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# Mass Action and Industrial Unionism

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The growing interest in Mass Action is important and should be encouraged. But we must not accept Mass Action without considering the historical conditions of its European origin, and adapt it to our particular needs and revolutionary practice.

We did not do this with syndicalism, and it proved more of an injury than a benefit. Syndicalism contributed nothing of value that was not implicit in Industrial Unionism, except Sabotage. And even in this we did not relate Sabotage to our own conditions and industrial development.

It is different with Mass Action. This practice contributes an important idea — *if we interpret rightly*.

Mass Action means more revolutionary action against imperialism, against war, against capitalism. But, apart from this program, Mass Action is indefinite. It is indefinite — that is to say, incomplete — because it does not emphasize the ultimate revolutionary mission of unionism. It is indefinite because in Europe it is used primarily as a means to fight the conservatism of the Socialist movement. When rebels in Germany urge Mass Action upon the party, they mean more aggressive action and not a comprehensive program of revolution (While street demonstrations, for example, may be an aggressive and even revolutionary act in Germany, they are not in this country.)

Mass Action, precisely as does Industrial Unionism, urges the extension of Socialist activity to *conscious* and *aggressive* action in the economic field. This activity stimulates the independence of the working class and warns its idealism into aggressive action. It “puts a bone” into the parliamentary struggle and compels it to become revolutionary. The fight against capitalism becomes an active mass fight, not merely an electoral and parliamentary debate.

But Industrial Unionism goes much further: it bases the whole Socialist movement upon economic action; it sees in the immediate struggle of the unions a preparation for the revolutionary strike that will overthrow capitalism; and it organizes the working class in a way that provides the means of assuming control of society — builds in its organization the structure that will function as the administration of the new society on the day of the revolution.

Karl Kautsky, in an article in the *International Socialist Review*, April 1901, said:

“The trade unions...will constitute the most energetic factors in surmounting the present mode of production and they will be pillars on which the edifice of the socialist commonwealth will be erected.”

But trade unions are not working for the revolution; they are working as a caste for a place in the governing system of the nation — making for State Socialism and not the Social Revolution. Nor does the structure of the trade unions admit of their assuming possession and management of concentrated industry. Industrial Unionism alone provides the aspiration and the means, the theory and practice, of the ultimate revolutionary act.

All this isn't emphasized in the program of Mass Action; nor does it project a *new* and *more effective* form of union organization.

But Mass Action and Industrial Unionism are not antagonistic: they are supplementary.

Industrial Unionism, alone and in itself, is compelled to abstain from action until the future, or to indulge in small action. On the whole, it may preach, but as yet it cannot always act. Through the practice of Mass Action, however, the revolutionist may participate in all the struggles of the working class, organized and unorganized. We come to them with a program of *immediate* action, and in this way emphasize our propaganda.

Industrial Unionism without the practice of Mass Action may be doomed to propaganda alone; Mass Action without the theory and practice of Industrial Unionism neither builds for the future nor develops the *maximum* power of the proletariat.

The two must fuse: our movement must accept the practice of Mass Action. May our European comrades fuse their Mass Action with the theory and practice of Industrial Unionism.

*Edited by Tim Davenport*

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