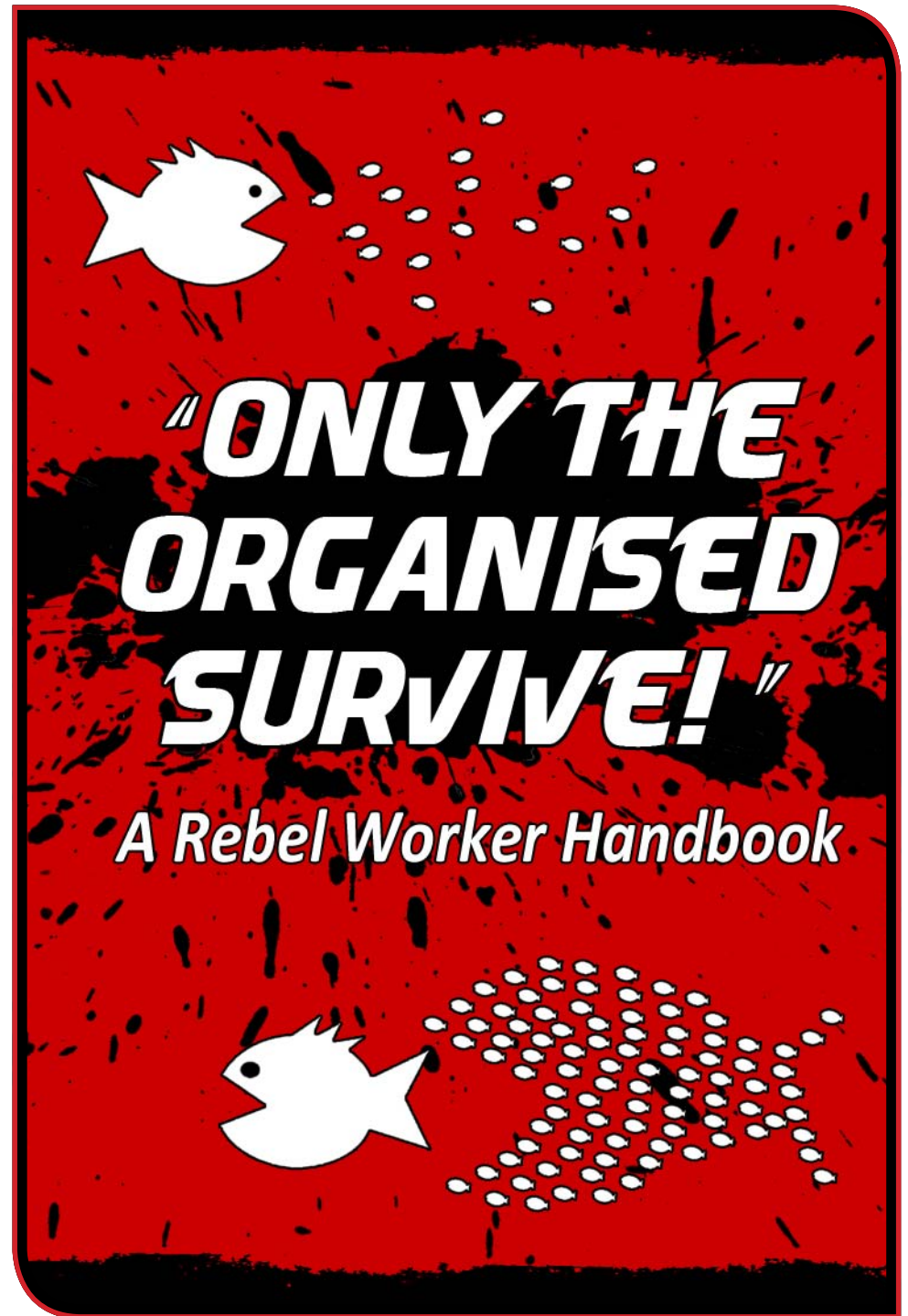




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"Knowledge is the key to be free!"



► Anarcho-Syndicalism in Spain

In 1936, a right wing coup attempt in Spain was foiled when Union members mobilised popular militias to resist them. When war broke out, factory and land owners fled the country leaving workers to run them for themselves. In areas controlled by the Anarchist CNT (National Confederation of Labour), 5 692 202 Hectares of large estates were communalised by the former peasant tenants into 1750 agrarian collectives in Aragon, Levant and Castille. 1850 factories and businesses were collectivised by 800 000 workers. Nearly all industry in Catalonia and 70% in Levant was collectivised. The CNT collectives ran the economy co-operatively and co-operated with businesses and industries collectivised by other Unions until Stalinist military forces began to imprison or kill all those in Spain who would not join a Russian-style dictatorship. Stalinists later returned the collectivised agriculture, businesses and industry to their former Capitalist owners.



***“ONLY THE
ORGANISED
SURVIVE!”***

A Rebel Worker Handbook



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Section 5: A Brief History of Worker Self-Management

► Syndicalism in Italy

The federation of the Italian Bottle-Blowers was organised in 1901. It opened its first co-operative glass factory at the end of 1902 in Milan, using money raised by the workers themselves, to provide work for 150 striking workers. The co-operative bought or built factories in Livorno, Imola, Sesto-Calendo and Asti, and leased another near Naples. By 1906 it employed 2000 workers, its factories were worth 750 000 Lira and it earned 300 000 Lira more than it spent. Syndicalism in Italy was weakened when workers were sent to fight WWI and was later destroyed by the Fascist dictatorship.

