

HOW TO FIRE YOUR BOSS!



A WORKERS' GUIDE TO DIRECT ACTION

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A Workers' Guide To Direct Action

Direct action is any form of activity that cripples the boss' ability to make a profit and makes him/her cave in to the workers' demands. The best known form of direct action is the strike, in which workers simply walk off their jobs and refuse to produce profits for the boss until they get what they want. This is the preferred tactic of the TUC "business unions," but is actually one of the least effective ways of confronting the boss.

The indignity of working for a living is well-known to anyone who ever has. Democracy, the great principle on which our society is supposedly founded, is thrown out the window as soon as we punch the time clock at work. With no say over what we produce, or how that production is organized, and with only a small portion of that product's value finding its way into our paychecks, we have every right to be pissed off at our bosses.

Ultimately, of course, we need to create a society in which working people make all the decisions about the production and distribution of goods and services. Harmful or useless industries, such as arms manufacturing, or the banking and insurance scams, would be eliminated. The real essentials, like food, shelter, and clothing, could be produced by everyone working just a few hours each week.

In the meantime, however, we need to develop strategies that both prefigure this future AND counteract the day to day drudgery of contemporary wage slavery. Direct action in the workplace is the key to achieving both these goals. But what do we mean by direct action?

The bosses, with their large financial reserves, are better able to withstand a long drawn-out strike than the workers. In many cases, court injunctions will freeze or confiscate the union's strike funds. And worst of all, a long walk-out only gives the boss a chance to replace striking workers with a scab (replacement) workforce.

Workers are far more effective when they take direct action while still on the job. By deliberately reducing the boss' profits while continuing to collect wages, you can cripple the boss without giving some scab the opportunity to take your job.

Direct action, by definition, means those tactics workers can undertake themselves, without the help of government agencies, union bureaucrats, or high-priced lawyers. Running to government or legal agencies for help may be appropriate in some cases, but it is NOT a form of direct action.

What follows are some of the most popular forms of direct action that workers have used to get what they wanted. Yet nearly every one of these tactics is, technically speaking, unlawful.

Every major victory won by organised labour over the years was achieved with militant direct actions that were, in their time, illegal and subject to police repression. After all, until the early 20th Century, the laws surrounding unions were simple — there were none.

Most courts held unions to be illegal conspiracies in restraint of "free trade," and strikers were routinely attacked by police, troops, and private security goons.

The legal right of workers to organise is now officially recognised, yet so many restrictions exist that effective action is as difficult as ever. For this reason, any worker contemplating direct action on the job — bypassing the legal system and hitting the boss where they are weakest — should be fully aware of labour law, how it is applied, and how it may be used against labour activists.

At the same time, workers must realise that the struggle between the bosses and the workers is not a badminton match — it is war. Under these circumstances, workers must use what works, whether the bosses (and their courts) like it or not.

Here, then, are the most useful forms of direct action:

Slowdown

The Slowdown has a long and honourable history. In 1899, the organised dock workers of Glasgow demanded a 10% increase in wages, but met with refusal by the bosses and went on strike. Strike-breakers were brought in from among the agricultural workers, and the dockers had to acknowledge defeat and return to work under the old wages. But before they went back to work, they heard this from the secretary of their union:

“You are going back to work at the old wage. The employers have repeated time and again that they were delighted with the work of the agricultural labourers who have taken our place for several weeks during the strike. But we have seen them at work. We have seen that they could not even walk a vessel and that they dropped half the merchandise they carried; in short, that two of them could hardly do the work of one of us. Nevertheless, the employers have declared themselves enchanted with the work of these fellows. Well, then, there is nothing for us to do but the same. Work as the agricultural labourers worked.”

This order was obeyed to the letter. After a few days the contractors sent for the union secretary and begged him to tell the dockworkers to work as before, and that they were willing to grant the 10% pay increase.

At the turn of the century, a gang of workers on a railway in Indiana, USA, were notified of a cut in their wages. The workers immediately took their shovels to the blacksmith shop and cut two inches from the scoops. Returning to work, they told the boss “short pay, short shovels.”

