

Syndicalism and Direct Action

Manuel Joaquim de Sousa

Contents

Two words	3
I	4
II	5
III	7
IV	11
V	14

Two words

The “Committee of Syndicalist Propaganda of Porto”, fulfilling the mission to which it was created, and following the norms established by the *Center and Library of Social Studies* of which it is part, publishes the following leaflet, certain that it will contribute its own grain of sand for the education of the Portuguese proletariat, which now – more than ever – needs to organize and gear itself in such a way as to bring itself, alongside the proletariat beyond our borders, towards full emancipation.

– Porto, 15 April 1911

– The Committee for Syndicalist Propaganda

I

The current societal system of individual property has established an antagonism of interests, one in which a determined number of individuals has managed to seize for itself all the wealth – social and natural – to the detriment of all others.

This privilege of ownership¹ of all existing goods on this Earth, established in the laws of Ancient Rome, has, despite all transformation Society has faced through the centuries, subsisted. So that this principle would not be altered, those who have maintained this privilege have made use of the repressive and astute forces of both Religion and the State, the first so that it could insinuate in the spirit of the weakest the feelings of resignation and passivity, and the second to enforce such a principle, through the force of the judiciary and the strength of bayonets, against all who would oppose to it.

In such a fashion, two distinct classes have been established: one which has established itself over the Land – the above, and the under-ground -, over all instruments of labour, over land and sea lanes, over all means of communication, and which has monopolized for its exclusive enjoyment the wonderful discoveries of Science, Art, Literature, everything, thus, in which the genius, the talent and the power of muscle have produced, and of which all of mankind is favoured to enjoy; the second, the one which produces day and night, which possesses nothing, which enjoys nothing and which lives in a continuous misery, stagnant from work, dead from suffering and hunger.

On one side is thus one class, the bourgeoisie, which only consumes, and produces nothing useful to mankind; on the other side the other class, the producer class, which, being the source of all social wealth, is unable to consume *according to its needs*.

Nowadays one can verify within the working class a certain desire of retaliation, not in the sense of revenge towards the bourgeois capitalist class – whose egoism has given cause to all of human suffering – but more in the sense of proclaiming its emancipation, to destroy the current capitalist system and to replace it with a more equitable, human one, where each being, without suffering from any form of coercion, has secured the right to his own existence – Free Communism.

Towards it are marching all of the conscious workers of the world.

¹ TN: accession (acessão) in the original

II

In Portugal the workers are also beginning to look towards new horizons, or stated otherwise, they are convincing themselves that their well-being can – and should – be conquered only by themselves. And as such since a long while have they been creating the spirit of association, because they understand that in isolation they can do nothing for their benefit.

The spirit of the first association in which they braved themselves to attenuate the difficulties of existence was Mutualism, whose organization still exists.

However, if it is certain that workers in times of disease can reap some benefit from the associations of mutual rescue, this is very restricted, and sometimes it may not even happen, because in the same way that there are diseases, there are also labour crises that force the non-payment of the respective due. And there are workers as well, who, despite their daily work, cannot subscribe to these associations, as they are not allowed the meager salary they earn. And it is for that, and still because it is necessary to attend the thousands of jobless, that Mutualism does not resolve the problem of misery. Another form, apparently of more practical results, is cooperativism.

Cooperativism is deeper. It aims to, or has at least conceived, the remodeling of the current economic-capitalist system through means of gradual and legal expropriation of the tools and means of production in such a fashion that it may establish the reciprocal and mutual exchange between the consumer-producers, through everyone's cooperation.

It would be a good way of achieving emancipation were it not forced to fight the capitalist power which, lord of all wealth, capitalized or not, would pose an obstacle to the realization of this principle.

And the cooperatives which have thus far existed, and still do exist, they have served, at best, for the emancipation of industrial tutelage of those individuals who have managed to nest therein. However, the role of cooperatives may yet be of relevance in the struggle of labour against capital, either providing auxiliary aid to the strikers (through food, for example), or by putting forward those who through industrialism find themselves in persecution.

For that end, however, it is necessary to impress in it a more social character, as thus far it maintains only a commercial and capitalist one, being unable to distinguish itself from the formulas used by the bourgeoisie.

Meanwhile, it is fair to say that as the cooperative societies organized themselves, we have seen within the midst of the working class – and through the influence of the AIT¹ – the exclusively worker's organization: the associations of professional class.