► Anarchist Communes in the Ukraine

When the Bolsheviks withdrew Russia from World War One, they agreed to give the Ukraine to the Germans and Austrians. By 1921, Anarchist partisans organised by Nestor Makhno expelled the occupying armies, defeated a Polish and Ukrainian nationalist counter-revolution and freed a region north of the Crimea. Large estates in this region that were taken over and operated by former peasants under Anarchist influence prospered, while areas where estates were looted because there was no Anarchist presence fell on hard times and looked to the Anarchist communal farming villages as a model of prosperity. Anarchist partisans fought a guerrilla war against the Red Army after the Bolsheviks began to force all Unions and collectives under the control of the Bolshevik dictatorship. The Bolsheviks later returned many large estates to their former owners.

Disrupting magnetically-stored information (such as cassette tapes, and poorly-shielded hard drives) can be done by exposing them to a strong magnetic field. Of course, it would be just as simple to “misplace” the discs and tapes that contain vital information. Restaurant workers can buy a bunch of live crickets or mice at the nearest pet shop, and liberate them in a convenient place. For bigger laughs, give the Health Inspectors an anonymous tip.

One thing that always haunts a strike call is the question of scabs and strike-breakers. In a railroad strike in 1886, strikers who took “souvenirs” from work home with them solved the scab problem. Oddly enough, the trains wouldn’t run without these small, crucial pieces, and the scabs found themselves with nothing to do. Of course, nowadays, it may be safer for workers to simply hide these pieces in a secure place at the jobsite, rather than trying to smuggle them out of the plant.

Use the boss’s letterhead to order a ton of unwanted office supplies and have it delivered to the office. If your company has a 0800 number, have all your friends jam the phone lines with angry calls about the current situation. Be creative with your use of superglue... the possibilities are endless.

► **Solidarity**

The best weapon is, of course, organisation. If one worker stands up and protests, the bosses will squash them like a bug. Squashed bugs are obviously of little use to their families, friends, and social movements in general. But if we all stand up together, the boss will have no choice but to take us seriously. They can fire any individual worker who makes a fuss, but they might find it difficult to fire the entire workforce.



Section 1: The Bosses Need Us... (We Don’t Need Them!)

► **What do bosses do?**

Scheduling - Deciding when work needs to be done. Setting deadlines. This could just as easily be done by the workers ourselves.

Co-ordinating - Making sure that activities which depend on each other don’t hold each other up. Making sure resources are distributed to those who need them. Often, the centralised control of resources is more of a bottleneck that keeps people from getting what they need to do their jobs. Much of this is actually done informally by the workers ourselves.

Accounting - This is a clerical job, counting the money we make for them.

Budgeting - The actual work is done by those who do the work and only compiled by the manager. The manager then sets priorities.

Staffing - Hiring, firing and assigning people to tasks.

The less work a boss does the more they are paid! This is because they are not paid for doing actual work. They are paid for how well they get others to do the most work for the least compensation. It also happens because bosses tend to use their power to make themselves richer.

► **What do Stockholders (Capitalists) do?**

Nothing!

Capitalists buy part of a company (“stock” is a measure of ownership) and receive a part of the value of what its workers produce (profit taken from workers is called “stock dividend”) or they rent their money to a company by buying bonds and are paid “interest.” They do not work for this money outside of the kind of brainwork a thief would use in choosing an easy victim.

► Where do profits come from?

You!

The cost of running a business is the money spent for labour, machinery and tools, materials, rent, utilities, interest on loans, maintenance, and other services. The value of labour is the difference between the income of the business and its non-labour expenses. Profit is the difference between the labour value and the money the boss actually pays the workers in salary and benefits.

A boss's performance is usually measured by how much profit they can squeeze out of us. Many are paid in stock capital or profit-sharing to make them more greedy.

► Having a boss is a dictatorship.

Modern bureaucracy was invented in Nazi Germany by a guy named Max Weber who patterned it after a military chain-of-command. Failure to follow orders results in discipline or being fired!

Modern production was invented by Henry Ford who wanted to reduce the actions of the workers to the repetitive motions of machines and Frederick Taylor who wanted to minimise the number of motions to maximise the "productivity" of each worker. Bosses design work tasks to dehumanise workers.

Many workplaces make you work overtime. Many workers are paid a fixed salary (instead of by the hour) so they can be worked as much as the boss likes without paying them for overtime.

Most workplaces discourage dissent, worker organising, or even asking questions of management outside of how to follow their orders.

Many workplaces pretend to involve workers in decision making to get them to spy on each other.

Many workplaces spy on their workers using time clocks, computer programs, hidden cameras, informers, and even private detectives. Some workplaces even limit the number of times and amount of time we can spend going to the toilet!

Many workplaces now make us wear uniforms.

► Dual Power (Ignoring the Boss)

The best way to get something done is to simply organise and do it ourselves. Rather than wait for the boss to give in to our demands and institute long-sought change, we often have the power to make those changes on our own, without the boss's approval.

