

*“As we began to feel our collective power, people got more obvious and flippant. We started doing little things like sending things to the wrong place and deliberately shutting things down. But as we got to be more organized, one of the games we played when we were bored was to deliberately break the machinery and make a bet on how long it would take the mechanic to figure out what was wrong.”*

## **SABOTAGE IN THE WORKPLACE**

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# Sabotage in the American Workplace

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## ASSEMBLYLINE WORKER • NICK

I worked for a year in a typical World War II-style plant with a saw tooth tin roof and smoke stacks billowing oily gray smoke. There were 1,000 of us poor bastards working there, doing mind less arm and wrist repetitions thousands of times per day, producing a basic industrial product.

The accident rate was enormous. Our sign out front read IT'S BEEN \_\_\_\_\_ DAYS SINCE OUR LAST ACCIDENT. It had no number on it as it would be too embarrassing. Almost every day there was a work-time lost accident. There were three shifts a day and most of the accidents happened in the wee hours of the morning, say just after your 4:00 am lunchtime of chili con carne served warm in the can from a vending machine. The nurse was only on duty during day hours, when no one got hurt.

One time a co-worker got his leg jammed in a machine. The foreman pulled me off the line and ordered me to take him to the hospital; an ambulance cost too much. I ran to get my car and drove around town looking for the damn hospital, which I had never been to before, while my buddy moaned in deep pain. Once there, I helped him out to the emergency room and they took him away. I had to stay up front to fill out the papers. When I told the admitting nurse where we were from, I didn't even have to sign anything. She said, "We have an open account with your company."

This was a union shop and contract negotiations were on. The contract expired and the big union bosses told us to work without a contract. We walked instead. To prepare for the walkout, it was essential to plan ahead. Production went way down so as not to have a big stock of finished goods. The last shift to work before the walk-out had a myriad of mechanical problems. It was uncanny. The laser quality assurance probes started breaking, their bloody red eyes getting skewed every which way. The box machines started getting jammed and glue was dripping all over the conveyor belts. Forklifts were falling apart, parts from them disappearing mysteriously. Finally, with the factory so disabled, we walked off the job. The next shift was massed by the main gate, cheering, taunting the bosses and pleased at not having to cross the gate and enter the monstrous plant. The international union boss and the company boss ordered us back, but no one balked. Out of 1,000 people perhaps seven went back, and we took their pictures for future shame.

During the strike, the management desperately needed to truck the warehoused goods to market. Often, however, dump trucks of broken concrete

greed on the part of the industrialists. When the IWW took it up, it was about the only effective weapon left to the underdog. Then the wobblies lost control of it and sabotage lost its social vision and purpose. The advocates of sabotage had turned loose in the community a force which they could not check and whose consequences were far beyond their intention.

Some employers, trying to combat sabotage, hired spies whom they paid more than regular workers, and whose business it was to spot strikers on the job and saboteurs and get them eliminated and blacklisted. But this, I think, was combating one evil with another, which produced a third and even greater evil. With spies in the factories, the workers distrusted one another, each believing that the other was or might have been a spy. This played the devil with the men's sense of honour. It tended to make 'heels' and 'sneaks' of them. I know of cases where workers practiced sabotage upon one another, 'framing' their fellows in order to get their jobs or gain other advantages. I know of a case where a man was beaten up by his fellow workers who believed him to be a spy. He happened not to be one.

Also, spies often encouraged sabotage; or, rather, detective agencies which specialized in saboteur spying frequently slipped saboteur instructors into the factories as workers. These taught the other employees subtler means of sabotage and soldiering, so that the detective whom the employers hired to watch the workers might have something to report. Thus, in some cases, the industrialists were quite helpless in the face of sabotage and striking on the job.

Sabotage and striking on the job are forms of revenge that the working class in America - blindly, unconsciously, desperately - exacts for the employers' relentless, brutal opposition to its strivings in the past - revenge for the Ludlow massacre, for the Mooney-Billings frame up, for the Centralia injustice, for the Sacco-Vanzetti horror, for the cossackism in the steel strike.

would get dumped in front of the plant gates, preventing the big tractor trailers from entering. Despite not having strike benefits (the union had declared our strike illegal) and no unemployment benefits (the company lawyers got it cut off), we stayed out for a month until we won the strike.

#### BANK TELLER • JASON

I was sick of starving so I needed a job. I walked into the California Employment Development Department and this was posted on the wall: "Be a bank teller. We'll train you." I didn't have any experience at all. I just went in and took an aptitude and math test and aced them both. Then I went to a week of teller school that was run by Bank of America. They taught me how to count money, handle irate people, and what to do if someone pulled a gun on me.

The job was okay. It was just a job but I was getting paid more money than I had ever been paid before. I ended up working there for a little more than a year. There wasn't that much job pressure at first, but then there was this weird reorganization. I started out working part time, but then they had me doing other work and paid me at a lower rate for these extra hours. I was working full time but classified as part time so I wound up making less but working more. I got kind of tired of working full time but I was told that if I wanted to keep my job I would have to keep working those hours and they refused to hire me full time.

This is when I put the word out to my friends that I would cash any check, just come on down. So over the course of a couple of days, there was a stream of people who had forged checks, or had scammed them somehow and I cashed them. The next day was the busiest day of the year for that particular branch: a Friday, the first of October, payday for welfare, Social Security, San Francisco General, MUNI, the City, and private business. The line was out the door. I just didn't show up. My soon-to-be-wife, who also worked there with me, didn't show up either. We were the two best tellers at the bank and we were also the only ones who spoke English as our first language. It just wrecked that branch. I think that did more damage than all of the bad checks that I'd cashed. I never went back. They tried to call but we didn't answer the phone for a week.

Eventually all those checks came back as bad. I knew that if you steal from a bank from the inside, you'll never be prosecuted because it hurts the bank's reputation. So I didn't think twice about doing what I did. I did it to get even, which I don't think really happened, but it did make me feel better.

#### BICYCLE MESSENGER • KENNY

Being a bike messenger in Seattle is hellish, but we had it kind of cush. We had to work our butts off, but at least we got paid by the hour.

The company always let us wear shorts, but since we had to wear company T-shirts, we cut off the sleeves. All of a sudden the company decided to clean up its image because they were dealing with big businesses. They started making us wear long pants and shirts made of heavy material, which is insane. Try biking ten miles up

hills, up massive hills with heavy packages as fast as you can, in long pants!

All of the messengers agreed there was no way this could continue. We all decided that we wouldn't wash our clothes at all and that we'd wear the same thing every day. We also realized that the intense heat you build up when you bike, mixed with the right food, means you're farting all the time. So we found the right type of food that caused the worst type of explosions, and whenever we were in a big office building, we farted. You can imagine what it was like when one of us was in an elevator with ten business people in suits. Our clothes were stinking, our bodies were stinking and within a month the company had enough complaints to let us wear shorts again.

#### BUS BOY • CHUCK

I worked at a seafood restaurant in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where we had to wear ridiculous outfits. They were these big, blue polyester sailor suits that had big, white bell-bottom pants and a French sailor hat that had a little red fuzz ball on top. All the little old ladies who ate there thought we were cute. It was horrible: the suit made us sweat and we felt completely embarrassed.

I worked there with a lot of my friends and we were all bus boys. We were on the low end of the totem pole. The waitresses were cheesing us for the tips. We were supposed to get a certain percentage but we rarely got anything. The guy that ran the place had a horrible temper which he took out on us, so, needless to say, we had a lot of animosity towards the place.

The restaurant was famous for its desserts. The little old ladies liked to eat these massive napoleons and big cheesecakes. We had this game called "Search and Destroy." When the waitresses weren't looking or were turned away from the counter, we would run back into the kitchen, grab as many of these desserts as possible, take them back to the dishwashing area, and totally dig into them with our hands, filling our mouths and eating them as fast as we could. Then we'd throw the dish in the dishwasher to destroy the evidence.

I worked there for four months wearing that little hat. I used to take it off and hide it, but then the owner would ask me, "Where's your uniform?" I'd pull out the hat and put it back on. One time the owner wanted us to work on New Year's Eve and we were all at someone's house, saying how we were tired of it. We sat there burning our little hats and just being totally disgusted with the job. We all decided to quit at the same time, that same day, on New Year's Eve. We left him completely short-handed. That was the best thing, sticking it to that guy on one of the busiest days of the year. We had a permanent workers' strike!

#### CARBURETOR ASSEMBLER • EUGENE

It's common to hear people complain about American cars breaking down and having problems; there's always some goddamn thing wrong with them. It's almost always internal, and they have to take the car back to the shop and figure out what's wrong with it. It's not an accident or a fluke. These machines are designed by engineers who

unionists' and radicals' inability to "match the industrialists' brains and weapons in open warfare, there was no effective organized radical movement in the last decade. There was, however, a vast unorganized radical movement, including millions of workers outside the unions and the socialist and communist parties, skilled and unskilled. They were left to their own devices to improve their lot in life and revenge themselves upon the system which used people only when their toil might bring profits for an employer, let them starve (unless they turned bootlegger or criminal) when there was a surplus of production, and utterly discarded them when they became old. After the suppression of the organized radical movement in 1922 or thereabouts, there was perhaps as much radicalism among American workers as ever before, only now it found scarcely any vent in organized open political or industrial action as it had 20 years ago, or even in the few years immediately after the first world war. The workers' radicalism now found individual, personal expression in doing as little as possible for the wages they received and in wasting as much material as possible. Their radicalism now lacked all social vision and purpose; its motive was mainly personal revenge.

This sort of radicalism continued into the 1930s. Workers were cynical. The motto in a factory where I once worked was: "To hell with 'em all but six; save them for pallbearers!" The more intelligent workers had no faith in politics. They sneered at the Socialist Party, especially those who had witnessed at close range the futile tactics of its leaders. They had no faith in trade unionism; most of those who belonged to the unions belonged because they must; because, for the time being, the unions still controlled certain jobs. They knew their leaders were crooked. I have heard members call their officials crooks from the floor in meetings and refer to their organizations as rackets. They had no faith in a better future for themselves as a class, while at the same time they felt that they were stuck - that most of them were fated to remain workmen till they got too old to work. They knew that the system was unjust to them; they had been told so by numberless red agitators and demagogues, past and present. They realized that most of their class movements, industrial and political, in the past had been largely ineffectual. They knew that the cause of low wages was a surplus of workers and that unemployment, which hit them every once in a while, was due to overproduction. And so, logically enough from their individual points of view, they struck on the job and wasted the bosses' time and material, thereby stretching out, as they felt, their spell of employment and diminishing the profits of employers, who, they believed, underpaid them.