The character of these associations was one of resistance against capital. Its action, however, was almost null, due to the scant number of associates, since, and due to, its orientation, one which was marked by its lack of orientation, and its failure to define itself in a precise and rev-

¹ TN: AIT: Associação Internacional dos Trabalhadores, portuguese name for IWA, aka the 1st International (not to be confused with the anarchist IWA, established 11 years after publication of this work).

olutionary manner, so as to oppose itself to the Patronage². It has been lacking the *goal* which should determine its orientation.

Under the political sphere, these class associations have never managed to expand their sphere of action. This sphere shows itself in two fashions, one interior, and one exterior. One of these characteristics which have influenced its weak development was the confusion which for a very long time has been sown by the social-democrats. Being unable to drag the Class Associations to the political field of their party, as they so desired, they simply confused its real meaning, which pushed the workers to grow disinterested not only in the associations, but in the very party they make a part of. On the side, the Republican Party, as it was part of the opposition, knew how to take advantage of the situation and fortify itself.

And so, while the workers' movement decayed due to the actions of those who did not want, or knew not how to fortify that movement through the revolutionary education of the workers by creating in each of them a firm and autonomous consciousness, the strength of the party which today is in power, and currently oppresses the workers, continued to grow unabated.

But as everything has its era, and in virtue of the growing daily needs, the Portuguese proletariat tends, as only it could do, to organize itself, and to impress an orientation of struggle against capital on a very different basis from that which it has so far followed.

² TN: "patronato" in the original, portuguese word to refer to the collective of bosses (from PT: patrão, boss), distinct in colloquial meaning from capitalist class, as it may include managers, taskmasters, foremans, etc.

III

It is revolutionary syndicalism, based on direct action of labour against Capital, which currently leads the weak labour organizations that now exist, and which it is guiding to a more perfect form; or, stated in another way, it is the profound remodeling of the workers organization, one which integrates itself in the true spirit of class struggle, developing within itself an ample and fecund sense of a principle of autonomy, creating its own ideology, one which strives for the development of the federal trade¹ organizations on all professions covered in the general confederation as a means of solidarity in the continuous fight for the improvement of socioeconomic welfare until such a time of the extinction of the wage system.

Already in the 1909 Congress in Lisbon was this new orientation settled as being the only one which can take the working class to its emancipation: “*The immediate goal of all working-class organization is, without a doubt, and without any interference of alien people, to reach, and to directly conquer, a constant improvement in the conditions of contracted labour, which will come to improve the material and economic situation of the proletariat, providing it with a better well-being, with each aggregate acting by itself, within their respective sector, but within a common action and common accord, not only with all professionals within the same job, but also with all workers of a single region, country, or group of countries.*”

“*The immediate or future goal consists in ensuring that the professional aggregates acquire an increasingly higher preponderance in the production of goods, until such production becomes fully socialized, and belonging to the anonymous mass of all workers grouped in their respective professions, free and open to all who wish to exercise them. And in this fashion, the wage system will become history.*”

When this was approved, the bourgeoisie, accustomed only to witnessing the verbal diarrhea between workers which led to no results, did not pay much mind to the case; but as they saw that from words came actions, witness them as they panic and come right away, their pages clamoring for antiquated and depressive forms of action and organization, such as the German organization and the english *Trade Unions*².

Of course they achieve nothing, because while the Portuguese workers do not have an exact comprehension of what is revolutionary syndicalism, they do not allow themselves to be goaded by the politico-bourgeois siren call, and this is because of the fact that despite their illiteracy, they have, fortunately, through their temperament and the many disappointments they have experienced, very little propensity to a disciplinarian spirit.

However, it merits to say something about the negative effects, ones determined by the action and organization of the German and English proletariat, so that the naive, in case there are any, do not get deluded by such conspicuous advisors.

The German organization, fronted primarily by the social-democrats, is a party-based organization, whose means of struggle reduce themselves to electoral action.

¹ TN: “sindical” in the original, from “sindicato” = trade union, not related to the syndicalist ideology

² in english in the original

Subordinated to the socialist-reformist party, it is obvious that their primordial goal is parliamentary struggle. Having established within itself the Mutualist principal, accessible to all partners, they do not wish anything other than the annihilation of the revolutionary energy of the proletariat, so that they may better secure themselves in their absolutism.

