THE STRIKE

A STUDY IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

By E. T. HILLER, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Sociology
The University of Illinois

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO · ILLINOIS

COMPOSED AND PRINTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, U.S.A.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
SOCIOLOGICAL SERIES

Editorial Committee

ELLSWORTH FARIS ROBERT E. PARK
ERNEST W. BURGESS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO SOCIOLOGICAL SERIES, established by the Trustees of the University, is devoted primarily to the publication of the results of the newer developments in sociological study in America. It is expected that there will ultimately be included a complete series of texts for undergraduate instruction, but the emphasis will be placed on research, including both the results of investigation and the perfecting of new methods of discovery. The editors have the conviction that the textbooks to be used in teaching should be based on the results of the efforts of research students whose studies of concrete problems are building up a new body of funded knowledge. While the series is called sociological, the conception of sociology is broad enough to include many borderline interests, and studies will appear which place the emphasis on political, economic, or educational problems dealt with from the point of view of a general conception of human nature.

THE STRIKE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA, LIMITED
TORONTO

THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON

THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA
TOKYO, OSAKA, KYOTO, FUKUOKA, SENDAI

THE COMMERCIAL PRESS, LIMITED
SHANGHAI

INTRODUCTION

The literature of strikes is extensive, but it is, for the most part, historical rather than sociological. It is concerned, therefore, with events rather than things, with programs and policies rather than with social processes and human nature.

The labor movement has, one may say, had its origin in the strike, and labor organizations have come into existence in order, on the one hand, to make strikes effective; and on the other, to make them unnecessary. This volume, however, is not immediately concerned with the labor movement, with collective bargaining, with class conflict, nor with most of the other matters which have engaged the attention of historical scholars and students of social politics. It deals less with policy than with practice, and seeks to give a naturalistic rather than a philosophical account of the phenomena of the strike, seeking to distinguish its different typical forms, inquiring into its etiology, and dealing with it in general as a describable aspect of human nature and social life.

It will serve to put this study of the strike into its proper perspective if it is regarded as, in some sense, a sequel to an earlier volume in this series, *The Natural History of Revolution*, by Lyford P. Edwards. War, revolution, and the strike are, fundamentally considered, elementary forms of political action. They are, in other words, forms in which issues are raised, forced upon the attention of a sometimes reluctant public, and eventually, in some fashion, settled. It may seem at first blush that a proceeding which substitutes ac-

tion for discussion—seeks to justify itself by force rather than by arbitration—is in no sense to be compared with the more orderly and dignified procedure of the courts where issues are dealt with according to law.

In the presence of the disturbances which the conflicts of employer and employee have occasioned, the public has been, on the whole, in the position of an innocent bystander, uncertain about its own interests and divided in its sentiments. The public has been particularly helpless and unable to act in regard to strikes, mainly because there has been no generally accepted law in accordance with which these disputes could be settled to the satisfaction of all the parties and all the interests involved.

On the other hand, the public has, in the long run, as Professor Hiller has pointed out, made the rules of the game and decided the issues. It has done this without recourse to courts of arbitration or of law. Nevertheless, the public has been, in all these disputes, the final arbiter. In this sense, at least, one may say that the strike is a form of political action. In so far as this is true, the study of the strike may be regarded as a contribution to our knowledge of the political process.

Political action is possible, no doubt, because man is a "political animal." But the ways in which men actually achieve concerted action, build up social organizations, and maintain morale in them constitute some of the most obscure and least understood problems in the whole field of human behavior. Not that the thing is not done, but for some reason not wholly clear almost no attempt has been made to study the method of doing it objectively and disinterestedly. Some years ago when Le Bon first published his book, *The Crowd*, we were led to expect, or to hope, that

there would shortly be in existence a body of knowledge, based upon detailed studies, which would go far toward explaining actual politics and collective behavior generally. But these expectations have not been realized. The "psychological crowd," as Le Bon conceived it, is, to be sure, an obvious instance of concerted action, interesting because, in this case, it is achieved without formal organization or leadership. But the crowd dissolves with the occasion that brings it into existence. How the transition is made from this passing, ephemeral and spontaneous organization to a more formal, permanent, and self-conscious one, such as we have in the strike, in revolution, and in social movements generally, neither Le Bon nor any later writer, with the possible exception of Theodor Geiger, has really attempted to explain.[1] This is a central theme of the present volume.

A social movement, such as the one here reviewed, seems, when looked at casually, to be a mere series of episodes—public meetings, discussions, accompanied by intermittent clashes and minor encounters with the existing order. On the other hand, the strike, as the author of this volume conceives it, is not a series of independent episodes but a cycle of typical events which take place in a more or less regular and predictable way.

No doubt every social movement tends to pass through a series of typical phases. Every political action, including war, revolution, and reform, assumes at the outset the character of a collective gesture. What takes place is expressive merely. Someone is agitated and his very agitation makes him, without any ulterior motive on his part, an agitator.

[1] Theodor Geiger, *Die Masse und Ihre Aktion: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie der Revolutionen*, Berlin, 1926.

