officials to lead them in a strike, or to negotiate with the employer, why should not the same body of manual workers, who form in every business organisation the immense majority, elect the general manager and the foreman, the buyer and the salesman, who are now appointed by the capitalist private owner of the enterprise to administer it for his own profit. All that stands in the way seems to be the private ownership of the instruments of production, entailing, as it does, the ownership of the whole product. Why not then abolish "the wage system," and establish an organisation of industry in which the manual workers shall obtain the whole product of their labour, and be at the same time emancipated from any control by another class of the conditions of their working lives?

Past Attempts to Abolish the Wage System.

Those who take the trouble to read nineteenth century history will recognise, in this desire for the Abolition of the Wage System, the most abiding of all working class aspirations. Students of the great "Owenite" movement of 1832-4 cannot fail to be struck by the close likeness that it bears to the French Syndicalism of the present day. What Robert Owen was preaching in those years, with an apostolic fervour that has never been surpassed, was exactly the complete organisation of all the workers, industry by industry, into a "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union," including all the workers all over the country.¹ With a somewhat guileless enthusiasm,

Owen seems to have believed that the capitalist class would probably be converted, by the spectacle of so successful a feat of working-class organisation, to a magnificent voluntary abdication of their position as owners and directors of the means of production. But failing such a conversion, he looked (as do the Syndicalists of to-day) to the "General Strike." All the workers in all the industries were simultaneously to cease work. The landlords and capitalists, finding their land and machinery useless, and their profits at an end, would, it was contended, quickly call back the workers as co-partners, if not indeed as sole owners, of the instruments of production which they alone could use. Owen tried the General Strike in 1833, but it failed, from the causes with which every experienced Trade Union Secretary is painfully familiar. But the failure of Owen's attempts at the "Abolition of the Wage System" by "direct action," led, not so much to any abandonment of the idea itself, as to a change of method. The Chartist agitation for political democracy, which occupied the largest place in English working class thought from 1839 to 1848, had always behind it the yearning for the transformation of the political into an "industrial" democracy. In the upheaval of the French workmen in 1848, their passionate desire to "become their own masters" led to Louis Blanc's famous establishment, by means of Government advances, of self-governing co-operative workshops in various skilled handicrafts.¹ These "self-governing workshops" of Louis Blanc, as described by the French economist Buchez, were eagerly acclaimed in England by the "Christian Socialists" of 1848-60, under whose inspiration many small experiments in "Co-operative Production" were carried on, with varying measures of financial success. The Co-operative Movement, which is now by far the greatest, financially, of all working-class organisations, began, in England, with this same generous ideal of the "self-governing workshop"—of an industry carried on by democratically organised "Associations of Producers," themselves owning the capital with which they worked, themselves electing their managers and controlling their enterprise, and themselves exclusively sharing out the entire product of their joint labour. But recurrent failures chilled the ardour even of the most fervent co-operators. Three-quarters of a century of experience has shown that such "self-

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-123.

¹ This interesting and by no means wholly unsuccessful experiment is (by an apparently invincible ignorance not very creditable to our nation) usually confused by Englishmen with the entirely different and wholly disastrous employment of the Parisian unemployed in digging up the Champs de Mars, organised by Louis Blanc's opponents and rivals (*Histoire des Ateliers Nationaux*, by Emile Thomas).

governing workshops" fail to command, either the amount of capital required, or the managerial ability, or the necessary "knowledge of the market," or the workshop discipline, without all of which efficient production is impossible.¹

Failure of the Co-operative Movement to Abolish the Wage System.

Meanwhile, working-class co-operation, organised on the opposite basis of "Associations of Consumers," has achieved a wonderful success. The thousand separate working-class Co-operative Societies in Great Britain, with their own great "wholesale" federations, their own mills and factories, their own farms and stores and ships, are as successful in production as in distribution. This purely working-class organisation is, in fact, unparalleled by any capitalist enterprise in its steady growth of capital and profits, membership, and trade. And this success has long since convinced these working-class administrators of the superiority of a "democracy of consumers" over any "democracy of producers." The wage-earners of other countries have learnt the same practical lesson. Though other forms of co-operative enterprise continue to exist, it is those based on "Associations of Consumers" which have flourished, until at the present day the Co-operative movement in Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, and Denmark is, in the aggregate, far more extensive in its financial achievements than that of Great Britain itself.

But in order to achieve success, the co-operators in all countries have found it necessary to abandon the idea of "abolishing the wage system." Thus, in our own nation, though all the fifty million pounds of capital of this most profitable business is owned by the two and a half million working-class members, and though all the managing committees are most democratically elected by these members on the basis of "one adult, one vote," yet the 120,000 men and women who work in the Co-operative Stores and in their factories (though in their capacity of consumers they are urged to become, and usually do become members) are, as producers, paid weekly wages, and work under the orders of managers and foremen over whom they, as producers, exercise no more influence and control than do the workers in the enterprises of private capitalism. This, plainly, is not the "Abolition of the Wage System," even for the 1 per cent. of the wage-earning population which alone has found employment in the Co-operative Movement.

And thus the Syndicalist feels that the Co-operative movement—greatly as it may have increased the incomes of the millions of workers

who have become members, successful as it may have been in emancipating them from the employers' "truck" and from the extortion and adulteration of the little shopkeeper—nevertheless leaves the manual working producer, even where it has been most triumphant, still spending his working life under somebody else's orders, still working with instruments of production which he is not allowed to control, still getting in return for his toil those "wages" which represent a part only of his product; whilst all the powers of ownership that he enjoys are to be attained only by periodically voting, as one among millions, on issues so vast and general as to seem only obscurely connected with his own labours.

The Disillusionment with the Parliamentary Action Advocated by the State Socialists.

Meanwhile the Socialist movement had arisen, to hold out high hopes to the wage-earners of the world. The fervent followers of Karl Marx taught the workers to believe that "under Socialism" we really should achieve the "Abolition of the Wage System," the workers would at last receive the entire product of their labour, and the "proletariat" would, for the first time, be definitely emancipated from the rule of any other class. How exactly the Socialist community would be constituted remained vague. Nor was the method of transition precisely indicated. The earlier Socialists habitually believed that the transformation of society would come by some more or less tumultuous upheaval of the working class, and they seem to have taken it for granted that the change would be both sudden and simultaneous. But decade after decade passed without any sign of a "Socialist Revolution," though each decade saw great strides in political democracy, under which the manual working wage-earners came, in many States, to constitute actually a majority of the total electorate. An insurrection of the whole working class against a Government put in by the votes of that same class, seemed an absurdity. The ballot-box had made obsolete the barricade. Moreover, the workmen were not merely voting, they were themselves, in this town or that, as Municipal councillors, actually taking part in the administration; and demonstrating, by the steady growth in the numbers of Labour and Socialist members in the Legislatures of the world, that the assumption of government by Socialist Ministries was not far distant. And thus it came about that the Socialists—at least, such of them as were practical enough to face the situation and candid enough to express it—with an increasing thinking out of the problem, in the light of Trade Union and Co-operative experience, and of that derived from actual participation in public administration, came more and more to see that what Socialism meant

¹ See *Co-operative Movement in Great Britain*, by Beatrice Potter (Mrs. Sidney Webb), Chap. V. "Associations of Producers."

was the substitution of public for private ownership and control. They came more and more to define their aim in terms of the Collectivist State; to rest their arguments on the progressive evolution of industry into companies and trusts of highly-concentrated management; to welcome, as part of their success, every increase of collective ownership of the means of production, and of collective control over what was still left in the hands of private capitalists; and finally to formulate, as the programme of a practicable Socialism, the transfer (as and when each industry had ripened for the change) of the instruments of production from private to public ownership, from individuals to the democratically elected organs of the community, whether local or national, in order that they might be administered, and their profits made available, for the benefit of the community. That this, so to speak, "revisionist" version of Socialism, alike in its English, its German, its French, its Belgian, its Swiss, its Italian and its American form, has done much to gain for it the adhesion of practical people of all sorts, is not to be doubted. But in putting their ideals and their programme into definite form, and in concentrating on practicable proposals, the Socialists gave up two articles of the earlier Socialist faith which had had their own attractions for the "class conscious" wage-earner, namely, the dramatic suddenness of the promised "revolution" to the ideal State, and, as the basis of that State, the "Abolition of the Wage System." The "nationalisation" of the railways, telegraphs, and postal service, the making up of tobacco and matches as a means of revenue, and the manufacture of ships and stores for the public service, or the "municipalisation" of water and gas works, tramways and sewage farms, though it might well be a transfer from private to public ownership and control, was not the dramatically "catastrophic" transformation of the wage system which, under the earlier Socialist teaching, many "class conscious" manual workers were led vaguely to expect. Moreover, in order to gain control over the "nationalised" or "municipalised" industries—in order, indeed, to safeguard the interests of the workers in the successive changes that were taking place—the Socialists had, perforce, to adopt the prosaic policy of getting Labour and Socialist members elected to the legislature and to the local governing bodies. These Parliamentary and municipal Socialists found themselves obliged to appeal for votes to the whole of the electors, whether or not these were Socialists, or Trade Unionists, or "class conscious" manual working wage-earners at all; and when they were elected, they had necessarily to conform to the conditions, and be subjected to the mental "atmosphere," of the Parliament or Town