This went on, more or less, as I have hinted, throughout industry, even where the IWW, who developed striking on the job and sabotage tactics in America, had never been strong (except, of course, in the great plants with the speed-up system, such as the Ford factories, where the motions of every worker were purely mechanical, prescribed by the management, and the foreman saw that a worker executed them with the required result). Early in the summer of 1930, for instance, the organized cafeteria owners in New York City and Brooklyn gave out the information that saboteurs among their employees wasted or destroyed from one to two million dollars' worth of food a year. The working class had been driven to sabotage by

machines leather bands were cut with safety razor blades. The foreman blamed these things on "those communist bastards". On several of the cut leather bands one morning 'Sacco-Vanzetti' was inscribed in white chalk.

I worked in three or four restaurants in New York and Pittsburgh and encountered sabotage in at least two of them. In one place a communist dishwasher before quitting poured several cans of kerosene into barrels of sugar and urinated into containers of coffee and tea. I imagined that he went from job to job doing this sort of thing.

In New York I met another communist, a handsome red-headed young Irishman, whose special racket was to work on soda-fountains in the garment making sections and serve his communist friends, whom he counted by the score, expensive milk drinks and fancy sandwiches for which he handed them nickel and dime checks to pay the cashier. When he was discovered and discharged he found himself another job in the Bronx or Brooklyn near some factory employing great numbers of communists.

In a print shop in Kansas City the workers, instead of distributing expensive type, dumped it into the so-called 'hell box'. A printer friend of mine who has worked in big and small shops, union and non-union, all over the country, tells me that the hell box is still a very popular receptacle for type. Few printers nowadays retain any love for fine type or good workmanship.

In a shoe factory in Milwaukee a man was pointed out to me who was known among some of his fellow workers to be a saboteur. An eccentric-looking person, he hated the machines and had all sorts of devices to damage them. He was an indefinite sort of radical, and he considered the machines a great curse to humanity. I have encountered this hate for machines elsewhere. People vent it in various forms of sabotage, which has no connection with IWWism or communism, but is purely a matter of personal resentment and vindictiveness. I have seen people who - sometimes drunk, sometimes sober - cursed the machine and, passing by, shook their fists at the mills, declaring they were not their slaves. Every big industrial town seems to have 'nuts' who believe that machines are alive and hold them - the workers - in their power.

Shortly after the war I read I forget where - about an American soldier who believed that machines were killing people in revenge for the work that they were made to do. "Stop the machines", he would cry, lying wounded in a hospital, "and there'll be no more war. Machines make war - machines kill us!".

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During the 1920s big and bitter union upheavals were comparatively few in the United States, but the struggle of the have-nots against the haves went on unceasingly and relentlessly just the same; only now it was no longer open warfare. On the surface things were quiet, but underneath the workers were being infected with the germs of sabotage and striking on the job.

As a result of the employers' anti-union drives, the anti-red hysteria, marked by such incidents as the Centralia trial and the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, and the

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know what they're doing. They're precise. It's the people putting them together who aren't quite as precise as the engineers would like them to be.

I worked manufacturing carburetors in Detroit. There was one particular carburetor that you could place a BB in and it was there for life. The only way you could see it was if you x-rayed it. The only way to fix it was to replace the carburetor. It would be an intermittent problem with your carburetor you'd never know when it was going to strike. Usually it would hit you when you were going downhill.

Anytime we got a chance to do internal parts, like a carburetor, we would screw them up purposely. We would put in bolts that were the wrong size. We would do anything we could to make the carburetors dysfunctional. We did this to as many carburetors as possible.

I inspired and taught many others. They were bored out of their minds. It was such a relief for them to take that screwdriver and damage that part internally, knowing that no one would know they did it.

The goal was to wreak the most blatant destruction without getting caught. The most insidious thing, of course, was dealing with internal parts of engines and inside door panels. Workers might take a pair of pliers and pop off just one cog on the end of the plastic crank. There's a gear inside that's plastic and when you roll the window up and the cog is popped off; eventually that window won't work. With wiring and electronic parts, you could do countless things so that initially it works, but later on you'll have problems. You can't find out the source of the problem, who did it, or how it happened. That's the beauty of it.

Sabotage is different than revenge because it's a means by which you can express yourself and free yourself from oppression and dehumanization. You aren't attacking a person, you're dealing with an issue. It's satisfying to know that you're causing long-term problems for the industry. For the first time in my life, I saw other people like me who were drudging through life, making pretty good money and benefits, but whose lives were shit. Being human is so wonderful. If we're pushed apart from that, we tend to struggle because you can't be human in America and work in industry.

When you work for the auto industry, profit is number one. Although they say they're not doing it anymore, they've cut back on quality. They're trying to compete with Japan, but the only way to do that is to treat the most important person in the industry -- the worker -- as a human being.

They don't treat you like a human being, they treat you like a robot, and your function is to produce the profit. You're dehumanized. The carburetors were our way of equalizing the situation.

I caused a lot of damage. Not only did I teach and encourage others to do it, I caused many Americans strife and heartache and taught them the lesson not to buy from that particular company. The auto industry got a bad rap because of it. The fear and dissatisfaction from driving a car that breaks down all the time are going to stick.

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## COIL WINDER • JAY

While working as a coil winder in a big transformer factory, we workers faced the dehumanizing “science” known as Minutes Times Motion, which is where a computer estimates how long it should take to complete a task such as building a transformer. Every day, we would check the number and type of transformers built, and at the end of the week we would get a computer-generated analysis of our efficiency rate. If we “beat the clock,” we would get a happy face on our evaluation report. A frown face would mean that we were just not up to par, as far as our computer was concerned.

To get a grip on this bad situation, especially in a non-union plant, we required a total conspiracy amongst workers. Starting with the guy I knew the best, we each agreed to slow down production on one of the transformer types. We each handed in approximately the same number of units as our co-workers. After a few frowning faces on our monthly reports and a talking-to by the supervisor, the management had to readjust their computer time accordingly. It makes management look bad to have a product constantly come in under production goals. Adjusting to our new time made them come out around 100 percent again. This victory encouraged other assemblers to do the same, with equally good results.

As we became faster at winding, we would overproduce and thus we would have to store some units in our lockers. We soon saw the wisdom of having a bank of units, in case we didn’t want to work as hard one day, or a friend needed one because they messed one up. We earned more free time at work, and were still working at 100 percent, as far as management was concerned.

## COMBINE DRIVER • TAD

I got a job with a custom cutter, the people who follow the wheat harvest from Texas on up to North Dakota every summer. The combines we were using were a new model series on loan from International Harvester. A fleet of eight or ten of us went along in a big row through the fields and checked out the new models to see how they were performing.

We were all pretty young, between fourteen and twenty-two, and would rather flick off than sit on these things for twelve hours a day. Once or twice a week we would slug the combine, which means we’d cause the combine to feed up so much material that it would bind up the cylinder inside the machine. We would shut down two or three machines. Then they would set them aside and take us off the field. International Harvester representatives would come out, tear apart the machines, and try and figure out what the fuck was going on.

We did this intentionally so we could slack off. We got a kick out of these guys with ties and clipboards going over the machine. We thought this was tremendously funny because they seemed very concerned since they had millions of dollars at stake. It was beyond them to think that we would do something like that because, like most employers, they thought their employees were a lot dumber than they really were. I think this is true for most non-unionized, off-the-street labor. They generally assume

Then, instead of pumping the bilges, one of the men pumped out nearly all the fresh water! There was enough left for drinking but none for the boilers; so we were compelled to use salt water for steam, with the result that presently the valves were choked with salt. We had to stop every few hours to clean them out. We were about a day off Madeira when the Oskawa’s engines went out of commission entirely. We drifted a night and a day while the machinery was being sufficiently repaired to enable us to limp into Madeira, in which port, however, there were no facilities for any extensive repairs, and we procured only water and a few more lamps and some oil for the running lights. The dynamos, it appeared, were totally ruined.

The refrigeration system was not working, the frozen meat began to melt and smell; whereupon, to make a good job of it, someone - I suspect one of the IWW - shot steam into the refrigerator pipes, with the result that before it was discovered much of the cargo was cooked or otherwise spoiled.

Anyhow, the wobblies laughed among themselves, figuring how much the United States government would have to pay for the ruined cargo.

Somewhere off the coast of Holland, the fuel oil supply suddenly gave out, and we had to be towed into Hamburg, where the investigations that followed nearly drove the master out of his mind. At the end he was exonerated and some of the officers were jailed and deprived of their licences. The Oskawa was sufficiently repaired to be taken back to the United States and there put in the “boneyard”, where there already were hundreds of other ships in no better condition!

One of my IWW friends aboard said to me, “They couldn’t have done a better piece of sabotage even if everybody from the skipper down had been a wobbly or a communist. Hallelujah!”.

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The Oskawa incident which, by the way, is a matter of record in Washington and also received considerable attention in the Hamburg press at the time, as well as some slight mention in the American newspapers -disgusted me utterly with sailing and so I began to earn my living ashore again. From 1923 to 1927 I worked on dozens of jobs all the way from Philadelphia to Los Angeles - in steel, furniture, shoe and textile factories, on farms and ranches, in restaurants, in a stone quarry and a printshop, in a grocery store and an automobile plant, on construction jobs, on docks unloading ships - and practically everywhere I found some form of sabotage. Nowhere did I find any real zest for work, any pride in work.

In a furniture shop in Cleveland, where I managed to get a job as a carpenter’s helper, I found cliques of workers organized to help one another in working for themselves in the boss’s time, making parts out of the boss’s material, then smuggling them out under their clothes in the evening, and finally assembling them at home into chairs and cabinets, either for sale or for their own use. In a lace mill near Scranton, Pennsylvania, where I worked for a while, I found the operatives, especially the men, in a bad mood. The management was speeding up the machines, forcing the employees to work faster and faster for the same pay, with the result that there was much sabotage on the machinery. Looms were injured; on the large

found in the fo'c's'le unquestionably were the best men aboard. The skipper was an old man, not in the best of health, somewhat bewildered by his responsibility. The mates, engineers and the steward were a collection of bleary-eyed 'lime-juicers' and overbearing 'squareheads', licensed during the war emergency when almost anybody could have obtained a ticket. There was much drunkenness and brawling, along with poor navigation. In Hamburg we picked up an enormous cargo of champagne and liqueurs for South America. Then, four or five days after leaving Germany, bottles began to pop in the officers' rooms and the mess-rooms; finally' even on the bridge and in the chart-room, and cases of the marvelous liquids found their way into the crew's quarters.

The old skipper - feeble and unresourceful character that he was, scared of his own authority, befuddled by endless shipping board regulations and the Seamen's Act, afraid of legal trouble which would entail making all sorts of reports at which he was not clever - was beside himself. The second mate was the only other officer who kept sober. The ship was thrown off her course several times; but, finally and miraculously, thanks in part perhaps to the six or seven IWW who stayed sober and helped the skipper to run the boat, she reached Brazil.

