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Sabotage

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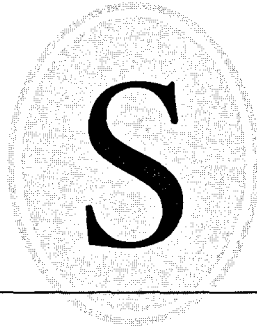
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SABOTAGE. A term borrowed from French syndicalists by American labor organizations at the turn of the century, sabotage means the hampering of productivity and efficiency of a factory, company, or organization by internal operatives. Often sabotage involves the destruction of property or machines by the workers who use them. In the United States, sabotage was seen first as a direct-action tactic for labor radicals against oppressive employers. The first organization to openly proclaim sabotage as a tactic, though by no means the only labor group to employ it, was the **INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD**, known as the Wobblies. A Wobbly translated *Sabotage* by French syndicalist Émile Pouget and promulgated the various means of sabotage offered in the book and used by European radicals since the 1830s.

Though the Wobblies were the loudest advocates of sabotage tactics, such as playing dumb or tampering with machines, no state or federal authority ever established legal proof that they actually instigated sabotage. In fact, one historian has asserted that the American Federation of Laborers was linked more closely with industrial violence. Nevertheless, the Wobblies' association with syndicalism and socialism terrified industrialists, antisocialists, and other Americans who feared "red" infiltration of American society.

During World War I, American concern about sabotage turned to the military when operatives supported by the German government blew up the munitions supply terminal at Black Tom Pier on the New Jersey side of New York Harbor. Germany was hoping to coerce the United States into the war, a tactic that also involved the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*. The bombing at Black Tom in July 1916 and a second explosion at a shell manufacturing plant eight miles north in December broadened the definition of saboteur beyond socialists and anarchists.

In the 1950s, sabotage seemed to serve the purposes of workers as well as enemy nations when Americans believed that the Soviet Union was infiltrating United States labor and community organizations. In November 1950 the *Herald Tribune* reported that sardine cans discovered on a merchant marine ship were actually filled with how-to manuals for short-circuiting electrical lines, burning vital transformers, and other forms of industrial sabotage.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, sabotage moved from the factory to cyberspace, as hackers frequently infiltrated computer systems to destroy data or embarrass companies. In one of the costliest acts of sabotage in American history, a computer programmer at a New Jersey engineering firm in 1998 allegedly planted a "computer bomb" that deleted software critical to the company's operations, leading to the loss of more than \$10 million in sales and contracts. In the spring of 2001 hackers broke into California's electricity grid. There was little damage, but the system's vulnerability was apparent and embarrassing. Computer hackers, much like their syndicalist forerunners, developed their own antiauthoritarian culture based on infiltrating America's key computer systems. Though sabotage was originally a tactic promoted by intellectual subversives attacking specific economic and governmental systems in Europe, in America it became a tactic used by activists operating in numerous areas of society and for many different reasons.

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