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Voltairine de Cleyre

From the standpoint of one who thinks himself capable of discerning an undeviating route for human progress to pursue, if it is to be progress at all, who, having such a route on his mind's map, has endeavored to point it out to others; to make them see it as he sees it; who in so doing has chosen what appeared to him clear and simple expressions to convey his thoughts to others, — to such a one it appears matter for regret and confusion of spirit that the phrase "Direct Action" has suddenly acquired in the general mind a circumscribed meaning, not at all implied in the words themselves, and certainly never attached to it by himself or his co-thinkers.

However, this is one of the common jests which Progress plays on those who think themselves able to set metes and bounds for it. Over and over again, names, phrases, mottoes, watchwords, have been turned inside out, and upside down, and hindside before, and sideways, by occurrences out of the control of those who used the expressions in their proper sense; and still, those who sturdily held their ground, and insisted on being heard, have in the end found that the period of misunderstanding and prejudice has been but the prelude to wider inquiry and understanding.

I rather think this will be the case with the present misconception of the term Direct Action, which through the misapprehension, or else the deliberate misrepresentation, of certain journalists in Los Angeles, at the time the McNamaras pleaded guilty, suddenly acquired in the popular mind the interpretation, "Forcible Attacks on Life and Property." This was either very ignorant or very dishonest of the journalists; but it has had the effect of making a good many people curious to know all about Direct Action.

As a matter of fact, those who are so lustily and so inordinately condemning it, will find on examination that they themselves have on many occasion practised direct action, and will do so again.

Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. Some thirty years ago I recall that the Salvation Army was vigorously practising direct action in the maintenance of the freedom of its members to speak, assemble, and pray. Over and over they were arrested, fined, and imprisoned; but they kept right on singing, praying, and marching, till they finally compelled their persecutors to let them alone. The Industrial Workers are now conducting the same fight, and have, in a number of cases, compelled the officials to let them alone by the same direct tactics.

Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct action.

Every person who ever in his life had a difference with anyone to settle, and went straight to the other persons involved to settle it, either by a peaceable plan or otherwise, was a direct actionist. Examples of such action are strikes and boycotts; many persons will recall the action of the housewives of New York who boycotted the butchers, and lowered the price of meat; at the present moment

a butter boycott seems looming up, as a direct reply to the price-makers for butter.

These actions are generally not due to any one's reasoning overmuch on the respective merits of directness or indirectness, but are the spontaneous retorts of those who feel oppressed by a situation. In other words, all people are, most of the time, believers in the principle of direct action, and practicers of it. However, most people are also indirect or political actionists. And they are both these things at the same time, without making much of an analysis of either. There are only a limited number of persons who eschew political action under any and all circumstances; but there is nobody, nobody at all, who has ever been so "impossible" as to eschew direct action altogether.

The majority of thinking people are really opportunists, leaning some perhaps more to directness, some more to indirectness as a general thing, but ready to use either means when opportunity calls for it. That is to say, there are those who hold that balloting governors into power is essentially a wrong and foolish thing; but who nevertheless under stress of special circumstances, might consider it the wisest thing to do, to vote some individual into office at that particular time. Or there are those who believe that in general the wisest way for people to get what they want is by the indirect method of voting into power some one who will make what they want legal; yet who all the same will occasionally under exceptional conditions advise a strike; and a strike, as I have said, is direct action. Or they may do as the Socialist Party agitators (who are mostly declaiming now against direct action) did last summer, when the police were holding up their meetings. They went in force to the meeting places, prepared to speak whether-or-no, and they made the police back down. And while that was not logical on their part, thus to oppose the legal executors of the majority's will, it was a fine, successful piece of direct action.

Those who, by the essence of their belief, are committed to Direct Action only are — just who? Why, the non-resistants; precisely

those who do not believe in violence at all! Now do not make the mistake of inferring that I say direct action means non-resistance; not by any means. Direct action may be the extreme of violence, or it may be as peaceful as the waters of the Brook of Shiloa that go softly. What I say is, that the real non-resistants can believe in direct action only, never in political action. For the basis of all political action is coercion; even when the State does good things, it finally rests on a club, a gun, or a prison, for its power to carry them through.

