

# New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism



New Perspectives on Anarchism,  
Labour and Syndicalism:  
The Individual, the National  
and the Transnational

Edited by

David Berry and Constance Bantman

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism:  
The Individual, the National and the Transnational,  
Edited by David Berry and Constance Bantman

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Pour François Poirier, qui aimait les anarchistes, le syndicalisme  
et les études transnationales. CB

For René Bianco, for all the help and encouragement he gave a young  
and ignorant PhD student. DB



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—CB and DB

## ACRONYMS

AFL:	American Federation of Labor
AFP:	Anarchist Federation of Poland
AK:	Home Army (Poland)
CAS:	Comité d'Action Syndicaliste (Syndicalist Action Committee, France)
CCN:	Comité confédéral national (National Confederal Committee, France)
CGT:	Confédération Générale du Travail (General Confederation of Labour, France)
CGT-FO:	Confédération Générale du Travail—Force Ouvrière (General Confederation of Labour—Workers' Force, France; also known as 'FO')
CGTSR:	Confédération Générale du Travail Syndicaliste Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Syndicalist General Confederation of Labour, France)
CGTU:	Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire (United General Confederation of Labour, France)
CNT:	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (National Confederation of Labour, Spain)
CNT:	Confédération Nationale du Travail (National Confederation of Labour, France)
CUAS:	Cartel d'Unité d'Action Syndicaliste (United Syndicalist Action Cartel, France)
FAI:	Federación Anarquista Iberica (Iberian Anarchist Federation, Portugal and Spain)
FAU:	Freie ArbeiterUnion (Free Workers' Union, Germany)
FAUD:	Freie Arbeiter Union Deutschlands (Free Workers' Union of Germany)
FEN :	Fédération de l'Éducation Nationale (National Education Federation, France)
FNSA:	Fédération Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes (National Federation of Independent Trade Unions, France)
FO:	Force Ouvrière (France)
GFP:	General Federation of Labour (Poland)
ILP:	Independent Labour Party (Great Britain)

IWMA:	International Working Men's Association
IWW:	Industrial Workers of the World (United States)
KPD:	Communist Party of Germany
NAS:	Nationaal Arbeids Secretariaat (National Labour Secretariat, Netherlands)
OMN:	National Youth Organisation (Poland)
PCF:	Parti Communiste Français (French Communist Party)
PPR:	Polska Partia Robotnicza (Polish Labour Party)
PPS:	Polish Socialist Party
PTT:	Postes, télégraphes et téléphones (National Post and Telecommunications Service, France)
PZPR:	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party)
RSA:	Movement for an Alternative Society (Poland)
RIOK:	Workers' Institute for Education and Culture (Poland)
SAC:	Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation (Central Organisation of the Workers of Sweden)
SD:	Democratic Party (Poland)
SDF:	Social Democratic Federation (Great Britain)
SFIO:	Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (United Socialist Party, France)
SLLPW:	Socialist People's Polish Party of Freedom
SOW:	"Freedom" Syndicalist Organisation (Poland)
SPD:	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social-Democratic Party, Germany)
TUC:	Trade Union Congress (Great Britain)
UAI :	Unione Anarchica Italiana
UCES:	Union des Cercles d'Études Syndicalistes (Union of Syndicalist Study Groups, France)
UD:	Union Départementale (Departmental Union, France)
USI:	Unione Sindacale Italiana (Italian Syndicalist Union)
USOLA:	Union des Syndicats Ouvriers Libres de l'Aude (Aude Union of Free Workers' Unions, France)
ZNR:	Union for Republican Development (Poland)
ZPMD:	Polish Democratic Youth Union
ZSP:	Polish Syndicalists Union
ZZZ:	Central Wydział Zawodny (Union of Trade Unions, Poland)



## INTRODUCTION

# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ANARCHISM, LABOUR AND SYNDICALISM: THE INDIVIDUAL, THE NATIONAL AND THE TRANSNATIONAL

CONSTANCE BANTMAN AND DAVID BERRY

Recent years have seen an upsurge of interest in the history of European anarchist and syndicalist movements. The rise of alter-globalisation protest borrowing many of its direct-action tactics from pre-World War I anarchism and syndicalism has been important in bringing it on over the last ten years or so. As the anthropologist and anarchist activist David Graeber has commented: “most of the creative energy for radical politics is now coming from anarchism,” and horizontal, acephalous organisation, networks, prefigurative politics and consensus decision-making have all become major themes for debate.<sup>1</sup> The necessity to control international terrorist networks has also rekindled public interest in the anarchist diaspora of the late-nineteenth century, the golden age of “propaganda by the deed”, sparking many debates about the relevance of such comparisons.<sup>2</sup> Within the academy, the study of anarchist and syndicalist movements and their functioning has been greatly spurred by new