Council in which they had, henceforth, to spend so much of their lives. To the "class conscious" wage-earner who watched his representative from outside, progress seemed to come with maddening slowness. And as administrators and legislators, the Labour and Socialist members could not fail to realise how imperative it was, if any sort of efficiency was to be attained, to secure highly trained expert management, and to maintain discipline throughout the whole working staff. Thus, when "Socialism" was worked out to mean the transfer of industry from private to public ownership, it became plain that it by no means meant handing industry over to the manual workers. The ownership and control passed to the whole body of citizens, among whom the wage-earners in any particular workshop, or even those of a whole industry, found themselves, as citizens, in an insignificant minority, whilst as workers they were receiving wages and obeying orders just as before.¹ Nor do the Syndicalists see that the progress of this sort of "Socialism" has, in itself, any tendency to lead to any other state of things. To them it seems that its tendency is to induce the manual workers to put their reliance on the promises of the politicians, who are necessarily, for the most part, not of the manual working class; whilst such working class members as are elected quickly fall away, with the great change in the circumstances of their lives, from that full "class consciousness" which is bred of the wage-earner's insecurity, impecuniosity and subjection to the orders of others.

The Disillusionment with Democracy.

The Syndicalists have, especially in France, yet another objection to Socialism as it is now understood. Socialism is based throughout on complete Democracy. It depends for its adoption on the conversion of a majority of the community. The Socialist deplors the "ignorance" which makes the masses slow to adopt his faith; and he can seldom free himself from a quite illusory degree of optimism as to the rapidity of their conversion. But without a majority he can do nothing. To the Syndicalist this seems to mean the subjection of the "conscious minority" of intensely feeling workmen to the "incompetent vote" of an inert and apathetic mass. He has no intention of waiting for their conversion. We find him expressly repudiating Democracy.

¹ "The insistence on economic freedom—in the sense indicated—runs through all the literature of the French Labour Movement. It is not only and not so much the inequality of wealth, the contrasts of distribution that stimulate the militant workmen to their collectivist hopes, as it is the protest against the 'arbitrariness' of the individual employer and the ideal of a free workshop. To attain the latter is the main thing and forms the programme of the General Confederation as formulated in the first clause of its statutes." (*The Labour Movement in France*, by Louis Levine, 1912, p. 187.)

"French Syndicalism," writes one of its leaders, "was born of the reaction of the proletariat against Democracy."¹ "They are not taken in by the Democratic sophism that all men are equal. . . . They despise the opinion of the unawakened, of the apathetic and fainthearted masses. The free man, even if he stand alone, is superior to a servile crowd. His right to revolt is indefeasible."² "The minority," says the most representative of all French Syndicalists, "is not at all disposed to give up its claims and its aspirations before the inertia of a mob not yet animated and stirred by the spirit of revolt. Hence the conscious minority is driven to act without bothering about the refractory mob, under penalty of having to bow the neck to the yoke, like the thoughtless mob itself."³

The Essence of Syndicalism.

From the depth of this disillusionment Syndicalism arises—in France, between 1892 and 1900—with a new faith and a new programme. What are the main articles of this faith? First, that the manual working wage-earners should rely exclusively on themselves and their own organisations to work out their own salvation. They recall the principle of the old "International" of 1862-71, that "the workers' emancipation can only be the work of the workers themselves."⁴ To the Syndicalist, what he calls the confrontation of classes is absolute. "On the one side the robbers, our masters: on the other, those who are robbed, the employed."⁵ Hence the working-class organisation, which is now to transform the world, must, from start to finish, be an exclusively working-class organisation. "The strength that we create in the fighting organisation ought to work under the direction of those who have to profit by the fight. It is for the workers to conduct their own movement, for the very object of it is the maintenance of the workers' interests. . . . The working-class movement, having arisen from the miseries of the wage-earners, ought to include only wage-earners, and ought to be conducted only by wage-earners, exclusively for the specific interests of the wage-earners. . . . The organisation must keep itself free from every extraneous influence, whether emanating from the possessory classes or from the Government of the State; it ought to include all the institutions and

services that meet all the several needs of the manual worker. It must be self-contained and self-sufficing, so as to find within itself all the forces by which it will act and impose itself."¹

This working-class organisation is to take the form of a Trade Union co-extensive with the whole scope of a great national industry. "An ideal form of organisation," writes Mr. Tom Mann, "would be to get all the workers employed in any one industry to join into one union of that particular industry, be they carpenters or blacksmiths, boilermakers or upholsterers, engineers or labourers, skilled or unskilled, cigar-makers or shop assistants, railway porters or booking clerks."² The Syndicalist organisation must be based exclusively on the "class consciousness" of the manual worker. It has been the fault of the Socialists, says one of the leading French Syndicalists, that they "have been guided by abstract ideas expounded by 'intellectuals.'" The Syndicalists, who are almost wholly manual workers, bring more feeling than thought. They have "a feeling of brutal opposition to the middle-class, without the preoccupations of any deliberate plan or general theory."³ To induce the hesitating workman to join, all other issues must be avoided than that which divides Labour from Capital. "You will talk about the employer, and contrast the capitalist's profit with the operative's wages, between the wealth which the master enjoys and the destitution in which his 'hands' are plunged. You will prove to the members of the Union, not by learned explanations, but by the facts with which they themselves are acquainted, that they are robbed day by day, that the luxury of the small minority of profit-mongers is built up out of their poverty."⁴ We see the same spirit reflected in the leading exponent of Syndicalism in England. "Unions should teach their members to think, every time they enter a yard, mill, or line, This is the place that we keep going; this is the place we ought to own and control."⁵ As put more picturesquely by Mr. Tom Mann: "We will lead them a devil of a dance and show whether or no there is life and courage in the workers of the British Isles."⁶ The Syndicalists, in fact, urge a continuous state of war with the employers. They are "to fight against the employers in order to extract from them, and to their hurt, ever greater ameliorations of the worker's lot, on the way to

¹ *Syndicalisme et Socialisme* (Rivière, Paris), p. 36 (article by Hubert Lagardelle).

² *Syndicalisme révolutionnaire et Syndicalisme réformiste*, by Félicien Challaye (Alcan, Paris, 1909), p. 33.

³ *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, by Emile Pouget (Rivière, Paris), p. 36.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁵ *Le Syndicat*, by Emile Pouget (Paris), p. 5.

¹ *L'Action Syndicaliste*, by Victor Griffuelhes (Paris), p. 16, 17.

² *The Weapon Shaping* by Tom Mann (Vol. I, No. 9, of *The Industrial Syndicalist*, March 1911), p. 17.

³ *L'Action Syndicaliste*, by Victor Griffuelhes (Rivière, Paris, 1908), p. 5.

⁴ *Le Syndicalisme contre le Socialisme* by Mermeix (Paris, 1907), p. 15.

⁵ *The Industrial Syndicalist*, article by E. J. B. Allen; Nov. 1910.

⁶ *The Industrial Syndicalist*, article by Tom Mann; July, 1910.

the complete suppression of 'exploitation.'"¹ "Unionism," says Mr. Tom Mann, "that aims only at securing peace between employers and men is not only of no value in the fight for freedom, but is actually a serious hindrance and a menace to the interests of the workers . . ." [Syndicalism] "will refuse to enter into any long agreements with the masters . . . it will seize every chance of fighting for the general betterment—gaining ground and never losing any."² We see this formulated in "The Miners' Next Step," which makes it a matter of principle that "a continual agitation be carried on in favour of increasing the minimum wage and shortening the hours of work, until we have extracted the whole of the employers' profits. . . ." "Our only concern is to see to it that those who create the value receive it. And if by the force of a more perfect organisation and more militant policy we reduce profits, we shall at the same time tend to eliminate the shareholders who own the coal-field."³

The "Direct Action" Advocated by the Syndicalists.

