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Syndicalism : its basis, methods, and ultimate aim : compiled by Norman Young from a lecture delivered by Guy Bowman on April 6th, 1913, at the Co-operative Hall, Little Newport Street, W.. [1913?]

Bowman, Guy

London: Guy Bowman, [1913?]

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Notes and irregularities:

Bowman, Guy. Young, N. (Norman), Editor
Syndicalism : its basis, methods, and ultimate aim :
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Syndicalism

GUY BOWMAN

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Gaylord
PAMPHLET BINDER
Syracuse, N. Y.
Stockton, Calif.

JUN 26 1958

SYNDICALISM:

Its Basis, Methods, and Ultimate Aim.

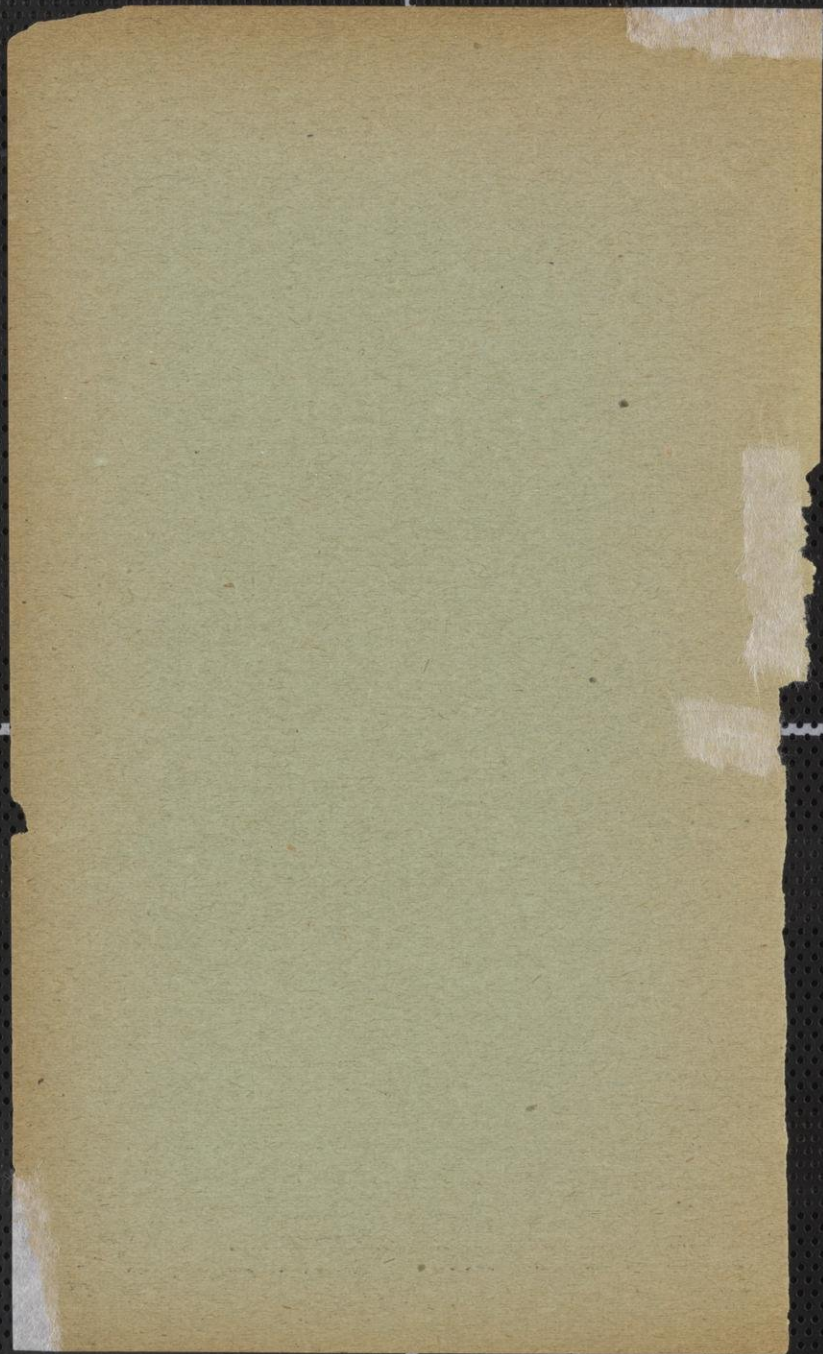
Compiled by Norman Young
from a Lecture delivered ::

By Guy Bowman

On April 6th, 1913, at the
:: Co-operative Hall, ::
Little Newport Street, W.

