

Direct Action and Sabotage

By William E. Trautmann

Published in 1912

Topics: [craft and industrial unionism](#), [IWW](#), [sabotage](#)

Awful! An Awful Thing!

A street speaker, once being asked by a bystander, was pressed to answer whether the socialists approved of direct action and sabotage. “Oh no, no, they are opposed to it, they are denouncing it, it is an anarchist doctrine.” Again the persistent bystander put the question. “What then is direct action, what is sabotage? It should be explained if so repulsive as a weapon of the workers in the warfare against the capitalist class.” — “Destruction of human life by dynamite, of property with powder and other explosives, repetitions of McNamara outrages,” was the cocksure reply. The crowd yelled approval, the craft unionists in that crowd nodded their heads as an impressive demonstration that the trades union principals were not to be held responsible for the McNamaras. A labor fakir or two yelled themselves hoarse exclaiming: “Gompers and the [American Federation of Labor](#) disapprove such methods as direct action and sabotage, it’s the illegitimate organization, the Industrial Workers of the World, that preaches the use of direct action and sabotage, they ought to be outlawed.” And a lonely member of the Socialist Labor Party added to it: “It’s Haywood and his gang of anarchists who advocate ‘Direct Action,’ and other uncivilized methods, and therefore we of the Detroit Socialist Labor Party have repudiated them.”

And these assurances by the “intellectual” fountain heads of the labor movement are passed unchallenged, and travel all over the country as indisputable facts. They form the basis for discussions and resolutions, and in the official records of many a body of workers these terms of “direct action” and “sabotage” are inscribed as meaning something that must be tabooed.

The matter is thus settled, until papers occasionally bring it to the notice of millions, for instance, that striking mine workers, in that or the other district, got the mine engineers and pumpmen to strike with them, and that as a result mines were flooded and could not be operated for weeks.

“Oh, that’s right,” says the street shouter this time; “all workers must quit together, and when Mr. Capitalist sees that there are no workers to protect property against deterioration by other than human efforts then he will soon squeal and give in.” And in this apparent contradiction lies the admission that few only understand what “direct action” and “sabotage” really mean, what they imply, what forces are needed for their operation, what results are expected to be attained by the use of these methods, and it is only hoped that this treatise of the subject will be enlarged by others who are as staunch advocates of these methods as the author of this pamphlet is.

Indirect and Direct Action

The economic power of the capitalist class, used by that class for the oppression of labor . . . in the nature of things can not be radically changed, or even slightly amended for the benefit of the working people, except through the direct action of the working people themselves, economically and politically united as a class.

—From the Preamble of the S.T. and L.A. [Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance]

In this true statement of objects, the S.T. and L.A. proclaimed itself as the first labor organization which advocated direct action as the principal, as the only, method by which the economic power of the capitalist class could be radically changed or even slightly amended by the workers organized as a class.

But if the workers are supposed to organize as a class it presupposes that there must be another class. The latter, by the very nature of things, seeks to prevent this radical change or slight amelioration of conditions based on their economic power. This class, the capitalists, are secured in their economic power by the

ownership of land, mines, factories, and transportation utilities. These possessions, though, have no value in themselves. Human labor power must be applied to these economic resources before they yield value, and thereby also assure power to one class to determine the relationship of the other class who invest their labor power in these industrial possessions. This human labor power is obtained from the millions of toilers, for wages. Wages, though, only represent a small proportion of the value of a product created by the application of human efforts. The job of the workers in these economic possessions is the privilege to work for wages, and the job itself is an inseparable and indispensable part of the economic possessions of the employing class, and consequently also of their economic power.

This direct ownership of economic resources and control of economic power would oft be open to dispute. Therefore, infringements upon that domain of power must be prevented at all hazards. For this object political institutions are maintained and used to protect this industrial power of the capitalist class, with the aid of courts, police, militia, jails, and legislative institutions.

The applied labor power of the working class is the most indispensable part of that economic power wielded by the employing class. Without that there would be no production, and without production there would be no economic power at all.

The workers instinctively, and millions now consciously, feel that they alone contribute to the making of this economic power for the class of non-producers. And they, consequently, strive to wrest that economic power away from the employing class, with means and methods that are either direct or indirect.

In these endeavors the workers meet, as a matter of course, the fierce opposition of the owners of economic resources and the wielders of economic power. And as the political institutions are operated to protect the latter in their power they use them to subdue any attempt to question, or efforts to infringe upon their domain of possessions and economic supremacy. They use the indirect methods of the agencies of legislation and institutions for the execution of their mandates and laws. Parliaments, courts, militia, police are used to prevent successful withdrawal, if possible, of the human laboring forces, which form the most indispensable part of their economic power, from the operation of the mechanical or other devices. Or they use them in the maintenance of their economic possessions to offer jobs to those who would not infringe upon their absolute domain, and who patiently acknowledge the employer's sovereignty over the life conditions of the millions who must have a job to live, the job, which though, forms the basic source of economic power for the oppression of the many, by the few.

The capitalist class uses the "indirect" method of political repression to check, if possible, direct actions on the part of the workers, that is, the withdrawal of their labor power and also their efficiency, from the workshops, the mines, land, etc. Only when he is assured of the use of that political agency in his behalf will he resort also to the direct action method, to wit: Throw the disgruntled workers out by a lockout.