In this perpetual state of war with the employers, the workers will use, in new forms, the weapon of the strike—not the mere temporary suspension of work as an incident of collective bargaining, to which the best organised English Trade Unions have now and then to resort, but the strike in two more extreme forms, which are expressly described as "the Irritation Strike" and "the General Strike." The "Irritation Strike" is not a concerted withdrawal of work, but, so to speak, a subtle and unavowed "adulteration" of its quality. The "Irritation Strike," we are told, "depends for its successful adoption on the men holding clearly the point of view that their interests and the employer's are necessarily hostile. Further, the employer is vulnerable only in one place, his profits. Therefore if the men wish to bring effective pressure to bear, they must use methods which tend to reduce profits. One way of doing this is to decrease production while continuing at work."⁴ The French Syndicalists claim to have learnt this policy of "Sabotage" from that of "Ca Canny," to which certain English dock labourers' Unions have, in their despair of other redress, occasionally been tempted.⁵ Its definition on the other side of the Channel is, "A mauvaise paye, mauvais travail"

("For a bad wage, bad work"). But the extensive variety of its applications in France leaves our English procedure far behind. "If you are a mechanic," gleefully recites one of the leading French Syndicalist writers, "it is very easy for you, with a pennyworth of some sort of powder, or even with sand, to scores lines on your rollers, to cause loss of time, and even costly repairs. If you are a carpenter or cabinet-maker, what is easier than to injure a piece of furniture, so that the employer will not notice it, nor at first the customer, but so that customers will presently be lost. A tailor can quite easily ruin a garment or a piece of stuff; a shopman with some stains will make it necessary to sell off damaged goods at a low price; a grocer's assistant causes breakages by faulty packing. No matter who may be to blame, the master loses his customers. . . . The methods of 'Sabotage' may thus be varied indefinitely."¹ "Sabotage," says another, "is carried out sometimes by a diminution in the speed of production, sometimes by bad workmanship, sometimes by injury to the instrument itself. . . . It is commonly an individual act, emphasising to the employer the importance of the collective demand made upon him. It should be added that the fear of 'Sabotage' is a most valuable sedative, and often suffices to bring recalcitrant employers to a better state of mind."² This policy was eloquently condemned by the eminent Socialist Jaurès as dishonest and unworthy, but it is abundantly upheld and justified by the French Syndicalists. "Simple common sense," we read, "suggests that, as the employer is an enemy, it is no more disloyal for the workman to entrap him into ambushes than to fight him face to face."³

The General Strike.

"The General Strike" is a revival of Robert Owen's idea of 1833, of putting pressure to bear on the community as a whole, by a concerted and simultaneous withdrawal of all labour. A "main idea" of Syndicalists, we are told—"one of its cardinal principles, is to be able to paralyse the industry."⁴ "What we Syndicalists are after," explains Mr. Tom Mann, "is to use this weapon on a huge scale, actually to change the state of society itself. We shall prepare the way as rapidly as possible for 'The General Strike' of national proportions. This will be the actual social and industrial revolution. The workers will refuse to any longer manipulate the machinery of production in the interest of the capitalist class, and there will be no power on earth able to compel

¹ *L'Action Syndicaliste*, by Victor Griffuelhes (Rivière, Paris), p. 12.

² *Forging the Weapon*, by Tom Mann (*The Industrial Syndicalist*, Vol. I. No. 3, Sept. 1910).

³ *The Miners' Next Step* (Tonypandy, 1912), p. 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵ *Industrial Democracy*, by S. and B. Webb, p. 307.

¹ *Le Sabotage*, by Emile Pouget (Rivière, Paris), p. 34.

² *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, by Emile Pouget (Rivière, Paris), p. 46.

³ *Le Sabotage*, p. 31.

⁴ *The Industrial Syndicalist*, December, 1910, p. 21.

them to work when they thus refuse."¹ To Syndicalists, we are told "the General Strike is one of the forms—the most complete, the most impressive, of 'direct action.' The general body of wage-earners, by deliberately suspending all labour on a given day, by tearing themselves away, on a concerted decision, from the exploitation to which they are subjected and by which alone the existing social order is maintained, cut away that social order at its very base. If they cease to work for the employing class and for the great joint stock companies, they destroy at one blow the economic dominion exercised upon them. And as this economic dominion is translated in the region of politics by the authority of the State Government, the State Government itself will crumble to pieces simultaneously with what is but its other side, the system by which millions of men are used for the profit of a minority. From this paralysis of the machinery of the State, and of all services, public and private, to the 'Socialisation' of the means of production is but a step. Syndicalism thinks nothing will be easier than to take this final step. Such, at any rate, is the theory."² "Within a week," writes an English sympathiser, "the useful, productive classes, once mere wage-earners, would be masters of the situation. There would be no fear of starvation, for they could take possession of the food supplies, and of the land as the source of further food supplies."³ As one of them has explained, "'the General Strike' can only be the Revolution itself, for if it were anything else, it would be but one huge deception the more (!). The industrial or localised general strikes which precede it and prepare the way for it . . . really constitute a necessary gymnastics just as the army manœuvres are the gymnastics of war."⁴

The Future Syndicalist Community.

How exactly the respective Trade Unions are to take possession of the instruments of production in each industry, and precisely how it is proposed to transfer "the few useful functions" which the public departments and local governing bodies perform, is—so far as we can discover—nowhere explained. The fact is that the typical manual working Syndicalist revolts against the "middle-class" assumption that action, and especially collective action, should be preceded and guided by some clear conception of what is to be substituted for that which it is intended to destroy. To quote once more from one of the most active of

French Syndicalists: "Directly we think of definite aims endless disputes arise. Some will say that their aims will be realised in a society without government. Others say that they will be realised in a society elaborately governed and directed. Which is right? I do not take the responsibility of deciding. I wait to decide whither I am going until I shall have returned from the journey, which will itself have revealed whither I am actually going."¹

"No more dogmas or formulas," writes another, "no more futile discussions as to the future of society; no more comprehensive plans of social organisation; but a feeling of the fight, quickened by practice, a philosophy of action which accords pre-eminence to intuition, and which declares that the simplest workman in the heat of combat knows more about the matter than the most abstract doctrinaires of all the schools."²

Moreover, to the typical French Syndicalist at any rate, government, whether national or local, seems of such little consequence that he does not stay to think how it will be organised. What is clear is that all the present machinery is to be "scrapped," as well as most of the present functions. "Syndicalism does not aim simply at a change in the persons exercising the functions of government, but at the reduction to zero of the State Government itself, by transferring to the Trade Union organisation the few useful functions which create the illusion as to the great utility of government, and by the pure and simple suppression of all the rest."³ The English Syndicalists are a little more definite, at any rate as regards the organisation of production. "Our objective," says *The Miners' Next Step*, "begins to take shape before your eyes. Every industry thoroughly organised, in the first place, to fight, to gain control of, and then to administer that industry. The co-ordination of all industries on a Central Production Board, who, with a statistical department to ascertain the needs of the people, will issue its demands on the different departments of industry, leaving to the men themselves to determine under what conditions and how the work should be done. This would mean real democracy in real life, making for real manhood and womanhood. Any other form of democracy is a delusion and a snare."⁴ The English Syndicalists occasionally make it clear that there will be some central body exercising what we should call Parliamentary control. "The State," we are told, "would retain for itself, in some simple form the right of supervising

¹ *The Syndicalist*, January, 1912; article by Tom Mann, entitled, "What we Syndicalists are after."

² *Histoire du Mouvement Syndical en France, 1789-1906*, by Paul Louis (Alcan, Paris, 1907), p. 275.

³ *The Clarion*, May 1912.

⁴ *L'Action Syndicaliste*, by Victor Griffuelhes (Rivière, Paris), p. 32; quoting Guyot.

¹ *L'Action Syndicaliste*, by Victor Griffuelhes (Rivière, Paris), p. 4.

² *Syndicalisme et Socialisme* (Rivière, Paris), preface by Hubert Lagardelle, p. 8.

³ *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, by Emile Pouget (Rivière, Paris), p. 47.

⁴ *The Miners' Next Step*, p. 30.

the administration of the railroad system, without, however, directly interfering with the administration itself. The workers would draw a certain minimum wage, would participate in the net profits of the enterprise, and subscribe the necessary cash for its running expenses."¹ What is very clear, however, is that the central legislature is not to be built up out of geographical constituencies. "Parliament to-day is made up of representatives from geographical districts, and is in no sense a body adapted to intelligently regulate the industrial life of the workers. A body to be competent for such a purpose must be made up of delegates from the organisations of industry, and it would seem practically impossible to transform Parliament into such a body. The Syndicalist says there must be a substitution of one body for the other."²

Objections to Syndicalism.