The owner of a San Francisco coffeehouse was a poor money manager, and one week the paycheques didn't arrive. The manager kept assuring the workers that the cheques would be coming soon, but eventually the workers took things into their own hands. They began to pay themselves on a day-to-day basis straight out of the cash register, leaving receipts for the amounts advanced so that everything was out in the open. An uproar from the boss followed, but the cheques always arrived on time after that.

In a small printing shop in San Francisco's financial district, an old worn-out offset press was finally removed from service and pushed to the side of the pressroom. It was replaced with a brand new machine, and the manager stated his intention to use the old press "for envelopes only". It began to be cannibalised for spare parts by the press operators, though, just to keep some of the other presses running. Soon enough, it was obvious to everyone but the manager that this press would never see service again.

The printers asked the manager to move it upstairs to the storage room, since by now it only took up valuable space in an already crowded pressroom.

He ummed and awwed and never seemed to get around to it. Finally, one afternoon after the printers had punched out for the day; they got a moving dolly and wrestled the press into the lift to take it upstairs. The manager found them just as they got it into the lift, and, though he turned red at this open disobedience; he never mentioned the incident to them. The space where the press had been was converted to an "employee lounge", with several chairs and a magazine rack.

► Monkey-Wrenching

Monkey-wrenching is the general term for a whole host of tricks, devilry, and assorted nastiness that can remind the boss how much they need the workers (and how little we need them). While all these monkey-wrenching tactics are non-violent, most of them are major social no-no's. They should be used only in the most heated battles, where it is open wholesale class warfare between the workers and the bosses.

The tactic was so effective that the Pennsylvania legislature promptly introduced bills that would outlaw selective strikes.

► Whistle Blowing (The Open Mouth)

Sometimes simply telling people the truth about what goes on at work can put a lot of pressure on the boss. Consumer industries like restaurants and packing plants are the most vulnerable. And again, as in the case of the Good Work Strike, you'll be gaining the support of the public, whose money can make or break a business.

Whistle Blowing can be as simple as a face-to-face conversation with a customer, or it can be as dramatic as the engineer who revealed that the blueprints for a nuclear reactor had been reversed. Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*, blew the lid off the disgraceful health standards and working conditions of the meatpacking industry when it was published earlier last century.

Waiters can tell their restaurant clients about the various shortcuts and substitutions that go into creating the food being served to them. Just as Work to Rule puts an end to the usual relaxation of standards, Whistle Blowing reveals it for all to know.

► Sick-In

The Sick-In is a good way to strike without striking. The idea is to cripple your workplace by having all or most of the workers call in sick on the same day or days. Unlike the formal walkout, it can be used effectively by single departments and work areas, and can often be successfully used even without a formal union organisation. It is the traditional method of direct action for public employee unions, which are legally prevented from striking in a lot of regions.

At a New England, USA, mental hospital, just the thought of a Sick-In got results. A shop steward, talking to a supervisor about a fired union member, casually mentioned that there was a lot of flu going around, and wouldn't it be too bad if there weren't enough healthy people to staff the wards. At the same time – completely by coincidence, of course – dozens of people were calling the personnel office to see how much sick time they had left. The supervisor got the message, and the union member was rehired.

► Bosses are inefficient!

Many managers create unnecessary work or make you redo work “their way” just to satisfy their job or to make you think you have to go through them to get your work done.

Many managers create “empires” of things under their centralised control so you can't get resources or information you need to do your day-to-day work. Without a boss, access to these crucial resources would be decentralised and made available based on need.

► Bosses can get you killed!

Work is one of the leading causes of death from accidents and health problems.

Accidents occur when your boss tries to speed-up the work to increase their profit. Bosses try to cut costs by cutting safety measures and practices on the job. Jobs can be stressful due to overwork, harassment, competition, scheming, manipulation, etc. by bosses and co-workers who think they can kiss ass to get ahead. Stress will hurt your health, weaken your body and ultimately shorten your life. “Accidents at work kill people, but bad working conditions are no accident.”

► But workers need to be told what to do?

Why?

Workers get together on the job informally all the time to talk about how to do a job or solve a problem on the job. We don't ask the boss because s/he doesn't know how to do the work.

Workers regularly get together with friends or family members to make decisions without the need for a boss. We go out to have a good time together. We plan holidays and road trips. We make “management” decisions all the time about our home and personal life.

► But bosses go to school to learn how to be managers...

Actually, most of them don't have degrees in business administration or public administration (MBA, MPA). Master's Degree programs in these fields teach accounting and capitalist economics, but you won't learn anything about people or problem-solving which you don't already know from experience.

What you learn is management and motivational theory: how to exploit people through psychology. Most managers (bosses) just have business degrees, at best, which is a degree in Capitalism: Banking, Accounting, Profiteering, etc.

► **But bosses create jobs...**

No!

The boss only hires and fires us. Jobs are created because the boss sees a chance to get richer, but the amount of work involved is greater than what those who currently work for the boss can do alone. Bosses will do anything possible to avoid hiring new workers including assigning more tasks to each worker (“work speed-ups”), buying machines to take workers jobs and paying overtime. Overtime costs a boss less than hiring a new worker, but the workers who work overtime actually get paid less than that additional work after they pay tax (it may even increase their tax rate).