Price: One Penny

LONDON :: :: :: Published by GUY BOWMAN
4 Maude Terrace, Walthamstow, E.



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SYNDICALISM :

ITS BASIS, METHODS,
AND ULTIMATE AIM.

*Compiled by Norman Young from a Lecture delivered
by Guy Bowman, on April 6th, at the*

CO-OPERATIVE HALL, LITTLE NEWPORT ST., W.

SYNDICALISM AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

There are to-day many people who are inclined to call themselves Syndicalists. They do so because they imagine that Syndicalism stands for something more militant than anything that has hitherto been put forward by any of the Social-Democratic Parties—and when we mention Social-Democracy or the Social-Democrats, we mean that theory and the members of such parties as are all out for the same thing, namely, the bringing about of a society with a superstructure (the state) catering for the whole of that society, irrespective of the trades and industries in which men and women are engaged, thereby involving the bossing of a minority by a majority. The B.S.P., the I.L.P., the S.P.G.B., the S.L.P., are all Social-Democratic Parties.

It is to such bossing that we Syndicalists object, and we are now making proposals calculated to bring about a society without a superstructure. To-day there are at least some men and some women free ; but under a system of Social-Democracy there would not be a man or a woman left who was free.

March 58 Hammermill 210 Ave. Studios

We are out to bring about a society in which every man and every woman will give to society according to his or her ability, and will take from society according to his or her needs. In other words, in the society we Syndicalists want to bring about there shall be no *value* whatever attached to any commodity, so that every individual will be able to partake of all commodities in the full measure of his wants.

This being so, our proposals for the construction of a new society are entirely different from those of Social-Democracy, and it follows from this that Syndicalism does not consist in finding fault with any of the existing Social-Democratic Parties, or in wasting time running down individuals or parties as such.

THE BASIS

Let us draw a comparison between the two proposals. The Social-Democratic basis is society as a whole. The latter hopes to bring about a new society with better conditions all round. This very proposal to build upon society itself—to cater for the whole of society—involves in its very nature a superstructure which we call the state.

The Syndicalist basis of the new society should be industry itself, or the industries as we find them. What are the industries? They are those activities which produce the commodities necessary for the leading of happy lives. In order to do away with the conflict of interest that exists to-day, we are taking industries and classifying them so that the interests of those engaged therein shall be identical. Identity of interest does away with the need for domination, and, therefore, we propose to build up society in sections corresponding to the industries as we find them to-day. We look around us in the world of capitalist industry as it exists at present. We see men and women working to produce useful and useless things. Some of them might very well be filling up holes in the earth; some, though working very hard (such as servants in rich men's houses) are living off the producers. But taking the whole of the workers as we find them we have to answer this question: "How are the workers going to organise themselves so that they will form such sections as will produce so as to satisfy the requirements of the whole community in future society?"

OUR PROPOSAL

We object to any kind of state (as much to an industrial state as to a political state), and in order to avoid a superstructure, we propose that the workers should build up society in sections, each of these sections to correspond to our great industries, about fourteen to seventeen of them. There can be nothing definite about this number owing to the fact that industries decay and new industries rise.

When these sections of society are organised, the problem will be to establish a connexion between them, and to establish also a system of distribution and local administration.

To do this, we propose that the workers should first transform their *Trade Unions* into *Industrial Unions* by a process of amalgamation; then bring about a National Federation of Industrial Unions on the one hand, and a National Federation of Trades Councils on the other hand; and finally we propose to confederate these two national federations, thereby bringing about a General Confederation of Labour, including all producers and all distributors, both being the consumers.

Such an organisation of society composed of sections, the members composing such sections having identity of interest, does not involve a superstructure—the state—which is to cater for society as a whole. Every section will be able to produce for the benefit of the whole community without the interference of any other section.

