

How to Build the International

Libertarian Labor Review

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At its conference on Eastern Europe and Russia last fall, the International Workers Association (IWA) decided to give the responsibility for publishing its Eastern European newsletter to the IREAN (Initiative of Revolutionary Anarchists). The IREAN is a small propaganda group which split from the KAS (Anarcho Syndicalist Confederation) a couple years ago. This development startled members of KAS, who had hoped to maintain good relations with the IWA, and see little hope that this will be the case with IREAN filtering the information which the IWA gets about the syndicalist movement in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Perhaps what should trouble the international syndicalist movement is the prospect that this may lead to IREAN's recognition as the IWA's affiliate in Russia, and put an end to IWA efforts to bring KAS and CMOT into the international.

We don't intend this to be a criticism of IREAN. We know very little about IREAN and its politics. What we question is the wisdom of the IWA in setting up an intermediary in its relations with Russian anarcho-syndicalists without getting input from the largest syndicalist organizations. The IREAN is a splinter group from KAS. It is therefore not in the interests of IREAN that the IWA be on good terms with KAS. Whether this was the IWA's intention or not, by giving official recognition to IREAN, the IWA is furthering a split in the syndicalist movement of that country and may be cutting itself off from the majority of Russian syndicalists. Bringing IREAN into the IWA may give the international another affiliate, but does this serve the cause of international unity?

This is not the first time the IWA has permitted sectarian syndicalist groups to draw the international into internal feuding. In 1984 we warned the IWA about a similar situation with a group of anti-IWW syndicalists, the Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA), who were seeking recognition as the IWA's U.S. affiliate. The IWA ignored these warnings, and the WSA was given a blank check to carry on sectarian warfare against the IWW and pro-IWW anarcho-syndicalists, all in the name of the international. Perhaps it is not surprising that when the IWW passed a referendum in 1989(?) to affiliate with the IWA, this received no follow-up from the IWA. The IWA decided it must rely on the judgement of WSA, who told them to ignore the IWW's prospective affiliation.

The policy of the IWA should be to seek the widest solidarity between syndicalist organizations of all countries. IWA Statutes allow only one affiliate in each country. This is supposed to discourage sectarian feuding. Ironically this rule has been used as a weapon by splinter groups

to encourage it. Knowing that the IWA rarely refuses a request for affiliation from a country where no IWA section exists, these minority splinter groups take advantage of the IWA's goodwill. Once they are in the international, the IWA feels it must support these minority sections in their political feuds, without making a serious investigation into what these disputes are all about.

To build a strong international, the IWA needs to reassess its affiliation process. The goal must be to federate with the majority syndicalist organization in each country. Where splits have occurred or where a small propaganda group seeks IWA affiliate status, the IWA should try to get input from the majority organization before committing itself. Certainly foot-dragging by the larger group should not stop the IWA from having contact with sympathetic minorities. The IWA, however, needs to be more aware of the consequences of giving these minorities official recognition.

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