► **But my boss is “nice”...**

Don't trust them!

A boss is a boss is a boss is a boss... ...!

The boss knows that their job depends on being able to exploit us. We can depend on them only to tell us what we want to hear. The boss you think you know and “trust” is a façade.

If you work hard, they will work you harder.

If we do a good job at work, they will criticise the quality of our work then take credit for it from their boss. They will use our work to get themselves a promotion.

If there is a problem at work, they will tell their boss it's your fault. If you know more than your boss, they will try to get you fired or harass you so that you will quit or make mistakes they can use against you to get you fired. They will tell you things like “I want to help you” or “you are over-qualified”. When you hear this, you will know the end is near.

In New York City, USA, IWW restaurant workers, after losing a strike, won some of their demands by taking the advice of IWW organisers to “pile up the plates, give ‘em double helpings, and figure cheques on the low side”.

► **Sit-down Strikes**

A strike doesn't have to be long to be effective. Timed and executed right, a strike can be won in minutes. Such strikes are “sit-downs” when everyone just stops work and sits tight, or “mass grievances” when everybody leaves work to go to the boss's office to complain about something of importance.

The Detroit (USA) IWW used the Sit-down to good effect at the Hudson Motor Car Company between 1932 and 1934. “Sit down and watch your pay go up” was the message that rolled down the assembly line on stickers that had been stuck on pieces of work. The steady practice of the sit-down raised wages 100% (from \$.75 an hour to \$1,50) in the middle of a depression.

IWW theatre extras, facing a 50% pay cut, waited for the right time to strike. The play had 150 extras dressed as Roman soldiers to carry the Queen on and off the stage. When the cue for the Queen's entrance came, the extras surrounded the Queen and refused to move until the pay was not only restored, but also tripled.

Sit-down occupations are still powerful weapons. In 1980, the KKR Corporation announced that it was going to close its Houdaille plant in Ontario, USA, and move it to South Carolina. The workers responded by occupying the plant for two weeks. KKR was forced to negotiate fair terms for the plant closing, including full pensions, severance pay, and payment toward health insurance premiums.

► **Selective Strikes**

Unpredictability is a great weapon in the hands of the workers.

Pennsylvania, USA, teachers used the Selective Strike to great effect in 1991, when they walked a picket line on Monday and Tuesday, reported for work on Wednesday, struck again on Thursday, and reported for work on Friday and Monday.

This on-again, off-again tactic not only prevented the administrators from hiring scabs to replace the teachers, but also forced administrators who hadn't been in a classroom for years to staff the schools while the teachers were out.

enforce the rules, that these shortcuts must be taken in order to meet production quotas on time.

But what would happen if each of these rules and regulations were followed to the letter? Confusion would result – production and morale would fall. And best of all, we can't get into trouble with the tactic because we are, after all, "just following the rules".

Under nationalisation, French railroad strikes were forbidden. Nonetheless, railroad workers found other ways of expressing their grievances. One French law requires the engineer to make sure of the safety of any bridge over which the train must pass. If, after a personal examination, they are still doubtful, then they must consult other members of the train crew. Of course, every bridge was so inspected, every crew was so consulted, and none of the trains ran on time.

In order to get certain demands without losing their jobs, the Austrian postal workers strictly observed the rule that all mail must be weighed to see if the proper postage had been stuck on. Before, they had passed without weighing all those letters and parcels that were clearly underweight, thus living up to the spirit of the regulation but not to its exact wording. By taking each separate piece of mail to the scales, carefully weighing it, and then returning it to its proper place, the postal workers had the office full with unweighed mail on the second day.

► **Good Work Strike**

One of the biggest problems for service industry workers is that many forms of direct action, such as Slowdowns, end up hurting the consumer (mostly fellow workers) more than the boss. One way around this is to provide a better or cheaper service – at the boss' expense, of course.

Workers at Mercy Hospital in France, who were afraid that patients would go untreated if they went on strike, instead refused to file the billing slips for drugs, lab tests, treatments, and therapy. As a result, the patients got better care (since time was being spent caring for them instead of doing paperwork), for free. The hospital's income was cut in half, and panic-stricken administrators gave in to all the workers' demands after three days.

In 1968, bus and train workers in Lisbon, Spain, gave free rides to all passengers to protest a denial of wage increases. Conductors and drivers arrived for work as usual, but the conductors did not pick up their money satchels. Needless to say, public support was solidly behind these take-no-fare strikers.

► **But what if the boss is the owner?**

First of all, most small businesses are usually owned by the bank (through a mortgage or small business loan) and a landlord (most are in rented commercial property) who collect money from you through your boss for doing nothing.

It is arguable that many small business "owners"/operators work harder than if they were working for someone else, but the chances are, even if they do, they still don't pay their workers for the full value of the work their workers do. The best evidence of this is that while you ride a bike to work, the boss owns a car. While you have to rent or share a room, the boss has a house. Obviously, you can't afford to live like your boss and even the hardest working boss doesn't do that much more than you do, to be equal to the difference in the money each of you get out of the business.

