

# INDUSTRIAL WORKER



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## Workers Win Big At New York Restaurant Supplier

By Brandworkers International

QUEENS, NY – Immigrant workers at Pur Pac, a food distribution warehouse supplying many landmark Chinese restaurants, bakeries, and cafés in Chinatown and elsewhere in the city, have won a major settlement with the company after prevailing in a bitterly contested workplace justice campaign. The comprehensive settlement will return \$470,000 in illegally withheld minimum wage and overtime pay and subjects Pur Pac to a binding code of conduct. The code will include protection for collective activity and compels the company to comply with all workplace laws; including anti-discrimination and health and safety provisions. The workers organized with Focus on the Food Chain—a joint campaign of Brandworkers and the IWW—which is challenging sweatshop conditions in a sprawling industrial corridor of food processing and distribution warehouses that service New York City

markets and restaurants.

"No one who wakes up and goes to work every day should have their wages stolen," said Primo Aguilar, a former worker at Pur Pac and a leading member of the campaign. "I feel proud today that my co-workers and I stood up, got organized, and won. This settlement means a great deal for us and our families, but also for our effort with the Focus campaign to win respect for all of New York City's food processing and distribution workers."

Through grassroots advocacy and protest, the workers persuaded key food retail customers of Pur Pac to stop doing business with the company until the dispute was resolved. Pursuant to the settlement, worker representatives are notifying customers that the dispute has been resolved favorably. Pur Pac's product line includes bulk rice, sugar, cooking oil, chop sticks, and soy sauce.

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Pur Pac workers at a summer event in Queens.

Photo: Brandworkers International

## Couriers Fight For A Living Wage

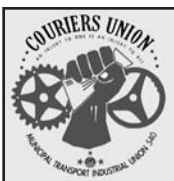
By the IWW Couriers Union

SAN FRANCISCO – On August 12, the IWW Couriers Union Organizing Committee publicly asserted the right of workers at Speedway Delivery and Messenger Service, and throughout the courier industry, to earn a living wage.

For many years, workers in the courier industry have been subjected to shamefully low or wildly fluctuating compensation from employers. Couriers work day in and day out—in trucks, on bikes, or on foot—in extremely dangerous conditions, under intense pressure to deliver parcels on time. While most couriers fulfill their ominous task dutifully, few find that their compensation fulfills the task of making ends meet. Living hand to mouth is the norm for the people on whose backs our metropolises thrive.

At the San Francisco-based Speedway Delivery and Messenger Service, conditions are no better. In fact, they're much worse. Bought by current owners Lori O'Rourke and Charlie Lutge in the 1980s from former owners who refused to deal

with then-emerging unionizing efforts, Speedway has pushed working conditions below even non-union standards. Their couriers endure harassment and disrespectful treatment from management, are extorted for equipment replacements, and to top it off, make an insultingly low commission of about 35 percent per delivery, or as little as \$8.00 an hour—almost 20 percent less than the prevailing San



Francisco minimum wage of \$9.92 an hour, which is still far too low to live on.

To inaugurate our campaign to improve conditions for all workers in the courier industry in the San Francisco Bay Area, we submitted a letter to Speedway owners demanding that they stop breaking minimum wage laws and pay a living wage, and to remedy grievances regarding disrespectful treatment at work. It is our aim that these issues will be handled swiftly, respectfully, and to the satisfaction of Speedway's hard-working couriers. Further action from the Organizing Committee will then be necessary to resolve the issues at hand.

## Sandwich Shop Workers Organize

By FW Zachary M.

A new organizing campaign is in full swing at a Kansas City deli and pizzeria. The campaign, initiated by a brand new member in a brand new General Membership Branch (GMB), started in the spring when a worker joined the IWW and then realized that the union is the perfect platform for making changes at the shitty restaurant where he works. I am that worker, and this is the beginning of our ongoing struggle to take over our workplace.

I started working at the shop about two years ago, but only started to organize after becoming a Wobbly in April. After a mixture of stabbing in the dark, taking advice from the group that would later become the Greater Kansas City GMB, attending a wonderfully helpful meeting with some Wobblies from the Starbucks Workers Union in Omaha in May, and then receiving an exceptional Organizer Training in June, some real organizing started to take place. I started to rally my co-workers to defend each other. At our first meetings we committed to solidarity in the workplace and began to figure out the concrete problems at our shop. After a few more weeks of organizing and trying to establish some concrete ground from which to move forward, management decided to rearrange the structure of the store and started clamping down, enforcing new and old policies alike, leading to understaffing as workers were fired or left due to frustration over harassment in the workplace. Management refused to replace these workers and then expected the few remaining workers to pick up the slack.

Problems at our workplace started to heat up at the beginning of August. Corporate management decided that they wanted to open more locations, which meant a whole new set of rules and a rigid cost-cutting strategy to squeeze every last penny out of every store. To do this they began using our location as a guinea pig and transferred in a management-loyal

employee who worked for the company on and off for the last 20 years. This person, whom we refer to as the Corporate Manager (CM), is not a manager but is in charge of enforcing the new rules and cutting costs.

One day in August, there were only two line cooks—Fellow Worker Charlie and another worker. This left Charlie alone to do the work of what normally is done by three workers. The store was busy with the lunch rush, so Charlie started running back and forth between making sandwiches and running them down to our expo line, which was being worked by our store manager. Charlie forgot to write the name of a sandwich on the wrapper. The manager picked up the sandwich and yelled "WRITE THE NAME ON THE GODDAMN SANDWICH!" and threw the sandwich at Charlie. Not surprisingly this upset Charlie. He calmly took off his hat and apron, clocked out, and left without saying a word.

Charlie called me from his car, and we decided it would be best to talk to upper management before the offending manager could talk to them. Charlie called our shop to inform the manager that he needed to talk about what happened and that he would be coming into work the next day. To this, management replied, "As far as I'm concerned you're done here!" The next morning, Charlie called the District Manager (DM) and explained the situation to her. She told him to come in and they sat down with the CM and Charlie again explained what happened. Once the store manager arrived they went over the story again and the store manager apologized. At this point everyone went back to work as normal and there were no repercussions for the sandwich-throwing manager.

We called a meeting to figure out what happened and how to proceed. We decided that good documentation of the incident, and a serious push towards marching on the boss, were the best moves we could make.

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# The Battle For Blair Mountain

By Brendan Maslauskas

After ten hours on the road in a beat up Oldsmobile with no air conditioning, four Wobblies from Brooklyn and The Bronx made it to Mingo County, West Virginia. We, like hundreds of others, were brought there for many reasons, some of them overlapping. Many locals from across the state pulled into the county that week, but the struggle in Mingo attracted people from as far away as Wyoming and Washington state. What brought us all together was Blair Mountain. The coal industry wants to blow it up unless a coalition of union miners, workers, environmental activists, historians and others can stop them. For me, the trip to Blair Mountain was a pilgrimage of sorts to pay respects to my family—to those who lost their lives in the coalfields of Pennsylvania and to the few who survived. But I also went down to get a taste of what appears to be an exciting movement taking shape for environmental justice and workers' rights. As we rolled into the campsite in Logan, I walked over to a nearby stream—runoff from the surrounding mountains and coal mines. The water was bright orange and I immediately thought that something terribly wrong was happening to those mountains.

Blair Mountain sits in the Appalachian Mountains in southern West Virginia. This is the heart of coal country and has been for quite some time. West Virginia trails only one other state in the country for annual coal extraction. Wealth is to be made in this resource-rich area but very little of that wealth is actually seen by those who produce it. When a few of us Wobblies trekked into the nearby town of Logan, I was shocked by the degree of poverty—boarded up buildings, dilapidated houses, welfare and social service offices on every street. Yes, capitalism has not been kind to poor Mingo, but that seems to be the storyline we're used to. Sometimes, however, people fight back. Blair Mountain was the site of one of the most bitter fights in the annals of labor history in the country. In the summer of 1921, 20,000 armed

coal miners of the United Mine Workers (UMW) fought in what became the largest uprising in the United States since the Civil War. Their demands were simple: the right to unionize with the UMW, dignity, respect and to live a life not in conditions tantamount to slavery. They dubbed themselves the "Red Neck Army," and it took the combined power of the police, militia, company goons and the U.S. Army to put down the rebellion. The story is captured with a firsthand account in the book "When Miners March" by Bill Blizard, and dramatized in the film "Matewan."

In March 2009 the Blair Mountain battlefield was formally listed on the federal National Register of Historic Places. This would have protected the mountain from being mined, but the coal companies got the site delisted. The march on Blair Mountain was organized to draw attention to the plans that Massey Energy and other coal companies have for strip mining on the historic mountain ridge and the devastating effects that it will have. Many who attended the march saw it as a wedding of environmental and labor struggles and also as an opportunity to educate others about our hidden history—a people's history of workers taking control of their lives, standing up and fighting back. Marchers took five days to march along the historic route that the Red Neck Army originally took, ending up at the foot of Blair where a rally was held on June 11. Several hundred participated and marched the few miles up to the top of Blair—a number that pales in comparison to the original Red Neck Army, but one that marks the largest demonstration against mountaintop removal in the coalfields. Speeches were given by United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) members, environmental activists, locals and even folks like Josh Fox who produced the film "Gasland" about the devastating effects of hydrofracking (natural gas drilling). Fox, who is deeply sympathetic to the IWW, stated that the anti-coal and anti-gas movements need to work together in finding sustainable energy alternatives.

Environmental activist Robert Kennedy Jr. was also present. He has said in the past that if Americans could see the true effects of mountaintop removal that "there would be a revolution in this country." That definitely seemed to be the view of a number in the crowd, especially those who live in the wealth-producing yet poverty-stricken Appalachia.

Many of the marchers wore red bandanas, also worn by the original Red Neck Army, and marched single file on a winding road up Blair Mountain. Speeches were made on the top of Blair and a few Wobbly tunes such as "Solidarity Forever" were sung. The coal company operators like Massey's viciously anti-union Don Blankenship and the media have been quick to spin the struggle against mountaintop removal as an environmentalist (anti-worker) versus coal miner (pro-worker) struggle. Participants begged to differ. West Virginians Brianna Griffith and Dan Taylor had their own opinions on the matter. "Progressives and radicals today, if we're going to get anywhere today we can't be factionalized, we've got to get together," said Taylor. He continued by imploring that the environmental factors the workers live in and the labor conditions are "intimately tied together...it's the same destructive über-capitalistic business practices that are destroying labor in this country... they're also destroying the environment." Griffith, whose grandfather died in a mining disaster and whose father is an injured coal miner, spoke of the extreme health deterioration of coal miners and people who live near mountaintop removal sites. She developed asthma in high school as a result of the industry. Asthma, lung cancer and other cancers are on the rise in areas



Activists march on Blair Mountain.

Photo: Ben Ferguson

around strip mining sites.

The process of mountaintop removal is exactly what it sounds like. Instead of the long, more labor-intensive and less environmentally-damaging process of mining underground, mountaintop removal siphons off and blows up the tops of mountains bit by bit, devastating beautiful landscapes and polluting the air, land and water with a number of toxins. I was told that the orange creek I saw on arrival is a product of this process. It is this process which will possibly decimate Blair Mountain, destroying the landscape, environment, history and surrounding communities with it. And although the UMWA represents a number of workers and locals at these sites, the union's international is also fighting to keep Blair Mountain a registered historical site and UMWA locals, including the Matewan local, have endorsed and supported the march and demonstration. Joe Stanley, a UMWA member and former union organizer and coal miner, told me that "there is enough underground mining sitting idle that they could shut down every surface mining site in America now and not miss a beat."