And it is in such a way that the leaders of that organization, instead of breaking ties with the militarist prejudice which has for centuries cursed the German people, have instead cultivated and rooted it further for the exclusive enjoyment of social-democracy, serving, in such a way, not the interests of the enslaved and hungry proletariat, but the interests of Capitalism.

The disciplinarian spirit which we can observe in the German army is precisely the same that exists in the workers' movement. Being a powerful organization in both numbers and in capital, it is, however, an organization without virility, without potential, without a combatative action.

It is not guided by a spirit of freedom as one can observe in other countries and even in Portugal, but by a passive, disciplined militarist spirit of the highest degree. It is not an organization of *men*, it is an unconscious *flock moved by bad shepherds* which they must almost blindly obey.

And to prove this, we can just use this excerpt of a study by Manuel de Montulia, which, being a bourgeois, is unsuspecting.... *"I had to go to learned Germany to see such a degrading spectacle. In the century of the automobile, precisely in a land famed for its industrial developments, there are those who use men as beasts of burden, lacking only the crack of a whip upon the backs of the slaves to complete the painting. Here is modern Germany: a great show, a blinding glaze outside, and on the inside a frantic despotism furthered by the powerful, and an unheard of servility on the part of a people armed with all the spiritual forces to defeat these oppressing forces, but which does not know or dare to use them at all.*

"I have had a chance to speak of this so despised German people in other times, a people so abused by the high classes of this country. This German folk has entered socialism without passing through human rights, and here is its ill and the cause of its misery; despite such illustrious status, it does not have sufficient moral education to comprehend the dignity of Man; from a flock of slaves it became a flock of socialists; they lack the nerve of individuality and it is still, however, the concept of "crowd" and "flock" which constitutes its strength. Now it obeys as a single man the commands of its party, as its ancestors obeyed to the feudal lord; and while the ideals of this party are dignified and elevated, it has yet to awaken, however, the Man in its interior, and with it the strength which it appears to have on its exterior.

"The fires of Revolution have not yet baptized this German folk, followers of a once-again divine Louis XIV."

We believe nothing else will be necessary to demonstrate what is the reformist organization of the Germans. However, it would be convenient to say that not all of the German workers follow the commands and rules of the reformist socialists. There have been observed some revolutionary gestures, and the coal workers strike (1910) is proof of what we state.

The *trade-unionist*³ organization of the English diverges quite substantially from the German organization. Besides being, like the reformist German organization, strong in numbers and capital, it has established as a basis of well-being for its members, the collective labour agreement between bosses and workers for a determined number of years. And to be able to win in any fight with industrialism, it has established strike funds, onto which almost everyone regularly contributes. To which I mean: while the German proletariat has concentrated its strength in the

³ in english in the original

bosses of social democracy, the English proletariat has instead focused on their strike funds. As such, their forms of struggle have been for a long time exclusively legalistic, which has brought very little concern to the bourgeoisie, seeing as it, through the fact that it has *always won* with the collective labour agreements, now possesses many more millions than what exists in these funds, and as such can easily beat the workers.

The English bourgeoisie has always won in two ways, as we will demonstrate: if the workers would pretend to gain from the bourgeoisie and as such, felt impelled to strike, trusting simply in their strike funds, they would always come out defeated.

Despite this, the concessions that could be wrestled from industrialism through the means of collective bargaining were by no means a guarantee, seeing not only that such a deal would create barriers to the conquest of further benefits which would coincide with new needs, but also that they would themselves confess, ipso-facto, to be inept at recognizing their own dignity as producers, and recognizing within the managerial class and in the wage system a reason of being which they do not truly possess.

This right now is being understood by a sizable portion of the English proletariat. For a while now there have been declared several strikes, with a more or less violent character, all of them violating the established collective bargains. One of them got to be very violent. It was the miners' strike in Wales, where they understood that sabotage would be the only way to have the bosses listen to them.

The legal and passive means of action are being set aside as revolutionary direct action is taking roots between the English workers, as is demonstrated in the recently approved resolutions in the last Trade-Union congress.