What are we to think of such a policy and such a programme? To those who are satisfied with the present state of Society, or who regard the existing organisation of industry as unalterable, any refutation of Syndicalism will seem superfluous. To such persons its spirit, its methods, and its ideals will seem a monument of unreason, if not of wickedness. But we should err gravely if we assumed that to the mass of the wage-earners in Great Britain, as in France, it presents itself in any such light. We ourselves regard Syndicalism as a very natural and, we must concede, very pardonable reaction from the intolerable social conditions of to-day, and from the quite inexcusable neglect of Cabinets and Parliaments to deal with these evils. But whilst we think that the Syndicalist agitation supplies a useful corrective, and brings into prominence working-class feelings that we are too prone to ignore, we regard the Syndicalist proposals, not only as ethically objectionable, but also as fundamentally impracticable.

We will now try to explain summarily our main objections, and briefly to indicate our own alternative.

[The Permanent Value of Trade Unionism.

First let us distinguish between (i) what is called "direct action"; and (ii) the Syndicalist vision of a community based exclusively on Associations of Producers. We have never had any sympathy with those who have preached to the workman that he should desert his Trade Union and give up his right to strike, whether in return for a benevolent employer, a scheme of profit-sharing or the most alluring proposals for "arbitration." Nor

ought he ever to confide all his interests to Parliament or to any political party whatsoever. Our view has always been that the wage-earners in each industry are bound to look after their own interests by the "direct action" of their own trade organisation. We have always insisted that if they did not organise and combine for this purpose, and take up a very determined attitude about it; and, when necessary, even at great hardship to themselves and their families, collectively refuse to work at all, they would not only fail to get a fair show in the world, but also inevitably find their Standard of Life degraded by the economic pressure of the community. This, indeed, is now the authoritative conclusion of the English economists. And we have always insisted, to the horror of the Marxian Socialist, that this would continue to be the case even if all the means of production were "nationalised" or "municipalised." We have had to fight many a battle to convince the enthusiastic State Socialist that Trade Unions would still be necessary, and could, indeed, only rise to their highest development in a Socialist State. We have equally pointed out the enormous educational influence, both in the training of character and in the development of technical efficiency, of self-governing associations expressive of one of the most vital parts of a man's life, his capacity for production. It was just because we deemed this "direct action" by the organised workers of such vital importance to them, and because we regarded it as a necessary and permanent element even in an ideal State, that we spent seven years in studying how it could best be organised out of the imperfect Trade Unionism that exists, and by what methods it could most efficiently fulfil its permanent social function. And it is significant of our feeling of the fundamental importance of this "direct action" by organised industries that we entitled our study of it "Industrial Democracy."

An Evil Type of Trade Unionism.

But this insistence on the importance of "direct action" by the organised workers themselves does not involve acceptance of any particular form of "direct action." Experience seems to us to show that there is a bad Trade Unionism as well as a good Trade Unionism; and that the bad Trade Unionism has very terrible results on the workers themselves. Now, although Syndicalism, as an ideal organisation of Society, does not necessarily involve any particular methods of getting to the ideal, all the Syndicalist preaching that we have read or heard is closely bound up with the idea of a complete abstention from Parliamentary or political action of any kind, and a contempt for the whole procedure of Collective Bargaining and Legal Enactment which has been spontaneously

¹ *The Syndicalist*, January, 1912, article entitled "The Railroad to the Railwaymen."

² *The British Socialist*, May 15th, 1912, article by Gaylord Wilshire, p. 197.

¹ *Industrial Democracy*, by S. and B. Webb. (Longmans, London.)

developed by the English Trade Unionists; whilst reliance is placed exclusively on the "Irritation Strike," designed to make the private management of industry both disagreeable and unprofitable, and on the "General Strike," by means of which it is supposed that such pressure can be brought to bear on the community at large that, somehow or another, the strikers will get the new organisation and ownership of industry that they desire. Frankly, we cannot conceive how any such methods could possibly bring about the desired results. We do not need to dilate on the practical obstacles in the way of getting all the sixteen millions of wage earners enrolled in the new Trade Unionism by industries that is suggested; or on the obvious difficulty of persuading such large numbers to adopt and to maintain for any length of time either the "Irritation Strike" or a General Strike; or on the unlikelihood that any paralysis of the nation's industrial life would, in itself, produce a gigantic transfer of ownership from hundreds of thousands of private capitalists to the new associations of the workers in each industry. A more grave consideration is the fact that to preach to the workers a deliberate disregard of the duties of citizenship, the persistent abstention from voting, and the abandonment of all interest in Parliament and the Local Authority, for the sake of advancing their own interests in another way, is hardly the road to higher things. Moreover, the adoption on a large scale of a persistent policy of "Ca Canny," let alone the more unscrupulous French varieties of "Sabotage," means, we are convinced, a serious deterioration of moral character in those who consent to take part in it. And in view of the widespread misery and suffering among the workers themselves, that any great paralysis of industry inevitably produces, we should have to think seriously before we could ever place reliance for huge constitutional changes on the use of such a weapon as the General Strike. The use of such equivocal methods leads to reactions which their advocates do not always bear in mind. In a state of civil war, all social progress comes to an end; and Society has, at its command, if it is sufficiently provoked by acts that outrage public opinion, measures of repression which might easily mean the permanent shackling of Trade Unions for any "direct action," the suppression of free propaganda, and a withdrawal, by some manipulation of the political constitution, of all effective political power from the wage-earning class.

We need not imagine that sincere and earnest advocates of Syndicalism are blind to the material loss and suffering involved in the General Strike; or that they are heedless or indifferent to the demoralisation of character caused by the "Irritation Strike"; or that they underrate the hardships which they are asking their fellow-workers

to undergo; or that they ignore the risk of failure and the consequences of defeat in a really serious revolt against the community as a whole. Their answer would be that all these incidental evils are temporary only, and that the state of Society which it is proposed to bring about, with its "abolition of the wage system," and the destruction of the "capitalist state," is so beneficial as to be well worth the cost. In short, such persons feel, rightly or wrongly, that the end justifies the means. To convince them, we must therefore criticise their ends.

Now we would point out in the first place that the Syndicalist community would not be able to achieve the declared object of "abolishing the wage-system" in any sense in which either the Syndicalist or the average workman understands that phrase. What the workman understands by it is that he will no longer be under the authority and the orders of another person, and that he will retain for himself all that he produces. What the Syndicalist means by it is not less clear. We may quote the able and eloquent description of the ideal Syndicalist community after the revolution, written by two of the working-class leaders of the movement. With wages, they say, "there necessarily disappeared every vestige of subordination. No one could, under any circumstances, be paid by any other person, and could, equally, not be the subordinate of any person. There were among the various men and women, contacts, contractual relations, associations, the forming of groups, but each person rendered service to his colleague, on a foot of equality, and on the understanding of reciprocity of service. And it was just because things were on this footing that any law-making body, whether national, provincial, district, or parish, became obsolete."¹

This idea of the destruction of discipline is carried very far. "On board ship, the selection of a captain and of the other persons having charge of the navigation was made by common consent of the crew. There was no question of authority, but merely of a natural division of labour, which made no one less than another, and gave no one any superior rights."²

Syndicalism would not Abolish the Wage System.

But could this be so? To take coalmining, for instance, we do not understand that it is proposed that each miner should keep for his own profit the actual pieces of coal that he digs out. This would obviously be unjust to the man working at a "bad place" in the worst mine. What is demanded is that all the coalminers should receive an equal return for equal work. But this means

¹ *Comment nous ferons la revolution*, by E. Pataud and E. Pouget. Paris, 1909, p. 142.

² *Ibid.* p. 213.

something very like wages. Even if we imagine that all the coal mines in the United Kingdom are controlled exclusively by the National Union of Coalminers, and that the proceeds are shared out among those who have co-operated in the production, it would still be necessary for some authority—we assume a National Council of the Coalminers' Union, sitting at Manchester or Newcastle—to fix how much money should be paid each week to the hewers, drawers, enginemens, mechanics, colliery clerks, managers, foremen, pony attendants, and all the other kinds of "labourers." This is not a question of whether they should be paid at different rates, or all alike. Whatever might be the basis adopted for this weekly "sharing out," and whatever might prove to be the amount of the payment in each case, the thirty, or fifty, or seventy shillings, whichever it was, could hardly fail to appear, to the workman in Ayreshire or Glamorganshire, as anything but an arbitrarily fixed sum, *having no sort of relation to the productivity of his own labour*, or even to the productivity of the mine at which he was working; and fixed, not by himself, or by his mates, but by some far-off "external" authority, whose decisions he could not possibly check, or (in the absence of the necessary information), even understand. And we fear that, to his wife, the money that he brought home every week would seem merely "wages," differing only in amount from what her husband had brought home under the "Capitalist System."