Jasper Conner, a Wobbly from Virginia who was very active in organizing around Blair Mountain gave me his perspective of the march:

"The history of Appalachian struggle has been one of open confrontation with the bosses and open confrontation with government. Blair Mountain was when 20,000 coal miners had a wildcat military march on a company-controlled county to militarily liberate it from the bosses. And here we are today defending that mountain with a struggle that says, well, if we get enough people to pressure Congress to abolish this law then we can abolish mountain top removal."

Fellow Worker Conner got involved with this struggle to change the direction of the movement from one that is too legalistic and reliant on political change from above to one that relies more on the grassroots of the movement using direct action to enforce change.

And while there are certainly others in the movement who agree with him, the non-profit sector has much decision-making power. He told me it was necessary to break out of the non-profit method of organizing and what it all came down to was this: "We can stop this if we can get the miners involved."

As the struggle against mountaintop removal and to save Blair Mountain continues, it would be wise to take FW Conner's advice seriously. There are a number of similarities between the Appalachian struggle of today and the struggle that Earth First! and the IWW waged on the West Coast in the 1980s to save the redwoods. Wobbly Judi Bari, whom the FBI and timber companies attempted to assassinate with a pipe bomb, was relentless in her advocacy for timber workers and the environment and knew that the only way to save old growth redwoods was for the timber workers to lead the struggle. Perhaps the IWW can be a vehicle in Appalachia to shift the movement in a direction that would liberate both the mountains and the miners from the strangling grasp of the coal industry.

## IWW Constitution Preamble

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

## Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially—that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

**TO JOIN:** Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618, USA.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$2000, dues are \$9 a month. If your monthly income is between \$2000 and \$3500, dues are \$18 a month. If your monthly income is over \$3500 a month, dues are \$27 a month. Dues may vary outside of North America and in Regional Organizing Committees (Australia, British Isles, German Language Area).

I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer.

I agree to abide by the IWW constitution.

I will study its principles and acquaint myself with its purposes.



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Membership includes a subscription to the **Industrial Worker**.

## Three Big Unions: The IWW And Revolution

By John O'Reilly and  
Nate Hawthorne

*This is the last in a series of articles on Industrial Unionism and One Big Unionism. In this piece we talk more about the One Big Union and revolutionary change. We suggest that we should not think about One Big Union as the IWW coming to include the entire working class. Instead we think that this is a three-part metaphor or three big unions. The One Big Union is a metaphor and name for our hope and vision of a unified working class acting together—acting in union—in a revolutionary situation. The One Big Union is also a formal organization, the IWW. Finally, One Big Union is the name for the relationship between the IWW as an organization and the rest of the working class. In our view, this understanding orients us toward questions about what we think revolutionary change looks like.*

We believe, with the IWW Preamble, that it is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. Only the working class can end capitalism, and in certain moments the working class has a greater chance to move closer to carrying out this important task. That kind of moment is a revolutionary situation. We need to have a serious union-wide discussion about what a revolutionary situation looks like. We should also talk about what we think the IWW's role is in preparing for and acting within a revolutionary situation. This not an exercise in fantasy but part of being serious about believing in a revolutionary future.

Think for a moment about the size of what we're talking about. A genuinely revolutionary situation where we could end capitalism, even if it happened in one U.S. state or even in just one major metropolitan area, would involve millions of people. (And really, this is actually too small of a scale: a working class revolution that ends capitalism must be truly global.) This means we need to be thinking in huge numbers of people. This is not something anyone can control, but we need to figure out ways to make our struggles self-reinforcing and self-expanding. As an organization and as a class we need to see struggles that expand to involve hundreds of thousands of people.

In this series of articles we have been discussing revolutionary unionism through the concepts of Industrial Unionism and One Big Union. The meaning of "One Big Union" is closely related to the role of the IWW in the working class's historic mission. Here are a few scenarios:

1. The IWW grows to become the One Big Union that all members of the working class are members of. This kicks off major social upheaval.

2. The IWW grows to become One Big Union in the sense that it is very large and includes a whole lot of workers, and this creates major social upheaval.

3. The IWW grows to become One Union Which Is Very Big, including a whole lot of workers. Other groups wage important fights as well. The IWW and other groups cooperate and have good relationships. This combination is One Big Union, metaphorically speaking, and makes for major social upheaval.

We can see different versions of the idea of One Big Union in each of these scenarios. In the first scenario the IWW literally becomes the One Big Union for all workers. In the second scenario the IWW becomes One Big Union that is really big, but that is not literally composed of all the workers.

The third scenario seems more likely to us than the other two. In this scenario, One Big Union means three different things. We somewhat jokingly call this "three big unions." One Big Union is the name for the IWW and expresses our commitment to revolution. One Big Union is also a metaphor for the working class as

a whole—that is, for millions of workers around the world, acting together in solidarity—in action against capitalism and for a better world. That's not an organization, really, though it is an organized class-wide process. One Big Union is also a metaphor for how the IWW should act within the working class. We should act in a way that is open to struggles outside our organization and we should wage our own organizing drives, trying to both support our fellow workers in their struggles and building our own struggles where we are—acting in a way that both builds organization and fights the capitalists.

A revolutionary situation in our day (or, within our lifetime) will involve millions of people in a complex ensemble across the class. No single organization will lead or control this. The working class can have more than one organization working on aspects of its interests. Given the divisions in our class, it's good to have multiple types of organization (such as unions of waged workers, committees of unemployed people and tenants' organizations), and multiple organizations of each

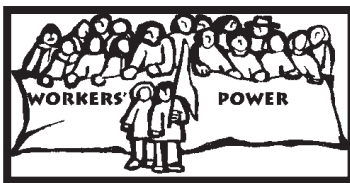
type. In all likelihood the IWW will be one working-class organization among many who make an important contribution to working-class revolution.

As the working class takes action in a revolutionary situation there will have to be different practices developed than those that the IWW practices, and different kinds of organization—including both formal organizations and informal organizations.

These issues open onto a few key questions which apply both to the "normal" operations of the capitalist system and to revolutionary situations that will develop. How can the IWW become an organization that exerts a strong and revolutionary pull within the working class? How should the IWW relate to other organizations and struggles of the working class? How should we relate to other revolutionary anti-capitalists now? How can our orientation to other struggles and organizations help or hurt the IWW and the historic mission of our class? In our view there was a good start to answering these in Alex Erikson's recent article "For A Union Of 10,000 Wobblies" in the June issue of the *Industrial Worker* and in Juan Conatz's "What Wobblies Can Learn From Direct Unionism" in the July/August issue. We don't have clear answers to these questions. We pose them as questions for discussion. The two of us have written as much on all this as we're currently able to say. We hope the principles and concepts we've sketched help contribute to a discussion of these questions of the direction of the IWW as a revolutionary union.

The IWW and the sorts of activities that the IWW currently carries out will not be the only things that go on during a revolutionary situation and are not the only things that will contribute to a revolutionary situation taking place. We have to do our part, but everything does not rest on our shoulders.

We believe the IWW will make a major contribution, however. The IWW will make a contribution by radicalizing workers, and by giving those radicalized workers skills, confidence, and relationships that they will use to contribute to the movement of our class as a whole. That's currently what we're doing and have done. We're helping to make more working-class revolutionaries. As we grow, we will periodically gather together and reassess our course in order to refine the specifics of how we contribute to the historic mission of our class. Completing that mission is not in the cards for the relatively near future. Getting the project onto the agenda as a real possibility is not the same thing as actually carrying out that project once and for all. Our tasks for now are preparing ways to get that mission onto the agenda in a real and winnable way.



# WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

## Chapter 47

## Call for General Strike

On the evening of November 22, 1909, Cooper Union hall in New York was filled to capacity with young immigrant women, many attending their first union meeting. Three garment shops were on strike, and the industry was seething with rebellion. On the podium were officers of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and various prominent guests, among them AFL Pres. Samuel Gompers. For two hours, speakers urged caution. Then a striker named Clara Lemlich rose, and asked for the floor.

## HISTORICAL HYSTERICAL WOMEN



Although only 20 years old, she was a founder of ILGWU Local 25 and already a veteran of two strikes. She was still recovering from a beating on the picket line. "I am a working girl," she said, "one of those who are on strike against intolerable conditions. I am tired of listening to speakers who talk in general terms. What we are here for is to decide whether we shall or shall not strike. I offer a resolution that a general strike be declared -- now!"

Work in the garment shops was seasonal. Workers were either pushed for up to 60 hours a week, or thrown out on the street without income of any kind. Most workers were employed by small shops, which constantly tried to bid down prices and wages. Workers were charged for the use of sewing machines, needle and thread, fined for coming in late or spoiling cloth. Most workers were young women, who were paid a pittance; men were either skilled workers of subcontractors.

The men ran the union. But the women, exploited and abused, were going to make history. The meeting voted unanimously to adopt Clara Lemlich's resolution. The general strike was on. (To be continued!)

Graphic: Mike Konopacki



## RECOMPOSITION BLOG

**NOTES FOR A NEW WORKERISM**

An informal blog of new and reposted material by IWW members. Recomposition includes Worker's Power columns, reflections and discussions related to our organizing and solidarity unionism as well as classics by Martin Glaberman, Stan Weir and others."

**RECOMPOSITIONBLOG.WORDPRESS.COM**

## Wobbly News Shorts

# What's Happening Across The U.S. & Around The IWW

By Adam W.

A new column with labor news highlights from across the U.S., and items of interest from the IWW.

## Global Resistance Accompanies Global Downturn

While many political leaders and economists promoted the idea of a soft recovery from the downturn that began in 2008—the worst since the 1930s—all signs point to a much longer and growing global downturn than previously predicted. For workers around the world this means continued high unemployment, stagnant or declining wages and major fights against austerity measures. Meanwhile, governments push to make workers pay for the crisis through cuts in services while protecting the profits of bosses and investors.

Figures released in an August economic report by the U.S. government showing flat job growth, together with the downgraded credit rating prompted by a manufactured federal government "debt crisis," caused stock markets in the United States, Europe and Japan to decline sharply. Numerous governments are proposing new waves of cuts to alleviate "investor fears,"—over increasing government debts. This has not gone without major responses however; in Italy the mainstream Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), as well as grassroots, or "base" unions, called a general strike on Sept. 6 against government proposals to attack worker rights and living standards. In Chile the main Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile (CUT) union federation, under major pressure from below, called a 48-hour general strike from Sept. 24-25 in solidarity with student protests around education cuts, as well as their own demands.

## Longshore Workers Block Grain Shipment

Acting in defiance of a court-imposed restraining order, hundreds of workers represented by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) gathered on the morning of Sept. 8 to block a grain shipment in Longview, Wash., leading to at least 19 arrests as pickets were cleared by police with clubs and pepper spray. Ports across Washington were reportedly shut down in response. The conflict stems from a consortium of three companies opening a new grain terminal using non-ILWU workers, in violation of a pre-existing contract with the port requiring this. The company has instead signed a contract the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE).

Read more at: <http://labornotes.org/2011/09/longshore-workers-dump-scab-grain-protect-jobs>.

