
Revolutionary Industrial Unionism versus Armed Insurrection

[leaflet of the Industrial Workers of the World, circa April 1921]

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All intelligent workers realize the capitalist system fails to supply the needs of the vast majority of the human race, and that it must be overthrown before the workers can have freedom. But there is considerable difference of opinions as to the means by which this can be accomplished. Some advocate the ballot, or parliamentary action; some armed insurrection, or military action; and some Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, or Industrial Action. It is the purpose of this leaflet to analyze these different methods and show which is most likely to prove successful. Little space need be devoted to the ballot. This method has proved its own worthlessness and is generally discredited among intelligent revolutionists in all countries.

Armed Insurrection.

Inspired by the success of the Russian Revolution, many who formerly put their faith in the ballot are now advocating armed insurrection in the United States. But these people ignore the difference between conditions in Russia at the time of the Revolution, and those now existing in this country. Russia is a country backward in industrial development. Its economic structure is simple. About 85 percent of the population are engaged in agricultural pursuits. When subjected to the strain of the war, its economic structure broke down. The country was invaded by an immense army. Due to the economic breakdown the population was faced with hunger, the Russian soldiers used their military power to overthrow the weak tottering regime of the tsar, which was shaken to its foundation by the war, and, in any case, was destined soon to be replaced by modern capitalism.

In the United States conditions are vastly differ-

ent. More than 50 percent of the population is industrial. The immense natural resources of the country are highly developed. Capitalism has held sway for many years and is strongly entrenched in power.

To have a reasonable chance of success by armed insurrection the workers would need to have as large and well equipped an army as the capitalists. Little could be expected from revolutionary propaganda within the ranks of the capitalist army, for they would probably recruit a "white guard" army whose economic interests would render them proof against this. It is true the workers are in the majority but the revolutionists are a small minority. A good percentage of the workers would support the capitalists. The workers are unarmed and the great majority are untrained in the use of arms. They have no military organization. They have no means of securing arms. Even the few firearms and the small amount of ammunition in the hardware store would be removed and placed beyond their reach by the constituted "authorities" if an uprising was feared. The only weapon that could be obtained in any great quantities, could be called weapons by courtesy only — such as axes, pick handles, bars, pitchforks, wagon spokes, etc. These would be ridiculously inadequate to compete against the trained army of the capitalist state. An untrained, undisciplined "army" of workers equipped in this manner, going forth to overthrow the system might be well named a suicide club.

Just as the machinery of production has displaced the simple hand tool, so the machine of warfare has displaced the simple hand weapon. The bow and arrow, the sword, and the spear are now only interesting relics of the past. Even the rifle is now behind the time. It has been displaced to a great extent by the machine gun. These instruments of destruction fire hundreds

of rounds a minute and, mounted in tanks, armored automobiles, and trains, spit death in all directions. The latest developments of the machinery of warfare are the airplane and poison gas. In destructive capabilities these eclipse all others. A combination of mechanical and chemical warfare far more deadly than any formerly known is being rapidly perfected.

Hell from the Heavens.

The late war has demonstrated the efficacy of poison gas and has stimulated research in that direction. In the chemical laboratories of the great capitalistic nations skilled scientists are constantly at work, studying and experimenting to discover the most deadly poison ever known. Falling like rain from nozzles attached to airplanes these poisons would destroy all forms of life in their path. A few tons used in this manner would annihilate whole armies or cities. In view of these facts the prospects of success by armed insurrection does not look very encouraging. As long as the means necessary to equip, supply, and transport armies remains in control of the capitalists, it is impossible for the workers to gain military power. The revolutionary "army" would be slaughtered like sheep by the highly developed machinery of warfare in the hands of capitalists and their tools.

The advocates of armed insurrection say we must overthrow the capitalist state. But they fail to understand the real nature of the state. Their reasoning is superficial. They deal with effects, not causes. The big capitalists who control industry are the real government, and the state is only a committee to represent their interests. Capitalism means a state of society in which production is carried on for profit. This necessitates control of industry by capitalists. The state is only an effect of capitalism. Overthrow of the state would only mean a political revolution which could be of no lasting benefit to the workers. Overthrow of capitalism would mean a social revolution, a complete change in the methods by which production and distribution are carried on. It would mean production for use instead of for profit. This can only be accomplished by the workers taking control of industry out of the hands of capitalists and running it for themselves.

Revolutionary Industrial Unionism.