► **But, if I work hard and do what I'm told, I can be rich and successful...**

People who work hard and are smart at what they do are usually viewed as a threat by their boss because they probably know as much or more about the work than those in charge.

Working for a boss isn't competitive. Chances are, if your boss wants to hire or promote someone, they will choose someone they think is like them or a friend, regardless of their qualifications.

Take a look around you. How many rich people do you see? There aren't a lot compared to the rest of us. Now, common sense tells us that if you subtract the majority of rich people who only inherited their money, there is only a handful left and they all got their money from owning stock or property and not from honest work. At best, hard work can make you comfortable. At worst, it will make you sick and your boss rich! The best way to insure that you are working for yourself is to have no boss at all!





Section 2: How Would We Work Without Bosses?

► How are decisions made?

We are organised into working groups based on what we do (our tasks).

Decisions are made democratically by those who do the work. Each group sends a representative (called a delegate) to co-ordinating meetings for their section of the workplace. Each section co-ordinating committee sends a delegate to the co-ordinating committee for the workplace.

Delegates can be changed at any time by the group who chooses them.

The delegates have no authority over the groups.

Conflicts are resolved through mediation and arbitration by someone neutral and impartial.

► How is work organised?

Working groups plan the work and divide up the tasks. Without a boss you don't have to wait for them to OK everything, you just agree with your co-workers what needs to be done. We decide for ourselves which jobs we wish to learn. Co-ordinating Committees co-ordinate scheduling and the allocation of group resources to projects. It is also how working groups share information and find out what's going on at the workplace.

The workplace co-ordinating committee co-ordinates budgeting and major functions like accounting, purchasing and sales so that production is based on demand for the products or services of the workplace.

New workers are brought into a workplace when the current workers agree that more people are needed.

► Slowdown

The slowdown has a long and honourable history. In 1899, the organised dockworkers of Glasgow, Scotland, demanded a 10% increase in wages, but were met with refusal by the bosses and went on strike. Strike-breakers were brought in from among the agricultural workers, and the Dockers had to acknowledge defeat and return to work under the old wages. But before they went back to work, they heard this from the secretary of their union:

"You are going back to work at the old wage. The employers have repeated time and again that they were delighted with the work of the agricultural labourers who have taken our place for several weeks during the strike. But we have seen them at work. We have seen that they could not even walk a vessel and that they dropped half the merchandise they carried; in short, that two of them could hardly do the work of one of us. Nevertheless, the employers have declared themselves enchanted with the work of these fellows. Well, then, there is nothing for us to do but the same. Work as the agricultural labourers worked."

This order was obeyed to the letter. After a few days the contractors sent for the union secretary and begged him to tell the dockworkers to work as before, and that they were willing to grant the 10% pay increase.

At the turn of the century, a gang of section men working on a railroad in Indiana, USA, were notified of a cut in their wages. The workers immediately took their shovels to the blacksmith shop and cut two inches from the scoops. Returning to work they told the boss "short pay, short shovels".

Or imagine this. Train operators in Australia are allowed to ask for "10-501's" (toilet breaks) anywhere along the mainline and Central Control cannot say no. In reality, this rarely happens. But what would management do if suddenly every train operator began taking extended 10-501's on each trip they made?

► Work to Rule

Almost every job is covered by a maze of rules, regulations, standing orders, and so on, many of them completely unworkable and generally ignored.

Workers often violate orders, resort to our own ways of doing things, and disregard lines of authority simply to meet the goals of the company. There is often an unspoken understanding, even by the managers whose job it is to

walk off our jobs and refuse to produce profits for the boss until we get what we want. This is the preferred tactic of many unions, since this action is easily controllable (in other words, stoppable), but is one of the least effective ways of confronting the boss.

The bosses, with their large financial reserves, are better able to withstand a long drawn-out strike than we are. In many cases, strike funds are non-existent or not sufficient. And worst of all, a long walk-out only gives the boss a chance to replace striking workers with a scab (replacement) workforce.

We are far more effective when we take direct action while still on the job. By deliberately reducing the boss' profits while still continuing to collect wages; we can cripple the boss without giving some scab the opportunity to take our jobs.

Direct action, by definition, means those tactics we can undertake ourselves, without the "help" of government agencies, union bureaucrats, or high-priced lawyers. Running to the labour court for help may be useful in some cases, but it is NOT a form of direct action.

What follows are some of the most popular forms of direct action that workers have used to get what they wanted. Yet nearly every one of these tactics is, technically speaking, illegal. Every major victory won by labour over the years was achieved with militant direct actions that were, in their time, illegal and subject to police repression. In the United States, for example, up until the 1930's the laws surrounding labour unions were simple – there were none.

Most courts held labour unions to be illegal conspiracies that damage "free trade", and strikers were often beaten and shot by police, state militia and private security goons.

The legal right of workers to organise is now officially recognised by law, yet so many restrictions exist that effective action is as difficult as ever. For this reason, any worker thinking about direct action on the job – bypassing the legal system and hitting the boss where they are weakest – should be fully aware of labour law, how it is applied, and how it may be used against labour activists.

At the same time, we must realise that the struggle between the bosses and us is not a soccer match – it is war. Under these circumstances, we must use what works, whether the bosses (and their courts) like it or not.