Work To Rule

Almost every job is covered by a maze of rules, regulations, standing orders, and so on, many of them completely unworkable and generally ignored. Workers often violate orders, resort to their own techniques of doing things, and disregard lines of authority simply to meet the goals of the company. There is often a tacit understanding, even by the managers whose job it is to enforce the rules, that these shortcuts must be taken in order to meet production quotas on time.

But what would happen if each of these rules and regulations were followed to the letter? Confusion would result — production and morale would plummet. And best of all, the workers can't get in trouble with this tactic because they are, after all, "just following the rules."

Under nationalisation, French rail strikes were forbidden. Nonetheless, railway workers found other ways of expressing their grievances. One French law requires the engineer to assure the safety of any bridge over which the train must pass. If after a personal examination he is still doubtful, then he must consult other members of the train crew. Of course, every bridge was so inspected, every crew was so consulted, and none of the trains ran on time.

In order to gain certain demands without losing their jobs, the Austrian postal workers strictly observed the rule that all mail must be weighed to see if the proper postage was affixed. Formerly they had passed without weighing all those letters and parcels which were clearly underweight, thus living up to the spirit of the regulation but not to its exact wording. By taking each separate piece of mail to the scales, carefully weighing it, and then returning it to its proper place, the postal workers had the office congested with unweighed mail on the second day.

Good Work Strike

One of the biggest problems for service industry workers is that many forms of direct action, such as slow-downs, end up hurting the consumer (mostly fellow workers) more than the boss. One way around this is to provide better or cheaper service — at the boss' expense, of course.

Workers at Mercy Hospital in France, who were afraid that patients would go untreated if they went on strike, instead refused to file the billing slips for drugs, lab tests, treatments, and therapy.

As a result, the patients got better care (since time was being spent caring for them instead of doing paperwork), for free. The hospital's income was cut in half, and panic-stricken administrators gave in to all of the workers' demands after three days.

In 1968, Lisbon bus and train workers gave free rides to all passengers to protest a denial of wage increases. Conductors and drivers arrived for work as usual, but the conductors did not pick up their money satchels. Needless to say, public support was solidly behind these take-no-fare strikers.

In New York, IWW restaurant workers, after losing a strike, won some of their demands by heeding the advice of IWW organisers to “pile up the plates, give 'em double helpings, and figure the checks [bills] on the low side.”

Sitdown Strike

A strike doesn't have to be long to be effective. Timed and executed right, a strike can be won in minutes. Such strikes are "sitdowns" when everyone just stops work and sits tight, or "mass grievances" when everybody leaves work to go to the boss' office to discuss some matter of importance.

The Detroit IWW employed the Sitdown to good effect at the Hudson Motor Car Company between 1932 and 1934. "Sit down and watch your pay go up" was the message that rolled down the assembly line on stickers that had been fastened to pieces of work. The steady practice of the sitdown raised wages 100% (from \$.75 an hour to \$1.50) in the middle of a depression.

IWW theatre extras, facing a 50% pay cut, waited for the right time to strike. The play had 150 extras dressed as Roman soldiers to carry the Queen on and off the stage. When the cue for the Queen's entrance came, the extras surrounded the Queen and refused to budge until the pay was not only restored, but tripled.

Sitdown occupations are still powerful weapons. In 1980, the KKR Corporation announced that it was going to close its Houdaille plant in Ontario and move it to South Carolina. The workers responded by occupying the plant for two weeks, KKR was forced to negotiate fair terms for the plant closing, including full pensions, severance pay, and payment towards health insurance premiums.

Selective Strikes

Unpredictability is a great weapon in the hands of the workers. Pennsylvania teachers used the Selective Strike to great effect in 1991, when they walked a picket line on Monday and Tuesday, reported for work on Wednesday, struck again on Thursday, and reported for work on Friday and Monday.

This on-again, off-again tactic not only prevented the administrators from hiring scabs to replace the teachers, but also forced administrators who hadn't been in a classroom for years to staff the schools while the teachers were out. The tactic was so effective that the Pennsylvania legislature promptly introduced bills that would outlaw selective strikes.