## Egyptian Textile Workers Continue Struggle with Renewed Strike

After playing a key role in the uprising

leading to the downfall of former Egyptian President Mubarak, 22,000 workers at the Egypt Weaving and Textile Company in Mahallah City—the country's largest public sector textile factory—have announced that they will launch an open-ended strike on Sept. 10 (at press time) over demands to increase the minimum wage, release outstanding merit pay checks and increase government investment in the company to ensure adequate supplies for production.

## Workers Suffer as AFL-CIO's Trumka Pledges to Continue with Electoral Politics

Recently-released reports show new job creation at zero and unemployment holding at 9.1 percent, with 6 million of the 14 million unemployed out of work for longer than 27 weeks. Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., even though a large majority of the population favors addressing the deficit by taxing the very rich (72 percent), U.S. Congress and President Obama approved a deal to cut federal spending by \$1.5 trillion over the next 10 years. This is almost certain to result in future austerity measures, including spending cuts in health and social services that overwhelmingly target the working class.

In a recent interview, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka ascribes the mainstream labor movement's ever-declining lack of influence over electoral politics, despite the millions of dollars they pay in contributions to the Democratic Party: "In the past we've spent a significant amount of resources on candidates and party structures, and the day after election, workers were no stronger than they were the day before," said Trumka. Yet in the same interview, Trumka spoke of the President as "a friend" and in discussing lobbying efforts pledged to "do it 12 months a year." In contrast, the IWW continues to believe that workers have the most to gain by organizing from below on the job and in their communities, and does not support any political candidates or parties.

## Employers Required to Post on Right to Organize

The National Labor Relations Board has published a new rule requiring all private employers to post a notice informing workers of their right to organize a union, similar to required postings for federal wage and discrimination laws. The rule is set to take effect on Nov. 14. While potentially giving encouragement to workers to organize on the shop floor, what is not addressed in the ruling is that basic labor law is little enforced in the United States. A 2009 study by Human Rights Watch concluded:

*"U.S. labor law currently permits a wide range of employer conduct that interferes with worker organizing. Enforcement delays are endemic, regularly denying aggrieved workers their right to an 'effective remedy.' Sanctions*

*for illegal conduct are too feeble to adequately discourage employer law breaking."*

Read more on the ruling at: [http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/11871/nlrb\\_posting\\_rule\\_creates\\_a\\_stir/#.TlvmHyX\\_a0F](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/11871/nlrb_posting_rule_creates_a_stir/#.TlvmHyX_a0F). facebook.

## Whole Foods Resignation Letter: "Faux hippy Wal-Mart"

In late July, a Toronto Whole Foods employee made a splash when their resignation letter sent to the entire company went viral on the internet. The former worker accuses the earthy-chic grocery chain of being "a faux hippy Wal-Mart" with low pay and mistreatment. According to Gawker.com, the website that broke the story, the letter gives a "point-by-point evisceration of the grocery chain's carefully calibrated image as an earth-and-body-friendly, organic foods paradise."

Read more at: <http://gawker.com/5824287/read-a-disgruntled-whole-foods-employees-epic-resignation-letter>.

## Turning the Tide in the Public Sector Fight

Coming off the heels of the Wisconsin uprising, the Twin Cities IWW Work People's College hosted "Attacks on the Public Sector: What Will it Take to Turn the Tide?" The day-long forum on Aug. 13 began with a panel of public sector workers in health care, education, transit and human services speaking on the current conditions and possibilities for action. An IWW dual carder gave a presentation on the recent Canadian postal strike and their role in direct action training. Two Wobblies involved in the Wisconsin uprising also gave their reflections. An important theme of the event was the creation of independent rank-and-file networks within the existing unions that can combine grievance-based direct action with broader campaigns.

## Newly Chartered Atlanta GMB Brings Down the House

In the heart of the South, members of the recently-chartered Atlanta General Membership Branch (GMB) held a smash hit inaugural fundraiser with food, dancing, drinking, and singing into the night. Held at The Cut barbershop on July 30, the event raised close to \$300 with 60 attendees throughout the night.

"If we unite and stay conscious and fight together," said GMB delegate Mike Bell, "who can stop us? It's workers who have changed society for the better—common people—and no one else." The crowd



Photo: Atlanta IWW

Members of the Atlanta GMB celebrate their charter.

called back in agreement, joined hands, and sung in unison Ralph Chaplin's classic "Solidarity Forever." Also recently chartered include are the Mid-Ohio, Kansas City, and Richmond GMBs. Welcome Fellow Workers!

Read more: <http://www.iww.org/en/content/atlanta-gmb-celebrates-new-charter-0>.

## Ours to Master and to Own: A History of Workers Control

A new collection of writings—"Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present," edited by Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini—was recently published. The writings look at examples of the creation of democratic institutions of self-management without bosses from all over the globe and every period of modern history. Listen to an interview with one of the editors here: <http://www.againstthegrain.org/program/473/id/351239/wed-8-31-11-workers-control>.

## New Guide Created for Building Wobbly GMBs

Looking for advice on how to build up a fledgling GMB? Fellow Workers from the Twin Cities GMB put out a helpful guide covering topics such as types of branches, building a core group, recruiting and training, taking yourself seriously, keeping active, remaining stable and building a support base. Also recently posted is a short piece "Using social media to build the IWW."

Read more at: <http://www.facebook.com/notes/twin-cities-iww/how-to-start-a-new-iww-branch/263514467000416> and at: <http://www.facebook.com/notes/twin-cities-iww/using-social-media-to-build-the-iww/263521546999708>.

Would you like to see something exciting that your campaign or branch is doing written about in the IW? If so, email [iw@iww.org](mailto:iw@iww.org).

## Boston IWW Commemorates Local Wobbly Past

By Steve Kellerman

Members of the Boston branch of the IWW participated in the Sixth Annual Sacco and Vanzetti March held in Boston on Aug. 21, 84 years after Sacco and Vanzetti were executed on Aug. 23, 1927, on trumped-up murder charges. The program began on the Boston Common with music by the Leftist Marching Band and several participants delivering talks. Steve Kellerman spoke on behalf of the IWW about who Sacco and Vanzetti actually were and what their revolutionary anarchist movement preached and did, rather than the usual portrayal we get of them as only being victims of a frame-up driven by the ruling class. The band then led the crowd of about 120 participants on a spirited march through downtown Boston to a park near the North End of the city, where the Italian anarchists of

the 1910s regularly met and where the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee had its offices. There the crowd heard several other speakers, including a great-grandson of the chief prosecutor in the 1920 trial, who expressed remorse at his ancestor's role in the frame-up.

On Labor Day, Sept. 5, members of the branch traveled to Lawrence, Mass. for the annual Bread and Roses Festival, held to commemorate the great 1912 Lawrence textile strike—otherwise known as the "Bread and Roses Strike"—that was organized by the IWW. The event, which attracts thousands



Photo: Bob D'Attilio

FW Steve Kellerman speaks.

of participants, featured music, food, dramatic and dance recitals, talks on the history of the strike, celebrations of the several ethnic traditions that have enriched Lawrence, and tabling by various organizations, including the LaRouchites, who displayed a poster of Obama with a Hitler mustache. The Wobblies greeted many attendees at our table and sold more than \$500 worth of literature and merchandise. The centennial of the strike will be celebrated throughout the next year with a variety of programs which the IWW will participate in.

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## Special

# Wobblies Discuss Union's Progress & Plan Ahead:

By Diane Krauthamer

Once a year, Wobblies from across the globe converge in one city to report and reflect on the union's progress, debate and improve upon the union's internal structure and proceedings, develop goals and ideas for improving upon the union's commitment to fighting against all forms of oppression, and build stronger relationships amongst each other. This year, nearly 100 Wobblies from across North America gathered in Baltimore, Md., for a weekend of reporting, planning, amending, proposing, voting, networking, and singing at the annual IWW General Convention, from Sept. 3-5, 2011.

## Kicking off the 2011 Convention

Following a welcoming "meet 'n' greet" for delegates and other attending IWW officers and members on Friday night, the Convention kicked off the morning of Saturday, Sept. 3, inside St. John's Church—otherwise known as the 2640 Space—on St. Paul Street in Baltimore. After a brief breakfast of tea, coffee and bagels, Wobblies took their seats and General Secretary-Treasurer (GST) Joe Tessone officially called the 2011 General Convention to order at 9:08 a.m. Delegates representing their General Membership Branches (GMBs) appointed a Chair, Recording Secretary, and Timekeeper for the Temporary Session, after which the delegates elected a Credentials Committee and a Rules Committee. The Credentials Committee confirmed the list of delegates seated on the Convention floor, while the Rules Committee drafted and confirmed guidelines on the proceedings. After a brief meeting held by these two committees, delegates and IWW participants began the Permanent Session and elected the following officers for the Permanent Session: Ryan G. (Portland) as Chair; Jason Krpan (Chicago) and Diane Krauthamer (NYC) as Recording Secretaries; Cims Gillespie (Lane County) as Time Keeper; and Koala Largess (Baltimore) as Sergeant-at-Arms.

The permanent session began with a brief report from the two committees, and approval of the final agenda. A few slight alterations were made to the agenda and the delegates voted to adopt the Rules Committee's recommendations as set forth in the "IWW Manual of Policies and Procedures." Once the procedural formalities were taken care of, officers and representatives of the IWW's various elected bodies presented reports on past, current and future activities.

## Moving the Work Along

GST Joe Tessone started with a report from General Headquarters (GHQ). Though not verbally presented on the floor, FW Tessone eloquently opened his written report with the following:

"My second term as General Secretary-Treasurer is coming to an end. Holding international office in the IWW has truly been an amazing experience. Though trying at times, I am so proud and honored to have been given this opportunity of a lifetime."

FW Tessone spoke on the floor about the union's improved finances and membership, emphasizing that the IWW has more than doubled its treasury since 2010. While some of the improvements stem from GHQ's switch to a new database in 2010, which has allowed for more efficiency when promoting and developing organizing and outreach opportunities, FW Tessone commented that he was not able to fully implement an online reporting system. This system will give GHQ the



Wobblies pose in front of the 2640 Space in Baltimore.

Photo: IWW

tools to handle a larger membership as it will provide the tools to more efficiently contact new members who sign up online, thereby improving growth and ultimately aiding in promoting and developing organizing and outreach opportunities for the union as a whole. This, he said, will be one of the larger challenges facing the incoming GST in 2012.

While there are many improvements in the works, FW Tessone pointed out that GHQ still needs to build its infrastructure in Chicago. He encouraged all Wobblies who are interested to consider volunteering at GHQ. "GHQ can operate with its minimal paid and volunteer staff, but it can do a whole lot more with extra hands and a constant flow of fresh ideas," he reported.

Next was the International Solidarity Commission (ISC) report, in which ISC Chair D.M. Kloker discussed yet another productive year of building worker-to-worker solidarity that can lead to effective action against the bosses of the world.



The 2011 GEB reports.

Photo: IWW

This year, he said, the ISC focused on three main areas of organizing. The first was reaching out to IWW members in countries without Regional Organizing Committees (ROCs), such as in South Africa, which is on course to have a Cape Town GMB. The second was the ISC's commitment to starting a liaison program so that GMBs could be more engaged with the ISC, paving the way for the ISC to become a more democratically functioning body. The third main area of focus was responding to calls for solidarity from other organizations throughout the world. While it is important for the ISC to respond to these calls, he commented, it's equally important for Wobblies who plan to travel abroad to contact the ISC beforehand to help them meet with IWW members or other labor activists and groups in those countries.