Concluding from these observances that these political institutions and their consistent use for the purpose for which they were created, are the sole causes for the abuses and wrongs the workers suffer in the places of production, political reformers would advocate the capture of the political institutions. It is the easiest way of resisting the cruel abuse of political power. The workers, in large numbers, are told to base their hope in the change of the economic conditions on the application of indirect means, so to reach thereby, so they are told, the foundation of the economic power of the employing class. Political institutions in the control of the working class, and used for their own purposes, are hailed as the instruments by which the economic possession and industrial power of the capitalist class can be infringed upon and finally be overthrown. The conquest of political power is therefore, according to these statesmen, a prerequisite for effectually contesting the domain of economic power of the employers of labor, the job-owning class.

But political institutions are dependencies of economic possessions, and the political actions and the struggle for political positions for avowed purposes are therefore "indirect actions." For the materialization of such "indirect actions" organized efforts are necessary, and these organized efforts find their expression and combined strength in political organizations. The political organization of the working class, for instance, if it is to be a class organization, would therefore be a reflex only of the desire to gain control of the political institutions, the object being to wield them for purposes diametrically opposed to the economic interests of those holding the economic power by their possession of the means of production, exchange and the means of employment

of wage labor, which, as shown before, constitutes the most indispensable part of the economic possessions of the capitalist class.

But in observing actual conditions and occurrences the workers perceive how the capitalists shut down plants, either by lockouts or by compulsory suspensions as consequences of industrial panics, or as the result of the concentration process in industries and their management. In these cases the economic possessions deteriorate in value, even are void of any market value, as long as factories are not kept running and machines and other devices are not longer operated by human hands and supervised by human ingenuity.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that from the days that production by collective combination began, the workers became conscious of the important part they formed in the process of production? The job in the workshops, mines, farms, and transportation instruments was the indispensable factor in the economic power of the capitalist class. The withdrawal from the job, the suspension of operation, the withdrawal of efficiency from that position of employment were therefore methods that suggested themselves as more direct, as aiming straight to the point and curtailing the economic power of the capitalist class, and thereby also reducing the efficiency of the political institutions wielded by them for the protection of their interests.

Those direct action methods are grouped and determined in their application according to the conditions in the various industries and industrial combinations. But not always are "direct actions" inaugurated for the social protection and advancement of the working class. The capitalists, quite often, knowing the immense power that the wage workers place in their own hands for the oppression of the working class, engage the direct actions of workers for the furthering of their own plans. Only when "direct actions" are applied in efforts to undermine the economic power of the employing class, are they essentially and socially useful and beneficial, no matter whether they are "direct actions" of individuals, or of combinations of workers.

Social and Anti-social Direct Action

The suppression of the rights of free speech, free assemblage, and combination breeds the determination to apply direct action methods in their most violent forms. And their application is justified by such conditions, inevitably. The Russian individualist who uses explosives, responsible only to himself as an individual, may be abhorred by many, but still his action must be judged by the results he aims to achieve. If ultimately, after a long series of such violent and destructive direct actions they result in the removal of agencies of suppression and oppression his direct action is socially useful.

But when the Russian autocracy uses agents and hirelings to impose on these individuals responsible to themselves only, and exploits them, unconsciously to themselves, for the furtherance of their own obscure and criminal designs, then the results, stamp such acts as anti-social direct actions.

In the possessions of the United States Steel Corporation, Jones and Laughlin, and others, the workers are denied, absolutely, the right to seek redress against appalling wrongs by organized efforts. The methods of repression are worse than those applied in most backward countries. Individual self-help is therefore an inevitable method to look for redress and the righting of wrongs.

One actual occurrence, out of hundreds that occur every year in the possessions of these corporations, will illustrate the point quite clearly. A former graduate of the Moscow university was compelled to escape the fangs of the Bloody Czar. Shortly after landing in America, he found employment in the Pressed Steel Car Company plant at McKees Rocks. The second strike in 1910 forced him out of employment. R. went to Chicago and got a job in the Rolling mill of the United States Steel Corporation in Gary, Ind. There, as a common laborer, despite a university education, working twelve hours a day, he encountered the ill-will of an ignorant straw boss. The ignorant brutes employed by the corporations as overseers and bosses cannot bear to see an intelligent-looking face among the hordes of humanity who patiently and meekly bow to their tyrannic, overbearing commands and appalling impositions. The boss would make it hard for this worker, sneer at him, call him epithets to which the steel workers are getting well-nigh accustomed (they don't mind them any more). But this boss being treated by R. with silent contempt, threw one day, by sheer accident, a heavy hammer on R. 's feet. Laid up in Gary's Corporation hospital for weeks, and lucky to get out alive from that slaughter house, he went back to work and was, without protest on his part, assigned to the same job he occupied before, and under the same foreman. The latter would continue his abuses, until one day the

foreman stood again in the gangway on which the workers drive on cranes the white heated ingots into the roll. He was purposely obstructing the road to force R. . . . who was due with his steel block, to switch aside when passing him. But the latter, purposely not noticing the boss drove the heavy ingot against the brute, and accidentally the ingot fell upon the foreman, as accidentally as he threw the hammer on the victim's feet, only that the last mentioned accident cost the foreman's life. Was this an act socially justifiable or not?