WHISTLE BLOWING (THE OPEN MOUTH)

Sometimes simply telling people the truth about what goes on at work can put a lot of pressure on the boss. Consumer industries like restaurants and packing plants are the most vulnerable. And again, as in the case of the Good Work Strike, you'll be gaining the support of the public, whose patronage can make or break a business.

Whistle Blowing can be as simple as a face-to-face conversation with a customer, or it can be as dramatic as the P.G.&E. engineer who revealed that the blueprints to the Diablo Canyon nuclear reactor had been reversed. Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* blew the lid off the scandalous health standards and working conditions of the meatpacking industry when it was published earlier this century.

Waiters can tell their restaurant clients about the various shortcuts and substitutions that go into creating the faux-haute cuisine being served to them. Just as *Work to Rule* puts an end to the usual relaxation of standards, Whistle Blowing reveals it for all to know.

Sick-Ins

The Sick-In is a good way to strike without striking. The idea is to cripple your workplace by having all or most of the workers call in sick on the same day or days.

Unlike the formal walkout, it can be used effectively by single departments and work areas, and can often be successfully used even without a formal union organisation. It is the traditional method of direct action for public employee unions, which are legally prevented from striking.

At a New England mental hospital, just the thought of a Sick-In got results. A shop steward, talking to a supervisor about a fired union member, casually mentioned that there was a lot of flu going around, and wouldn't it be too bad if there weren't enough healthy people to staff the wards.

At the same time — completely by coincidence, of course — dozens of people were calling the personnel office to see how much sick time they had left. The supervisor got the message, and the union member was re-hired.



Daul Power: *Ignoring The Boss*

The best way to get something done is to simply organize and do it ourselves. Rather than wait for the boss to give in to our demands and institute long-sought change, we often have the power to institute those changes on our own, without the boss' approval.

The owner of a San Francisco coffee-house was a poor money manager, and one week the paychecks didn't arrive. The manager kept assuring the workers that the checks would be coming soon, but eventually the workers took things into their own hands.

They began to pay themselves on a day-to-day basis straight out of the cash register, leaving receipts for the amounts advanced so that everything was on the up-and-up. An uproar ensued, but the checks always arrived on time after that.

In a small printing shop in San Francisco's financial district, an old decrepit offset press was finally removed from service and pushed to the side of the press room. It was replaced with a brand new machine, and the manager stated his intention to use the old press "*for envelopes only.*"

It began to be cannibalised for spare parts by the press operators, though, just to keep some of the other presses running. Soon enough, it was obvious to everyone but the manager that this press would never see service again.

The printers asked the manager to move it upstairs to the storage room, since by now it merely took up valuable space in an already crowded press room. He hemmed and hawed and never seemed to get around to it.

Finally, one afternoon after the printers had punched out for the day, they got a moving dolly and wrestled the press onto the elevator to take it upstairs. The manager found them just as they got it into the elevator, and though he turned livid at this blatant usurpation of his authority, he never mentioned the incident to them.

The space where the press had been was converted to an “employee lounge,” with several chairs and a magazine rack.



Monkey Wrenching

Monkey-wrenching is the generic term for a whole host of tricks, devilry, and assorted nastiness that can remind the boss how much he needs his workers (and how little the workers need him/her). While all these monkey-wrenching tactics are non-violent, most of them are major social no-nos. They should be used only in the most heated of battles, where it is open wholesale class warfare between the workers and the bosses.

Disrupting magnetically-stored information (such as cassette tapes, floppy discs and poorly-shielded hard drives) can be done by exposing them to a strong magnetic field. Of course, it would be just as simple to “misplace” the discs and tapes that contain such vital information. Restaurant workers can buy a bunch of live crickets or mice at the neighbourhood pet shop, and liberate them in a convenient place. For bigger laughs, give the Health and Safety Executive an anonymous tip.