Here, then, are the most useful forms of direct action.

► **How are workers paid?**

The workers decide how much of the income earned by their work goes to keep the business going and how much goes to them as compensation for their labour. Without "make work" from bosses, every job becomes equally necessary: both physical and brain work. The workers may choose to each take an equal share or to pay everyone based on how many hours they work.

Without stockholders and overpaid bosses, more money goes to those who actually do the work.

► **What about benefits?**

Without bosses, we are no longer considered "expendable." Medical Care, Dental Care, Child Care, Disability, Vacation Time, Sick Time and Retirement are considered part of the cost of maintaining the workplace and are paid for out of the earnings of the workplace.

The workplace also covers the cost of your tools, safety equipment and training.

► **What about promotions?**

Tasks are assigned based on our skills and abilities: what we know and can do. There is no "kissing ass" because no one tells anyone else what to do and people are paid based on their work and not their position.

We learn on-the-job how to do more and more complex tasks. Self-managed workplaces have apprenticeship/internship procedures for new workers.

The only "promotion" is in the area to responsibility. Since no one is in charge, the working group gives the most responsibility to those they trust.

The reward is personal satisfaction and respect.

► **What about shirkers?**

By doing away with the real parasites in the workplace (bosses), we have a lot more people to do the work and we can reduce the amount of work everyone has to do to be productive. This means that the workday can be shorter and more flexible and that work won't be as strenuous. People can also choose to work part time.

Without a boss, the stress at work will be lower.

Shirking is usually a subconscious response to being exploited. Without exploitation, there will be less incentive to shirk off work.

Those who still want to stand by and let their co-workers do the work while they do nothing will be stealing from us. It is up to us to decide if and when someone's laziness is unfair to the rest of us. Workers who try to live off the work of others while doing nothing will be kicked out of the job at the discretion of their co-workers.



Section 4: How to Fire Your Boss

All of the tactics discussed below depend for their success on solidarity, on the co-ordinated actions of a large number of workers. Individual acts of sabotage offer little more than a fleeting sense of revenge, which may admittedly be all that keeps you sane on a bad day at work. But for a real feeling of collective empowerment, there's nothing quite like direct action by a large number of angry workers to make your day.

THE INDIGNITY OF WORKING FOR A LIVING is well known to anyone who ever has. Democracy, the great principle on which our society is supposedly founded, is thrown out the window as soon as we punch the time clock at work.

With no say over what we produce, or how that production is organised, and with only a small portion of that product's value finding its way into our paycheques, we have every right to be pissed off at our bosses.

Ultimately, of course, we need to create a society in which working people make all the decisions about the production and distribution of goods and services. Harmful or useless industries, such as arms and chemical manufacturing, or the banking and insurance scams, would be eliminated. The real essentials, like food, shelter, and clothing, could be produced by everyone working just a few hours each week.

In the meantime, however, we need to develop strategies that both build towards this society AND fight the day-to-day drudgery of today's wage-slavery.

We believe that direct action in the workplace is the key to achieving both these goals. But what do we mean by direct action?

Direct action is any form of action that we take directly and collectively, and that cripples the bosses' ability to make a profit and makes him/her cave in to our demands. The best-known form of direct action is the strike, in which we simply

employer has to be built into the increasing activities. The first confrontation may be something as simple as wearing a "Vote No" button. If people are not willing to risk upsetting the boss, they won't win.

Win Small Victories. Most movements, from a small group in one workplace, to massive social protests which changed society (e.g. the anti-apartheid movement), grow on the basis of small victories. The victories give us confidence that we can do more. They win us new supporters who now see that "You can fight the boss." With each victory the group becomes more confident and, therefore, more capable of winning larger victories.

Organising is Everything. Organisation need not be overly formal or structurally top-heavy, but it must be there. A telephone tree and a mailing list may be all the organisation that you need, but if those things are what you need, then you must have them. The last twenty years have supplied many examples of reform movements that grew, fought hard - and then died because they didn't stay organised. As one labour organiser, Bill Slater, said, "**Only the organised survive.**"



Section 3: Organising Your Workplace

*You Have a Problem at Work. You believe that Management is unfair.
Something has to be done. Where do you begin?*

► General

The most important advice is to be well organised. Legal strategies can aid day-to-day work. They can't take the place of it. Any position, legal or otherwise is going to be stronger if the people behind it act as a group, have plans that are thought out, and follow through on them. If the matter comes to a hearing or to court, any judge is going to be impressed by a well-attended and well-organised presentation.

Don't set yourself up. Be a model worker, come on time, and be above reproach.

Keep a notebook of all suspicious things. Record the five W's: *What* happened, *Where* it happened, *When* it happened, *Who* saw it (names, addresses, phone numbers), and *why* each party claimed they acted as they did.

► No Personal Problems

The employers try to make us believe that our problems are merely personal. For example: the boss calls Portia into the office and gives her a warning for being late. Portia explains that she was late because her sitter was late. The boss says he's sorry, but he can't bend the rules for one person. As she leaves the office, Portia may think: "But it isn't one person, it's everyone in this office. Everybody in this place has been absent or late at least once because of a problem with child care."