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<sup>1</sup> “The New Anarchists”, *New Left Review* 13 (January-February 2002), <http://www.newleftreview.org/?view=2368> (accessed July 15, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Among a large number of publications, see “For jihadist, read anarchist,” *The Economist*, August 18, 2005. In more academic perspectives, see Michael Collyer, “Secret Agents: Anarchists, Islamists and Responses to Politically Active Refugees in London,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28:2 (2005): 278–303; Ersel Aydinly, “Before Jihadists there were anarchists,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:10 (2008): 903–923. See also the recent debate in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, initiated by James Gelvin’s article “Al Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian’s Reply to Terrorology,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:4 (2008): 563–581.

methodological developments opening up new perspectives. As a result, three essential trends have been developed in this field of study: the move towards transnational or global history; a renewed interest in historical biography and the mapping out of personal networks, and, as a result, new approaches to comparativism.

The current shift towards transnationalism in labour history can be taken to have started in 1990, with the publication of Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe's landmark study *Revolutionary Syndicalism in International Perspective*.<sup>3</sup> Transnational history—a term still competing with “new global history”, “connected histories”, or “entangled histories”—has recently been defined as the study of “links and flow...people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under, or in-between polities and societies”.<sup>4</sup> Most areas of the humanities and social sciences have responded to this dramatic change of focus, which is based on the awareness of the entangled and interconnected nature of societies, not only as a result of the most recent period of economic globalisation, but also over the past centuries, and in their very essence. This drive towards transnational revisionism has stemmed from the acknowledgment that historiography has been overwhelmingly written within a national framework and needs to be reconsidered with greater attention for the international context which constitutes, explains, determines or contradicts national developments. This approach is also necessary to provide a much-needed history of globalisation.

Anarchism, syndicalism and more generally labour history provide a case in point for the pertinence of this angle of study, especially as a way of expanding research on working-class internationalism. Internationalism as an ideal and a practical organisational goal has been at the centre of labour activism since at least the universalist proclamations of the French Revolution, and became a prime endeavour after the International Working Men's Association was set up in 1864. Labour internationalism, in its traditional and most widely accepted basic definition, is the ideology promoting universal brotherhood and solidarity among workers, and the setting up of organisations in order to achieve these aspirations.

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<sup>3</sup> It is true that, as Pierre-Yves Saunier points out, the German linguist Georg Curtius first used the term in a lecture in 1862, and that it was most likely already in use by then, but the term's academic career started in the 1960s. Saunier, “Transnational,” in *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 1051.

<sup>4</sup> Iriye and Saunier, *Palgrave Dictionary...*, xviii.

The study of labour and socialist internationalism or its absence among the workers of the world logically emerged as a key theme for labour historians; such an approach is usually considered to have had its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> It developed in three directions: the history of institutions and leading actors, the history of congresses and debates, and the probing of the strengths and weaknesses of internationalism.<sup>6</sup> This clearly left many areas unexplored, as the main emphasis was on the institutional or organisational level, with little attention paid to individual activism or to informal modes of organisation and action. And yet these levels do not overlap and often have diverging chronologies and fortunes. Classical studies of labour internationalism have thus ignored the networks and informal links underpinning or bypassing many established organisations. This has had especially notable consequences for the study of anarchism and other anti- or extra-parliamentarian movements, for which the rejection of formal militant organisation and the denunciation of parliamentary politics are held as central tenets. A related pitfall has been a dominant interest in charismatic leaders and institution officials. Lastly, in many cases, internationalism has been dealt with as an entirely separate category of study, and the three classic levels of historical study, the local, the national and the international, have been dealt with like Russian dolls—to borrow Pierre-Yves Saunier’s image<sup>7</sup>—studied in isolation, internationalism being easily dispensed with in many cases.<sup>8</sup> This can be

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<sup>5</sup> Such first-generation landmarks in the history of international socialism include Lewis L. Lorwin, *Labor and Internationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); Édouard Dolléans, *Histoire du mouvement ouvrier 1830–1871*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1936), although the latter is considered as a militant as well as a scientific study; James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1955); G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought, The Second International 1889–1914* (London: Macmillan, 1956); Milorad M. Drachkovitch, ed., *The Revolutionary Internationals 1864–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966); Annie Kriegel, *Le pain et les roses: jalons pour une histoire des socialismes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Patrizia Dogliani, “Socialisme et Internationalisme,” *Cahiers Jaurès* 191 (2009): 14; Marcel van der Linden, “Transnationalizing US Labor History,” *The Journal of American History*, 86:3 (1999): 1078–1092.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux,” *Genèses* 57 (2004) : 111.

