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BY: **L. van der Walt**

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"The Industrial Union is the Embryo of the Socialist Commonwealth": the International Socialist League and revolutionary syndicalism in South Africa, 1915-1919[1]

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The outbreak of the First World War in Europe in August 1914 was a turning point in the history of the international socialist and radical labour movement. The war precipitated the collapse of the International Socialist Bureau (the "Second International") of socialist and labour parties, with almost all sections supporting the war efforts of their national governments. The only Second International groupings which proved exceptions to this general pattern –a violation of every basic tent of the international socialism, as well as the formal anti-war commitments of the Second International - were the Russian Bolsheviks, the Serbian socialists, and anti-war minorities in a few of the belligerent parties.

The war also confirmed the salience of a more long-standing division in the international socialist movement: the division between "political socialists" (foremost amongst which were the parties of the Second International), who sought to use the State as a means of socialist transformation, on the one hand; and "libertarian socialists" (the anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists) opposed to both the State and capitalism, advocating instead the constitution of a stateless socialist society based on "free federations of free producers". In contrast to the parties of the Second International, every major anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist organisation –with the single exception of the revolutionary syndicalist-led unions of France and a few prominent individual anarchists - opposed the war[2].

The upheaval in the socialist and labour movements had its echo in South Africa. Immediately upon the outbreak of war, the White worker-based South African Labour Party (S.A.L.P.), which had affiliated to Second International in 1913, condemned the conflict as a conflict that could "only benefit the International Armament Manufacturer's Ring, and other enemies of the working class" and appealed ""to the workers of the world to organise and refrain from participating in an unjust war"[3].

However, this uncharacteristically radical statement (the S.A.L.P. was committed, *inter alia*, to segregation and the colour bar), was clearly at odds with the sentiments of the great majority of S.A.L.P. members, and was rejected at a special party conference held on August 22-3, 1915. Consequently, a minority of internationalist and socialist S.A.L.P. members, previously grouped around the dissident War on War League and the *War on War Gazette*, resigned from the S.A.L.P., and helped found the International Socialist League in September 1915[4]. The I.S.L. was also joined by supporters of two small South African revolutionary syndicalist groupings: former members of the defunct South African section of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), which had operated between 1910-1913, and members of the Socialist Labour Party founded in 1902 (linked to the American party of the same name, led by Daniel De Leon, and not to be confused with the S.A.L.P).

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[2] See, *inter alia*, W. Thorpe, 1989, *The Workers Themselves: Revolutionary Syndicalism And International Labour 1913-23.* Kulwer Academic Pubs. Dordrecht, Boston, London. & International Institute of Social History. Amsterdam. Lenin's claims to the contrary in *The State and Revolution* cannot be sustained. See V.I. Lenin, [1917] 1933, *The State and Revolution.* Martin Lawrence. London.

[3] B. Hirson, with G.A. Williams, 1995, *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924.* Core Publications. London. p 138.

[4] A detailed narrative of the split in the S.A.L.P. is provided by D. Ticktin, 1969, "The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party", *South African Historical Journal.* No. 1.

The new organisation issued a weekly newspaper, *The International: the Organ of the International Socialist League (S.A.).*

HISTORIES OF SOCIALISM:

A CRITICAL COMMENT ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Despite its small size –the I.S.L. never had more than few hundred members[5]- the I.S.L. has attracted a fair amount of attention in the scholarly literature. In large part this attention is attributable to the prominent role played by I.S.L. members in founding the Communist Party of South Africa (C.P.S.A.) in March 1921, the first Communist Party on the African continent.

Most of the literature proceeds from the assumption that the I.S.L. was a basically "Marxist" organisation. In adopting this approach, the literature follows the pattern laid down in the first published histories of South African socialism, written by members and former members of the C.P.S.A. and S.A.C.P. from the 1940s onwards[6]. Thus, we read in various accounts -both academic and activist- that the I.S.L. was the "Communist nucleus" of "true socialists"[7] and the "first Marxist orientated political organisation in the history of the South African labour movement" [8]: launched and led by "revolutionary Marxists"[9], the I.S.L. occupied itself with itself with "following the teachings of Karl

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[5] The I.S.L.'s January 1919 congress was, according to one source, attended by 39 delegates representing "less than a dozen branches", indicating that the total membership could not have been "more than a few hundreds". See E. Roux, [1944] 1993, , *S.P. Bunting: a Political Biography.* Mayibuye Books. UWC, Bellville. UWC Mayibuye History series no. 47. p. 82. In 1921, the I.S.L. estimated that the membership never exceeded four hundred: see David Ivon Jones, 29 March 1921, "Communism in South Africa", presented to the Executive of the Third International on behalf of the I.S.L., reproduced in B. Bunting (ed.), 1981, *South African Communist Speak: Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party, 1915-1980.* London. Inkululeko Publications.

[6] The first accounts of socialist history in South Africa were produced from within the movement, and include Cope, [?1940] n.d., *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader.* Cape Town. Stewart; Foreman, [1959] 1992, *op cit.* ; W.H. Harrison, [?1948] n.d., *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa 1903-47.* Cape Town. Stewart Printing; Roux, 1993; *idem.* [1948] 1978, *Time Longer than Rope: a History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa.* Wisconsin University Press. Second edition; Jack and Ray Simons, [1965] 1983, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950.* International Defence and Aid Fund. London. Both Harrison and Roux had ended their connections with the C.P.S.A.. Despite their flaws, Roux 's works and that of the Simons study remain the standard, most frequently cited, and far too infrequently criticised, works on the early socialist movement in South Africa and are relied upon even in conservative accounts.

[7] "Introduction by Dr Yusuf Dadoo, National Chairman of the South African Communist Party", in B. Bunting (ed.), 1981, *op cit.*

[8] E.A. Mantzaris, 1988, "Radical Community: the Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League, 1918-20), in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict.* Ravan. p. 161; also see c.f. S. W. Johns, 1965, *Marxism-Leninism in a Multi-Racial Environment: the International Socialist league and the South African Communist Party, 1914-32.* Phd. thesis. Harvard. Reprinted in 1995 as *Raising the Red Flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-32.* Mayibuye Books. UWC, Bellville. UWC Mayibuye History series no. 49. pp. 51-2. All references are to the Mayibuye edition of Johns.

[9] South African Communist Party [J. Cronin], n.d., *The Red Flag in South Africa: A Popular History of the Communist Party.* Jet Printers. Johannesburg. p. 6; J. Cronin, 1991, "Origins and 'Native Republic'", in C. Bundy, (ed.), *The History of the South African Communist Party.* University of Cape Town. Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies. p. 9.

Marx"[10], "applying Marxism to South Africa"[11], and acting as "tireless propagandists" for Marxist ideology[12].

Once this claim is made the next step of fully assimilating the history of the I.S.L. to the history of the C.P.S.A. is readily taken. This can be done quite directly. Take, for example, the March 1944 issue of the *Party Organiser*, an organ of the Cape C.P.S.A.: "The Communist Party of South Africa was really founded in 1915 under the name of 'The International Socialist League' as a result of a split in the Labour Party on the question of the War"[13]. Less ambitiously, perhaps, other Communist Party accounts refer to the I.S.L. as the "direct forerunner"[14] or the "main foundation" and direct predecessor[15] of the C.P.S.A. Similarly, the autobiography of Eddie Roux, a one-time C.P.S.A. leader, and later, a vehement critic, states of the early 1920s: "The I.S.L. at that time was about to change its name to the Communist Party of South Africa and affiliate to the Communist International"[16]. The title of the John's scholarly account of the I.S.L. and early C.P.S.A. is equally revealing: an otherwise excellent book, *Marxism-Leninism in a Multi-Racial Environment: the International Socialist League and the South African Communist Party, 1914-32*, treats the I.S.L. as the first six years of South African Marxist socialism[17].

Thus, the I.S.L. is presented in these accounts as either the C.P.S.A. in embryo, or, the C.P.S.A. in fact. This enables studies to concern themselves with the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the I.S.L.'s "Marxism" [18]. In the historiography associated with C.P.S.A. and S.A.C.P. leaders and intellectuals (Bunting, Cope, Cronin, Foreman, Lerumo, and the Simons), the I.S.L. is typically praised for being in step with international developments of the anti-war Marxist minorities: thus, the I.S.L. is typically praised for developing an anti-war analysis "closely approaching the stand

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[10] Govan Mbkei, 1992, *The Struggle For Liberation in South Africa*. David Philips. Cape Town. Mayibuye Books. UWC. Bellville. UWC Mayibuye History Series no. 13. p. 27.

[11] Lungisile Ntsebeza, 1988, *Divisions and Unity in Struggle: the A.N.C., I.S.L. and CP, 1910-28. B.A. Honours dissertation. Economic History*. University of Cape Town. p. 30

[12] See Jack and Ray Simons, 1983,*op cit.*; R.K. Cope, n.d., *op cit*; E. Roux, 1978, *op cit.* p. 134. Also see Roux, 1993, *op cit.*.

[13] "Editorial" in *Party Organiser: Organ of the Cape District C.P.S.A.*, March 1944, "23 Birthday Special", p. 1. Held in the Simons Collection. African Studies Centre. University of Cape Town. See also "Introduction by Dr Yusuf Dadoo, National Chairman of the South African Communist Party"", in *South African Communist Speak, op cit.* p. xv

[14] L. Foreman, [1959], *Chapters in the History of the March to Freedom*, reprinted in S. Foreman and A. Odendaal, 1992, *Lionel Foreman: a Trumpet from the Rooftops*. Zed Books. London. David Philips. Cape Town. Ohio University Press. Athens, Ohio. UWC Mayibuye History Series no. 7.

[15] Lerumo, A. (M. Harmel), 1971, *Fifty Fighting Years: the Communist Party of South Africa 1921-71*. Inkululeko Press. London. p. 34.

[16] Eddie Roux and Win Roux, 1970, *Rebel Pity: the Life of Eddie Roux*. Rex Collings. London. p. 19. Roux makes an identical statement Roux, 1978, *op cit.*, pp. 134-5. Oddly enough, Roux, 1993, *op cit.*, p. 90 is more subtle on this issue. See also B. Bunting (ed.) , 1996, "Introduction", in his *Letters to Rebecca: South African Communist Leader S.P. Bunting to his Wife 1917-1934*. Mayibuye Books. UWC. Bellville. UWC Mayibuye History series no. 67. This introduction treats the I.S.L. and C.P.S.A. as interchangeable.

[17] Johns, *op cit.*

[18] Such assessments constitute a core part of most works dealing with the I.S.L.. See, *inter alia*, Bunting 1981, *op cit.*; Cope, n.d., *op cit.*; Cronin, 1991, *op cit.*; Foreman, 1992, *op cit.*; M. Legassick, 1973, *Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: the South African Communist Party and the 'Native Republic', 1928-34.*

of Lenin", for anticipating the formation of the Third (Communist) International in 1919, and for developing a correct interpretation of the events of the Russian Revolution that began in 1917[19]. It is, however, criticised by Bunting, Foreman, and the Simons for its ostensible failure to realise the revolutionary potential of Black nationalism, clinging instead to an abstract commitment to non-racial class struggle.

From the 1940s onwards, then, the history of the C.P.S.A. (and the I.S.L.) is portrayed, essentially, as a series of struggles to attain a correct understanding of the South African situation. From the 1950s onwards, the Simons suggest, success was finally reached, after many false starts and workerist deviations, with the formation of an alliance for "national democracy" between the C.P.S.A. (renamed the South African Communist Party (S.A.C.P.) in 1950) and the African National Congress (A.N.C.)[20].

In this manner, the early history of socialism is assimilated to its later developments; meanwhile, the perceived imperfections of the earlier period are reduced to passing maladies whose critique and cure occurs in the fullness of time through a clarification of Marxist theory under the guidance of the correct leadership. Like the history of socialism in China, which has been reduced to the "progressive evolution of a correct socialism under the guidance of Mao Zedong or the Communist Party"[21], the history of socialism in South Africa has thus often been reduced to an account of the C.P.S.A.'s struggle to develop the correct relationship with nationalist forces. In this struggle, the I.S.L. constitutes a first step in the right direction.

I will draw attention to some of the specific flaws in the assessments of the I.S.L. developed in the C.P.S.A. historiography later. At this point, however, it is worth noting that there are both methodological and substantive errors with the approach thus far outlined. Most immediately, the teleology it embodies is unacceptable: simply because the C.P.S.A. and A.N.C. formed an alliance does not mean that such an alliance was inevitable, necessary, or correct. Embedded in this version of I.S.L., then C.P.S.A., then S.A.C.P., development is an implicit denial of the validity of non-Marxist positions and pre- A.N.C./S.A.C.P. alliance politics.