One thing that always haunts a strike call is the question of scabs and strike breakers. In a rail road strike in 1886, the scab problem was solved by strikers who took “souvenirs” from work home with them. Oddly enough, the trains wouldn’t run without these small, crucial pieces, and the scabs found themselves with nothing to do. Of course, nowadays, it may be safer for workers to simply hide these pieces in a secure place at the job site, rather than trying to smuggle them out of the plant.

Use the boss’ letterhead to order a ton of unwanted office supplies and have it delivered to the office. If your company has an 800 number, have all your friends jam the phone lines with angry calls about the current situation. Be creative with your use of superglue. The possibilities are endless.

Solidarity

The best weapon is, of course, organization. If one worker stands up and protests, the bosses will squash him or her like a bug. Squashed bugs are obviously of little use to their families, friends, and social movements in general.

But if all the workers stand up together, the boss will have no choice but to take you seriously. They can fire any individual worker who makes a fuss, but they might find it difficult to fire their entire workforce.

All of the tactics discussed here depend for their success on solidarity, on the coordinated actions of a large number of workers. Individual acts of sabotage offer little more than a fleeting sense of revenge, which may admittedly be all that keeps you sane on a bad day at work.

But for a real feeling of collective empowerment, there's nothing quite like direct action by a large number of disgruntled workers to make your day.



Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The Preamble is the founding document and statement of principles and visions for the IWW. It has not changed considerably since the union's founding conference in Chicago, 1905.

It is a powerful statement of intent which pulls no punches and refuses the compromises and 'partnership' attitudes of most contemporary unions. In the context of intensifying employer and government crack-downs on our hard-won pay and conditions, the Preamble resonates as strongly in the contemporary period as it did when it was first written.

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever growing power of the employing class.

The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organisation formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," *we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."*

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organised, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD



**ONE BIG
UNION**



AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Réamhrá do Bhunreacht an IWW

Níl aon rud i gcomhchoiteann idir an lucht oibre agus an lucht fostaíochta. Ní bheidh aon síocháin ann agus ocras agus díth le fáil i measc na milliún d'oibrithe agus an dream beag, as a ndéantar an lucht fostaíochta, agus a bhfuil gach rath sa saol acu.

Idir an dá aicme seo ní mór do choimhlint dul ar aghaidh go dtí go n-eagróidh oibrithe an domhain mar aicme, go nglacfaidh siad seilbh ar na meáin táirgeachta, go gcuirfidh siad an córas pá ar ceal agus go mbeidh siad ar aon dul leis an Domhan.

Is é ár dtaithe é nuair a fhágtar lárnú bhainistíocht earnáil na tionsclaíochta ag líon Laghdaitheach daoine, go n-imíonn sé crua ar na ceard cumainn déileáil le cumhacht síarmhéadaitheach an lucht fostaíochta.

Is bocht an cás a chothaíonn na ceard cumainn a ligeann de ghrúpa amháin den lucht oibre dul i gcoimhlint le grúpa eile den lucht oibre sa tionscadal céanna, ag cuidiu le cliseadh a chéile i gcoimhlint an phá.

Lena chois sin, cuidíonn na ceard cumainn le lucht fostaíochta dallamullóg a chur ar na hoibrithe le go gcreidfidh siad gurb ionann suimeanna an lucht oibre agus an lucht fostaíochta.

Is féidir na coinníollacha seo a athrach le go ndéanfar suimeanna an lucht oibre a sheasamh trí eagraíocht atá bunaithe ar bhealach le go stopfaidh a mballraíocht in aon tionscadal amháin nó in gach tionscadal más gá, go

stopfaidh siad de bheith ag obair nuair atá stailc nó frithdhúnadh ar siúl in aon rannóg ar bith de chuid an tionscadail, rud a chialaíonn gurb ionann díobháil do dhuine amháin agus díobháil do gach duine.

In áit mana na gcoimeádach, "lá macánta pá do lá macánta oibre," ní mór dúinn scríobh ar ár mbratach an focal faire réabhlóideach, "Cealú an chórais phá."

Is é misiún starúil an lucht oibre an caipitleachas a chealú.