The cargo discharged, it was discovered that the Oskawa was short over 100 cases of champagne, kummel and other fancy hooch. The old man, of course, knew what had become of the stuff; but, nearly the whole ship being in a sort of conspiracy against him, he was unable to locate a single case aboard or prove anything against his officers. He signed for the shortage, to be made good by the ship. He looked around both in Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo, but realized that he could not pick up any better officers and crew in South America, even should he be so fortunate as to rid himself of his present gang.

The Oskawa's cargo on the return trip to Hamburg was about 1000 tons of frozen meat.

A day or so out, the champagne bottles that they had hidden away began to pop once more in the officers' rooms and on the bridge. Most of the officers became openly hostile to the captain, who was at his wits' end. He carried a gun and, in his futile way, threatened to arm a few sailors, including myself and three of the IWW, whom he considered loyal.

One day someone fed too much oil into the furnaces, and the fire blazed out of the funnel, belching burning oil all over the ship. The fire destroyed or damaged a good part of the upper structure, including most of the lifeboats, the bridge and the chart-room; indeed, it was sheer luck that the sober part of the crew -- mostly IWW - managed to extinguish it. "We'd let 'er burn", said the wobblies, "if it weren't that we'd go to hell with 'er".

But the worst was yet to come. While still several days from Hamburg, the engineer burned out the dynamos, so that for the rest of the voyage the Oskawa was without lights and there was no more cold air for the refrigerator pipes. Indeed, to the great menace of other ships on that course, part of the time she sailed at night without running lights. We used oil lamps, which, however, were little better than nothing; and one night the first mate, too drunk in his bunk to raise himself and put out the light, kicked the lamp over and we had to put out another fire.

that you will never pull any stunts. Everybody on the job was in cahoots together. We got to sit around in hotel rooms while they looked over the machines.

#### COPY SHOP CLERK • ALAN

I've never dealt with so many fucked-up managers as when I started working at a busy, downtown Minneapolis copy shop. We had to do a lot of work, took a lot of shit from customers and got paid beans. Actually, it was one of the best jobs I've had because everybody that I worked with was really fun.

One day, a friend from work and I decided to go to a movie, until we realized how absolutely poor we were. The only one we could afford had a \$1 admission. We decided we weren't being paid enough, so we started to pay ourselves -- from the cash register. We got to the point where we couldn't work a day unless we got \$40 each, on top of our daily wages. If a manager got on our case to work faster, we laughed and took \$20 out of the cash register for harassment. We found out later that we weren't the only employees taking money. It seemed to be a common practice.

Eventually, we got so fed up that we decided we weren't going to charge anyone for anything all day. This became known as the "Free Day." The three of us gave away hundreds of dollars' worth of services and products. We didn't charge anyone for time on the computers laser printers or copiers. If anyone came to pick up a big job, we just gave it to them. A lot of customers were very shocked. Some people almost got to the point of demanding we take their money, which, when you think about it, is silly. We told customers it was part of a promotional campaign or that the cash register was broken and we couldn't take their money at the time.

The owners started to notice money was missing, and that at least one employee was stealing, but there was nothing they could do because the store was open twenty-four hours and they didn't keep good track of things. I think they still don't know just how much money we took.

Our bonus checks were paid according to the number of good customer evaluations we got. We would go through them (even though we weren't supposed to touch them, much less look at them), and if any bad ones came in we'd throw them out. If we didn't meet our end-of-the-month quota for good ones, we just made some up with fake names and addresses, and wrote how great the employees were at that particular store. The results would be published in the company newsletter each month. We were rated the best employees and the best store. The management never thought employees could make money by faking these evaluations. We faked hundreds of them. To this day, when I get together with other people who worked there, we always have a good laugh.

#### DISCOUNT CHAIN STORE STOCK CLERK • KARL

Working at Kmart was your typical teenage shit job. The job was boring. Everyone who worked there hated being there; it was drudgery. The aspect that was really depressing was seeing people who had families work there, making the same amount as a teenager. It was sad to see people support their kids on shit wages. I don't think

any employee, except for upper management, made more than \$15,000 a year.

The day after Christmas, 1979, the store laid off a lot of people, even people who had been working there longer than I had. To get even with the company, I started stealing.

The first things I took were two music cassettes that were in the stock room. I stuck them in my sock and walked out. When I got into the appliance department I gave my friends discounts on batteries and cassette tapes. Everything was minor until I was moved into the camera and jewelry department where I was under a lot of pressure. I couldn't take it anymore. I knew that other people were taking stuff but everyone was really quiet about it. I had a friend come in and I gave him a shopping bag filled with six Minolta and Pentax cameras -- about \$400 each -- and a couple cases of film. I charged him \$1.99, which was the price of some batteries. I made sure that I stapled a long receipt onto his bag. Then two security guards walked up and we engaged them in a twenty minute discussion about shoplifting. Later, my friend walked out the front door. After that, it was easy.

I was transferred to building materials, where I had access to a large garage door. My friend had a big car and we loaded it up with garage door openers and ceiling fans. At Kmart they only went by department sales -- they didn't have I.D. numbers like other big stores -- so they didn't know what item was being sold. We could sell a load of plywood and the company would think we had sold a load of garage door openers. My friend would go out and sell the stuff and we would split the profit. We did this three or four times a week. I think we stole close to \$100,000 worth of merchandise. We wouldn't give a second thought to leaving the shelf empty, and when we ran out we would order more. I told some of the people who worked there what I was doing and most would say, "I couldn't do that." Then one day I saw my friend going outside with a huge box filled with about \$20,000 worth of stuff, everything from gold chains to stereos.

In 1981, Kmart 3399 had the worst yearly inventory of any Kmart in the country. The store had \$500,000 in invisible waste. That year we fudged the inventory: instead of marking one ceiling fan we would mark five. The same people who were stealing were doing the inventory, so we were able to cover our asses real good, but it made us wonder who was taking the rest of the stuff. In reality, the store probably had lost between \$750,000 and \$1,000,000 to invisible waste.

An ironic story is that one Christmas I took four cases of Atari games and gave them out as presents at the store's Christmas party. I later found out that security was taking stuff too. The person in charge of the warehouse was taking stuff by the forklift load and putting it in the back of his pickup. Nobody ever thought to check that guy.

I don't think I did that much damage to the company. In 1982 the company blamed the store's problems on management, most of whom were transferred to other stores. The store never fired or caught anyone stealing, but the store's reputation did bring management morale way down. Just think, they were in charge of the worst store in the entire country.

the owners!" We discussed the graft that the skipper, the chief engineer, the mates and the steward were pulling down each trip. I was told that on the second previous voyage the captain and the engineer had fixed up the engines so that the vessel had to be laid up in a San Pedro, California, shipyard for three weeks for \$23,000 worth of repairs, for which they collected a bonus from the shipyard's agent.

I found out that IWW and other saboteurs aboard ships often helped officers do their dirty work, and with great gusto. I recall that once, when one of the mates ordered a group of us sailors to throw over the side a slightly damaged oil hose nearly 50 feet long and worth several hundred dollars, because the skipper did not want to bother making out a report to the home office the way it had been damaged, most of us laughed; it was a joke on the company - "to hell with it!"

An IWW sailor, perhaps the most intelligent worker I ever met, said to me once when we discussed sabotage on the ships: You see in the magazines that the United States is having great difficulties in establishing a merchant marine of any consequence because in America shipbuilding costs exceed those elsewhere; because American investors would expect a larger return on capital invested in shipping than foreign companies make, and because the wages of American crews are higher than those paid by the lines of other countries - with the logical result, so they say, that the American freight and passenger rates must be higher, and consequently shippers find it advantageous to deliver their goods in foreign bottoms I'm no high-powered executive, only a fo'c's'le stiff; but I know enough to realize that all these alibis are only superficially true; the last alibi, perhaps, not even superficially. In point of fact, American officers and men do receive higher wages than the ships' crews of other countries except Canada; but in relation to the wages ashore American crews are hardly as well paid as the Japanese. And, to my mind, therein lies one of the primary causes of the sad state of the American merchant marine. The American go-getter in the shipping business, as his brothers in other lines, is stupidly greedy; for those who, caught between the circumstances of their environment and their own innate qualities and shortcomings, are compelled to sell him their brains and brawn, he usually has small consideration and rewards them as meagerly as he can manage for all the effort he can exact from them - with the result that in the long run his slaves get back at him, some of them through conscious sabotage, such as our IWW sabotage, which nibbles away at the vitals of the capitalist system; others, half-unwittingly, through sabotage which has no social aim and is purely personal revenge, but which blindly attains the same purpose - hastens the decay of the system. It is true that the so-called maintenance of American ships is higher than of most foreign ships, but that is solely because the crews don't give a damn for the ships or the owners and willfully waste. I don't doubt but that more is wasted on American ships than the shippers manage to get out of the government in subsidies."

A few months after he had said this to me -- it was in 1922 - my wobbly sailor friend and I signed on the Oskawa at Philadelphia. She was a United States shipping board freighter, 6100 gross tons, built in 1918 at a cost of nearly two million dollars and equipped with an up-to-date refrigeration system. We sailed to Hamburg with a small cargo. The trip there was uneventful. The crew was the usual crew that one found on American freighters, perhaps a little worse. The half dozen wobblies I

from Moscow to sabotage American industry. These stories probably were based upon a confidential circular said to be 'unquestionably authentic' - but which in all likelihood wasn't-which the United States department of justice 'discovered' and published at that time, and in which some 'executive committee in Moscow urged its representatives abroad, among other things to instigate general and particular strikes, injure machinery and boilers in factories, and do everything possible to disorganize capitalist industries.

There can be little question that, early in the last decade, communists in the United States engaged in such doings; only, let me hasten to say, there was and is no connection between them and several communist movements now existing in this country. Most American communists at that time were various kinds of dissenters from the IWW, none of whom would now have any connection with communism.

Regular leaders of conservative unions issued warnings to the strikers to steer clear of ultra-radical agitators. Even so, during the 1920s and '30s sabotage and striking on the job became a part of the psychology and action of millions of American workers who would resent being called wobblies or communists.

3

Late in 1921 I found myself in the east again. Unable to get work ashore, I went to sea and during the next year sailed on five different American ships, on all of which I encountered sabotage, both among the sailors, wobbly and non-wobbly, and the officers (though, of course, the latter would not have called their doings sabotage).

As a messboy I saw wasted or thrown overboard thousands of dollars' worth of food supplies and as a seaman tens of thousands of dollars' worth of paint and ship's equipment. I met wobblies on every ship and made friends with some of them. One of them, I remember, once said to me: "The American underdog is getting wised up and so is the American underling; I mean the small-time bosses and overseers, like the officers on a ship. They're beginning to realize they're underpaid and they act accordingly. I've been going to sea now for 15 years and, if I know anything - and I consider myself a pretty smart guy - there is, for instance, more graft, petty graft, on American ships than ever before. As you know, stewards ruin food and dump it overboard so that when they get into port they can order more provisions and collect a small commission on the purchase from the provision house. The same is true of mates, engineers and masters. On some ships I've been on the whole gang of them was in cahoots, selling great big coils of expensive Manila rope in foreign ports or rolling them overboard, throwing over whole cans of ship's paint and so on - so that they could order more rope and paint, and collect cumshaw."

