

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



Émile Pouget

Sabotage

1898

Original text from RevoltLib.com, 2021.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

Sabotage

Émile Pouget

1898

Sabotage is something great that in a little while will make the fat cats laugh out of the other side of their mouths.

At the last *Congrès Corporatif* in Toulouse, where a bunch of terrific guys came from the four corners of France, sent by the unions, SABOTAGE was loudly acclaimed.

The place went wild over it.

And all the delegates promised that once they'd gotten home to spread the word on the thing so that the working stiffs could practice it all over.

And I can assure you, my pals, that that enthusiasm is not the result of a passing fancy, a fad.

Not in the least!

The idea of SABOTAGE will not remain an empty dream: it'll be carried out.

And the exploiters will finally understand that the boss' job isn't a bed of roses.

That said, for the guys who don't know what this is all about, I'm gonna explain what sabotage is.

Sabotage is the conscious kicking of the boss in the ass, it's the screwing up of a job, it's a grain of sand snuck into the gears so

the machine breaks down, it's the systematic sinking of the boss' system...All of this carried out secretly, letting no-one know what's going on when it's being done.

Sabotage is the baby cousin of the boycott. And fuck it, in a bunch of cases when a strike is impossible it can render some damn good service to the working stiffs.

When an exploiter feels like his workers can't pull off a strike he doesn't hesitate to screw them over. Stuck in the gears of exploitation the poor buggers don't dare speak up for fear of being sacked. They're eaten up with rage and bend their necks. Eaten up with rage, they still put up with the boss' prickeries.

But they put up with them. And angry or not, the boss doesn't give a damn, as long as things go the way he wants.

Why are things like this?

Because the working stiffs haven't found the right way to respond tit for tat to the big ape and, with their actions, neutralize his screwing.

But the way exists:

It's sabotage!

The English have been doing this for a long time – and they find it a terrific fucking thing.

For example, suppose a big prison, er... factory whose boss suddenly has a thieving whim; maybe he's got a new mistress to keep up, maybe he's got his eye on a chateau...or maybe he has some other fantasy that calls for an increase in his benefices. The bastard doesn't hesitate; to get the profit he aims at he lessens the number of working stiffs, saying things are going badly. Fuck, he doesn't ever lack for some kind of reasons.

Let's suppose that this mangy dog has carefully worked out his plans and his vise squeezing coincides with a situation so messed up that his workers can't even try to strike. What happens?

In France, the poor exploited would piss and moan, cursing the vampire. A few- the hardiest of them – would make a real stink

and find themselves in the calaboose. As for the others, they'd just put up with the hand they were dealt.

In England, dammit, things would happen differently. And this is because of sabotage. The workers would secretly pass the word from ear to ear: "Hey, mates, we're gonna sabotage the place...we gotta do it on the QT." And before you know it, production would be slowed down. So slow that if the boss isn't as dumb as a stump he won't persist in his prickery. He'll return to the former pay rate, 'cause he'll have understood that going like this for every five cents he saves on each worker's day he loses four times that amount.

That's what it means to do what you gotta do.

While those who just lay down and take it would have had their asses kicked, these guys, taking some initiative, manage to pull themselves out of the shit.

The Brits learned lessons in sabotage from the Scots, and they even borrowed from them the baptismal name of the system: Go canny!

Lately the International Longshoremen's Union, which has its offices in London, sent out a manifesto calling for sabotage, so that the dockers start doing it, since up till now it's mainly in the mines and the textile factories that the Brit workers have carried it out.

Here's the manifesto in question:

What does "Go canny" mean?

It's a short and useful word to designate a new tactic employed by workers instead of going on strike.

If two Scotsmen are walking together and one is going too fast the other says to him: "Go canny," which means, "Slow down."

If someone wants to buy a hat worth five francs he has to pay five francs. But if he wants to only pay four then he'll have one of lesser quality. A hat is a form of "merchandise."

If someone wants to buy six shirts at two francs each he has to pay twelve francs. If he only pays ten he'll only get five shirts. A shirt is a form of "merchandise sold in the market."

If a housewife wants to buy a piece of beef worth three francs she has to pay for it. And if she only offers two francs then she'll be given bad meat. Beef, too, is a "merchandise sold in the market."

Well, the bosses declare that labor and skill are "merchandises for sale in the market," like hats, shirts, and beef.

Perfect, we answer. We'll take you at your word.

If it is "merchandise" we'll sell it like the hat maker his hats and the butcher his meat. They give bad merchandise for bad prices, and we'll do the same.

The bosses have no right to count on our charity. If they refuse to discuss our demands, well, we'll put in practice the "Go canny," the slowdown, while waiting for them to listen to us.

So here we see a beautiful definition of sabotage: *for bad pay, bad work.*

And goddamn this'll be great when it enters into our way of thinking. It'll be too damn bad for the boss' band when the fat monkeys learn from experience that that tile is always ready to fall on their noggins. The fear of losing money and of going bankrupt will calm the arrogance of the fat cats.

Feeling the vulnerability of their cash boxes -which serve as their hearts - they'll think twice before unloading one of their customary dirty deals on us.

Of course there'll be some good buggers who, on the pretext that we have to have our eye on the radical disappearance of capital, will find it too petty to limit ourselves to keeping the fat apes in their places and preventing them from showing their claws.

These people have forgotten the two faces of the social question: the present and the future.

Well, the present prepares the future. If there was ever a time when the saying "You made your bed, now lie in it" is appropriate, it's this one.

The less we allow ourselves to be beaten by the bosses the less intense will be our exploitation, the stronger will our revolutionary resistance, the greater will be our consciousness of our dignity and the more vigorous will be our desire for freedom and well-being.

And consequently, we'll be better able to prepare the blossoming of that great society where there'll be no more rulers, no more fat cats.

And we'll be better able too, when we get there, to evolve in our new surroundings.

If on the contrary instead of starting our apprenticeship in freedom now we show no interest in current life, showing contempt for the needs and passions of the present hour, it won't be long before we dry out in a world of abstractions and become terrific at splitting hairs. And then, living in our dreams, our activity will dullen and, since we'll have lost all contact with the masses, the day we'll want to shake ourselves out of our torpor we'll find ourselves stuck in the mud like an elephant.

So there's no two ways about it: in order to bring about equilibrium in life, in order to take human activity to its highest level, neither the present nor the future should be neglected.

When one weighs more than the other the rupture of equilibrium isn't pretty. When we're stuck in the present we get lost in the pointless and the petty; if we fly off into the clouds we manage to freeze in the ideal.

And this is why I tell the boys who have some balls: don't lose sight of either the present or the future.

In this way they'll reactivate the germination of hopeful ideas and the spirit of revolt.