

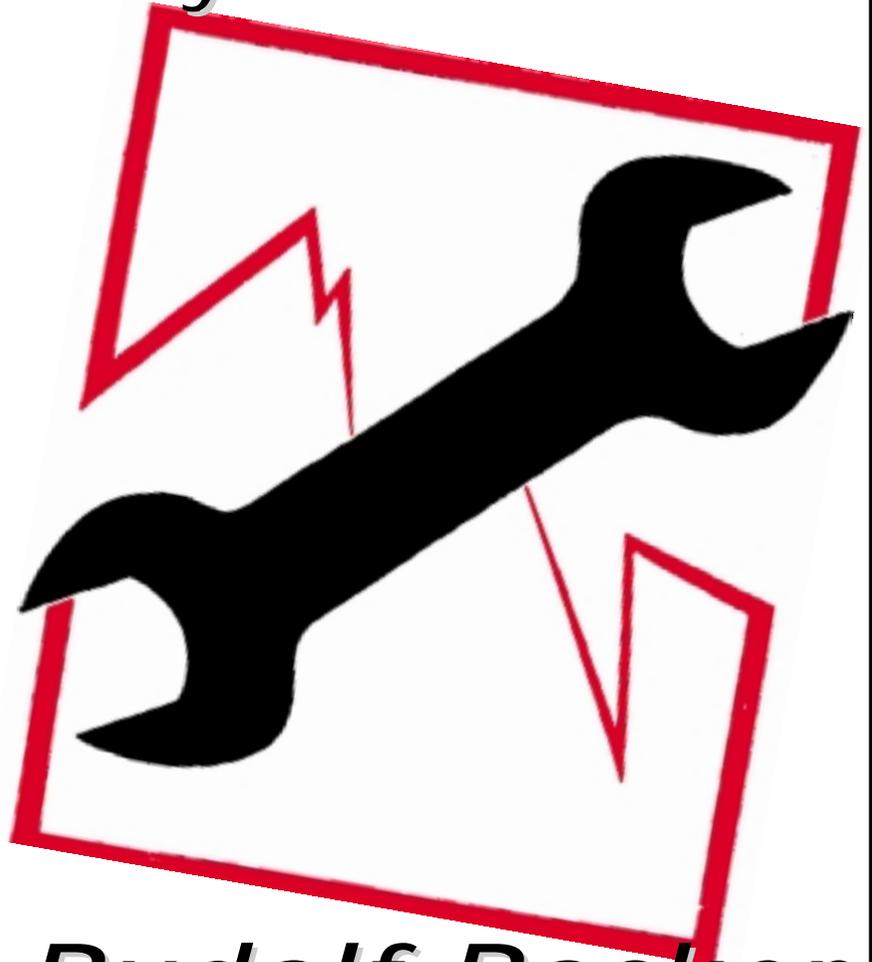
Zabalaza Books

*"Knowledge is the Key
to be Free"*



Post: Postnet Suite 116, Private Bag X42, Braamfontein, 2017,
Johannesburg, South Africa E-Mail: zabalaza@union.org.za
Website: www.struggle.ws/africa/safrica/zababooks/HomePage.htm

The Methods of Anarcho- Syndicalsim



Rudolf Rucker

justifiable that can prevent the organised murder of peoples. In this field also the workers have every means in their hands, if only they possess the desire and the moral strength to use them.

Above all it is necessary to cure the labour movement of its inner ossification and rid it of the empty sloganeering of the political parties, so that it may forge ahead intellectually and develop within itself the creative conditions which must precede the realisation of Socialism. The practical attainability of this goal must become for the workers an inner certainty and must ripen into an ethical necessity. The great final goal of Socialism must emerge from all the practical daily struggles, and must give them a social character. In the pettiest struggle, born of the needs of the moment, there must be mirrored the great goal of social liberation, and each such struggle must help to smooth the way and strengthen the spirit which transforms the inner longing of its bearers into will and deed.