<sup>8</sup> This is a marked trait in most studies on local anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism in France. See for instance Vivien Bouhey’s recent *Les Anarchistes contre la République. Contributions à l’histoire des réseaux sous la Troisième République, 1880–1914* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2008). Notable exceptions include René Bianco, “Le mouvement anarchiste à Marseille et dans les Bouches

illustrated by the history of the French anarchist movement, whose international aspects were pretty much ignored in the canonical studies of Jean Maitron<sup>9</sup>—as if French anarchism, being very influential as it was, did not have or need international connections. Similarly, the history of the French trade-union federation, the CGT, has often been dissociated from the international discussions it took part in—however vocal the latter were; as a result, separate and often groundbreaking monographs have had to make up for these gaps and provide the much-needed “broader picture”.<sup>10</sup> This is one of the aspects in which the fairly new corrective of transnationalism proves most welcome, as it binds together the various geographical levels of study as well as the interaction of existing national or local cultures with outside influences.

Indeed, the contributions gathered in this book testify to the continuing emergence of a “new history” of anarchism, syndicalism and labour, in response to all these limitations. This work is a summary of these research strands and methodological developments, although this was initially largely coincidental. The volume is the result of a session held in 2008 during the first Anarchist Studies Network conference at the University of Loughborough,<sup>11</sup> for which a very broad call for papers had been issued; however, it appeared very early on that the contributions offered in response echoed one another, thus testifying to current research trends. This volume is intended to bring such trends to light. It opens with a comparative survey by Wayne Thorpe, which highlights the key themes of this volume: international cross-influences, personal connections, the mapping out of European syndicalism, and the role of informal ties

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du Rhône, 1880–1914” (PhD Diss., IEP Aix en Provence, 1977), Nancy Green, *The Pletzl of Paris. Jewish Immigrant Workers in Paris in the Belle Époque* (New York and London: Holmes and Meier Publishing, 1985) or David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France, 1880–1914* (Paris : Maspero, 1975); see also Jean Maitron (ed.), *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français* (Paris : Éditions Ouvrières, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> For instance Susan Milner, *The Dilemmas of Internationalism. French Syndicalism and the International Labour Movement, 1900–1914* (Oxford: Berg, 1991); Wayne Thorpe, “*The Workers Themselves*”. *Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour 1913–1923* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989). Thorpe and Van der Linden, *Revolutionary Syndicalism...*

<sup>11</sup> Except for the chapters by Wayne Thorpe and Davide Turcato. The conference also featured a paper by Ralph Darlington, since published under the title “Syndicalism and the Influence of Anarchism in France, Italy and Spain,” *Anarchist Studies* 19:2 (2009): 29–54.



through travel, journalism or the translation of theoretical works.<sup>12</sup> Thorpe proceeds with a comparative survey of the various national movements and the often insurmountable hurdles to effective national and international coordination, through formal organisations or congresses. This contribution sketches out an extraordinarily dense web of international networks, stressing that “syndicalism found proponents in the easternmost and westernmost reaches of the European continent”. This overview is logically followed by several studies on “Individuals”, international and ideological mediators, sometimes well-known, sometimes completely unknown. The last case is exemplified in Yann Béliard’s evocation of Gustav Schmidt/Gus Smith, a migrant activist whose itinerary from Germany to Hull and from anarchism to the Labour Party bears witness to the importance of individual work migration for ideological dissemination, as well as to the two-way nature of such influences. Carl Levy highlights the intense international networking activity of Errico Malatesta, the “rooted cosmopolitan”, a prime example of the transnational activist in the age of the Second International. Drawing on Comintern and Profintern archival material, Reiner Tosstorff follows the CNT leader Ángel Pestaña on his 1920 journey to Moscow, to seal the inclusion of the CNT in the newly-founded Red International of Labour Unions and his growing disenchantment upon his return. Dieter Nelles writes on Alfons Pilariski and Upper-Silesian anarchism, a broadening of geographical and time scope, in a complex national and international context of disputed borders after 1914 and the rise of fascism. This leads to a third section, devoted to the movements which result from such individual activism and the personal networks underpinning them. Davide Turcato, examining Franco-Italo-British syndicalist connections, ponders the 1896 London congress and its long-term strategic significance, replacing the debates held at large congresses in the context of individual or small-group discussions over the crucial and ever-problematic question of the relation of anarchism to the organised labour movement. Constance Bantman charts the evolution of revolutionary syndicalism through 30 years of Franco-British discussions and reflections, questioning the notions of national militant models and emphasising the importance of ideological transfers in their making. In a survey which spans a century, Rafal Chwedoruk depicts the complex but hitherto under-researched ideological filiations of Polish anarchism and

