

TACTIC GENERAL STRIKE

A widespread work shutdown across many industries in a city, region, or country. General strikes are led by workers, often involve entire communities, and can be triggered by unpopular political edicts.

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“INSTEAD OF JUST ENGAGING IN PICKETING AT THEIR WORK SITE, STRIKERS SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF BEING LIBERATED FROM WORK BY THE STRIKE AND BECOME FULL-TIME ORGANIZERS.”

“Win or lose, mass strikes reveal the truth.”

—Jeremy Brecher

Strikes can be a powerful weapon for shifting the balance of power in workplaces and points of production. By withholding their labour and stopping work from continuing, generations of workers over the last 150 years have won better wages, improved working conditions, and basic bargaining rights.

One-day general strikes, like those that took place around the world in 2011 from Bangladesh to Oakland, are in essence symbolic protests, more focused on making a political point than creating real economic pressure. To harness the tactic's true potential, general strikes need to escalate from symbolic one-day protests to ongoing actions that last days and potentially weeks, with a clear goal of inflicting both economic and political damage until the strikers' demands are met.

In 2014, the Jordanian General Union for Port Workers launched several open-strike intervals causing real economic chaos and disruption of import operations, which led their employers to heed their demands. The citywide general strikes of janitors in Los Angeles (2000), Boston (2002), and Houston (2006), are another example of how an industry-wide general strike successfully forced

POTENTIAL RISKS

It is too easy to romanticize the idea of a strike. Due to the increasing concentration of transnational corporate power and various laws limiting workers rights, most strikes are now small and rarely successful rearguard actions to resist wage and benefit cuts. Workers need to creatively reinvent the tactic if strikes are again going to be an effective weapon to win justice. In particular, workers need to recognize, and harness, the power of general and cross-industry strikes. Additionally, strikers should be aware of empty promises by their targets only as a counter-tactic to lure them to end the strike. Strikers should be prepared to come back with even stronger

powerful corporations hiding behind cleaning subcontractors to meet the demands of tens of thousands of striking janitors.

In both cases, a wide array of tactics were used, including sit-ins (see: TACTIC: Occupation), street blockades (see: TACTIC: Blockade), and nonviolent civil disobedience (see: TACTIC: Civil disobedience). In Jordan, one of the approaches included slowing down the work rate to the extent that port operations were completely halted. And with the janitor strikes, which won massive public support by pitting poor janitors against rich landlords, striking workers and their supporters effectively shut down business-as-usual in the business districts of the cities.

A key factor to the success of a general strike is to have an escalation plan (see: PRINCIPLE: Escalate strategically). Instead of just engaging in picketing at their work site, strikers should take advantage of being liberated from work by the strike and become full-time organizers, campaigning against the corporations and politicians that control and profit from the industry the workers were targeting. That could literally mean thousands of strikers/organizers working full-time day in and day out organizing demonstrations that shut down streets and occupy buildings while simultaneously mobilizing community and ecumenical support. Not one action or tactic will provide enough pressure. There needs to be constant, creative, and courageous escalation.

General strikes can also be effective to achieve political demands, such as the 2012 strike in Nigeria which forced the government to reduce fuel prices, or the 2017 strike in Al-Hoceima, Morocco, which demanded the release of one of the leaders of the popular uprising in the Rif region.

The striking janitors learned firsthand that that isolated strikes are rarely effective, and that going on a citywide or nationwide general strike, even in large numbers, doesn't *alone* lead to victory either. To win, strikers need to have a clear understanding of the target and its vulnerabilities (see: METHODOLOGY: Power mapping), and develop a plan to exploit those vulnerabilities.

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Strike!

Jeremy Brecher, 2014

<https://books.google.com/books/about/Strike.html?id=Eh33AwAAQBAJ>

organizing if their target(s) refused to implement the promise it made after the strike ended.

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- Justice for Janitors
- Schools of Struggle
- Stop Praver Plan
- Taco Bell Boycott
- Taxi drivers strike against taxation
- #ThisFlag
- Wisconsin Capitol Occupation

Tactics

- Blockade
- Cacerolazo (noise-making protest)
- Civil disobedience
- Debt strike
- Hunger strike
- Mass street action
- Occupation

Principles

- Build people power, then negotiate
- Choose tactics that support your strategy
- Choose your target wisely
- Consensus is a means, not an end
- Create many points of entry
- Define "hardcore" strategically
- Escalate strategically
- Follow the lead of the most impacted
- Maintain nonviolent discipline
- Use organizing strategies that scale
- We are all leaders
- Would you like some structure with your momentum?

Theories

- Al faza'a (a surge of solidarity)
- Capitalism

- Commodity fetishism
- Cultural hegemony
- Decolonization
- Direct action
- Expressive and instrumental actions
- Gerontocracy
- Neoliberalism
- Palace coup
- People's "Shock Doctrine"
- Prefigurative politics
- Revolutionary nonviolence
- The Global South
- The tactics of everyday life

Methodologies

- Battle of the story
- Pillars of power
- Power mapping
- Spectrum of allies
- Theory of change

TAGS

Austerity, Capitalism, Direct action, Labour, Wealth inequality