The Methods of Anarcho-Syndicalism

Chapter 5 of *Anarcho-Syndicalism*

by Rudolf Rocker

It has often been charged against Anarcho-Syndicalism that it has no interest in the political structure of the different countries, and consequently no interest in the political struggles of the time, and confines its activities to the fight for purely economic demands. This idea is altogether erroneous and springs either from outright ignorance or wilful distortion of the facts. It is not the political struggle as such which distinguishes the Anarcho-Syndicalists from the modern labour parties, both in principle and in tactics, but the form of this struggle and the aims which it has in view. They by no means rest content with the ideal of a future society without lordship; their efforts are also directed, even today, at restricting the activities of the state and blocking its influence in every department of social life wherever they see an opportunity. It is these tactics which mark off Anarcho-Syndicalist procedure from the aims and methods of the political labour parties, all of whose activities tend constantly to broaden the sphere of influence of the political power of the state and to extend it in ever increasing measure over the economic life of society. But by this, in the outcome, the way is merely prepared for an era of state capitalism, which according to all experience may be just the opposite of what Socialism is actually fighting for.

The attitude of Anarcho-Syndicalism toward the political power of the present-day state is exactly the same as it takes toward the system of capitalist exploitation. Its adherents are perfectly clear that the social injustices of that system rest, not on its unavoidable excrescences, but in the capitalistic economic order as such. But, while their efforts are directed at abolishing the existing form of capitalist exploitation and replacing it by a Socialist order, they never for a moment forget to work also by every means at their command to lower the rate of profit of the capitalists under existing conditions, and to raise the producer's share of the products of his labour to the highest possible.

Anarcho-Syndicalists pursue the same tactics in their fight against that political power which finds its expression in the state. They recognise that the modern state is just the consequence of capitalist economic monopoly, and the class divisions which this has set up in society, and merely serves the purpose of maintaining this status by every oppressive instrument of political power. But, while they are convinced that along with the system of exploitation its political protective device, the state, will also disappear, to give place to the administration of public affairs on the basis of free agreement, they do not all overlook that the efforts of the worker within

the existing political order must always be directed toward defending all achieved political and social rights against every attack of reaction, constantly widening the scope of these rights wherever the opportunity for this presents itself.

For just as the worker cannot be indifferent to the economic conditions of his life in existing society, so he cannot remain indifferent to the political structure of his country. Both in the struggle for his daily bread and for every kind of propaganda looking toward his social liberation 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 whenever the attempt is made to wrest them from him. It is, therefore, utterly absurd to assert that the Anarcho-Syndicalists take no interest in the political struggles of the time. The heroic battle of the C.N.T. in Spain against Fascism is, perhaps, the best proof that there is not a grain of truth in this idle talk.

But the point of attack in the political struggle lies, not in the legislative bodies, but in the people. Political rights do not originate in parliaments; they are, rather, forced on parliaments from without. And even their enactment into law has for a long time been no guarantee of their security. Just as the employers always try to nullify every concession they had made to labour as soon as opportunity offered, as soon as any signs of weakness were observable in the workers' organisations, so governments also are always inclined to restrict or to abrogate completely rights and freedoms that have been achieved if they imagine that the people will put up no resistance. Even in these countries where such things as freedom of the press, right of assembly, right of combination and the like have long existed, governments are constantly trying to restrict these rights or to reinterpret them by juridical hair-splitting. Political rights do not exist because they have been legally set down on a piece of paper, but only when they have become the ingrown habit of a people, and when any attempt to impair them will meet with the violent resistance of the populace. Where this is not the case, there is no help in any parliamentary Opposition or any Platonic appeals to the constitution. One compels respect from others when he knows how to defend his dignity as a human being. This is not only true in private life, it has always been the same in political life as well.

