

Ah-ah-ah, ha-ha, ho-ho! Fly into the streets!

On the 16th of July it became known that the firemen and freight brakemen of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad were on a strike at Martinsburg, West Virginia, and that no freight trains were allowed to pass that point in either direction. This proved to be the beginning of a movement which spread with great rapidity from New York to Kansas, and from Michigan to Texas, which placed an embargo on the entire freight traffic of more than twenty thousand miles of railway, put passenger travel and the movement of the United States mails at the mercy of a mob, subjected great commercial centres like Chicago and St. Louis to the violent disturbance of all their business relations, and made the great manufacturing city of Pittsburgh for twenty-four hours such a scene of riot, arson, and bloodshed as can never be erased from the memory of its people.

In Baltimore, Reading, Scranton, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville, and many points in New York and New Jersey, the laws were set at defiance, the property of the various railway companies seized, injured, or destroyed, the civil authorities overpowered or overawed, and in many cases compelled to call upon the military power of the States to protect persons and property. ...

I do not wish, and happily it is not necessary, to fill your pages with the mere recital of the distressing cases of violence and outrage which marked the course of these riots unexampled in American history. Suffice it to say that the conduct of the rioters is entirely inconsistent with the idea that this movement could have been directed by serious, right-minded men bent on improving the condition of the laboring classes. How wages could be improved by destroying property, the existence of which alone made the payment of any wages at all possible, it is difficult to understand. Nothing but the insanity of passion, played upon by designing and mischievous leaders, can explain the destruction of vast quantities of railroad equipment absolutely necessary to the transaction of its business, by men whose complaint was that the business done by the full equipment in possession of the railways did not pay them sufficient compensation for their labor. ...

All who are still fresh and young and not dehumanized—to the streets! The pot-bellied mortar of laughter stands in a square drunk with joy. Laughter and Love, copulating with Melancholy and Hate, pressed together in the mighty, convulsive passion of bestial lust.

Long live the psychology of contrasts! Intoxicated, burning spirits have raised the flaming banner of intellectual revolution. Death to the creatures of routine, the philistines, the sufferers from gout! Smash with a deafening noise the cup of vengeful storms! Tear down the churches and their allies the museums! Blast to smithereens the fragile idols of Civilization! Hey, you decadent architects of the sarcophagi of thought, you watchmen of the universal cemetery of books—stand aside! We have come to remove you! The old must be buried, the dusty archives burned by the Vulcan's torch of creative genius. Past the flaky ashes of world-wide devastation, past the charred canvases of bulky paintings, past the burned, fat, pot-bellied volumes of classics we march, we Anarcho-Futurists! Above the vast expanse

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[Since the panic of 1873] the country has been obliged to meet its debts, not by renewals, but by actual payments from its resources. Every important industry in the country has been compelled to practise the closest and most rigid economies in order to escape marketing its products at an absolute loss. ... The capital which communist orators so eloquently denounce has yielded such scant returns as the men who pretend to dictate the scale of adequate wages for labor would regard with disdain. In every manufacturing State in the country it is perfectly well known that many establishments have been kept in operation simply that the men might be employed. This has been done often without one iota of profit to the owners. ...

This insurrection, which extended through fourteen States, and in many cases successfully defied the local authorities, presents a state of facts almost as serious as that which prevailed at the outbreak of the Civil War. Unless our own experience is to differ entirely from other countries, and it is not easy to see why it should, with the increasing population of our large cities and business centres, and the inevitable assemblage at such points of the vicious and evil-disposed, the late troubles may be but the prelude to other manifestations of mob violence, with this added peril, that now, for the first time in American history, has an organized mob learned its power to terrorize the law-abiding citizens of great communities. With our recent experience before us, it is believed that no thoughtful man can argue in favor of delay by the proper authorities in dealing with lawless and riotous assemblages. Delay simply leads to destruction of property, and may lead in the end to the destruction of life. ...

What is needed ... would clearly seem to be that proper forces should be so disposed at prominent points, large cities and other great business centres, in many of which the government has arsenals, custom-houses, mints, navy-yards, and other property of its own to protect, that their movements can be combined rapidly, and they be directed against points of danger so as to be able to act effectively and with decision before violence can become triumphant. ...

But to no one class in the community is an absolute assurance of peace so important as to the men who have no capital but their labor. When the accumulations of labor are put in peril by lawlessness, capital may always protect itself by suspending the enterprises which give labor its value and insure it its reward. Anarchy not only deprives the laboring man of his present subsistence, but puts -n jeopardy all his hopes of improvement for his own future and the future of his family.

[Excerpted from: "The Recent Strikes" by Thomas A. Scott in *The North American Review*. v. 75, September 1877.]

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of devastation covering our land the banner of anarchy will be proudly unfurled. Writing has no value! There is no market for literature! There are no prisons, no limits for subjective creativity! Everything is permitted! Everything is unrestricted!

The Children of Nature receive in joyous ecstasy the chivalrous golden kiss of the Sun and the lascivious, naked, fat belly of the Earth. The Children of Nature springing from the black soil kindle the passions of naked, lustful bodies. They press them all in one spawning, pregnant cup! Thousands of arms and legs are welded into a single suffocating exhausted heap! The skin is inflamed by hot, insatiable, gnawing caresses. Teeth sink with hatred into warm succulent lovers' flesh! Wide, staring eyes follow the pregnant, burning dance of lust!

Everything is strange, uninhibited, elemental. Convulsions—flesh—life—death—everything! Everything!

Such is the poetry of our love! Powerful, immortal, and terrible are we in our love! The north wind rages in the heads of the Children of Nature. Something frightful has appeared—some vampire of melancholy! Perdition—the world is dying! Catch it! Kill it! No, wait! Frenzied, penetrating cries pierce the air. Wait! Melancholy! Black yawning ulcers of agony cover the pale, terror-stricken face of heaven. The earth trembles with fear beneath the mighty wrathful blows of its Children! Oh, you cursed, loathsome things! They tear at its fat, tender flesh and bury their withered, starving melancholy in the flowing blood and fresh wounds of its body. The world is dying! Ah! Ah! Ah! cry millions of tocsins. Ah! Ah! Ah! roar the giant cannon of alarm. Destruction! Chaos! Melancholy! The world is dying!