REJUVENATE THE MACHINERY IN EXISTENCE

A.—THE UNIONS

Some six or seven years ago proposals were made by a few enthusiastic young men for the formation of brand new unions on a class basis. But the experience we have gained from their very efforts has shown us that in England, at any rate, the proposal was hopeless. As far as organisation is concerned no headway has been made, nor is likely to be made. The value of their work, however, has been that they have rendered the present Syndicalist Movement fruitful.

We have already an organised working class, badly organised maybe, yet coming together gradually on the only field that matters, that of the CLASS STRUGGLE. The old classification in Trade Unions was one of "trade." Though this kind of organisation has been very good in the past, it has become ineffective in the present. But we think that the only thing needed is that the Unions should bring themselves up to date.

There are thousands of workers to-day who are agreed and eager that their unions should be put on the right track. The members of the rank and file desire it ardently: they seem determined to have it. "Trade Unions," they say, "ought to be amalgamated." The cry is: "One Industry! One Union! One Card!" Amalgamation committees are being formed (and have been formed) in every industrial centre, and in spite of the throwing of cold water on their proposals by officials and members of executives, amalgamation is inevitable.

But those who are engaged in bringing about amalgamation, or the transformation of *Trade Unions* to *Industrial Unions*, are not agreed by far as to what purpose such amalgamation and the consequent Industrial Unions will have to serve. Some are not very explicit as to the reason for their sudden advocacy; but we have a strong suspicion that they do not intend the coming Industrial Unions to serve any other purpose than that of becoming huge voting machines. Others are thinking only of the better conditions they might obtain here and now if the Trade Unions were so transformed. A third section is not quite sure as to what the functions of the Industrial Unions will have to be. They simply say, "Oh! Let us get on with amalgamation and we'll see the result afterwards!"

We Syndicalists, however, are doing our very best to get the workers to see that the purpose of a perfected organisation of their own is to lead to their emancipation.

B.—THE TRADES COUNCILS

As we find in existence to-day in the old Trade Unions the machinery for production as Industrial Unions in future society, so we find in our Trades Councils of to-day the machinery for taking over local distribution and administration.

When a commodity has been produced it has to be transported. Besides the organisation for production there must be an organisation for distribution and local administration. We find the nucleus of such organisation already in existence to-day—in our Trades Councils. But the present day Trades Councils, being used as they are, merely as an adjunct to political advancement, serve no purpose whatever.

They must therefore shake themselves together, and prepare for the duties that await them. They must cease engaging in futilities. They are the finest agencies for our purpose one could wish. They are already based upon industry, being composed as they are, of delegates from each trade composing the industry. The one thing necessary is to infuse into the minds of these delegates the spirit which must fight the Revolution, and afterwards carry on the local administration of the future. Instead of serving, as they do at present, merely for electioneering agencies, they will have to stand against the municipal council, destroy it, and establish themselves in its place.

True, Rome was not built in a day, nor can the Trades Councils accomplish this in a week. For the time being the delegates should carry on propaganda and, on the whole, propaganda really depends on them. After discussing the different proposals, all these delegates go back to their respective Unions and get them to do something.

Just as we propose to aid in bringing about a national federation of producers, so we propose to bring about a national federation of these Trades Councils for educational and consultative purposes. This will have the effect of strengthening local action through the interchange of ideas between the different Trades Councils.

With the formation of these two federations, the producers and distributors of commodities form a General Confederation of Labour. That is the nucleus of future society that should be brought about NOW, under capitalism. This kind of organisation is to achieve a three-fold purpose.

THE THREE-FOLD PURPOSE :

- 1. To obtain better conditions here and now.**
- 2. The fighting of the revolution.**
- 3. Management of Industry after the revolution.**

THE FIRST PURPOSE—BETTER CONDITIONS NOW

The first purpose of the organisation is to obtain better conditions here and now, under capitalism. More importance is attached to the reduction of working hours than to the raising of wages, for obviously the great need of the workers is time in which to live and think. These better conditions must be obtained by Direct Action.

The getting of better conditions is after all, a skirmishing, a testing of strength, a gaining of power, of knowledge before the great fight.