Now every school child in the United States has had the direct action of certain non-resistants brought to his notice by his school history. The case which everyone instantly recalls is that of the early Quakers who came to Massachusetts. The Puritans had accused the Quakers of "troubling the world by preaching peace to it." They refused to pay church taxes; they refused to bear arms; they refused to swear allegiance to any government. (In so doing they were direct actionists, what we may call negative direct actionists.) So the Puritans, being political actionists, passed laws to keep them out, to deport, to fine, to imprison, to mutilate, and finally, to hang them. And the Quakers just kept on coming (which was positive direct action); and history records that after the hanging of four Quakers, and the flogging of Margaret Brewster at the cart's tail through the streets of Boston, "the Puritans gave up trying to silence the new missionaries"; that "Quaker persistence and Quaker non-resistance had won the day."

Another example of direct action in early colonial history, but this time by no means of the peaceable sort, was the affair known as Bacon's Rebellion. All our historians certainly defend the action of the rebels in that matter, for they were right. And yet it was a case of violent direct action against lawfully constituted authority. For the benefit of those who have forgotten the details, let me briefly remind them that the Virginia planters were in fear of a general attack by the Indians; with reason. Being political actionists, they asked, or Bacon as their leader asked, that the governor grant him a

go on because Life cries to live, and Property denies its freedom to live; and Life will not submit.

And should not submit.

It will go on until that day when a self-freed Humanity is able to chant Swinburne's Hymn of Man:

> "Glory to Man in the highest,
> For Man is the master of Things."

commission to raise volunteers in their own defense. The governor feared that such a company of armed men would be a threat to him; also with reason. He refused the commission. Whereupon the planters resorted to direct action. They raised volunteers without the commission, and successfully fought off the Indians. Bacon was pronounced a traitor by the governor; but the people being with him, the governor was afraid to proceed against him. In the end, however, it came so far that the rebels burned Jamestown; and but for the untimely death of Bacon, much more might have been done. Of course the reaction was very dreadful, as it usually is where a rebellion collapses or is crushed. Yet even during the brief period of success, it had corrected a good many abuses. I am quite sure that the political-action-at-all-costs advocates of those times, after the reaction came back into power, must have said: "See to what evils direct action brings us! Behold, the progress of the colony has been set back twenty-five years;" forgetting that if the colonists had not resorted to direct action, their scalps would have been taken by the Indians a year sooner, instead of a number of them being hanged by the governor a year later.

In the period of agitation and excitement preceding the revolution, there were all sorts and kinds of direct action from the most peaceable to the most violent; and I believe that almost everybody who studies United States history finds the account of these performances the most interesting part of the story, the part which dents into the memory most easily.

Among the peaceable moves made, were the non-importation agreements, the leagues for wearing homespun clothing and the "committees of correspondence." As the inevitable growth of hostility progressed, violent direct action developed; e.g., in the matter of destroying the revenue stamps, or the action concerning the tea-ships, either by not permitting the tea to be landed, or by putting it in damp storage, or by throwing it into the harbor, as in Boston, or by compelling a tea-ship owner to set fire to his own ship, as at Annapolis. These are all actions which our commonest textbooks

record, certainly not in a condemnatory way, not even in an apologetic way, though they are all cases of direct action against legally constituted authority and property rights. If I draw attention to them, and others of like nature, it is to prove to unreflecting repeaters of words that *direct action has always been used, and has the historical sanction of the very people now reprobating it.*

George Washington is said to have been the leader of the Virginia planters' non-importation league; he would now be "enjoined," probably by a court, from forming any such league; and if he persisted, he would be fined for contempt.

When the great quarrel between the North and the South was waxing hot and hotter, it was again direct action which preceded and precipitated political action. And I may remark here that political action is never taken, nor even contemplated, until slumbering minds have first been aroused by direct acts of protest against existing conditions.