As such, to replace the old centralist organization, whose collapse was already a fact, and to modify in a general fashion their means of struggle, the following was voted upon: *"It is ordered to the parliamentary Committee of the Trade Unions to immediately forward a brief to all Congress-adherent Unions, with the purpose of collecting their opinions or initiatives with respect to the formation of a national Federal or Confederate organization for all professions. The Committee will collect, likewise, the opinion of the Unions with regards to the possibility, or convenience, that all accords between bosses and workers expire within the same day."*

This motion, whose spirit was considered as the precursor of the general strike, was confirmed by this other motion: *"The Congress is of the opinion that with the current system of fraction of Unions, one cannot battle with assurance or safety of triumph against the attacks of modern capitalism; and recognizing the utility of this system in the past, considers meanwhile that one would achieve better results, giving the proletariat an impulse towards redemption, if all existing Unions would organize themselves by industry, with a central committee elected by all combined Unions, with the powers to proceed in case of strike or lock-out, in such a way that the demands of a few become the demands of all. The central parliamentary Committee would be in charge of studying the question of presenting the relevant project in the following congress."*

This is, positively, an advance of the English proletariat towards revolutionary syndicalism. If these accords, as Anselmo Lorenzo very well notes, *"came from Spain or Italy, or even France, it would be said: impressionability of the Latin race! Being a work of the English, these works acquire the importance of revolutionary predictability."* But even in North America, where trade-unionism⁴ was also deeply rooted, a new organization is operating, one more revolutionary,

⁴ in english in the original

more autonomous, and freer, in which the American proletarian marches directly towards the conquest of economic and social well-being, against all reformist prejudices. In Portugal it is no longer easy, even though it may weigh on the reformist “counsel-men”, to deter or to divert the ascending march of the proletariat towards its emancipation, led by revolutionary syndicalism.

What one can learn from these movements is that the Portuguese proletariat, in virtue of its life of constant misery, is ambitious for better days of material and economic well-being. What it lacks is a solid base of organization and autonomous direction. But of these the Congress of which we have spoken has already taken care, lacking for now only the practical application.

It is indeed over this issue that the Portuguese workers should be organizing as soon as possible, since the bourgeoisie also takes no rest, not for a single moment, in their exploitation. Because it is no longer enough to think only of the minor demands, of small details, and mostly without any great benefits, such as small wage increases; what demands haste is that the workers enlarge their vision, and better understand the determining causes of their slavery, so that they may acquire the conscience of their personality, turning it respectable through common and energetic action, acting continuously in such a way as to attain the annihilation of the current capitalist regime.

IV

It is very difficult for the workers to endeavor for any movement with the goals of achieving improved material, economic, or social well-being if they are in a situation of isolation. The conditions in which modern industrialism has established production make it so that the workers cannot realize the improvements they so seek, except through the creation of a strong and valourous organization, in such a way that their action erects a serious and potent obstacle to the exploitation which victimizes them.

The way in which capitalism is developing its activity in the industrial sector, be it by mechanical development — a development, which has as a consequence the increase in the numbers of the jobless, and with it the misery in the homes of the proletariat — or by organizing itself as a powerful opponent to the conquest of further well-being by the proletariat, makes it evident that only revolutionary syndicalism can stop its advance, with any real and positive developments.

Now, as the majority of the Portuguese proletariat finds it awkward to learn new doctrines, it is necessary to say that it is not at all new. It was already established, although in a more general fashion, with the building of the International Workingman's Association. Already in this organization, whose *class associations* exist today in Portugal, there has been established a clear and direct struggle of Labour against Capital. These associations have categorically defined that the *emancipation of workers has to be the labour of these same workers*. But only now has it been established, or better yet determined, that this character of struggle is uniquely proletarian — and nothing else.

For the rest, this doctrine is within the spirit of the workers. Already for a long time have the workers recognized the necessity of organizing professionally into trade unions (class associations). What has been lacking is the associative and revolutionary education itself, born spontaneously from the spirit of autonomy which each worker must possess, even when organized. And that is why the word *syndicalism* creates awkwardness.

Syndicalism means the avenue of struggle through which the proletariat proposes to conquer, in the economic and social terrain, all the perks which it can attain until the moment of the complete extinction of the wage system. The primordial base for this doctrine presents itself as the union or professional association. In this association a conjugation of the efforts of all workers in a given profession is gathered. It is there where its strength resides, a strength which creates itself, of course, spontaneously through the ever growing need of studying the determinant causes of the misery which resides in their homes, and of the need to struggle to cleanse such misery as hastily as possible.

Of course, in the way these class associations have been viewed, one cannot reach the end which syndicalism aims for. It is known by all that the majority of organized proletariat does not have the exact comprehension of the strength it acquires when it is organized.