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<sup>12</sup> This text was originally published in French, under the title “La famille agitée. Le syndicalisme révolutionnaire en Europe de la charte d’Amiens à la Première Guerre Mondiale,” *Mil Neuf Cent* 24 (2006) : 123–152. We are grateful to Wayne Thorpe and the revue *Mil Neuf Cent* for agreeing to reprint this study, which appears in English for the first time.

syndicalism, stressing the importance of foreign ideological imports and their appropriations—not least with an enduring nationalist strand—in the vexed geopolitical context of the country, whilst emphasising equally the national particularities of Polish syndicalism. Guillaume Davranche similarly reconsiders the history of the CGT in an international perspective, revisiting its 1947 split as the result of the mounting ideological tensions of the early Cold War, but considering the scission not in terms of monolithic ideological currents, but through a close study of the concerns, aspirations, hesitations and ambiguities of the individual activists, and the history of the local groups. Bert Altena's essay on the importance of community in Dutch syndicalism concludes the volume, by putting forward another interpretation for the rise of syndicalism. Taking as its starting-point extensive primary research on contrasting labour organisations and cultures in two neighbouring Dutch towns, Altena's contribution provides a detailed discussion of the existing literature on syndicalism, and argues for the investigation of a little-heeded factor: the nature of the local community—an element hitherto neglected in favour of excessively economic/technological or political explanations. However, Altena points out in his conclusion the entanglement of the local and the national levels. Of course, in the age of the first globalisation, both were also heavily dependent on international developments, so that the question of scales of analysis remains crucial.

So whilst different methods and approaches coexist, these papers partake in an overall attempt to replace the “—isms” at the human level, break free from methodological nationalism, and show the many connections operating between the individual, national and transnational levels. The shift between different scales of analysis points to what Carl Levy describes as “the importance of the binominal”, between “local patriotism and cosmopolitanism” but also, we could add, the individual and the collective, informal and formal modes of organisation, as well as between internationalism, nationalism, localism and, occasionally, xenophobia.

It must be pre-emptively added that this collection does not escape the common accusation of Eurocentrism or Western-centrism which many transnational studies seek to rectify. These contributions are devoted exclusively to European developments and cover a limited time-span. Nor is the traditional supremacy of white male workers—to put it bluntly—challenged. This is yet another case of researchers being “the complacent

victims of [their] own networks and locations”.<sup>13</sup> But for all its limitations, this convergence testifies to the shared questionings of a group of researchers rather than to any ideological preference or assumption. In terms of periods, the three decades before the First World War and the War itself are at the centre of several chapters. This reflects the significance of these pivotal years, those of the first globalisation, which saw a great increase in exchanges across Europe, and when a handful of anarchist and syndicalist movements in Europe and the United States achieved some form of hegemony.

Britain, which played host to many anarchist exiles and numerous foreign workers in the last decades of the long nineteenth century, also holds pride of place, with studies on Franco-British, Franco-German or Franco-Italo-British connections. France’s CGT or the Spanish CNT also retain some of their usual historiographic pre-eminence and feature in the foreground of several contributions, as well as in the background of others; however, rather than perpetuate the existing and occasionally debatable hegemony of these institutions, these contributions seek to provide new perspectives on them, by exploring their international ramifications and influences or by focusing on individual members.

Key topics stand out, many of them pertaining to the field of transnational history, along with a marked influence of the social history pioneered in the 1960s by Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson. The first theme is the significance of individual and network-based activism if one is to understand both national and international developments in the labour movement. Social histories of anarchism have usually been written as histories from below, recreating the perspective of lesser-known and middling militants. Pivotal works in this perspective include Jean Maitron’s encyclopaedic *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier*, where anarchists and syndicalists are duly represented.<sup>14</sup> Branching out of the anti-parliamentary and revolutionary territory, a similar project exists across the Channel, with Joyce Bellamy and John

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<sup>13</sup> Iriye and Saunier, *Palgrave Dictionary*..., xix. For an overview of the literature on anarchist and syndicalist movements around the world, see the “Bibliographic Essay” in Vadim Damier, *Anarcho-syndicalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2009), 207–24.

<sup>14</sup> This canonical work is currently under revision, and a *Maitron des Anarchistes* is to appear in 2011. This title itself is revealing of the current prosopographic emphasis, with a striking shift of focus from the labour movement to its actors, from a general to a more individualised perspective.