Moreover, whilst the thirty, or fifty, or seventy shillings brought home each week by the coalminer would, under the Syndicalist plan, appear very much like wages, he would still find himself spending his working hours under the definite orders of somebody. It would be necessary for some authority to decide which mines should be worked at all, and which should be closed; on how many days, and on which days, and during which hours the engines should be kept going and coal be drawn; which seams should be opened and developed and which abandoned; where pitprops should be put up; where new shafts are required, and when they should be provided; what kind of machinery should be used, and how much of it; what arrangements should be made for conveying the coal to the shaft and stacking it at the pit's mouth; and what should be the rules about safety lamps, smoking, meal times, working the ventilating apparatus, hours of beginning and ending, and a thousand and one other details of management. Would it not be necessary for these decisions to be come to, not by the individual miners themselves, nor yet by any local group of miners, but by the "National Council" of the Union, away in Manchester or Newcastle, acting on the advice and proposals of its own skilled engineers and managers? The same is even more obvious in

the case of the railways. We assume that it is not supposed that each engine-driver could run his own train when and where he pleased, and collect what he could from the adventurous passengers. Some central authority would have to decide what trains should run, at which stations they should stop, at what hours they should start, which men should work each train as drivers, firemen, guards, etc.; what system of signalling should be used, what signal-boxes should be provided, and where; which men should work each set of signals, and for how long; how much coal, and water, and oil should be provided, and when and where; what arrangements should be made for the reception and delivery of goods and the accommodation of passengers; and all the innumerable details of the work done by the booking clerks, the permanent way men, the ticket collectors and so on; to say nothing of the detailed arrangement of the work of all the men employed in the hotels, docks, steamship lines, omnibus services, goods warehouses, and locomotive works, which now form part of the railway enterprise. We assume that all these decisions would have to be taken, day by day, by a "National Council" of the National Union of Railway Workers, and the necessary orders would have to be transmitted through a hierarchy of managers, clerks, foremen, etc. *Thus, the individual coalminer or railway worker would find himself acting under orders, just as he does at present.* It is urged that the Syndicalist movement is a revolt against the idea of people's lives being managed for them by others, and more especially by a hierarchy of expert officials. We cannot see how the workmen, in these cases, would escape finding the details of their working lives settled, over their heads, by a far-off, centralised expert department of the Syndicalist community. We do not, ourselves, urge the existence of such orders or such a fixing of weekly allowances to the workers as any objection to the Syndicalist ideal, any more than we urge it as an objection to the Socialist ideal, or for that matter, to the existing order. We see no other way than that of a system of uniform weekly payments and of disciplined obedience to orders, by which any "National" industry can be carried on. But if the Syndicalist community expects the workman to obey orders and to receive uniform weekly payments, what does it mean by claiming to abolish the wage-system, and claiming also to get rid of other people's "management" of the worker's working hours?

We can understand that an enthusiastic Syndicalist might assert that, under his plan, the orders which the coalminer or the railwayman would have to obey, with regard to all the details of his working life, would be very different in their nature from those to which he is at present subject, because they would be given by men who were them-

selves coalminers or railway workers, as the case might be; that though they would emanate from the distant headquarters of the National Union, and would come down through a hierarchy of managers, clerks, and foremen, they would be the decisions of "men of his own kidney," sitting as the National Council of his own Union. Similarly he might say that though the reward that the miners or railwaymen got for their labour might come to them week by week in a fixed number of shillings, settled by some distant authority, these sums would, if the miners or the railway men got the entire product of their work, be very different in amount from the present wages after royalties and rents and profits and dividends and interest on capital had first been abstracted by the non-working shareholders and landlords. But is it quite clear that they would be so very different? Is the National Union of Coalminers actually to own the coal mines, and the National Union of Railway Workers actually to own the railways? Are they to govern them exactly as they think fit, and to divide all the product among their respective members? In the case of the coal mines, the men are working on a natural product, which cannot be replaced, and which is in itself of great value. Have the other workers, who are not so fortunate as to be coalminers, no claim to share in this "natural" wealth? Must they pay, for the coal that they need, whatever the National Union of Coalminers chooses to ask? In the case of the railways, the men are working with instruments of production which, in their present highly efficient state, have resulted from the toil of countless other workers of past generations. Are the existing railway workers, and such recruits as they may choose subsequently to admit to their ranks, to enjoy all the advantages of what is necessarily a profitable monopoly? Are all the rest of the workers to travel at the hours that the National Union of Railway Workers finds most convenient to its members, pay the fares that it chooses to exact, and put up with just whatever accommodation it is willing out of its profits to provide? It would be unfair to the Syndicalists to imagine that they had overlooked so obvious a point; and the Editor of the *Syndicalist* has explained that the coal mines are not to belong to the coalminers, or the railways to the railway workers. They are to belong to the Syndicalist Community. And as there must plainly be some arrangement for settling the relations between the different National Unions, including the prices at which their several products shall be mutually exchanged, we are, it appears, to have a General Council, or National Assembly, elected by and representative of the National Unions of the different industries. This body, as we understand, will take care that the National Union of Coalminers, or the National Union of Railway Workers, does not abuse its

position of monopolist; and will secure, in one form or another, for the benefit of the rest of the workers, whatever may be deemed to be their equitable share of the value of the coal (which would take the place of the existing royalties), and of the profits of the railways (to be substituted for the existing payments to debenture and shareholders). Thus, it would inevitably be the General Council or Assembly, and not any particular National Union, which would have to determine the amount of each product that the community required; which would have to settle how many hours should make up the working day; which would have to fix the prices at which the different products should be exchanged; and therefore, which would have (indirectly, at any rate) to decide the amount which each National Union would be able to share out as weekly allowances to its members. But here we get back to something very like a Parliament, a Parliament in which, it is true, the non-producers will have no share, but also a Parliament in which the members of any particular industry will be in a tiny minority. Thus, we have in the Syndicalist community, an authority superior to that of the National Union of the workers in any industry still further removed from the individual worker; made up of people who for the most part will not even have any personal experience of the conditions of his working life. And it will be this Supreme Authority which will practically have to issue the orders fixing the hours, wages, and conditions of working in the different industries. The individual coalminer or railway worker will therefore, in a Syndicalist Community, be as far as ever from obtaining the entire product of his own labour, or from managing the details of his own working life. He will have to obey orders, and exist on uniform weekly allowances as he does now. And those orders and weekly allowances will not even be determined finally by the men of his own industry, or by the National Council of his own Union. They will be determined finally by a General Assembly, probably sitting at Westminster; made up by men of all sorts of industries; and necessarily having its committees and sub-committees, its heads of departments and other officials, and all the complicated apparatus required for the government of a great community.

The Complicated Administration of the Syndicalist Community.

For we must remember that the work to be done by this Syndicalist General Council or Assembly, elected by trades, which is to supersede the present House of Commons, will be a hundred times more complicated, varied, and exacting than the duties now performed by the much-abused "Parliament of Incompetents" at Westminster. To the old problems of Foreign Affairs and

Colonial Policy, of National Defence and Internal Police, of Sanitation and Public Education there will be added not only the necessary provision for the widows and orphans and sick and aged of the community, and all that now absorbs the attention of the Town and County Councils, but also such abstruse and difficult business as the annual distribution among the various National Unions of all the boys and girls beginning work each year; the continuous adjustment and readjustment of the wages, hours, and conditions of work of the various kinds of labour in the different industries in the various parts of the kingdom; the prices at which the thousands of different commodities shall be exchanged; the vexed problem of the adoption of new inventions and the scrapping of old machinery involving the supersession of somebody's cherished skill, the decision of how much land the National Union of Agriculturists shall each year cede to the National Union of Building Workers for new houses, to the National Union of Textile Workers for new factories; and to the National Union of Coalminers for new mines, and where exactly these should be situated; to say nothing of the bargaining with the representatives of foreign powers or foreign merchants as to which commodities should be obtained from abroad, and exactly what commodities should be taken from the product of each particular National Union to be given in exchange for them. The Statistical Department, which always appears in Syndicalist proposals, as supplying to the General Council or Assembly all the facts and figures required for such department of its work would, indeed, have to be a monster, of a degree of complicated organisation and bureaucratic omniscience which leaves far behind even the wildest caricatures of the Fabian Socialist State.¹