This is the program advocated by the IWW. It is based on scientific principles and knowledge of the real nature of the capitalist system. It aims at the root of all capitalist power, control of industry. It advocates organization of the workers in industry in such a way that they can control industry. The power of the workers is neither political nor military, but Industrial. This is the greatest power in the world, it is the foundation that underlies all other forms of power. Carrying on industry is the most important of all human activities, for, without the food, clothing, shelter, and fuel produced in the industries, human life could not exist. Without industry there could be neither intellectual, political, financial, military, nor any other form of power. Without industry, scientists could not study, professors could not teach, editors could not write, governments could not function, armies could not fight; all human activities would come to an end.

The workers alone can carry on production. Organized on the Industrial plan they can control industry and run it for their own benefit. The place to organize is at the point of production. When the workers are organized industrially they have the power to stop industry at any time it suits their purpose, or to run it in any way they see fit.

Military Power Depends on Industrial Power.

In case of civil war between labor and capital, whichever side controls industry will win. The late war has proved conclusively that military power is dependent on industrial power. An army on the military field is helpless unless it is supported by an industrial army in the shops, factories, farms, and on the railroads. Soldiers must be fed, clothed, supplied with arms and ammunition, and furnished with transportation. Lacking these things the best army soon degenerates into a starved, ragged, helpless mob. When the workers are organized under the banner of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, they can refuse to support capitalist armies to be used against themselves. Clothing workers will refuse to manufacture uniforms for them. Telegraph and telephone workers will refuse to transmit messages ordering mobilization against workers. Rail-

road men will refuse to transport scabs, gunmen, or soldiers to be used against strikers. Steel workers will refuse to manufacture tanks, armored trains, or automobiles for use against their class. Production of arms, ammunition, and aircraft will be stopped by strikes. The Revolutionary Bureau of Industrial Research will have ascertained the location of every laboratory and chemical plant used for the production of poison gas. It will know what raw materials are used and where they came from, and the workers will see that they never reach their destination. It may be necessary to stop production or transportation of some one indispensable ingredient to entirely stop the manufacture of poison gas or liquid. When the capitalists try to mobilize their armies against the workers they will meet with obstruction at every turn. They will be unable to send messages or move troops or supplies.

But, say the objectors, they will man the trains with soldiers and in that way will run them in spite of the workers. This was tried some years ago during a strike of railroad workers in France. But it was found that for some mysterious reason, doubtless explainable by engineers, that the locomotives themselves were on strike. In any case, even if they did succeed in moving trains they would find it an exceedingly hazardous undertaking to run trains over roads where the section men were on strike. When the workers control industry they not only deprive the capitalists of all weapons to use against them but they can supply themselves with everything they need. They can stay on the job and carry on production and distribution to suit themselves. This would mean the end of capitalism and the inauguration of a system of Industrial Democracy.

Theoretically capitalism could be overthrown peacefully and the revolution accomplished without bloodshed, by industrial action. But such is not likely to be the case. When the capitalists feel their control slipping they will probably bring about an extensive shutdown of industry and try to starve the workers into submission or goad them into premature uprising. The best tactics on the part of the workers is to avoid armed insurrection unless it is actually forced upon them and work by all means in their power to increase their control of industry. In case of civil war, the success of the workers will be measured by the amount of control they exert over industry. Complete control of industry would mean complete and blood-

less victory while lack of control would mean bloody slaughter and inevitable defeat. The workers should beware of all who urge them to resort to armed insurrection and "mass action." These are dangerous misleaders and there is good reason to believe that many of them are agent provocateurs in the pay of the capitalists.

Iron Heel Fails to Stop Job Organization.

As to the power of the workers when industrially organized there can be no question, but how is this organization to be brought about? The objection is often made to the program of Industrial Unionism that the capitalists will not allow the workers to organize. The answer is that it is impossible for them to stop organization of the workers. For the last 15 years the "powers that be" have been trying to break up the IWW but they have failed. The organization has had many ups and downs but still carries on the work of education among the workers. Its power cannot be judged by its membership for, in the words of the Industrial Relations Commission, "its spirit and vocabulary permeate enormous masses of the workers." It is impossible for the capitalists to stop the spread of an idea. This idea is spread from worker to worker by word of mouth and by literature in the shops, factories, harvest fields, and industrial camps. It is spread in the homes of the workers, on the streets, and from the lecture platforms.