Saville's *Dictionary of Labour Biography*.<sup>15</sup> While these key works are a few decades old, the genre of historical biography is currently enjoying a revival. The biographical dictionary went transnational with the publication in 2002 of *La Sociale en Amérique. Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier francophone aux États-Unis, 1848–1922*, under the supervision of Michel Cordillot, which transposed the interest in the lives and influences of lesser-known militants into a transnational context, by studying Francophone exiles and emigrants in the United States.<sup>16</sup> A "Maitron des anarchistes" is currently under way in France, making room for unheard-of militants as before, but also for Francophone exile groups outside France. Important biographies of anarchist or syndicalist militants have recently appeared or are about to be published, such as Sheila Rowbotham's biography of Edward Carpenter and Benedict Anderson's *Under three flags*, which shows all the potentialities of biography in the context of transnational/global history.<sup>17</sup> Carl Levy's forthcoming biography of Errico Malatesta, *The Rooted Cosmopolitan*, will explore a similar questioning (Levy's contribution to this volume presents some of this research).<sup>18</sup> This historiographic development could perhaps also be seen as deriving from anarchist principles, which advocate individual or small-group action against large organisations. Indeed, in the words of José Moya, anarchism "formed the world's first and most widespread transnational movement organized from below and without formal political parties".<sup>19</sup> Such accounts are especially interesting for the pre-1914 period, which has often been described as the golden age of the

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<sup>15</sup> Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville, eds., *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, nine vols. (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972–93). For a list of other biographical dictionaries, see the relevant section in the bibliographical appendix to Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden, eds., *Class and Other Identities. Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labour History* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), 183–5.

<sup>16</sup> See also Cordillot's recent *Révolutionnaires du Nouveau Monde. Une brève histoire du mouvement socialiste francophone aux États-Unis (1885–1922)* (Montreal : Lux, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter. A Life of Love and Liberty* (London: Verso, 2008); Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags. Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Davide Turcato, whose contribution appears here, has also defended an acclaimed doctoral thesis on Malatesta. See also Constance Bantman, "The Militant Go-Between: Emile Pouget's Transnational Propaganda (1880–1914)," *Labour History Review*, 74:3 (2009): 274–287.

<sup>19</sup> José Moya, *Palgrave Dictionary*, entry on "Anarchism," 39.

charismatic leader rather than the rule of party politics,<sup>20</sup> and of formal as well as informal labour organisation. Even if syndicalism did not share this anti-organisational reluctance, it still relied heavily on prominent activists and a tight organisational network, and thus also lends itself well to biographical approaches. Hence also the pertinence of Bert Altena's focus on the local level and the community as the basis of syndicalism.

Network approaches have logically built on this biographical interest, since informal networks play a key role in the dissemination of ideologies, as evidenced by many of the contributions gathered here. Traditionally derided as mere "overlapping biographies" (Hobsbawm), or as a tedious and abstract social science tool, networks—used with various degrees of scientific pretension—are proving increasingly useful for social historians,

Going beyond the hyper-individualisation of life narratives typical of oral history, without however reverting to the disembodied generalisation of the dominant historiography of the 1950–1970 period. [They] make it possible to study the formation of political and social micro-identities, to insert individuals in collective webs of socialisation.<sup>21</sup>

At a more basic level, networks also evidence how militants cooperate outside institutions to propagate their views.

Travel and migration, so often a "moment of redefinition,"<sup>22</sup> when new contacts are made and existing allegiances questioned, surface as another recurring theme, whether it is a question of attendance at an international congress (such as the 1896 London congress, or Pestaña's journey to Moscow), of labour migration (in the case of Gustav Schmidt), of exile (Malatesta and the French anarchists), or of simple visits, often kept up through personal correspondences, the translation of foreign writings and more or less formal collaborations. The contributions proposed here build on a growing body of research exploring anarchist and syndicalist cultural and countercultural activities in exile and migration.<sup>23</sup> And of course,

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<sup>20</sup> Georges Haupt, "International leading groups in the labour movement," in *Aspects of International Socialism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 81–100.

<sup>21</sup> François Poirier, "Retours sur *In Place of Strife*," in *Les années Wilson, 1964–1970*, ed. A. Capet (Rouen: Publications de l'Université de Rouen 257, 1999), 137. Our translation (and in all other translations from foreign sources, unless otherwise stated).

<sup>22</sup> Saunier, "Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux," 113.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance Constance Bantman, "Internationalism without an International? Cross-Channel Anarchist Networks, 1880–1914," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 84:4 (2006): 961–81; Pietro Dipaola, "Italian Anarchists in London, 1870–1914" (PhD Diss., University of London, 2004); Tom Goyens, *Beer and*

following the old stereotype, physical journeys should also be read as journeys of the mind: the atypical trajectories depicted here are both physical and figurative, the crossing of borders—physical and ideological—often go together.