If his sentiments thus expressed find an echo in other minds, this expression assumes the character of "public sentiment." Public sentiment thus aroused expresses itself, perhaps, in a spontaneous and unpremeditated public demonstration. At this point the necessity for some organization and direction makes itself felt. Agitation turns out to be a serious business. What was a gesture assumes the form of a political movement. It becomes important that the movement be directed with foresight in order that it may achieve its end. In attempting to direct such a social movement the leaders develop some sort of technique for maintaining discipline within the ranks and strategy in dealing with the enemy outside.

A study of this technique and of these tactics throws light upon the nature of social movements and collective action generally. Thus there is much in a study of the strike that throws light upon political strategy, public opinion, and upon all the conscious devices and unconscious mechanisms by which morale is maintained in conflict groups.

While a strike may be regarded as a single collective act in which minor clashes and individual cases of violence are incidents, every individual strike may be regarded as a single episode in a larger revolutionary movement, a movement of which the participants are perhaps only dimly conscious.

One thing, therefore, which lends interest to studies in this field is that they indicate how, and how far, the principles that Le Bon and other writers in collective psychology have used to make concerted action in the crowd intelligible can be carried over and used to interpret those more persistent and more important forms of collective action that we call social movements.

ROBERT E. PARK

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE STRIKE DEFINED

CHAPTER PAGE

I. A Typical Strike 1

1. The Nature of the Study 1
2. Narrative of a Typical Strike: the Strike Cycle . . 5
   a) Development of Unrest and Tension 5
   b) Mobilization for Action 5
   c) Economic Pressure Gives Way to "Direct Action" 6
   d) "Blacklegs" Arouse Hostility 6
   e) The Issue Obscured by Personal Hostilities . . 7
   f) The Strike Breaks 8
3. The Strike Cycle Epitomizes the Nature of Social Movements 10

II. Collective Suspension of Function 12

1. Stoppages and Strikes 12
   a) When Is a Stoppage of Work Collective? . . 12
   b) When Is a Collective Stoppage a Strike? . . . 15
2. Coercion through Collective Suspension 16
3. Types of Motives 18
   a) Rational 18
   b) Sentiments Collectively Aroused 19

ORGANIZATION OF THE STRIKE

III. Where Strikes Arise 25

1. Class Dividing Lines 25
   a) Contacts between Wage-workers 25
   b) Exclusion from Contacts with Employer . . . 28
   c) Conflicts 30
2. Wage Remuneration as a Class Symbol 32
3. Obstacles to Organization 34
   a) Competition between Wage-workers 35

CHAPTER PAGE

b) Unlike Traditions 35
c) Resistance by Employer and Public 36
d) Shop Loyalty 37

IV. Preliminary Organization 38
1. Group Objectives 39
a) Immediate 41
b) Deferred 41
2. Group Structure 42
a) Correlation of Functions 43
b) Adoption of Social Positions 43
3. Institutionalization of Structure 45

BEGINNING THE STRIKE

V. Strikers Mobilize 49
1. Removing Obstacles 49
a) Finding Justifications 50
b) Minimizing Hazards 53
2. Devising Plans of Procedure 54
3. Types of Spontaneous Beginnings: Interaction with Outsiders 57
a) Response Sequences between the Employer and the Organized Group 57
b) Response Sequences between Strikers and Other Labor Groups 61

VI. The Ordered Strike 66
1. Methods of Beginning 66
2. Aids to Striking 71
3. Restraints against Striking 73
4. Insurgent Movements 75

MAINTAINING MORALE

VII. Conditions of Morale 79
1. Definition 79
2. Factors Complicating Control 80
a) Character of the Strikers 80
b) Isolation 82

CHAPTER PAGE

3. Techniques of Control 83
a) Increasing Rapport 83
(1) Regulating Contacts 84
(2) Creating Group Distinctions 87

VIII. How Morale Is Maintained 89
1. Techniques of Control, *continued* 89
a) Raising Incentives to Prolong the Strike . . . 89
(1) Fostering Conflict Moods 89
(2) Seeking Justification 91
b) Lessening the Incentives for Returning to Work . 91
(1) Compensating for Tedium 91
(2) Manipulating the Critical Periods . . . 93
(3) Supplying the Means of Subsistence . . . 96
c) Imposing Restraints upon the Workers . . . 98
2. Excessive Morale 98

CONTROLLING STRIKE BREAKERS

IX. Scabbing the Nonconformer 100
1. Types of Strike-Breakers 100
a) Employees in the Establishment 100
b) Members of Competing Unions 101
c) Job-Hunters 101
d) Adventurers 102
e) Saboteurs Who Bore from Within 103
2. The Technique of Control 103
a) Expressions of Disapproval 103
(1) Innuendoes 104
(2) Ostracism 105
(3) Persuasion 107
b) Threats 108
c) Violent Coercion 108
(1) Tentative Violence 108
(2) Overt Violence or Terrorism 108
3. The Group Norms 111