Let it be considered, according to best information and close personal observation, that half of these fatal accidents in the mills, in which human rights are completely ignored and suppressed, are the result of "individual direct actions." But it is certain also, that these actions suggest to thousands the application of more effective combined protest and resistance. And as the organized revolt is only the result of the series of individual direct actions, the latter under such conditions and in similar cases must be classified as socially beneficent and are therefore "social direct actions."

But, conversely, when human lives are sacrificed as a result of a combination of interests who further plans which, in the long run, are detrimental to the working class as a whole, though groups of them may derive immediate benefits, then the conclusion is different. When the Fuller Construction Company, backed by the Steel Trust, squeezed its competitors to the wall by using the Craft Unions of their employees, and their officials, to apply occasionally the most "explosive and violent direct action methods" it was, from the viewpoint of class-conscious workers, anti-social direct action. And when after this task had been accomplished, the Steel Trust set out to annihilate that same union that had been once so useful to them, and when the latter combined with other groups of manufacturers to stem the wave of destruction, and when, as a result thereof, the dynamite explosions blew out the life of workers who were not parties to these contests between former allies and later rivals, then this result must be judged from the effects it created on the entire working-class struggle to obtain possession and control of the job. The means, the end were detrimental, anti-social, criminal, and must therefore be classified under antisocial "direct actions."

In all these cases, however, we see "direct action," be it social or anti-social in character, applied by individuals. The destructive violent tendencies they often develop, are the results and the revolt against anti-social conditions. Whenever and wherever the industrial situation necessitates the amassing of large bodies of workers in given places, the individual is soon submerged in that great mass. But this mass would remain stagnant, stoic, were it not for the "actions" of individuals in a series of attacks against unbearable conditions. They are the yeast in the leaven preparing the cells for an amalgamation into compact material. In the long run these "individual direct actions" shatter the stability of capitalist absolute control of the job, the source of their economic power. Conversely, the self-assertions of individuals comes to an end when the masses begin to move. The masses in their claims and struggles against wrongs and repressions beget the mass efforts and mass organizations.

But the existence of mass organizations and mass efforts does not necessarily imply that they are to be used as levers for the attainment of things socially good for the working class in its entirety. Mass organizations, in the application of "direct actions" can not always, by the nature of their objects, refrain from the use of violent and destructive methods. As long as the mass is not imbued with that spirit which is generated by the recognition of a fierce class struggle in the social system for the control of the jobs, they may be goaded on to perpetrate acts which, in their relation to the working class and working-class movement in general determines the character.

Ignorance of the real cause of their lack of economic power, and the source of power of the employing class, is mostly the reason why mass organizations of workers are using direct action methods for anti-social purposes.

Reprehensive operation of mass efforts by designing agents of capitalist interests, to further the ends of the latter in solidifying and strengthening their own economic power, furnishes another reason why in final results such use of direct and also indirect action methods must be classified as anti-social in character, and therefore, by the very nature of things, detrimental to working-class interests.

Results Alone Determine Character of Mass Actions

It matters not whether these mass organizations call themselves Mechanics' Unions, or Knights of Labor, American Labor Union, Molly Maguires, Trades Unions, Industrial Unions, Syndicalist organizations or what

else, they all have been formed for the use of “direct actions” and only accidentally have been used for purely political indirect actions, much to their own undoing and disintegration.

But whether these mass movements, resulting in mass actions on direct lines, have been guided by a desire to radically change or slightly amend the conditions making for the oppression of labor, must be judged by the intelligent application of the methods at their disposal, and what the results were which they sought to obtain, or attained.

The Molly Maguires, in their resistance against aggression, thought that they had an exclusive right to the jobs in the mines, with the exclusion of all other nationalities. Stubborn as was their fight, ending only with the judicial assassination of innocent workers, yet they were used, because of this narrowness, by the capitalists and their henchmen, to wage war on another portion of wage workers, and therefore, their “direct action” methods were antisocial. The Knights of Labor, and the Railroad Workers organized with them, then had many hard skirmishes with the capitalists who consciously knew that the workers were aiming at a larger control of their job conditions; indirectly, therefore, at the curtailment of economic power of the master class. Methods were used, quite often, which resulted in destruction and devastation. But as long as they directed their direct action methods against the capitalists, the world of workers did not object, even encouraged them. The final results, as long as this policy of attacking the capitalist class alone was pursued, were socially good for the entire working class. When later the economic strength of these workers was used for the support and enlargement of political powers of the capitalists, the economic basis of the organizations gave way, and in the final end their actions became decidedly anti-social. Another mass organization noteworthy in this connection is the American Railway Union. Direct actions marked the career of the organization in its advent to economic power. Even when, after the Pullman strike, it appeared that it had failed in all its objects, it was never denied that by its use of the direct action road it had acquired great social good for hundred thousands of workers. It failed when it left its economic foundation and switched from the clear path into a political party camp. Anti-social were the final effects of both the gigantic struggles of the Knights of Labor and the American Railway Union, when the capitalists, seeing how the basis of their own economic power had been successfully threatened, again safeguarded themselves against repetitions by their open support of the craft union movement, and the misdirection of the actions of the workers for purposes that were in no way dangerous to the interests of the capitalists, even protective in the perpetuation of the foundation for their economic possessions and power.