Following the ISC report was a lunch break, with food generously arranged and cooked by Fellow Workers Kate Khatib and Lanie Thomas of the Red Emma's collective. Red Emma's generously provided all of the meals and an assortment of healthy snacks for delegates throughout the proceedings, and there was certainly no shortage of tea, coffee, water, fresh fruit, and crackers served with cubes of cheese. Additionally, childcare was provided throughout the weekend by Kidz City Baltimore, a volunteer anarcho-feminist collective.

The General Executive Board (GEB) was next to present its report. GEB Chair Jason Krpan briefly introduced the six Board members: Koala Largess, Ryan G., John Slavin, John Reimann, Greg

Giorgio, and Ildi Sipos (who could not attend), and gave an overview of their role in "dang near every affair of the union," as FW Krpan described it. He went on to speak more generally of the GEB's work in helping to establish the Canadian Regional Organizing Committee (CanROC) and the Britain and Ireland Regional Administration (BIRA), and emphasized the union's continuing growth, announcing that four new GMBs were chartered this year: Atlanta, Richmond, Greater Kansas City and Mid-Ohio.

Fellow Workers Krpan and Ryan G. briefly summarized budgetary changes and other financial and legal issues, following which FW John Reimann reported on his activities liaising with branches outside of the United States, including his recent trip to Egypt. FWs Koala and Ryan G. commented on the GEB's commitment to reaching out to Wobblies across regions, pointing out that while a lot of their focus as a body is on regions, the focus of organizing should be happening across industrial lines. At the conclusion of their report, Wobblies seated on the Convention floor gave the GEB a thunderous applause for their hard work and virtually thankless dedication to the union.

FW Ryan G. presented on the Organizing Department Board (ODB) report, written by ODB Chair Matt Jones. He briefly summarized the ODB's role and purpose to coordinate organizing activity between branches and groups, be in contact with organizers from major campaigns and with members from branches, and build structures that aid in industrial organizing. One of the primary focuses of the ODB was the 2010 Organizing Summit held in Los Angeles, where Wobblies held extensive discussion and trainings. This summit brought together over 40 Wobblies from

around the United States and Canada to discuss organizing strategy and coordinate between campaigns. The ODB was also involved in coordinating with the Starbucks Workers Union, the Jimmy Johns Workers Union, and the Construction Workers Organizing Committee.

Fellow Workers Wren Monokian and Eric Zenke enthusiastically reported the achievements of the Literature Department (Lit. Dept.) throughout the past year, and what they have *in store* for the coming year. FW Zenke gave an overview of the Lit. Dept.'s increase in sales, and their hopes that putting the *Industrial Worker* on the Lit. Dept.'s books will benefit the union's finances as a whole. Additionally, the Lit. Dept. established a General Defense Committee (GDC) store, in which anyone can purchase books and literature and have these items sent directly to political prisoners. The Lit. Dept. also worked this year to coordinate fundraising to the Madison GMB in helping along their work with organizing to retain collective bargaining rights and other such issues. Additionally, the Lit. Dept. established a new website, <http://store.iww.org>, which FWs Monokian and Zenke said would aid significantly in promoting sales. They responded to questions and highlighted future goals of focusing on fundraising for organizing campaigns, as they did with the Madison GMB. FW Zenke said the Lit. Dept. will continue to sell merchandise from all of the active IWW campaigns, and they are looking forward to another year of helping the work along.

FWs Joe Tessone and Joseph Sanchez were next up to present a brief Audit Committee report. As stated in their report, the Audit Committee's role is "to make sure that operations at Headquarters were proceeding in a democratic and transparent way and that our membership was being served well by our Administration." Overall, the committee found significant improvements in bookkeeping this year. FW Sanchez gave a brief summary of what appeared in the full report, highlighting a significant amount of money gained from the Freight Truckers Organizing Committee and other such campaigns, and fielded questions. FWs Tessone and Sanchez said the committee was able to assess GHQ's expenditures, at times make recommendations on what money should and should not be spent on, and provide some overall suggestions on accounting practices.

The newly-formed Gender Issues Committee (GIC) was next in line to present. A committee formed at the 2010 General Convention, the GIC was mandated to "draft a union-wide harassment and anti-discrimination policy to be brought to referendum as soon as possible, and

Continued on next page

## Workers Win Big At New York Restaurant Supplier

Continued from 1

In a previous companion agreement, Pur Pac acknowledged that it was the successor to two predecessor companies, E-Z Supply Corp. and Sunrise Plus Corp., and has recognized the IWW as the exclusive collective bargaining agent of Pur Pac employees.

"Every New Yorker depends on workers like the ones at Pur Pac for the food we all need to survive and thrive," said Daniel Gross, Executive Director of Brandworkers and long-time Wobbly. "But for far too long, the city's food processing and distribution employees have constituted an invisible workforce, out-of-sight and out-of-mind. The conditions in the sector are deplorable and systemic but, as the Pur Pac workers have shown, positive workplace change can and will be won. Today, we're savoring the workers' hard-earned victory and could not be more proud to be associated with this march toward justice."

Pur Pac, through successor companies, engaged in massive wage theft against its Latino and Chinese employees and fired

them illegally when they asserted their rights. By engaging in two sham sales and re-branding efforts, the company attempted to evade liability even after losing cases in federal court and at the National Labor Relations Board. The victory is the largest yet for Focus on the Food Chain, which prevailed last year in a high-profile workplace justice campaign at a seafood processing facility in Queens.

Pur Pac, based in Ridgewood, Queens, is part of a corridor of food factories that starts in East Williamsburg and Bushwick in Brooklyn, and extend into Ridgewood and Maspeth in Queens. Wage theft, retaliation, discrimination and reckless disregard for worker health and safety are endemic in the sector. Earlier this year, the corridor claimed the life of Juan Baten, a Guatemalan immigrant who was crushed to death at the tortilla factory where he worked. The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) found that Baten's death would have been prevented if the employer had not disregarded basic safety precautions.

# Special A Report From The 2011 IWW General Convention

**Continued from previous page**  
develop proposals to the membership to increase the gender diversity in the union." The report, written by GIC Chair Monika Vykoukal and presented by FW Stephanie Basile, briefly summarized the role of the committee in both developing an anti-harassment policy which incorporates conflict mediation, immediate relief and a confidentiality clause; and focusing on increasing gender diversity in the union. Though they had not formed a specific resolution for increasing gender diversity, the GIC presented many ideas on how to increase diversity, including advertising the Charlie Sato Memorial Fund, which was established in memory of Fellow Worker Charlie Sato to help women Wobblies attend important meetings, such as the annual Convention, by contributing to their travel costs. The GIC has also been working with the Literature Department to sell more gender issues-related merchandise. The GIC presenters concluded the report by inviting other Fellow Workers, especially for male-bodied individuals, to join.

Fellow Workers Steve Ayers and X360056 reported on the General Defense Committee's (GDC) recent work. The two Wobblies defined the GDC's general activities as having the aim of raising money for the legal defense of political prisoners and those who are under attack for IWW-related activities, and summarized that the GDC has a total of 95 members. In Chicago, the GDC started a local newspaper, and in the Twin Cities local, they created a training program project. Additionally, in Ottawa where the GDC has had a local for a longer period of time, the local gets support from the community for its work.

The IWW.org Administrative Committee (IAC) followed with a report on the status of the union's website. FW Steve Ayers discussed the technicalities involved in re-designing the main website and launching <http://store.iww.org> and <http://wiki.iww.org>. He discussed the significant updates on the main website, which is a work in progress that continues to grow. FW Ayers also announced a new website project in the works, <http://www.industrialworker.org>, which will be the news-oriented site, while <http://www.iww.org> will be focused on organizing. He concluded the report by thanking FW Steve Ongerth (who was not

in attendance) for his hard work and more than 10 years of dedication in developing and administering the IWW website. Convention attendees gave FW Ongerth a round of applause.

Next up was the *Industrial Worker* report, which I presented. In 2011, the *IW* has grown significantly, with some 1,200 subscribers and 3,000 issues distributed worldwide, as well as a steady increase in overall income. Some of the more prominent stories this year included the ongoing struggles of Jimmy John's workers in the Midwest and Starbucks workers in South America and Europe; the IWW's role in fighting back against anti-union legislation in Wisconsin and throughout the United States; and news that promoted international diversity and solidarity. New features to the newspaper this year included the "Industrial Worker Book Review" and "Wobbly News Shorts," as well as pieces from the Committee for Industrial Laughification, such as the re-animation of long-time Wobbly naysayer Mr. Block. The editor thanked all the hard-working volunteers and contributors who make the paper possible and fielded questions.

Last but not least was the Finance Committee report. FW Jason Krpan delivered the report on behalf of Finance Committee members MK, Adam W. and Jerry Chernow. FW Krpan explained the committee is charged with advising the GEB and GST on financial matters and helping to draft a new budget each year. Essentially, their work is to ensure that the union is sticking to its budgetary goals.

The reports concluded, and as there were no inactive committees to decommission, the delegates voted to take a short break, and, running ahead of schedule, decided to jump to voting on the first agenda item scheduled for Sunday morning. This proposed amendment to the IWW Constitution, which begins with the line: "The General Convention of the IWW shall not remain in session over 10 days," was discussed, amended, and approved, and the session adjourned for the night so del-

egates could grab some dinner and head straight to Liam and Jessica's Ale House for an evening of punk rock karaoke.

At the event, held at a bar filled with IWW regalia and owned by former Baltimore GMB member Liam Flynn, Wobblies showcased their singing talents throughout the night with renditions of popular songs by The Clash, Le Tigre, Johnny Cash, NOFX, Crass, and others. In a spirited night of song, dance, jokes and discussion, a few dozen Wobblies reminisced on a successful first day at the Convention, and discussed the proposals and concerns for the coming two days.

## Back to Business

On Sunday morning, Sept. 4, delegates and attending members gathered for a vegetarian-friendly brunch at Red Emma's, which is not only a collectively run anarchist bookstore and café, but is also a "Wob shop" as part of Industrial Union 660. During brunch, FW Kenneth Miller recognized and congratulated IWW translators who were commissioned by the GEB to translate pertinent IWW materials, and heard a report from the organizing work in Madison, delivered by FW Russ Faulkner. After brunch, all of the Fellow Workers carpooled back to the 2640 Space, and Convention Chair Ryan G. called the meeting back to order.

Throughout the sessions on Sunday and Monday, the delegates discussed, amended and voted on 10 constitutional amendments and 8 resolutions. Branch delegates discussed pieces of each section, recommended amendments, and debated for hours until the proposed amendments and resolutions either carried or failed. Of particular significance this year was passage of the long-awaited and much anticipated anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies. While the specific language to be included in the Constitution and Bylaws were amended and debated for nearly five hours, attendees said it was worth the time and energy to form a concrete policy that will more effectively address such urgent issues that have, unfortunately, not taken such urgent priority



Delegates sing "Solidarity Forever." Photo: IWW

for the union until now. While the final proposals will still have to be voted on by the membership during the General Referendum in the fall, members of the GIC and others present in the room expressed joy and relief at having pushed the policy this far ahead.