The peoples owe all the political rights and privileges which we enjoy today in greater or lesser measure, not to the good will of their governments, but to their own strength. Governments have employed every means that lay 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. One need only study the history of the past three hundred years to understand by what relentless struggles every right has to be wrested inch by inch from the despots. What hard struggles, for example, had the workers in England, France, Spain, and other countries to endure to compel their governments to recognise the right of trade union organisation. In France the prohibition against trade unions persisted until 1886. Had it not been for the incessant struggles of the workers, there would be no right of combination in the French Republic even today. Only after the workers had by direct action confronted parliament with accomplished facts, did the

pernicious 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. The task of the trade union has heretofore been restricted almost exclusively to the protection of the worker as producer. As long as the employer was observing the hours of labour agreed on and paying the established wage this task was being performed. In other words: the trade union is interested only in the conditions under which its members work, not in the kind of work they perform. Theoretically, it is, indeed, asserted that the relation between employer and employee is based upon a contract for the accomplishment of a definite purpose. The purpose in this case is social production. But a contract has meaning only when both parties participate equally in the purpose. In reality, however, the worker has today no voice in determining production, for this is given over completely to the employer. The consequence is that the worker is debased by doing a thousand things which constantly serve only to injure the whole community for the advantage of the employer. He is compelled to make use of inferior and often actually injurious materials in the fabrication of his products, to erect wretched dwellings, to put up spoiled foodstuffs, and to perpetuate innumerable acts that are planned to cheat the consumer.

To interfere vigorously here is, in the opinion of the Revolutionary Unionists, the great task of the trade unions of the future. An advance in this direction would at the same time enhance the position of the workers in society, and in large measure confirm that position. Various efforts in this field have already been made, as witness, for example, the strike of the building-workers in Barcelona, who refused to use poor material and the wreckage from old buildings in the erection of workers' dwelling (1902), the strikes in various large restaurants in Paris because the kitchen workers were unwilling to prepare for serving cheap, decaying meat (1906), and a long list of instances in recent times; all going to prove that the workers' understanding of their responsibility to society is growing. The resolution of the German armament workers at the congress in Erfurt (1919) to make no more weapons of war and to compel their employers to convert their plants to other uses, belongs also to this category. And it is a fact that this resolution was maintained for almost two years, until it was broken by the Central Trades Unions. The Anarcho-Syndicalist workers of Sommerda resisted with great energy to the last, when their place were taken by members of the "free labour unions."

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 their turning their weapons against their brethren in time of a strike. This has cost them great sacrifices; but they have never ceased their efforts, because they know that they can regain their efforts only by incessant warfare against the dominant powers. At the same time, however, the anti-militarist propaganda contributes in large measure to oppose the threat of wars to come with the general strike. The Anarcho-Syndicalists know that wars are only waged in the interest of the ruling classes; they believe, therefore, that any means is

latter defends himself as best he can and for this purpose makes use of the means which the circumstances put in his hands. 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. There are today in every industry a hundred means by which the workers can seriously disturb production, everywhere under the modern system of division of labour, where often the slightest disturbance in one branch of the work can bring to a standstill the entire process of production. Thus the railway workers in France and Italy by the use of the so-called greve perlee (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. When the employers are at once faced with the fact that even in an unfavourable situation, where the workers would not dare to think of a strike, they still have in their hands the means of defending themselves, there will also come to them the understanding that it does not pay to make use of some particular hard situation of the workers of force harder conditions of living upon them.

The so-called sit down strike, which was transplanted from Europe to America with such surprising rapidity and consists of the workers remaining in the plant day and night without turning a finger in order to prevent the installing of strikebreakers, 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. In no field is there as so much scope for the imagination of the worker as in this. But the sabotage of the workers is directed against the employers, never against the consumers. In his report before the C.G.T. in Toulouse in 1897, Emile Pouget laid special stress on this point. All the reports in the bourgeois press about bakers who had baked glass in their bread, or farm hands who had poisoned milk, and the like, are malicious inventions, designed solely to prejudice the public against the workers.