The history of the anti-slavery movement and the Civil War is one of the greatest of paradoxes, although history is a chain of paradoxes. Politically speaking, it was the slave-holding States that stood for greater political freedom, for the autonomy of the single State against the interference of the United States; politically speaking, it was the non-slave-holding States that stood for a strong centralized government, which, Secessionists said and said truly, was bound progressively to develop into more and more tyrannical forms. Which happened. From the close of the Civil War one, there has been continual encroachment of the federal power upon what was formerly the concern of the States individually. The wage-slavers, in their struggles of today, are continually thrown into conflict with that centralized power against which the slave-holder protested (with liberty on his lips by tyranny in his heart). Ethically speaking, it was the non-slave-holding States that in a general way stood for greater human liberty, while the Secessionists stood for race-slavery. In a general way only; that is, the majority of northerners, not being accustomed to the actual presence of

to the small investor; their reading notices assure their readers in this city that we need not go to the great department stores to buy — buy rather of So-and-so on Milwaukee Avenue, who will satisfy us quite as well as a "big business" institution. In short, they are making every desperate effort to win the support and to prolong the life of that middle-class which socialist economy says must be ground to pieces, because they know they cannot get a majority without them.

The most that a working-class party could do, even if its politicians remained honest, would be to form a strong faction in the legislatures which might, by combining its vote with one side or another, win certain political or economic palliatives.

But what the working-class can do, when once they grow into a solidified organization, is to show the possessing class, through a sudden cessation of all work, that the whole social structure rests on them; that the possessions of the others are absolutely worthless to them without the workers' activity; that such protests, such strikes, are inherent in the system of property and will continually recur until the whole thing is abolished — and having shown that effectively, proceed to expropriate.

"But the military power," says the political actionist; "we must get political power, or the military will be used against us!"

Against a real General Strike, the military can do nothing. Oh, true, if you have a Socialist Briand in power, he may declare the workers "public officials" and try to make them serve against themselves! But against the solid wall of an immobile working-mass, even a Briand would be broken.

Meanwhile, until this international awakening, the war will go on as it had been going, in spite of all the hysteria which well-meaning people who do not understand life and its necessities may manifest; in spite of all the shivering that timid leaders have done; in spite of all the reactionary revenges that may be taken; in spite of all the capital that politicians make out of the situation. It will

waiting for the majority to grow, are going to become metamorphosed into human high-explosives by a mere process of packing!

I quite agree that the sources of life, and all the natural wealth of the earth, and the tools necessary to co-operative production, must become freely accessible to all. It is a positive certainty to me that unionism must widen and deepen its purposes, or it will go under; and I feel sure that the logic of the situation will gradually force them to see it. They must learn that the workers' problem can never be solved by beating up scabs, so long as their own policy of limiting their membership by high initiation fees and other restrictions helps to make scabs. They must learn that the course of growth is not so much along the line of higher wages, but shorter hours, which will enable them to increase membership, to take in everybody who is willing to come into the union. They must learn that if they want to win battles, all allied workers must act together, act quickly (serving no notice on bosses), and retain their freedom to do so at all times. And finally they must learn that even then (when they have a complete organization) they can win nothing permanent unless they strike for everything — not for a wage, not for a minor improvement, but for the whole natural wealth of the earth. And proceed to the direct expropriation of it all!

They must learn that their power does not lie in their voting strength, that their power lies in their ability to stop production. It is a great mistake to suppose that the wage-earners constitute a majority of the voters. Wage-earners are here today and there tomorrow, and that hinders a large number from voting; a great percentage of them in this country are foreigners without a voting right. The most patent proof that Socialist leaders know this is so, is that they are compromising their propaganda at every point to win the support of the business class, the small investor. Their campaign papers proclaimed that their interviewers had been assured by Wall Street bond purchasers that they would be just as ready to buy Los Angeles bonds from a socialist as a capitalist administrator; that the present Milwaukee administration has been a boon

negro slavery about them, thought it was probably a mistake; yet they were in no great ferment of anxiety to have it abolished. The Abolitionists only, and they were relatively few, were the genuine ethicals, to whom slavery itself — not secession or union — was the main question. In fact, so paramount was it with them, that a considerable number of them were themselves for the dissolution of the union, advocating that the North take the initiative in the matter of dissolving, in order that the northern people might shake off the blame of holding negroes in chains.

Of course, there were all sorts of people with all sorts of temperaments among those who advocated the abolition of slavery. There were Quakers like Whittier (indeed it was the peace-at-all-costs Quakers who had advocated abolition even in early colonial days); there were moderate political actionists, who were for buying off the slaves, as the cheapest way; and there were extremely violent people, who believed and did all sorts of violent things.