Such is the poetry of our melancholy! We are uninhibited! Not for us the wailing sentimentality of the humanists. Rather, we shall create the triumphant intellectual brotherhood of peoples, forged with the iron logic of contradictions, of Hate and Love. With bared teeth we shall protect our free union, from Africa to the two poles, against any sentimental level of friendship. Everything is ours! Outside us is only death! Raising the black flag of rebellion, we summon all living men who have not been dehumanized, who have not been benumbed by the poisonous breath of Civilization! All to the streets! Forward! Destroy! Kill! Only death admits no return! Extinguish the old! Thunder, lightning, the elements—all are ours! Forward!

Long live the international intellectual revolution! An open road for the Anarcho-Futurists, Anarcho-Hyperboreans, and Neo-Nihilists!

Death to world Civilization!

[Reproduced from: "Shturmvoi, opustoshaiushchii manifest anarkhofuturistov (Anarcho-Futurist Manifesto)," by a Group of Anarcho-Futurists, March 14, 1919, in Paul Avrich, ed., *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973).]

The 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike, MA

Mr. Wood wrote the following letter to the strikers:

TO THE STRIKERS:

I am an employee of the Company as you are. ... I ask you to return to work. ... You are being advised by strangers ... men who are not and never have been employees of the Company...

When conditions of our business warrant raising your wages, I shall, without even a request, recommend such an advance.

—Wm. W. Wood, President American Woolen Co., January 19, 1912

And the strikers replied:

To MR. WOOD:

We are of the opinion that you have had ample time to consider the demands of the men, women and children who have made the American Woolen Co. what it is today.

You speak of men from out of town who know nothing of the textile industry... We, the committee, would like to know if the militia, the special policemen and the Pinkerton detectives, recently brought into the city, know anything about the textile industry.

—STRIKE COMMITTEE

[Excerpted from: Bill Cahn, *Mill Town* (New York: Cameron & Kahn, 1954).]

Louis Adamic: Sabotage & the Strike

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 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.

[Reproduced from Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (Oakland: AK Press, 2008).]



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More info: Occupy.com | Occupytogether.org | Strikeeverywhere.net | Occupywallst.org

W.E.B. Dubois on the General Strike

How the Civil War meant emancipation and how the black worker won the war by general strike which transferred his labor from the Confederate planter to the Northern invader, in whose army lines workers began to be organized as a new labor force. ...

The Southern worker, black and white, held the key to the war; and of the two groups, the black worker raising food and raw materials held an even more strategic place than the white. This was so clear a fact that both sides should have known it. ... Another step was logical and inevitable. The men who handled a spade for the Northern armies, the men who fed them, and as spies brought information, could also handle a gun and shoot. Without legal authority and in spite of it, suddenly the Negro became a soldier. ...

At first, the rush of the Negroes from the plantations came as a surprise and was variously interpreted. The easiest thing to say was that Negroes were tired of work and wanted to live at the expense of the government; wanted to travel and see things and places. But in contradiction to this was the extent of the movement and the terrible suffering of the refugees. If they were seeking peace and quiet, they were much better off on the plantations than trailing in the footsteps of the army or squatting miserably in the camps. They were mistreated by the soldiers; ridiculed; driven away, and yet they came. They increased with every campaign, and as a final gesture, they marched with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea, and met the refugees and human property on the Sea Islands and the Carolina Coast.

This was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on the wide basis against the conditions of work. It was a general strike that involved directly in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations. At first, the commanders were disposed to drive them away, or to give them quasi-freedom and let them do as they pleased with the nothing that they possessed. This did not work. Then the commanders organized relief and afterwards, work... The Negroes were willing to work and did work, but they wanted land to work, and they wanted to see and own the results of their toil. It was here and in the West and the South that a new vista opened. Here was a chance to establish an agrarian democracy in the South: peasant holders of small properties, eager to work and raise crops, amenable to suggestion and general direction. ...

Very soon the freedmen became self-sustaining and gave little trouble. They began to build themselves comfortable cabins, and the government constructed hospitals for the sick. In the case of the sick and dependent, a tax was laid on the wages of workers. At first it was thought the laborers would object, but, on the contrary, they were perfectly willing and the imposition of the tax compelled the government to see that wages were promptly paid. The freedmen freely acknowledged that they ought to assist in helping bear the burden of the poor, and were flattered by having the government ask their help. It was the reaction of the new labor group, who, for the first time in their lives, were receiving money in payment for their work. Five thousand dollars was raised by this tax for hospitals, and with this money tools and property were bought. By wholesale purchase, clothes, household goods and other articles were secured by the freedmen at a cost of one-third of what they might have paid the stores. There was a rigid system of accounts and

monthly reports through army officials...

The experiment at Davis Bend, Mississippi, was of especial interest. The place was occupied in November and December, 1864, and private interests were displaced and an interesting socialistic effort made with all the property under the control of the government. The Bend was divided into districts with Negro sheriffs and judges who were allowed to exercise authority under the general control of the military officers. Petty theft and idleness were soon reduced to a minimum and "the community distinctly demonstrated the capacity of the Negro to take care of himself and exercise under honest and competent directions the functions of self-government."

[Excerpted from W.E.B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1999). First published in 1935.]

George Orwell on Workers' Control

I mention this Italian militiaman because he has stuck vividly in my memory. With his shabby uniform and fierce pathetic face he typifies for me the special atmosphere of that time. He is bound up with all my memories of that period of the war—the red flags in Barcelona, the gaunt trains full of shabby soldiers creeping to the front, the grey war-stricken towns farther up the line, the muddy, ice-cold trenches in the mountains.