We see, therefore, that the ideal of the fervent Syndicalist, when worked out in cold print, inevitably brings him—not at all to the “abolition of the wage system,” or to the worker being freed from other people's management of his working life—but to an elaborately organised National State, in which he would be subject, not only to the Central Committee of his Union, but also an omnipotent National Parliament, composed for the most part of men having different occupations from his own; settling in committees and sub-committees of different kinds (which would

infallibly escape publicity), the amount of his weekly wage, the length of his working day, and all the conditions of his daily toil; and served in all this business by an elaborate statistical and secretarial staff distributed over the whole country, having a training different from that of the manual worker, and inevitably developing the character and qualities commonly abused as “bourgeois” and “bureaucratic.” It is a curious paradox that whilst, in our opinion, the proposed Syndicalist organisation inevitably partakes of the defects of “authoritarianism” and “bureaucracy” attributed to the present State, or of those that may characterise any future Collectivist State, it seems to us to have drawbacks and difficulties of its own, from which any society based on geographical constituencies is or may be free.

Syndicalism robs the Worker of his Trade Union.

First let us notice that Syndicalism, in attaining its end, will unwittingly have robbed the worker of his Trade Union. The National Union of Coalminers, in becoming the managing authority for all the coal mines in the Kingdom, will necessarily cease to serve (as the present Trade Union serves), as the workers' defence against the managing authority. Of course, we may hope that the Central Committee of the National Union of Coalminers, and the managers and foremen whom it appoints, will never be as tyrannous, or as heedless of the comfort and convenience of individual workmen, as the present coalowners and the managers and foremen whom they appoint. But as is shown by our experience of working men as employers, in Trade Unions as well as in Co-operative Societies, the decisions of the most democratically elected executive committees with regard to the wages, hours and conditions of employment of particular sections of their fellow workmen, do not always satisfy the latter, or even seem to them to be just. This is particularly the case with regard to small minorities of workers inside a great industry, like the pattern makers in the engineering trade, or the beamers, twisters, and drawers in the textile industry. Such small minorities, whether skilled or unskilled, are apt to find their special needs and requirements misunderstood by the mass of their fellow workers, and they are therefore swamped in any aggregate vote of the industry as a whole. Under the present arrangements of industry (as also in a Collectivist State), the Trade Union is available to protect from injustice either the individual workman, or the workers in a particular mine or factory, or in a particular district; or, by such separate sectional organisation as we see among the pattern makers or the beamers, twisters, and drawers, the workers in a particular branch of the industry having special needs or require-

¹ “The Statistical Committee, composed of delegates of the federations of Unions and Trades Councils . . . had for its task, not management but merely condensation and analysis; it got together statistics as to the output of production and the amount of consumption, and served as a link between all the groupings. It became the centre of an enormous telephonic network, to which there was continually sent, and from which there was continually despatched the information required to regularise the whole social functioning, to maintain equilibrium everywhere so that there should not be plethora at one place, scarcity at another.”—*Comment nous ferons la révolution*, by E. Pataud and E. Pouget. Paris, 1909. p. 170.

ments. But if all local and sectional Trade Unions are to be merged in great National Unions including whole industries; if the National Union is itself to be the managing authority of the industry as a whole, with its branch committees carrying out the orders of the managing authority, and its local officers acting as the agents of the managing authority, the individual workman, or the workers in a particular mine or factory or district, or in a special branch of the industry will find themselves without any independent organisation able to represent their case and to stand up for their rights, against the far-off Central Committee of the National Union. It seems to us that if all the coal mines of the United Kingdom were managed, under the General Council or Assembly, by the National Union of Coalminers, it would be quickly found necessary for the coalminers of Glamorganshire and Ayrshire, and every other district, to organise themselves into District Unions, and for the colliery enginemen and mechanics to combine in their own trade organisations, for the express purpose of maintaining their particular interests against the Central Committee sitting at Manchester or Newcastle, which could hardly fail to be dominated by the overwhelming majority of hewers. In short, Syndicalism, by making the Trade Union into an employing authority, necessarily destroys its utility as a Trade Union. A new crop of Trade Unions would be necessary, representing particular sections of the workers, and employing the methods of Collective Bargaining (and even occasionally the old-fashioned strike!) against the Central Committee of the National Union itself, as the successor to the present employing authority.

The Exclusiveness of the Syndicalist Community.

And when we come to consider how these managing authorities of the Syndicalist Community will actually be composed, we cannot help wondering whether all the necessities of the case have been seen by the Syndicalist leaders. The whole working class (as *The Miners' Next Step* tells us) is to be "classified, regimented, and brigaded along the lines indicated by the product," into National Unions, each controlling one entire industry. The General Council or Assembly, which is to be the supreme authority, is, we are told, to be composed, not of representatives of individual citizens, but exclusively of delegates from the various industries so organised. This is exactly how the future organisation is described by the French Syndicalists.¹ In this way, it is claimed, you will get, instead of the

"incompetent vote" of a quite heterogeneous electorate, artificially grouped according to the accident of geographical residence, the deliberately expressed will of men associated together by their strongest and most enduring interest—namely that of wealth production. All non-producers will be automatically excluded from any voice in the councils, and from any share in the decisions of the Syndicalist community based exclusively on production.

We are struck by this exclusiveness. It is all very well to claim that the workers in any particular industry, organised on that basis, will have a much keener interest than the present Parliamentary voter, *in the details of that particular industry*, and that they may therefore prove more competent electors of its managing committee. But does it follow that they will be as keenly interested, and as competent electors with regard (i) to the details of industries other than their own; (ii) to Foreign Affairs and Colonial Policy; (iii) to National Defence and Police; (iv) to Sanitation and Public Education; or (v) to all the complicated business of providing for the orphans, the widows, the sick, the aged, the lunatics, etc.? The General Council or Assembly of the Syndicalist Community will (in succession to the present Parliament and Local Authorities) necessarily find itself charged with all these things, without, so far as we can understand the electorate of workers in particular industries, having any more concerned itself about them than the present Parliamentary voters. But it is a special difficulty that we do not see how the National Unions, unlike our present geographical constituencies, can ever be made to include anything like the whole population. Where will the doctors and the ministers of religion, and the great army of school and college teachers, and the domestic servants and nurses come in? Are they all to be compulsorily enrolled in great National Unions, each managing its own branch of service? Will the not inconsiderable population of invalids of various kinds—the chronically sick, the crippled, the blind—together with the million aged pensioners, all be denied votes? And what will be the position of the women? Only a million or two, out of the twelve million of adult women, would find themselves, as industrial wage-earners, in the proposed National Unions. Are the others, married or unmarried, or widowed, to be denied all participation in the settlement of matters in which they have quite as much interest as the men? Moreover, even if you could "classify" all the adult population (or all the adult population, excluding those who existed idly, without contributing anything to the Producers' State), would it be desirable to "brigade and regiment" them all into National Unions? There are some

¹*Comment nous ferons la révolution*, by E. Pataud and Emile Pouget (Paris: 1909).

services of inestimable value to the community which are best performed by individuals at their own time and in their own way. We should make a poor thing of it, for instance, if we tried to subject the artists to Trade Union regulations; or the composers of music; or the poets; or, for that matter, the historians and novelists. Even within the realm of material production, there are, in the aggregate, a very large number of workers who are not wage-earners but independent producers, such as small agriculturists, or artistic handicraftsmen, needing no Trade Union regulation of their industry, and interested only in the direct exchange of what they have themselves produced. The law-abiding but eccentric bachelor, a modern Thoreau, for instance, who does not want to work regularly at any particular trade, and who prefers to earn casually, at any kind of honourable work, the small subsistence that he is content with, so long as he is free to live and wander and think as he chooses—how is this man to be represented in the Syndicalist Community? It is exactly this sort of individual worker—the whole class of inventors, artists, religious teachers, writers, and eccentrics of all kinds—who most value the completest personal freedom, and who (in alarm at the progress of Labour and Socialism) cling to what Mr. Belloc calls “the proprietary state” as their only chance of remaining unregimented. As a matter of fact, the English Collectivists count, in the gradual transformation from a Capitalist to a Socialist State, organised on the all-inclusive basis of actual local residence, upon a great development of this wide and miscellaneous class; from the agricultural small holder, and the independent handicraftsman, to the artist, the writer, and the specialist inventor. The world stands to gain by their being left as free as possible; and, if we bear in mind the whole population, instead of only the propertied class, any reasonable Socialism leaves much more room for their freedom, including all sorts of novel experiments in living, than does the present order. Hence we cannot but count it as a serious drawback to Syndicalism that it seems to contemplate either the suppression and exclusion of these exceptionally valuable elements of the commonwealth or the brigading and regimenting of them into great National Unions.