X. Formal Control of Strike Breakers 114
1. Payments to Job Hunters 113

CHAPTER PAGE

2. Picketing 115
3. The Social Boycott 122

TACTICS USED BETWEEN OPPONENTS

XI. Time and Form of the Strike 125
1. The Time to Strike 125
2. Secret or Open Preparation 132
3. Form of Organization 134
4. Plan and Scope of the Strike 135

XII. Forms of Coercion 141
1. Employers' Tactics 141
a) Blocking the Suspension 141
b) Undermining Morale 143
(1) Propagating Dissensions 143
(2) Threatening Unemployment 145
(3) Guards and Violence 149
2. Strikers' Means of Coercion 151
a) Sabotage 151
b) Competition 152
c) The Commodity Boycott 153

THE STRIKE AND THE PUBLIC

XIII. How the Public Becomes Involved 156
1. The Public Defined 156
2. Public Indifference 157
3. How the Public Is Aroused 158
a) Economic Encroachments 158
b) Disturbance of Tranquillity 158
c) Infringement upon Sentiments and Social Codes . 159
4. Do Outsiders Determine the Victor? 161
5. Active Solicitation of Public Attention 162

XIV. Control of the Public 166
1. The Strikers' Techniques 164
a) Claiming Identification with the Public . . . 164
b) Enduring Non-resistant Suffering 169

CHAPTER PAGE

c) Retaliating for Announced Wrongs 171
d) Coercing the Public 173
2. The Employer's Tactics 174
a) Seeking Justification 174
b) Discrediting the Strikers 175

XV. The Public Intervenes 177
1. As Neutral: Aid Responses 177
a) Conciliator 177
b) Mediator 179
c) Arbiter 181
2. As Partisan: Conflict Responses 186
a) Verbal Gestures 186
b) Direct Participation 189
c) Political Interferences 189

DEMOBILIZATION

XVI. The Strike as Ordeal by Battle 192
1. Ordeal by Combat 192
2. Settlement by Attrition 195
a) Factors Prolonging the Strike 198
b) Disintegrating Factors 202
3. The Strike Breaks 205

XVII. How Strikes End 207
1. Terms of Settlement 207
a) Success 207
b) Compromise 209
c) Postponement 210
d) Failure 210
2. Effects of Settlement upon Union Structure . . . 212
3. Techniques for Ending Strikes 213
a) Rules Facilitating Settlement 214
b) Methods of Corporate Ending 215
4. The Life-Cycle of the Strike 216

THE STRIKE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

XVIII. Strikes and Industrial Reorganization 218
1. Changes Arising in Conflict 218

CHAPTER PAGE

a) Breaking Traditions 218
b) The Workers' Encroaching Control 220
2. Stabilizing the Forced Concessions 222
a) Constitutional Enforcement 223
b) Habituation to Compulsory Terms 225
3. Development of Shop Loyalty 225

XIX. Political Strikes 233
1. Reform Strikes 234
a) Strikes against Official Acts 234
b) Strikes against Objectionable Laws 236
c) Strikes for Positive Rights 238
2. Strikes and Changes in Social Structure 242
a) Usurpation of Authority 244
b) Establishment of Control Organizations . . . 246

XX. The Mythical General Strike 250
1. Schooling in Revolution 250
2. Why General Strikes Fail 254
a) Lack of Organization 254
b) Wage-workers Are Dispensable 256
c) Government-Control Organizations Have Balance of Power 259
d) Interdependency Inhibits Revolt 262

XXI. When Will Strikes Cease? 266
1. Factors Promoting Conflicts 266
2. Stabilizing Factors 269
3. The Strike as a Historic Movement 274

Appendix A. Classification of Strikes 278

Appendix B. Selected Bibliography 280

Index 293

CHAPTER I

A TYPICAL STRIKE

Strikes are a form of conflict peculiar to modern industrial organization. Under the simpler conditions of earlier times disagreements between employer and employees were personal and action was individual. Today, in a larger and more highly integrated society, such disputes are settled by the concerted action of many individuals. These changes imply that old controls are failing. The frequent recurrence of strikes indicates that new adjustments in working relations are forming.

The significance of strikes is indicated by their volume and frequency. During the period 1916–23 their annual average number in America was three thousand, involving nearly two million workers each year. During the years 1923–26, the average annual number of strikes was 1,300.[1] Over five million persons took part in labor suspensions during 1919. More than six million working days were lost by those directly involved in 1,156 selected strikes occurring during six months in 1917.[2] The amount of idle time due to strikes in the bituminous coal fields from 1899 to 1923 was

[1] United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Monthly Labor Review*, XVIII, 1367–71, and XXIV, 1250. Paul H. Douglas, "An Analysis of Strike Statistics, 1881–1921," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, XVIII, 866 ff.

[2] National Industrial Conference Board, research report No. 3, *Strikes in American Industries in War Time* (April 6–October 6, 1917), p. 7. Statistics of strikes in other industrial nations are equally significant. In England 1,413 trade disputes in 1919 had an aggregate duration of thirty-five million working days.