This was in late December, 1936, less than seven months ago as I write, and yet it is a period that has already receded into enormous distance. Later events have obliterated it much more completely than they have obliterated 1935, or 1905, for that matter. I had come to Spain with some notion of writing newspaper articles, but I had joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do. The Anarchists were still in virtual control of Catalonia and the revolution was still in full swing. To anyone who had been there since the beginning it probably seemed even in December or January that the revolutionary period was ending; but when one came straight from England the aspect of Barcelona was something startling and overwhelming. It was the first time that I had ever been in a town where the working class was in the saddle. Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary

parties; almost every church had been gutted and its images burnt. Churches here and there were being systematically demolished by gangs of workmen. Every shop and café had an inscription saying that it had been collectivized; even the bootblacks had been collectivized and their boxes painted red and black. Waiters and shop-walkers looked you in the face and treated you as an equal. Servile and even ceremonial forms of speech had temporarily disappeared. Nobody said 'Señor' or 'Don' or even 'Usted'; everyone called everyone else 'Comrade' and 'Thou,' and said 'Salud!' instead of 'Buenos dias.' Tipping had been forbidden by law since the time of Primo de Rivera; almost my first experience was receiving a lecture from an hotel manager for trying to tip a boy. There were no private motor cars, they had all been commandeered, and all the trams and taxis and much of the other transport were painted red and black. The revolutionary posters were everywhere, flaming from the walls in clean reds and blues that made the few remaining advertisements look like daubs of mud. Down the Ramblas, the wide central artery of the town where crowds of people streamed constantly to and fro, the loudspeakers were bellowing revolutionary songs all day and far into the night. And it was the aspect of the crowds that was the queerest thing of all. In outward appearance it was a town in which the wealthy classes had practically ceased to exist. Except for a small number of women and foreigners there were no 'well-dressed' people at all. Practically everyone wore rough working-class clothes, or blue overalls or some variant of the militia uniform. All of this was queer and moving. There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for. Also I believed that things were as they appeared, that this was really a workers' State and that the entire bourgeoisie had either fled, been killed, or voluntarily come over to the workers' side; I did not realize that great numbers of well-to-do bourgeois were simply lying low and disguising themselves as proletarians for the time being.

Together with all this there was something of the evil atmosphere of war. The town had a gaunt untidy look, roads and buildings were in poor repair, the streets at night were dimly lit for fear of air-raids, the shops were mostly shabby and half-empty. Meat was scarce and milk practically unobtainable, there was a shortage of coal, sugar, and petrol, and a really serious shortage of bread. Even at this period the bread-queues were often hundreds of yards long. Yet so far as one could judge the people were contented and hopeful. There was no unemployment, and the price of living was still extremely low; you saw very few conspicuously destitute people, and no beggars except the gypsies. Above all, there was a belief in the revolution and the future, a feeling of having suddenly emerged into an era of equality and freedom. Human beings were trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine. In the barbers' shops were Anarchist notices (the barbers were mostly Anarchists) solemnly explaining that barbers were no longer slaves. In the streets were coloured posters appealing to prostitutes to stop being prostitutes. To anyone from the hard-boiled, sneering civilization of the English speaking races there was something rather pathetic in the literalness with which these idealistic Spaniards took the hackneyed phrases of revolution. At that time revolutionary ballads of the naivest kind, all about proletarian brotherhood and the wickedness of Mussolini, were being sold on the streets for a few centimes each. I have often seen an illiterate militiaman buy one of these ballads, laboriously spell out the words, and then, when he had got the hang of it, begin singing it to an appropriate tune...

[Excerpted from George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1980).]

Art Strike, 1990–1993

We call for all artists in the U.S. to put down their tools and cease to make, distribute, sell, exhibit or discuss their work from January 1, 1990 to January 1, 1993. We call for all galleries, museums, agencies, alternative spaces, periodicals, theaters, art schools etc., to cease all operations for the same period.

Art is conceptually defined by a self-perpetuating elite and is marketed as an international commodity; the activity of its production has been mystified and co-opted; its practitioners have become manipulable and marginalized through self-identification with the term “artist” and all it implies.

To call one person an artist is to deny another an equal gift of vision; thus the myth of “genius” becomes an ideological justification for inequality, repression and famine. What an artist considers to be his or her identity is simply a schooled set of attitudes; preconceptions which imprison humanity in history. It is the roles derived from these identities, as much as the art products mined from this reification, which we must reject.

Unlike Gustav Metzger’s Art Strike of 1977 to 1980, our purpose is not to destroy those institutions which might be perceived as having a negative effect on artistic production. Instead, we intend to question the role of the artist itself and its relation to the dynamics of power within our specific culture.

Everybody knows what’s wrong

We call this Art Strike because, like any general strike, the real reasons being discussed are ones of economics and self-determination. We call this Art Strike in order to make explicit the political and ethical motivations for this attempted large-scale manipulation of alleged “esthetic” objects and relationships. We call this Art Strike to connote and encourage active rather than passive engagement with the issues at hand.

[Excerpted from YAWN: *Sporadic Critique of Culture*, n.1, September 15, 1989.]

Rent Strike in Italy

On May Day, 1970, about 2,000 people demonstrated in the streets of Quarto Oggiaro. This was a positive break with the tradition of public processions organised by the political parties and the trade unions. People were coming onto the streets of their own community. The march was an occasion for people to realise their growing strength and unity and for developing further their struggle. It culminated in a mass meeting, held in a square in the centre of the district. A large number of people spoke about their experiences.

An elderly woman from the area:

“The struggle of us tenants began in January, 1968. I was one of the first women to stop paying rent. Despite the many difficulties our struggle has developed, The young people of the area have had a lot of trouble, day and night, But our minds are made up. If anyone goes on rent strike, nobody’s going to be able to evict them. Every time the bailiffs come we’ll be there, all together, in front of the door, stopping them from getting in.

“Not long ago 500 police were sent down from the Viale Romagna. 500 police to throw the family of one poor worker out onto the street. How come, when hundreds of evictions used to be carried out with only a bailiff there, it now takes a whole army?