Eastern African Studies. XV ; Lerumo, 1971, *op cit.*; Ntsebeza, 1988, *op cit.*; Roux , 1978, *op cit.*; Roux, 1993, *op cit.*; S.A.C.P. 1991. *op cit.*; Simons, 1983, *op cit.*

[19] This is emphasised by Bunting, 1981, *op cit.*; Cope, n.d., *op cit.*; Cronin, 1991, *op cit.*; Foreman, 1992, *op cit.*; Lerumo, 1971, *op cit.*; S.A.C.P., 1991. *op cit.*; Simons, 1983, *op cit.* The quote is from Cope, nd., *op cit.*, p. 205.

[20] For example, Bunting, 1981, *op cit.*; Cronin, 1991, *op cit.*; Lerumo, 1971, *op cit.*; S.A.C.P., 1991. *op cit.*; Simons, 1983, *op cit.* c.f. also N. Dixon, February 12 1997, "The Transformation of South Africa's Communists [Review of Johns]", *Green Left Weekly.* Australia. A similar point is made by A. Drew, A., 1997, "Writing South African Communist History", in *Science and Society.* vol. 61, no. 1. p. 110.

[21] Arif Dirlik, 1991, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution.* University of California Press. Berkeley. Los Angeles. London. p. 8.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT: MARXISM AND REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM

> *... in 1905-1914, the marxist left had in most countries been on the fringe of the revolutionary movement, the main body of marxists had been identified with a de facto non-revolutionary Social Democracy, while the bulk of the revolutionary left was anarcho-syndicalist, or at least much closer to the ideas and the mood of anarcho-syndicalism than to that of classical marxism....*
>
> **Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*[22]**

Equally problematic is the identity posited between the I.S.L. and the C.P.S.A. At a general level, this assimilation is in line with a broader flaw in a substantial portion of the international literature on socialism and radical labour: the conflation of the history of revolutionary socialism with the history of Marxism. Here, the founding of Communist Parties in the period after 1917 is simply another episode in this history, perhaps a regroupment of revolutionary Marxists after a period of revisionist error. This conflation of revolutionary socialism and Marxism is not justifiable, and is based on an excision of the rich tradition of libertarian socialist (particularly anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist) theory and practice[23] from narratives of socialist history.

Thorpe, in his exemplary pioneering study of revolutionary syndicalist internationalism, distinguishes between two main streams in the socialist tradition[24]. The first stream is "political" socialism, associated most notably, but not exclusively, with the Marxist tradition, which advocates a "a political battle against capitalism waged through ... centrally organised workers' parties aimed at seizing and utilising State power to usher in socialism". "Libertarian" socialism, by contrast, argued that socialism could not come through the State: anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin argued that any attempt to use the State for progressive social change would fail, either resulting in co-option of the revolutionaries, or in the substitution of a "red bureaucracy" for the capitalist elite.

Revolutionary syndicalism, a form of libertarian socialism directly rooted in the anarchist movement of the 1860s-70s[25], took this position to its logical conclusion. Revolutionary syndicalism (literally, "revolutionary trade (or industrial) unionism", "syndicalism" being the French for "unionism") argued that the working class could only emancipate itself from capitalism and the State through the formation of revolutionary trade unions which would perform a dual role: in the short-term, the trade

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[22] Dirlik, 1991, *op cit.*, p. 2.

[23] For partial overviews of the history of libertarian socialism –i.e. anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism- see Thorpe 1989, *op cit.*; Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (editors), 1990, *Revolutionary Syndicalism: an International Perspective*. Scolar Press; P. Marshall, 1994, *Demanding the Impossible: a History of Anarchism*. Fontana; M. Nettlau, 1996, *A Short History of Anarchism*. Freedom Press; R. Rocker, [1938] 1989, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Pluto Press. London.

[24] Thorpe, 1989, *op cit.*, p. 3.

unions would organise the workers as a *class* conscious force in defence of their immediate interests; in the long-term the revolutionary trade unions would provide the vehicle through which the workers will seize direct control of the means of production in a revolutionary general strike (or "lockout of the capitalist class"), replacing the political State and the capitalist system with socialism, workers self-management and socialist economics[26]. Unions were, the revolutionary syndicalists argued, the best weapons for socialist revolution, given that they mobilised workers as a class at the point of production on the basis of their class interests, and against capitalism and the State. By contrast, political parties –including labour and socialist parties – were typically multi-class institutions led by non-workers: in practice these parties used workers as passive voters in a futile quest to use the capitalist government for socialist transformation.

Divisions between political and libertarian socialism became clearly defined in the split in the International Workers Association (the "First International") of 1864-1877[27], which broke into Marxist and "Anti-Authoritarian" wings, associated with Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin, respectively. This division was reproduced with the formation of the Second International in 1889 (from which anarchists and "anti-parliamentarians" were explicitly excluded), and by the dramatic "capture" of the French trade unions –amalgamated in the Confederation General du Travail (CGT) in 1902- by revolutionary syndicalists. In this way, "the Anarchists, beginning with their famous 'raid' on the [French] unions in the nineties had defeated the reformist Socialists and captured almost the entire French trade union movement"[28]. They had also managed to shift the direction of the socialist movement: although the anarchists had founded revolutionary syndicalist union movements in the 1870s and 1880s –in Spain and Chicago, for instance[29]- the success in France had an international impact unmatched by these earlier movements. Not only was the take over of the French unions achieved *despite* the opposition of a well organised, Second Internationalist, Socialist Party (in Spain, anarchist hegemony in the socialist movement was relatively unchallenged), but it coincided with, and reinforced, a growing popular disenchantment with political socialism coupled with widespread working-class radicalisation[30].

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[25] See Thorpe, 1989, *op cit.*; also see Rocker 1989, *op cit.*

[26] Thorpe, 1989, *op cit.*

[27] The collapse of the First International is often given as 1873. This is, however, the date of the collapse of the Marxist faction, whose only Congress –held in Geneva that year- was "as the Bolshevik historian Steckloff admitted, 'a pitiful affair' attended almost entirely by Swiss an German exiles in Switzerland" . The majority "Anti-Authoritarian" section –which was not purely anarchist, but was certainly dominated by anarchism- held its final congress in 1877 (see G. Woodcock, 1975, *Anarchism: a History of Libertarian ideas and Movements.* Penguin Books. pp. 230-240, the quote is from p. 230).

[28] W.Z. Foster, 1936, *From Bryan to Stalin.* Lawrence and Wishart. London. p. 49.

[29] The 4 "Haymarket Martyrs", whose execution in the United States in November 1887 is annually commemorated through May Day, were anarchist leaders of the revolutionary syndicalist Central Labour Union in Chicago (see Foster, 1936, *op cit.*,; P. Avrich, 1984, *The Haymarket Tragedy.* Princeton University Press. Princeton. New Jersey). On Spain, see Bookchin, M, 1976, *The Spanish Anarchists: The Heroic Years 1868-1936.* Harper Colophon Books. New York. Hagerstown. San Francisco. London; Kaplan, T., 1977, *Anarchists of Andalusia, 1868-1903.* Princeton University Press. Princeton. New Jersey.

[30] The role of disenchantment with the dominant labour strategy in the rise of revolutionary syndicalism from the 1890s is comprehensively discussed in M. van der Linden and W. Thorpe, 1990, "The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism" in Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (editors), *op cit.*

As a result, anarchism- through revolutionary syndicalism- was able to break out of the isolation in which it had languished in many countries in the 1880s and 1890s due to repression and the unpopular tactic of "propaganda by the deed" (which included a spate of assassinations of prominent elite figures)[31]. It was also able to capitalise on the weaknesses of the Second International to present itself as a viable mass-based alternative socialist movement.

The formula of revolutionary syndicalism clearly proved attractive: between the 1890s and the 1930s, revolutionary syndicalist unions and were established in countries as varied as Argentine, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the United States of America, and Uruguay. In addition to functioning unions, there were also numerous organisations advocating revolutionary syndicalism, including in Britain, Egypt, India, Puerto Rico, and Norway. In the "English-speaking" countries, the most successful revolutionary syndicalist union was the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), founded in the United States in 1905. I.W.W. unions and propaganda groups subsequently emerged in Australia, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, New Zealand, Peru, and South Africa (in the latter case, a small section functioned between 1910-1913).

Not only did revolutionary syndicalism enable anarchist ideas to influence mass organisations, but it also acted to fracture the ranks of the Second Internationalists themselves. In some cases, revolutionary syndicalist movements were born through breakaways and splits from Second International groupings (for example, the Italian Syndicalist Union). In other cases, prominent leaders in the tradition of political socialism themselves shifted to revolutionary syndicalism: key examples here are James Connolly in Ireland, Tom Mann in Britain, and Daniel De Leon in the United States of America[32].

Thus, a conflation of revolutionary socialism and Marxism can only operate to distort and limit our understandings of the complexity and richness of pre-Communist Party "socialisms" in particular countries, tending (particularly if structured around a teleological arc) to treat such alternative socialisms as, at best, temporary deviations in the onward march of Marxism. Although the current crisis of Marxism has undermined such visions, this version of history operates against the genuine rediscovery of pre-Leninist socialism: a rediscovery, which is being urged upon the left by the concurrent crisis of social democracy and revolutionary Marxism[33].

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[31] D. Geurin, 1971, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice*. Monthly Review Press. Translated by Mary Klopper.

[32] On Mann and Connolly, see, *inter alia*, B. Holton, 1976, *British Syndicalism: Myths and Realities*. Pluto Press; E. O'Conner, 1988, op cit., *Syndicalism in Ireland, 1917-23*. Cork University Press. Ireland.

[33] See, *inter alia*, David Goodway (editor), 1989, *For Anarchism: History, Theory and Practice*. Routledge. London/ New York; Samuel Mbah and I.E. Igariwey, 1997, *African Anarchism: the History of a Movement*. See Sharp Press. Tucson, Arizona; Darrow Schecter, 1994, *Radical Theories: Paths Beyond Marxism and Social Democracy*. Manchester University Press. Manchester /New York.Samuel Mbah and I.E. Igariwey, 1997, *African Anarchism: the History of a Movement*. See Sharp Press. Tucson, Arizona.

THE BIRTH OF THE I.S.L.:
REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

> *... In common with the Labour movement elsewhere in the world, South Africa passed through a period of vigorous reaction against politics on the working-class front ... The disillusion of the workers' movement in the value of parliamentary reform was now spreading from Europe, from Britain, America, Australia and New Zealand ... From America came the ringing call to action of Haywood and Eugene Debs of the I.W.W., while from France was spreading an enthusiasm for the doctrines of the revolutionary Syndicalists with their faith in the industrial struggle and the general strike and their mistrust of politics ...*
>
> **R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*[34].**

In the case of China, the result of the assimilation of socialist history to the history of the Communist Party has been the foreclosure of any recognition that anarchism was between 1905 and 1925 "the most popular of and pervasive of all socialisms in China"[35]. I argue that a similar outcome has characterised assessments of South African socialism, where the assimilation of the I.S.L. to the C.P.S.A. -an identification closely related to, and facilitated by, the labelling of the I.S.L. as "Marxist" - has led to a similar narrowing and distortion of focus: notwithstanding some *organisational continuity* between the I.S.L. and early C.P.S.A. -many prominent early C.P.S.A. leaders were drawn from the I.S.L., for instance, whilst the I.S.L. newspaper, *The International*, was transformed into the journal of the young C.P.S.A.- there was a fundamental *political discontinuity* between the two organisations: whereas the C.P.S.A. was unambiguously Leninist and Marxist, the I.S.L. was, despite occasional Marxist influences, basically a revolutionary syndicalist organisation situated in the broad libertarian socialist tradition. Internationally, the organisations to which the I.S.L. exhibits the greatest political affinity was not the "Marxist left wing of the European socialist movement"[36] or the Bolshevik Party in Russia, but the international I.W.W. movement.

The history of the I.S.L. is therefore more properly situated within the historical tradition of libertarian socialism than it is within the Marxist tradition, and that it is within the revolutionary syndicalist milieu of the 1890s-1910s that the I.S.L. may be best understood-. In turn our understanding of the history of libertarian socialism- and, particularly, of revolutionary syndicalism- is enriched by an understanding and assessment of the I.S.L. Thus, discussions which take as their starting point the assumption that the I.S.L. was a "Marxist" may be asking the wrong questions, and thus, reaching the wrong conclusions; discussions which assess the I.S.L. on the basis of its "Marxist" politics –whether such assessments are carried out within the ambit of Communist historiography, or

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[34] Cope, n.d., *op cit.*, pp. 108-110
[35] Dirlik,1991, *op cit.*, p. 16.
[36] Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 52.

other approaches- may be forcing the I.S.L. into a Procrustean bed which inhibits analysis of the organisation's politics.