But the craft unions also use methods which can be classified as “direct actions.” They apparently are also formed out of the mass for mass actions and efforts. This we will later investigate. First we must find what are the methods of “direct action,” what of “indirect action.”

Direct Action Instruments

The strike is undoubtedly the best instrument of direct action. By it the workers withdraw, in smaller or larger masses, their producing power from the job, the basis of the economic power of the employing class. The strike may be confined to a shop, or separate industries, but when it involves an industry, (no matter in what locality situated), of all workers, it then becomes a mass strike. When the workers in all or most of the industries in a given district or locality are involved then it is a “general strike.” And if it appears that the solidarity of labor commands them to withdraw their labor power from all the instruments of production in a given country then it is a “Universal Strike.”

Irritation strikes are sporadic strikes, during which the workers quit for a while their jobs, return to work for a given period until the industry or plant is in normal working order, then withdraw again spontaneously and without notice, in constant repetition until their objects are obtained.

Destructive strikes, in the beginning of which machinery is destroyed and the operation system is so demoralized that a resumption of work is only possible after the damaged tools are repaired or replaced and the operating machinery put in order again, are usually noted by the absence of any organization.

Indirect Actions

Political action is indirect, most of the time. The object is to secure control of political agencies, the reflex of economic power, and wield them to prevent the agencies of capitalist production from abusing their privileges, to the detriment of those who are striving with all means at their command to establish their partial, and ultimately complete control and possession of the job, the basis of all economic and political power. This is the most that even ardent advocates of political action can expect to obtain. When, for the maintenance or contest for political rights direct actions are invoked, as for instance in general strikes for the equal suffrage, it only proves that these indirect actions are void of any results if the economic power of the producers is not organized and wielded to make these slight ameliorations obtained by political, indirect action, permanent in the struggle for the possession of the job.

The boycott is essentially an instrument of "indirect action." By the application of the principle that the purchasers have a right to withdraw the patronage of goods manufactured by certain objectionable manufacturers or distributors, they thereby wish to bring pressure to bear that the workers involved should gain certain conditions in the place of employment, at the job.

Like in the application of indirect political action others than wage workers are expected to contribute to the attainments of certain ends outlined, so is also the boycott one of the means by which with the aid and co-operation of non-workers who are appealed to also, the desired results are to be achieved.

By the passive resistance strike, another means of "indirect action," the workers seek to make the job unprofitable for the master without ever leaving their places of employment. By the most minute observance of rules, and the harassing of the immediate functionaries of the employers of labor, by carrying out the orders with a complete suspension of their own initiative and ingenuity, the workers seek to obtain the same results, the curtailment of the economic power of the employing class in their absolute control of the conditions of employment, and for the establishment of more rights in dictating the terms of sale of their producing power.

The next akin to the passive resistance strike, many times even inoperative without the latter, is the instrument of "sabotage," the most abused and misunderstood term used in the vocabulary of "actions." So much space has been devoted to a discussion and dissection of this subject that a full explanation is not out of place in this presentation of facts and arguments.

Capitalist Sabotage and Workers' Sabotage

It should be superfluous to tell the workers who read this booklet much about the application of "direct" and "indirect" actions by the capitalists to establish and maintain their sovereignty over the basis of their economic power, the job of the producer, of the workers. The strike, local, general, or universal, is answered with the lockout, locally, in industries, universally, if need be, and when they are prepared for it. Irritation strikes they meet with the closing down of their factories or mines in one district and overtaxed operation of their factories and workshops in other districts. Political action by the workers they answer with the withdrawal of the rights of free speech, free assemblage, and coalition, and by the use of their servile tools, and the mass they purposely keep in ignorance, for the ratification of their abridgement of political guarantees. They counteract the boycott with their blacklist. The passive resistance for their own purposes is seen from the utter contempt of capitalists for any provisions by which life and limb of the toilers is supposed to be protected. This enforced indifference and silent acquiescence in the mandates of the employers to disregard these provisions has been and is being paid every day by thousands of workers with their life and health and limbs. The criminal passive resistance for capitalist purposes is responsible for such awful disasters as the murder of hundreds in the Cherry mines of Illinois, the Triangle factory slaughter of men, women, and innocents. Is it necessary to enumerate all the crimes perpetrated every day, as a result of the passive resistance of the capitalist class against measures that would guarantee security to the human attachment of the job, the toiler?

And as all these "actions" have been the result of observations of the manner in which the employing class uses its economic power, politically and economically organized as a class, to prevent even slight ameliorations, so is the old instrument of indirect action, now termed "sabotage" taken out of the arsenal of the oppressors of labor. In a few illustrations it can be shown how sabotage is in daily use for the enlargement of capitalist

profit-interests, and how it, when applied in the opposite direction, turns this instrument of capitalism into a means whereby the workers may effectually gain possession of more economic rights.