“It’s because here in Quarto Oggiaro people have got together to fight. Because here in Quarto Oggiaro there’s the Tenants Union. We’re using a new type of weapon to fight against the rising cost of living, against the bosses’ exploitation of us in our homes. It is something really effective—a rent strike.

“I’m not speaking now to the young people, to those youths in the area who have been in the forefront of our struggle. I want to say something to the women who live here. Many of them still aren’t involved and haven’t realised the importance of this strike.

“In the two years and five months that I’ve been on strike, I’ve saved a lot of money. I feel healthier. I’ve had more money to give to the children, to the ones who really need it. I’ve had some money to give to a few old age pensioners. I’m not saying all this to give you big ideas about myself. But just think for a minute. Rather than giving your money to the boss, keep it for yourself. Give it to the children. Give it to the workers who are struggling in the factories, who’re exploited year in and year out.

“People talk about the Autumn factory contracts. What did the workers gain? Nothing—absolutely nothing! I know what my family finances are like. If you do the shopping, you see prices rising everyday. I’d say we’ve lost out badly. They can laugh—the clever ones, the reformists, all those male politicians. But we’re getting near election time, and we’ll give our vote to those who deserve it—and that’s none of them!

“Eat sirloin steaks ... don’t go handing your hard earned money over to the thieves in the Viale Romagna!

“After those 500 police came to Quarto Oggiaro our struggle expanded a hundred times. Even the very next day. Anybody who’s still paying rent just remember this—you won’t get a penny of it back from the authorities. Follow the example of the young people. Even if you don’t give them responsibilities a lot of the time, seeing as they’re so young. But they’re much tougher and braver than us. Because after fifty years of struggle we can’t get same results we use to.

“Personally, I can say this. Since the time I first went on rent strike things have gone better for me. Long live the working class! And long live the struggle of the tenants!”

[Excerpted from Anon., ed., *Take Over the City: Community Struggles in Italy* (London: Rising Free, 1973).]



· A · GARLAND · FOR · MAY · DAY · 1895 ·
· DEDICATED · TO · THE · WORKERS · BY · WALTER · CRANE ·

Angelo Quattrocchi on Paris 1968

There are no revolutionary thoughts,
only revolutionary actions
—graffiti on a wall in Nanterre

Renault, Nord and Sud Aviation, Berliet, Rhodiaceta. The genealogy of rebellion follows a predictable pattern. A stream rushing down the mountain, cascading, finding its bed and becoming a torrent, then a river...

Strikes are admitted, strikes are permissible, passing illnesses, a few degrees of temperature, local disturbances, adjustments.

Occupation of factories is dangerous, a challenge, a threat. Workers can threaten to smash the machinery, and the threat alone can prevent any armed intervention.

Masters of the factories, their condition of dis-possession is their very strength. The machines, the Capital, owned by others and by others manipulated, are now in their hands. The threat to sabotage them paralyses their enemy, but smashing them would be a suicidal act.

On the other hand they can keep everything in perfect order, preparing for the second stage, the final act, when with the support of workers of higher echelons, they themselves can start the machines running again: worker's power. The Central Committee of the C.G.T. spells out very clearly that they are not calling a general strike, C.F.D.T. will have to follow.

They will ride the tiger, straightjacket the workers into a purely quantitative struggle, appealing to their penury and using it as a bribe and an arm. Asking for a 10% rise, which is needed, of course, very much needed, and getting ready to bargain, very quickly, as quickly as possible, section by section.

The occupation of the factories, started with-out them, against them, is for them mortal danger. They will have to ride the tiger.

Now the country is in a state of suspended animation, waiting for the inevitable spreading of the strikes (and occupations of the factories).

The Sorbonne, and all other universities, have become factories of ideas, the spider's thread is now a spider's web, silver webs into factories.

Paris is joy and bewilderment.

Students' and teachers' unions decide to go and demonstrate in front of the television and radio building; plastic vault which keeps the sky out...

And the tapestry shows its naked pattern. Alice-France goes through the mirror, a mirror which for years had been there in the bourgeois dining-room. But nice people don't think of going through mirrors.

The fall is long, long and easy, one has the time to think. Renault, Berliet, Rhodiaceta, Nord and Sud Aviation have begun.

Now the airports, the shipyards. Railworkers, miners. We are almost there. Big craters, small cracks, fumes and sparks, boiling waters. The eruption. The crust isn't solid any more. Paris public transport is still. There, the heart, the pump has ceased to beat.

The country is grinding to a halt. Electricity, gas. We've arrived.

Radio and television. The technicians and journalists are restless.

It's their consciences...

Who decides to produce what, how, when and for whom and to what purpose?

Not only the workers of the factories, but all who work for their living, at professional level, however high, haven't any decisional power. In

that sense, they are all workers in a gigantic factory called capitalist society, or bourgeois state.

They are all exploited, the workers are poor, but the others are too, because they are instruments of alien orders. Direct action (strikes) and direct democracy (strike committees which become committees to change the aims and nature of their work) will have them (from the scientists to the civil servants) as enthusiastic participants. The second ally. There, it's not the C.G.T. to close the ring, and the minds, but the old conditioning. Their discovery is new, their pretence of being privileged, well-off as opposed to being poor, very old.

[Excerpted from Angelo Quattrocchi and Tom Nairn, *The Beginning of the End: France, May 1968* (London: Verso, 1998).]

Women's General Strike, Iceland 1975

WHY A DAY OFF FOR WOMEN?

The Women's Congress, held in Reykjavik, June 20 and 21 1975, urges women to take a day off on October 24, the United Nations Day, in order to demonstrate the importance of their work. Why was a motion like that put forward and carried at a congress where women of all ages and political parties were assembled?

The reasons are many and here are but a few:

- Because when someone is needed for a badly paid low-status job the advertisement specifies a woman.
- Because average wages of women in trade and commerce are only 75% of the average wages of men doing the same jobs.
- Because the principal negotiating body of the Icelandic Trades Union Congress has no woman representative.
- Because the difference between the average monthly earnings of women and men labourers is \$200.
- Because farmers' wives are not accepted as full members of the Farmers Union.
- Because it is commonly said about a housewife "she isn't working—just keeping house."
- Because there are men in authority unable or unwilling to understand that day nurseries are a necessary part of modern society.
- Because the work contribution of farmers' wives on the farms is not valued at more than \$1,100 a year.
- Because whether an applicant for a job is male or female is often considered more important than education and competence.
- Because the work experience of a housewife is not considered of any value on the labour market.