As to what the politicians did, it is one long record of "how-not-to-to-it," a record of thirty years of compromising, and dickering, and trying to keep what was as it was, and to hand sops to both sides when new conditions demanded that something be done, or be pretended to be done. But "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera;" the system was breaking down from within, and the direct actionists from without as well were widening the cracks remorselessly.

Among the various expressions of direct rebellion was the organization of the "underground railroad." Most of the people who belonged to it believed in both sorts of action; but however much they theoretically subscribed to the right of the majority to enact and enforce laws, they didn't believe in it on that point. My grandfather was a member of the "underground;" many a fugitive slave he helped on his way to Canada. He was a very patient, law-abiding man in most respects, though I have often thought that he respected it because he didn't have much to do with it; always leading a pioneer life, law was generally far from him, and direct action

imperative. Be that as it may, and law-respecting as he was, he had no respect whatever for slave laws, no matter if made by ten times of a majority; and he conscientiously broke every one that came in his way to be broken.

There were times when in the operation of the "underground" that violence was required, and was used. I recollect one old friend relating to me how she and her mother kept watch all night at the door, while a slave for whom a posse was searching hid in the cellar; and though they were of Quaker descent and sympathies, there was a shotgun on the table. Fortunately it did not have to be used that night.

When the fugitive slave law was passed with the help of the political actionists of the North who wanted to offer a new sop to the slave-holders, the direct actionists took to rescuing recaptured fugitives. There was the "rescue of Shadrach," and the "rescue of Jerry," the latter rescuers being led by the famous Gerrit Smith; and a good many more successful and unsuccessful attempts. Still the politicals kept on pottering and trying to smooth things over, and the Abolitionists were denounced and decried by the ultra-law-abiding pacificators, pretty much as Wm. D. Haywood and Frank Bohn are being denounced by their own party now.

The other day I read a communication in the Chicago *Daily Socialist* from the secretary of the Louisville local Socialist Party to the national secretary, requesting that some safe and sane speaker be substituted for Bohn, who had been announced to speak there. In explaining why, Mr. Dobbs makes this quotation from Bohn's lecture: "Had the McNamaras been successful in defending the interests of the working class, they would have been right, just as John Brown would have been right, had he been successful in freeing the slaves. Ignorance was the only crime of John Brown, and ignorance was the only crime of the McNamaras."

Upon this Mr. Dobbs comments as follows: "We dispute emphatically the statements here made. The attempt to draw a parallel between the open — if mistaken — revolt of John Brown on the one

and likewise command the military power to defend them, shall hand over their dominion to the people.

And meanwhile?

Meanwhile, be peaceable, industrious, law-abiding, patient, and frugal (as Madero told the Mexican peons to be, after he sold them to Wall Street)! Even if some of you are disenfranchised, don't rise up even against that, for it might "set back the party."

Well, I have already stated that some good is occasionally accomplished by political action — not necessarily working-class party action either. But I am abundantly convinced that the occasional good accomplished is more than counterbalanced by the evil; just as I am convinced that though there are occasional evils resulting through direct action, they are more than counterbalanced by the good.

Nearly all the laws which were originally framed with the intention of benefitting the workers, have either turned into weapons in their enemies' hands, or become dead letters unless the workers through their organizations have directly enforced their observance. So that in the end, it is direct action that has to be relied on anyway. As an example of getting the tarred end of a law, glance at the anti-trust law, which was supposed to benefit the people in general and the working class in particular. About two weeks since, some 250 union leaders were cited to answer to the charge of being trust formers, as the answer of the Illinois Central to its strikers.

But the evil of pinning faith to indirect action is far greater than any such minor results. The main evil is that it destroys initiative, quenches the individual rebellious spirit, teaches people to rely on someone else to do for them what they should do for themselves; finally renders organic the anomalous idea that by massing supineness together until a majority is acquired, then through the peculiar magic of that majority, this supineness is to be transformed into energy. That is, people who have lost the habit of striking for themselves as individuals, who have submitted to every injustice while