A glance over the yearly reports of health and poor food commissions and government inspectors will reveal a few facts to the point. Here we see that millions of eggs are condemned in the store houses. The food commissioners discover that there are “spots” No. 1 and spots No. 2 and “Roses” in the market. These spots and roses, sorted according to the degree that the rosening or rotting process has reached, are used mostly in bakeries for pies and cakes, and bread. The bakery worker knows it, is aware of it since ever bakeshop slaves had to work in dirty, filthy, vermin-infested workshops. His job is supposed to make him immune against the effects of perfumes and deteriorated flour. He has to mix it in so that everybody will believe and think that the bakeshops, small and large, are operated under the most sanitary conditions. So these millions of “spots” are backed in and nicely mixed by the worker in the bakeshop. These cakes and pies are mostly sold to the poorer people, their stomach is hardened anyway by the adulterated stuff they consume every day without knowing it. The effects of this slow poisoning process are scarcely noticed.

But what a howl would go up — in fact, we heard quite often the furor that these statements of plain facts have created — if the bakery workers on a nice day, all together, would announce that the “spots” and “roses” are all in abundant quantity baked into a certain assortment of baked wares. The consumer is warned of the possibilities — who ever gets one of these “rose embalmed” pies is himself only to blame if his stomach gets out of commission. Sabotage applied in the interest of capitalist profit returns is suddenly applied to curtail the returns. It has been done, quite often, and no resolution of protest will stop it either, whenever the workers in the bakeshops are determined to use this “indirect action” instrument to gain for themselves more of the needed things of life.

Every candy maker knows that “terra alba,” a white clay, is used in such proportions that it would shock the gum-chewers if they knew how much of that undigestible stuff wanders into the stomachs of the fair ladies. Throwing in sugar and other ingredients the candyworker is supposed to let the machines work the mixing to perfection, the worker tends the machine, he is supposed to see nothing when that “terra alba” is squeezed through the mixer.

Are the workers supposed to be the capitalists’ keepers and help protect them against the effects of their quiet, legitimate business affairs? Terra alba may get into a heap of candy stuff in big chunks, unmixed. The workers turn that instrument against their own oppressors. They inform the candy eaters through a public notice that they have decided to turn the tables and use that sabotage for the gaining of their own ends instead of turning fraudulent profits in for their employers. The capitalists will know what it means for them, and they are growing frantic whenever they hear that there is an inclination on the part of workers to apply that weapon.

Every butcher workman knows he is expected to remain a meek, autonomous attachment to the job when working in and outside of the place of employment. But what they know about capitalist sabotage of meat products would fill volumes. Sinclair in his “Jungle” showed up, without exaggeration whatever, the extent to which capitalists and the meat barons order “sabotage,” to use up every available piece of the animals, whether they be short-tailed and big, or long-tailed and small, running rampant in the store houses and the rooms where meat is converted into meat products. Armour and Swift never served notice on the soldiers in Cuba that embalmed beef would cause stomach trouble and even death. But in a “sabotage” campaign of butcher workmen in Vienna they served notice to the meat buyers of their intentions, that is, of using “sabotage” for their own good. So did packing house workers in Pittsburgh not hesitate to apply that method to gain their ends. In Vienna the owners of the shops found out to their discomfiture that meat sabotage worked better than a meat boycott. When the rodents instead of falling into the chopper and mixer to be ground up into pudding for Wiener Wurst, are hacked into large chunks and distributed in several sausages and meat products, the salesman will soon discover whether rat-legs, and rat-heads, unmixed and unassimilated to real pork meat, will pass inspection by the meat eaters. It’s a horrible thing, this, but not more horrible than the sabotage for capitalist interests, when even the chopped-off fingers of workmen are passed into the meat, as every workmen in the meat industry can testify to.

The whole list of adulterated foodstuffs proves only that the workers are supposed to do this “sabotage” without protest, for the interests of the exploiters. But as soon as they use the knowledge of these things to

their own advantage it becomes a crime, an intrusion on the right of the employer to dictate absolutely what the employees must do when at his post of employment.

The hotel workers — cooks and waiters, the beer makers, the tobacco workers, could all tell about sabotage, and how in some stages of their contests for more rights they silently, by verbal agreement, would turn their own sabotage work in, in order to show the employers that they could use these things to their own advantage. Whether justifiable or not, it is being done. No amount of sophistry on the part of those who may be shocked to hear these things, will convince the workers that they are wrong in sometimes turning the tables against the capitalists.

Sabotage Implies the Withdrawal of Efficiency from the Work

The withdrawal of that efficiency to turn the fraud of capitalists into profits may run counter to the ethical standard of moralists, but it affects the most vulnerable part of the exploiters of labor, their pocket-book, and that's what the workers care for.

The withdrawal of the efficiency of the railroad service, by the railroad clerk misdirecting the loading bills and the freight handlers putting on wrong tags of destination on the cars, may cause a confusion hard to untangle, even partial paralyzation of systematic and orderly service and deliveries, but to the capitalists it has quite often brought home the lesson that, even if the worker is an attachment to the job, and is supposed to have no brain for himself, this withdrawal of that brain and efficiency is able to paralyze industries and prompt the employing class in making terms for the employee under which he again turns in his efficiency on the job he holds.