On a ship on which I made a round trip from New York to the Pacific coast the fo'c's'le was almost 100% saboteur - and some of the men had scarcely heard of IWWism. The wobblies had what at least they deemed a high social motive when they preached and practiced sabotage; the non-IWW saboteurs, however, seemed to be just in an ugly mood and derived a mean personal satisfaction when, instead of washing a paint brush, they tossed it over the rail or threw whole bucketfuls of paint into the sea. There was no shipmindedness. "To hell with 'er!" was the motto. "To hell with

## DEMOLITION WORKER • ANTHONY

The wicked New England winter had set in. There was no more work haying fields or picking apples. There was food from our livestock and from what we could put away from our garden, but no money for anything else. My friends and I drove our beat-up station wagon to the nearby "city," population 5,000. We went to apply for food stamps and possibly general assistance. The case worker wouldn't hear of it: "There's plenty of work in this town. I know for a fact that they're hiring workers across town at the old grain mill."

We bundled ourselves against the bitter cold and went over to the hulking remains of an enormous grain mill that was now in a state of disrepair. We found the boss in his little warming shack relaxing next to his diesel space heater. "Sure I need more men, can't pay the going rate, but it is work. It's paying buck-fifty an hour." This guy was in cahoots with the state and he wasn't even paying minimum wage. We took the job.

Our job was to tear apart the huge grain mill and strip the parts into piles, so he could sell the bits and pieces. The planks from the hardwood floors, the electrical equipment, the I-beams and metal work, the plumbing fixtures -- all this would be resold, plus he would get paid for the demolition itself. He sent us out with crowbars, hammers and little else.

We were working on sub-flooring on the top of a three-story building. The roof had already been removed so we were totally exposed to the snow and howling wind. The floorboards were frozen and difficult to budge with crowbars. We attacked them with hammers and catspaws. We were in danger of freezing to death or slipping on the icy walkways and falling to our deaths. We worked all day while the boss huddled inside with his jet powered space heater. We went home bitter with cold. We returned day after day in search of that elusive paycheck. Some days it wouldn't climb above zero degrees, and we'd be out sawing flooring apart, disassembling metal conduit or cutting I-beams with cutter torches, watching them fall perilously below. At lunch time, we would munch on our cheese sandwiches in the comfort of the warming shack, while the boss would stand by watching the clock. We were perhaps twenty, all young men, most with wives and new babies. The wives would come around at lunchtime to bring sack lunches and show the baby to their freezing husbands. There was a sick, desperate feeling most of the time, as this miserable work was the only way to escape the bitter impoverishment winter brings to small towns.

At the end of the day, on payday, we waited for our checks. The boss looked sheepish. "Look boys, see that pile of hardwood there? I expect to have your checks as soon as I sell that pile. Then there'll be plenty of money. Tomorrow, no doubt." We stood around and stared in disbelief. The next day came and still no money. A week passed with all of us sawing boards, tearing down walls, chainsawing through sub-flooring, sparks flying as we hit nails below. The anger was building.

Finally, one morning, we threw our tools down. Gathering all around, stomping our heavy boots trying to warm our feet, we plotted our retaliation for working several weeks with only promises of a paycheck. We knew he had in fact

sold much of the material, and had even bought a new pick-up truck a few days ago. We picked up our crowbars, stomped down the remains of the stairs and barged into his office, the twenty of us prominently displaying our crowbars. We demanded our money. He swore he didn't have any. We said we'd have to pay ourselves then.

We left the warming shack and fanned out over the plant, grabbing anything of value. We brought our vehicles up close to the gate and started filling them with anything we could possibly resell -- the tools, chain saws, materials, electrical equipment, anything and everything. The boss just stood by nervously, not even bothering to call the police as the five or so cops in town wouldn't mess with the twenty of us with crowbars. When we were satisfied with our booty, we waved our bars at him; called him the scumbag he was and drove away. Never heard from him again.

#### HOSPITAL PERSONNEL • MALCOLM

One day the three hospital workers I lived with showed me a memo the hospital put out announcing a picnic for the staff. It said you had to bring your own food. The administration thought they were doing all the workers a great favor sending them this invitation to a bring-your-own-food picnic.

We took the memo and reworded it so it said the hospital would provide steaks and a bunch of other stuff. We sent it through inter office mail so it went to every station in the hospital. Supervisors took it as a real message and posted it around their departments. Within a few days, the administration sent out a message saying, "Disregard all previous messages about the picnic. There is still going to be a picnic. The kitchen workers will be cooking up hamburgers and hot dogs." It went from bring-your-own-food to them providing it.

The hospital circulated another memo about everyone having to help cut labor costs. We replied to it by sending out one suggesting that the best way to cut costs was to move the hospital to Korea. We listed all the options for moving and some people read it and halfway believed it, then realized it just wasn't possible. It was one of those jokes that get to the heart of the matter.

The hospital puts out two magazines, one called Pulse and one called Pulsebeats. The first is internal, for employees, and the other is for the community, although it probably never gets out of the hospital. Because the memos we put out were well-received, we took Pulsebeats and turned it into Deadbeats. It was a complete parody of the official magazine.

Deadbeats was circulated and quickly became popular at the hospital. "We don't care" buttons were made and proudly worn by workers. Other hospital workers contributed material and another issue came out. Unfortunately, there were only two issues. The administration got wind of Deadbeats. They seized the mail room and searched all the mail packets to stop its distribution. The second issue was the last issue but a lot of people at the hospital still flash their "We don't care" buttons.

The stuff we did was well received. We only got negative reactions from one or two people. One nurse who made a comment like, "They must have too much time on their hands." I think that nurse was administrative and her job wasn't on the line.

things would break down in the middle of the forenoon or afternoon, whereupon 10 or 20 men stood around idle while the mechanics repaired them. My friend the wobbly winked at me meaningfully, smiling. In the evening while we walked about he told me about sabotage stunts in which he had participated or of which he had heard.

One day he said: "I guess I'm a short-timer on this job. Did you notice how the old Irish buzzard" - meaning the foreman we worked under - "watches me all the time the last few days? They're getting wise to me; maybe one of the stiffes that I've tried to educate told them what my religion is." He smiled "I'll be fired in a day or two. But what the hell! I'll be on another job in a week, doing the same thing."

The next day he and three other men, also wobbly sabotage apostles, were paid off and cautioned to stay away in the future; But before they went I learned that the two miles of concrete road we had laid in the past month and a half would be full of wide cracks in a few weeks. They had put something in the cement that would cause it to crack and the contractor would have to do it all over again. I stayed on the joliet job another month, long enough to see the concrete crack; then, with mid-summer near, I went on to St Louis with two young IWW who were confident that there we should have no difficulty getting work as harvest hands in the Missouri and Kansas wheat fields.

In St Louis the 'slave market' was also full of wobblies. They were all a rather jolly, if somewhat lopsided lot, aflame with a sort of fanaticism tempered with good humour. I heard the story (which I later verified) of an incident that occurred one winter before the first world war when the city was full of starving and freezing unemployed workers who had come in from the camps and fields. The wobblies decided to force the city to take care of them one day several hundred of them invaded the restaurants, ordered big meals, ate, and then presented their checks to the cashiers, telling them to charge them to the mayor. Arrested, they made speeches in court that broke on the front page. The town got excited over the prospect of thousands heading for St Louis to eat at the mayor's cost - for that was just what they did, out of jail or in. The city council then hastily passed an emergency bill to start municipal houses with free beds and meals. The 'stunt' was a form of sabotage on the community, dramatic and humorous, which, frankly, appealed to me.

Indeed, not a few wobblies with whom I came into contact, though intensely serious, were genial, amusing and intelligent fellows, quite frank about their ideas and doings. They were freelance missionaries in the cause of the underdog to whom the end justified the means, with the self-imposed duty to harm the propertied classes as much as, and whenever, possible: guerrilla soldiers in the class war.

In the Kansas wheat fields, where I worked for several weeks in the summer of 1920, there was much stalling or striking on the job, and the threshers and other harvest equipment would break down in the midst of our work, when every hour counted to the farmer. Some 30 miles away from where I worked, a wheat field nearly a mile square burned up. It created somewhat of a sensation in our camp. The wobblies I knew, most of them fairly level-headed stiffes, seemed opposed to fire and blamed the stunt on the communists, who were much more drastic. There were stories among the IWW that the communists in the United States had orders

Through a Chicago employment agency I found pick-and-shovel work on a long-time construction job outside of Joliet. I was one of perhaps a hundred muckers, among whom, as I soon discovered, were also several wobbly sabotage evangelists. "Take it easy, kid", one of them said to me smilingly the second or third day. "Don't try to build the road in a day. T' hell with it! You're getting the same as me, three fifty a day, ain't you? Well then, don't work as if you were getting thirty-five." I had been working steadily, and this not because I wanted to see the road finished as soon as possible, but because, not having worked for months, and being plagued by some sort of blues, I thought that a few months of real work would toughen me up physically and otherwise. But now as the wobbly prophet of sabotage called me down for working too fast, I blushed - without knowing why. I became self-conscious.

For days the man kept close to me, continuing to urge me to slow down. "Put the brakes on, kid", he would say. Or, "Go take a sip of water". Or, "Say, don't you think it's about time you went to the can again?". Or, "Tomorrow's another day, boy".

Then we would have long conversations, while he pretended to be digging beside me; he had stalling down to a science. He evidently was a well-read, self-educated bozo; and when I revealed to him that I was a fan of such writers as Upton Sinclair and Frank Harris, and was interested in the Russian revolution, he told me about the IWW movement, and about 'Big Bil' Haywood and William Z Foster who, in 1912, had attended an international labour congress in Europe and brought back to America the French ideas of sabotage which since then have been considerably improved by the rank and file of the wobblies. He was a self-appointed apostle of sabotage, with a surprising gift of gab, going from job to job, making wobblies of scissor bills, teaching them what he called "the technique of stalling". He taught me the technique. He said: "Don't take so much on the shovel, kid. Don't break your back. Which reminds me of what a bunch of stiff did down in Bedford, Indiana, back in 1908, when the boss told 'em their wages were cut. They went to a machine shop and had their shovels shortened, and said to the boss, 'Small pay, small shovel'. They had the right dope. That was a kind of instinctive, spontaneous sabotage; though sabotage, I mean the word, was then unknown in this country. That still holds good - 'small pay, small shovel'. You get three fifty; do you think that's all your labour is worth? Don't be a fool. So give 'em a small shovel; when nobody is looking, no shovel at all. T' hell with 'em! Stall - strike on the job. Savvy?"