My focus in this paper is on the I.S.L. between September 1915 and the end of 1918. From 1919, the I.S.L. entered a difficult transition from revolutionary syndicalism to Leninism (culminating in it joining the C.P.S.A.) which will be examined in a future paper; however, revolutionary syndicalism would continue to influence the organisation well into 1920. Three points may, however, be made at this point: first, the very fact of such a transition was necessitated by precisely those revolutionary syndicalist politics of the I.S.L. which I examine in this paper; second, the parallels for the I.S.L.'s transition to Leninism are not the processes of revolutionary regroupment amongst political socialists which led to the formation of many other Communist parties (for example, Germany and Italy), but the experiences of that minority of revolutionary syndicalists (notably in Britain and the United States) who went over to Leninism. All of this serves to confirm, not challenge, the I.S.L.'s place in the libertarian socialist tradition. This paper also touches on the question of the adequacy of I.S.L. analyses of racial oppression in South Africa, but for a fuller discussion of this issue, the reader is referred to my other work on the subject[37].

At its founding, the membership of the I.S.L. in this period was largely based amongst immigrants from Australia, Britain, the United States and eastern Europe. They included W.H. Andrews, an engineer from England; Andrew Dunbar, a blacksmith from Scotland; S.P. Bunting, a lawyer from England; T.P. Tinker, a mason; George Mason, a miner; and David Ivon Jones, a clerk from Wales. The I.S.L. was based primarily in the Witwatersrand region, where it established branches in towns such as Benoni, Krugersdorp and Johannesburg; the I.S.L. also established a section in Durban. In addition, the I.S.L. established contact with other socialist groups, such as the Social Democratic Federation in Cape Town (whose ranks "included anarchists, reform socialists, guild socialists" and Marxists[38]), the Pretoria Socialist Society, and the Social Democratic Party in Durban.

Bringing with them experiences and traditions of labour and socialist organising from their home countries, these militants stepped into a context in which capitalism had been constructed upon relations of colonial domination. South Africa's industrial revolution followed the discovery of rich deposits of diamonds in 1867, followed by the discovery of the world's largest gold bearing reef in 1886. The result was the rapid emergence of a substantial mining sector emerged in this previously marginal, agriculturally based area of the world. The resultant inflow of capital and labour reshaped the political economy and international relations of the area that would become unified as the British

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[37] In particular, to my *"Segregation Is A Policy Of Capitalism, Not Of The Labour Movement": Revolutionary Syndicalism and Black Liberation in the Politics of the International Socialist League of South Africa, 1915-19* (forthcoming). See also Lucien van der Walt, 1998a, *Revolutionary Syndicalist Organising in South Africa: The International Socialist League And The Industrial Workers Of Africa, 1916-9* (Paper presented at Syndicalism: Swedish and Historical Experiences. Department of Economic History. Stockholm University. March 13-14, 1998) and Lucien van der Walt, 1998b, *Revolutionary Syndicalism and Anti-Racism in South Africa: A Re-examination of the Politics of the International Socialist League 1915-1919* (Paper presented at South African Sociological Association Congress. Randse Afrikaanse Universiteit. Johannesburg. 30 June to 3 July 1998).

[38] Johns, 1995, *op cit.* p. 31.

dominion of "South Africa" in 1910. Soon after the mineral discoveries, large capitalist combines emerged to dominate the mining sector, and were further unified by the formation of the Chamber of Mines in 1887. Although a range of factors undoubtedly fed into renewed British imperialist intrigue in the region in the late nineteenth century, there is little doubt that that the economic and strategic value of the growing mining sector contributed directly to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 in which (officially) 28,000 Afrikaners and 14,000 Africans died in concentration camps.

Facing the new bourgeoisie stood a new working class made up of workers from across the world. The majority of this proletariat were African workers, whose labour was forced into the market through hut taxes, labour taxes, land restrictions, and other State interventions[39]. However, African workers were not "free labour" in the classical sense at this point. On the one hand, African workers were typically male migrants employed in industry on contract of limited duration, sometimes lasting a year, following which they returned to their rural homes and families. They were not, therefore, fully separated from the means of production, a fact advantageous to employers in that it allowed the payment of "bachelor wages" on the grounds that the worker's family subsisted by farming. On the other hand, African workers were also subject to a battery of coercive labour practices ranging from indenture laws, to pass controls over movement, housing in tightly regulated closed compounds. From 1896 the mines also recruited their African workers through low-wage monopsonic labour agencies controlled by the Chamber of Mines.

All of these mechanisms operated to suppress worker organisation, and to hold wages at the extremely low levels needed to make the Witwatersrand's vast amounts of low-grade ore profitable on world markets[40]. Industrial action by African workers was, as a rule, forcibly suppressed[41]. When, for example, one hundred and sixty two mineworkers at the Vereeniging Estate Coal Mine tried to desert (thus breaking their contracts) in September 1901, soldiers shot nine dead and wounded fifteen. Similarly, the 1902 strike wave by African mineworkers was defeated by soldiers and mounted police, as were sporadic strikes in 1913. It was in large part because of these measures that by 1917 African workers had never been organised into a trade union, although the earliest recorded African mineworkers strike took place in 1896, and attempts by African mineworkers to unionise seem to have taken place as early as 1912[42].

In addition to the 195,000 Africans on the mines in 1913 (concentrated in actual mining work, but also including clerks and police), the labour force on the Witwatersrand also included an estimated 37,000 African workers in domestic service, and 6,000 Africans in factories, workshops and

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[39] E.Webster, 1978, "Background to the Control and Supply of labour in the Gold Mines", in E. Webster (ed.), *Essays in Southern African Labour History*. Ravan Press. Braamfontein; also see J. lever, "Capital and Labour in South Africa: the Passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1924", in *ibid.*.

[40] Webster, 1978, *op cit.*

[41] see P. Warwick, 1978, "Black Industrial Protest on the Witwatersrand, 1901-2", in E. Webster (ed.), 1978, *op cit.* ; S. Moroney, 1978, "Mine Worker Protest on the Witwatersrand: 101-1921", in *ibid.*

[42] J. Philips, 1976, "The South African Wobblies: the Origins of Industrial Unions in South Africa", *Ufahuma*. vol. 8. no. 3. , p. 125. Philips is citing a report in *The Voice of Labour*, a radical weekly of the time closely associated with the South African I.W.W. and Socialist Labour Party.

warehouses[43]. Of the 38,500 White workers employed on the Witwatersrand, 22,000 worked on the mines, 4,500 on the railways, and the remainder in building, tramways, printing, electricity, and other industries[44]. Initially most White miners were immigrants from abroad, with possibly 85 percent in the 1890s being British-born (albeit arriving in South Africa via other mining regions) [45], but by 1913 the majority were Afrikaners[46].

White workers were generally free of the direct labour coercion that dogged Africans, and from 1907 there was full manhood suffrage for Whites in the area that would become South Africa. By contrast, the vast majority of African, Coloured and Indian people were disenfranchised in the Union of South Africa, with the exception of the Cape Province where a qualified franchise based on educational qualifications and property ownership was retained. Precisely because of the absence of direct coercion, White workers were generally better paid than Africans, a position reinforced by White domination of skilled work. On the mines, wages for professional miners and also artisans were generally at least double, and sometimes up to five times, higher than wages in other settled mining areas[47]. The White miners typically earned about five times the wages of the Africans.

However, against these high wages must be weighed the emotional and physical costs of migration, many of the White miners working as single migrants. In 1897, 54 percent of White mineworkers were bachelors[48]. Living costs on the Rand were also high, housing was poor and expensive, and the ravages of silicosis affected White and African miners alike: in the first decade of the 1900s, the average working life of Witwatersrand miners was estimated at to be on average an incredible twenty-eight years shorter than that of the average "male" population[49]. It would, moreover, be a mistake to identify the White working class as a whole with the miners and artisans: a population of at least 200,000 unskilled "poor whites" –drawn from the rural poor extruded by the commercialisation of agriculture- had emerged in the cities by the early 1920s, whilst wages and conditions in non-mining sectors tended to be lower. In addition, the White workers were vulnerable to employer undercutting of jobs and conditions through the use of cheap, servile African labour. State repression of industrial action by White workers was repeatedly demonstrated in the 1910s. When, in May 1913 a dispute over working hours at New Kleinfontein Mine in Benoni escalated to affect 63 of the 69 Witwatersrand mines and bring out 19,000 White miners, the government called out imperial troops to defend scabs and disperse crowds with pick handles, batons and swords. At least 100 strikers and onlookers were killed on the first two days of the general strike (4-5 July). A follow-up general strike in January 1914 was crushed by troops, more than 70,000 of which were mobilised

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[43] D. Hobart Houghton, 1964, *The South African Economy*. Oxford University Press. p. 141; Hirson, 1995, *op cit*. pp. 106, 116

[44] *ibid.*

[45] E. Katz, 1994, *The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886-1910.* Witwatersrand University Press. Johannesburg. P. 65

[46] P. Alexander, 1994, *Industrial Conflict, Race, and the South African State, 1939-1948.* Phd. University of London. p. 29.

[47] Katz, 1994, *op cit.*, pp. 67, 75-7

[48] Katz, 1994, *op cit.*, p. 78.

when martial law was declared; nine leading trade unionists were arrested and secretly deported to England.

"THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS OF EMANCIPATION": THE I.S.L. AND REVOLUTIONARY INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

> *... State Socialism is State Capitalism imposed from above ... Socialism in the true sense must be industrial democracy, a socialism from below up. Men must be citizens in industry to be free...*
>
> ***The International,* 3 November 1916, "'State Socialism' in Practice".**

The specificity of South African capitalism –particularly its colonial nature, and the deep divisions within the working class- clearly posed important issues for the class and race politics of revolutionary socialists. How should the South African working class organise against capitalism? Indeed, what was the South African working class? Did it include both African and White labour, or should labour organising be directed towards Whites only? For its part, the bulk of the White labour movement (as represented by the trade unions and the S.A.L.P.) had dealt forthrightly with such issues since the 1890s. Foregoing anything but (at most) a ritual nod in the direction of "socialism", these bodies were committed to a "White Labour" policy, expressed in the 1910 Labour Party election platform as calls for racially based job reservation, an end to Asian immigration, the segregation of Blacks in tribal areas under limited self-government, and opposition to inter-racial "cohabitation"[50].

Initially, the I.S.L. lacked a clear position on the challenges posed for socialist analysis and strategy by the South African context. In its first four months, the organisation had only a provisional constitution, a document clearly vague enough to accommodate a variety of interpretations: "to propagate the principles of International Socialism and anti-militarism, and to maintain and strengthen International working class organisation"[51]. The early issues of *The International* were equally broad, with reprints from the Socialist Labour Party *Socialist* (of Glasgow) sitting alongside articles from the (English) Independent Labour Party's *Labour Leader*, reports on various anti-war movements, and a book service carrying anti-war literature ranging from the (anarchist) Peter Kropotkin's anti-imperialist *Wars and Capitalism* to the (libertarian socialist) Leo Tolstoy's *Patriotism and Christianity*, Fenner Brockway's *Is Britain Blameless?* and *Anti-Patriotism* by the syndicalist Gustav Herve[52].

Throughout its existence, the I.S.L. would maintain a resolute opposition to the war, which it characterised as no more than a conflict between contending capitalist groups. "The very conditions

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[49] Katz, 1994, *op cit.*, p. 4.; also see E. Katz, , 1976, *A Trade Union Aristocracy: a History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913.* Johannesburg. Institute for African Studies

[50] Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 29; Katz, 1976, *op cit.*

[51] cited in *The International: the Organ of the International Socialist League (S.A.).*, 1 October 1915, "International Socialist League"

[52] *The International*, 5 November 1915, "League Literature"

of existence" of "the whole ruling class of the earth, including South Africa", argued an I.S.L. manifesto, inevitably led to "universal conflict": "its competition for economic predominance on the most gigantic scale, its race for control of world markets to absorb the ever increasing over-production and for sources of raw material and cheap labour, wherewith to produce yet more, coupled with its continual degradation of the great mass of humanity ... MUST necessarily and always produce world-conflict"[53]. Instead of being tricked by "Imperialistic claptrap" into "bleeding in their masters' cause", workers should refuse to take sides in the conflict, and cleave only to their own class's struggle for freedom.

