# The limits of syndicalism and the institution of popular assemblies

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(Το κείμενο στα ελληνικά εδώ)

Syndicalism as a product of the class struggle and as organizational structure of workers came to manage or to reverse labor relations, developed in conditions of competition within the workplaces. The primary grassroots organization of the workers, explicitly emphasizing on the working conditions and remuneration, gave birth to many expectations throughout all of society, insofar as and to the extent that, together with farmers, they formed the vast majority of the population.

But because capitalism based itself on the new subject of exploitation -the worker- it transferred him to its locomotive, enslaved and leader simultaneously, in a direction that, as was demonstrated, had neither logic nor boundaries and barriers. And wherever all these were appearing, they were not spared neither blood nor terror.

However capitalism didn’t rely on brute force but on its ability to incorporate and assimilate its own cracks. The brute force did not show its strength but instead its weakness to integration and assimilation. Behind the curtain of violence is hidden its own imaginary that have loaded two ideological weights on the backs of the workers:

The first weight was the ideology of messianism, with all the religious characteristics and “laws”, historic and economic, and what they entailed. The main mentor of this messianism was

Marx and Marxism which replaced metaphysics of religion with earthly scientific “truth” of communism.

The second weight and more durable, since the first one nowadays has went bankrupt, was and still is the ideology of economy. That is, how through it capitalism somehow discovered the *BEING* of human relationships and human history. The organization of production and the produced product themselves formed values as physical ends of the realization of this *BEING*. What this means can be seen in the manuscripts of Marx from ’45 where he briefly concludes that the workers, and thus revolutionaries, should not waste time for thinking of better organization of production because this has been discovered by capitalism itself.

The practical realization of this thesis was done by Lenin, who introduced fordism and the production chain in the factories of his newly established dictatorship.

Apart from Marx and the Marxists, what is being situated as a central objective of the class struggle of the workers is the issue of ownership of the means of production and of produced wealth. However the growth of the productive forces was the only way as for capitalism so as for the worker. Let’s not forget the often repeated position of Bakunin who agreed completely with the economic program of Marx but disagreed with his political one. It was the epoch when scientific discoveries and industrial development – the early stage of technoscience – seemed to be the main pillars for the passage from the era of scarcity into the times of abundance. Clothing, communication, transportation, diet with new products along with mechanization were major pillars of capitalist growth and its first wide spread campaign.

In that moment, the revolutionary aspect of syndicalism directly raised the issue of control and ownership of factories and land and the produced wealth to which capitalists predatory aspired.

All uprisings and revolutions led to the gates of the factory. From inside the boss was defending himself and from outside the worker was trying to take it over. The last revolution before the 50s, the Spanish one, having as a battering ram the anarcho-syndicalism, was the final one about labor claims for self-management of production on behalf of the entire society.

After the war, capitalism was faced with the necessity to fix the huge damages that he himself had caused signing a new social contract with real increases, social security, pensions, collective agreements, etc., looking for other ways to address labor demands. What it couldn’t do inside the working place it did outside of it. I.e. whatever it couldn’t achieve with machines in order to reduce the power of the labor force, it did achieve through trade, opening new cycles and jobs to meet the technical needs that capitalism itself created. The worker transforms into a consumer and the intensity of services that is involved with the disposal of goods increases.

The consumer frenzy has three essential consequences. Firstly, it is the integration of the entire population into the logic of the commodity which creates ephemeral and alternate lifestyles. The peculiarity of this logic is that the product ceases to support the needs of human and the human is called upon to support the needs of the commodities. Secondly, it is the over-exploitation of natural resources for the needs of a supposed growth, achieved at huge ecological disasters, energy wastage and accumulation of improbable amounts of garbage. That’s why today we don’t know what to do with the melting of ice caps and the ozone hole, that’s why landfills flood, areas around energy plants turn into deserts and water resources are depleted at an exponential rate. If we add the destruction of agriculture and food nightmare that followed, the picture becomes even more apocalyptic. Thirdly, it is the growing individualization, as necessary and sufficient condition for the proliferation of commodities that in an individual level

led to personal nests of things, most of them useless and in a collective level led to a widespread corporatization, degradation of social solidarity and in the workplace to a stagnation of the solidarity of workers between each other.

To say just that responsible for all this, as far as it is concerned, is the sold out bureaucratic leadership of the trade union movement, is a banality, an aphorism without to perceive the great upheavals of the last fifty years.

The two versions of syndicalism (reformist-revolutionary) are based on the same two basic pillars that have to do with the participation of the workers in the production process and in the final product. The reformists negotiate for the minimum, thus reproducing exploitation, while the revolutionaries want everything for everyone, abolishing exploitation.

What both of these tendencies couldn’t understand, and especially the second one, was the fact that the problems within the workplace were being transferred, even stronger, out of it. In other words they couldn’t understand that the problem was not just the working conditions, remuneration, participation and seizure of the means of production, but the problem became, more and more intensively, the work itself, the product of which had enormous social consequences.

Whoever insists on syndicalism must answer to two key questions. What means for the workers to take control of the factories and what means expropriation of the produced wealth? Today we don’t have to do with this. The production and the final product face a strong questioning. The harshest criticism against capitalism does not come from inside the workplace but outside of it, from citizen movements that are not based on work but on the basis of its dubious or destructive consequences. The very “growth” is under criticism along with barricades. The produced wealth is increasingly becoming a produced junk and its corresponding industrial units are not anymore a breath of air for their areas but

suffocating stench. So what kind of self-management can be done in fertilizer factories, in combustion plants at landfills, in gold mines in Chalkidiki, in the Acheloos gigantic dam, in nuclear power plants or in coal plants? What kind of wealth are the products of agricultural and livestock production that must be appropriated when food scandals succeed one another? Today the production units and their products are not possessions and usable objects but social consultation objects for their usefulness. And when the decision is negative, there are two commonly and permanently absentees: the bosses and the workers. Is it by chance that in all the movements against the results of work the unions are absent? Or is it by chance that the Movement of the Squares didn't want the presence of the syndicates at all? For what was happening with the recycling in Tagarades (region south of Thessaloniki, Greece) so many years, the employees of OTA knew better than anyone else, but the protests came out from residents of the surrounding areas, including the collected information, gathered outside the workplace, not through it.

Today the questioning of syndicalism follows the same path, not with the questioning of its obsolescent bureaucrats, but by something much deeper, with the questioning of labor itself. Now is required its redefinition not as a worker-employer relationship, but as an overall social relationship. If the produced wealth is social then the questions can't be posed nor solved by anyone else except from society itself.

Syndicalism today cannot be the engine of social transformation, not only because it's dominated by reformism, bureaucracy, corruption and attachment to "positions", but because it cannot respond and solve on its own, the big issues raised by work and the product itself. For example, in the health, all trade unionists, radical or not, agree for more hospitals, more doctors and nurses for better health services. But especially in the western world the already existing hospitals will appear too many if the quality of food and

environment change. This requires a radical change in agriculture, radical change in transportation and radical change in the installation of industrial units. This means transition towards real prevention rather than regular check-ups and diets. We will answer the question of health either as society or we will syndicalize its spiral circle.

The Movement of the Squares paved the road for great social deliberation, which without direct democracy would be just a distasteful repetition of the syndicalist, party and parliamentary farce. We can cross it if we decide to walk it.

**Source:**
https://www.babylonia.gr/2011/10/22/ta-oria-tou-sindikalismou-ke-o-thesmos-ton-laikon-sinelefseon/#sthash.P4AAF9rH.dpuf