Each and every industry offers illustrations of capitalist sabotage, and presents suggestions how the withdrawal of efficiency, an indirect method, forces the capitalists to recognize labor's power in that direction. The common workers in the textile print shops withdraw their quickness to separate the aniline-soaked cloth from the piles. The employers, knowing that if the job is not done on a specified time thousands of dollars' worth of goods will go up in fire generated by the chemical decomposition of the colors, will rather accede to the demands of the workers than suffer incalculable loss.

The earlier day jurisdiction contests of the mine workers, the brewery workers, the packing house workers to have control over all workers in their respective industries, sprang originally from the conception that the direct action method of striking could more effectually be supplemented by the indirect method of sabotage. When the ice machine engineers in breweries, cold storage houses, packing houses, or hotels, withdraw from work, or only their efficiency to keep these machines running, for 24 hours or less, all the perishable goods have gone the natural road of decay. When the miners many times found that the strike brought no results, they knew that the withdrawal of engineers and pumpmen would work the sabotage with the aid of the waters flooding the mines.

Many a time workers lost by the "direct action" method, their strikes. They lost because the employers could secure strikebreakers to fill their places. But even in this machine age of production the efficiency of a worker is increased if he tends constantly to one job. It takes time for strikebreakers to acquire that efficiency, and then they are not there to look for that. Even after a lost strike most of the old workers are returned to their former positions, only their privileges on the job are curtailed. Then they decide not to turn out more work than did the strikebreakers during the strike, to withdraw their efficiency, do their duties as carelessly as the strikebreakers, and in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases they quickly obtained what by a strike they never could hope to get, the recognition of their rights to have something to say about the terms of employment.

Let it be conceded even, that sabotage action may run amuck. Nor will it be denied that often wanton destruction resulted, whenever it was applied by irresponsible individuals aggrieved. Going even further, let it be admitted that its use has been prostituted for anti-social purposes. But have not all other methods of the working class in the war against the oppressors been sometimes misused and wrongly applied?

We must above all investigate by whom sabotage is applied, and for what purposes. We must know the source of the abuses, and also its limitations. Then alone can an enlightened working class determine what must be done to stop the misuse of the weapons of the toilers in their struggles for better life conditions. Misuse is mostly done by those who strive only to discredit them, and to lay the blame for their own obscure

actions at the door of those who declare, knowing that no matter how to achieve it, that the emancipation of the workers must be their own work, intelligently guided and directed.

Misuse of Direct and Indirect Methods

If one is trained to consider the job a bargain-counter at which employer and employee meet on equal terms, for mutual bargaining, as the term used in the trade movement implies, he thereby binds himself not to impair the interests of his partner in the bargain during the period of the mutual understanding. Collectively the trades unionists are trained in that theory, and iron-clad contracts, looked upon as sacred instruments, prevent them from jeopardizing the interests of the employers during the life of such contracts. Belonging to a passing age they also believe in the law of competition. The competition on the bargain counter makes one craft unionist praise the virtues and qualification of his commodity, one craft, to the disadvantage of other crafts that may complete in the same line of business. "This competition between crafts for jurisdiction will in the long run give the award to the fittest, the most efficient," is the proclamation of Samuel Gompers before a convention of Stationary Firemen held in Washington, DC.

We will not talk here of the earlier functions and theories of trades unionism. Trades unions were useful agencies in by-gone days to use all the described methods, with no exception, to gain some control of shop conditions, thereby curtailing the economic power of the employing class. Today they function mostly to prevent the intelligent, class-conscious use of all these weapons, and serve even to allow groups of capitalists to misuse them in their competitive games against each other. The strike of trades unionists aims not to gain more control of the job conditions for all workers in a given plant or industry. The strike may be used to force non-members of employers' associations to either quit business or join the price combination of the employers, as in the case of the plumbers and horseshoers. The walk-out of one group of organized workers, or preferably of large numbers of unorganized toilers is used to gain slight concessions for other craftsmen in the same plant or industry with union contracts, to defeat the others, as it is done in most of the crafts in the textile, metal, and other industries. The strike of workers in the same industry in one district is used to increase the prices of the commodity in other districts. Or a general strike, after serving months of notice on the employers, is arranged to sell the accumulated commodity at higher market prices, as so many suspensions of work in the coal mining industry have shown.

The boycott, through the union label, is used to boost the trade of one set of manufacturers without any consideration of the claims of all the workers in the same industry, and often to prevent the organization of men, women, and children with lower wages and worse labor conditions, as it is done in the cigar industry, in the clothing-making, in the baking industry, and others.

The destructive strike is applied to browbeat, to club, and even assassinate workers who are debarred by high initiation fees from these craft unions, or who are victims of the jurisdiction fights, the competition-struggle on the mutual bargain counter of capitalists and craft unionists.