The general conclusion is that women's contribution to the community is underestimated. Let us demonstrate to ourselves and to others the importance of our role in society by stopping work on October 24th. Let us unite in making the day a memorable one under the theme of the International Women's Year.

EQUALITY—DEVELOPMENT—PEACE

—Executive Committee for Women's Day Off,
Reykjavik, June 1975

[Reproduced from *The Power of Women: Magazine of the International Wages for Housework Campaign*, n. 5, 1976.]



Photograph of Reykjavik on October 24, 1975 during Women's General Strike.

Sembene Ousmane: *God's Bits of Wood*

Mamadou Keïta, or the Old One, as he was respectfully known, was standing at the left of the stage. A sleeveless tunic revealed his long, emaciated arms. The narrow, angular head perched above his meager body was entirely shaved, except for a sparse white beard of which he was fiercely proud. He spoke slowly, but precisely, evoking the laying of the first rails. At that time he had not yet been born, but later he had seen the completion of the railroad at Koulikoro. Then he spoke of the epidemics, of the famines, and of the seizure of tribal lands by the company.

Mamadou Keïta paused, and his bloodshot, deep brown eyes studied the crowd thoughtfully. From his forehead three ritual scars ran down to his chin, crossed at intervals by little horizontal gashes. He saw Ad'jibid'ji and began to speak again.

"It is true that we have our trade, but it does not bring us what it should. We are being robbed. Our wages are so low that there is no longer any difference between ourselves and animals. Years ago the men of Thies went out on strike, and that was only settled by deaths, by deaths on our side. And now it begins again. At this very moment meetings like this one are taking place from Koulikoro to Dakar. Men have to come to this same platform before me, and other men will follow. Are you ready to call a strike—yes or no? Before you do, you must think."

From the hall Tiémoko interrupted him. "We're the ones who do the work," he roared, "the same work the white men do. Why then should they be paid more? Because they are white? And when they are sick, why should they be taken care of while we and our families are left to starve? Because we are black? In what way is a white child better than a black child? In what way is a white worker better than a black worker? They tell us we have the same rights, but it is a lie, nothing but a lie! Only the engines we run tell the truth—and they don't know the difference between a white man and a black. It does no good just to look at our pay slips and say that our wages are too small. If we want to live decently we must fight!"

All through the hall clenched fists were raised, and voices cried out, "Yes, we must strike! Strike!" Then, from the hall into the courtyard, and from the courtyard to the neighboring streets there seemed to be only one voice, crying, "Strike!" Everyone wanted to present his evidence, to give his opinion, and the din became indescribable.

Tiémoko, who had interrupted the Old One, got up from his seat, his brutish head thrust forward. He was a thirty-year-old colossus with a thick-muscled body, enormous shoulders, and a bull neck on which the veins pulsed angrily. From his left ear hung a heavy ring of twisted gold. His yellow undershirt was soaked with sweat.

Disconcerted by the tumult he had unleashed, Mamadou Keïta waited silently, but the disorder only increased. In the deepening uproar the hall seemed suddenly smaller. It was no longer possible to hear anyone; there was just a clamor of voices. A sickly-looking youth, arguing with someone, tried to climb up on a bench, but it collapsed and crashed against the shins of the men around him. Almost immediately, six, eight, ten voices began to curse, and angry cries and oaths filled the air. Outside, the crowd was growing restless, too, and a vague, rumbling sound poured in through the door and the windows. Through it all, one word could be heard, endlessly repeated: "Strike!"

In the street, the militiamen fidgeted with their whips, and the soldiers adjusted their weapons. The officers surveyed the excited mob uneasily.

Ad'jibid'ji took advantage of the confusion to climb up on the stage with the Old One. She gave him Fatoumata's message, and he told her to stand against the wall at the back, beneath the banner. She was taking in the noisy spectacle with more interest than amusement,

when suddenly a little smile lit up her face. The memory of a story Ibrahim Bakayoko had told her raced through her mind. "In the days before we had the union the men used to sit on the ground, in the middle of a discussion, and demand that we give them benches. We gave them benches, and what happened? When they wanted to argue they all stood up, as if the benches weren't even there!" Remembering, Ad'jibid'ji suppressed a laugh.

On the stage the officials murmured among themselves, and several times Keïta called for silence. Little by little the uproar died down, and the men began to take their places again. When someone refused to sit down, the others pulled him by the tunic, or pushed him down by the shoulders. Diara, the ticket collector on the railroad, was trying to worm his way into a better place and had managed, by adroit maneuvering, to move up several rows before he got an elbow in his belly, and fell down. In the midst of the general laughter Mamadou Keïta was at last able to resume his interrupted speech.

"I did not say that I was against the strike. I said only that a decision of this importance had never before been taken here, and that we must think about it carefully. I am your oldest member, and I have never seen such a thing here. Your enthusiasm frightens me and makes me wish that Ibrahim Bakayoko was with us today. He knows how to speak to us, and all of us listen to him. Do you remember—the last time he spoke to us of strike-breakers..."

"We'll take care of traitors!"

Again it was Tiémoko who interrupted. His supporters rose with him from their bench. The Old One stopped speaking and bowed his head. Tiémoko looked like a wild animal preparing to charge, and Ad'jibid'ji regarded him breathlessly. She did not like Tiémoko, and now, in her heart, she could sense the birth of hatred for this man.

Someone, overcome by nausea, ran out of the hall with a hand clasped to his mouth. The heat was becoming unbearable.

Konaté, the secretary of the union, tried to intervene. "Tiémoko, let the Old One speak, so that we can get to the vote..."

A voice from the courtyard stopped him. "Hey, in there! You are late—some of us are already on strike!"

