

# The Strike

There was in the fall a university strike for many months, conducted with the typical lack of imagination of the traditional left, and with the same predictable failure. The doors were barred and things were left in their useless abandonment. The government, not caring at all about pretences or any humanistic illusions, simply waited (which it could afford to do) and the strike eventually petered out, through a small margin of vote at a strike assembly. No effort was made to expand or aggravate the struggle besides a tardy effort to link up with ERT. So with these reflections we started thinking about the passing away of the strike as a shape of the world.

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Does the strike actually threaten anything in the de-industrialized West? And did the strike ever really threaten anything, as the strike in itself? In neither case, one is forced to think. For the former contemporary example, none of the pensioned workers going on strike want to threaten the social fabric but to preserve their gains in it. So even if the potential for disruption is there, the government can always manage it, since the participants themselves don't actually want to hurt a social model, but keep it. Or for precarious workers, they perform non-vital (yet obviously exploitative) labour that threatens nothing (what would happen if there were no cappuccinos

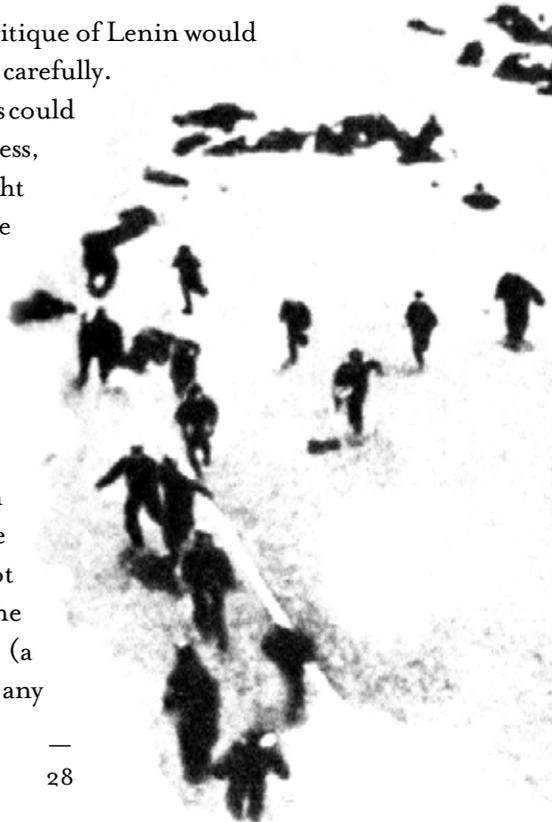
at all for a week? Etc.). And to go further, the economist thinking which says that labour makes power, and thus the workers do have the power, needs to be challenged as a symbolic fiction and a myth. As Stirner says, only power makes power, not any substitute (almost self-evidently at the logical level), and certainly not labour which takes people away from being powerful and makes them servile. This is not a mean-spirited critique: the greatest proponent of the general strike, Sorel, openly admitted that this was a myth. If this was a myth, it is one we can no longer believe in. Similarly, if we review the history we see that the strike, when it was general, always posed the unthought question of power, even if unconsciously. But if it did so unconsciously, then it failed, whereas if it consciously posed the question, then it seems like a mere correlation of things not essentially related. The general strikes like May '68 or in 1920 Germany against the Kapp Putsch are never successful on their own: or, in another sense, they are very successful on an economic terrain that keeps them rooted in a normal world. Politically they are missed chances, or promising beginnings, but left off. Revolutions



have happened without general strikes, as in 1789, and also what most forget, in Russia's 1917. Even the most famous general strike ending in a revolution, Spain's 1936, could be critiqued (as it was by Debord) as defensive and lacking in initiative. After all, it occurred as a response to Franco's coup.

And today, does the government fear the general strikes, so much as the rioting that accompanies them? And this rioting is independent of strikes, as in December, for example. Just as Marxists talk the most of strikes, but they forget that their October, and later Mao, had nothing to do with strikes, but were rather armed decisions. German councilism, too, abandoned waged strikes for purely insurrectionary strikes. But why demand insurrectionary strikes, so much as insurrectionary acts? Why be focused on the metaphysics of economics, so much as the spiritual reality of political power?