Through the lack of an associative and revolutionary education — an education which is only acquired through daily labour struggle — the workers have assumed that the association is not the *reunion of all*, nor that the little perks can, and should be conquered through the *cooperation of all*

–not to say anything about the remodeling of capitalist society or the abolishing of wage labour –; unfortunately the workers have in most occasions joined these associations, and have abandoned the issues and questions of struggle to the leaders, or some or another commission, and they understand that it will be in those commissions that these issues are solved. The association, to these workers, is the administrative commission, or the improvement commission, in which they judge that making some form of quota is sufficient.

It is necessary that all understand that one should not trust unto others the questions which are relevant to oneself. To trust another what only is of business for us to solve is to lack trust in ourselves. And the union (class association) is only strong when each of us integrates in the struggle with fervor, meaning with persistence and perseverance, by interesting ourselves in all and for all issues, whether they go over daily propaganda, or if they relate to claims against the bosses. A trade Union, whatever one it is, is not worth something simply by the number of members, what gives it strength and makes it feared by the bosses is the value of the revolutionary consciousness which its members have acquired. No, a Union must not be a *flock* lead by whichever *shepherd*, which most often leads us astray, but a congregation of autonomous people, with full consciousness of their own personality, of a free mind and a well-formed heart, whose love of humanity makes them integrate in their spirit the strongest solidarity in the struggle for existence.

Having so understood the syndicalist spirit, one quickly becomes convicted that the Union is by itself not sufficient for the purpose of our emancipation; and then, as a way of tying efforts between trade associations within the same or similar industries, one organizes local professional federations, when circumstances force it, as for example the ones which exist in Lisbon (federation of lisbonense drivers and union of civil construction), and in Porto (mixed commission of the four classes of civil construction, the textile federation), etc.

But that organization alone is not enough. It is necessary to complete it, to extend it to the whole country, the same way bourgeois interests are. Just as bourgeois exploitation has no limits (that is, the capitalist system being extended across the whole country), the evils which workers of one town must face are the same as the ones workers of other towns face. As such, it becomes necessary to establish workers solidarity across the whole country.

How?

By creating *national professional federations*, through which the organized workers can improve the conditions of their existence. These federations impose themselves. As an example, if in a determined location, the workers who are already organized in Unions decided to begin a movement which would benefit them, they would be susceptible to betrayal by the workers in other towns, but if they were federated between themselves this fact would not happen, since their interconnections would impede such.

On another (maybe the most important) level is the national federation, comprised of the unions from all over the country, which can easily achieve agreements between the involved professionals, agreements which will have as outcome the material and economic improvement of the well-being that all can communally enjoy.

The *national professional federations* are born out of the necessity which workers from the whole country have of defending themselves, and of conquering, each time and forever, the improvement of their condition.

But as there isn't just one profession which is under the tyranny of wage, and as workers of all professions are equally victims of bourgeois exploitation, there is born a need of organizing

themselves in such a way as to create solidarity against the common foe. And in this case we see the *Unions* or local *Federations* which include the trade unions of all professions in each settlement.

These federations already exist. And while they yet remain within a certain morass, an anomaly which already came from its constituent associations, what is true is that it is already well known how useful they are in the struggle of labour against capital.

It is through local federations that bonds of solidarity are deepened between workers; through their action efforts of general character are elevated and built, propaganda is developed, schools are created wherein the professional and technical education in which all members can enjoy is given, and others where rational instruction and education is given; the formation of libraries, – everything, then – which translates the sentiment of mutual solidarity into propaganda and education of the general proletariat.

All this organization must have one other organism where all trade unions of the country are represented, as a necessity of the struggle and to channel action against capitalist exploitation – The General Confederation of Labour, which is formed by special delegates, selected from within the unions, through intermediary of the professional federations and local Unions.

The mission of the General Confederation of Labour does not constitute in any way the *direction* of the working class or simply its organization. On the contrary: the Confederation acts according to the instructions it receives from the federation, which are themselves the reflection of the will of all Unions.

It is in the Union which all power resides, because it is absolutely autonomous. It is from the Union that springs forth all strength of resistance against capitalist exploitation and oppression; it is also from the Union that the necessary strength of cohesion will arise, the irreplaceable energy, which, as quick as the workers are aware of it, will bring about the reshaping of society and the emancipation of the working class.