It was three of the locomotive workers who had just arrived, their clothes still covered with grease and coal dust. A frantic burst of applause rattled through the room. Arms were held out to them, and they were lifted up and carried through a window, to be stared at as if they had accomplished some miracle which was impossible to other humans. Pleased and proud, their faces creased with laughter, they drank in this adulation.

After that, no one could speak. A vote was taken, and the strike was called unanimously, for the next morning at dawn.

...
Slowly, the sun went down, and blue-black shadows lengthened across the motionless locomotives and railway cars, the silent workshops and yards, the white villas and the mud-walled houses, the sheds and the hovels. From somewhere in the watchmen's barracks came the call of a bugle.

And so the strike came to this. An unlimited strike, which, for many, along the whole length of the railroad, was a time for suffering, but for many was also a time for thought. When the smoke from the trains no longer drifted above the savanna, they realized that an age had ended—an age their elders had told them about, when all of Africa was just a garden for food. Now the machine ruled over their lands, and when they forced every machine within a thousand miles to halt they became conscious of their strength, but conscious also of their dependence. They began to understand that the machine was making of them a whole new breed of men. It did not belong to them, it was they who belonged to it. When it stopped, it taught them that lesson.

The days passed, and the nights. There was no news, except what every passing hour brought to every home,

and that was always the same: the foodstuffs were gone, the meager savings eaten up, and there was no money in the house. They could go and ask for credit, but they knew what the storekeeper would say. 'You already owe me this much, and as it is I won't have enough to pay my own bills. Why don't you do as they say? Why don't you go back to work?'

Then they would have to fall back once more on the machine and carry off the motor scooters and the bicycles and the watches to a moneylender. After that it was the turn of whatever jewelry there was, and of any clothing of value, the ceremonial tunics that were worn only on important occasions. Hunger set in; and men, women, and children grew thinner. But they held on. Meetings were held more frequently, the directors of the union intensified their activities, and everyone swore not to give in.

The days passed, and the nights. And then, to everyone's surprise, the trains began to run again. The locomotives were driven by mechanics brought from Europe, and soldiers and sailors became station masters and trainmen. The big, gardenlike squares before the stations became fortresses, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by sentinels, night and day. And after the hunger, fear set in.

Among the strikers, it was a formless thing, a furtive astonishment at the forces they had set in motion, and an uncertainty as to how they should be nourished—with hope, or with resignation. Among the whites, it was a simple obsession with numbers. How could such a small minority feel safe in the midst of these sullen masses? Those few members of the two races who had had relations based on friendship avoided seeing each other. The white women went to the market only if there was a policeman at their side; and there had even been cases when the black women refused to sell to them.

The days passed, and the nights. In this country, the men often had several wives, and it was perhaps because of this that, at the beginning, they were scarcely conscious of the help the women gave them. But soon they began to understand that, here, too, the age to come would have a different countenance. When a man came back from a meeting, with bowed head and empty pockets, the first things he saw were always the unfired stove, the useless cooking vessels, the bowls and gourds ranged in a corner, empty. Then he would seek the arms of his wife, without thinking, or caring, whether she was the first or the third. And seeing the burdened shoulders, the listless walk, the women became conscious that a change was coming for them as well.

But if they were beginning to feel closer to the lives of their men, what was happening to the children? In this country, they were many, so many that they were seldom counted. But now they were there, idling in the courtyards or clinging to the women's waistcloths, their bones seeming naked, their eyes deep-sunk, and on their lips a constant, heart-bruising question: "Mother, will there be something to eat today?" Then the mothers would gather together, by fours perhaps, or tens, the infants slung across their backs, the brood of older children following; and the wandering from house to house began. Someone would say, "let's go to see so-and-so. Perhaps she still has a little millet." But most of the time so-and-so could only answer, "No, I have nothing more. Wait, and I'll come with you." Then, carrying a baby against a flaccid breast, she would join the procession.

The days were mournful, and the nights were mournful, and the simple mewling of a cat set people trembling.

One morning a woman rose and wrapped her cloth firmly around her waist and said, "Today, I will bring back something to eat."

And the men began to understand that if the times were bringing forth a new breed of men, they were also bringing forth a new breed of women.

[Excerpted from Sembene Ousmane, *God's Bits of Wood* (Oxford, UK: Heinemann, 1986).]

Fredy Perlman on Paris, May 1968

The major factories of France have been occupied by their workers. The universities are occupied by students who are attending continuing assemblies and organizing Committees of Action. The transportation and communications services are paralyzed.

"After a week of continuous fighting, the students of Paris took possession of the Sorbonne," explains a leaflet of a Students and Workers Committee for Action; "We have decided to make ourselves the masters."...

The French student movement was transformed into a mass movement during a period of ten days. On May 2 the University of Nanterre was closed to students by its dean; the following day the Sorbonne was closed and police attacked student demonstrators. On the days that followed, students learned to protect themselves from the police by constructing barricades, hurling cobblestones, and smearing their faces with lemon juice to repel police gas. By Monday, May 13, 800,000 people demonstrated in Paris and a general strike was called throughout France; a week later the entire French economy was paralyzed....

On May 10, student demonstrators demand an immediate opening of all universities, and the immediate withdrawal of the police from the Latin Quarter. Thousands of students, joined by young workers, occupy the main streets of the Latin Quarter and construct over 60 barricades. On the night of Friday, May 10, city police reinforced by special forces charge on the demonstrators. A large number of demonstrators, as well as policemen, are seriously injured. ...

Tuesday May 14, the movement begins to flow beyond the university and into the factories. The aircraft plant Sud-Aviation, manufacturer of the Caravelle, is occupied by its own workers.

On Wednesday, May 15, students and workers take over the Odeon, the French national theater, plant revolutionary red and black flags on the dome, and proclaim the end of a culture limited to the economic elite of the country. The same day numerous plants throughout France are occupied by their workers, including the automobile producer Renault.