Egotistic Materialism.

It is, in our view, a more fundamental objection to the Syndicalist proposals that, by resting the future community on Associations of Producers, whose material interests must always seem to be mutually opposed, they are basing society on mutual rivalry, mutual hostility, even mutual envy and hatred; instead of upon community of interests, fellowship and love. The defiant assertions of the Syndicalists, which run through both

their French and English writings, as to the necessary and perpetual warfare between the manual workers and all other sections of society; the incessant accentuation of the material interests of those engaged in any one industry against all the rest of the community; the outbursts of suspicion and anger and denunciation against everyone but the members of the “Syndicats,” are, to say the least of it, not conducive to that growth of fellowship upon which alone a decent social order can be built. In the Syndicalist teaching, in fact, we find a weird resurrection of the old “Grad-grind” Political Economists’ reliance on the motive of material gain as the one road to national welfare—a curious rehabilitation of the notion that wealth production is the only matter worth consideration! And it is significant that, exactly as James Mill and Ricardo thought that the pecuniary self-interest of the individual, if left to work untrammelled, would, of itself, bring about the finest type of society, so the modern Syndicalist believes that the impulsive direct action of Associations of Wage-earners, inspired by the desire of enriching themselves at the expense of the capitalist, will, without the aid of any intellectual conception, automatically bring about “the Social Revolution” and an ideal State. We cannot help thinking that the very foundation of the Syndicalist community is wrongly chosen, and that we must reconstruct society, on a basis not of interests, but of community of service, of that “neighbourly” feeling on which local life is made up, and of that willingness to subordinate oneself to the welfare of the whole without which national existence is impossible. Our analysis of the Syndicalist proposals makes us feel, indeed, that the reason why they are erroneous is that they look at the world in a lopsided way. They make it a cardinal principle “that the task of the revolution is to free mankind not only from all authority, but also from every institution which has not for its essential purpose the development of production. Consequently they can imagine the future society only as a voluntary and free association of producers.”¹ But important as may be material production, it is not the only interest, and not even the highest or most vitally important interest of the community. We do not live to work; we work merely in order to live. Moreover, wealth production takes up only a part of the time even of the manual worker. We all of us live, and consume, and enter into innumerable relations with our fellow-citizens, continuously from the moment of birth to the moment of death; but we are producers, even the busiest of us, only during some of the years of our lives, and then only for about one-third to two-fifths of our time. A great part of the most valuable things that we do for the world, even

¹ *Histoire des Bourses du Travail*, 1902, p. 163-4; *The Labour Movement in France*, by L. Levine, 1902.

during our active years, cannot properly be classed under wealth production at all; such as bearing and rearing children, or improving our own minds and characters, or giving loving care and devotion to others' needs, or thinking the thoughts and creating the art that ennobles the world. To some of us, indeed, it seems probable that the heritage of man will gradually unfold a world in which consideration of wealth production, and even of wealth consumption, will sink into relative insignificance, and will become merely a mechanically organised preliminary to the essential life of man—of the life, that is to say, by which man is distinguished from the brute creation. A constitution based exclusively on wealth production—one, therefore, which deliberately excludes all but one side of life, and that not the most constant, or the most universal, or the most important to the community—seems as lop-sided as a constitution based exclusively on wealth possession. Surely we shall not fight for any ideal smaller than Humanity itself; and that not only as it exists at present, but also as it may arise in the future.

The Underlying Truth in Syndicalism.

At the same time, we must recognise that the Syndicalists are trying to express what is a real and deep-seated feeling in millions of manual working wage-earners, which cannot and ought not to be ignored. The workman refuses any longer to be a mere instrument of production: a mere "hand" or tool in the capitalist enterprise. He claims the right of a man: to be an end in himself, and not merely a means to some one else's end. And with this in his mind he refuses (and in our judgment rightly refuses) to be satisfied with continuing, for all time, to be merely a wage-earner serving under orders, without control over his own working life.

But though this is true, the Syndicalists, in grasping at the management of industry (not to say also of all public affairs) for the actual producers of wealth, in their capacity as producers, take, as it seems to us, too simple a view of what management means. Even confining ourselves to the management of an industrial enterprise, there is first the decision as to what should be produced, and in which quantities. What claim have they to decide what we shall eat, or what we shall wear, or what sort of things we shall use? That is not a matter for the producers, as producers, at all, but for the whole community of consumers, including the young and the aged, the women and the invalids, the artists and the eccentrics.

Secondly, there is the decision as to the manner in which the production shall take place, the material to be used, the process to be employed, the place and the time to be chosen. This is a matter which has necessarily to be decided, in the interests of the community as a whole, over

the heads of particular sections of producers, who must always be biased in favour of the materials, the processes, the places or the times to which they are accustomed. If the producers had had the decision, the world would still have been using wooden sailing ships, travelling by the stage coach, and wearing hand-woven products. No section of producers would ever welcome the supersession of its own cherished skill.

Thirdly, there is the altogether different question of the conditions under which the production shall take place—that is to say, of how the producers shall spend their working lives—the temperature, the atmosphere, and sanitary arrangements amid which they will work, the duration and intensity of their toil, and the daily or weekly share of the product of combined labour that each adult person shall receive for subsistence. It is, as we suggested in our *Industrial Democracy* fifteen years ago,¹ in this part of the field of management—not in the whole field—that the producers, organised as producers, have a title to great—and acting collectively as a whole—even predominant influence. What we have to do is find out how to arrange for this influence to be exercised, consistently with the maintenance of the consumer's right of choice and the decision of the community as a whole as to how the means of production shall be employed.

The Control of Industry in the State of the Future.

Now in this making of plans for reform, we are apt, in the twentieth century, when no change seems out of the question, to be a little misled by our speculative freedom. We are almost irresistibly tempted to judge, as between different schemes, *according to our own liking of them*. Which of the rival plans do I prefer? But though we are free to speculate without limits, we ought to remember that what it is open to society to obtain or to achieve is very far from being without limitations and bounds. We might, in talking about bridges, prefer a bridge so light and thin as to achieve the utmost grace, withstand the fiercest floods, and carry the heaviest weights. The engineer would tell us of the limitations which the nature of the materials set to our possible choice. So with society. Though we dare not predict what humanity may not rise to, what humanity now is sets very real limits to the kind of social order that is feasible. As to what is feasible, here and now, or in the near future, opinions will, of course, differ. But Syndicalism, it will be clear to most of us—even if we liked the idea of it—is not feasible. And, to bring this long article to a close, we put down briefly, and therefore necessarily dogmatically, the form of the organisation that seems to us the only practicable

¹ *Industrial Democracy*, pp. 818-826.

alternative to the worker's dependence and degradation in the Capitalist State.

In the inevitable complications of a large and densely populated community, any such democratic organisation must necessarily be difficult to construct. We must accept the fact that human nature has two sides, which we may for this purpose call the faculty of production, and the faculty of consumption. In order to set the worker free from his present servitude to the owners of the instruments of production, we must rescue these, step by step, from private ownership, and vest them in the community organised as a Co-operative Commonwealth. Now, if this Co-operative Commonwealth is not to be, whatever its composition, the "horriddest tyranny" over the individual, we must, as far as possible, avoid the centralisation, either of power or knowledge or authority, and give as much as possible to local organisations, from any of which we can easily escape, if we choose, and which will, at any rate, not be all alike! Thus, we can hardly avoid making a great use, in creating our State machine, of mere local residence. What we now call the Parish or District Council, or the Town or County Council, which the Syndicalist seems to despise, must, as it seems to us, necessarily become a very important affair—perhaps, in the aggregate, more important than the central administration itself. Moreover, as our interests as consumers—which continue all our lives, and for every moment of them—are at least as important to us as our interests during the working hours of our working years, we must take care to be free on that side of our existence, as well as on the other. We do not want, as human beings, to be subject to ourselves (and our fellows) as wealth producers. It may be that the majority of the electors of this or that part of the administrative machine, whether organised by industries as producers, or by localities as municipalities, do not think fit to supply what we want—it may be tobacco, it may be alcohol, or it may be music or pictures or the drama. Thus, if we are to be really free in our consumption, we must not be completely subject to the votes of a majority even of producers. Here we see the sphere of the democratic Co-operative Society, based on the voluntary membership of consumers who club together to supply themselves with special articles which the Public Authorities, or the Associations of Producers, may not choose to produce, or to produce in some particular way. But we are not going to let either the National Executive Department or the Local Municipality, nor yet the voluntary Co-operative Society, succeed to the full power over the workers' working lives that the private capitalist enjoys. Whoever controls the instruments of production, whether State or Municipality or Co-operative Society, will find it necessary, as we ventured in "Industrial Demo-

cracy" to suggest, to treat the workers definitely as equal partners in the enterprise; and will, for this purpose, have to consult and agree in the determination of all the conditions of employment with a completely organised Trade Union including every worker in the industry, and having its own elaborate division of authority between federal and national committees and district and even workshop committees, all legally entitled to their due share in the settlement of the way in which the producer has to spend those working hours, which will, we may hope, come to be an ever-dwindling fraction of his life.