Sabotaging the consumers is the age old-privilege of the employers. The deliberate adulteration of provisions, the construction of wretched slums and unsanitary tenements of the poorest and cheapest material, the destruction of great quantities of foodstuffs in order to keep up prices, while millions are perishing in direst misery, the constant efforts of the employers to force the subsistence of the workers down to the lowest point possible, in order to grab for themselves the highest possible profits, the shameless practice of the armament industries of supplying foreign countries with complete equipment for war, which, given the appropriate occasion, may be employed to lay waste the country that produced them, all these and many more are merely individual items in an interminable list of types of sabotage by capitalists against their own people.

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 producers than with the protection of the community against the most

government see itself obliged to take the new situation into account and give legal sanction to the trade unions. What is important is not that governments have decided to concede certain rights to the people, but the reason why they have had to do this. To him who fails to understand the connection here history will always remain a book with seven seals.

Of course, if one accepts Lenin's phrase and thinks of freedom as merely a "bourgeois prejudice," then, to be sure, political rights and liberties have no value at all for the workers. But then all the countless struggles of the past, all the revolts and revolutions to which we owe these rights, are also without value. To proclaim this bit of wisdom it would hardly have been necessary to overthrow tsarism, for even the censorship of Nicholas II would certainly have had no objection to the designation of freedom as a "bourgeois prejudice." Moreover, the great theorists of reaction, Joseph de Maistre and Louis Bonald, has already done this, though in different words, and the defenders of absolutism had been very grateful to them.

But the Anarcho-Syndicalists would be the every last to mistake the importance of these rights to the workers. If they, nevertheless, reject any participation in the work of bourgeois parliaments, it is not because they have no sympathy with political struggles in general, but because they are firmly convinced that parliamentary activity is for the workers the very weakest and the most hopeless form of the political struggle. For the bourgeois classes the parliamentary system is without a doubt an appropriate instrument for the settlement of such conflicts as arise, and for making profitable collaboration possible, as they are all equally interested in maintaining the existing economic order and the political organisation for the protection of that order. Now, where a common interest exists, a mutual agreement is possible and serviceable to all parties. But for the working class the situation is very different. For them the existing economic order is the source of their economic exploitation, and the organised power of the state the instrument of their political and social subjection. 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 impart to a system of social injustice the stamp of legal right and to induce the slave to set the stamp of legality on his own servitude.

But, most important of all, practical experience has shown that the participation of the workers in parliamentary activity cripples their power of resistance and dooms to futility their warfare against the existing system. Parliamentary participation has not brought the workers one iota nearer to their final goal; it has even prevented them from protecting the rights they have won against the attacks of the reaction. In Prussia, for example, the largest state in Germany, where the Social Democrats until shortly before Hitler's accession to power were the strongest party in the government and had control of the most important ministries in the country, Herr von Papen, after his appointment as Reichskanzler by Hindenburg, could venture to violate the constitution of the land and dissolve the Prussian ministry with only a lieutenant and a dozen soldiers. When the Socialist Party in its helplessness could think of nothing to do after this open breach of the constitution except to appeal to the high court of the Reich instead of meeting the perpetrators of the coup d'etat with open resistance,

the reaction knew they had nothing more to fear and from then on could offer the workers what they pleased. The fact is that von Papen's coup d'etat was merely the start along the road to the Third Reich.

Anarcho-Syndicalists, then, are not in any way opposed to the political struggle, but in their 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. The most trivial wage fight shows clearly that, whenever the employers find themselves in difficulties, the state steps in with the police, and even in some cases with the militia, to protect the threatened interests of the possessing classes. It would, therefore, be absurd for them to overlook the importance of the political struggle. Every event that affects the life of the community is of a political nature. In this sense, every important economic action, such, for example, as a general strike, 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 which for decades was carried on solely by the libertarian Socialists and the Syndicalists, and which was attended by tremendous sacrifices.

The fact is that, when the Socialist labour parties have wanted to achieve some decisive political reform, they have always found that they could not do so by their own strength and have been obliged to rely wholly on the economic fighting power of the working class. The political general strikes in Belgium, Sweden and Austria for the attainment of universal suffrage are proof of this. And in Russia it was the great general strike of the working people that in 1905 pressed the pen into the tsar's hand for the signing of the constitution. What the heroic struggle of the Russian intelligentsia had not been able to accomplish in decades, the united economic action of the working classes quickly brought to fulfilment.