cently said at a meeting in Chicago that the Haymarket bomb of '86 had set back the eight-hour movement twenty-five years, arguing that the movement would have succeeded but for the bomb. It's a great mistake. No one can exactly measure in years or months the effect of a forward push or a reaction. No one can demonstrate that the eight-hour movement could have been won twenty-five years ago. We know that the eight-hour day was put on the statute books of Illinois in 1871 by political action, and has remained a dead letter. That the direct action of the workers could have won it, then, cannot be proved; but it can be shown that many more potent factors than the Haymarket bomb worked against it. On the other hand, if the reactive influence of the bomb was really so powerful, we should naturally expect labor and union conditions to be worse in Chicago than in the cities where no such thing happened. On the contrary, bad as they are, the general conditions of labor are better in Chicago than in most other large cities, and the power of the unions is more developed there than in any other American city except San Francisco. So if we are to conclude anything for the influence of the Haymarket bomb, keep these facts in mind. Personally I do not think its influence on the labor movement, as such, was so very great.

It will be the same with the present furore about violence. Nothing fundamental has been altered. Two men have been imprisoned for what they did (twenty-four years ago they were hanged for what they did not do); some few more may yet be imprisoned. But the forces of life will continue to revolt against their economic chains. There will be no cessation in that revolt, no matter what ticket men vote or fail to vote, until the chains are broken.

How will the chains be broken?

Political actionists tell us it will be only by means of working-class party action at the polls; by voting themselves into possession of the sources of life and the tools; by voting that those who now command forests, mines, ranches, waterways, mills, and factories,

hand, and the secret and murderous methods of the McNamaras on the other, is not only indicative of shallow reasoning, but highly mischievous in the logical conclusions which may be drawn from such statements."

Evidently Mr.Dobbs is very ignorant of the life and work of John Brown. John Brown was a man of violence; he would have scorned anybody's attempt to make him out anything else. And once a person is a believer in violence, it is with him only a question of the most effective way of applying it, which can be determined only by a knowledge of conditions and means at his disposal. John Brown did not shrink at all from conspiratorial methods. Those who have read the autobiography of Frederick Douglas and the Reminiscences of Lucy Colman, will recall that one of the plans laid by John Brown was to organize a chain of armed camps in the mountains of West Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, send secret emissaries among the slaves inciting them to flee to these camps, and there concert such measures as times and conditions made possible for further arousing revolt among the negroes. That this plan failed was due to the weakness of the desire for liberty among the slaves themselves, more than anything else.

Later on, when the politicians in their infinite deviousness contrived a fresh proposition of how-not-to-do-it, known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which left the question of slavery to be determined by the settlers, the direct actionists on both sides sent bogus settlers into the territory, who proceeded to fight it out. The pro-slavery men, who got in first, made a constitution recognizing slavery and a law punishing with death any one who aided a slave to escape; but the Free Soilers, who were a little longer in arriving since they came from more distant States, made a second constitution, and refused to recognize the other party's laws at all. And John Brown was there, mixing in all the violence, conspiratorial or open; he was "a horse-thief and a murderer," in the eyes of decent, peaceable, political actionists. And there is no doubt that he stole horses, sending no notice in advance of his

intention to steal them, and that he killed pro-slavery men. He struck and got away a good many times before his final attempt on Harper's Ferry. If he did not use dynamite, it was because dynamite had not yet appeared as a practical weapon. He made a great many more intentional attacks on life than the two brothers Secretary Dobbs condemns for their "murderous methods." And yet history has not failed to understand John Brown. Mankind knows that though he was a violent man, with human blood upon his hands, who was guilty of high treason and hanged for it, yet his soul was a great, strong, unselfish soul, unable to bear the frightful crime which kept 4,000,000 people like dumb beasts, and thought that making war against it was a sacred, a God-called duty, (for John Brown was a very religious man — a Presbyterian).

It is by and because of the direct acts of the forerunners of social change, whether they be of peaceful or warlike nature, that the Human Conscience, the conscience of the mass, becomes aroused to the need for change. It would be very stupid to say that no good results are ever brought about by political action; sometimes good things do come about that way. But never until individual rebellion, followed by mass rebellion, has forced it. Direct action is always the clamorer, the initiator, through which the great sum of indifferentists become aware that oppression is getting intolerable.