The General Confederation of labor is simply an agglomeration of individuals which, being nominated by the federations, *with full consent of the Unions*, will endeavor to facilitate the march of the proletariat, through propaganda, through education, and through solidarity of all members, towards the destruction of all obstacles that oppose its liberation.

It is as such that the syndicalist organization is organized and practiced in many countries (France and Spain, especially), where industrialism is developed; and this is, truly, the organization which better answers to the wishes and aspirations of the proletariat, which anxiously awaits its liberation and full emancipation from all bourgeois exploitation and oppression.

V

Once recognized the need of establishing a powerful worker's organization, we are left with discussing the correspondent action which will facilitate to all those who are exploited the means of acquiring more and better social and economic well-being, and which will quickly lead us to the suppression of the bosses and their wages.

There are three main modes of struggle which are usually told to be available to the working class, as being the only means by which it can stretch out its hand to achieve a better state of well-being in society – *the strike fund, reformism, and direct action*; the first already adopted in England, the second in Germany, and the third in France.

Of the first two we have already spoken of in Chapter III, and we have already made clear their inefficiency as means of action in the daily struggle of the worker against capital. This does not stop us from referring to them again, however, so we may have a clearer picture of the superiority of *direct action* over the other two modes of struggle.

There was a time in which trust was put into the value of the strike fund to beat the capitalist reluctance in times of struggle, mainly by assisting the workers in times of strike. It was not taken into account that, no matter how large the membership quotas which supported the fund might be, it would never be able to accumulate enough money to be able to resist the accumulated capital of the bourgeoisie during this struggle; and as such, when one would imagine that in a safe somewhere there would be enough capital for the sustenance of a few hundred, when it sees that the workers which would initiate a strike for an indeterminate amount of time, and from there, to launch a whole movement, then failure would already be complete. The proof of this fact is in the mechanics strike in London (1897) which, after fighting for 7 months and spending **27 million pounds**, had to surrender, completely defeated.

This and other failures of no less importance have already determined the break of the English workers with this tactic. When even those who have adopted such a tactic are no longer confirming with it, and abandoning it, there is little else to argue.

The *strike fund*, besides being as useless as it is, is, just like *reformism*, pernicious to the workers. And it is for that reason that these tactics are advised to the proletariat. Indeed, the bourgeoisie has never wanted to concede to the working class the right to its life. It is too selfish to even think about it. Only in the face of danger, only when it sees the workers thinking of something through direct means which accelerate liberation, only then will the bourgeoisie act like a drowning man, when they sense incoming death, and seek to grab on to any last floating thing.

And so, the bourgeoisie sees reformism as the tactic that allows it to enjoy for the most amount of time the parasite pleasures, facilitated by the workers attached to the political vehicle. Reformism, when well understood, does not imply the existence of syndicalist associations. It is a fundamentally political tactic, and that is why it obeys to a preconceived political goal – *the social republic*. Seeing as the aspiration of the social democrats (bourgeois or not) is the conquest of political power to transform society in the political power, while allowing the subsistence of wage labour, it becomes evident for them that the method of struggle of the people must

be parliamentary struggle. The syndicalist associations serve only as a means of achieving this desired goal. And we do not need to make use of other countries to find evidence of what we say. It is enough to see what the social-democrats have produced in the field of education of the Portuguese proletariat to achieve its emancipation: nothing.

They have only made use of the associations to recruit adepts to a cause which nowhere improves the economic and social conditions of the proletariat, enjoying only the politics of their party. And still, look, see, compare the activity that the social democrats employ in the struggle against capital, and the activity they employ in election season.

And why all this? Because social-democrats only consider as the end-goal of human emancipation their Social Republic, where the proletariat ceases being the serf of private industrialism to be under the lash of a single boss – the State... A social system perhaps more tyrannical than the one which currently enslaves us.

The results achieved through reformist action are null. More than that, they are depressing, as we have seen in chapter III. Reformism, above all, conserves the proletariat in constant apathy, annihilating its own will, its autonomy, the vivifying energy which each day must bring new teaching which approaches it to its full emancipation.

For the rest, it is useless to try and stop the revolutionary march of the proletariat. Since the proletariat understood that only through the autonomous and federal organization could it hasten the end of its slavery, has it integrated, ipso-facto, in the spirit of *class struggle*, and consequently, in *direct action*. They have simply tried to make it believe that direct action is something else than it really is. As such, politicians have spread to the four winds that direct action consists of the workers coming to the public square, to expose themselves to slaughter and other sort of things. It is necessary to know that it is no such thing.