After the last of the resolutions were voted on early Monday afternoon, it was time for everyone's favorite part of the Convention: nominations. During this time, Fellow Workers made nominations for next year's GST, GEB, ODB, ISC, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, Chair of the Gender Issues Committee, Central Secretary-Treasurer (CST) of the GDC, and 2012 Convention Sites. Some of the nominations for next year's Convention include Portland, Ore.; Boston, Mass.; Gainesville, Fla.; and Cape Town, South Africa.

## Good and Welfare

As was the case throughout the weekend, the Convention was ahead of schedule, and by 4:00 p.m. on Monday it was time for "Good & Welfare"—a time traditionally set aside at IWW meetings in which attendees make announcements for upcoming campaigns, events and actions, and provide compliments or critiques to the body regarding various aspects of the Convention as a whole. At this time, Fellow Workers expressed a profound appreciation of the Baltimore GMB for all the hard work that less than a dozen volunteers put in to make the Convention a success. Delegates were also commended for passing the GIC anti-harassment and anti-discrimination proposals, and many emphasized the importance of continuing such discussions on anti-oppression work as the IWW moves forward.

As per tradition at each year's general meeting, the weekend drew to a close late on Monday afternoon with a spirited singing of Ralph Chaplin's "Solidarity Forever," our longtime anthem. Wobblies used their copies of the recently published "Very Little Red Songbook," and sang in a circle with their fists raised and heads up high. The 2011 IWW General Convention was adjourned at 4:27 p.m., and Wobblies left the floor inspired by our union's renewed spirit in moving forward and hopeful for the year to come.

*Convention Co-Recording Secretary Jason Krpan contributed to this report.*

## Sandwich Shop Workers Organize

**Continued from 1**

The DM worked our store the next day. During her shift it came to her attention that Charlie and I were never given a *new worker orientation*. In other words, we were never made to sign the rulebook. We were pulled off the line and read the employee handbook word for word and with particular emphasis placed on the reasons we could be fired. Stunned by the audacity of this move, we just went back to work and did not have time to discuss it until after our shift.

The next weekend, the CM pulled Charlie and I aside and yelled at us. I was told that if I ever ate more than my allotted shift meal she would tell the DM and I could be fired. I explained that what she saw me eating was a sandwich that a customer had returned and we were going to throw it away. She became even more aggressive and said that all food that is returned by customers should be thrown away and we are not allowed to eat it anymore, adding that we needed to stop being "insubordinate."

That same weekend, we were informed that we were no longer able to take breaks, even during shifts that lasted up to nine hours. After a little research we discovered that there is no such thing as a federal law mandating breaks. Break laws are left up to the states. Missouri and Kansas have no laws mandating breaks. Taking away our breaks was an inhumane move to assert more power and gain labor product per

hour, though this was the push some of our fellow workers needed to get involved. Seeing direct action as our only option aside from quitting, we decided to write a demand letter and do a march on the boss to serve the letter.

We met and brainstormed ideas, drafted the letter out and set the date for the march. In the two weeks leading up to it, we continued to plan out how the march should take place, reasoned through the possible responses from management, and continued to organize at our store.

The Saturday before our march, I was involved in a car accident on my way to work. After crawling out of the car, I found my phone was dead and my girlfriend (the driver) was taken away in an ambulance. An hour and a half later, I got to the hospital and called work to tell them what happened and that I would be in later, since I was not badly injured. Two hours later when I arrived, the CM pulled me aside and asked about my Workers Release Form. I responded with confusion because I have never heard of this form before. We went back and forth for a while about this new policy as the CM became more and more aggressive and persistent about me clocking out and going home since I did not have a form saying I was able to work. The other workers said that they have never heard of this policy either. After the CM screamed at me to leave, and then walked off, there was not much more I could do, so I walked home.

Distraught from the harassment, but seeing no other options, we continued with our plans, and the day of our march on the boss finally arrived. There were three workers on the floor before the store opened, and as I and another worker got to the lobby of the mall, the workers who were already inside asked for a meeting. The other worker and I followed; we surrounded the store manager and gave him a copy of our demand letter, then took turns reading every part to him. He responded by telling us he was sorry and that we would get our breaks back and start getting the respect we deserve. He also says that our other demands require approval from management higher up than himself. We took this meeting with a grain of salt and waited to see how things would turn out.

We got our breaks back and the harassment stopped for the next couple of days. The following Thursday, the store manager quit and walked out, which forced the DM to come into our store for a closing shift with us. She cornered one of the workers and asked for an individual meeting to discuss the demand letter. We knew this was coming as another worker who had helped in the march was cornered and pressured into an individual meeting with the DM earlier in the week. Wanting a group meeting with her and refusing to meet alone, we attempted to explain to her that these are not individual problems and that the letter was not written alone so only a group meeting is appropriate. Not

surprisingly she refused to listen to us or give us a group meeting.

Seeing escalation as our only next step, we wrote a customer letter and had members from our GMB hand them out at the mall in front of our store beginning the next day, lasting all weekend, and continuing sporadically after that. Also, we wrote a newsletter for the workers at the other locations to inform them of our progress, and we are continually handing them out at the other stores. We are currently focusing on organizing the other stores and making plans to escalate our expression of displeasure over the DM's refusal to meet with us as a group. In hindsight we can see some mistakes, such as not organizing across the stores sooner, but we are learning invaluable lessons along the way and are striving to push this campaign as far as we can take it.

Our demands are simple and reasonable. We are demanding the hiring of new employees to replace the ones who have left; a yearly review and raise process; proper training for our tasks; guaranteed breaks; respect; and finally to have all rules given to us in writing before we are expected to follow them. We still need a group meeting with our DM so we can move forward. If you would like to help, please contact us at [greaterkiww@gmail.com](mailto:greaterkiww@gmail.com). This is not a public campaign yet so we still have to be a little careful but we do have plans for our next step and would appreciate your support!

## Special

## Reflections On The 2011 General Convention

By Ryan G.

## IWW General Executive Board

I had the great pleasure of attending this year's IWW General Convention. There is something exciting about getting together with so many IWW members, to debate the issues facing our organization and the labor movement, and generally putting faces to names that we normally only see through email.

This was the fifth IWW General Assembly/Convention that I've attended in my 10 years as a member. I think my initial experience with these gatherings generally mirrors that of most members: at first, complete bewilderment at the meeting process and volatile personalities, then, subsequently, a growing appreciation for the great democratic experiment that we are participating in. Despite the growing pains one might feel, it is very refreshing to see so many IWW members taking ownership of the General Convention, particularly younger people who are active in organizing at their workplaces.

## A Brief History of the General Convention

The Convention is the annual opportunity for our members to propose amendments to the IWW Constitution, debate resolutions which signify union policy or general political sentiment, and to make nominations for the General Administration in the coming year. However, the way the Convention operates is still very new to the current generation of IWW members, having only voted as an organization to adopt the model in 2008.

Prior to that year, our annual constitutional convention was called the General Assembly. In this format, which was utilized for the last several decades, voting privileges in the proceedings were based on "one member, one vote." This model seemed to work well during this period, as the union was only comprised of 200-500 members internationally, at most.

The IWW began to grow exponentially beginning in the late 1990s. This period signified the union's transition from a grouping of labor militants seeking mainly to keep the IWW's name and ideals alive in the movement, into a blossoming of younger members who took those ideals and began actually applying them to workplace organizing. Coupled with this new wave of IWW workplace organizing came the growth of IWW membership beyond the United States, particularly in Canada and Europe.

Suddenly, the union was expanding both in numbers and in geographical representation. This organizational development posed new challenges for the General Assembly system. It became apparent that the greater mass of votes required to pass a resolution or proposal was largely influenced by the regional location of the meeting. For example, if the Assembly was held in a large city, the host branch and/or neighboring branches would constitute the largest majority of attendees. With the "one member, one vote" system, branches from locations further away had difficulty making their voice and vote heard on an equal footing, as typically only one or two members could afford to make the journey.

Unfortunately, there were a few instances where this imbalance was exploited by members seeking to "control" the outcome of voting by the Assembly. I remember one General Assembly in particular that I attended. During the debates on various proposals, several dozen or so members went outside the hall for a break. On several occasions, during critical votes, somebody would run outside and quickly herd them back into the building just prior to the main motion decision. These individuals could easily be heard instructing these members, "Vote yes! Vote yes!" which they would then do, not having any idea in some cases what it was they were voting on. Simply by their numbers, members were able to "pack the vote" and

control the motion.

As the IWW was developing internationally, and after experiences such as the one previously mentioned, it became clear to many in the union that we were quickly outgrowing the General Assembly system. The idea began to emerge that a more representative model was necessary in order to enfranchise branches who would need to send members over greater geographical distances in order to participate. Again, the critical element of this was that branches should have equitable representation regardless of the distance between their home cities and the location of the Assembly (which alternated from year to year, mainly in the United States).

Out of this necessity, the General Convention system was developed and approved by the IWW membership in the 2008 General Referendum. The Convention model establishes voting rights to branches based upon the number of members they retain in good standing. A branch with 10 to 29 members is allotted one delegate; branches with 33 to 59 members have two delegates; branches with 60-89 members have three delegates, and so on. While IWW members are allowed to attend the Convention and have voice in the debates, only delegates elected by a chartered IWW branch are allowed to vote.

This structural change has produced a refreshing balance of representation between the IWW branches in attendance at our annual constitutional conventions. Branches are able to discuss the proposed constitutional amendments in advance, and instruct their delegate(s) on how to vote at the Convention. Additionally, a branch can fundraise to help with the costs of sending their delegate(s) to the proceedings, which helps ensure that members with limited financial means are given the opportunity to participate in the democratic process. In this way, there is much more of an incentive for branches located several thousand miles away to send a delegate to the Convention, as there is a proportionate balance of voting ability based upon the number of members in a branch, and not their geographical proximity.

Significantly, all proposed amendments to the IWW Constitution approved by delegates at the General Convention must ultimately be ratified by the membership in a referendum. In this way, the greater decision-making power in the union rests directly with the membership at large.

## Critical Observations of the 2011 General Convention

This was the second year in a row that I served as the Chairperson for the General Convention. Both occasions have been extremely valuable learning experiences for me, not only in the practice of chairing a large meeting, but also in learning about the various viewpoints, strengths and weaknesses of branches throughout the union. As Chair, you have a different perspective on the Convention because you must remain neutral during the entirety of the proceedings while paying sharp attention to the orders of business and the status of various proposals and resolutions.

While it is clear that the General Convention system is an improvement from the old General Assemblies for the previously mentioned reasons, there is also a need to be critical of the event in order to continue refining our democratic and cultural standards.

## Convention Logistics

A great deal of recognition is due to the members of the Baltimore GMB for the

outstanding work they put in to managing the technical aspects of the Convention. Hosting this event is not an easy undertaking, even for a branch with a large number of members. When hosting the Convention, you have approximately 70-90 people coming to your city who need to be fed, housed, entertained, and otherwise accommodated for. The Baltimore GMB met this challenge with grace and style.

The stone masonry, stained-glass, and steeple ceilings of 2640 Space provided great ambiance and ample room for all attendees. One mixed blessing was that it was very difficult to hear fellow work-



Delegates at the Convention floor. Photo: IWW

ers speaking from a distance in the meeting area, so each speaker had to use the microphone when addressing the Convention. While this slowed down the pace of discussion, it also limited the frequency of impulsive commentary as members had to stand or leave their chairs in order to be heard.