We have now and oppression in the land — and not only in this land, but throughout all those parts of the world which enjoy the very mixed blessings of Civilization. And just as in the question of chattel slavery, so this form of slavery has been begetting both direct action and political action. A certain percent of our population (probably a much smaller percent than politicians are in the habit of assigning at mass meetings) is producing the material wealth upon which all the rest of us live; just as it was 4,000,000 chattel Blacks who supported all the crowd of parasites above them. These are the *land workers* and the *industrial workers*.

Through the unprophesied and unprophesiable operation of institutions which no individual of us created, but found in existence

the strikers cannot do any other way, without giving up the fight at once. Nor to they mistake those who thus resort to violence under stress for destructive miscreants who do what they do out of innate cussedness. The people in general understand that they do these things through the harsh logic of a situation which they did not create, but which forces them to these attacks in order to make good in their struggle to live or else go down the bottomless descent into poverty, that lets Death find them in the poorhouse hospital, the city street, or the river-slime. This is the awful alternative that the workers are facing; and this is what makes the most kindly disposed human beings — men who would go out of their way to help a wounded dog, or bring home a stray kitten and nurse it, or step aside to avoid walking on a worm — resort to violence against their fellow men. They know, for the facts have taught them, that this is the only way to win, if they can win at all. And it has always appeared to me one of the most utterly ludicrous, absolutely irrelevant things that a person can do or say, when approached for relief or assistance by a striker who is dealing with an immediate situation, to respond with "Vote yourself into power!" when the next election is six months, a year, or two years away.

Unfortunately the people who know best how violence is used in union warfare cannot come forward and say: "On such a day, at such a place, such and such specific action was done, and as a result such and such concession was made, or such and such boss capitulated." To do so would imperil their liberty and their power to go on fighting. Therefore those that know best must keep silent and sneer in their sleeves, while those that know little prate. Events, not tongues, must make their position clear.

And there has been a very great deal of prating these last few weeks. Speakers and writers, honestly convinced I believe that political action and political action only can win the workers' battle, have been denouncing what they are pleased to call "direct action" (what they really mean is conspiratorial violence) as the author of mischief incalculable. One Oscar Ameringer, as an example, re-

false to those interests. It isn't so at all. The majority of business people are just like the majority of workingmen; they care a whole lot more about their individual loss or gain than about the gain or loss of their class. And it is his individual loss the boss sees, when threatened by a union.

Now everybody knows that a strike of any size means violence. No matter what any one's ethical preference for peace may be, he knows it will not be peaceful. If it's a telegraph strike, it means cutting wires and poles, and getting fake scabs in to spoil the instruments. If it is a steel rolling mill strike, it means beating up the scabs, breaking the windows, setting the gauges wrong, and ruining the expensive rollers together with tons and tons of material. IF it's a miners' strike, it means destroying tracks and bridges, and blowing up mills. If it is a garment workers' strike, it means having an unaccountable fire, getting a volley of stones through an apparently inaccessible window, or possibly a brickbat on the manufacturer's own head. If it's a street-car strike, it means tracks torn up or barricaded with the contents of ash-carts and slop-carts, with overturned wagons or stolen fences, it means smashed or incinerated cars and turned switches. If it is a system federation strike, it means "dead" engines, wild engines, derailed freights, and stalled trains. If it is a building trades strike, it means dynamited structures. And always, everywhere, all the time, fights between strike-breakers and scabs against strikers and strike-sympathizers, between People and Police.

On the side of the bosses, it means search-lights, electric wires, stockades, bull-pens, detectives and provocative agents, violent kidnapping and deportation, and every device they can conceive for direct protection, besides the ultimate invocation of police, militia, State constabulary, and federal troops.

Everybody knows this; everybody smiles when union officials protest their organizations to be peaceable and law-abiding, because everybody knows they are lying. They know that violence is used, both secretly and openly; and they know it is used because

when he came here, these workers, the most absolutely necessary part of the whole social structure, without whose services none can either eat, or clothe, or shelter himself, are just the ones who get the least to eat, to wear, and to be housed withal — to say nothing of their share of the other social benefits which the rest of us are supposed to furnish, such as education and artistic gratification.