A great wealth of cross-border interactions has been highlighted by recent studies, retracing intellectual, militant and ideological transfers in the history of anarchism and syndicalism, which often defy or qualify traditional historiographic distinctions between movements and political cultures, by pointing out the links and similarities between them at the national or international level and thus the hybrid character of such movements.<sup>24</sup> This acknowledgment in turn leads us to explore ideological and militant borrowings and the implied processes of adaptation. Hence the themes of ideological hybridity (transnational and transpolitical, especially in highly disputed areas like those studied by Nelles and Chwedoruk in this volume), or the study of geographical and historical variations in the interpretation of ideologies, along with the use of foreign references...

Unexpectedly perhaps, transnational and individualised approaches have resulted in a fresh confidence in comparative studies, probably because they are validated by archival work, take into account the extent

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*Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914* (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> In addition to works previously cited here, see José Moya “Italians in Buenos Aires’ Anarchist Movement: Gender, Ideology and Women’s Participation, 1890–1910,” in *Women, Gender and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World*, ed. D. Gabaccia and F. Iacovetta (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002). Recent ESSH conferences testify to a boom in this field of study. The 2008 conference featured a panel entitled “Anarchist Networks in Port and Provincial Cities: Latin America in Comparative Perspective”. The 2010 session of ESSHC was just as focused on international, transnational and comparative approaches, with Steven Hirsch’s “Anarchist Trails in the Andes: Transnational Influences and Counter-Hegemonic Practices in Peru’s Southern Highlands, 1905–1928”, Kirwin Shaffer’s “Contesting Internationalisms: Transnational Anarchists Confront US Expansionism in the Caribbean, 1890s–1920s”, and Geoffroy De Laforcade’s “Anarchist Federative Networking in Latin America: The Impact and Legacy of the Argentina Regional Workers’ Federation (F.O.R.A), 1901–1930”. Another panel was dedicated to “Trans-Atlantic Anarchy: Re-Evaluating European Anarchist Experiences in North America, 1890s–1930s”, with contributions by Kenyon Zimmer on Yiddish- and Italian-language anarchism in America, Travis Tomchuk on factional disputes among anarchists in Canada and the United States; Davide Turcato on “Malatesta in America, 1899–1900”, and Amparo Sanchez Cobos, on Spanish anarchists in Cuba.

to which the notion of the “national” is problematic, and are informed by an awareness of the pre-eminence of local, regional or occupational differences over any “national model”, quite simply because “nations can be too big for comparison”.<sup>25</sup> The confrontation in context of national militant cultures, allowing for the subtleties of individual experience, avoids the blunt juxtaposition which often besets comparativism; this is how local/individual studies can lead to fruitful comparisons. After all, transnational history is not to be understood exclusively as a study of interactions, and comparativism is integral to this approach, if we follow Marcel van der Linden’s definition of the term:

By “transnational”, we mean the placing in a wider context of all historical processes, no matter how geographically “small”, by means of comparison with processes elsewhere, the study of interaction processes, or a combination of the two.<sup>26</sup>

This makes for compelling social and political history, because of the background and personal histories of those involved, and also because anarchism and syndicalism can so often be read as the reflections and manifestations of changing societies. Here they emerge as a consequence of the first modern globalisation, in a period marked by industrialisation and revolutions in communications and transport, but also as “a phenomenon in circumstances in which the world of workers was isolated from the rest of society” geographically, economically, politically, symbolically...<sup>27</sup> In the wake of Van der Linden and Thorpe’s *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, the questioning on the reasons for the international syndicalist outburst continues. In an approach which breaks away from the predominantly socio-economic factors put forward by Thorpe and Van der Linden, Altena puts the emphasis on the importance of the socioeconomic structure of the community, the workers’ independence and the buoyancy of local working-class cultural activities. Chwedoruk analyses the impact of a large set of determinants, such as political liberalism/repressive regimes; nation- and state-building; the existence of local political traditions as well as foreign influences; the social structure and degree of industrialisation of the country.

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<sup>25</sup> Stefan Berger, “Introduction,” in *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies*, ed. S. Berger, A. Croll, N. Laporte (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Marcel van der Linden, “Globalizing Labor Historiography: the IISH Approach” <http://www.iisg.nl/publications/globlab.pdf>, (accessed on February 4, 2010), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Bert Altena, “Analysing Revolutionary Syndicalism: the Importance of Community,” ch.10 of this volume.