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 which impelled the Revolutionary Unionists to centre all their activity on the Socialist education of the masses and on the utilisation of their economic and social power. Their method is that of direct action in both the economic and the political struggles of the time. That is the only method which has been able to achieve anything at all in every decisive moment in history. And the bourgeoisie in its struggles against absolutism has also made abundant use of this method, and by refusal to pay taxes, by boycott and revolution, has defiantly asserted its position as the dominant class in society. So much the worse if its representatives of today have forgotten the story of their fathers, and how bloody murder at the "unlawful methods" of the workers fighting for liberation. As if the law had ever permitted a subject class to shake off its yoke.

By direct action the Anarcho-Syndicalists mean every method of immediate warfare 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, such, for example, as that in Spain today, armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty.

try, of itself compels them to look about for new methods for the effective defence of their interests and their eventual liberation from the yoke of wage slavery.

Another important fighting device for direct action is the boycott. It can be employed by the workers both in their character of producers and of 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 purchaser the sign by which to distinguish the goods he wants from the spurious. Even the masters of the Third Reich experienced what a weapon the boycott can become in the hands of the great masses of people, when they had to confess that the international boycott against German goods had inflicted serious damage on German export trade. And this influence might have been greater still, if the trade unions had kept public opinion alert by incessant propaganda, and had continued to foster the protest against the suppression of the German labour movement.

As producers the boycott provides the workers with the means of imposing an embargo on individual plants whose managers show themselves especially hostile to trade unions. In Barcelona, Valencia and Cadiz the refusal of the longshoremen to unload German vessels compelled the captains of these vessels to discharge their cargoes in North African harbours. If the trade unions in the other countries had resolved on the same procedure, they would have achieved incomparably greater results than by Platonic protests. In any case the boycott is one of the most effective fighting devices in the hands of the working class, and the more profoundly aware of this device the workers become, the more comprehensive and successful will they become in their everyday struggles.

Among the weapons in the Anarcho-Syndicalist armoury is the one most feared by the employer and most harshly condemned as "unlawful." In reality we are dealing here with a method of economic petty warfare that is as old as the system of exploitation and political oppression itself. It is, in some circumstances, simply forced upon the workers, when every other device fails. 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 curtailment of wages or by lengthening of the hours of labour. The term itself is derived from the French word, sabot, wooden shoe, and means to work clumsily as if by sabot blows. The whole import of sabotage is exhausted in the motto: for bad wages, bad work. The employer himself acts on the same principle, when he calculates the price of his goods according to their quality. The producer finds himself in the same position: his goods are his labour-power, and it is only good and proper that he should try to dispose of it on the best terms he can get.

But when the employer takes advantage of the evil position of the producer to force the price of his labour-power as low as possible, he need not wonder when the

conflict, and are aware of what they have at stake, they become much more willing to make the necessary concessions, and, above all, they fear to take a course with the workers which might drive them to extremes. Even Jean Jaures who, as a Socialist parliamentarian, was not in agreement with the idea of the general strike, had to concede that the constant danger arising from the possibility of such a movement admonished the possessing classes to caution, and, above everything, made them shrink from the suppression of hard-won rights, since they saw that this could easily lead to catastrophe.

But at the time of a universal social crisis, or when, as today in Spain, the concern is to protect an entire people against the attacks of benighted reactionaries, the general strike is an invaluable weapon, for which there is no substitute. By crippling the whole public life it makes difficult mutual agreements of the representatives of the ruling classes and the local officials with the central government, even when it does not entirely prevent them. Even the use of the army is, in such cases, directed at very different tasks from those of political revolt. In the latter case it suffices for the government, so long as it can rely on the military, to concentrate its troops in the capital and the most important points in the country, in order to meet the danger that threatens.