Two days after the take-over of the Renault plant, Sorbonne students organize a 6-mile march to demonstrate the solidarity of the students with the workers. At the head of the march is a red flag, and on their way to the plant marchers sing the "International" and call "Down with the Police State," "Down with Capitalism," and "This is only the beginning; continue the struggle!"...

In the auditoriums and lecture halls of University of Paris buildings, a vast experiment in direct democracy is under way. The state, the ministries, the faculty bodies and the former student representative bodies are no longer recognized as legitimate lawmakers. The laws are made by the constituents of "General Assemblies." Action committees establish contacts with striking workers, and leaflets inform workers of the experience in direct democracy which the students are gaining.

[Excerpted from R. Gregoire and F. Perlman, *Worker-Student Action Committees France May '68* (Detroit, MI: Black and Red, 2002).]

CA Prisoner's Hunger Strike, 2011

Men of respect, men of honor, have committed their lives to the struggle. Literally placed their lives on the line in order to put a stoppage to all these injustices we are subjected to day in and day out. People would rather die than continue living under their current conditions. That's why to me, it is a privilege, an honor to be a part of the struggle, to be a part of history for the betterment of not only "me" but for all those inside these cement walls... I have joined this second hunger strike once again full heartedly with a smile on my face. I will go as far as my body allows me to go.

[Excerpted from a letter from a Hunger Striker at Calipatria State Prison on the 11th Day (Oct 6th, 2011).]

Oaxaca Teachers on Strike, 2006

It's unprecedented and nobody knows what will happen, but nobody is backing down. Tens of thousands of striking teachers occupy the center of Oaxaca City, sprawled out under camp tents, on top of cardboard cartons, on stairs and walls and benches. The plantón—the occupying camp—has now been going on for fifteen days. It covers 56 blocks, preventing all traffic and access to the heart of the central square, or zócalo. ...

It's true that in past years the teachers' strike was something like the swallows' return to Capistrano—an annual event. For twenty-seven years the teachers union has been trying to wrest sufficient funds from Oaxaca governors to aid poverty-ridden towns where classrooms of cardboard and laminated plastic roofs, without sanitary facilities, are common.

But this strike feels different; the level of name-calling and recriminations reaches higher than ever before. The union has called for Ruiz to resign. Ruiz called for federal police. The union publicly and firmly asserted that Ruiz is a thief, a bastard, and several times over an assassin. Ruiz solicited a condemnation of the union by the state legislature. On June 2 the union staged a mega-march of teachers and supporters: 100,000 people if you ask the teachers, 80,000 if you read the newspapers, and 50,000 if you consult the police. It stretched 5 kilometers, with many of the marchers' family members alongside students and their families.

The strikers are well organized, with rotating shifts for blocking and picketing in all the areas now under their control. Cell phones as well as their Radio Plantón broadcasts are used for communications. The radio station has moved to a safer location. A radio in the center of the zócalo on a folding table broadcasts all night long. Furthermore, the zócalo and the streets around it are such a maze of ropes and flapping plastic that unless the police came in tanks they'd enter very slowly, and the strikers would have time to defend themselves or flee.

Out three blocks on the western side of the zócalo lies a security perimeter. No sign of the reported sticks or weapons, just teachers wearing security badges sitting on the curb with cell phones. Westward, Plaza de la Danza, recently renovated by the governor, is now occupied completely by teachers. This is the plaza that gives (would give) access to the municipal offices. Lots of fruit, Italian ices (raspas), popsicles, straw hats and Chinese parasols are displayed on sale. The sky looks like a thunderstorm in a couple of hours—this is the rainy season. Teachers fill the grandstand beneath plastic tarps, embroidering and knitting, or reading the daily papers. Peaceful and unconcerned. ...

Strikers closed the airport road. Tourism is disrupted, as it has been since the attack on Atenco, by foreigners advising the Mexican authorities that they are being watched. Movements have learned how to internationalize their struggle and use that to their advantage.

The relentless confrontation tactics of the union go way beyond seeking negotiations. They demand a complete overhaul of state government. The struggle encompasses all the political ill will and citizen ire that has built up in Oaxaca for decades, around basic issues such as government failure to protect towns against flooding, the murderous control by caciques, lack of health services to deal with the epidemic of cervical cancer among women, the brutalization of women accepted by the culture of machismo, the cooperation with narco-traffickers and gangsters.

Essentially, this strike is a combination of social forces, many of which were brought together in February by the Other Campaign, now also attracting the electoral political force that is the PRD, in a massive concentration of protest.

[Excerpted from Nancy Davies, *Oaxaca Near Meltdown Over Teacher Strike*, *Narco News*, June 7, 2006.]



Block print by ASARO Collective, Oaxaca, Mexico, 2006.

Gioconda Belli: "Strike"

I want a strike where we will all go.
A strike of arms, legs and hairs,
a strike born of every body.

I want a strike
of laborers of doves,
of chauffeurs of flowers,
of technicians of children,
of doctors of women.

I want a strike so large,
that even love will fit.
A strike where everything will stop:
the clocks in the factories,
the administrations of schools,
the bus the hospitals,
the roads the ports.

A strike of eyes, of hands and of kisses.
A strike where breathing will not be permitted,
a strike where silence will be born,
where we will hear the steps of the tyrants as
they flee.

[Reproduced from Barbara Paschke and Alejandro Murguía, eds., *Volcán: Poems from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1983).]

Student Strike, February 1969

BERKELEY: The University of California campus here became a battlefield Thursday, Feb. 20, as students fought back against repeated tear gas attacks by club-swinging pigs. Some 3,000 strikers abandoned the usual tactics of picketing and running, to remobilize when the cops attacked. When the students counterattacked—hurling rocks, bricks, bottles, and cherry bombs—the police often retreated in terror. As a result of the day's battle, the University reported 12 students injured, and the Alameda County Sheriff's Office reported 13 cops hurt, including Division Chief Tom Hutchins, who was struck on the shoulder by a rock. Fifteen students were arrested on Thursday, bringing the total number arrested to 133 in the month-old strike.