I found stalling, even after I had more or less mastered the technique, harder than real work, but my instructor derived a deep satisfaction from it. He encouraged me, saying that by and by I should get used to it.

Originally - back in 1912 and 1913 - the wobbly idea was to damage the machinery just before going on strike, so that the scabs could not use it; but by 1920 the IWW and the communist agitators, who then began also to play an important role in the drama of sabotage in American industry, commenced to 'fix' machines while the work went on. On the road building job I worked on near Joliet the foreman had trouble every few days with the concrete-mixers, trucks and steam shovels. Suddenly

It was a way of gaining leverage in different employee situations that were going on. They were cost-cutting and when they started to see all the sarcasm, they tried to do something that wouldn't get as big of a rebellion going. Judging from the stuff that was coming out, they knew they had to do something.

#### LIQUOR COMPANY SHIPPING CLERK • ROY

There was a time when I was a temp worker, an employee of Kelly Services. It was always amusing when I, obviously male, walked into a new assignment, when they'd called for a "Kelly Girl." I got to see a lot of people cutting slack for themselves in the world of work. As I moved around, one assignment in particular stands out as a hotbed of slacking off.

I did a stint as a shipping clerk at the Old Mr. Boston liquor warehouse. This was during the last six months the company was in Boston, before it moved to Louisville, having been bought out by another company. The previous shipping clerk quit when he found out the company was not going to transfer any of the workers to the new location. Everyone knew their job was ending, and for all the resume help and outplacement services, the bulk of them were going to end up unemployed. This completely destroyed morale in the entire plant. With even the plant manager about to go out on the streets, there was no one who cared to check up on the employees and keep them working hard.

So none of them did. Things were especially bad in shipping, since most of the warehouse employees were long-time alcoholics; I was one myself, encouraged by this job. One of my duties was to help my boss go around the warehouse once a week and pick up all the half empty bottles, and set the cases that had been broken aside so they could be refilled. The worst of the half-open bottles we would pour down the drains. The better stuff came into the office, where we drank it ourselves.

And we certainly had time to drink it. There were three people in the shipping office -- with work for only one and a half which declined rapidly as operations moved to Louisville. Whenever I was done typing up shipping papers for the day, I turned to reading. We also talked a lot about everything from auto repair to what was wrong with employers.

Meanwhile, in the warehouse, the half-drunk guys continued to knock over full cases of liquor with the forklifts, and more than once the stench of cinnamon schnapps filled the air. Every month we'd take inventory and track the "shrinkage," which should have been called "drinkage."

Things got worse and worse as the date for the final move came closer. Adding machines vanished from the offices all over the plant. Apparently a grand piano and a solid oak conference table did the same. Finally, the guys in the shipping department decided that we might as well arrange for our own severance bonuses as well. On the final day, we were supposed to load all of the remaining stock in a boxcar and send it down to Kentucky. We loaded about 200 cases of mixed liquor onto a panel truck instead, and drove it around town, stopping at the houses of all the workers. When it got back to the plant, the truck was empty. I still have some of that booze...

## MACHINIST • BURT

I worked for a small company called Gray's Manufacturing Company in Inglewood, California. They made specialized airplane parts for companies like Boeing and Lockheed. I was the low man on the totem pole, working for two rich brothers who were trying to outdo each other all the time. One brother had done really smart things with his money and had made good investments. But the other brother, who owned the company, was always losing his ass on small business ventures. I-- always put it off on his little brother who took his frustrations out on me. It was like passing the buck.

hat it boiled down to was a really shitty job: deburring, which means cleaning the parts when they came off the machine. I had to run this big piece of sandpaper across each part five or six times, bore it with air and water, and check it with calipers. I had to wash my hands every time because if I Got just one little piece of grit on my calipers, it didn't measure correctly. It's a really screwy job. They were charging the company a lot of money for these parts -- about \$25,000.

I was frustrated doing the work and having the boss come and check stuff that I knew was accurate. I-- would be frustrated because of the bad deals he was making, so he'd knock the parts around and make them so they weren't any good, and then blame me. If one part hits a certain place on another, it's not going to be any good. After he screwed up half of the parts I had done, I had to go through and figure out which ones were screwed up and fix them up just right. I got really tired of this and knew it was going to come out of my paycheck. So I thought, fuck it! I'm going to ruin every one of them.

I made it look as if the parts were okay. I took ten-thousandths of an inch off more than I should have, or I bored a hole wider than I was supposed to. Then I wrapped them up, packed them and got them ready for delivery. The boss didn't catch anything because I'd always make sure the top three in the batch were okay, and he'd only check those when they were packed. All the ones after the top three were screwed up. The company only got \$4,000 worth of good parts out of a \$25,000 job. It really ended up costing them a lot -- probably \$21,000, not including shipping -- and what it cost to recall the parts.

The pay was low, they treated me badly, they were running a shitty company, and their ethics were rotten. I still think they owe me for all the shit they put me through. I did really good work. They kept promising me a raise, but it never came. They ended up going out of business.

## MAIL HANDLER • JUDI

The Washington Bulk Mail Center is one of twenty-one centers in the United States. I worked there from 1976 to 1980. They spent lots of money and put together factories that just plain didn't work. These computer nerds design factories and they've never seen one in their whole lives. They didn't want to admit that it didn't work. They set an efficiency rate for the factory but since the machinery didn't work, they couldn't achieve that rate. Instead of hiring more employees and admitting it was a failure,

interest of higher incomes? Did not millers and bakers mix talcum, chalk and other cheap and harmful ingredients with flour? Did not candy manufacturers sell glucose and taffy made with vaseline, and honey made with starch and chestnut meal? Wasn't vinegar often made of sulphuric acid? Didn't farmers and distributors adulterate milk and butter? Were not eggs and meat stored away, suffering deterioration all the while, in order to cause prices to rise?

All of this, the wobblies insisted, was sabotage, just as their doings were sabotage; the ethical difference between the worker and the capitalist with k their respective forms of sabotage was that the former was open and honest about it, and the latter dishonest, practising destruction secretly, under the guise of business, the while condemning proletarian saboteurs as criminals.

There was another difference. The wobblies preferred that property should not be destroyed; indeed, they were more jealous of its preservation than the capitalists, for at the basis of their philosophy was the idea that the property belonged to them. It was their - the workers' - creation; some day it would be theirs by right of possession; and until that day it should be preserved for them.

These things were openly discussed by the wobblies in meetings, newspapers and conversation. They didn't care who knew that they believed in and practiced sabotage. Some of them were veritable evangelists of sabotage, for they saw it as almost the only means - but a powerful one - whereby the cause of the underdog could be advanced. One of my wobbly friends said, in effect:

Now that the bosses have succeeded in dealing an almost fatal blow to the boycott; now that picket duty is practically outlawed in many sections of the country, free speech throttled, free assemblage prohibited and injunctions against labor are becoming epidemic - now sabotage, this dark, invincible, terrible Damocles' sword that hangs over the head of the master class, will replace all the confiscated weapons and ammunition of the workers in their war for economic justice. And it will win, for it is the most redoubtable of all, except for the general strike. In vain will the bosses get an injunction against strikers' funds, as they did in the great steel strike - sabotage, as we practice it, is a more powerful injunction against their machinery. In vain will they invoke old laws and make new ones against it - they will never discover sabotage, never track it to its lair, never run it down, for no laws will ever make a crime of the 'clumsiness and lack of skill' of a scab who bungles his work or 'puts on the bum' a machine he 'does not know how to run', but which has really been 'fixed' by a class-conscious worker long before the scab's coming on the job. There can be no injunction against sabotage. No policemen's club. No rifle diet. No prison bars.

It was some time before I realized how effective - and significant -sabotage really was.

## **SABOTAGE AND STRIKING ON THE JOB**

**by Louis Adamic**

Selections from Chapter 32 of "Dynamite: the Story of Class Violence in America"  
(1930)

In 1920, following my discharge from the Army, I became, under bread-and-butter compulsion, a young working 'stiff' (I was just 20) with no particular trade. For several months I hung around the employment agencies - the 'slave market' in Chicago. There I met a couple of rather articulate IWW members who, seeing that I was a young ex-soldier, palpably 'on the bum' and a 'scissor bill' with a radical trend of mind, set out to make me into a class-conscious proletarian, a wobbly. They urged me to give up all ideas of ever being anything else than a working stiff for the chances of my becoming a capitalist or a bourgeois, in however modest a way, were extremely slender, indeed, almost nil. I was a foreigner and the number of opportunities was decreasing rapidly even for native Americans. I should make up my mind to remain a worker and devote such abilities as I had to the hastening of the decay of the capitalist system, which was doomed to collapse, they said, within a very few years whether I joined the IWW or not.

I learned of the methods by which, it appeared, sooner or later the workers would attain to power and abolish capitalism and wage slavery. At first I did not understand everything I was told. The wobblies used a word - sabotage - which, as I recalled, I had read some time before in Frank Harris's Pearson's Magazine without knowing its meaning. At the public library I did not find it in the dictionary. Then, in a dingy IWW reading room I came upon a little book entitled Sabotage, written originally in French by Emile Pouget and translated into English by Arturo Giovannitti, in 1912, while he was in jail at Lawrence, Massachusetts, on framed-up charges for his part as a wobbly leader in the famous textile workers' strike. There I found sabotage defined as: any conscious or wilful act on the part of one or more workers intended to reduce the output of production in the industrial field, or to restrict trade and reduce profits in the commercial field by the withdrawal of efficiency from work and by putting machinery out of order and producing as little as possible without getting dismissed from the job. The book was a sort of wobbly gospel.

In the same reading room I found pamphlets in which sabotage was discussed from the ethical point of view. A wobbly writer described it as a 'war measure' in the conflict between the capitalist class and the working class, and in war everything was fair and moral. The wobblies admitted that sabotage on the part of the workers was no goody-goody method, but defended it on the ground that it certainly was no worse than the methods to which the capitalists were resorting in the economic warfare. If the workers, in their efforts to gain economic advantages, damaged property and destroyed materials, did not the bosses, in the interest of profits, destroy property with a ruthless and careless hand? Have they not laid waste the country's national resources with utter lack of consideration for their human values - forests, mines, land and waterways? Did they not dump cargoes of coffee and other goods into the sea, burn fields of cotton, wheat and corn, throw trainloads of potatoes to waste - all in the

they forced us to work overtime. We worked at least sixty hours a week, and in December they would work us eighty-four. A major problem was that we worked all the time, and started to go crazy.

Overtime was the main issue, but accidents and industrial injuries were two other ones. General harassment was a problem too -- they give a ten point preference to veterans, so everyone thinks they're still in the army. The real army ass-kissers rise to supervisor. Since you don't have to make a profit in the post office, it lacks the semblance of reason you get in capitalism. In the post office it didn't matter how much money was wasted.