Paid childcare was provided throughout the entirety of the Convention in a designated room adjacent to the meeting area. There were two children present throughout most of the weekend, one of whom is the young baby of our newest Literature Department staff person at GHQ. It was excellent to see how serious the Baltimore branch was about providing quality childcare for the weekend, and I am encouraged by how the IWW seems to take this responsibility seriously more and more every year.

For the second year in a row, the Convention's Recording Secretaries made use of a video projector while delegates were amending proposals and resolutions. This enabled attendees to view the progress of language changes to these items in real time, minimizing the confusion that settles in when voting on amendments.

## Meeting Procedure Decorum

With the old General Assembly system, the merits of various proposals and resolutions were often intensely debated by members in attendance. With the Convention system, however, the necessity for most of this debate is limited, as delegates in attendance should be carrying votes based upon how their home branch has instructed them to act. It was clear that several delegations at the Convention were doing this, approaching the microphone with written amendments to proposals.

However, it was also evident (from the observations of the Chair) that several delegates were making amendments to motions on the fly. Small changes to proposals can be made in this way, as delegates are empowered by their branch to vote based upon general sentiments expressed through their local membership. I did notice, unfortunately, that some delegates were proposing substantial changes in a spontaneous fashion. These proposed amendments seemed to be born of individual prerogative.

By and large, IWW delegates and members present took the Convention very seriously, and there was a good atmosphere of mutual respect, even when viewpoints varied widely. There were several occasions, during particularly contentious proposals, when non-delegate members began to "circle" the seated delegates. These members were very vocal in their opposition/support, and began standing around the periphery of delegates. From my point of view, this created a somewhat intimidating environment, particularly when these members began speaking out of turn. Better efforts need to be made in the future to keep elected delegates in a separate seating area, while still providing

a space and opportunity for members-at-large to voice their opinions.

As usual, the first day of Convention was almost completely comprised of reports from the General Administration and various committee Chairpersons. While this chance for direct questioning of our union officers is vital to our organization, it can often be dull. Members who report at Convention should be ready to speak dynamically and to engage delegates directly so that this Q&A period can be productive and captivating.

## Culture and Representation

Earlier in the year, the union's Gender Issues Committee made a request that all branches prioritize gender equity when electing their delegates to the General Convention. Most branches represented seemed to have taken this call seriously and there was a marked improvement in gender balance during the weekend, with many women taking opportunities to offer arguments and proposals on the Convention floor. However, the large majority of amendments and comments were often vocalized by men, particularly those coming from the non-delegate members in attendance. Furthermore, the vast majority of delegates in attendance were white, indicating that we still have a long way to go when it comes to empowering minorities in the union.

The Baltimore branch did a great job providing social events during the evenings after the Convention had closed for the day. Punk rock karaoke may well become a Convention staple for years to come. These social events were exclusively hosted at a local favorite bar. This unfortunately has the unintended effect of limiting inclusion for our members, particularly those who are underage or may not feel comfortable in an environment dominated by alcohol. Subsequent branches who host the Convention should keep this in mind. More inclusive social gatherings after a day's work should be planned, such as a BBQ at a park or a banquet dinner.

It's important for more long-term members to remember that our system of conducting the General Convention can be alienating and confusing to newer members. Much of this is related to the reliance on Robert's Rules of Order to conduct business, but a lot of it has to do with the myriad of acronyms and back stories that present themselves as matter-of-fact realities amongst seasoned members. One fellow worker suggested that we should host a Convention "orientation" the day before things get under way, as a means to acclimate first-time attendees to our meeting procedures.

## Conclusions

By and large, I was very impressed with the level of debate and participation at the Convention. We ended each day ahead of schedule, certainly a first at an annual IWW gathering that can sometimes extend to midnight. It is evident that the union is growing, and delegates took their job seriously by arriving promptly before Call to Order (mostly).

We all know what needs to change in order to make the Convention more representative of our collective voice: increased gender and racial equity, demystification of meeting procedures and emphasis on the ability to "agree to disagree." We will get there through continuing to do IWW work, organizing in workplaces and taking the time to educate new members. There are very few unions in the United States that have constitutional conventions where the rank and file are allowed to participate, and just as few that enable their members to vote on structural changes directly, via referendum. Let's cherish this commitment to democracy in the IWW and continually strive to make it better.

Comments or questions on this article can be forwarded to the author via the IWW Editor at [iw@iww.org](mailto:iw@iww.org).



## Analysis

## What Wobblies Can Learn From “Direct Unionism,” Part 2

By Juan Conatz

On page 7 of the July/August *Industrial Worker*, I reviewed a pamphlet called “Direct Unionism: A Discussion Paper” in a piece titled “What Wobblies Can Learn From ‘Direct Unionism.’” In this review I focused on how the pamphlet links the conception of direct unionism to the IWW’s Organizer 101 Training, and I gave examples, both historical and contemporary, of groups and organizations which practiced something similar to the conception outlined. Now I will get more in-depth about what the pamphlet says regarding contracts with employers. Before taking that up, it’s worth looking at the subject of contracts within the early IWW.

A common myth about our union is that “the IWW doesn’t negotiate contracts with employers.” This myth is addressed on the IWW website, which acknowledges that contracts were shunned in the early days and tries to explain the following:

*“This misconception results from the fact that during the early years of the IWW, union contracts had no legal force in the United States of America. In fact, union contracts did not become federally protected agreements until the passing of the National Labor Relations Act, or Wagner Act, in 1935. Prior to that, many union contracts were attempts by the employing class to limit economic direct action and class based solidarity by unions.”*

This is inaccurate. Contracts always include attempts to “limit economic direct action and class-based solidarity by unions.” A contract is a written agreement in which affected parties attempt to get what they want. By the nature of class struggle, employers want uninterrupted production. U.S. labor law hasn’t changed this. Later, the myths section of the website quotes former IWW General Secretary-Treasurer Fred Thompson saying, “Originally the IWW had put no restrictions, except requiring GEB approval.” However, labor historian Philip Foner describes that in 1912 a local in Montana had its charter revoked over signing a contract. The 1932 IWW Constitution states that all contracts required GEB approval, and also prohibited contracts that were for specified amounts of time or required notice from workers before making demands on wages, hours or shop conditions.

A 1920 pamphlet entitled “The IWW in the Lumber Industry” stated:

*“It is against the principles of the IWW to sign contracts with employers. When workers sign an agreement not to*

*strike, they sign away the only weapon they possess. Past experience has shown that employers only respect contracts so long as the workers have power to enforce them. When the workers have such power, contracts are unnecessary. When they lack power, contracts are useless, for the employers break them whenever it suits their purpose.”*

It’s safe to say that while the early IWW didn’t explicitly forbid contracts, it structured their acceptance in a way which would be difficult, seemingly seeing them as undesirable. Why this changed is outside the scope of this article, but it probably had a lot to do with the combination of declining numbers and new labor laws such as the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

While it is certainly interesting to take a look at the past and see how IWW members handled the question of contracts, it is now 2011, not 1911. We can learn from our past but we shouldn’t let the ghosts of the past determine what we do in the present, otherwise we’ll have no future.

**The IWW’s Uniqueness**

In a section called “What if workers ‘want’ a contract?” the “Direct Unionism” pamphlet mentions something significant:

*“We note here that in the countries where the IWW is most active—and especially in the United States—union density and active organizing has been on the wane for decades. Ironically, this opens up a space for IWW members to present our ideas of unionization to those who may have very little understanding of what a union is and how they are ‘supposed’ to function. In fact, in many instances, IWW organizers may inadvertently give the impetus to a contract campaign by presenting the differences between ‘us’ as the IWW and ‘them,’ the business unions. If IWW methods falter, workers then look to other, contractual, options.”*

This is mostly correct. The space opened up by declining union density means most workers will only be vaguely familiar with how a union operates, if at all. So we have a chance to do that defining, and operate in a somewhat ideal way. But

the reason the piece attributes contract campaigns being taken on (listing differences between us and the mainstream unions, workers wanting “stabilized” gains) is missing something. I think what happens just as much is that the IWW’s radical outlook is downplayed and it is “marketed” as basically a more militant version of an AFL-CIO union. The importance of the IWW Preamble gets minimized and the language of the mainstream labor movement is adopted. There are a variety of understandable reasons for this. Among them are a history of red-baiting in

the United States that can’t be paralleled anywhere else, a tendency for populism inherited from the left, and fear of alienating or scaring co-workers away. Another reason worth exploring is the quite conservative way mainstream unions act, which leads to those with experience in these unions looking at the IWW as appealing. The appeal is sometimes merely due to a desire for something more militant than the mainstream

unions, which covers a lot of ground, much of it not an area the IWW should be covering. Minimizing our anti-capitalist stance is something we shouldn’t try to do and in my opinion, it is a significant factor in why contract campaigns are chosen in some organizing committees.

We—the IWW—are a revolutionary, anti-capitalist union which advocates for the abolition of the wage system. We have different goals, and so we should have different methods. Ends and means are linked so it doesn’t make sense to mimic mainstream union tactics for our end goals. The “Direct Unionism” pamphlet states:

*“...by encouraging a non-contractual organizing strategy we are, in many ways, putting the building of class power before the protection of bread-and-butter gains.”*

This is important. We aren’t merely trying to improve our conditions; we are also trying to eliminate these conditions. If an organizing campaign wins higher wages but does not develop our co-workers skills and knowledge, we have failed, overall. We need both, and when we organize, we need to consider how what we do will determine both.

The pamphlet describes two shops

with campaigns. One won, but lost nearly all its committed organizers. The other lost but gained committed organizers. A win doesn’t necessarily mean that our capacity is increased. A loss doesn’t necessarily mean disillusion and people drifting away. It’s how the campaign is organized that determines these.

**Bad Things in Contracts**

So, coming from the point of view that the IWW is a revolutionary anti-capitalist union which should be building class power and developing our co-workers’ organizing skills and commitment, why would contractualism be counter-intuitive to these goals? In a section called “What are the pitfalls of contractualism?” the pamphlet lists a number of negative things employers almost always want in contracts, including: no-strike clauses, management rights clauses, and binding grievance procedures.

No union, much less a self-professed revolutionary one, should ever agree to a no-strike clause. It is basically a set of handcuffs that restricts our greatest power: the power to disrupt. Yet, this is one of the first things an employer wants in a contract. In fact, it is an already assumed and understood aspect of contract negotiations. “Management rights” is the same thing. It acknowledges the employer’s rights on the speed and pace of work and many other workplace issues. If there is a dispute on what these issues are, the way for addressing this (since strike or work stoppages are off the table) would then be “binding grievance procedures”—a disempowering process that leaves our issue in the hands of a steward and member of management. All three of these things, which are usually things every employer wants in the contracts, take away our power or individualize our issues, when we should be building our power and collectivizing our issues.

“Direct Unionism” purposefully brings up the question of what exactly the role of the IWW is. Are we just a militant, democratic union? Or are we a militant, democratic, revolutionary anti-capitalist union? And how do our campaigns, strategies, and decisions reflect this? We are small, no doubt about it. But we have always punched and continue to punch way above our weight. It is time we recognize this and the tactics that make this possible. Part of this is recognizing that contracts may be things that work against our goals, not towards them.