However, while the war was a key factor dividing the I.S.L. from the South African Labour Party (commented an issue of *The International* in this early period) the war question was "merely an index of fundamental disagreement over the whole field of Labour tactics and working class philosophy"[54]. While initially the fledgling organisation admitted that it lacked clear policies, it promised that the upcoming January 1916 conference "shall definitely fix basic principles and a name"[55]. When the actual conference was held in Johannesburg on the 9 January 1916, the conference endorsed the following resolution, moved by the I.S.L.'s management committee as "the significant implication of our anti-war stand"[56]:

> That we encourage the organisation of the workers on industrial or class lines, irrespective of race, colour or creed, as the most effective means of providing the necessary force for the emancipation of the workers

From this point onward, the eclecticism of late 1915 was replaced by a constant reiteration of the need for revolutionary workplace–based action and organisation The 1917 conference reaffirmed this stance, declaring its object "To propagate the principles of International Socialism, *Industrial Unionism* and Anti-Militarism, and to maintain and strengthen International Working-Class organisation"[57].

That the "Industrial Unionism" in question was taken to refer to a strategy of *revolutionary* industrial unionism is clear from I.S.L. documents. The first issue of *The International* after the 1916 Conference explained the I.S.L.'s position as follows[58]:

> Parliament is after all only a house. Its function is to regulate and adjust the Capitalists system, and to legislate the necessary violence for its preservation. But whichever power controls industry can dispense with parliament in extremity and remain unscathed.

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[53] *The International*, 1 June 1917, "The League Undaunted: Manifesto for the Elections"
[54] *The International*, 10 December 1915, "League Conference"
[55] *The International*, 12 November 1915, "Towards One Socialist Party"
[56] *The International*, 7 January 1916, "League Conference"; 14 January 1916, "The First Conference of the League"
[57] *The International*, 19 January 1917, "The Second Annual Conference", my emphasis
[58] 21 January 1916, "The Most Effective Means"

The International then turned to the question of the control of industry: "If an industry is not to be dominated by a paternal bureaucracy how shall it be administered if not democratically by the workers themselves". And if so, "does it not follow that [workers'] organisation should be along the lines of their particular industry"? What was required, argued an article a few weeks later, was a "new and definite" socialism based on "immediate action" which recognised "capitalism, yea and the capitalist State" as "unmitigated evils" to be "swept away here and now"[59]. The content of the "new" socialism was "the control of industry by organised labour": the "imperative need of the hour for South African labour is the union of all workers along the lines of industry; not only as a force behind their political demands, but as the embryo of that Socialist Commonwealth which ... must take the place of the present barbaric order"[60]. In contrast to the "disease" of "Civilisation", which began with the "crack of the slave drivers' whip" and private property, the superstructure of the socialist system will have "no room for government, as only slaves require to be kept in subjection; no room for laws, as no restriction will be required in a society of social equals; no soldiers or policemen, who are only required to enforce class made rules" [61].

At about this time the 1916 Easter Rising in Ireland took place: a failed military revolt against British imperialism by republican nationalists, as well as the revolutionary syndicalists linked to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (set up in 1908 as the basis for an Irish I.W.W.) in which James Connolly was martyred[62]. Commenting on the events, *The International* argued that the "bitter lesson" to be learnt by Irish labour in its fight for freedom was that "barricades are the relics of the revolts of half a century ago"[63]. The article continued:

> If an effective working–class revolt depends on the purchase of adequate armaments, then the working-class can resign itself to slavery. If an effective working-class revolt depends on securing mere parliamentary representation, it can with equal resignation say good-bye to emancipation ... Both activities betray the workers, and lead them eventually in despair to death on the barricades.
>
> The workers' only weapon are their labour ... All ... activities should have this one design, how to give the workers greater control of industry ... With greater and greater insistence comes from sad tragedies like that enacted in Dublin, the need for men to forego the cushion and slipper of parliamentary ease, and recognise the Industrial Union as the root of all the activities of Labour, whether political, social or otherwise.

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[59] *The International*, 11 February 1916, "The Break up of Capitalism"
[60] *ibid.*; cf. *The International*, 24 March 1916, "Branch Notes"
[61] *The International*, 1June 1917, "The Disease of Civilisation"; *ibid.*; "League Notes"; 14 June 1918, "Civilisation".
[62] See Holton, 1976, *op cit.*; and O'Conner, 1988, *op cit.* The Irish Citizen's Army, a workers militia set up by the ITGWU in the 1913 Dublin Lock-Out, fought alongside forces such as the Irish Republican Army in the Easter Rising.

> The key to social regeneration ... to the new Socialist Commonwealth ...is to be found in the organisation of a class conscious proletariat within the Industrial Union.

There are three key points in the above excerpt. The first is the absolute priority given the revolutionary industrial union as the weapon of the working class, the means to greater workers' control of industry, and as the framework of a future self-managed socialist society. The second point is that the I.S.L. did not envisage the workers' struggle –or the revolutionary industrial union- as focussing merely on "bread and butter" questions of wages and the like. Rather than being based an "economistic" approach, the revolutionary industrial unionists of the I.S.L. sought to use the revolutionary unions as a weapon in the fight against *all* the issues –"political, social or otherwise" – which belaboured the working class[64]. The third point is that the I.S.L. generally depreciated violence, and envisaged revolutionary industrial unionism and the "lockout of the capitalist class" as a *peaceful* means of socialist transition, counterposed to "physical force" methods[65]:

> Neither in non-resistance nor in resort to violence is the way of emancipation. But in that *higher resistance made possible by the growth of capitalist industry, the resistance of the* Industrial Union.

Like revolutionary syndicalists elsewhere[66], and in sharp contrast to political socialists, the I.S.L. viewed State welfare reforms and State control of the economy with deep misgivings. The I.S.L. was quite aware that the State might seek to incorporate workers[67], and commented that "It is significant that the cry of 'Syndicalism' has taken the place ... all over the Industrialised World, of 'Socialism' to stampede the mass of law abiding citizens today"[68]. This had happened because "State Socialism is now being strongly advocated by the *Capitalist Class*[69]". State sponsored welfare reforms were a means of co-optation and pacification: thus, proposed pension schemes on the railways and

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[63] 5 May 1916, "What's Wrong With Ireland"; cf. also 4 August 1916, "Chopping off Heads"

[64] This confirms Holton's general critique of the charge of "economism" often levelled at revolutionary syndicalism: B. Holton, 1980, "Syndicalist Theories of the State", *Sociological Review*. vol. 28. no. 1.; Cf. Rocker, R., n.d., *Anarcho-Syndicalism*. Phoenix Press, p. 63-5: "just as the worker cannot remain indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country ... he needs political rights and liberties, and he must fight for these himself in every situation where they are denied him, and must defend them with all his strength when the attempt is made to wrest them from him". Also see Bird, S., Georakas, D. And D. Shaffer, 1985, *Solidarity Forever: the I.W.W.: an Oral History of the Wobblies*. Lawrence and Wishart. pp.139-40.

[65] *The International*, 26 May 1916, "Violence and the Labour Movement". The I.S.L. provided a useful overview of its own statements on the matter in *The International*, 16 August 1918, "Incitement to Violence"

[66] see, for example, Holton, B., 1976, *op cit.*; Holton, 1980, *op cit.*

[67] *contra* Ntsebesa, 1988, *op cit.*, p. 32

[68] 2 February 1917, "Thoughts on Sabotage and State Socialism"

[69] *ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

mines were seen as methods of "knee haltering" the workers devised by "noodles" in the "Dung Market" of parliament with the aim of promoting worker loyalty to the firm[70].

State ownership of industry was criticised as a "fantastic scheme" that could at best lead to "State Serfdom", a "servile State" run by "officials in uniforms and brass buttons": the "transformation into State ownership will not do away with the capitalistic nature of production and distribution" but rather "the more it becomes the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit, and the workers remain wage slaves without any control over their conditions of Labour"[71]. Given that the State was an "engine of class tyranny", it was necessary that "the workers organise in their industries outside of the machine, and ...overawe the political machine ... with the greater power ... of industrial solidarity"[72]. "Socialism in the true sense" was "industrial democracy, a socialism from below up. Men must be citizens in industry to be free"[73].

Such themes would be the mainstay of I.S.L. analysis well into 1919. What is remarkable about the literature is the extent to which this revolutionary syndicalist approach has been disregarded and de-emphasised in almost all studies of the organisation[74]. Some accounts make no mention at all of revolutionary syndicalist influences on the I.S.L.[75]. In others, these influences have been noted[76], but treated either as a minority current *juxtaposed* to the Marxism of the I.S.L. leaders (and C.P.S.A. founders)[77], or as a distortion *internal* to Marxism itself[78], an approach which not only helps confine the I.S.L. to the Marxist tradition, but also lends itself to teleological discourses of the history of South African socialism as a linear progression towards the "correct socialism", which I outlined earlier. Overall, then, the influence of revolutionary syndicalism on the I.S.L. has not been examined and explicated, most accounts confining themselves to a few asides on the matter which fail to draw links

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[70] *The International*, 25 February 1916, "Mineworkers and Political Action"; 24 March 1916, "Scab Manufacture"; cf. also 2 March 1917, "The Mineworkers to be Made a Scab Union". These critiques failed to raise the issue of racial bias in the allocation of welfare benefits. Nonetheless, the quiescence of the White working class from the 1920s to the 1980s, which was at least in part the product of growing (relative) prosperity due to such factors as State promotion of White employment, and expanding (and racist) welfare services, would seem to confirm the essential thrust of the I.S.L. critique.

[71] *The International*, 8 December 1916, "State Socialism"; *The International*, 3 November 1916, "'State Socialism' in Practice"; 27 April 1917, "Revolt or Revolution?"; 16 June 1916, "State Mines, State Serfdom"; also see 21 July 1916, "Branch Notes"; 17 November 1916, "Branch Notes"; 16 August 1918, "Our Objective".

[72] *The International*, 21 September 1917, "The Uses of the Labour Politician"

[73] *The International*, 3 November 1916, "'State Socialism' in Practice"

[74] Hirson's own work on the early South African left is generally an exception to the rule here, and is considerably more nuanced than most accounts. See, inter alia, Hirson,*op cit.*

[75] For example, Roux, 1978, *op cit.*.

[76] Revolutionary syndicalist themes and individuals are mentioned in the Simons, 1983, *op cit.*, pp. 191, 196, 199, 205, 209, 215, 245.

[77] The Simons, *op cit.*, juxtapose Syndicalism and I.S.L. politics by speaking of a "syndicalist faction" within the organisation: p. 215, also see 245; Foreman, *op cit.*, mentions in passing that some I.S.L. *members* were revolutionary syndicalists, and others anarchists, but does not point to the existence of syndicalist influences on I.S.L. policy: p. 74. Cope, n.d, *op cit*, speaks of opposition between "syndicalist ideas of direct action and opposition to politics" and the I.S.L. leadership (p. 206). S.A.C.P. [Cronin], 1991, *op cit.*, notes the existence of diferent currents in the I.S.L., but states that the leaders were revolutionary Marxists (p. 6).

[78] Lerumo, *op cit.*, speaks of the I.S.L. as having a "distorted version of Marxism" which denounced "all types of parliamentary political activity" and held that "the formation of 'one big Industrial Union' and the

between revolutionary syndicalism and the overall outlook and activities of the I.S.L.: thus, the Simons' sixty-four page account of the I.S.L. only mentions in passing that the organisation favoured non-racial "industrial unionism" and the "organisation of all workers for industrial action" in "one big union"; but the point of this "industrial unionism" is not made clear; the single reference to "the 'general strike' ... would finally eliminate the capitalist's rule" is neither explicated, nor integrated into an analysis of the how the I.S.L. saw the link between industrial organisation and the struggle for socialism[79].

"SCABBING ON JUDAS": THE I.S.L.'s CRITIQUE OF THE WHITE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

> *... we ... carry on uncompromising warfare against a system of organising which makes the workers an easy prey for the capitalist, lifts a man into a position of being able to barter away the working class, gives him pocket boroughs in the working class movement, and tears the proletariat asunder more effectively than all the cannon of the capitalist class...*
>
> ***The International*, 4 August 1916, "More Craft Scabbery"**

As a direct consequence of its revolutionary syndicalist politics, the I.S.L. argued that the existing (White) South African trade and craft unions were unsuited to the emancipation of the working class. This critique underlined the distance between the I.S.L. and the "White Labour" tradition that was consolidating itself in South Africa. The White unions were castigated as bureaucratic and divisive of the working class: they typically organised on a craft basis, generally excluded all unskilled workers, and as a rule excluded African workers. Craft unions divided the forces of the working class, and allowed small sections to be bought off by capital and turned against the mass of workers[80]. Craft unionism was also singularly inappropriate in an age of characterised by the "combination of capital" into giant corporations and trusts, and the formation of powerful employers' associations[81]. Craft unions had "no earthly hope" of opposing such associations: "One big union is the only form of organisation powerful enough to oppose the united organisation of the capitalist class, a class conscious union of workers to oppose the class conscious association of employers".

