

the picket line and service the buses in accord with their contract. In the 1930s, contract or no contract, this union would have honored the picket line.

In the western United States, Phelps Dodge copper miners on strike for many months receive regular pledges of support and occasional cash contributions from other unions. But union members across the country continue to handle products made from Phelps Dodge's scab copper; to do anything else might mean costly lawsuits or even imprisonment of labor leaders. In an earlier era, union officers would have taken their chances. Today, most unions are prudent: stingy with their treasuries, protective of their investments, and obsessed with their officials' job security.

And the rest of us—liberals, radicals—have become ever so careful, too, weighing the issues, choosing which causes we will support and which we will ignore or undermine, deciding “objectively,” as if there were an impartial measure to determine whether, in any particular instance, the rich or the poor are “in the right.”

The vanishing sanctity of the picket line is as valid an indicator as any of our political disarray and decay. We'll have a functioning movement when the old rule is in full force again: Never cross a picket line.