Graphic: IWW

## Counterpoint: Response To Juan Conatz’s Take On “Direct Unionism”

By Sean G.

In FW Conatz’s two pieces responding to “Direct Unionism: A Discussion Paper,” which appear in two parts—on page 7 of the July/August *IW*, and above—he gives an overall positive appraisal of the concept of “Direct Unionism.” I cannot. The starting point is the idea that contracts were unconstitutional in the IWW “until the 1930s,” which is technically not true. Though contracts were discouraged, they could be negotiated with GEB approval. In “Part 2” of his review, he corrects this error but rightly maintains that a general hostility and reluctance to negotiate contracts was pervasive during our heyday. The reason for eschewing contracts in our early period emanated from historical circumstances which have not survived to the present day. There was no federally recognized right to organize, which meant no barriers to contract violations by employers. We all know employers still violate contracts with impunity, but it is in no way comparable to the non-codified nature of industrial relations prevalent in 1905. The composition of our membership then would also be completely alien to us now. The bulk of Wobblies were the transient workers of the industrially underdeveloped West; migrants rarely

toiling consistently under one company or farmer. This too negated the role contracts could play.

In 2011, the IWW is a small union, filled with potential and only lacking the necessary connections to a wider working class to use it. How then can the IWW play a positive and transformative role in the class struggle today? One way is through vigorous organization on the part of dual-carders, one result of which would be opposition caucuses within the business unions and larger “cross-industry assemblies.” I do not disagree with this part of “Direct Unionism,” although I do reject framing this in a context of “de-emphasizing membership.” What I am opposed to is dropping contracts, or not pursuing them when they can realistically be achieved. We cannot simply present the working class with ideas in lieu of material gains in their economic status. To build the kind of “networks of militants” that “Direct Unionism” asks for, Wobblies need to fight on the ground for better working conditions, and among dual-carders this means agitating for better contracts. As quoted by Conatz, the pamphlet states: “...by encouraging a non-contractual organizing strategy we are... putting the building of class power before the protection of

bread-and-butter gains.” Yet, how can class power be felt by workers if material gains are not achieved? Power is relative; it only matters insofar as it can be used to claim something for itself. For the working class, our pre-revolutionary power IS bread and butter.

“Direct Unionism” states that the fight for union recognition is an activity best accomplished after a “critical mass of workers” understand, amongst other things, direct action. Do these fellow workers not understand that some of the most militant labor struggles in American history have centered on the fight for union recognition? This was one of the core demands of the 1934 general strikes.

In my branch, the San Francisco Bay Area GMB, we have three contracted shops. The workers there organize great on-the-job actions and meetings (what the “Direct Unionist” pamphlet gives the pathetic name of a “culture of resistance” to) without ever attending branch meetings or engaging in theoretical debates. They are simply not left activists. They are, like most workers, motivated by meat and potato issues instead of theories. This is not to disparage theory; I think theory is absolutely critical for action. Instead, I bring this up only to remind fellow workers

that ideas only matter to the extent that they correctly reflect historical experience and objective conditions. The material reality in the Bay Area is that if the branch decided not to renew the contracts, their working conditions would quickly deteriorate and our branch would shrink dramatically. This is the reality of the situation, and no theory can obscure that fact.

The IWW today is mainly organizing among the service sector, and moreover a segment that is mainly young part-timers. In these shops, the struggle for contracts may seem insignificant if only because they are not immediately attainable. Due to a small number of Wobblies organizing among a workforce of this nature, the emphasis has naturally been on informal solidarity unions. Yet it would be a mistake to apply what the IWW does from a position of relative weakness (let’s be honest) and make this a credo of our organizing (especially not the use of “Moral Pressure,” as the pamphlet argues). Under this model, the IWW would not only be unprepared for an unexpected struggle like Wisconsin, but also have no lasting structures to build upon after the contest breaks. For these reasons, I think the IWW should be very skeptical about the methods discussed in “Direct Unionism.”

## Industrial Worker Book Review

# Books Encourage Kids To Speak Out Against Injustice

Complete review online at <http://www.iwwbookreview.com>.

Meddaugh, Susan. *Perfectly Martha and Martha Blah-Blah*. New York: HMH Books, 2008 ("Perfectly Martha") and 1998 ("Martha Blah-Blah"). Paperback, 32 pages each, \$6.99 each.

## By Nate Hawthorne

My daughter will be two years old this summer. Having a child has meant I can't be involved in efforts for social justice in the way that I used to be. It has also meant that I've started to feel even more strongly about the terrible and widespread injustices in our society: my daughter has to grow up in this world. At this point my daughter is too small to have a meaningful conversation about justice and injustice. I think often about how I will talk with her in age-appropriate ways about these matters as she grows up. We read a lot together, so I end up reading quite a few children's books.

There's a certain quality that some kids' books have, where they provide a picture of certain social conditions in a very concise way. "Perfectly Martha" and "Martha Blah Blah" by Susan Meddaugh do this well. Meddaugh's illustrated books center around a dog named Martha. Martha eats alphabet soup every day. The letters go to her brain instead of her stomach, giving her the ability to speak in English. "Perfectly Martha" and "Martha Blah Blah" illustrate some core dynamics of capitalist society. In "Perfectly Martha," the owner of an obedience school uses microchips in dogs' collars to turn off all of the dogs' brains except for their "obedience lobes." This eliminates the dogs' troublesome habits of barking, running, chasing squirrels, and doing all types of

things other than simply obeying commands. Martha's speaking ability is part of who she is in the world, and part of her relationships with her family. If the obedience school had managed to put a chip on her, her ability to speak would have been lost, since it doesn't rest in the obedience lobe. The ability to communicate is closely linked to our ability to obey but, even more so, it is linked to our ability to disobey. Our ability to communicate means that we can receive orders and cooperate with others in carrying them out. Even moreso, however, our ability to communicate means we can engage in art and love and struggle—things opposed to the orders we're given.

In "Perfectly Martha," Martha finds her individuality and her ability to communicate threatened by a machine and an obedience school. In "Martha Blah Blah," Martha faces the same basic threat, but this time it comes from another source: the commodification of food. Martha needs alphabet soup in order to be able to speak. The alphabet soup company owner decides to fire half the employees at the soup factory and eliminate half of the letters. Downsizing and cutting corners on quality of materials are common dynamics in capitalism; in individual companies and in the economy and society more broadly. If needed goods and services are produced more cheaply and the price is lowered, sales can rise for the company and result in a competitive advantage. This can also work to the interests of other employers. If key goods get cheaper then wages can be lowered. Sometimes this happens through inflation, so that the numerical amount of money we get paid is the same but our wages buy less.

People have known since the early 1800s that more cheaply made food meant that workers could be paid lower wages.

In 1821 Charles Wentworth Dilke wrote that "however horrid and disgusting it may seem, the capitalist may eventually speculate on the food that requires the least labor to produce it, and eventually say to the laborer, 'You sha'n't eat bread, because barley meal is cheaper; you sha'n't eat meat,

because it is possible to subsist on beet root and potatoes.'" And to this point have we come! In "Martha Blah Blah" the fired workers take pride in their work and are not happy to lose their jobs. They are also angered at the degradation in the quality of the soup produced. The half-alphabet soup leaves Martha without the ability to say most words because she is unable to say half of the alphabet. Just as in "Perfectly Martha," Martha faces a threat to her basic ability to communicate and have relationships. This dynamic will be familiar to anyone who has seen relationships and families suffer because of the effects of work on life away from the job. When we leave work tired, stressed, and withdrawn, that is, when we find ourselves drained of qualities necessary for social interaction, it is harder to be fully present for our friends and loved ones.

Those that need to flourish are regularly treated by those in power as simply a means to make a profit. These are two different ends to economic activity: production directed toward capitalists' profits, and production toward meeting human needs and wants other than profits. In a



Graphics: houghtonmifflinbooks.com

capitalist society, perfection is obedience, obedience to the needs of capitalist profits, rather than the expansion of freedom and the meeting of human needs.

The competing dynamics between capitalist's profits and broader human needs are all over these books. They're depicted with a softness that is appropriate in a book for young children, but the books depict truths about our society, and they suggest—gently, obliquely, but nonetheless—that business owners shouldn't behave in ways that have such negative consequences for others. The message here is not that people should accommodate themselves to circumstances. It matters as well that Martha wins in the end. It's possible for underdogs to stand up to people in power and to win.

Some readers have likely by now thought to themselves, "It's just a kids' book." If so, I suggest to you that kids' books can and should speak to the world. Kids have to live in the world, after all. Kids, like all people, deserve literature that encourages them to speak, and to speak against those who prefer brains reduced simply to obedience lobes.

## Harrison's Dream Of Race Conscious Working-Class Power Comes Alive

Perry, Jeffrey B. *Hubert Harrison. The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. Paperback, 624 pages, \$26.50.

## By Peter Moore

Hubert Harrison was an internationalist, a socialist, an industrial unionist, an experimenter in thought and action and a master of public speaking. His influence stamped a generation of New Yorkers and beyond from all races.

Working-class historian Jeffrey Perry has done us a service in returning this radical prodigal son to the public consciousness. He will do so again in 2012 with part two of this expansive biography.

Hubert Harrison was an orphaned Caribbean immigrant from the Danish West Indies who arrived in a country wracked by race riots, lynching and class struggle. Throughout his life, he sought repeatedly to create a mass movement that would end the racism and oppression of workers and black people in the United States. He sought to do so through the Socialist Party, the Industrial Workers of the World, and ultimately, his own race-based organization, the Liberty League of Negro-Americans. Through his struggle, Perry depicts the weaknesses and failures of the Socialist Party and the American labor movement in general to challenge white supremacy and its offspring, lynching and economic exclusion.

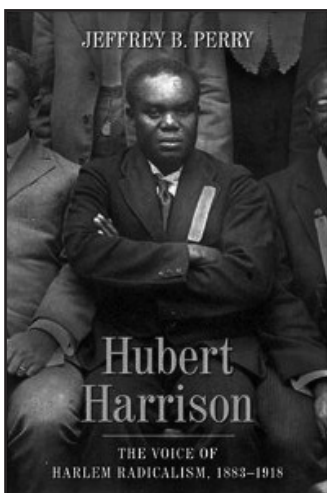
Perry demonstrates that not only is he a persistent researcher, but he is an honest one, too. Rather than attempt to simply

lionize the man, Perry details Harrison's faults and pretensions as well. He was a scoundrel with women and had a terrible time making and managing money. Perry even translates diary entries in Latin and French, which his wife did not speak. When he died from an illness, he was buried in an unmarked mass grave in New York, leaving behind a penniless widow with five children.

