

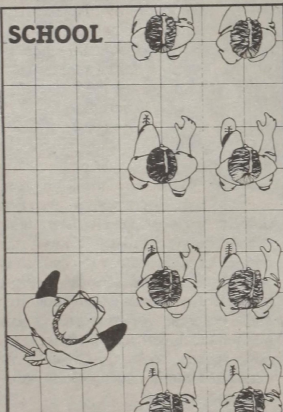
Working it Out Giving Them The Gears

I was on my way to work the other morning when I was intercepted by the mailperson with a couple of letters for me. One of the letters didn't have a stamp on it. When I brought it to her attention she said "Don't worry about it," as they were having a dispute at the post office and they were encouraging people not to put stamps on and letters would be delivered regardless. Great. Went to grab the morning paper out of the vending box and found the door jammed open. Didn't have to pay. Out of smokes. Dropped into the local Safeway to see the cashier and ask how their dispute was going. Not well, and she charged me half price for the fags. Got on the bus and the driver put his hand over the fare box, "Nobody pays today." Finally made it to work and found that everyone was in the cafeteria on a sit-in because 50 people had been notified of job termination.

AN UNLIKELY SCENARIO?

Maybe, but one which displays the variety of approaches and the ingenuity of workers when they decide out of frustration or inaction to circumvent the traditional avenues of protest. How many of us have faced management with but a simple request for a change here or there and been stonewalled? How many of us

SCHOOL



BECAUSE THE jobs are quite different, rotation helped break up the monotony. It also helped equalized the work, spreading the hard and easy jobs around.

Auto Worker

have filed grievances to find that that is exactly what's happened - they've been filed? Or gone to union meetings and lambasted the executive for its inability to resolve outstanding grievances and other disputes? When we get fed up and frustrated enough at the back-sliding and inaction on im-

portant issues it's time to take issue ourselves by means of direct action.

If ever an environment offered the importance, the immediacy, the urgency and the comradeship for direct action it is at the work-place. From the Wobblies of the early 1900's to the Spanish syndicalists of the 1930's to the factory occupations of May 1968 and today, direct action at the work-place has been an effective and inspiring means of attaining goals more effectively and immediately than if we had wallowed in the quagmire of conventional union wisdom and tactics.

As one anarcho-syndicalist writer expressed it: "By direct action, the anarcho-syndicalists mean every method of immediate warfare by the workers against their economic and political oppressors. Among these, the outstanding are: the strike, in all its gradations from the simple wage-struggle to the general strike; the boycott; sabotage in its countless forms; anti-militarist propaganda; and in peculiarly critical cases, such, for example, as that in Spain today (1930's), armed resistance of the people for the protection of life and liberty." (Rudolph Rocker, *Anarcho-Syndicalism*, p. 136).

The kind of actions that one can undertake at the work-place are limited only by the imaginations of the workers themselves. What culminates in an all-out strike is usually preceded by months of negotiations between union and management with most workers prepared to stand by and wait it out while the lawyers and negotiators try to come to terms. However there's nothing like a little direct action to get things moving or more importantly to bring the conflict with the bosses onto the shop floor where we can exercise our own tactics and lay waste to the apathy and alienation that plague working people.

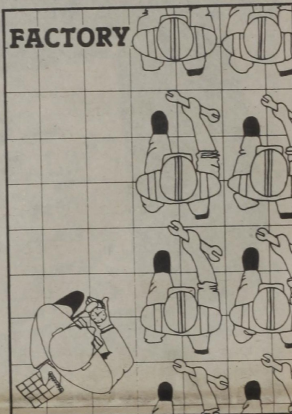
Wait-And-See

In the initial stages of conflict the support of co-workers may not be immediately forthcoming, as for the most part they will accept a 'wait-and-see' attitude. In a great number of cases individual workers have not had the patience to wait out a union directive and have taken the initiative personally. In one such case the company involved was an electronics firm. Due to the intricacy of the work and the susceptibility for breakdown of the equipment produced, one-worker's attitude was that a disconnected wire here, a faulty part there, and the equipment would be rendered inoperable. An equally-disillusioned co-worker who happened to be one of the people who checked equipment for errors before the equipment left the plant was prone to let it through even if it malfunctioned. The damage to the company's quality reputation was somewhat downgraded, not to mention the repairs which were made necessary to returned equipment. These actions, while damaging, were, however, limited in that they were of a clandestine nature, and while personally satisfying to the individuals involved, were not sufficiently high pro-

file to attract the notice of their co-workers.

Co-operation and comradeship with co-workers, even if only on a limited basis, is of the most importance if we are to move beyond acts of individual action and into the realm of collective action. In the case above, of working for an electronics firm, the workers were in a production line of twenty people, each assigned a very limiting, unstimulating and repetitive task.

FACTORY



THE MILL BREAKS down probably a couple of times a week. People do it to keep the company from stockpiling, as well as to get a break.

Mine Worker

Each worker took a turn at screwing up, thus making it more difficult to isolate the problem and consequently to isolate the worker responsible.

The emphasis with these actions was to reduce the productivity of the company and to vent the frustrations of the workers fed up with lousy working conditions and stalemated negotiations. For every job there is a unique way of reducing productivity and by far most of the tactics are of a more passive and less destructive type. Some of the more common and straight-forward acts which happen daily are employee appropriation of company goods, refusal to work in areas deemed unsafe, being late for work, etc.

Other actions which have been employed by disenchanted workers have included failure to oil machinery, sugar in a taxi fleet's gas tanks, machinery dropped onto conveyor belts and other acts which, if not shutting down a firm as effectively as a strike, have provided the workers with a temporary respite. These are actions which for the most part are done either individually or by small groups of workers and, while satisfying over the short term, are not truly effective unless they act as a catalyst or a boost to the larger body of workers and

provide encouragement to move on to larger and more sustained stoppages.

Sit-downs and Wildcats

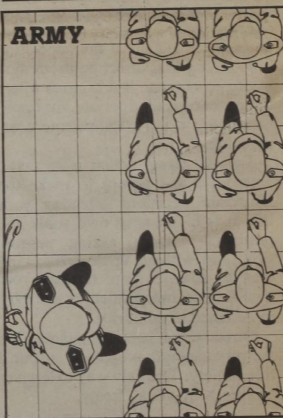
Of all work stoppages the strike is the one most often sanctioned by the union and therefore is a more 'official' form of direct action. The strikes which arise out of immediate grievances and result in work stoppages such as the sit-down strike or the wildcat, are more direct in their nature because they are called by workers spontaneously and most often without the approval of the union. Sit-downs and wildcats have been called for such things as poor treatment of an employee by a manager, improper heating or air conditioning at the work place or for that matter any type of dispute that has taken too long to be resolved. But of the varieties of strikes by far the most satisfying, from an anti-authoritarian point of view, are those which see the workers defying the bosses by actively taking control of the work place and locking them out.

The revolutionary potential of such actions is clear from the comment of a telephone operator who was one of 15,000 workers in British Columbia to take part in occupying and running an entire telephone system in 1978 as a tactic in breaking a deadlock over contract negotiations:

"What happens when a decision is needed, when a crisis arrives? Some people feel comfortable with the old ways: putting up a flag to go to the bathroom, asking someone in 'author-

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ARMY



A WORKER ASKED the commandante if now that we were all military we'd receive the same salaries as they did. "Arrest that guy," came the reply... The commandante concluded, "and now I want everyone to shout loud and clear 'Soldier, long live Spain'." The railwaymen remained totally silent.

Wildcat Spain Encounters Democracy