Wherever the workers gather together, the idea of Industrial Unionism germinates, takes root, and spreads from mind to mind. Laws have been passed with the express purpose of putting the IWW out of existence. Thousands of members have been jailed throughout the country. Many are behind the bars at all times. Mob rule, violence, the blacklist, and persecution in all its forms have failed to stop the progress of organization. Tyrannical acts only spread the revolutionary idea among the workers, and are fast ridding their minds of the delusion that they live in a free country. The work of organization on the industrial field goes on quietly. It cannot be stopped by machine guns or poison gas. The agitators mingle with the great mass of the workers and it is impossible to segregate them. Blacklisting active workers only spreads the propaganda more widely by forcing them to travel from

place to place. In many places IWW members are openly active on the job and the bosses are afraid to discharge them for fear of starting labor trouble. Past history shows the capitalists have never succeeded in their efforts to stop organization of the workers at the point of production. In England a little over a century ago it was a "crime" punishable by death to belong to any kind of labor union. But that did not stop the English workers from organizing, and today the British labor movement is the strongest in the world and is able to dictate the policy of the British government in many important matters.

Hundred Percent Organization Not Necessary.

Another objection frequently urged against Industrial Unionism is that it will be impossible to organize all the workers. It will not be necessary to organize all the workers or even a majority of them. Great changes are not brought about by majorities but by militant minorities. The history of the labor movement shows that in some of the most successful strikes ever conducted only a small minority was organized. The active, militant minority stirs the mass into action and directs its energies where they will produce best results.

As soon as the workers begin to organize on the job they begin to exert some control over industry. The amount of their control is measured by the strength of their organization. Workers control first makes itself felt in the shape of improved wages, hours, and conditions. As the organization grows stronger they can dictate as to who shall work on the job. They can refuse to work under objectionable foremen and can choose their own foremen. With the increasing strength of their organization they can exercise control in many other ways and can refuse to work in any way detrimental to their class. The following incidents which recently happened in the US are examples of working class control. During the streetcar men strike in New York a carload of scabs was shipped from Boston. When this car reached Worcester, Mass., the switchman uncoupled it from the train, switched it onto a sidetrack, and refused to have anything more to do with it. The scabs never reached New York. At Ogden, Utah, during the shopmen's strike in Southern California, car-

loads of scabs were uncoupled from westbound trains and sent back east. The same thing was done at Las Vegas, New Mexico [*sic.*]. The longshoremen in Seattle and Philadelphia refused to load munitions for use against the Bolsheviki. Many similar instances have happened in all countries. As the idea of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism becomes more deep rooted and widespread such action will become general.

Workers Must Be Organized to Run Industry.

Before capitalism can be permanently overthrown the workers must be organized to take over industry and run it themselves. Without such an organization industry would stop and the workers would be faced by wholesale starvation and counter-revolution. Lacking organization to run the industries the workers would have to let them go back into the hands of the capitalists. In his pamphlet *The Soviets at Work*, Lenin says the overthrow of an existing system is child's play compared to the building up of the new system. He further says the exportation [expropriation?] of the capitalists must be stopped until the workers are organized to run industry. Capitalism is not yet completely overthrown in Russia. The Bolsheviki government was forced to pay enormous salaries to technical experts. Most of these were not in sympathy with the revolution, and many caused great loss by the practice of sabotage. In the US where the economic structure is highly developed and intricate, a breakdown in industry would be much more serious, and its rebuilding would be a much greater task than in Russia, where agriculture is the main industry and is still carried on to a great extent with simple hand tools.

The preamble of the IWW plainly states:

The army of producers must be organized, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

The world-shaking events that have occurred since the outbreak of the late great war have proved this to be scientifically correct. The carrying on of industry after the overthrow of capitalism is an indispensable part of the program of any revolutionary organization. Political or military organizations cannot

function in industry.

What We Learn from Late Events.

Recent history shows that in industrially developed countries the revolutionary activity of the workers is successful when they are organized in the industries, and disastrous when they lack such organization. In Germany the uprising of the Spartacans was put down by a bloody slaughter and their leaders murdered. In Italy during the strike of the steel workers they locked out the bosses, took possession of the steel plants, and continued to operate them. Here was an attack on a gigantic scale on the sacred rights of private property, an unpardonable crime in the eyes of the capitalists. But the military power was not used against the Italian workers. The strength of their industrial organization rendered this impossible.

In England the coal miners have repeatedly tied up the coal supply of the country. They are now out on another general strike and have threatened the destruction of millions of dollars worth of property by calling out the pump men. Even during the madness and hysteria of the war the Welsh miners defied the government. But the English workers have not been slaughtered by the military. Their leaders are not even arrested. They are strongly organized in all industries and any attempt at massacre by the ruling class would be met by a general shutdown of industry, which would probably mean the end of capitalism.

It is time for the workers of the United States to learn their own power and use it for their own benefit. Unorganized they are a helpless mob to be exploited by capitalists, betrayed by politicians, and butchered by "white armies." Organized under the banner of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism they become an invincible army, efficient, disciplined, and responsible, and will press forward irresistibly to the goal of industrial freedom.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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