I unloaded and sometimes loaded trucks. It was supposedly all mechanized. We had these great big things called extended conveyor belts that went into the trucks. We froze our butts off in the winter and roasted in the summer.

Parcels and sacks were unloaded and sorted separately, but the machine was always jamming up. The best way to break up the jam was to throw some sacks on the parcel system because they were heavier and would push the jam through. This of course meant that they'd be landing on the parcels and squashing them to bits. That was a kind of sabotage that was actually endorsed by management because they wanted us to work faster.

There's no back-up system in the plant. If there's a tangle somewhere, the whole line shuts down. When the non-zip chute backed up, everything we wanted to know the zip code of would shoot back up, and everything going to that place stopped. For every piece, you had to have a non-zip option, so if the non-zip chute closed down, the whole line closed down. We'd key every thing in as non-zip, and the system would overload. All the red lights came on and everything went down. When New York was in a wildcat strike, we keyed everything to New York.

As we began to feel our collective power, people got more obvious and flippant. We started doing little things like sending things to the wrong place and deliberately shutting things down. But as we got to be more organized, one of the games we played when we were bored was to deliberately break the machinery and make a bet on how long it would take the mechanic to figure out what was wrong. We'd try to break it in a bizarre manner. One of our favorite things to do was to turn off emergency stops to see how long the mechanic would take to figure out which one it was. We would take turns banging on the sides of the trucks while we were unloading them. The supervisors would get very upset and run back and forth trying to figure out who was doing it.

Eventually we began to do really organized things. When they ordered us to work overtime on Thanksgiving, everybody left. We were real proud of that one. Another time, we did a sick-out, where a lot of people went home sick at the same time.

We weren't allowed to strike. We met between the two shifts -- there was an hour break in between -- and I stood up on a table and gave a speech in the cafeteria. We drew up a committee of twelve and a list of demands, and eighty of us did a walk-in (since we couldn't do a walk-out) to our supervisor's office and gave her our list. Her reaction was to put locks on the door between the plant and the administration office so you couldn't get in. You had to have a computer card and a combination and

all of that. Short of going on strike, the culmination of our action was the trash-in. They were famous for losing our paychecks on the night shift. The forklift drivers would drive around and tell everyone that they lost our checks again. We'd cause machines to wreck (which was pretty easy), the forklift drivers would drop pallets everywhere, and everyone keyed everything non-zip. One night we brought the place to a standstill. We trashed everything that came in.

The unions were very corrupt and the overtime didn't decrease in most of the country. But we won. They stopped giving us overtime. As we did such a horrible job on the parcels, people started using UPS more and the post office less. The volume started to go down, so the trashings and overtime and accidents went down. The safety conditions improved. After a year, when we did the wildcat strike, the union crumbled and fell into our hands. We ended up taking over the union and I became the Chief Shop Steward (the highest position in that plant) and began to expedite grievances. They got rid of the worst of the supervisors and brought in new ones specifically to appease us. Everyone makes jokes about postal workers smashing up mail because they think they don't care. But postal workers don't like the fact that we can't do a good job no matter how hard we try.

#### MAILROOM CLERK • REGGIE

I worked at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank on Capitol Hill. It's a group of attorneys, columnists, whatever, who crank out -- daily or weekly or whatever -- information. It's printed downstairs, in the Xerox room, and distributed to senators, congressmen, and other influential people. In a couple of cases I delivered packages addressed to Ed Meese. That gives you an idea of what kind of people work there. My basic duties were to collect mail in the mornings from the post office, sort it, and distribute it, and so on. I pretty much did everything myself and I had a lot of responsibility.

I got the job right after high school. I had never heard of the organization, and just found the job through the newspaper. When I was working there, I would occasionally glance at what they were putting out; the more I read, the more I thought about it and realized they were doing fucked-up things, like defending business practices in South Africa and U.S. investments there.

They have a big fundraising deal, and when they sent out fundraising requests, people would mail in checks. Sometimes they'd be huge amounts, and sometimes they were piddling. Checks came in from individuals as well as companies. So I'd randomly take an envelope, open it, see how much it was for, and throw it in the shredder. I started doing it more and more. I could tell if it was a check by holding it to the light. If so, I'd toss it, dump it or shred it.

#### MILLWORKER • CRAWDAD

The Fort Bragg Redwood sawmill is owned by Georgia-Pacific, a large company with interests in building materials and chemicals. Workers used to call bomb threats into the company. They waited until 1:00 pm on Fridays, in spring, when it was

relations and motivates the evolution of counter-structures in the plant.

form of working-class struggle. The few examples here have been a mere glimpse of that form and hardly entitle us to fully comprehend it. But we can see that as a form it is applied to the actual working day itself and to the issues of planning and control which, in my view, make it distinctly post-unionism as a practice. The use of sabotage as a method of struggling for control will increase as this form of struggle develops further, but this is merely the apparatus of movement. A crucial point to focus on is the differentiation of this new form of struggle from its former organization: mass unionism.

Within these new independent forms of workers' organization lies a foundation of social relations at the point of production which can potentially come forward to seize power in a crisis situation and give new direction to the society. I would urge, in closing, that our attention and work be focused on the investigating and reporting of the gradual emergence of this new mode of production out of the old. "Like a thief in the night" it advances relatively unnoticed.

## NOTES

1. In this plant more than half the workers were either black or newly arrived Southern whites; that percentage may be as high as 75%. The remainder were mixed; whites of Northern origin, many Italians and Mexicans, and a small Hungarian and Polish segment. The women constituted from 5% to 10% of the work force and were generally black or Southern white. In the actions and organizations of workers which this paper describes, the most operative relationships were between blacks and Southern whites. Despite the prevalence of racist attitudes, which were a regular substance of interaction and even a source of open talk and joking, these two groups functioned together better than any other groups in the plant. Also in the events described women were no less active than men. Finally, there was a definite relationship between age and action. Younger workers were more willing to fight back and risk their positions than older workers. The workers from 18 to 35 were the most militantly anti-union and the most willing to go beyond the established channels in their work actions.

2. The overt expressions of the men themselves about their activity are closely tied to the actual work experience. There is little if any notion that the daily struggle in the plant has anything to do with the state or the society as a whole. Rather it is seen as a struggle waged against an immobile bureaucracy in the company and against the labour establishment so as to improve working conditions. A kind of populist mentality is crucial here, particularly with the Southern whites who showed an immediate dislike for all organizational authority and believe (like a religion) that the only way to get anything done well is to do it themselves. While workers clearly design activity to control the length of the working day, for example, these same men are unaware that the relationships and organization involved could also function to plan and control their own production. Yet it is not so important that workers so often miss the social significance of their activities; the vital point is not their consciousness, but what they actually do. Their activity smashes into the contradictions of productive

balmy and glorious. They would call the dispatcher, the same person they called in sick to, and say "I put four charges of plastique in the powerhouse. It goes off at 4:00. Nobody works today!" and hang up. Then they'd get a cold-pack and a gram of hash and drive out to the river. The tactic quit working around July, when it wore out from overuse. The dispatcher was instructed not to tell anybody, and no one looked for the bombs anymore.

The bomb-threat callers only wanted the occasional afternoon off, and took advantage of the political struggle then taking place between ownership, woodworkers and the first wave of reform minded hippies and political radicals, who made it a point not to get jobs in mills or timber.

Another favorite (but rarely successful) tactic is to drop metal and glass into the Hog, a machine which chops wood trimmings and waste into Hog fuel, or chips and dust to be burned for power generation. A metal detector and a full-time worker guard the Hog against such foreign objects, although the odd aluminum soda can and will get by, and everyone then enjoys a half-day or so of relaxation while millwrights attend to the damaged blades. The mill loses between \$100 and \$200 per minute while the Hog is broken. Anyone caught intentionally dropping foreign material onto the Hog-feed chain is subject to stern discipline including termination, so it is not done lightly. Equipment breakdowns are fairly common events, and I always enjoyed them to the fullest while bosses got all red-faced and stood around wishing they could fix it with a hammer.

I suppose sabotage also might include hiding between the loads of lumber with three or four buddies and copping a buzz. At least half the workers I know are regular marijuana users, and their motive is to reclaim their minds, or at least to render them useless to the company. It's also a way to relieve the crushing monotony. They've instituted pre-employment urinalysis since my day, and they work harder at propagandizing the smoker against seeking peace through drugs, but let's be honest about this: getting a mill job is the quickest way to get on drugs. Speed is not quite as common as pot, but the effects are more profound and users are truly dedicated. And then there's alcohol.

Acts of sabotage are likely to be appreciated by some workers. Many seem to have no opinion. Others are so much in debt that they find ways to work even when their co-workers are sent home, and they are against sabotage.

## PALLETIZER • PATRICK

I worked in a food production factory that made thousands of bottles of warm goo a day. I stood at the end of a conveyer belt where boxes with a dozen bottles of this warm crap came whizzing down to me, about one per second. I would stack them on pallets and the forklift driver would take them away. Occasionally, when we got a major shipment of boxes with plastic bottles for the front end of the assembly line, the foreman would take me and a few others off the line and send us upstairs to the old wooden storeroom. The boxes would come up on a conveyor belt to us, where we would stack them on the floor.

One day we were called to unload a major shipment. The boxes were

coming at us at an alarming rate. Me and two co-workers were running like fools, arms stretched wide, grasping these boxes. We would have to run them over to where they were being stacked on the far side of the wall. It was sweltering hot up in the attic storeroom of this antiquated old factory. We were sweating and running with these boxes, squeezing tight so the middle ones wouldn't fall out. The conveyor belt was crammed with boxes. The foreman, a despicable Marine sergeant type, sat on a stack of boxes and picked his teeth, chiding us to go faster. If one of us fell behind the others, he'd call us "pussy" or some other insult sure to drive us into a working frenzy.

There was no let-up in boxes, and with sweat dripping into our eyes and cardboard dust irritating our skin, the three of us exploded into open revolt. Tim punched a box off the conveyor belt, and in a matter of seconds, we were punching them all off the belt. Boxes and plastic bottles were flying all over the floor. As the boxes kept coming from below, we kept punching them off. One after the other in a wild, deliriously happy frenzy. We ran to the stacks of boxes and started pulling them down with a dull crash onto the old wooden floor. The foreman was grabbing at our arms, trying to stop us, hollering as loud as he could over the din of the boxes and conveyor motor.

Finally, with big sheepish grins on our faces, we stopped. The boxes had stopped. The foreman told us to take the day off, to go home. The next day we came to work as if nothing had happened. I took my place on the line. The boxes of warm crap came whizzing down to me, about one per second...

#### PINEAPPLE PACKER • LANCE

In Honolulu, most people start working at Dole Pineapple right out of high school. They usually end up staying there for the rest of their lives like my grandparents did. If you don't have a good education, it's hard to find any other job in Hawaii. I'd have to say that for most people, it was just a shitty job. The work was hard and the factory was noisy and hot. No one liked it. The managers were incredibly abusive; in order to avoid promoting people, they switched us around a lot so we never got skilled at any one job.