With what seems in retrospect almost prophetic insight, *The International* suggested that *two* paths lay ahead for the skilled White workers: *either* "sticking to their own little trade union parlours ... becoming a kind of association of compound managers, an oligarchy of Trade Unionists, working

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subsequent calling of a general strike was the panacea for the winning of workers' power and the overthrow of capitalism" : p. 39.

[79] Simons, 1967, *op cit.*, pp. 191, 196, 199, 205, 209,. 215, 245. Ntsebeza, 1988, *op cit.*, similarly does not explain what the "grip" of De Leon's "concept of industrial unionism" on the I.S.L. actually meant, other than a "shift ... to the Trade Unions as the site of organisation" (p. 29).

[80] see also *The International*, 15 September 1916, "Liberty Sold for 6/3d"; 22 September 1916, "Liberty: Price 6/3"; 2 March 1917, "The Mineworkers to be Made a Scab Union"; 25 May 1917, "Is the White Miner a Miner?"

[81] *The International*, 9 August 1918, "Craft Unions Obsolete".

bailiffs for capitalism for the better hoodwinking of the mass" *or* "giving up their craft and colour vanity and throwing in their lot with their fellow workers" in the struggle for the "control and administration of industry by the workers"[82]. In the former case the artisans would be co-opted as a "closed guild of favoured White workers to police it over the bottom dog, the great mass of the unskilled", both Black and White[83].

Thus, not only was the South African Mineworkers Union taken to task for its bureaucratic structure, its craft organisation, and its exclusion of African workers but it was accused of aiming to sell out to the Chamber of Mines and become a "Scab Union of suborned well-fed slaves, the like of which has yet been seen in South Africa"[84]. The Engine Drivers on the mines were condemned for "craft scabbery" when they accepted a small raise in return for signing a five year no-strike pledge: "no class conscious Engine Driver should barter away the working class for an extra one and eight pence"[85]. The mechanics' Union was accused of "scabbing on Judas" for making a similar deal: Judas at least "demanded thirty pieces as his price"[86]. While pleased with the amalgamation of a number White craft unions into a Building Workers Industrial Union in mid-1916, *The International* ("at the risk of being thought hypercritics") asked if the new union admit the "coloured fellow workers"? "A generous declaration of solidarity will all workers is the only true test" of an industrial union[87].

The alternative to racially exclusionary craft unionism was all-inclusive industrial unionism: here the artisan would be placed "side by side with the poor white labourer, and ... the native, in organisation"[88]. How could the I.S.L. reconcile this hope with its belief in capitalism's ability to co-opt skilled workers and craft unions? It is clear that an assumption that any gains secured by "selling out" would be, at best, transitory. "The vanity of the craft unionists", opined *The International*, "blinds them to the process which was levelling all, skilled and unskilled, before the great lord of machinery"[89]. Unskilled White and African labour would take over the tasks of the craftsman as dilution took place. Moreover, cheap African labour would exert a downward pressure on high White wages. Andrews argued: "All segregation schemes are doomed to failure. We must either lift the Native up to the White standard [of living], or sink down to his"[90].

The colour bar was argued to be incapable of holding back either dilution or downward pressure on wages: "Make no mistake", wrote *The International*, " your puny breakwater –the colour bar" cannot hold back the "big coloured Industrial Army coming in on the tide of their evolution ...

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[82] Dilution did come to the Witwatersrand in subsequent years, and the a large number of one-time artisans moved into supervisory roles (E. Webster, 1984, *Cast in a Racial Mould*. Ravan).

[83] *The International*, 16 February 1917, "'The Poor Whites' and a Page From History"; 2 March 1917, "The Mineworkers to be Made a Scab Union"

[84] *The International*, 2 March 1917, "The Mineworkers to be Made a Scab Union"; 2 June 1916, "Mineworkers, Unite!"

[85] *The International*, 4 August 1916, "More Craft Scabbery"

[86] *The International*, 22 September 1916, "League Notes"

[87] 9 June 1916, "Trade Unions Reforming"

[88] *The International*, 3 March 1916, "The War After the War"

[89] 3 March 1916, "The War After the War"; see also *The International*, 18 February 1916, Bunting, "Workers of the World Unite"

[90] cited in Cope, *op cit.*, p. 181

demanding that place in the sun to which every single human on this earth is rightfully entitled"[91]. At the same time, the I.S.L. argued that the pressures of industry were removing ethnic divisions between African workers: "capitalism was killing that more effectively than anything else"[92].

The solution, then, was not job protection or the colour bar (the S.A.L.P. approach), but the exact opposite: the unification of all workers into industrial unions, and the lifting of African workers to the "political and industrial status" of the White; equal rights for all would undermine divisions between workers and lay the basis for socialism and freedom. It should, however, be noted that the I.S.L. argued that the homogenisation and deskilling of labour would *facilitate* workers' unity, it would not by itself automatically lay the basis for socialist revolution[93]: whereas proletarian unity was a *necessity*, it was not the *necessary* product of "economics" (the development of the forces of production), but had, rather to be fostered by "politics" (industrial unionism)[94].

Clearly such arguments reflected an assumption that all workers shared a fundamentally common class interest, although the possibility of temporary deviations from this norm by small sections of the workers were recognised. Racial discrimination was not, therefore, in the basic interests of White workers, even if small sections gain transient benefits. It was also clearly against the interests of African workers: contrary to the stereotype portrayed in much of the literature, the I.S.L. was *explicitly* opposed to the racial oppression of African workers, a critic of segregation and of scientific racism [95]. An article in the fourth issue of *The International* stated that[96]:

> an internationalism which does not concede the fullest rights which the native working class is capable of claiming will be a sham ... If the [International Socialist] League deal resolutely in consonance with Socialist principles with the native question, it will succeed in shaking South African capitalism to its foundations. Then and not till then will we be able to talk about the South African Proletariat in our international relations. Not until we free the native can we hope to free the white.

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[91] *The International*, 16 February 1917, "'The Poor Whites' and a Page From History"; also 23 February 1917, *op cit*, "Race Prejudice"

[92] *The International*, 7 April 1916, "Call to the Native Workers"; see also 26 May 1916, "The Last of the Baralongs"

[93] Syndicalists do not, therefore, suppose (*contra* Ntsebeza, 1988, *op cit.*), suppose that workers will be become organised simply due to capitalist industrialisation, and "*a fortiori*, suddenly become revolutionary" (p. 32).

[94] 3 March 1916, "The War After the War". In revolutionary Syndicalist theory it is *through* political education and the aegis of the industrial union itself that the working class is *formed* as an active social force. To cite Rocker, the trade union is "the elementary school of Socialism in general" in which the worker "becomes aware of his strength", gaining a "definite direction" for "social activities", and "through direct and unceasing warfare with the supporters of the present system" developing "the ethical concepts without which any social transformation is impossible: vital solidarity with their fellows in destiny and moral responsibility for their own action""(n.d. : 52-3).

[95] This theme is explored in detail in my *"Segregation Is A Policy Of Capitalism, Not Of The Labour Movement": Revolutionary Syndicalism and Black Liberation in the Politics of the International Socialist League of South Africa, 1915-19* (forthcoming). See also Lucien van der Walt, 1998a, *op cit.*, and 1998b, *op cit.*

[96] *The International*, 1 October 1995, "The Parting of the Ways"

What was required was a "new movement" which would overcome the "bounds of Craft and race and sex": "founded on the rock of the meanest proletarian who toils for a master" the new movement must be "as wide as humanity" and "recognise no bounds of craft, no exclusions of colour"[97]. Ultimately, "Socialism can only be brought about by *all the workers* coming together on the industrial field to take the machinery of production into their own hands and working it for the good of all... the man who talks about a Socialism which excludes nine-tenths of the workers is not being honest with himself" [98]. Racism, then, was against both the immediate and the ultimate interests of all workers.

The argument that White workers were harmed by the existence of a coerced African labour force is rather more plausible than the Simons [99] claim. In South Africa, at least, there is some evidence that the conditions of the "poor Whites" (300,000 out of 1,8 million Whites in 1931) in the early twentieth century were the result, not of their antipathy to "native work", but of employer preference for cheap, coerced African labour[100]. Whether *all* White workers in South Africa would have been similarly impoverished by ongoing capitalist development remains a matter for speculation. Although the I.S.L. did warn of the prospect of a reactionary White labour aristocracy emerging, it tended to see such a development as at best temporary: thus, it did not anticipate the systematic *State*-sponsored (if capitalist supported) policy of protecting and co-opting White workers –skilled and unskilled- in support of the South Africa *status quo* that became entrenched from the 1920s until the 1980s in South Africa. This process of incorporation took the form of racially biased State sponsored public works programmes to employ "poor Whites" (the "civilised labour policy"), statutory job reservation, and racially restricted trade union rights[101]. The effect was that White workers as a whole *did* receive very real gains from racial discrimination.

"THE MARVELLOUS INFLUENCE OF DE LEON'S SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY 'PHILOSOPHY'": THE PECULIARITIES OF THE I.S.L.'s REVOLUTIONARY SYNDICALISM

> *... I should pay one tribute to the marvellous influence that has been exercised by De Leon's workers and SLP 'philosophy' generally here during the last year or so...*
>
> ***Letter to Socialist Labour Party, written by David Ivon Jones for the I.S.L., May 1916[102].***

The phrases used by the I.S.L., such as "Industrial Union", "industrial democracy", "co-operative commonwealth", "craft scabbery" and "labour fakers" clearly indicate the influence of I.W.W. ideology. Three years after its establishment in 1905 in the United States, the I.W.W. underwent a split

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[97] *The International*, 3 December 1915, "The Wrath to Come"
[98] *The International*, 16 June 1916, "Inviting Jim Sixpence to Tea"
[99] Simons, 1983, *op cit.*
[100] Lacey, M., 1981, *Working for Boroko: the Origins of a Coercive Labour System in South Africa*. Ravan.
[101] see D. Yudelman, 1984, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa*. Ravan. Braamfontein.
[102] cited in Hirson, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 157.

over the question of "political action" [103]. Although both parties to the split at the 1908 convention believed in the primacy of revolutionary "economic" (workplace) action, the "Chicago" I.W.W., associated with "Big Bill" Haywood argued that involvement in elections to the capitalists State was futile; by contrast, the "Detroit" I.W.W., associated with Daniel De Leon and the Socialist Labour Party, argued that "political action" could play a useful, if secondary, role in the struggle for socialism.

De Leon and the Socialist Labour Party had been bulwarks of orthodox Marxism in the latter decades of the nineteenth-century, the party itself having been one of the few associated with Marx's ill-fated wing of the First International. Before 1905, De Leon adhered to the orthodox Marxist view that the maturation of capitalism would lead to the emergence of a proletarian majority which would "sweep presidential and congressional elections, and then utilise its governmental majority to legislate into existence public ownership"[104]. During the course of the founding convention of the I.W.W. in 1905, however, De Leon's programme underwent "dramatic and thoroughgoing alterations" with the "heart of his revolutionary theory" revised in direction of revolutionary syndicalism [105].

De Leon's replaced his previous exclusive reliance on the electoral victory of the Socialist Labour Party through the ballot box with the contention that only revolutionary "trade union action could transfer property from individual to social ownership" [106]. De Leon now stated that the notion of socialist transformation through parliament was "a more gigantic Utopia than Fourier or Owen ever dreamed of", based as it was on reliance of a small clique of elected officials beyond the direct control of the working class, officials who were, moreover, operating in the context of the State apparatus which had been specifically "built up in the course of centuries of class rule for the purpose of protecting and maintaining the domination of the particular class which happens to be on top"[107]. Consequently, the working class could only emancipate itself through "Industrial unionism, an economic weapon, against which all the resources of capital ... will be ineffective and impotent"[108]. The "*Industrial Unions will furnish the administrative machinery for directing industry in the socialist commonwealth*" after the "general lock out of the capitalist class"[109] and "razing" of the political State to the ground[110]. The Industrial Unions were to build in *opposition* to existing craft unions, denounced as

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[103] A standard history of the I.W.W. in the United States is provided by P.S. Foner, 1965, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-17.* International Publishers. New York. An extremely important discussion of I.W.W. ideology is S. Salerno, 1989, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World.* State University of New York Press. An *De* Leonite account of the I.W.W. split is provided in *The International*, 22 February 1918, "The Two I.W.W.'s"

[104] This metamorphosis is traced in McKee, 1958, *op cit*,; and McKee, 1960, *op cit.* The quote is from McKee, 1958, *op cit.*, p. 276.

[105]McKee, 1958, *op cit.*, pp. 276-7. See also L.G. Seretan, 1979, *Daniel De Leon: the Odyssey of an American Marxist.* Harvard University Press; Holton, 1976, *op cit.*, p. 211

[106] McKee, 1958, *op cit.*, p. 277.