Our immediate proposal is that the Working Class should switch their train from the "trade" line to the "industrial" line. We want every one concerned to get together and bring the different trades making one industry into that one union. These should form a loose federation for consultative purposes, so that every one of the industries could find out particulars of what would be required, what output would be necessary when society has been changed from capitalist to Socialist. How this can be done will be developed in the next lecture of this series by our friend Dave Armstrong, in the absence, through illness, of our friend Jack Wills, the Secretary of the *Amalgamation Committees' Federation*.*

THE SECOND PURPOSE—THE REVOLUTION.

The second purpose is to achieve the revolution. We are of the opinion that the revolution will have to be brought about by the conscious minority: at that moment there will be a huge mass of people who are inert. We shall probably have to urge on the non-acting section, in order to hold what we have won. But this inert mass will change in one or two generations. Let us dismiss, in passing, the idea that this justifies any bossing of the rank and file on the part of the executives of trade unions. The rank and file to-day is anything but an inert mass. The executive is there to carry out the wishes of the rank and file. It is circumstance alone that can dictate our action at any given time. We must face the fact that the unconscious majority (which to-day includes many labour leaders) will have to be urged on.

* A pamphlet entitled "The Case for Amalgamation," written by Jack Wills and published by Guy Bowman for the *Amalgamation Committees' Federation*, deals fully with the question of amalgamation. Price: One Penny.

The revolution will have to be a sudden and violent affair. It would be absolutely impossible to change the system without a shock. The new is born in the death-throes of the old.

WHAT IS A REVOLUTION?

Most of those who call themselves revolutionary, have a wrong idea of how a revolution is to be brought about. When they tell you there will be no bloodshed, they are expressing rather a pious wish than a certainty. If you can get a change of system without bloodshed, it would be foolish to spill any. But it will be necessary. No great change has ever been brought about except by violent means. The class in power at present certainly has many weaklings in its ranks. But this is counter-balanced by the fact that there is a number of them that will never surrender. The owning class, too, is able to buy service as long as it remains in power. The masters will not surrender. For them the present system is a very good system; it gives them those things they deem worth having. The system to-day gives them those things in even greater abundance than any system ever did to a ruling minority before; they will surrender less readily now than ever they were prepared to do before. We must find means whereby the bosses can be crushed finally. If we are not making up our minds about that, all the better conditions in the world will avail us nothing.

WHEN WILL REVOLUTION COME?

No one can say when the time will be ready. A revolution is not one of those things that can be put down in the column of coming events. We do not know when it will come. When a conscious minority has to make a revolution it has to wait for the psychological moment. You must devise your tactics; always be prepared; know what you are going to do. You can't do it by theory; you can't do it by rule of thumb; you can't do it by turning to Karl Marx, page 322, line 14. It is necessary constantly to study the tactics of the masters—what they are devising. What is the purpose of the National Reserve? What means the movement towards conscription? What is the Civilian Force up to? These are the questions we must ask and answer. Not only must we do this; we have also to devise means of defeating their tactics by better tactics of our own.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT

The great Transport Strike in Liverpool in 1911 affords an excellent illustration of what is meant by the phrase "psychological moment." A few days before the outbreak of the strike, Tom Mann was at Hull. Everything there was as dull and stagnant as ditch water. There wasn't a stir. He gave it up as a hopeless business altogether. He went to Liverpool and had been in that city only a few days when the great revolt broke out. An enormous majority was ready to act. It required only to be shown how. Successful action would have been the taking possession of the land, machinery, railways, mines, etc.

THE THIRD PURPOSE—MANAGEMENT AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The third purpose of the organisation to be brought about is to prepare ourselves by its means to manage and run the industrial sections of the community after the fight. The organisations must not only achieve the revolution. They must realise this third purpose, that they must be absolutely ready, after the revolution, to take the management of the industries into their own hands.

Since 1793 there have been three great revolutions in France. During these revolutions the Working Class of France swung itself towards political power; more than this, such power was actually seized; but it was kept for only five minutes. The workers had never faced the fact that they would have to manage the system themselves. They had to hand over power to the politicians, who not only "swanked" them, but finally shot them down.

Are we to have a recurrence of such mistakes? Let us learn from past experience. The working class must be able to step in and manage production through its own organisations, which have been brought into existence, developed, and vitalised by the workers themselves.

It is therefore urgent—as was pointed out in the first purpose—that every man who bears these things in mind should now—immediately—take the greatest possible interest in his trade and industry; see what connexions it has, both internal and external, national and international. A brick-layer, for instance, should get to work so that he knows the building industry in all its aspects.