I worked at the janacka machine, which cuts the hides and skin off the pineapple. I also worked where they seal the tops of the cans, and then I worked inspection, where they weigh random samplings of cans to make sure they have the right amount of juice and everything.

The janacka machine was probably the best. We usually worked a straight ten-hour shift, so a lot of people would just burn out. The biggest problem was people falling asleep and getting their hands caught in the machine. To combat that, people would try to get more breaks--we were only allowed two breaks a shift. To do this, they would send a pineapple down the wrong direction, or send a glove down, and it would break the whole machine. If the janacka machine shuts down, you can't cut the pineapple, and if you can't cut the pineapple, the line can't go on. The whole production line shuts down. It takes at least three hours to fix, so you're getting paid for three hours at least for just sitting around.

called "john time"; the men line up an hour here or there when they can take a turn in the fresh air of the roof or space out on a cot in one of the ripped-out stalls. The "off-limits" character of these areas is solid, as was demonstrated when a foreman, looking for a worker who had illegally arranged to leave his job, went into one of the workers' bathrooms. Reportedly he walked up the stairs into the room, and within seconds was knocked out the door, down the stairs, and onto his back on the floor. That particular incident involved two foremen and several workers and ended with the hospitalization of two participants with broken ribs and bruises.

The coexistence of two distinct sets of relations, two modes of work, and two power structures in the plant is evident to the worker who becomes part of any of the main plant areas. But that coexistence is the object of constant turmoil and strife; it is hardly an equilibrium when considered over time. It is a struggle of losing and gaining ground. The attempt to assert an alternative plan of action on the part of workers is a constant threat to management.

During the model changeover mentioned above, the management had scheduled an inventory which was to last six weeks. They held at work more than 50 men who otherwise would have been laid off with 90% of their pay. The immediate reaction to this was the self-organization of workers, who attempted to take the upper hand and finish the inventory in three or four days so they could have the remaining time off. Several men were trained in the elementary use of the counting scales while the hi-lo truck drivers set up an informal school to teach other men to use their vehicles. Others worked directly with experienced stock chasers and were soon running down part numbers and taking inventory of the counted stock. In several other ways the established plan of ranking and job classification was circumvented in order to slice through the required working time.

The response to this was peculiarly harsh. Management forced it to a halt, claiming that the legitimate channels of authority, training, and communication had been violated. Being certified as a truck driver, for example, required that a worker have a certain amount of seniority and complete a company training program. There was a great deal of heated exchange and conflict, but to no avail. Management was really determined to stop the workers from organizing their own work, even when it meant that the work would be finished quicker and, with the men quickly laid off, less would be advanced in wages.

The threat which this unleashing of energy in an alternative plan of action presented to the authority of the bureaucracy was evidently quite great. Management took a stand, and, with only a limited number of men involved in a non-production activity, retained its power to plan that particular event. For six weeks, then, the "rational" plan of work was executed - which meant that the labour force was watched over and directed in an orderly fashion by foremen and various other agents of social control. The work which men want to do together takes four days-at most a six-day week; the work which is forced on them, in the same amount, is monotonously dragged out for six weeks, with all the rational breaks and lunch periods which are deemed necessary for the laborers.

We end, then, more or less on the note on which we began: stressing a new social

be an interesting and enjoyable thing. In this way the campaign against the six-cylinder motors does not differ from the rod-blowing contest or the hose fight: each is the expression of men who see their work as a practical concrete process and their relations as men as simple and spontaneous, to be structured as they see fit. Whether they should work together at full steam or with intermittent periods of diversity-or even cease working altogether - comes to be more and more a matter for their own decision. The evolution of these attitudes is, needless to say, a constant target for bureaucratic counter-insurgency.(2)

This constant conflict with the bureaucratic rationalization of time is expressed dramatically each day at quitting time. Most workers not on the main assembly line finish work, wash, and are ready to go a full four minutes ahead of the quitting siren. But with 30 or 40 white-shirt foremen on one side of the main aisle and 300 or 400 men on the other side, the men begin, en masse, to imitate the sound of the siren with their mouths, moving and then literally running over the foremen, stampeding for the punch clocks, punching out, and racing out of the plant as the actual siren finally blends into their voices. With a feeling of release after hours of monotonous work, gangs of workers move out from the side aisles into the main aisles, pushing along, shouting, laughing, knocking each other around - heading for the fresh air on the outside. The women sometimes put their arms around the guards at the gates, flirting with them and drawing their attention away from the men who scurry from the plant with distributors, spark plugs, carburetors, even a head here and there under their coats - bursting with laughter as they move out into the cool night. Especially in the summers, the nights come alive at quitting time with the energy of release: the squealing of tires out of the parking lot, racing each other and dragging up and down the streets. Beer in coolers stored in trunks is not uncommon and leads to spontaneous parties, wrestling, brawling, and laughter that spills over into the parks and streets round the factory. There is that simple joy of hearing your voice loudly and clearly for the first time in 10 or 12 hours.

There is planning and counter-planning in the plant because there is clearly a situation of dual power. A regular phenomenon in the daily reality of the plant is the substitution of entirely different plans for carrying out particular jobs in place of the rational plans organized by management.

On the very casual level, these substitutions involve, for example, a complete alternative break system of workers whereby they create large chunks of free time for each other on a regular basis. This plan involves a voluntary rotation of alternately working long stretches and taking off long stretches. Jobs are illegally traded of and men relieve each other for long periods to accomplish this. The smuggling of men through different areas of the plant to work with friends is yet another regular activity requiring no small amount of organization.

The substitution of alternative systems of executing work has its counterpart in areas of the plant which have become, strictly speaking, off limits to non-workers; they are havens of the plant where men are not subject to external regulation. Usually they are bathrooms, most of which are built next to the ceiling with openings onto the roof. Chaise lounges, lawn chairs, cots, and the like have been smuggled into most of them. Sweepers, who move around the plant, frequently keep tabs on what is

There was only one manager for the people who sealed cans, and it's such a huge place that they couldn't check on us more than once an hour. We could easily switch the wrong button and the juice would go into the wrong container, or we could change the levels so that everything overflowed. They'd have to shut down the machine to figure out what went wrong.

There were about five of us working at the inspection place in different shifts. We would collect the pineapple for samples, go into the back room, hang out, listen to the radio for a couple of hours, and then throw all the samples away. It was a pretty common practice.

We never got caught and I don't know anyone who's ever been fired from Dole. First off, it's incredibly cheap labor and, overall, they're making a hell of a lot of money from our ten hour shifts. It was so easy to make a mistake that they'd never know when we did it on purpose. Everyone who worked there knew that people did it. They welcomed the break -- they'd be stupid not to, and be ostracized by everyone else.

#### RECORDS CLERK • ZEKE

A long time ago, in the pre-computerized days, I got a job with the records department of the Arizona Division of Motor Vehicles. I thought I'd be doing mindless filing from midnight to eight, but when I got there, I found that I was sitting there looking up vehicle registration numbers for cops who were investigating people. I said, "Oh Jesus is this really what I want to do?" I couldn't afford to quit -- I only had a hundred dollars -- so I figured I could stand it for a while.

Four or five days after I started, I get this one cop who calls up and gives me half a dozen phone numbers and says, "Yeah, we got a pot party under observation and we're going to get these guys. Give me the information on them." I thought, "Oh, man!" and I just made UD vehicle registration info: phony names and phony addresses for all of them. I never heard much more about it.

The following week, a narcotics agent calls and identifies himself as such. I gave him phony information too. This friend of mine was working there and started doing the same thing. Narcs would call in occasionally, and about seventy-five percent of the time, we'd give them bad information. This went on for about two and a half months, until we got word that detectives were coming around, talking to our supervisor. We called her the "peg woman" and she was absolutely awful. We got called in and she said,

"Somebody is giving the police false information and we can't prove it's you, but if it happens again, we're going to fire everyone in the department." My friend and I had both just gotten out of prison for dope dealing and both of us were selling major quantities of pot at the time. I sort of felt like a Jew helping run a concentration camp. So at that point we both decided to quit rather than start giving the cops correct information. Fortunately, they were never able to pin it on us.

I worked for Smith Barney for two years. I got my job totally by accident. Headhunters love me. They see dollar signs when they read my resume. I don't make much effort to look the corporate part, since I have college up my ass and will do anything from the lowliest of word processing (I type 100 wpm and am literate in nine computer languages) to the highest level of analytical-type work Wall Street has to offer. I got into Wall Street because I'm a hustler. Six years ago I saw all the money those people were stealing, and I thought, "I want a slice."

When I was hired at Smith Barney, my new boss almost wouldn't let me leave -- they wanted me to show up and start working the next day. Of course, this is often a sign that the job has to be filled immediately because the company's a mess, but he wanted me to start the next day because he was a big-shot junk bond analyst and had no helper. He told me I was overqualified but that he'd consider himself fortunate to have me for a little while, doing analytical work at the low salary of \$21,000 per year, less than half of what I was making at my previous job. Turns out that this guy is a really nice person and I respect him and like him a lot, but the rest of the shit I saw at that company was mind-bending.

Everything there is done shoddily. I've seen traders lose millions for the firm in minutes because they were hung over and mad at their bosses. You just pick up a phone on the trading floor and start hitting the keys. The touchtone phones are actually computer links to do block trades. One day I picked up some phones, pressed a bunch of buttons and then ran to a Telerate screen to watch the market plunge. I'll never know, but I may have caused a million shares of IBM to be sold that second. This became a big game and I enjoyed scrambling things in the trading department and then running to a screen to see the market fluctuate. It was funny because I'd ask traders if I could use their phones for a second, then get the computer on the line to just pound my fist on the keys.

Once this big, hot-shot analyst -- these guys make millions, mind you -- wrote this really un-cool memo about how his secretaries had all been cocaine addicts and that's why he'd had to fire them, and personnel should get off his back for using up so many secretaries. I had six people photocopy this memo and send it around anonymously to hundreds of people inside and outside the firm, all at the company's expense. I sent "news releases" to Ray Brady, the CBS news correspondent, via rush messenger. This was before the big drug-testing shit and it must've really caused a stir. I sent copies to all his previous secretaries and all these other people, and a year later he left. This guy was a sadistic, arrogant fuck, and I sent this memo around to show everybody how he'd screwed himself through his indiscretion. After the way I'd seen him talk to female subordinates, I decided it had to be done. It was scary, but fun.

quantities of time for getting together with friends and the amusement of activities ranging from card games to reading or walking around the plant to see what other areas are doing is an important achievement for laborers. Not only does it demonstrate the feeling that much of the time should be organized by the workers themselves, but it also demonstrates an existing animosity toward the practice of constantly postponing all of one's desires and inclinations so the rational process of production can go on uninterrupted. The frequency of planned shutdowns in production increases as more opposition exists toward such rationalization of the workers' time.