[107] Socialist Labour Party, n.d, *The Socialist Labour Party: Its Aims and Methods.* Socialist Labour Press. Edinburgh. p. 18; also see De Leon, 1905, *The Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World.* Address delivered at Union Temple, Minneapolis, Minnesota, July 10, 1905. Socialist Labour Press. Edinburgh. p. 23.

[108] Socialist Labour Party, n.d., *op cit.*, p. 21.

[109] De Leon stated that this term was synonymous with the idea of a revolutionary general strike, but had the advantage of being a more accurate and positive formulation.

[110] Socialist Labour Party, n.d., *op cit.*, 23, emphasis in original; De Leon, 1905, *op cit.*, pp. 23, 27.

sectional groupings led by treacherous "labour fakers"[111]. Self-management in industry would be impossibility under the State, whose electoral districts were based on regional demarcations; only on industrial lines could workers organise control over the different sectors of the economy[112].

In contrast to most revolutionary syndicalists, however, the De Leonites explicitly called on workers to take part in electoral activity and vote for the Socialist Labour Party. However, the "political movement is absolutely the reflex of economic organisation", meaning that a strong party could only be built, or win elections, if backed by a powerful revolutionary industrial unionist movement[113]. Seats in parliament were not, however, an end in themselves. Rather, running in elections served three primary functions: it provided a means of spreading socialist propaganda, the party running on the single plank of abolishing the wage system; it provided an "thermometer" of socialist strength in that popular support for socialism could be gauged through election results; and, finally, it was argued that a socialist majority in parliament would be able to paralyse, and then adjourn, the capitalist state, on the day of the "general lockout of the capitalists class" by the revolutionary industrial unions[114]. The State was to be taken *only* "for the purpose of *abolishing it* ... the political movement of labour is purely *destructive* ... [in the event of an electoral victory the labour candidates would] *adjourn themselves on the spot* "[115].

If the political movement did not immediately abolish the State, argued De Leon, it would "usurp" power from the trade unions leading to (at best) "a commonwealth of well-fed slaves" ruled by "a parliamentary oligarchy with an army of officials at its back, possessing powers infinitely greater than those possessed by our present political rulers"[116]. If labour candidates won a political majority in the absence of revolutionary industrial unions capable of taking and holding the means of production, it would be the "signal for a social catastrophe", as capitalists would sabotage production. The "general lockout of the capitalist class" by the revolutionary unions had to be coterminous with the abolition of the State: "as the slough [is] shed by the serpent that immediately appears in its new skin, the political State will have been shed, and society will *simultaneously* appear in its new administrative garb"[117]. Clearly, for De Leon the primary actor in the process of revolutionary transformation was the revolutionary industrial union movement. While political action was viewed as necessary, its function was, at most, to aid the formation of, and later shield, the One Big Union, the real agent of revolution.

The influence of De Leon and the "Detroit" I.W.W. on the I.S.L. was marked. Already in 1915, the I.S.L. book service carried a number of titles from the Socialist Labour Party press, including a range of De Leon's writings, such as *The Burning Question of Trade Unionism,* and the *Preamble of the I.W.W.* The remainder of the literature sold by the I.S.L. also appears to be drawn from the catalogue of the Socialist Labour Party in Britain. In early 1916, the *International* announced that

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[111] Socialist Labour Party, n.d., *op cit.*; De Leon 1905
[112] De Leon, 1905, *op cit.*, p. 24.
[113] De Leon, 1905, *op cit.*, p .21
[114] De Leon 1905, op cit., pp. 23-4, 25, 27-8.
[115] De Leon, 1905, *op cit.*, p. 23, emphasis in the original
[116] De Leon, 1905, *op cit.*, pp. 23-4; Socialist Labour Party, n.d, *op cit.*, p. 20.
[117] De Leon, 1905, *op cit.*, p. 24, my emphasis

"Comrade Rabb" was offering subscriptions to the same party's monthly journal, *The Socialist*[118]. South African supporters of De Leon were prominent at the 1916 conference, the "S.L.P. men" in their "favourite element" in the discussion of revolutionary industrial unionism. While a motion by the Benoni branch to have the that the I.S.L. "adopt the constitution of the Socialist Labour Party of America" ruled out of order, the I.S.L. management committee was instructed to "make enquiries" into the matter[119]. As a result, Jones wrote to the Socialist Labour Party in America in May 1916, requesting copies of their publications and platform, and commenting that "I should pay one tribute to the marvellous influence that has been exercised by De Leon's workers and SLP 'philosophy' generally here during the last year or so"[120]. The I.S.L.'s own report to the Third International in March 1921 emphasised that at this time the I.S.L. had been "captured by the De Leonites" [121].

The I.S.L.'s approach to political action also matched that of De Leon. Electoral activity was downgraded at the 1916 I.S.L. conference to a tactic for "demonstration and education"[122]. This view that electoral campaigns had an essentially propagandistic role was regularly reaffirmed[123]. In addition to propaganda, the I.S.L. also envisaged that "political action" could be used to adjourn the "class State". The weapons of the working class, argued Bunting, are "industrial and political action", the latter deftly summarised as[124]

(a) propaganda through Press, platform, election campaigns, leaflet, pamphlet and book distribution, classes, study groups, etc., in economics, history, etc., and
(b) the attempt to gain political control of Parliament with a view to supplanting Parliament and substituting the administration of production by the producers, suitably organised not on a mere territorial basis, but rather by industries. Such political action obviously requires the support of industrial or economic organisation to exercise the necessary pressure on the possessing class, and in the fullness of time to take over possession from it.

In elections, then, the party would not produce a "big genealogical tree of two-penny reforms", but run on a single issue: "the demand for the complete destruction of the Capitalists system by the industrial combinations of the workers" [125]. After all, "government by the State is only necessary because there is an exploited class in society"[126].

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[118] *The International*, 7 January 1916, "The 'Socialist'"
[119] *The International*, 14 January 1916, "The First Conference of the League"
[120] cited in Hirson, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 157.
[121] David Ivon Jones, 29 March 1921, "Communism in South Africa", presented to the Executive of the Third International on behalf of the I.S.L., reproduced in Bunting (ed.), 1981, *op cit.* p.55.
[122] *The International*, 7 January 1916, "League Conference"; also see Cope 1940: 178
[123] *The International*, 10 March 1916, "The Resurging International in All Lands"; 4 August 1916, "Politics and Labour Leaders"; 11 August 1916, "Politics and Labour Leaders II"; 20 October 1916, "Municipal Politics and the Revolution"
[124] *The International*, 6 September 1918, "Socialism and Violence"
[125] *The International*, "Facing North by South"
[126] *The International*,18 August 1916

On occasion, the I.S.L. also suggested that "vigorous political action" backed by revolutionary industrial unions could also "sweep away" the "chief barriers to efficient working class solidarity". These included the "denial of equal civil liberty to the natives" and the cheap labour system based on compounds and indenture[127]. Even so, argued *The International*, "political action" was at most the "foliage" of the "Industrial tree"[128].

Although the I.S.L. had a revolutionary syndicalist ideology, it did make occasional, and often favourable, references to Marx and Engels, although readers were referred to De Leon's works for "the more fluent and practical applications of Socialism"[129]. It is also true that the I.S.L. maintained contact with the remnants of the Second International, and occasionally reprinted articles from mainstream political socialist newspapers such as *Vorwarts* (associated with the German Social Democratic Party) and the *Appeal to Reason* (associated with the United States' Socialist Party).

However, three points need to be made at this juncture. The first relates to citations of Marx and Engels. The standard approach in the literature is to utilise these quotations as evidence of the I.S.L.'s "Marxism". The flaw in this line of argument is its failure to understand the ideological context, and political function, of these quotations. What is remarkable about I.S.L. references to Marx and Engels were the manner in which they were utilised: like De Leon, the I.S.L. invoked Marx and Engels in *support* of revolutionary syndicalist positions[130]. To understand Marx's statement that "every class struggle is a political struggle", the I.S.L. directed the reader to revolutionary unionist literature: "The full significance of that declaration is only grasped by a study of De Leon's pamphlets", all of which were stocked by the organisation [131]. Engels' comments in the *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* and *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* that the State "withers away" or "dies out" under full communism after an *intermediate* phase of "socialism" were re-read as compatible with –and as backing for- the De Leonite notion that the notion that the State would be *immediately* abolished with the advent of the "general lockout of the capitalist class"[132]. Marx's advocacy of the need to conquer and utilise State power to usher in the transition to socialism was, similarly, presented as an endorsement of the De Leonite position that the State should be taken in order to be destroyed, the

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[127] *The International*, 16 June 1916, "Socialism and the Middle Class". There is, however, an apparent contradiction within this formulation- it assumes the existence of powerful industrial unions which would back the demands of the political party in parliament; on the other hand, the demands which would be raised in parliament were designed to remove "unparalleled" barriers against the "marshalling of the various sections of the proletariat side by side".

[128] *ibid.*

[129] For example, *The International*, 21 January 1916 (book list).

[130] The use of the following quote from an early edition of *The International* to establish the I.S.L.'s "Marxist" credentials misses the point: "What the labour movement requires is a return to the limpid, unequivocal affirmations of the Communist Manifesto of Karl Marx" (Lerumo, 1971, *op cit.*, p. 31). Yes- but what were the "limpid, unequivocal affirmations" of the *Manifesto* taken to mean by an organisation opposed to political action to establish a workers' state?

[131] *The International*, 22 February 1918, "The Two I.W.W.s"

[132] see *inter alia*, *The International*, 21 April 1916; 10 August 1917; 14 December 1918, "The Russian Revolution Explained"

tasks of revolutionary reconstruction falling to the revolutionary trade unions which would replace territorial political constituencies with a stateless industrial republic[133].

Thus, it was as revolutionary syndicalists that Marx and Engels were admired by the I.S.L. Yet, and this is the second point, it should be noted that both De Leon and the I.S.L. invoked Marx and Engels in support of libertarian ideas *directly counter* those endorsed and defended by Marx and Engels themselves. There is a clear contradiction between the post-1904 De Leonite vision of the replacement of the State by revolutionary industrial unions and Marx's insistence that the that proletariat could only make the revolution by "constituting itself as a distinct political party" to take State power[134]. The belief in the immediate destruction of the State at the start of the socialist revolution, defended by De Leon, had been vehemently attacked by Engels in his polemics against the anarchists in precisely the same books cited by De Leon as supposed support for the "immediate adjournment" of government[135]. Similarly, De Leon's belief that State ownership would be more onerous and oppressive than private ownership jars with the *Communist Manifesto's* call for the "the centralisation of credit in the hands of the State ... the centralisation of the means of transport in the hands of the State ... extension of national factories and instruments of production ... the organisation of industrial armies "[136]. It is also impossible to reconcile De Leon's faith in the "general lockout of the capitalist class" with Engels' diatribe, *The Bakuninists at Work*, which not only (accurately) attributes the notion of a revolutionary general strike to the anarchists of the First International, but also (unsurprisingly) rejects the idea with contempt as impractical and unnecessary[137].

De Leon's attempts to claim classical Marxist support for his revolutionary syndicalist positions ultimately placed him and his party in the unenviable position of defending their views on Marx and Engels by citing spurious Marx quotes[138] and printing an edition of the *Communist Manifesto* ("undoubtedly the finest English version going", in the view of the I.S.L.[139]) with an introduction making the unjustifiable claim that the document explicitly endorsed revolutionary industrial unionism and stateless socialism[140]. Insofar as De Leon often labelled himself a Marxist, and the I.S.L. accepted De Leon, there is a small justification for regarding the I.S.L. as "Marxist". Yet insofar as De Leon's politics were not, in fact, "Marxist", this reasoning is fallacious. De Leon's occasional nods to Marx and Engels in no way negated the change that had taken place in his socialist vision: the scaffolding supporting his new political platform remained revolutionary syndicalist, even if traces of Marxist paint on the

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[133] *The International*, 14 December 1918, "The Russian Revolution Explained"
[134] quoted in Thorpe , 1989, *op cit.*, p.10.
[135] See McKee, 1958, *op cit.*, p 278 ; McKee, 1960, *op cit.*, p. 296-7.
[136] K. Marx and F. Engels 1984, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Progress Publishers. Moscow. p. 30.
[137] cited in Bookchin, 1976, *op cit.*, p. 136. See also *Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions*, 1975, Pathfinder Press. New York. Second edition. Pages 3-34 are of particular relevance.
[138] De Leon claimed, for example, that Marx had stated in 1869 that "Only the economic organisation is capable of setting on foot a true political party of labour, and thus raising a bulwark agaimnst the power of capital".Yet De Leon himself was repeatedly unable to provide a reference for this citation: see McKee, 1958, *op cit.*; and McKee, 1960, *op cit.*
[139] *The International*, 1 February 1918, "The 'Planks' of the Communist Manifesto"
[140] See McKee, 1958, *op cit.* and McKee 1960., *op cit.* and the "Translators Preface" , 1909, *Communist Manifesto*, Socialist Labour Press. Edinburg. Britain

infrastructure obscured the anarchist manufacture of the materials. The ultimate irony of post-1904 De Leonism was surely that, notwithstanding its polemics against anarchism, it based itself on a political programme ultimately rooted in orthodox anarchism.