And it isn't just that office. A reporter once wrote, "[what if a union of working mothers held] a one-day nation-wide strike. In unison at a predetermined time,

we will rise and say, “My kid is sick, and so is my sitter,” and walk out. Look around your office. Think how much work wouldn’t get done.”

The need for childcare - to choose just one example - affects tens of millions of workers. The same applies to other “personal” problems such as reactions to chemicals, injuries, and stress. It is in management’s interest to make the problems appear to be “personal” so that management will not bear responsibility.

► Ask Questions and Listen to the Answers

You have a problem; where do you begin?

Some people when they first feel that they have been treated unfairly fly into a rage or start loudly speaking out against the boss. This can be dangerous. Management jealousy guards its authority in the workplace, and when you begin to question authority, you become a threat. In most workplaces, from the moment you begin to question authority, you become a troublemaker in management’s eyes. If you have never before made any waves where you work, you may be shocked, hurt or angered by how quickly management turns against you. This is one more reason not to act alone, and also to be careful when you begin to talk to others.

Talk to your co-workers and ask them what they think about what’s happening at work lately. What do they think about the problems you’re concerned about. Listen to what others have to say. Get their views and opinions. Most people think of an organiser as an agitator and rabble-rouser (and there are times when an organiser must be those things), but a good organiser is first of all one who asks good questions and listens well to others.

Having listened well, the organiser is able to express not only his or her own views and feelings but those of the group. Almost inevitably there will be some people who are more concerned than others, and a few of those people will want to do something about it. Those few people now form the initial core of your “organisation.” You might ask the two most interested people to have coffee or lunch with you, introduce them to each other, and then ask, “What do you think we should do about this?” If they are indeed ready to do something, not just complain, you are almost ready to begin organising.

authority is the government, the boss, the union - or you. An effective organiser encourages co-workers to think for themselves.

Talk One-on-One. Almost every experienced activist agrees that “The most important thing about organising is personal one-to-one discussion.” Leaflets are necessary, meetings are important, rallies are wonderful – but none of them will ever take the place of one-on-one discussion. Frequently, when you have simply listened to a co-worker and heard what is on her or his mind, you have won them over because you are the only one who will listen. When you talk to Anna at the next desk and overcome her fears, answer her questions, lift her morale, invite her to the meeting, or take her to the rally - that is what organising is all about.

Find the Natural Organisers or Instigators. Every workplace has its social groupings of co-workers and friends. Each group has its opinion makers, its natural organisers and its instigators. They are not always the loudest or the most talkative, but they are the ones the others listen to and will choose to represent them. You will have gone a long way if you win over these natural organisers.

Get People Involved in Activity. Life is not a classroom and people do not learn simply by going to meetings or reading leaflets. Most people learn, change, and grow in the process of action. Will you take this leaflet? Will you pass it on to your friend? Will you mail in this postcard? Will you sign this petition? If you want to develop new organisers, you must give them something they can do, however small the first step is.

Make That Collective Activity. However, the point is not only to get individuals involved, but also to join them together in a solidarity-conscious group. We want to create a group that sees itself as a whole: we are the union. We are the movement. Will you come to the meeting? Can you get the whole department to visit the boss together? Can we count on all of you for the picket line?

Activities Should Escalate Over Time. Ask people to become involved in activities of increasing commitment and difficulty. Are you willing to wear a button saying “Vote No”? Will you vote against the contract? Will you vote for a strike? Are you prepared to walk a picket line? Are you willing to be arrested? Some union campaigns have included hundreds of people willing to go to jail for something they believed in. For many of them it started with that first question, Will you take this leaflet?

Confront Management. Organising is about changing power relationships, the balance of forces between management and workers. Confrontation with the

bring to bear to get that person back in line. This applies to supervisory personnel too, especially the supervisor who likes to think he or she is everyone's friend.

► The Balance Of Power

The bottom line for this type of workplace organisation is to tip the balance of power in our favour. It can win grievances, for example. If grievances remain individual problems or are kept in the hands of just the steward or union higher-ups, the natural organisation and loyalty that exists among work groups is lost. Chances are that the grievance is lost, too.

However, if the work groups can be used to make a show of unity, the threat that production could be hampered can be enough to force management into a settlement. For example, back in the die-casting plant: a machine operator was fired on made up charges. A representative of that work group informed key people in the skilled trades who had easy access to all workers in the plant to tell them something was going to happen at lunch time in the lunch room.

At each lunch-break, a meeting was held to explain the situation. It was decided to organise for a symbolic action. The next day black armbands were handed out in the parking lot to everyone entering work. The key people in every work group were informed to use their influence to make sure everybody participated in the action. It was suggested that everyone had an off day once in a while, and it would really be a shame if everyone had an off day at the same time.

After two days of this, the machine operator was brought back to work. Such an action would have been impossible without recognition of the informal work groups and their representatives. The grievance procedure worked because management understood that the grievance had become the concern of all the groups and that problems lay ahead unless it was resolved.

