

Review of Anarchism in Australia Today: A Survey of Current Debates in the Australian Anarchist Movement; revised and edited by Leigh Kendall; published by Scam Publications, Melbourne, March 1997; 31 p.; first published by Melbourne anarcho-syndicalists in April 1986 as Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism in Australia Today.

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This pamphlet does not contain, as asserted in the title, "a survey of current debates in the Australian anarchist movement" - no actual debates between actual groups or individuals are anywhere cited. Nor is it even a survey of the ideas that are current in the anarchist milieu in Australia - no specific sets of ideas are attributed to any specific groups or individuals. This pamphlet is merely a grab-bag of abstract, anarchist-related opinion that Leigh Kendall, the reviser and editor, apparently concurs with at this particular point in time, interspersed with a few basic facts of political economy, and presented in the style of a party manifesto. It contains little analysis, much assertion, and not a lot to think about. Its primary purpose is probably to attract new members to the sectlet that published it. Leigh's method is largely abstract and utopian, presenting in blueprint-style fashion descriptions of what the ideal anarchist society might look like rather than initiating discussion as to how it might be possible to begin organising for it in the first place. He informs us that decision-making in the future anarchist world will have "information and decisions pass both ways between the different constituents of the federation from local assemblies, through regional meetings of delegates to continental and international congresses, and back" (p. 30). But without having first discussed in some detail the rudiments of creating an anarcho-syndicalist tendency within the workers' movement in Australia, such florid ruminations upon pan-continental cooperation are somewhat premature, to say the least. It seems evident that the job of facilitating some intelligent discussion on the project of organising for workers' control is too great a task for Leigh, so he doesn't at-

tempt it. Incredibly, he proposes that the actions of "support groups" of anarchists assisting workers in regular trade union struggles constitute anarcho-syndicalist practice! Funny, latter seems to me more like good old-fashioned "tail-ending", the main purpose of which is the attempt on the part of the tail-enders to acquire members from amongst striking workers, a phenomenon much engaged in by various Trotskyist sects, with usually dismally unsuccessful results. But Leigh now informs us that this is "a good example of anarcho-syndicalist 'practice" (p. 26). Such an assertion can only be expected, though, given that the demonstrated *raison detre* of the milieu that issues this pamphlet is the sect-like recruitment of members, not the stimulation of an anarcho-syndicalist attitude amongst workers.

Elsewhere, Leigh claims that "Anarchists in Australia are avoiding the questions of how we stop capitalism (and state capitalism) and how we will organise the meeting of needs into the period of revolutionary change" and that in order to bring about progress towards anarchism "Anarchosyndicalists believe that [it] is important that we are involved in the labour force" (p. 20-21, my italics). There is a clear implication in the foregoing two quotations that "we" the "anarchists" and "anarcho-syndicalists" - and here Leigh is referring to all those "anarchists" and "anarcho-syndicalists" currently "organised"

in small and obscure sectlets, and primarily his own - are somehow going to be instrumental in bringing about anarchist society, that is, that these sects are going to be the main agents of historical change, and not the working class. Note, yet again, the assertion that it "is important

that we are involved in the labour force" (my italics), not, for instance, that it is important that workers are assisted to discover anarcho-syndicalist methods of self-managed organisation. Implicit in Leigh's view is an elitist and vanguardist perspective that has potentially dangerous ramifications for the workers' movement if permitted the chance to take hold. Leigh sums up his perspective in the following paragraph: "What anarcho-syndicalists are seeking is a basis for taking action with other anarchists to bring about what we want - an anarchist society" (p. 31). It seems that what the workers might want is of little concern to Leigh. If put into practice, such a vanguardist and ultra-leftist perspective could only result in anarchist sectarianism and dictatorship, the like of which was responsible for the degeneration and defeat of the CNT in Spain during the 1930s. Anarcho-syndicalists in Australia have a responsibility to propagate anarcho-syndicalist methods amongst the working class, for it will be the proletariat organised along anarcho-syndicalist lines that will bring about anarchist society, not some self-declared minority elite.

Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy of the first edition of this pamphlet for comparison, but I would guess that it would have contained fewer abstractions than this revision, on account of the fact that the milieu that issued it was engaged in some practical workplace activity at the time. Whether this comparison between editions of the pamphlet would hold true or not - and I'm prepared to bet that it would - it certainly is the case that the ASG-M has moved from some level of practical engagement in anarcho-syndicalist activity in the 1980s to total disengagement by the late 1990s. The sum total of their activity today would seem to be playing at constructing their own little anarchist mini-Bureaucracy within the more macro-sized bureaucracy of the IWA. This second edition of the pamphlet, as even the name change suggests, marks a reorienting of the outlook of the ASG-M (or whatever it calls itself now) from anarcho-syndicalism (at which it had no success whatsoever) to a more inward-looking anarchist affinity, group type of perspective. The ASG-M is not an anarcho-syndicalist organisation: they don't organise amongst workers and no self-respecting worker goes anywhere near them. The ASN milieu, on the other hand, has for many years engaged in consistent and persistent propaganda work amongst Sydney transport workers (railways, buses and taxis) through the publication and distribution of the rank-and-file magazine Sparks. These efforts having succeeded in linking together a number of militants from across the transport industry. The success of the Sparks project is such that at the end of August a combined transport workers' meeting is scheduled at which it is expected that an anarcho-syndicalist oriented industrial union will be inaugurated and matters of concern to the assembled workers discussed with a view to resolving them by means of direct action, thereby totally by-passing the treacherous official unions. This organisation has the potential to effect a historic turnaround towards a workers' control perspective amongst a sizable section of this country's workers and the ASN and the magazine Sparks played a significant role in establishing links between militants of the various transport sectors. This, I can confidently assert, is what genuine anarcho-syndicalism is all about. ASN praxis does not advocate setting up a union of anarchists; rather, it supports an anarchistic approach to unionism. There is an enormous difference between these conceptions; the former leads to vanguardism and dictatorship if successful, and sectarian confusion if unsuccessful, while the latter, if successful, leads to democratic workers' control and libertarian socialism, and if unsuccessful, it at least leaves a principled legacy of true proletarian democracy that future generations' revolutionaries will take up. Peter Siegl.