A general strike, however, leads inevitably to a scattering of the military forces, as in such a situation the important concern is the protection of all important centres of industry and the transport system against the rebellious workers. But this means that military discipline, which is always strongest when soldiers operate in fixed formations, is relaxed. Where the military in small groups faces a determined people fighting for its freedom, there always exists the possibility that at least a part of the soldiers will reach some inner insight and comprehend that, after all, it is their own parents and brothers at whom they are pointing their weapons. For militarism, also, is primarily a psychologic problem, and its disastrous influence always manifests itself where the individual is given no chance to think about his dignity as a human being, no chance to see that there are higher tasks in life than lending oneself to the uses of a bloody oppressor of one's own people.

For the workers the general strike takes the place of the barricades of the political uprising. It is for them a logical outcome of the industrial system whose victims they are today, and at the same time it offers them their strongest weapon in their struggle for liberation, provided they recognise their own strength and learn how to use this weapon properly. William Morris, with the prophetic vision of the poet, foresaw this development in affair, when, in his splendid book *News from Nowhere*, he has the Socialist reconstruction of society preceded by a long series of general strikes of ever increasing violence, which shook the old system to its deepest foundations, until at last its supporters were no longer able to put up any resistance against this new enlightenment of the toiling masses in town and country.

The whole development of modern capitalism, which is today growing into an ever graver danger to society, can but serve to spread this enlightenment more widely among the workers. The fruitlessness of the participation of the organised workers in parliaments, which is today becoming more and more manifest in every coun-

Among these fighting techniques the strike, that is, organised refusal to work, is the most used. It plays in the industrial age the same role for the workers as did their frequent uprisings for the peasants in the feudal era. In its simplest form it is for the workers an indispensable means of raising their standard of living or defending their 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 their powers of resistance, showing them every day that every least right has to be won by unceasing struggle against the existing system.

Just as are the economic fighting organisations of the workers, so also are the daily wage-struggles a result of the capitalist economic order, and consequently, a vital necessity for the workers. Without these they would be submerged in the abyss of poverty. Certainly the social problem cannot be solved by wage-struggles alone, but they are the best educative equipment for making the workers acquainted with the real essence of the social problem, training them for the struggle for liberation from economic and social slavery. It may also be taken as true that so long as the worker has to sell hands and brain to an employer, he will in the long run never earn more than is required to provide the most indispensable necessities of life. But these necessities of life are not always the same, but are constantly changing with the demands which the worker makes on life.

Here we come to the general cultural significance of the labour struggle. The economic alliance of the producers not only afford them a weapon for the enforcement of better living conditions, it becomes for them a practical school, a university of experience, from which they draw instruction and enlightenment in richest measure. The practical experiences and occurrences of the everyday struggles of the workers find an intellectual precipitate in their organisations, deepen their understanding, and broaden their intellectual outlook. By the constant intellectual elaboration of their life experiences there are developed in individuals new needs and the urge for different fields of intellectual life. And precisely in this development lies the great cultural significance of these struggles.

True intellectual culture and the demand for higher interests in life does not become possible until man has achieved a certain material standard of living, which makes him capable of these. Without this preliminary any higher intellectual aspirations are quite out of the question. Men who are constantly threatened by direst misery can hardly have much understanding of the higher cultural values. Only after the workers, by decades of struggle, had conquered for themselves a better standard of living could there be any talk of intellectual and cultural development among them. But it is just these aspirations of the workers which the employers view with deepest distrust. For capitalists as a class, the well-known saying of the Spanish minister, Juan Bravo Murillo, still holds good today: "We need no men who can think among the workers; what we need is beasts of toil."

One of the most important results of the daily economic struggles is the development of solidarity among the workers, and this has for them a quite different meaning from the political coalition of parties whose following is composed of people of

every social class. A feeling of mutual helpfulness, whose strength is constantly being renewed in the daily struggle for the necessities of life, which is constantly making the most extreme demands on the co-operation of men subjected to the same conditions, operates very differently from abstract party principles, which for the most part are of only Platonic value. It grows into the vital consciousness of a community of fate, and this gradually develops into a new sense of right, and becomes the preliminary ethical assumption of every effort at the liberation of an oppressed class.