► Some Basic Principles

The following is a list of what successful organisers' say are the most important principles to remember:

Question Authority. Organising begins when people question authority. Someone asks, "What are they doing to us? Why are they doing it? Is it right?" Encourage people to ask, 'Who is making the decisions, who is being forced to live with the decisions, and why should that be so?' People should not accept a rule or an answer simply because it comes from the authorities, whether that

► Map Your Workplace

Knowledge is power. Or at least it is the beginning of power.

You will want to know everything you can about your work place and your employer. This will be a long-term, on-going process of education. You should begin with your department. Remember, all the information you gather can be used by you against your employer or by them against you so be sure not to let it fall into the hands of management or their supporters.

The steward and/or shop floor activist cannot afford to overlook the natural organisation that exists in most work places.

Resist the tendency to complicate shop floor organisation by establishing artificial structures or involved committees and caucuses without first taking advantage of the organisation that already exists. "Mapping" your work place will help you to communicate with your co-workers and increase the union's power.

Management has long understood the value of identifying informal work groups, their natural organisers, and their weak links. In fact, one of the main thrusts of management training is to develop strategies to alter the psychology of the work place.

A company called United Parcel Service in America, for example, has developed its psychological manipulation techniques into a fine art. The UPS managers' training manual, titled *Charting Spheres of Influence*, shows how to map the work place to identify the informal work groups, isolate natural organisers or instigators in those groups, exploit the weak links, and in the end, break up the groups if they can't be used to management's advantage.

While most companies have not developed their techniques to the same level that UPS has, many do use some of the same methods. Have outspoken workers, instigators or organisers in your work place been transferred, promoted into management or singled out for discipline? Are work groups broken up and rearranged periodically? Has the layout to the work place been arranged to make communication between workers difficult? Do you get to walk around on your job? Who does? Who doesn't? Are certain people picked on or disciplined by management in public? How does this affect the rest of the work force? Do you feel you are always under surveillance? You get the point. All of the above can be used to break up unity and communication between the workers in your shop.

How to Map Your Workplace

If you work in a large shop, you may want to begin by mapping just your department or shift and then work with other stewards and/or shop floor activists to piece together a map of the entire work place.

You can begin by drawing an outline of your department and putting in work stations, desks, machines, etc. - a floor plan. Now place a circle where each worker is usually stationed, and write in their names. If you can, chart the flow of production by using a broken line or arrow. Indicate on your map where members of management are usually stationed and their normal path through the shop. Mark the places where workers tend to gather (break areas, lunch rooms, bathrooms, water fountains).

Now identify and circle the informal work groups. Informal work groups are groups of workers who work face-to-face with each other every day. They have the opportunity to communicate with each other every day while working and perhaps spend time together on breaks, eat lunch together, or generally hang out with each other.

Mark the influential people or influential work group organisers or instigators. In each group is there a person who seems to enjoy a special influence or respect? Sometimes they are stewards or activists, but in many cases the organisers or instigators will not be. Do conversations in the group ever get into shoptalk? If so, what do they talk about? Is there an unspoken code of behaviour in these groups towards management or problems at work? Is there an informal production standard that is followed and enforced by group members?

If you are aware of loners or people who don't mix with any group, indicate that by using some special mark. Also identify the weakest links: any friends of the bosses, perhaps a part-timer or new hire, and anyone who is particularly scared.

You may want to begin taking notes on each worker and record such things as when the person started work, grievances filed, whether they have been active in any union projects, etc. Keep these notes on separate index cards in a file.

Your map may show you how the workplace is set up to keep people apart, a good reason for map-making. But the real reason for map-making is to develop more unity in the workplace.

Using Your Map

Let's say you have an important message to communicate, but you don't have the time or resources to reach every one of your co-workers. If you can reach the natural organisers in the informal work groups and get them on your side, you can bet that the word will get around to everyone. Once organisers have been identified and agree to co-operate, it is possible to develop a network which includes both stewards and these natural organisers who can exert considerable power and influence.

Informal work groups also have the advantage of creating certain loyalties among their members. You can draw on this loyalty to figure out unified strategies for problems, and take advantage of people's natural tendency to stick up for those who are close to them.

Sometimes it is necessary to negotiate between the work groups which, while experiencing common problems, also have concerns involving only their own members. For example, at one shop, two informal work groups existed in the department. One group consisted of machine operators who die-casted transmission cases and the other consisted of inspectors. Management didn't allow inspectors to talk to machine operators.

At one point management increased machine operators' production quotas, which caused inspectors to mark many of the pieces as scrap, because they were having trouble keeping up with the production too. Both work groups were facing pressures from the speed-up and tended to blame each other.

Eventually, representatives of the two work groups worked out an arrangement to deal with the speed-up. It was agreed that the inspectors would mark as scrap any transmission case with the tiniest little flaw, causing the scrap pile to pile up.

Management would then have to come up and turn off the machines in order to figure out what was causing the problem.

Soon every machine was experiencing a few hours of downtime every day. After a week of this, management reduced the production quota.

Besides working with the group organisers, it is important to draw in the loners too. More than likely, their apathy, isolation, or anti-union ideas stem from personal feelings of powerlessness and fear. If collective action can be pulled off successfully and a sense of security established through the group's action, fear and feelings of uselessness can be reduced.

If you have got a particularly tough character in your shop who seriously threatens unity, don't be afraid to use the social pressures that work groups can