The third point that needs to be made relates to the I.S.L.'s international connections. That the I.S.L. reported on, and maintained contact with, socialist organisations and minorities linked to the collapsed Second International does not establish the existence of a common political outlook with these organisations[141]. The I.S.L. also kept in contact with the Socialist Labour Parties of the United States and Britain and the British syndicalists associated with Tom Mann and his journal *Solidarity*[142], and avidly reported on the shop-stewards movement in Britain, the activities of the De Leonites, and the I.W.W. in Australia and the United States (coverage of the I.W.W. increasing greatly from 1917 onwards). The *International* regularly carried articles from the revolutionary syndicalist press (for example, *Solidarity* and the De Leonite *Socialist*) and frequently used quotes from libertarian socialist figures such as Edward Carpenter, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Peter Kropotkin, Antonio Labriola, William Morris, Henry David Thoreau, and Leo Tolstoy. On education, the I.S.L. deferred to the libertarian theories of "pupil self-government" advocated by Tolstoy and the anarchist Francisco Ferrer ("an educational tin Jesus on wheels")[143].

In 1917 the I.S.L. sent Andrews as its delegate to Britain *en route* to the socialist Stockholm Peace Conference. Although the conference did not take place, Andrews used his time in Britain to renew his friendship with Tom Mann (he had invited Mann to South Africa in 1908), and to make contact with the a range of left-wing and labour organisations, notably the Socialist Labour Party (who praised the I.S.L.'s stand on "the race question and on industrial unionism"[144]), the Plebs League, the Labour College, and the I.W.W. Andrews also addressed meetings of the Welsh miners (the South Wales Miners' Federation was a notable stronghold of revolutionary syndicalist ideas) and the revolutionary shop-stewards movement, the Clyde Workers' Committee[145], which excited his "particular admiration", and "desire to organise the South African workers on similar lines"[146]. There were definite similarities between the anti-war positions of the I.S.L. and Lenin, but given that Lenin was by no means the only socialist to oppose the First World War, such parallels in no way establish that the organisation was anticipating Leninist politics, or implicitly Leninist, as is implied in some accounts[147].

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[141] For examples of this type of argument see Cronin, 1991, *op cit.*; Cope, n.d., *op cit.*; Hirson, 1995, *op cit.*, ; Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, pp. 50-4; Lerumo, *op cit.*; S.A.C.P., 1991, *op cit.*; Simons, 1983, *op cit.*

[142] For example, *The International*, 11 January 1918, "A Message from Tom Mann"

[143] See *The International*, 11 January 1918, "Remarks on Education"; also January 11, 1918, "Our Annual Gathering" ; 18 January 1918, "How Capitalism Educates"

[144] *The International*, 16 August 1918, "An Appreciation from the S.L.P."

[145] Cope, n.d., *op cit.* , pp. 191-2. For background on the British movement, See Holton, 1976, *op cit.* The reader is also directed to 1912 pamphlet *The Miners' Next Step: Being a Suggested Scheme for the Reorganisation of the Federation*, issued by the Unofficial Reform Committee. Robert Davies and Co. Tonypandy. Reprinted in 1991 by Germinal and Pheonix Press with introduction by Dave Douglass.

[146] Cope, n.d, *op cit.*, p. 191-2.

[147] For example, Lerumo, 1971, *op cit.*, p. 71.

"THE COUNCIL OF WORKMEN IS THE RUSSIAN FORM OF INDUSTRIAL UNION": THE I.S.L.'S RESPONSE TO THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION OF 1917

> *.... the Industrial Organisation of the Workers is the embryo that will burst the shell of capitalism and become the directing authority for the administration of things in the Commonwealth of Labour ... The Word becomes Flesh in the Council of Workmen.*
>
> ***The International*, 30 November 1917, "The Word becomes Flesh"**

The I.S.L., like revolutionary syndicalist organisations across the world[148], greeted the Russian Revolution of 1917 with "exultation" such as "admits of no commentary" [149]. South African workers were advised to look towards the ""dramatic and inspiring rapidity of the revolution"[150] and the "bold and inspiring lead of the Russian Workers"[151] . The 1918 I.S.L. congress stated that it "rejoices beyond measure at the triumph of the Russian Revolutionary proletariat under the banner of the Bolshevik wing of the Social Democratic Party, and pledges on behalf of the advanced proletariat of South Africa its growing support to stand by the Russian workmen against the Capitalist Governments of the whole world, that of South Africa included" [152]. The congress also resolved that the I.S.L. would make contact with the Bolsheviks.

However, the I.S.L.'s enthusiastic support for the Russian Revolution of 1917 did not follow from a belief that the Revolution was a seizure of State power by a political party of the working class, but rather from an interpretation of events of 1917 as a syndicalist revolution *in action*. The "Council of Workmen" (the Soviets) was, *The International* informed its readers, simply "the Russian form of the Industrial Union"[153]. Lenin and Trotsky were not the leaders of the Revolution, but "only the delegates of the Russian Federation of Labour, otherwise the Council of Workmen, or the Soviet"[154].

As for the Bolshevik, or Social Democratic Party, it was presented as a political party on the lines advocated by De Leon: a shield and supplement for the real revolutionary force of industrial organisation. "The Socialists do not want to be responsible for the Political State, especially at a time when that State has piled up overwhelming world wide disasters, until they are in a position to destroy that Political State in step with the world wide movement of the working-class" [155]. Knowing that they could never "triumph by the ballot alone" the workers had organised the industrial bodies which could (the article cites De Leon here) undertake the "LOCKOUT OF THE CAPITALIST CLASS" and supplant

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[148] See, for example, Marshall, 1994, *op cit.*; Thorpe, 1989, *op cit.*; Woodcock, 1975, *op cit.* However, by 1921 the vast majority of revolutionary syndicalist organisations had broken with the Russian revolutionary government to form the International Workers Association, criticising the Bolsheviks for political dictatorship and "State capitalist" policies.

[149] *The International*, 7 December 1917, "Long Live the Commisaries of the People"

[150] *The International*, 8 June 1917, "The Star in the East"

[151] *The League Undaunted: Election Manifesto* (June 1917)

[152] *The International*, 11 January 1918, "Our Annual Gathering"

[153] *The International*, 18 May 1917, "Russian Workmen Vindicate Marx".

[154] *The International*, 1 March 1918, "The Call of the Bolsheviks- League Manifesto".

the State: "the Council of Workmen has great regard for the State, hugs it like a bear; kills it with kindness, leaves it without a single function, except to endorse the decrees of the Commissaries of the People"[156]. There was "no State Socialism in Russia"[157]: the State "having died out through disuse, the Council of Workmen, or the Executive Board of the Industrial Workers" becomes "the directing authority" based on (here the I.S.L. again quoted De Leon) "industries ... regardless of former political boundaries ... the constituencies of that new central authority" [158].

The overthrow of the Provisional Government in October 1917 was thus explained as follows:[159]

> Marx said that the Capitalist system contains the germ of its own destruction ... that the State must be captured, not for proletarian use, but to be destroyed ... Engels said that the "the government of men will be replaced by the administration of things".
>
> Further they did not go. But De Leon added: Yes, the Industrial Organisation of the Workers is the embryo that will burst the shell of capitalism and become the directing authority for the administration of things in the Commonwealth of Labour.
>
> *The Word becomes Flesh in the Council of Workmen.* The Council of Workmen is the dictatorship of the proletariat.

The I.S.L. did not, then, interpret the "dictatorship of the proletariat" as referring to a special kind of transitional State constituted for the sole purpose of expropriating the bourgeoisie and suppressing counter-revolutionary activity. Rather, the dictatorship of the proletariat was simply Industrial Unionism in power. It being "no longer possible to obtain freedom under the most advanced form of political democracy", what was required was "Industrial democracy" [160]. The Provisional Government was therefore demolished by the Council of Workmen, and the "industrial solidarity of Labour" became the "only constituency and the only Parliament for bringing emancipation".

Thus (other than a flurry of favourable references to Marx in late 1917 and early 1918[161]), the immediate impact of the Russian Revolution on I.S.L. politics was to *reaffirm* the organisation's revolutionary industrial unionist beliefs, seemingly vindicated by the course of the Russian Revolution. Thus, an I.S.L. manifesto issued late in 1918 in English, Zulu and Sesuto, and entitled *The Bolsheviks are Coming*, charted the way ahead for South Africa workers as the struggle for the "free

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[155] *The International*, 3 August 1917, "The Russian Drama"
[156] *The International*, 14 December1917, "The Russian Revolution Explained"
[157] *The International*, 5 April 1918, "Notes of the Bolshevik Movement"
[158] *The International*, 14 December1917, "The Russian Revolution Explained"
[159] *The International* , 30 November 1917, "The Word becomes Flesh", emphasis in the original.
[160] *The International*, 1 February 1918, "The Decline and Fall of Political Democracy"
[161] See, for example, *The International*, 2 November 1917, "What Keeps Back the Native worker?"; 3 May 1918, "The Life of Marx"; 3 May 1918, "The Work of Marx"; 10 May 1918, "The Great Criminal"; 12 April 1918, "'Federation' Labour Day and International May Day"

commonwealth of labour ... an actual fact in Russia today" [162]. To achieve this aim, it was vital to "combine in the workshops ... as workers, regardless of colour ... While the black worker is oppressed, the white worker cannot be free. Before Labour can emancipate itself, Black workers as well as white must combine in *one organisation of Labour, irrespective of craft, colour or creed. This is Bolshevism: the Solidarity of Labour*". This interpretation was initially not uncommon in the international anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist movement, although, unlike the I.S.L., the majority of revolutionary syndicalists never, ultimately, shifted to Leninism[163].

Thus, the claim that from the time of the Russian Revolution, the "entire outlook" of the I.S.L. became "ever more deeply coloured by ... the teachings of Lenin"[164] is not convincing. While Roux was undoubtedly correct when he noted that "the Bolshevik revolution in Russia [was] welcomed by the South African socialist as tangible proof of the ultimate triumph of their faith"[165], it must be noted that the "faith" thus vindicated was not at that stage Bolshevism but revolutionary syndicalism. Finally, given that the Russian Revolution in fact moved in a rather different direction to that envisaged by syndicalism, the I.S.L.'s interpretations at this point are somewhat difficult to reconcile with the claim by some of the literature that one of the main achievements of the I.S.L. was the "unerring accuracy" of its analyses of the monumental events of 1917[166].

"HERE FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORKERS": THE I.S.L. AND THE BIRTH OF AFRICAN TRADE UNIONISM

> *We are here for Organisation, so that as soon as all of your fellow workers are organised, then we can see what we can do to abolish the Capitalist-System. We are here for the salvation of the workers. We are here to organise and to fight for our rights and benefits*
>
> ***A. Cetiwe, speech to meeting of Industrial Workers of Africa, May 1918[167]***

The activities of the I.S.L. between 1916-1919I were fundamentally informed by goals of revolutionary industrial unionism and workers' unity. Although the utility of "political action" was matter of ongoing controversy in the I.S.L., the organisation repeatedly participated in elections during this period, attracting negligible support from the mainly White electorate. In October 1916, for example, the I.S.L. stood candidates in the municipal elections in the Witwatersrand[168]. The candidates' manifesto, entitled "Call to the Workers of South Africa", argued that the key task facing the workers

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[162] This is reproduced in B. Bunting (ed.), 1981, *op cit.*, pp. 38-40. Emphasis mine.
[163] See, for example, Dirlik, 1991, *op cit.*; and Thorpe, 1989, *op cit.*
[164] Cope, n.d., *op cit.* , p. 194.
[165] Roux, 1993, *op cit.*, p. 81.
[166] See "Notes by Brian Bunting, " in Roux, 1993, *op cit.*, p. 186; Bunting, 1918, *op cit.*, p. 27; Cronin, 1991, *op cit.*; and S.A.C.P., 1991, *op cit.*
[167] unlabelled report on Industrial Workers of Africa, Department of Justice, 983/17/F473. National Archives, Pretoria
[168] *The International*, 6 October 1916, "Call to the Workers of South Africa"

was the formation of industrial unions open to all workers. None of the I.S.L. candidates won a seat. In mid-1917, the I.S.L. stood candidates in the provincial and parliamentary elections and urged workers to organise across racial lines, and to follow the road opened up by the February 1917 Russian Revolution. The three I.S.L. candidates lost their deposits, receiving 335, 71 and 32 votes, respectively. On this occasion, opponents made the organisation's support of African freedom the centrepiece of their counter-campaign: thus, an S.A.L.P. leaflet issued at Benoni stated that to "Vote for Andrews" was to "vote for the downfall of the workers and the blanket or kafir vote"[169]. There is no doubt that the I.S.L.'s anti-racism alienated many White workers and the organisation faced increasing levels of violence and harassment. The I.S.L.'s 1917 May Day rally, which included among its speakers Horatio Bud'Mbelle of the A.N.C., was broken up by mobs, whilst its weekly public meetings came under regular attack from September that year[170]. In September, too, the I.S.L. was forced to vacate its offices in the Trades Hall in Johannesburg after it refused to accept a management order barring Blacks from using its facilities[171].