Another question which arises once the transnational ramifications of anarchism and syndicalism have been brought to light is whether these foreign inputs actually improved the way workers' struggles were fought or at least made some impact. Davranche's conclusions are clear: the international level can be paralysing when it is highly polarising, as in the case of the Cold War. Chwedoruk and Nelles also show the terrible impact of wars. Most of the papers presented here are devoted to the circulation of ideology but this raises the problem of actually implementing these new ideas and it is always difficult to measure the practical impact of militant doctrines. Studies focusing on local interactions in transnational contexts often underline the ethnic tensions or at least the separateness between native and foreign workers, which leads us back to the all too familiar subject of working-class xenophobia and fascism. Such ideologies were also occasionally endorsed by anarchist and syndicalist movements, as shown by the Polish example here. Thus, against the idea that the internationalist principles of syndicalism and anarchism also held in practice, and against the reality of transnational cooperation and ideological diffusion, several contributions point to the gap between the internationalist rhetoric and the realities of militancy, echoing ongoing research about colonial or imperialist contexts in particular.<sup>28</sup>

The last issue which emerges in the course of this volume, but which has been little studied so far, concerns the complexities of terminology in a transnational labour movement and the resulting difficulties for those who set about exploring it. Indeed, since English is the reference language used here, the distinction between trade unionism and syndicalism arises, which is especially challenging when dealing with a movement where trade union organisations are in fact syndicalist, as in the case of France. As stressed by James Bennett, "some terminology embedded within one historiography fails the test of portability across boundaries".<sup>29</sup> But

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<sup>28</sup> Lucien van der Walt, "The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW and the ICU, 1904–1934," paper presented at the International Conference "Re-thinking Worlds of Labour. Southern African labour history in international context", University of the Witwatersrand, July 2006, available online:

<http://web.wits.ac.za/NR/rdonlyres/8C2196B0-155B-4786-B7FF-3A08F02238B0/0/vanderwaltLHC2006.pdf>

(accessed February 18, 2010); Yann Béliard, "Imperial Internationalism? Hull Labour's Support for South African Trade-Unionism on the Eve of the Great War," *Labour History Review*, 74:3 (2009): 319–329.

<sup>29</sup> James Bennett, "Reflections on Writing Comparative and Transnational Labour History," *History Compass*, 2009, 7: 2 (2009): 385.



sometimes linguistic portability and the semantic dimensions of political transfers become the very objects of study of the historian: thus, all the contributions refer at some point to the use of language as a way of nodding to a reference (syndicalism, CNT in Chwedoruk's paper), a way of adapting and symbolising a new ideological affiliation (Gus Smith/Gustav Schmidt) or, on the contrary, as a contentious practice (see Thorpe's remark on the foreign adaptations of the French term *syndicalisme révolutionnaire*). For us, this insistence on the symbolic dimension of militant terminology also linked up with an editorial dilemma: to translate or not to translate? We have opted to give the original names, mainly with a view to helping researchers, usually followed by an English translation, so that the actual meaning of organisation names might not be lost. It is hoped that, this way, the research summaries collected here will carry on opening up perspectives for further explorations.



## **PART I**

### **THE SYNDICALIST FAMILY**

# CHAPTER ONE

## UNEASY FAMILY: REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM IN EUROPE FROM THE *CHARTE D'AMIENS* TO WORLD WAR ONE

### WAYNE THORPE

Early in the twentieth century the French of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (General Confederation of Labour —CGT) presented a notable contrast to the labour thought and practice that predominated in much of Europe.<sup>1</sup> This difference was most conspicuous in relations between trade unions and political parties. In Britain, long-standing reformist trade unions were collectively bringing into being the Labour Party (1906) to speak on their behalf. In Germany the dominant trade unions had emerged under the auspices and imbued with the values of the German Social Democratic Party. A number of European countries exhibited a pattern similar to that of Germany, with major trade unions seen as the industrial arm and parties as the political arm of a social democratic movement. But the leading trade union organisation in prewar France, the CGT, prized the autonomy of militant unions. The CGT, in short, embraced revolutionary syndicalism, which postulated that autonomous and self-reliant trade unions, uniting workers at the point of production rather than as voters within cross-class political parties, constituted the fundamental and decisive workers' organisations, preserving the identity of workers as producers and best prepared to defend their interests. Unions should

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter first appeared in *Mil neuf cent: Revue d'histoire intellectuelle*, no. 24 (2006): 123–52, a special issue launched in sessions at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris in October 2006 to mark the centenary of the *Charte d'Amiens* of the CGT. I am grateful to *Mil neuf cent* for permission to reproduce it here. The present version has been somewhat revised, but does not incorporate work that has appeared since 2006, including most immediately the other chapters in this volume. Some post–2006 work will nevertheless be cited in the notes.

therefore remain independent of all political parties, including socialist ones. Since inevitable class conflict was fought out first and foremost on the economic terrain, direct action through trade unions was more effective than indirect action mediated through electoralism and parliamentarism in advancing not only short-term goals but long-term revolutionary objectives, notably the inauguration of a collectivised, worker-managed society.