In what sense we can Abolish the Wage System.

This substitution of State or Municipal ownership for the private capitalist, and this effective co-partnership so far as regards the conditions of employment between the agents of the community of consumers on the one hand, and the democratically chosen representatives of the producers on the other, is the nearest, so far as we can see, that the world can come, in all the great staple industries, to the "abolition of wagedom." For we must frankly accept the situation that, in such industries, for instance, as railways and shipping, post and telegraphs and police, coalmining and steel-smelting, engineering and textile manufacture and others run on a large scale, there is no way of getting rid of the wage-system—if by that is meant the service of men under the orders of others, in return for uniform weekly allowances which will bear no relation whatsoever to the actual productivity of their particular labour week by week. What the more practical of the Socialists describe as the Abolition of the Wage System—the supersession of the present *competitive* determination of wages, by their assessment by public authority on the basis of the Standard of Life necessary for full efficiency—is, of course, quite practicable, given the will to do it, as the experience of every Government Department and "Wages Board" demonstrates. But this leaves the worker still without the entire product of his labour—paid, indeed, irrespective of his product—and still working under orders. This seems to us, as far as we can foresee, a permanent necessity of any national industry on a large scale.

The Sphere of the Individual Producer and of the Self-Governing Workshop.

But notwithstanding this hard fact, there is, as Mr. Belloc rightly reminds us, also a sphere for the individual producer, outside the realm of both Collectivist Public Authority and Trade Union. We imagine in any reasonable future State the peasant cultivator having complete fixity of tenure of his plot of land, the artistic craftsman working directly for individual customers, the

skilled musician or painter living as he chooses, the poet, the novelist, the inventor, the prophet, even the professional agitator, all enjoying the extremest freedom of the "Proprietary State"—working with their own tools, exchanging their own products or services, or living on the freely tendered gifts of other people. And such individual producers may in a future State, even more than in the capitalism of to-day, combine together in a co-operative workshop—or the local committee of a Trade Union might itself establish one—in which a little Association of Producers, such as bookbinders or cabinet-makers, may find it possible, even in a land of the Great Industry, to supply private customers in their own peculiar speciality, to do the work of a village, or even to contract with a Government Department, in successful competition with the Public Authority itself. All these experiments in individual ways of life, and in individual or co-operative production, for which the Capitalist State allows scant freedom, and which the plan of the Syndicalist community seems to us to ignore, will, in the State of the future, be enormously facilitated by the rapid extension of public services on the lines of free or common use by all who need them. For the real distinction, as it seems to us, between the Capitalist State and the State of to-morrow, lies not so much in the work done by any set of workers, whether managers or doctors or coal-hewers or engine-drivers, all of which must always be with us, nor yet in the conditions of their employment, which might conceivably, even in the Capitalist State, be greatly humanised; but in the disposal of that large proportion of the total product which is economically of the nature of rent, or (to use the classic phrase of Karl Marx) surplus value. It is impossible, for reasons that we need not explain, *consistently with any approach to equality of income*, for this part of the product to be shared out as weekly wages. At present, for the most part, it provides the means of existence for the idle rich, and the disproportionate private consumption of the principal managers

and directors of industry. In an ideal State, after providing for the widows and orphans, the sick and the aged, it would be devoted, we may assume, to a thousand objects of common good. We may hope that, in the interests of the race, a large part would be available for the proper maintenance of child-bearing mothers, and for the most effective nurture and schooling and technical training of the rising generation, so that every child may find effectively open to it the utmost intellectual or artistic development. But beyond these prior claims, we may foresee a large and ever-widening expenditure on all these opportunities for a wider and fuller life which can best be utilised in common, of which our present parks and libraries are but the meanest specimens. And it is just here, in the development of the unproductive years and of the non-producing hours even of the working years, that the manual working wage-earner, and even the member of the lower middle class, is at present so unjustifiably enslaved, and can, in a reformed State, find such an enlargement of freedom. It is not so much in the hours of work that a manual working man or woman, or a subordinate clerk or little shopkeeper, at present suffers: it is in the limitations which his present penury sets to his use of his hours of leisure. We have, under any social order, all of us to work, for without work there can be no life. In working, we are necessarily serving—from this there is no escape, though in this service of the community we may, as it seems to us, if we like, find our own perfect freedom. But over and above the tribute of work that we have to pay to the world—a tribute that may be lightened by a more equitable sharing of the burden and sweetened by the sense that it is no longer aggravated by the toll levied by the idlers and parasites—there will be, in the Socialist State of the future, to which we personally look forward, all the rest of life to be lived; and lived for the first time, as far as it lies in us so to live, in the utmost liberty possible to a civilised society.

SELECTED BOOKS ON SYNDICALISM.

THE materials for any detailed study of Syndicalism are not easily accessible. The series of pamphlets by Mr. Tom Mann, under the general title of *The Industrial Syndicalist* (Bowman, 4, Maude Terrace, Walthamstow), from June, 1910, onwards, are perhaps the most important English source; together with *The Miners' Next Step* (Robert Davies & Co., Tonypandy, 1912). Of easily purchaseable books in English there are not many. Far and away the best is *The Labour Movement in France, a Study in Revolutionary Syndicalism*, by Dr. Louis Levine (Columbia University Series, 1912), to be obtained of P. S. King & Son, price 6s. This renders obsolete the older and not at all impartial volume by Sir Arthur Clay, *Syndicalism and Labour* (Murray), which is very incomplete in its survey. A corrective on the other side is *Syndicalism and the General Strike*, by Mr. Arthur Lewis (Fisher Unwin: 1912), price 7s. 6d. A forthcoming volume by Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., on Syndicalism (Independent Labour Party Office), should be consulted when published.

But for the best exposition the student must turn to France, and must there go through the files, especially of *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, and, further, of *La Voix du Peuple*, *L'Action Directe*, *La Revue Syndicaliste*, *La Guerre Sociale*, and other weekly and monthly journals. No less characteristic are the numerous pamphlets by Edouard Berth, Paul Delesalle, Victor Griffuelhes,

A. Labriola, Hubert Lagardelle. L. Niel and Emile Pouget (mostly published by Marcel Rivière, Paris).

The most considerable "intellectual" on the Syndicalist side is Georges Sorel (*Reflexions sur la Violence*, 1908 and 1910; *La Décomposition du Marxisme*, 2nd edition, 1910; and various other works).

Other Syndicalist books are: *La Grève Générale et le Socialisme: enquête internationale, opinions et documents*, by Hubert Lagardelle (Cornély, Paris, 1905); and the very explicit *Comment nous ferons la révolution*, by E. Pataud and Emile Pouget (Tallandier, Paris), a lengthy "Utopia" describing both the process of revolution and the way the new society organises itself.

Of expository and critical books, the reader will find most useful *Syndicalisme Révolutionnaire et Syndicalisme Réformiste*, by Felicien Challaye (Alcan, Paris, 1909); *Syndicalisme et Démocratie*, by C. Bouglé (Paris); *Le Syndicalisme contre le Socialisme: origine et développement de la Confédération Générale du Travail*, by Mermeix. *Les Transformations de la Puissance Publique: les Syndicats des fonctionnaires*, by Maxime Leroy, 1907, will be found suggestive. For modern Trade Union history in France, see *Histoire des Bourses du Travail*, by Fernand Pelloutier, 1902; *L'Évolution du Syndicalisme en France*, by Mlle. Kritsky, 1908; and *Histoire du Mouvement Syndical en France, 1789-1906*, by Paul Louis (Paris, 1907).