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 which the Anarcho-Syndicalists have set themselves. For this reason the sympathetic strike is one of their choicest weapons, and has developed in Spain to a compass it has not attained in any other country. 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 brethren, 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 and trusts private capitalism grows more and more into monopoly capitalism, this form of warfare is in most cases the only one by which the workers can still promise themselves success. Because of the internal transformation in industrial capitalism the sympathetic strike becomes for the workers the imperative of the hour. Just as the employers in their cartels and protective organisations are building an ever broader basis for the defence of their interests, so also the workers must turn their attention to creating for themselves by an ever wider alliance of their national and international economic organisations the required basis for solidaric mass action adequate for the demands of the time. The restricted strike is today losing more and more of its original importance, even if it is not doomed to disappear altogether. In the modern economic struggle between capital and labour the big strike, involving entire industries, will play a larger and larger part. Even the workers in the old craft organisations, which are as yet untouched by Socialist ideas, have grasped that, as is shown clearly enough by the rapid springing up of industrial unions in America in contrast with the old methods of the A.F. of L.

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. It is the most powerful weapon which the workers have at their command, and gives the most comprehensive expression to their strength as a social factor. After the French trade union congress in Marseilles (1892), and the later congresses of the C.G.T. (General Federation of Labour) had by a large majority declared for the propoganda of the general strike, it was the political labour parties in Germany and most other countries

which assailed most violently this form of proletarian action, and rejected it as "Utopian." "The general strike is general madness" was the trenchant phrase which was coined at that time by one of the most prominent leaders of the German Social Democracy. But the great strike movement of the years immediately following, in Spain, Belgium, Italy, Holland, Russia, and so on, showed clearly that this alleged "Utopia" lay wholly within the realm of the possible and did not arise from the imagination of a few revolutionary fanatics.

The general strike is, of course, not an agency that can be invoked arbitrarily on every occasion. It needs certain social assumptions to give it its proper moral strength and make it a proclamation of the will of the broad masses of the people. The ridiculous claim, which is so often attributed to the Anarcho-Syndicalists, that it is only necessary to proclaim a general strike in order to achieve a Socialist society in a few days, is, of course, just a silly invention of evil-minded opponents bent on discrediting an idea which they cannot attack by any other means.

The general strike can serve various purposes. It can be the last stage of a sympathetic strike, as for example, the general strike in Barcelona in February, 1902, or that in Bilbao in October, 1903, which enabled the mine workers to get rid of the hated truck system and compelled the employers to establish sanitary conditions on the mines. It can as easily be a means by which organised labour tries to enforce some general demand, as, for example, in the attempted general strike in the U.S.A. in 1886, to compel the granting of the eight-hour day in all industries. The great general strike of the English workers in 1926 was the result of a planned attempt by the employers to lower the general standard of living of the workers by a cut in wages.

But the general strike can also have political objectives in view, as, for example, the fight of the Spanish workers in 1904, for the liberation of political prisoners, or the general strike in Catalonia in July 1909, to compel the government to terminate the war in Morocco. And the general strike of the German workers in 1920, which was instituted after the so-called Kapp putsch and put an end to a government that had attained to power by a military uprising, belongs to this category; as do also the mass strikes in Belgium in 1903, and in Sweden in 1909, to compel the granting of universal suffrage, and the general strike of the Russian workers in 1905, for the granting of the constitution. But 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 reorganisation of the economic life by the workers themselves.

The great importance of the general strike lies in this: at one blow it brings the whole economic system to a standstill and shakes it to its foundations. Moreover, such an action is in no wise dependent on the practical preparedness of all the workers, as all the citizens of a country have never participated in a social overturn. That the organised workers in the most important industries quit work is enough to cripple the entire economic mechanism, which cannot function without the daily provision of coal, electric power, and raw materials of every sort. But when the ruling classes are confronted with an energetic, organised working class, schooled in daily