DUKE: More than 26 students were injured in a clash with police using tear gas and clubs last Feb. 13. The fight came after a ten-hour occupation of the administration building by black students backing up their demands for special black education programs without grading, a black studies program, money for a black student union building, and an end to "racist policies." In a rally Feb. 15 Duke's black students pledged to continue their struggle with the school administration and to use "words or physical force" to achieve their demands. National guardsmen are on alert at an armory two miles from the school.

NY CITY COLLEGE: Over 100 students occupied City's administration building for 4 1/2 hours Feb. 13 demanding a separate school of Negro and Puerto Rican studies. The occupation of the building ended with demonstrators marching silently from a side exit, and refusing to talk with the press.

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA: Over 500 students occupied the administration building Feb. 18 over demands concerning a University-City Science Center being built in the West Side ghetto. The Center has classified contracts and is part of a consortium of about 17 schools in and near Philadelphia. The Center is responsible for the urban renewal of 1,200 blacks in the area. Students are demanding no classified or military contracts at the Center; the U. of Penn. as majority stockholder, and

other corporations, should pay for low-cost housing on some land slated for the Center; and this land should be 10 acres.

MONTREAL: Canadian universities are experiencing disruptions similar to those in the US. Feb. 13 the Montreal police riot squad hauled 96 students, about half of them black, out of the wrecked Computer Center at Sir George Williams University. The students occupied the building for two weeks. All but six were jailed without bail. Four blanket charges of conspiracy involving harm to persons and property have been filed; the maximum penalty is life imprisonment. This action prompted McGill University officials to close off the main entrance to its computer area. At Windsor students demanded more power in policymaking and occupied part of the administration building. The events at Sir George Williams are preceded by a 10 month controversy traced to the vocational aspirations of black West Indian students their conviction that Canada is racist and a professor's admission that he failed to communicate with his black students because he did not appreciate the intensity of their feelings about racial questions.

ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY, CHICAGO: The Black Students Association has been disrupting classes around demands for a black studies department. They have gone into classes to speak about these demands. Six blacks have been suspended, and there are warrants out for four others on charges of criminal damage. Feb. 20, after a black rally, 150 marched to the president's office and demanded amnesty for the expelled students. When someone tried to call the cops the phone was ripped from the wall. Later cops stormed the campus. No arrests were made, but warrants have been issued.

SANTA BARBARA: Almost 2,000 students are occupying the University Center at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In January, a coalition composed of the Black Students Union, the United Mexican-American students, and SDS presented the administration a list of demands, centering around a call for the creation of Black and Mexican-American Studies Departments. The administration has refused to take any action since then. In the meantime, the leaders of the student groups have been harassed, evicted from their apartments, and arrested on trumped-up charges. 2,000 students marched on the administration building on Monday, Feb. 17, and demanded an end to this harassment. When the administration refused to listen, students then seized the University Center.

[Excerpted from *Liberation News Service*, Feb. 28, 1969 and *SDS New Left Notes*, Feb. 21, 1969.]

Day Without Immigrants 2006

Thousands of businesses were shuttered on the "Day Without Immigrants" as workers and their families, most of them from Mexico, participated in a boycott of work and commerce, rallying to demonstrate their importance to the U.S. economy and to demand changes in immigration law that would give illegal migrants a path to citizenship.

A crowd estimated by Los Angeles police at 250,000 marched to City Hall in the morning, after which many determined demonstrators made their way, on foot or by subway, to MacArthur Park for a larger march along Wilshire Boulevard. Police estimated that crowd at 400,000 and reported few problems.... The demonstrations in Los Angeles were the largest among the immigrant rights' protests held around the nation, including gatherings in Chicago, New York and Houston.

And the boycott apparently received substantial support—nearly stopping commerce at the nation's largest port complex. Elsewhere in the region, at least 15,000 people marched in Santa Barbara, 10,000 in Santa Ana, 8,000 in Huntington Park and a few thousand in the Inland Empire, according to official estimates.

In San Ysidro, about 1,000 protesters on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border blocked lanes into the United States for about an hour at midday, bringing traffic to a standstill. Eventually, protesters were pushed back by Mexican police, who arrested about two dozen people....

The boycott was felt in patches throughout Southern California. In some areas with large Latino populations, nearly every business was closed for the day; in other spots, especially those served primarily by large national chains, most if not all were open.... Trucking companies that serve the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach estimated that up to 90% of their drivers did not report to work, virtually halting the flow of cargo containers to and from terminals... [and] it might take up to a week to clear the cargo stalled by the immigration boycott.

[Excerpted from "Day Without Immigrants" by Anna Gorman, Marjorie Miller and Mitchell Landsberg in the *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 2006.]

Seattle General Strike, 1919

At a tumultuous session of the Central Labor Council, the shipyard union's resolution that the local unions poll their members on a general strike passed with virtually no opposition. The threat of a general strike was not taken seriously except by the workers themselves; as the *Seattle Times* wrote, "A general strike directed at WHAT? The Government of the United States? Bosh! Not 15% of Seattle laborites would consider such a proposition."

Yet within a day eight local unions endorsed the strike at their regular meetings—most of the votes nearly unanimous. Within two weeks 110 locals had voted for the strike, even some of the more conservative doing so by margins of five and ten to one.

In joining the strike, the workers knew they were risking more than a few day's pay...

Mayor Ole Hanson of Seattle described the start of the strike on February 6th, 1919: "Streetcar gongs ceased their clamor, newsboys cast their unsold papers in the streets; from the doors of the mill and factory, store and workshop, streamed 65,000 workingmen. School children with fear in their hearts hurried homeward. The life stream of the great city stopped." The A.F.L. strikers were joined by the I.W.W., the separately organized Japanese workers, and perhaps 40,000 non-union workers who did not go to work because of sympathy, fear, closed enterprise, or lack of transportation.

[Excerpted from Jeremy Brecher, *Strike* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1997).]

DAMN THE BOSSES
DAMN THE WORKERS
AND DAMN ME

—a member of the Bonnot Gang

[reproduced from anon., *Prolegomena: To a Study of the Return of the Repressed in History* (London: Rebel Press, 1994).]