In the political field the leaders of the craft union support the outrageous use of the governmental powers by openly boosting measures intended to protect the interests of employers or the capitalist class, thereby helping to increase the economic power of the latter, the absolute control of the job, as was done by the craft unionists in the steel and glass industries when they helped to boost the McKinley doctrine of high tariff. Or, by the conservative brotherhoods of railroad workers now supporting the railroad magnates in their claim that they would go bankrupt if the freight rates would be reduced. Or the United Mine Workers in agreeing with the coal operators in Illinois and other districts that they would abstain from supporting political measures intended to amend or improve existing mining laws for the protection of life and health of workers. There are too many instances to enumerate here, but even on the field of sabotage the capitalists have taken care that the trades unions safeguard them against any injuries from that direction. In contracts with the mine workers' unions it is directly stipulated that the United Mine Workers, the organization of employees, will not permit the damaging of property by water, as result of engineers leaving their positions. They agree to fill the places of any who would eventually quit with such an object in view. When, as in Danville, Ill., district in 1910, the striking miners try to make the pumpmen and engineers withdraw their work, the officials support the mine owners in their clamor for the militia to stop such attempts. To prevent the work of "sabotage," in its natural course, the striking brewery workers of Los Angeles make provisions

that the ice machines be not stopped so that the warm temperature in the cellar might not sabotage the immense amount of fluid. The capitalists only too well know how this instrument has impeded their absolute power over the worker's job, and may do so again. The trades union contract gives them, what will in their opinion be the best safeguard against the application of sabotage.

So even mass movements of workers for the exercise of their power by direct or indirect actions are utilized for anti-social purposes, by agencies that the capitalists time and again have used to prevent a concerted move of the entire working class to undermine the foundation of the economic and political power of their oppressors.

Class Organization, Class Action

The working people economically and politically united as a class will be the agency, and the only organ of human efforts by which the proper use of all the instruments of direct and indirect action will be wielded for the protection of the interests of the human forces, who as producers, are the source of economic power of those who hold them to their bondage.

Class unity implies organization. But such an organization must be based on the knowledge what class unity and class action means. In many matters the capitalists may often be divided; on their monopoly over the job of the workers, their collective producing power, they are united, and form a class for themselves. We have shown in the beginning that the land, the factories, the machines, the railroads, the steamships, etc., in themselves yield no economic power to their owners. Only the human labor used in their operation constitutes that power. Any infringement on that domain of power, even in the slightest degree, is an intrusion on the monopoly that the capitalists possess. Only a little evident break in that foundation endangers the whole structure upon which present day society is pivoted. For the protection of that dam which keeps the stored-up energies of the whole world harnessed for production for profit, they put out their guardsmen, their courts, their labor lieutenants, their reform fakirs, their law makers, their law executors, their police powers, their soldiers, militia, etc.

The pressure against that construction may oftentimes become so strong that its very safety is endangered. The capitalists, then, rather tap the enormous reservoir and let surplus energies go to waste before they concede the use of these economic resources for other than the creation of profits.

The monopoly of the jobs is their stronghold. That alone must be undermined, attacked, and completely destroyed ultimately, if ever the working class wishes to see its economic and political freedom established. This is the direct point at which working-class activity must always aim, regardless of the methods that may be employed to successfully accomplish the task.

But are these guardians of that economic structure to be brushed aside with a wishbone so that the mines may be laid for the removal of that dam? Are these protective agencies not in strength corresponding to the power of those who hold the monopoly over the places of work, and thereby also over the destinies of the producers? And is not the strongest weapon of the capitalist class, their best guardsmen on the line, the ignorance of the millions of workers who still cling to the idea that it is a God-ordained privilege that gives a few the right to hold this monopoly over the opportunities of the many? Is it not that great mass that is supporting the employing class in guarding their supremacy over the workers' life conditions, thereby allowing them to wield that economic power based on the monopoly of the jobs that the workers must have in order to live?

Those of the working class who have analyzed the social system from all angles know that it would be ridiculous to attack the system with only one instrument. They will scorn the idea that they should ignore the others, which the capitalists will in turn use to defeat the efforts of the workers to aim directly at the foundation of the system.

Therefore, the workers must use all actions possible to advance against the citadel of the employing class.

Political Rights Essential

Political rights must be secured and safeguarded. The right of free speech, of a free unmuzzled press, of undisturbed assemblage are prerequisite for the formation and maintenance of class organizations of workers.

When they are denied, direct action is applied to secure them. And the more severe the measures are by which the workers are to be debarred from enjoying these privileges, the more pronounced will the efforts be to get out of the stage where violent and even destructive actions are needed to show that the desire of the producers to get access to the source of economic power can never be stopped by repressions. Only where the conditions exist, or are established, that the guarantee of political rights assure the preparation for class action through class organizations of workers, will the struggle for the control of the job be void of the features that are denounced by the average man, because human life, the life of working people, is often placed in jeopardy in the struggle for more rights. The aim of political, indirect action of the working class tends primarily to remove the guardian of that structure behind which the immense producing energies are harnessed and stored up for capitalist production. By an agitation, protected by political rights previously secured, such as for instance anti-militaristic propaganda, it is endeavored to weaken the fortifications of the structure. With soldiers standing with the muzzle of their guns turned to the ground the attack on the main fortress of capitalism can be easier accomplished. With the law-making and law-executing agencies of capitalism, as guardians of capitalist interests, out of the way, the foundation may be easier undermined. It must even be conceded that political parties, exercising the mandates of the working class, may be able to remove the most pernicious opponents to the rights of the producers to the jobs and all the proceeds of that job, and place in their stead advocates of working-class interests. But then, this should never divert the activities of the workers from aiming constantly and directly at the foundation of all these agencies, the economic power of the oppressors and exploiters. A political party claiming to represent the toilers may have its functionaries in the lawmaking and law-executing agencies. But it should be for the purpose alone to facilitate the formation of class organization of workers for the attack against the seat of capitalist power, to wit: the monopoly over the places of employment. A political party, no matter what good the intentions of its constituency may be, by the nature of its composition, cannot be a class organization of workers. It can use but one method in battling for its objects and aims, the law-making and law-executing agencies of capitalism. It has but one road upon which it ought to pursue its course for the realization of its claims and aims, the road of education. If this education, though, is not based on the actual conditions in the social system, it is worse than useless, it is confusing and destructive.