"Industrial action" was also a key concern for I.S.L. members. A number of I.S.L. members, including Andrews and Mason, were prominent in the mainstream (White) trade unions, which they sought to reform on the lines of non-racial revolutionary industrial unionism[172]. I.S.L. members also helped establish an integrated Solidarity Committee in August 1917 to campaign for the formation of a "National Industrial Union" through which workers would take power in industry, so that "the one Industrial Union will become the Parliament of Labour and form an integral part of the International Industrial Republic"[173].

The I.S.L. also set out to organise African, Coloured, and Indian workers into revolutionary syndicalist unions. In March 1917, I.S.L. activists helped launch an Indian Workers' Industrial Union "on the lines of the I.W.W." in Durban[174]. The union organised in a number of industries, including printing, tobacco, laundry and the docks, and its officials Bernard L.E. Sigamoney[175] and R.K Moodley became prominent members of the I.S.L.[176]. The Industrial Union in conjunction with the I.S.L. organised regular study classes, at which the writings of De Leon, among others, were examined, and held regular open air meetings where "the Indian Workers Choir entertained the crowds by singing the Red Flag, the International and many I.W.W. songs"[177]. Plans were also made to print I.S.L. literature in Tamil, Hindi and Telegu.

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[169] Cope, 1940, *op cit.*, p.180
[170] *The International*, 4 May 1917, "Mob Law on Mayday" and "Hooliganism: the Last Ditch"
[171] Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, pp. 75-6
[172] Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, pp. 64-9
[173] cited in Johns 1995, *op cit.*, p. 67
[174] *The International*, 3 August 1917, "A Forward Move in Durban". For more details, see, in particular, Mantzaris, E., 1983, "The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike of 1920", in *Journal of Natal and Zulu.* VI.
[175] For further biographical information on Sigamoney, see B. Freund, 1995, *Insiders and Outsiders: the Indian Working Class of Durban 1910-1990.*Heinemann. Portsmouth, NH. University of Natal Press. Pietermaritzburg. James Currey. London. pp. 47-8. However, Freund does not mention the I.W.W. influences on the Workers' Industrial Union.
[176] Johns, 1995, *op cit.*, p. 76; Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.* p. 116
[177] Mantzaris, 1983, *op cit.*, p. 117

Three months after the launching of the Workers' Industrial Union in Durban, the I.S.L. advertised a meeting in Johannesburg to "discuss matters of common interest between white and native workers"[178]. The meeting, which was attended by 10 White I.S.L. members, and 20 Blacks[179], became the first of a series of weekly study groups at which revolutionary syndicalist themes were constantly reiterated. A prominent role was played at the first meeting on the 26 July by Dunbar, the former general-secretary of the South African I.W.W. section who served on the first management committee of the I.S.L. Police records report that Dunbar stated that the purpose of the meeting was[180]

> For all the workers black and white to come together in a union and be organised together and fight against the capitalists and take them down from their ruling place and let them come and work together with us ... and not own what other men produce.

He stated that "they can do it only [by] coming together and at the end of the month ... refuse to go and register their pass at the pass office": "the native affairs [Department] cannot arrest the whole lot of them" and would be forced to "abolish the pass laws". Once the passes were destroyed, the African workers should organise "into one Union" and launch a general strike across the Witwatersrand for higher wages[181]. Dunbar said the "thing they are trying to do is to make ... both black and white ... get the same wages because they are both workers"[182]. If workers were arrested, the strikers should demand their release. "If we strike for everything", Dunbar continued, "we can get everything ... If we can only spread the matter far and wide amongst the natives, we can easily unite"[183].

The study groups were transformed into an African trade union on September 27, 1917[184]. The new organisation initially styled itself the I.W.W., a title suggested by Dunbar in obvious reference to the American revolutionary syndicalist organisation. The meeting was also informed that the union would soon be linked to workers in Durban, where "the natives and Indians had formed their branch". Dunbar also suggested that when the "Industrial Workers of the World" became "stronger and stronger" and organised, "the white workers will ... join us and all will strike and see the result". Although the name of the union was amended on October 11 1917 to the "Industrial Workers of Africa"[185], its general outlook remained that of revolutionary industrial unionism[186].

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[178] From the start, these meetings attracted police interest, and the following account draws heavily on the reports submitted to the Department of Justice by police spies who infiltrated the meetings. These are in the files of the Department of Justice, JD 3/527/17, National Archives, Pretoria. The reports cited in the main body of the text are, unless otherwise stated, drawn from this source.

[179] Record in Department of Justice, *op cit.*

[180] Wilfrid Jali, report on meeting of 26 July 1917, in Department of Justice, *op cit.*

[181] William Mtembu, report on meeting of 26 July 1917, in Department of Justice, *op cit.*

[182] Simon, report on meeting of 26 July 1917, in Department of Justice, *op cit.*

[183] Wilfrid Jali, report on meeting of 26 July 1917,

[184] Wilfrid Jali, report on meeting of 27 September 1917, in Department of Justice, *op cit.*

[185] R. Moroosi, report on meeting of 11 October 1917, in Department of Justice, *op cit.*

[186] I discuss the Industrial Workers of Africa in more detail in *Revolutionary Syndicalist Organising in South Africa: The International Socialist League And The Industrial Workers Of Africa, 1916-9*. Paper presented at Syndicalism: Swedish and Historical Experiences. Department of Economic History. Stockholm University. March 13-14, 1998

Although a fuller discussion of the Industrial Workers of Africa falls outside the scope of this paper[187], three points need to be made. Firstly, the Industrial Workers of Africa was the first African trade union in South African history. Like the I.W.W. in Australia, Mexico, and the United States[188], the I.S.L. in South Africa was a revolutionary syndicalist organisation, which pioneered union organising amongst racially oppressed workers. Secondly, in undertaking this work amongst the most down-trodden layer of workers, the I.S.L. was not only acting in line with its sister organisations, but was also following the logic of its revolutionary industrial unionist politics of organising all workers, and acting upon its opposition to racism. Finally, the Industrial Workers of Africa was based upon, revolutionary syndicalist aims and principles. As such, it was analogous to the revolutionary syndicalist unions established across the globe in the early twentieth century; the first African trade union in South Africa history was a revolutionary syndicalist union formed at the height of the wave of international syndicalist organising in the 1910s.

The young union's political outlook was well summarised in a leaflet prepared by a committee of two I.S.L. and two Industrial Workers of Africa members in October 1917, and issued in Zulu and Sesutu in a run of 10,000[189]:

> LISTEN, WORKERS, LISTEN!
>
> Workers of the Bantu race:
>
> Why do you live in slavery? Why are you not free as other men are free? Why are you kicked and spat upon by your masters? Why must you carry a pass before you can move anywhere? And if you are found without one, why are you thrown into prison? Why do you toil hard for little money? And again thrown into prison if you refuse to work? Why do they herd you like cattle into compounds? WHY?
>
> Because you are the toilers of the earth. Because the masters want you to labour for their profit. Because they pay the Government and Police to keep you as slaves to toil for them.
>
> If it were not for the money they make from your labour, you would not be oppressed.
>
> But mark: you are the mainstay of the country. You do all the work, you are the means of their living. That is why you are robbed of the fruits of your labour and robbed of your liberty as well.
>
> There is only one way of deliverance for you Bantu workers. Unite as workers. Unite: forget the things which divide you. Let there be no longer any talk of Basuto, Zulu, or Shangaan. You are all labourers; let Labour be your common bond.
>
> Wake up! And open your ears. The sun has arisen, the day is breaking, for a long time you were asleep while the mill of the rich man was grinding and breaking the sweat of your work

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[187] See previous note

[188] See, *inter alia*, Norman Caulfield, 1995, "Wobblies and Mexican Workers in Petroleum, 1905-1924", in *International Review of Social History*. volume 40; Verity Burgmann 1996, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: the IWW in Australia*. Cambridge University Press; P.S. Foner, 1974, *Organised Labour and the Black Worker 1619-1973*. International Pubs, New York.

[189] translation by Wilfrid Jali, attached to report on meeting of 1 November 1917, in Department of Justice, *op cit.*

for nothing. You are strongly requested to come to the meeting of the workers to fight for your rights. Come and listen, to the sweet news, and deliver yourself from the bonds and chains of the capitalist. Unity is strength. The fight is great against the many passes that persecute you and against the low wages and misery of you existence.

Workers of all lands unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to win.

IN CONCLUSION:

REDISCOVERING OUR (LIBERTARIAN) SOCIALIST HISTORY

The history of international libertarian socialism is a very underdeveloped area of research. This is due to a variety of reasons, including the persistent conflation of revolutionary socialism with Marxism in much of the literature, teleological interpretations of socialist history, hostile scholarship, and the practice of claiming libertarian socialist history for other political traditions. This latter practice is represented by claims that Marx founded or led the First International, the presentation of the Mexican anarchist movement of the 1880s-1920s as Marxists[190], the claiming of James Connolly for "Marxism"[191], the argument that the I.W.W. in Australia was not syndicalist but Marxist[192], and the appropriation of the anarcho-syndicalist Augustino Sandino –leader of a guerrilla war against the United States' occupation of Nicaragua between 1927-33 (and his red-and-black anarcho-syndicalist banner) - by the nationalist "Sandinista National Liberation Front" in the 1980s[193].

The presentation of the I.S.L. in the literature is a case in point. Although generally described as a "Marxist" organisation, this paper has demonstrated that the I.S.L. is better understood as a political organisation in the tradition of revolutionary syndicalism. Likewise, the industrial Workers of Africa, the first African trade union in South African history, was a revolutionary syndicalist industrial union. The labelling of I.S.L. as "Marxist" in the literature can only be sustained on the basis of an exceedingly selective reading of I.S.L. material: a focus on the part –in this case, occasional nods to Marx - as opposed to the whole –revolutionary industrial unionism- is precisely the tactic employed by almost all accounts which deal with the I.S.L. as "Marxist". The I.S.L., and the Industrial Workers of Africa, are better understood as an organisations in the tradition of libertarian socialism; the

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[190] See, for example, the discussion of the Mexican literature in J. Hart, 1978, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class 1886-1931*. University of Texas Press. Austin. pp. 16, 185, 210.

[191] For a curious attempt to claim Connolly for Marxism, see K. Allen, 1990, *The Politics of James Connolly*. Pluto Press. This book claims, on the one hand, that Connolly was always a "revolutionary in the tradition of the Second International" (p. 171), but, on the other, states that he was a revolutionary syndicalist in the I.W.W. tradition because of his "conflict with the tradition of the Second International" (p. 173).

[192] For example, Verity Burgmann, 1995, *op cit.*

[193] See, for example, B. Marcus, (ed.), 1985, *Nicaragua: The Sandinista People's Revolution: Speeches by Sandinista Leaders*. Pathfinder Press. New York. London,. Sydney. and Tomas Borge, Carlos Fonesca, Daniel Ortega, Humberto Ortega, and Jaime Wheelock, 1986, *Sandinistas Speak: Speeches, Writings, and Interviews With Leaders of Nicaragua's Revolution*. Pathfinder Press. New York. London. Sydney. For more satisfactory discussions of Sandino, see A. Bendana, 1995, *A Sandinista Commemoration of the Sandino Centennial*. Speech Given on the 61 Anniversary of the Death of General Sandino, held in Managua's Olaf Palme Convention Centre. Distributed by Centre for International Studies, Managua. Trans: F.S. Courneyuer, and *Declaration of the Chilean Libertarian Movement on the Nicaraguan Revolution*, July 14 1987, translated by S. Dolgoff in *Libertarian Labour Review*, 1988, no. 5.

rediscovery of these bodies as a revolutionary syndicalist organisations, and the critique of their appropriation by "Marxism", is a contribution to the rediscovery of libertarian socialist history more generally. The I.S.L. in South Africa underlines the fact that revolutionary syndicalism in the early twentieth century was not simply an internationalist, but also an international, movement with a genuinely inter-continental scope.