What stands out in all this is the level of cooperative organization of workers in and between areas. While this organization is a reaction to the need for common action in getting the work done, relationships like these also function to carry out sabotage, to make collections, or even to organize games and contests which serve to turn the working day into an enjoyable event. Such was the case in the motor-test area.

The inspectors organized a rod-blowing contest which required the posting of lookouts at the entrances to the shop area and the making of deals with assembly, for example, to neglect the torquing of bolts on rods for a random number of motors so that there would be loose rods. When an inspector stepped up to a motor and felt the telltale knock in the water-pump wheel, he would scream out to clear the shop, the men abandoning their work and running behind boxes and benches. Then he would arc himself away from the stand and ram the throttle up to first 4,000 and then 5,000 rpm. The motor would knock, clank, and finally blur to a cracking halt with the rod blowing through the side of the oil pan and across the shop. The men would rise up from their cover, exploding with cheers, and another point would be chalked on the wall for that inspector. This particular contest went on for several weeks, resulting in more than 150 blown motors. No small amount of money was exchanged in bets over the contests.

In another case, what began as a couple of men's squirting each other on a hot day with the hoses on the test stands developed into a standing hose fight in the shop area which lasted several days. Most of the motors were either neglected or simply okayed so that the men were free for the fight, and in many cases they would destroy or dent a unit so that it could be quickly written up. The fight usually involved about 10 or 15 unused hoses, each with the water pressure of a fire hose. With streams of crossfire, shouting, laughing, and running about, there was hardly a man in the mood for doing his job. The shop area was regularly drenched from ceiling to floor, with every man completely soaked. Squirt guns, nozzles, and buckets were soon brought in, and the game took on the proportions of a brawl for hours on end. One man walked around with his wife's shower cap on for a few days to the amusement of the rest of the factory, which wasn't aware of what was happening in the test area.

The turning of the working day into an enjoyable activity becomes more of a necessary event as the loneliness and hardship of constant and rapid production becomes more oppressive. Part of the reality of concrete labour is that it is less and less able to see itself as merely an abstract means to some end, and more and more inclined to see its working day as a time in which the interaction of men should

The work force was sent home in this unusually climactic shutdown, while the inspectors were summoned to the head supervisor's office, where a long interrogation began. Without any confession of foul play from the men, the supervisor was forced into a tortuous display which obviously troubled even his senses, trying to tell the men they should not reject motors which were clearly of poor quality without actually being able to say that. With tongue in cheek, the inspectors thwarted his attempts by asserting again and again that their interests were as one with the company 5 in getting out the best possible product. In both the case of the "6s" and the V-8s, there was an organized struggle for control over the planning of the product of labor; its manifestation through sabotage was only secondarily important. A distinct feature of this struggle is that its focus is not on negotiating a higher price at which wage labour is to be bought, but rather on making the working day more palatable. The use of sabotage in the instances cited above is a means of reaching out for control over one's own work. In the following we can see it extended as a means of controlling one's working "time."

The shutdown is radically different from the strike; its focus is on the actual working day. It is not, as popularly thought, a rare conflict. It is a regular occurrence, and, depending on the time of year, even an hourly occurrence. The time lost from these shutdowns poses a real threat to capital through both increased costs and loss of output. Most of these shutdowns are the result of planned sabotage by workers in certain areas, and often of plantwide organization.

The shutdown is nothing more than a device for controlling the rationalization of time by curtailing overtime planned by management. It is a regular device in the hot summer months. Sabotage is also exerted to shut down the process to gain extra time before lunch and, in some areas, to lengthen group breaks or allow friends to break at the same time. In the especially hot months of June and July, when the temperature rises to 115 degrees in the plant and remains there for hours, such sabotage is used to gain free time to sit with friends in front of a fan or simply away from the machinery.

A plantwide rotating sabotage program was planned in the summer to gain free time. At one meeting workers counted off numbers from ~ to 50 or more. Reportedly similar meetings took place in other areas. Each man took a period of about 20 minutes during the next two weeks, and when his period arrived he did something to sabotage the production process in his area, hopefully shutting down the entire line. No sooner would the management wheel in a crew to repair or correct the problem area than it would go off in another key area. Thus the entire plant usually sat out anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes of each hour for a number of weeks due to either a stopped line or a line passing by with no units on it. The techniques for this sabotage are many and varied, going well beyond my understanding in most areas.

The "sabotage of the rationalization of time" is not some foolery of men. In its own context it appears as nothing more than the forcing of more free time into existence; any worker would tell you as much. Yet as an activity which counteracts capital's prerogative of ordering labour's time, it is a profound organized effort by labor to undermine its own existence as "abstract labour power" The seizing of

## UNIVERSITY MAINTENANCE WORKER • ADAM

We get in and out of the buildings very easily without being questioned. We always look like we belong wherever we may be because we wear work gloves and have a truck with the university insignia on it. The university spans across an entire city in New Jersey, so we can go wherever we want without our supervisors thinking anything of it. This gives us a lot of freedom to do whatever we want. We regularly drive the truck to one co-worker's house and go to sleep for a couple of hours, and then we go back and punch out.

The university was renovating an academic building and they put a lot of the furniture, carpet, space heaters and track lights in a warehouse that our department shares with whatever department was being renovated. It was all just piled up and none of it was labeled. I figured no one would miss anything. One day I told my boss we had to work overtime because there was a lot to do. Then three of us loaded up the university truck with two dressers, two desks, three chairs, three beds and some lights. Later I Went back and got two carpets. A guy I worked with got two mattresses and track lights.

I took most of the stuff because I was moving into a new apartment. I didn't own any furniture and I needed it. It was free and very easy to take; no one questioned us and I don't think anyone even noticed. They were so incredibly disorganized. If they did miss the stuff, they probably just chalked it up to the move.

If I had to rationalize doing it, I'd say that there wasn't a revenge motive, just fair give and take.

## Counter-Planning on the Shop floor

By Bill Watson

First printed in *Radical America* May-June 1971.

It is difficult to judge just when working-class practice at the point of production learned to bypass the union structure in dealing with its problems, and to substitute (in bits and pieces) a new organizational form. It was clear to me, with my year's stay in an auto motor plant (Detroit area, 1968), that the process had been long underway. What I find crucial to understand is that while sabotage and other forms of independent workers' activity had existed before (certainly in the late nineteenth century and with the Wobbly peirod), that which exists today is unique in that it follows mass unionism and is a definite response to the obsolescence of that social form. The building of a new form of organization today by workers is the outcome of attempts, here and there, to seize control of various aspects of production. These forms are beyond unionism; they are only secondarily concerned with the process of negotiation, while unionism made that its central point. Just as the CIO was created as a form of struggle by workers, so, out of necessity, that form is being bypassed and destroyed now, and a new organizational form is being developed in its place. The following, then, is by implication a discussion of the self-differentiation of workers from the form of their own former making. The activities and the new relationships which I record here are glimpses of a new social form we are yet to see full-blown, perhaps American workers' councils.(1)

Planning and counter-planning are terms which flow from actual examples. The most flagrant case in my experience involved the sabotaging of a six-cylinder model. The model, intended as a large, fast "6", was hastily planned by the company, without any interest in the life or the precision of the motor. It ran rough with a very sloppy cam. The motor became an issue first with complaints emanating from the motor-test area along with dozens of suggestions for improving the motor and modifying its design (all ignored). From this level, activities eventually arose to counter-plan the production of the motor.

The interest in the motor had grown plant-wide. The general opinion among workers was that certain strategic modifications could be made in the assembly and that workers had suggestions which could well be utilized. This interest was flouted, and the contradictions of planning and producing poor quality, beginning as the stuff of jokes, eventually became a source of anger. In several localities of the plant organized acts of sabotage began. They began as acts of mis-assembling or even omitting parts on a larger-than-normal scale so that many motors would not pass inspection. Organization involved various deals between inspection and several assembly areas with mixed feelings and motives among those involved—some determined, some revengeful, some just participating for the fun of it. With an air of excitement, the thing pushed on.

Temporary deals unfolded between inspection and assembly and between assembly and trim, each with planned sabotage. Such things were done as neglecting to weld unmachined spots on motor heads; leaving out gaskets to create a loss of compression; putting in bad or wrong-size spark plugs; leaving bolts loose in the

motor assembly; or, for example, assembling the plug wires in the wrong firing order so that the motor appeared to be off balance during inspection. Rejected motors accumulated.

In inspection, the systematic cracking of oil-filter pins, rocker-arm covers, or distributor caps with a blow from a timing wrench allowed the rejection of motors in cases in which no defect had been built in earlier along the line. In some cases, motors were simply rejected for their rough running.

There was a general atmosphere of hassling and arguing for several weeks as foremen and workers haggled over particular motors. The situation was tense, with no admission of sabotage by workers and a cautious fear of escalating it among management personnel. Varying in degrees of intensity, these conflicts continued for several months. In the weeks just preceding a change-over period, a struggle against the V-8s (which will be discussed later) combined with the campaign against the "6s" to create a shortage of motors. At the same time management's headaches were increased by the absolute ultimate in auto-plant disasters - the discovery of a barrage of motors that had to be painstakingly removed from their bodies so that defects that had slipped through could be repaired.

Workers returning from a six-week change-over layoff discovered an interesting outcome of the previous conflict. The entire six-cylinder assembly and inspection operation had been moved away from the V-8s - undoubtedly at great cost to an area at the other end of the plant where new workers were brought in to man it. In the most dramatic way, the necessity of taking the product out of the hands of laborers who insisted on planning the product became overwhelming. There was hardly a doubt in the minds of the men in a plant teeming with discussion about the move for days that the act had countered their activities. A parallel situation arose in the weeks just preceding that year's changeover, when the company attempted to build the last V-8s using parts which had been rejected during the year. The hope of management was that the foundry could close early and that there would be minimal waste. The fact, however, was that the motors were running extremely rough; the crankshafts were particularly shoddy; and the pistons had been formerly rejected, mostly because of omitted oil holes or rough surfaces.

The first protest came from the motor-test area, where the motors were being rejected. It was quickly checked, however, by management, which sent down personnel to hound the inspectors and to insist on the acceptance of the motors. It was after this that a series of contacts, initiated by motor-test men, took place between areas during breaks and lunch periods. Planning at these innumerable meetings ultimately led to plant-wide sabotage of the V-8s. As with the six-cylinder motor sabotage, the V-8s were defectively assembled or damaged en route so that they would be rejected. In addition to that, the inspectors agreed to reject something like three out of every four or five motors.

The result was stacks upon stacks of motors awaiting repair, piled up and down the aisles of the plant. This continued at an accelerating pace up to a night when the plant was forced to shut down, losing more than 10 hours of production time. At that point there were so many defective motors piled around the plant that it was almost impossible to move from one area to another.