

The Two Sides of the Coin of Class Struggle"
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On an overcast Sunday afternoon in early March, the Black Rose bookshop Sydney provided the space for a public meeting that was hosted by a group calling itself the Anarcho-Syndicalist Association (Now ASF Melb.), this being, presumably, the latest incarnation of the Melbourne end of Anarcho-Syndicalism in Australia, it featured as the speaker one Jorge Garcia.

The advertised title of the talk was "Anarcho-Syndicalism in Australia: Past, Present and Future" and consisted of Jorge's count of how the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation (A.S.F.) originally came to be established in Australia, when this took place, where this took place (Jorge says Melbourne, others remember it as Sydney), when it was dissolved, reformed, re-solved, renamed, recognised, etc., etc, etc. It was a discourse on the formal bureaucratic history of Anarcho-Syndicalist organisation in Melbourne from the Perspective of one, person's involvement. Little was said about any ACTIONS the organisation engaged in that might justify using the name "Anarcho-Syndicalist, with the exception of A S F. members' participation in the Melbourne tram dispute of 1990, even though the self-management actions that occurred then were the initiative of tram workers unconnected with the A.S.F. and would have occurred regardless of whether certain A.S.F., Melbourne, individuals went along for the ride or not. In fairness, it must be said that A.S.F. members did do some valuable work fundraising for the locked out trammies and popularising self management notions and countering the propaganda of the government and the union bureaucracy. The positive role they played then was different to what is subsequently became.

No other instances of concrete workers' control directed activity were given as examples of A.S.F. methods. One could be forgiven for asking, "Of what use is an Anarcho-Syndicalist organisation that does not practice Anarcho-Syndicalism? And why do they insist on calling themselves, Anarcho-Syndicalists, anyway?" The answer to the first question is obvious, to the second is that they are happy to maintain a purely FORMAL adherence to Anarcho-Syndicalism. In my view, the Anarcho-Syndicalist movement in the Australian context reduces itself to two streams: what I refer to as Formalist and Objectivist streams. Formalists are primarily concerned to concentrate on the procedural, organisational, bureaucratic, that is, the purely formal aspects of their activity, to the exclusion of practical work at the point of production. They meet from time to time to regale one another with glory tales of past Anarchist struggles, or to ever so earnestly debate over who should be admitted to, or excluded from, that holiest of institutions, the I.W.A., (International Workers Association), and in general, to piss in each other's pockets and slap each other on the back. They are decidedly inward looking and don't respond well to criticism, be it comradely or otherwise. They've also been known to close down meetings when the discussion takes a turn to their disadvantage. Formalists are really in their element when posturing and delivering empty talk to a credulous audience. Formalism is about SPECTACLE rather than CONTENT. The stream that I describe as comprised of Objectivists is concerned with the APPLICATION of Anarcho-Syndicalist theory to workplace struggles, and the further development of Anarcho-Syndicalist theory that results from this, the ultimate objective being the displacement of capitalist society by the liberated workers. I call this tendency Objectivism because its theory and practice derive from, and act upon, the existing objective social reality that workers encounter in their day-to-day lives. Objectivists seek to develop a theory and practice that is based on the

self activity of workers and does not seek recourse to utopian illusions or vanguardist authority; further, they seek to assimilate the lessons of previous and contemporaneous workers' struggles, and aim ultimately for the self organisation of the entire working class.

Jorge, in the course of his talk, gave a very telling insight into the elitism and vanguardism inherent in his Formalist version of Anarcho-Syndicalism. He recounted an incident that occurred at a May Day march in Melbourne concerning himself and an Italian migrant worker of his acquaintance who wore, for the occasion, the insignia of both the Catholic Church and the Communist Party. Jorge, by his own account, became so enraged at the sight of the Holy Cross and Hammer and Sickle displayed on this workers breast, that he physically attacked him and prevented him from participating in the march. Such a reaction comes quite naturally to a Formalist whose main preoccupation is to ensure that the "correct" forms are adhered to, that externalities conform to what is expected. If Jorge's manner of dealing with the unfortunate Marxist-Catholic worker is extrapolated to the entire working class, then clearly the Formalist organisation has no place for workers who do not identify as conscious Anarchists. The Formalists' objective is to establish an Anarchist-controlled Syndicalist movement and to substitute this for the actual mobilisation of the working class. The logical result of ANY form of vanguardism in the organisations of the workers, be it Anarchist Vanguardism or otherwise, is – apart from complete failure – some kind of bizarre political dictatorship by the vanguard that has substituted itself for the self activity of the working class.

In the objective world of the capitalist workplace, the extent to which workers understand the nature of the class struggle and strategies appropriate to combating the capitalist class varies a great deal according to particular and general circumstances, experience, etc, but a worker's apparent lack of understanding of the ins and outs of class conflict should never preclude him or her from associating with other workers for purposes of bettering their position as workers or to celebrate their solidarity with other workers on occasions such as May Day. While the Formalist might express contempt for the "less conscious" worker and try to exclude him, the Objectivist accepts him as he is and attempts to assist him in workplace self-activity, for example, by encouraging discussion about workplace issues, by assisting with the publication of 'a workplace bulletin or paper, and in general by encouraging activities that produce an increase in general worker morale and confidence that will lead by generally increasing steps to real challenges to the power of workplace management, and eventually, the capitalist status quo itself. The worker will, after experiencing a number of victories against the boss, arrive at the certainty that he or she (together with the rest of the proletariat) is potentially the SUBJECT OF HISTORY and capable of exerting a power sufficient to eliminate capitalism and establish a truly liberatory socialism. A worker who's reached such a high level of class consciousness will have, long ago, discarded any illusions he may have once held in the Church or the Communist Party.

Anarcho-Syndicalism is not an "Anarchists only" affair. It concerns every single worker on this planet. It's a methodology for bringing about the liberation of the working class as a whole. Surely, it's better to win a worker over to our side than to lose him or her to the Church or the Communist Party?

After a few questions from the floor and an especially constructive intervention from an Objectivist comrade which Jorge, in his reply, did not respond to, the meeting was closed rather abruptly, on the pretext that the speaker had to leave immediately to catch a flight. An hour

later Jorge was seen still at Black Rose, sipping drinks, and chatting amiably. Funny about that.
Siegl.