

WHAT IS SABOTAGE?

Sabots are wooden shoes. During the silk-weavers' strike in Lyons the workmen, before leaving their shops, are said to have hurled their wooden shoes into the delicately fashioned machinery of the looms. The results need not be described. In labor warfare the *sabot* may often have proved no less effective than it was convenient for use, not only in destroying property, but likewise in bringing to terms the unfortunate non-strikers (writes Rev. Joseph Husslein, S.J., in *America*). We have recently heard of an English suffragette hurling her shoe at the head of the judge who had condemned her for acts of militancy. The missile, however, was only a toy in comparison with the large and clumsy *sabot* in the hands of an angry striker.

From this, therefore, the term Sabotage was first derived. It may be applied to any practice by which loss can be inflicted upon an employer, whether in shirking work, in neglecting precautions that may lead to serious consequences, in reducing the quantity or deteriorating the quality of the industrial output, in confusing the management and routine of labor, commerce, and traffic, or in directly causing the destruction of machinery and property of whatever kind. It is, therefore, both active and passive, and is meant to be practised by the workman without risk to himself. The same directions, we should notice, were likewise given by their leaders to the English militant suffragettes. They were to do all the harm they could without exposing themselves to the danger of detection. Sabotage, however, in

The True Sense of the Word

implies far more than this. It is only incidentally an act of revenge or spite. Essentially it is a means to an end, and never an end in itself. As practised by the revolutionary worker it may be intended to gain immediate demands refused by his employer. Considered, however, in a larger sense and as a recognised syndicalist weapon of organised warfare, it is meant to lead ultimately to the great social revolution. Unless this supreme object is always kept in view it does not answer to the syndicalist conception. It is not only to be used in connection with the strike, but is in great measure to supplant the strike itself, as a more convenient and expeditious method of class conflict, implying no suffering for the laborer and yet causing the keenest distress to the employer.

We may quote as an instance the methods practised according to Walter V. Woehlke, by the Industrial Workers of the World, in the pine forests of the South: The Brotherhood of Timber Workers had just been formed by their organisers; but the employers at once locked out its members, and made their men promise not to join the organisation.

Nevertheless the log-cutters demanded higher wages. The demand was refused, but the men did not strike. They stayed at the work, but the logs cut by them were full of deeply driven spikes that ruined the teeth of a dozen band-saws a day. Orders for lumber of special sizes always fell a few inches short of the required dimensions, necessitating a new cut. Nuts were continually dropping off the spindles of the log carts; on the logging roads one train after another was derailed through defective flanges; in the mills wobbly fly-wheels forced frequent shut-downs; manufacturing cost showed a steady increase. That was the Industrial Workers' reply to the lock-out, to the denial of more pay' (*Outlook*, July 6, 1912).

Strange to say, Sabotage may at times be practised by no other means than the exact observance of certain Government regulations, which perhaps have fallen into desuetude, whether unobnoxious or not. An entire railway or industrial system may have accommodated itself to such conditions. The instant and unexpected observance of the laws in their strictest interpretation is, therefore, sufficient to throw traffic and production into endless confusion, leading even to wreckage and general destruction. At times it is merely the exact observance of the company's own rules, not meant to be taken literally, which brings about these same effects. The object of the workman in every case is to cause the greatest damage to the employer with the least harm to himself. It is evident, therefore, that we may almost accept the statement of Courtenay Lemon, made in the *Call*, that: 'The definition of Sabotage by the working class is as comprehensive as the definition of crime is by the ruling class. Sabotage means anything from dynamite to asafetida' (June 3, 1912).

In Promulgating the Teaching of Sabotage the same care is observed not to expose the agitators to unnecessary legal prosecution. The means of destruction and violence are, therefore, suggested by way of cautions, or in covered language which can easily be comprehended by those to whom it is addressed, yet when the desired results have been produced, 'it is the

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