To sum up, the three-fold purpose—

- (1) Better conditions here and now,
- (2) The fighting of the revolution,
- (3) Management of industry after the revolution,

must stand as one whole.

If we lose sight of one of these aims the other two fall. Some think that it is dangerous as well as futile to talk to workers about anything that hasn't to do with the immediate present. But we shall show that unless one has a clear idea of what is wanted after the revolution has taken place, action in the immediate present is futile. It is not a question of talking idealism; it is a question of being prepared for what is going to happen. For instance, if we are going to take action to-day for shorter hours, and we are not aware that this is only a little instalment, and that we have to prepare ourselves to manage society, all our actions will fail. In any case, even if better conditions were obtained, we should again be behind-hand when the next step came. That is why we should always bear in mind the three-fold purpose of the organisation.

THE KEY-NOTE OF SYNDICALISM

It is necessary to state here that we have drawn a picture out of our imaginations. Our method is to look at the industrial world around us and then imagine something of its probable development. But we have to watch continually the evolution of the industrial system, and to reconstruct our picture as changes take place. That is the very key-note of Syndicalism. There is no finality in it, no certainty. It is not a text book to be learnt by heart and spouted at the street corner. It is not the same to-day, to-morrow, and to the world's end. There is always something to do, something to alter, as the circumstances around us alter.

WORKER OR CITIZEN ?

The question will naturally arise as to why these things **MUST** be done by Direct Action. A believer in political action advocates that better conditions should be obtained

by this method. Many people think that parliament was the means of giving the miners the eight hours' day. If this were so, it would be good argument to say that it would be possible to do other things by the same means. But what are the facts?

There was no demand by the public for an eight hour day. They were quite unmoved by the cry of an eight-hour day for miners. Why did parliament pass the measure? It was because the bosses knew that the miners were organised and determined. It was the resolution of the miners alone that mattered, and even if there had been no such place as parliament (the place where men "talk") the miners would have had an eight-hour day; parliament bows to the inevitable. Compare the passing of this measure with Plimsoll's agitation. Plimsoll, by sheer obstinacy, was able to impress public opinion and parliament as to the necessity for lowering the load-line on merchant ships. The line was lowered. But, *because the seamen relied on parliament*, Lloyd George was able, by a mere stroke of the pen, to undo the work of Plimsoll. The seamen were not prepared to protect by action what had been given them. If it ever happens that the miners lose their power, a parliamentary act will avail them nothing.

The question naturally arises here as to the wisdom of seeking election to municipal councils and parliament. It could be argued very plausibly that it was necessary for Syndicalists to get on to the municipal councils in order that they might be trained to carry out their duties.

We must not forget that a worker taking this step is on the high-road to parliament. More important than this, however, is the fact that he is helping merely to administer the present system; he is devoting the whole of his spare time to the putting into operation of capitalist laws; he is preserving capitalist institutions. When you get on to the council you have to admit the goodness of the law you are administering; you become a tool. On the council the class-struggle is forgotten. We go into co-partnership with our bosses. Workers are doing far more effective work by building up working-class institutions, perfecting their organisations, and helping to make them the force of the future. The workers must cease to be subjects of any state and become the citizens of the industry with which they are connected.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER SIDE ?

Is the capitalist class which is watching us all the time, going to allow us to bring about an organisation vitalised through and through with the fighting spirit, the sole purpose of which is to upset and supplant their system ?

Our bosses are not going to do that passively any more than they are going to allow us to capture their parliament. Yes ! they will let a few working-class representatives come in, provided they are mild-mannered and innocuous enough, so that they shall continue to play their own game. But they will never allow them to take the upper hand. Let us illustrate this fact :

In Persia, about four or five years ago, a constitution on British lines was brought about. A certain Schuster—an excellent financier—was sent from America to Persia, in order to manage the finances of Persia. Poor old Schuster went there with the idea of managing the finances of Persia ; he did his very best to manage the finances of Persia. But who bosses Persia ? A few men who have interests in Threadneedle Street, Wall Street, The Bourse, and the other financial centres of the world ! About 150 men boss Persia, just as they boss the whole of the races of the world. These men called up Schuster for a talk. They asked him what he was up to. He told them he was managing the finances of Persia. They replied, " Yes ! But what about us ? These industries are OURS ! " Schuster had to leave Persia as quickly as he could. What happened in the Persian parliament ? The people had elected a majority who thought that the best thing that could happen in Persia was the nationalisation of the land. They were ready for land nationalisation. The bosses brought out their maxim guns, put them towards the parliament of Persia, and bombarded the very representatives of the people who sat there. Those of them who escaped into the streets were arrested. They were crucified more shamefully than was Jesus Christ, for they were crucified head downwards. The crucifixes were then put on the parapets of the railway bridges and pushed over.