Initially the CGT constituted the only self-described revolutionary syndicalist organisation in Europe. But revolutionary syndicalism (hereafter, usually simply “syndicalism”)<sup>2</sup>, by no means limited to France, was an international movement whose appeal was felt widely in Europe, North and South America and beyond.<sup>3</sup> Here the focus will remain on the

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<sup>2</sup> The term “anarcho-syndicalism”, although not used by its activists, is sometimes applied to the prewar CGT. An example: Barbara Mitchell, *The Practical Revolutionaries: A New Interpretation of the French Anarchosyndicalists* (New York: Greenwood, 1987). Anarchists, to be sure, were active in the labour movement from the 1890s onward, in France and elsewhere, and did much to fortify the insistence on union autonomy. See for example, Anthony Lorry, “Anarchisme et syndicalisme en France avant 1914,” Michel Pigenet and Pierre Robin, eds., *Regards sur le syndicalisme révolutionnaire* (Nérac: Albret, 2007), 49–70; David Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement, 1917–1945* (Westport: Greenwood, 2002), ch. 6. Very rare in prewar France, the term “anarcho-syndicalism” was coined in 1907 by socialists to disparage the programmatic neutrality of the CGT. See Anthony Lorry, “1907: Les guesdistes contre ‘l’anarcho-syndicalisme’”, [http://www.pelloutier.net/dossiers.php?id\\_dossier=262](http://www.pelloutier.net/dossiers.php?id_dossier=262). The pejorative was deployed much more widely in the early postwar period, usually by communists, against advocates of union autonomy. Only in the wake of the war, it appears, did movements begin to adopt “anarcho-syndicalism” as a self-description, for example, the All-Russian Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists of 1918. Lucien van der Walt and Michael Schmidt have recently argued that anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism, used as descriptive typologies, are best understood as nearly identical movements falling under the canopy of the “broad anarchist tradition”. *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism*, vol. 1 (Oakland: AK Press, 2009), ch. 5.

<sup>3</sup> The syndicalist movements in eight European countries (as well as Argentina, Mexico, the USA and Canada) are discussed in Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, eds., *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990). The editors’ introduction (1–24) to that volume offered a brief and tentative analysis of the factors encouraging the emergence of syndicalism in the era of the second industrial revolution: a generalised radicalisation of labour; the changing nature of labour processes and relations that challenged job control and workers’ autonomy; the growing feasibility of the general strike; spatial and geographical considerations; and the increasing rejection of the dominant labour strategy. We noted (6) that “the matrix of contributing factors [...] always took

European arena, within which the French enjoyed preeminence. With a membership perhaps exceeding 500,000 at its prewar height, the CGT was easily the largest syndicalist body in Europe, indeed, the world. Only in France had a syndicalist organisation emerged as the largest trade union association in its country, moreover, and it possessed an array of active and articulate advocates. The most visible exponent of syndicalism in Europe, the French movement also served as an example and an inspiration. Workers elsewhere could draw on their own traditions of self-reliance, for example, or the legacies of the libertarian wing of the First International to encourage direct action. But whatever combination of indigenous factors prompted militants elsewhere to embrace syndicalism—and they were above all responding to immediate circumstances—the comparative success of the CGT did not escape their attention. Many activists elsewhere saw syndicalism as an alternative to the reformist unions and Labour or Socialist Parties with which they were increasingly dissatisfied. In France itself, belated unification in 1905 of various socialist factions into a single French Socialist Party did not change the picture. To the contrary, it provided the backdrop for the CGT's single most important statement of union autonomy and revolutionary commitment, endorsed in 1906 and later known as the *Charte d'Amiens*.<sup>4</sup> Revolutionary unionists beyond France often applauded the *Charte*. In Switzerland *La Voix du peuple* hailed it as “the most brilliant victory that trade unionism has ever achieved”. Over another border, the Spanish militant Adolfo Bueso recalled the *Charte* as a primer of radicalism, as

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distinctive colouration from varying occupational, regional and national conditions”. Van der Linden pointed to some of those conditions, such as the role of the state and ideological dimensions, as well as to cultural factors, in “Second Thoughts on Revolutionary Syndicalism,” in van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 71–84. See also the discussions in Larry Peterson, “The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism,” in James E. Cronin and Carmen Siriani, eds., *Work, Community and Power: The Experience of Labor in Europe and America, 1900–1925* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 49–87, and more recently, in Ralph Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Study* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 49–93.

<sup>4</sup> On the development of the CGT see the work of the leading French analyst, Jacques Julliard, including *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971) and *Autonomie ouvrière: Etudes sur le syndicalisme d'action directe* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1988). Julliard reflects on the centenary of the *Charte* in “La charte d'Amiens, cent ans après: Texte, contexte, interprétations,” *Mil neuf cent 24* (2006) : 5–40.