

ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

THE ANARCHIST LABOUR MOVEMENT

THE METHODS OF ANARCHO-SYNDICALISM

People owe all the political rights and privileges that we enjoy today in greater or lesser measure, not to the good will of governments, but to our own strength. Governments have employed every means that lie in their power to prevent the attainment of these rights or to render them illusory. Great mass movements among the people and whole revolutions have been necessary to wrest these rights from the ruling classes, who would never have consented to them voluntarily. Even the freest ballot cannot do away with the glaring contrast between the possessing and non-possessing classes in society. It can only serve to give the system of social injustice the stamp of legal right and to induce the slaves to set the stamp of legality on their own servitude. But, most important of all, practical experience has shown that the participation of the workers in parliamentary activity [trusting politicians, political parties, labour law, etc.] cripples our power of resistance and dooms to futility our struggle against the existing system. Parliamentary participation has not brought the workers one iota nearer to our final goal; it has even prevented us from protecting the rights we have won against the attacks of the reaction.

Anarcho-Syndicalists, then, are not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in our opinion this struggle, too, must take the form of direct action, in which the instruments of economic power, which the working class has at its command, are the most effective. Every event that affects the life of the community is of a political nature. In this sense, every important economic action is also a political action and, moreover, one of incomparably greater importance than any parliamentary proceeding. Of a political nature is likewise the battle of the Anarcho-Syndicalists against Fascism and the anti-militarist propaganda, a battle that for decades was carried on solely by the Libertarian Socialists [Anarchists] and the Syndicalists. The focal point of the political struggle lies, then, not in the political parties, but in the economic fighting organisations of the workers. It is the recognition of this that impelled the Anarcho-Syndicalists to centre all their activity on the Socialist education of the masses and on using their economic and social power. By direct action the Anarcho-Syndicalists mean every method of immediate struggle by the workers against their economic and political oppressors. Among these the outstanding are: the strike, in all its gradations from the simple wage-struggle to the general strike; the boycott; sabotage in its countless forms; anti-militarist propaganda; and in particularly critical cases, armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty.

Among these fighting techniques **THE STRIKE**, that is, organised refusal to work is the most used. In its simplest form it is for the workers a very important means of raising our standard of living or defending our attained advantages against the concerted measures of the employers. But the strike is for the workers not only a means for the defence of immediate economic interests, it is also a continuous schooling for our powers of resistance, showing us every day that every least right has to be won by unceasing struggle against the existing system.

One of the most important results of the daily economic struggles is the development of solidarity among the workers. To cherish and strengthen this natural solidarity of the workers and to give to every strike movement a more profoundly social character is one of the most important tasks that the Anarcho-Syndicalists have set themselves. For this reason the **SYMPATHETIC STRIKE** is one of our choicest weapons. Through it, the economic battle becomes a deliberate action of the workers as a class. The sympathetic strike is the collaboration of related, but also of unrelated, categories of labour, to help the battle of a particular trade to victory by extending the strike to other branches of labour, where this is necessary. In this case the workers are not satisfied with giving fighting assistance to their striking fellow-workers, but go further, and by crippling entire industries cause a break in the whole economic life in order to make their demands effective. Today, when, by the formation of national and international cartels, capitalism grows more and more into monopoly capitalism, this form of struggle is in most cases the only one by which the workers can still succeed. Just as the employers in their cartels and protective organisations are building an ever broader basis for the defence of their interests, so also we the workers must turn our attention to creating for ourselves, by an ever wider alliance of our national and international economic organisations, the required basis for solidaric mass action adequate for the demands of the time.

Direct action by organised labour finds its strongest expression in the **GENERAL STRIKE**, in the stoppage of work in every branch of production by the organised resistance of the proletariat, with all the consequences arising from it. The general strike can serve various purposes. It can be the last stage of a sympathetic strike. It can as easily

be a means by which organised labour tries to enforce some general demand. But the general strike can also have political objectives. In Spain the widespread strike movement among the workers and peasants after the Fascist revolt in July, 1936, developed into a "**SOCIAL GENERAL STRIKE**" (**HUELGA GENERAL**) and led to armed resistance, and with this, to the abolishment of the capitalist economic order and the re-organisation of the economic life by the workers themselves.

Another important fighting device for direct action is the **BOYCOTT**. It can be employed by the workers both as producers and consumers. A systematic refusal of consumers to buy from firms that handle goods not produced under conditions approved by the labour unions can often be of decisive importance, especially for those branches of labour engaged in the production of commodities of general use. At the same time the boycott is very well adapted to influencing public opinion in favour of the workers, provided it is accompanied by suitable propaganda. The **UNION LABEL** is an effective means of facilitating the boycott; as it gives the buyer the sign by which to distinguish the goods they want from the spurious. As producers the boycott provides the workers with the means of imposing an embargo on individual plants whose managers show themselves especially hostile to unions.

Among the weapons in the Anarcho-Syndicalist armoury **SABOTAGE** is the one most feared by the employer. Sabotage consists in the workers putting every possible obstacle in the way of the ordinary modes of work. For the most part this occurs when the employers try to avail themselves of a bad economic situation or some other favourable occasion to lower the normal conditions of labour by cutting wages or by lengthening of the hours of work. The sabotage of the workers is directed against the employers, never against the consumers.

The English workers were already doing this long before revolutionary Syndicalism was spoken of on the continent. In fact the policy of "**CA' CANNY**" (**GO SLOW**), which, along with the phrase itself, the English workers took over from their Scottish brethren, was the first and most effective form of sabotage.

The railway workers in France and Italy, by the use of the so-called **GRÈVE PERLÉE (STRING-OF-PEARLS-STRIKE)** threw the whole system of transportation into disorder. For this they needed to do nothing more than to adhere to the strict letter of the existing transport laws, and thus made it impossible for any train to arrive at its destination on time.

The so-called **SIT DOWN STRIKE**, which was transplanted from Europe to America, consists of the workers remaining in the plant day and night without turning a finger in order to prevent the installing of strike-breakers and which belongs in the realm of sabotage. Very often sabotage works thus: before a strike, the workers put the machines out of order to make the work of possible strike-breakers harder, or even impossible for a considerable time.

Another form of direct action is the **SOCIAL STRIKE**, which will, without doubt, in the immediate future play a much larger part. It is concerned less with the immediate interests of the workers than with the protection of the community against the most destructive outgrowths of the present system. The social strike seeks to force upon the employers a responsibility to the public. Primarily it has in view the protection of the consumers, of whom the workers themselves constitute the great majority.

As outspoken opponents of all nationalist ambitions, the revolutionary Syndicalists, especially in the Latin countries, have always devoted a very considerable part of their activity to **ANTI-MILITARIST PROPAGANDA**, seeking to hold the workers in soldiers' coats loyal to their class and to prevent them turning their weapons against their fellow-workers in time of a strike. The Anarcho-Syndicalists know that wars are only waged in the interest of the ruling classes; we believe, therefore, that any means is justifiable that can prevent the organised murder of peoples.

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