Ní mór arm na táirgeachta a eagrú, ní amháin sa choimhlint reatha leis an chaipitlí, ach leis an táirgeacht a choinneáil ag dul nuair a bheas an caipitleachas cealaithe.

Trí eagrú táirgeachta tá muid ag tógáil struchtúr de shochaí nua taobh istigh de bhlaosc na seansochaí.



This is the IWW

The IWW is a revolutionary global union, fighting for better conditions today and economic democracy tomorrow. By training our members in powerful organising methods, direct-action and direct-democracy, we put power in the hands of workers.

We believe that ordinary people are best placed to lead and create change, both at work and in society. We put our members in charge, training each and every one to build and lead their workplace unions, organise their own campaigns and take the action that wins.

We're an active and fighting union. We know solidarity is strength, and we prove it by looking after each other. We provide advice and representation when you have problems at work, but we're much more than that.

We're not here to provide a service; we're here to build a movement, winning bigger and better victories for working people as our movement grows in strength and confidence.

Originally formed in 1905, the IWW has a rich and proud history, organising workers into revolutionary 'industrial unions' along the supply chain of their industry. This form of union organisation provides workers with the maximum clout in any dispute with employers.

When workers in one section of an industry have an issue, their fellow workers along the supply chain can take action to support them, having maximum impact on the running of that industry and hitting the employer where it hurts. This is the basis of our slogan, "an injury to one is an injury to all".

This is how we can defend and improve our pay, terms and conditions of employment. This is how we can build a better future. Political democracy is (at least) severely limited without democracy within the economy, within industry. The production and distribution of goods and services is the real power that shapes our society.

In the hands of the few – our employers – this power benefits the few. In the hands of all working people it could benefit everyone. Who else but us, working people, produce and distribute all the world's goods and services?

We make the world turn yet see little of the wealth and make few of the decisions.

Organised into industrial unions, linked together into one big movement, we could take possession of our industries and run them democratically for the good of all.

Your union is your future. Get involved. Join the IWW today!



Who We Are

IWW Ireland Branch is one of the fastest growing branch of the Industrial Workers of the World which covers the entire island of Ireland, north and south.

The IWW is a revolutionary syndicalist union which is open to all workers.

A grassroots and democratic union where members support each other through solidarity against exploitation we face as workers, tenants and claimants. The action we take is decided at the grassroots level and our (low) membership fees are not spent on highly paid union officials or political party donations. We are a radical union that aim is to see society re-organised to meet the interests of all people, and not just shareholders and corporations. We welcome new members to branch meetings.

Economic Justice, International Solidarity and Workers Rights

We are a grassroots, democratic and radical union helping to organise all workers across all workplaces. Through grassroots solidarity we work to support each other with problems we face as workers, tenants and claimants. Our aim is to see society re-organised to meet the interests of all people, and not just shareholders and corporations.

We are:

Led by membership. We make all decisions and we all have the final say.

For uniting all workers across trades, industries and countries.

Able to offer practical support for members in their workplace.

Flexible so you are still a member even when you change job or contract.

We are NOT:

Full of stifling bureaucracy or linked to any political party or group.

Led by fat cat salary earners who carry out deals with bosses behind your back.

Going to sell you services, life insurance or credit cards.

Who is the IWW for?

We are for ALL workers who do not have the power to hire or fire. This also includes workers who are retired, students, unemployed, part-time, temporary, self-employed or those working at home. Workers who are members of other unions are also welcome.

Our membership is wide and varied which so far includes workers in the public sector, construction, students, musicians, administration, arts, community, unemployed and hospitality workers.

At Present we have active members in towns and cities across Ireland, both north and south.

We have regular monthly meetings around Ireland and in different locations.

Each area has accredited workplace reps who can help you if you have a problem at work.

We can also provide advice, training and support if you want to recruit and organise others at your workplace.

If you would like to make a stand against your boss and create a difference then the IWW is where you should be.

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All of the tactics discussed in this pamphlet depend for their success on solidarity, on the co-ordinated actions of a large number of workers. Individual acts of sabotage offer little more than a fleeting sense of revenge, which may admittedly be all that keeps you sane on a bad day at work.

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