These workers have, in one form or another, mutually joined their forces to see what betterment of their condition they could get; primarily by direct action, secondarily by political action. We have had the Grange, the Farmer's Alliance, Co-operative Associations, Colonization Experiments, Knights of Labor, Trade Unions, and Industrial Workers of the World. All of them have been organized for the purpose of wringing from the masters in the economic field a little better price, a little better conditions, a little shorter hours; or on the other hand to resist a reduction in price, worse conditions, or longer hours. None of them has attempted a final solution of the social war. None of them, except the Industrial Workers, has recognized that there is a social war, inevitable so long as present legal-social conditions endure. They accepted property institutions as they found them. They were made up of average men, with average desires, and they undertook to do what appeared to them possible and very reasonable things. They were not committed to any particular political policy when they were organized, but were associated for direct action of their own initiation, either positive or defensive.

Undoubtably there were and are among all these organizations, members who looked beyond immediate demands; who did see that the continuous development of forces now in operation was bound to bring about conditions to which it is impossible that life continue to submit, and against which, therefore, it will protest, and violently protest; that it will have no choice but to do so; that it must do so or tamely die; and since it is not the nature of life to surrender without struggle, it will not tamely die. Twenty-two years ago I met Farmer's Alliance people who said so, Knights of Labor

who said so, Trade Unionists who said so. They wanted larger aims than those to which their organizations were looking; but they had to accept their fellow members as they were, and try to stir them to work for such things as it was possible to make them see. And what they could see was better prices, better wages, less dangerous or tyrannical conditions, shorter hours. At the stage of development when these movements were initiated, the land workers could not see that their struggle had anything to do with the struggle of those engaged in the manufacturing or transporting service; nor could these latter see that theirs had anything to do with the movement of the farmers. For that matter very few of them see it yet. They have yet to learn that there is one common struggle against those who have appropriated the earth, the money, and the machines.

Unfortunately the great organizations of the farmers frittered itself away in a stupid chase after political power. It was quite successful in getting the power in certain States; but the courts pronounced its laws unconstitutional, and there was the burial hole of all its political conquests. Its original program was to build its own elevators, and store the products therein, holding these from the market till they could escape the speculator. Also, to organize labor exchanges, issuing credit notes upon products deposited for exchange. Had it adhered to this program of direct mutual aid, it would, to some extent, for a time at least, have afforded an illustration of how mankind may free itself from the parasitism of the bankers and the middlemen. Of course, it would have been overthrown in the end, unless it had so revolutionized men's minds by the example as to force the overthrow of the legal monopoly of land and money; but at least it would have served a great educational purpose. As it was, it "went after the red herring" and disintegrated merely from its futility.

The Knights of Labor subsided into comparative insignificance, not because of failure to use direct action, nor because of its tampering with politics, which was small, but chiefly because it was a

heterogenous mass of workers who could not associate their efforts effectively.

The Trade Unions grew strong as the Knights of Labor subsided, and have continued slowly but persistently to increase in power. It is true the increase has fluctuated; that there have been set-backs; that great single organizations have been formed and again dispersed. But on the whole trade unions have been a growing power. They have been so because, poor as they are, they have been a means whereby a certain section of the workers have been able to bring their united force to bear directly upon their masters, and so get for themselves some portion of what they wanted — of what their conditions dictated to them they must try to get. The strike is their natural weapon, that which they themselves have forged. It is the direct blow of the strike which nine times out of ten the boss is afraid of. (Of course there are occasions when he is glad of one, but that's unusual.) And the reason he dreads a strike is not so much because he thinks he cannot win out against it, but simply and solely because he does not want an interruption of his business. The ordinary boss isn't in much dread of a "class-conscious vote;" there are plenty of shops where you can talk Socialism or any other political program all day long; but if you begin to talk Unionism you may forthwith expect to be discharged or at best warned to shut up. Why? Not because the boss is so wise as to know that political action is a swamp in which the workingman gets mired, or because he understands that political Socialism is fast becoming a middle-class movement; not at all. He thinks Socialism is a very bad thing; but it's a good way off! But he knows that if his shop is unionized, he will have trouble right away. His hands will be rebellious, he will be put to expense to improve his factory conditions, he will have to keep workingmen that he doesn't like, and in case of strike he may expect injury to his machinery or his buildings.

It is often said, and parrot-like repeated, that the bosses are "class-conscious," that they stick together for their class interest, and are willing to undergo any sort of personal loss rather than be