In Russia, after the Russo-Japanese war, a constitution on modern lines was granted, and a parliament called " The Duma " was instituted. Elections took place. Too many

Revolutionaries were elected. What was the consequence? The constitution and the method of voting had to be altered no less than three times before it suited the capitalists.

In Saxony, a few years ago, the vote was actually taken back from the people because they elected too many Revolutionaries.

In France, during the great railway strike, the prime minister, Briand, said in the chamber of deputies that if the railwaymen could not be subjected by legal means, illegal means would be adopted.

In America, during the Free Speech fight at San Diego (California) in 1912, the capitalists did not even wait for government interference, but took the matter of suppressing free speech into their own hands. They formed "The Vigilantes Committee" which included all the prominent capitalists, clergymen, the judiciary, lawyers, doctors, and city officials. They took the prisoners out of their jails at night (with the connivance of the police), into the desert, and subjected them to the most horrible tortures. They "tarred and feathered" them, they beat them into insensibility, they actually branded them on their backsides with cigar lighters, etc.

Many more cases of this sort might be related, but here is sufficient evidence to prove that the owning class will never allow the Working Class to dispossess them by peaceful means. What then can we do?

DIRECT ACTION

We have made up our minds that a revolution is to be made from capitalism to Socialism. We have made up our minds also, that it cannot be done without violence. But what kind of violence? We must devise means whereby we can take action. We must be devising new means, new tactics, continually. The day is already past when it is wisdom to go to Tower Hill and Trafalgar Square in mass to be batoned by the police and struck down by the soldiery. Are we going to offer our chests to the bullets of the soldiers? There are better ways than that.

We must carry on the warfare industrially and socially.

Industrially by using the means of Direct Action (the Label, the Boycott, the Strike, the Pearl Strike, the Irritation Strike, the Intermittent Strike, Sabotage, etc., etc.).

Socially by fighting their state. And what is their state? It is their government, their morality, their parliament, their army, their police, and their law courts.

This two-fold warfare, carried on by the organisation described before, constitutes Direct Action. Its meaning and methods will be dealt with in three subsequent lectures.*

Meanwhile we must, above everything, get that conscious minority in the working class that has made up its mind to act in the way we have shown.

THE GENERAL STRIKE

The emancipation of the workers must be the work of the workers themselves, acting through their own organisations, and perfecting these so that they will become the dominant organisations of the future. With the growth and development of these institutions from below, capitalism, and all that it stands for, will be to our children only a horrid nightmare in history—a period born in blood, sucking during its existence the blood of the workers, and coming to an end by the forcible expropriation of the few by the many, which we call the General Strike.

Note.—This is a brief account of the first of a series of lectures on Syndicalism. The compilations from the following lectures will deal more fully with the various aspects of Syndicalism than is possible in an introductory lecture.

It will be noted that such words as parliament, government, council, army, etc. commence with a small letter. This is not an error. It is done for the purpose of reducing these capitalist institutions to the importance which is their due from the Working Class.

Readers interested should get *all* the pamphlets advertised on the back cover.

* See "Direct Action, Its Meaning and Methods," by Guy Bowman and others. Price: One Penny.

Get the following pamphlets and read them
the order set out below.

Syndicalism :

Its Basis, Methods, and Ultimate Aim.

Guy Bowman

The Case for Amalgamation

Jack W

Direct Action :

Its Meaning and Methods of Warfare.

Guy Bowman, Dave Armstrong, and Jack Tam

Objections to Syndicalism

W. Nefydd Robe

The General Strike.

Norman You

Printed and Published by GUY BOWMAN, 4 Maude Terrace, Walthamst

NO 26 '88

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