Class Organization — Industrial Union

The class organization of the workers for class action on all lines must therefore be a combination that brings together all the men, the women, and the children who are furnishing today the economic power to the exploiters of labor. It must embrace all those who give value to all industrial resources of the world, by their producing power being applied to the instruments of production and exchange. It must be a union of toilers whose object must be to undermine the source of industrial power wielded today by the exploiters of human labor power. It must be an organization which teaches the fundamental principles of industrial solidarity of all workers so to break and to destroy the monopoly of the capitalist class over the jobs. It must be an industrial union, uniting therein the working people for direct and indirect actions in the workshops and against the political outposts of capitalism. It must struggle to the end that the results of the collective labor of the working class may gradually accrue in larger measure to the producers, and that finally the jobs of the world's workshops be controlled absolutely by those who give value to and create wealth with the enormous instruments and agencies of production. It must, by virtue of its class character, protect itself against the misapplication of actions for the support of foul designs of the employing class by recognizing the irrepressible antagonism of interests between the workers and the shirkers. It must combine the interests of the workers so strongly together that all actions, all methods of attacks, will be dictated by the mandates of the workers as a class, so that the irresponsible acts of individuals and the reactionary methods of craft unionism be discarded and made obsolete as a means of warfare.

Solidarity of Labor Stronger than Violence

Thus organized, the working class would need not fear the misuse of its own political or economic power by the employing class. Violence, destruction of life would be needless and useless. On the path to the industrial and political freedom of the toilers there will be many more skirmishes. But will it not be better, when, for example, street car employees are compelled to strike all together, none tied down by contracts, and moved only, by the feeling that the injury done to one is the injury to all, would quit — the power house workers,

the switch tenders, electricians etc., united with the others? There would be no need of overturning cars, of beating up alleged strikebreakers or non-union brothers and the use of destructive means to show that there is an industrial revolt on. With their arms folded the workers would know that the powerhouses could not furnish the required power, and the whole system must stand still. No violence needed to stop operation, when all quit at once. Withdrawal of labor power from the places of employment, or the removal of efficiency (sabotage) would then be organized class expression. Would it not be better to let the mines fill with water when engineers and pumpmen and all the rest quit together, than to have human life destroyed when, as often it has been, the striking miners try to gain their objects by an attack on those who under contract today continue to slave under the protection of sheriffs and troops, while their brethren are being bled to death, in an unequal struggle with their oppressors? What is more worth, the welfare of the workers or the hundreds of thousands of dollars of beef stored up in the packing houses? What then is wrong when the shutting down of ice machines either tends to destroy all the stored up wealth, or the employers are forced to give more of the means of existence, so that hungry, starving children may be better nourished, and the daughters of the toilers be protected against falling into the gutter of life?

All the resolutions of condemnation and protest, either dictated by ignorance or actuated by a desire to serve the interests of the capitalists, will not restrain the workers from weighing every measure that they conceive to be good in their efforts to get a larger, and finally complete control of that source of economic power, the place of production. The more they learn to know where their power lies the more will they strive and battle for the amelioration of their present day conditions. They will fight for better wages, shorter hours of work, more rights, for the undermining of the power of the employer. They will organize as a class for class action on all fields of activity. They are doing it now, until the day will come, must come, when the structure of capitalism will fall by the pressure of the attacking forces, and the energies of the world's workers will no longer be used to grind profits for a few parasites. With the structure in collapse, will be swept aside also the force of political guardians of capitalist interests, and a new reconstructed society, based on the control of the powers of production by the producers, will assure to the inhabitants of the world that peace, that pursuit of happiness, that plentifulness in material and intellectual requirements needed to establish the perfect, harmonious co-operation of all members of society for a most harmonious and beautiful life on earth for all who live.

The solidarity of labor for such accomplishment must be organized today in class organizations, for class action. Such are the Industrial Workers of the World.

Additional Information

Taken from *Direct Action and Sabotage: Three Classic IWW Pamphlets from the 1910s*, edited by Salvatore Salerno and published by The Charles H. Kerr Library and PM Press (2014). In the introduction, Salerno notes that this pamphlet by Trautmann "is among the earliest attempts at interpreting the principles and strategies of European syndicalism and applying them to the struggles of workers in the U.S. Though printed by the Socialist News Company, an IWW print shop, the pamphlet was not considered official literature."