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About the International Workers Association

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Anarcho-syndicalism has been and continues to be the most influential current within anarchism. Anarcho-syndicalists seek to build revolutionary unions, that organise all workers in a democratic union with a minimum number of full time ‘officials’ who will be on the average wage of those they represent and completely answerable to the rest of the membership.

The Workers Solidarity Movement does not consider itself anarcho-syndicalist but we seek to maintain good relations with anarcho-syndicalists everywhere. We print here an interview about the International Workers Association, the international body that many anarcho-syndicalists are part of. The interview is with Tom Wetzel, from the Workers Solidarity Alliance, the U.S. section of the IWA.

“The I.W.A. was formed at the 1922 Berlin Congress of Revolutionary Unionist organisations. This congress had been convoked by the CNT and USI in response to the formation of the Red Trade Union International.

[Delegates from unions and groups representing about 1,160,000 workers attended. This represented nine countries from North and South America as well as Europe. The CNT was unable to attend because of the fierce struggle being waged in Spain (ed.)].

“The CNT and USI (Italian Syndicalist Union) had tentatively affiliated to the Red Trade Union International when it was formed in 1921 on the initiative of the Russian Communists. Armando Borghi, the anarchist secretary of the USI, was their delegate. The CNT sent three delegates, including Angel Pestana. When Pestana talked for a few minutes, raising some basic libertarian issues about party domination, the state and so on, Trotsky (who wasn’t a worker or union member) got up and harangued the congress for an hour. The upshot was that Borghi and Pestana brought back negative reports on the Red Trade Union International to their respective organisations, and that’s why they voted to not affiliate to the Red Trade Union International, but to try to found a libertarian union international instead. Hence the IWA.

“Some organizations in the IWA call themselves unions and some do not, although all are in favor of a libertarian approach to unionism.. Among those that characterize themselves as “unions”, such as the CNT in Spain, a distinction is often made between the “union”, as a voluntary organization of those who advocate a particular approach within the class, versus the organs of class-wide unity, such as workers assemblies

“Today there are affiliates to the IWA in 17+ countries. Most recent additions are an anarchist federation in Finland (SAL) and the Awareness League (a libertarian

socialist organisation) in Nigeria (first ever affiliate of the IWA in Africa).”