Direct action is not trusting in parliamentarism nor the men who defend it; it is not expecting from the State anything other than illusory and depressing reforms for those who produce and suffer; it is not delivering the solution of our issues with the managerial class to politicians who always cheat us; it is to fight, openly and directly, against those who directly enslave us; it is to trust in the strength of our effort; it is to fight in the socio-economic field with increasingly higher energy, in such a way that we shorten the fall of the taskmasters and of wage labour which has chained us to the machinery of capitalist slavery; it is, above all, the re-invigoration of lost energy which can return the workers to their full physical, intellectual, and moral capacity, and which elevates and integrates all feelings of its personality.

All social and political revolutions have been made through the means of direct action. In Portugal, for as long as the republican party had limited itself to parliamentary action, they failed to end the monarchy. The monarchy was replaced by the republic when their action became *direct*.

It is precisely this that the proletariat needs to do. It is to direct their attack to the foundations of the capitalist regime. The means at their disposal are the *strike, sabotage, boycotts, and the general strike*.

The partial strike is employed for three reasons: for solidarity with one or more persecuted persons, for the defense of previously acquired perks, and for the conquest of new perks.

In any of those there is a reason to use boycotts or sabotage.

As an example: if an industrialist refuses to satisfy the claims of its workers, one must promote a campaign so that nobody will make use of their products; if it is a trader, then this boycott leads to even more practical results: it is enough if the campaign is directed in such a way as to ensure

that the population do not purchase from their establishment. In such a way the industrialists or traders are compelled to satisfy the demands of their wage labourers.

Sabotage also leads to effective results.

Primitively, sabotage was restricted to “bad wage, bad work”. Today, however, it has a wider reach. It is also used in the sense of forcing the bosses to accede to the workers’ demands through the use of force. The fashion in which sabotage is employed depends on the conditions that each industry faces. It is then the task of the workers to study the best way using it in the most effective way, with the most psychological gain. To us, it is a guaranteed fact that sabotage provides excellent results. The question is in knowing how to use it in the best occasion.

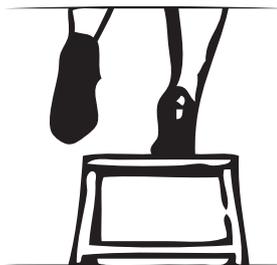
In Portugal we can already cite an example. It was in the cork-worker’s general strike. When the cork was in the train station, ready to be shipped off, it was set ablaze. How was it done, nobody knows. What is known is that it was enough for all demands to be immediately answered. One thing we should consider: the cork that burned, was the one that was already manufactured...The *general strike* is one of the primary means of struggle that the working class possesses to pull out all which it can from capitalism.

It can be employed by the workers of a town, by the workers of a certain industry inside a country, by all workers in a certain country, and it might be, maybe in a close future, used by the entire working class of this world as a means of social transformation.

One can easily see the terror which it brought to the bourgeoisie, such as the workers’ general strike in Porto (1903), and in the cork industry (1910), and still by the 24 hour general strike which Lisbon witnessed as protest against the assassinations in Setúbal; through these, one can assume what would be a national general strike.

The Portuguese proletariat must think of the strength which it could muster once it is conveniently organized: once it orients its revolutionary action it will convince itself quickly that there are no sufficient bourgeois forces which can oppose its full emancipation. From its effort hangs its liberation. Let the proletariat consider the causes of its misery, let it weigh the obstacles which it must beat, and it will quickly create the conviction that only revolutionary syndicalism will bring better days of happiness to itself, the method which has integrated in itself *direct action*, the tactic upon which the destruction of Capitalism and the State depends.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Manuel Joaquim de Sousa
Syndicalism and Direct Action
1911

Sindicalismo e Ação Direta — original text from 1911

Translated from original 1911 edition of “Sindicalismo e Ação Direta”, published by the “Centro e Biblioteca de Estudos Sociaes”(sic). Translated by the Propaganda Group of the Vrije Bond (Netherlands). Original text scanned and findable in Última Barricada, a Portuguese anarchist online text repository. <https://ultimabarricada.wordpress.com/arquivo-historico/portugal-anarquista-e-sindicalista-literatura/>

theanarchistlibrary.org