On this score, the critique of Lenin would have to be taken up more carefully. Famously, he claimed workers could never have class consciousness, but had to have it brought from without. Why don't we admit that, yes, the workers never had revolutionary economic consciousness, they sometimes had revolutionary political consciousness. In Russia this was taken over for them by the Bolsheviks. Thus the real critique would be, not that economics is really the creator of consciousness (a vulgar materialist notion at any



rate), but that politics needs to be self-created consciousness and not from a Bolshevik Party. This was the only successful Marxist revolutionary party in Europe and the one that most severed the primacy of the economic (or denied Marx's Victorian ideology in practice, in other words). How significant that the only large section of the 2nd International that remained internationalist and revolutionary (in a Marxist sense), the Bolsheviks, came from a country with no tradition of legalized unions and strikes. From the other side, the CNT-FAI never abandoned its pistoleros and historic link to Bakunin's insurrectionary ideal. Should we not view the "premature" insurrections of Spanish Anarchy, from 1931 to 1936, not in a one-sided way as failures, but also as skirmishes that prepared the society to accept the reality of a struggle that had to happen?

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What began the workers' movement? Basically Utopian thinkers, on the one hand, and in practice, Luddites, neo-Jacobins, Carbonari and other secret societies for insurrection. The issues here are basically overtly political in nature and immediatist, without the complicated metaphysics of labour. They equally are in one sense closer to us today since they have less relation to a factory proletariat than with a general mix of middle-class radicals and the poor, so called. At the end of a thing we often return to the beginning, as with the octave. At the end of this period in history we are returning to violent political struggles, sabotage of industry and commerce, and Utopian collective experiments. The European factory has vanished into its own sad inessentiality, just as has its misguided ideological worship in Marxism.

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If we return to the strike as such, it means that sabotage is getting more important than bargaining over labour, and getting powerful is much more important than faith in any illusory dialogue or recognition from the State. For example, in Italy recent practices have been blocking roads during political trials—because to protest outside a courthouse is increasingly being hindered by putting courthouses in isolation or closed sessions, and it shows a thoughtful tit-for-tat relation. In an ironic fashion, the police demonstrations against their proposed mass lay-offs in Athens were interesting, as they simply roved around on motorcycles blocking traffic, and this was one method they had of putting pressure on the government. It is always good to learn from enemies, and while blocking traffic is not the ultimate solution, it is something to consider in our world of transport and mass consumption. Just as internet traffic, too, in rivalries of the US and Russia or China, gets disrupted. Basically the economic illusions recede and we return back to the political issues at the heart of our era. This demands more thinking, since behind the frontal confrontations at the parliament, in which no one can believe anymore, lies an endless supply chain and technical flows. The recent

metro and dock workers strikes all threatened the “lines of supply” for the post modern army-society. They were treated seriously (besides the governmental police, the ship-owners were paying fascists to break the port strike) because they blocked the arteries to the diffuse heart of the social body. But these workers don’t produce anything material at all; their importance is as potentially disruptive, not productive. So again, we see we are leaving the productivist shape of the world behind and going to something more political and strategic. This is even borne out by the history of Marxism, as Trotsky in October cut the railways, telegraphs, electricity, etc. before proceeding to the famous Winter Palace. In Barcelona much the same position existed through the strength of the Anarchists. Perhaps now we can begin to think more in terms of the infrastructural bases of modern power.

Armed struggle, too, can be considered as a means of blocking the traffic of normal routine and propaganda. It is an act of communication that blocks the normal flow of governmental narratives since the everyday world of news is not, in fact, a reality but a one-sided flow of what has degenerated, from its 19th century ideology of liberty of speech, into a theatre of war for psychological operations directed against the populace. We see this quite a bit now with all the propaganda of recovery, the return to bond markets, and upcoming gentrification attempts in Athens. So interrupting these flows or, more truly, suspending their negation of the real reality is quite an important task. Generally this would have the *mass avant-garde* of a political movement connected to its real meaning, which is embodying a new form of spiritual meaning in the world, and in this sense, its existence is itself a communication at the spiritual level.