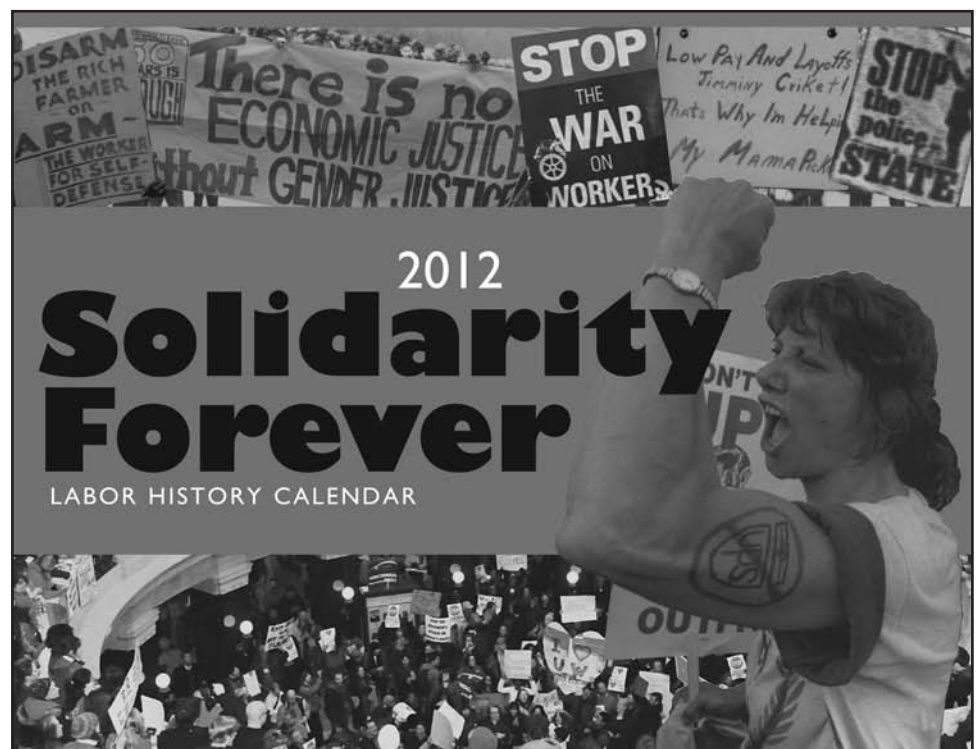
This book is a researcher's book, jammed with details about Harrison's life and the world in which he lived. Perry, as a historian, is well-aware that his book is the first tilling the fallow fields of Harrison's life. He quotes and paraphrases at length from Harrison's own articles, as well as articles about Harrison and at times, it is difficult to gauge the relative importance of the article being cited. As a result, he leaves clues and tangents for other researchers who want to follow in his footsteps. However, by doing so, Perry often sacrifices the narrative in order to include the many facts he has unearthed, resulting in a cluttered read that can overwhelm or confuse the reader.

Still, it is easy to see how Harrison has inspired Perry to dedicate 28 years toward writing his biography. Harrison was a visionary to rival Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Marcus Garvey and one with better horse sense than most.

Now if only a new generation could also be inspired by Harrison's dream of race conscious working-class power, then capitalism in the United States would receive the confrontation it so richly deserves.



Graphic: amazon.com



## 2012 IWW Labor History Calendar

Our annual revolutionary labor history calendar, published by the IWW Hungarian Literature Fund and IWW branches since 1985. This year's calendar benefits the new Greater Kansas City General Membership Branch, and features 14 striking photos — from the Winnipeg General Strike to the occupation of the Wisconsin state capitol; from Argentine workers protesting gun thugs to British miners battling police for the right to picket — and hundreds of notes marking important dates in the global struggle for industrial freedom. It concludes with extensive excerpts from Big Bill Haywood's classic speech on the General Strike, which recent events have proved is every bit as relevant as when the IWW was founded.

Ideal for tabling, workplace walls, and gifts. *Every wage slave needs one!*

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## Industrial Worker Book Interview

## Joe Burns: What The Labor Movement Needs

By John Maclean, *Industrial Worker*

The following interview was conducted with Joe Burns, author of the recently-published book *Reviving the Strike: How Working People Can Regain Power and Transform America* (Ig Publishing, 2011).

**Industrial Worker:** You follow James Begin and Edwin Beal, the authors of the textbook *The Practice of Collective Bargaining*, in contending that the “purpose of striking” is to deny access to a productive plant “until it is ransomed by a satisfactory settlement.” What do you think about the recent closing of the Minnesota state government, the Washington, D.C. debt ceiling theater, and settled attempts to “bleed” the pocketbooks of the working poor, elderly, and disabled, but not the bosses?

**Joe Burns:** Traditional labor economists understood that to be effective, union strike activity needed to impose economic pain upon employers. A strike which effectively halted production or a boycott which caused an employer’s business partners to cut off ties caused employers to feel pain during a strike.

Today, under a system of pro-employer labor laws and practices which I call the “system of labor control,” only workers feel pain during a strike. Tactics such as mass picketing, secondary strikes, and quickie strikes are not allowed precisely because they are effective at harming employers.

Likewise, in the context you speak about, in the government shutdowns or fake budget “crisis,” conservatives are not the ones feeling the pain. They don’t care if people don’t get government services. In fact they like it. The question for our movement is how to start causing the corporate elite to feel some of the pain. That means disrupting the only thing they care about—their ability to accumulate wealth off of the labor of workers. That is why we need an effective strike.

**IW:** You write that the outlawing of solidarity “began” with the National Labor Relations Act in 1935, became “explicit” with the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, and was “furthered along” by many [U.S.] Supreme

Court decisions. In the 1930s unions flourished “through solidarity,” and by the 1980s they were being wrecked by a lack of the same. Can you help people new to labor understand these legalistic intrusions into our right to free association?

**JB:** Solidarity is the heart and soul of trade unionism. Labor’s traditional tactics of solidarity allowed workers to join together across employers and even industries to confront employers together. The great strikes of labor history involved tens or hundreds of thousands of workers striking regional or national industries at once. Today, in contrast, unionists are often legally forced to strike one plant of a giant corporation.

Additionally, trade unionists were able to use powerful tactics of solidarity such as striking or boycotting business partners of struck firms. These solidarity tactics, which the legal system calls “secondary activity,” were so powerful [that] Congress outlawed them in the 1947 Taft Hartley Act. At a deeper level, the very structure of labor law encourages narrow collective bargaining. That makes it impossible to standardize wages within an industry and to maintain stable collective bargaining.

We can’t win without solidarity. It’s hard to see the revival of the labor movement taking place based on organizing and bargaining shop-by-shop. It will require taking on entire corporations and industries at once.

**IW:** You write that with fewer strikes, union membership has declined, and that there has been a failure to find alternatives to striking. Tell us about some of these failed alternatives, and the importance of building solidarity in struggle.

**JB:** Since the mid-1990s, trade unionists have attempted to revive trade unionism without a powerful strike. Our main

strategy has been to organize the unorganized either within or without the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). The strategy has not worked. Despite massive expenditures of resources (including over \$1.5 billion by the Service Employees International Union since 1995), the percent of private sector workers organized into unions has dropped from 10 percent in 1995 to about 7 percent today.

In “*Reviving the Strike*,” I argue the reason is our lack of tactics capable of improving workers’ lives. Lacking a powerful strike, trade unions are unable to win higher wages and benefits. Workers have shown zero interest in joining a weak and declining labor movement. Developing an effective strike should be the main focus of labor.

Instead, many trade unionists look further and further from the workplace and shop-floor struggle. So we see calls for social unionism centered on coalition building with non-profits, living wage campaigns, and even converting unions into mass protest vehicles divorced from the workplace. All good stuff, but what we need is a workplace-centered grassroots movement capable of interrupting the sale of human labor.

**IW:** In your book you write about the limited successes of “minority unionism” at Starbucks. Given the recently-terminated strike of independent Starbucks employees in Chile, what would you say to unionists organizing the coffee giant worldwide?

**JB:** The concepts of minority unionism and solidarity unionism are extremely important. A union is a group of workers and not an entity decreed by the government. The sort of non-bureaucratic, grassroots organizations being built by activists at Starbucks is what the labor movement

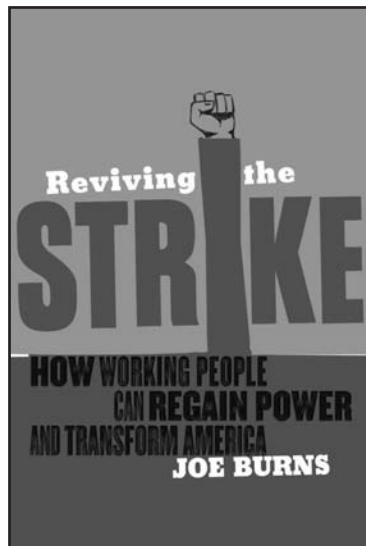
needs. The challenge for advocates of minority unionism, and for workers’ centers in general, is how take on powerful corporations. Building organization is only one piece of the puzzle.

Whether one advocates majority or minority unionism, the question is the same: how to build worker organizations capable of confronting capital and improving workers lives. Absent direct economic power, advocates of minority unionism are left with the same reliance on NLRB charges and elections. That was the question confronting activists at Jimmy John’s earlier this year when deciding whether to hold an NLRB election or engage in direct action.

**IW:** Finally, give us your sense of what needs to happen for labor to break free of the system of labor control in the United States. When you wrote about the things we could learn from the right in this country, I recalled William D. Haywood characterizing the founding convention of the IWW as a “continental congress of the working class” directed toward freeing it from the “slave bondage of capitalism.”

**JB:** We cannot have effective trade unionism without challenging capital’s control over the workplace, industry and the economy. An effective strike, one which stops production or disrupts the supply chain of an employer, by definition challenges the employers’ “right” to run “their” business. Underlying the system of labor control are a set of what law professor James Attleson calls pro-management “values and assumptions,” which in many ways are more important than individual case law. Challenging these ideas is critical to reviving trade unionism.

While radical unionists such as the IWW in the 1910s or the early CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] unionists of the 1930s certainly understood this, I argue many ideas of the relatively conservative American Federation of Labor also challenged capital more than the modern trade union movement. Mainstream labor ideas such as “human labor is not a commodity” and “labor creates all wealth” fueled militant strike activity.



Graphic: igpub.com

## Industrial Strength My Reading List

Complete column online at <http://www.iwwbookreview.com>.

By Eric Miles Williamson

I’m known as a construction worker who became a novelist and college professor, and because of this I regularly get email from people who are not in a position to leave careers and go back to college but want to read great books.

During finals week in my last semester of undergraduate school, I did one of the few smart things I’ve ever done. I roamed

the university walking into the various buildings, finding the offices of the professors. Anthropology professors, Math professors, Engineering professors, History, Philosophy, Geology, Physics, Music—scores of professors in dozens of fields of inquiry. I had two yellow-papered legal pads with me and I asked each professor to do me a favor: “Can you please write me down a list of 20 or 30 books anyone who studies your field must read?” They, of course, looked at me in shock. It’s a rare thing indeed for a college student to want to know more than he’s required to know.

They all happily sat right down and made me the lists, and I’ve kept them to this day. Each year I pick a different subject and study it thoroughly, not in the haphazard and oft interrupted fashion of an undergraduate who studies wildly various subjects for an hour a pop, but concentrated, interrelated, focused study. This past year for instance, I studied Brit-

ish History. I have five college degrees in English, and was never once required to study the history of the people who created the English language and English literature. How can anyone responsibly teach the literature of a nation without knowing its history? How can someone teach Tolstoy without knowing anything about Russia? How can someone teach Jack London without knowing about the Socialist movement of the early 20th century in America?

I’ve been studying like this for nearly three decades now and I still have a lot of lists to go through, I’ll never be bored.

Workers who read are for the most part autodidacts, as I was before going to college, reading books on the recommendation of friends or simply because they’ve somehow heard of

the authors or the books. This is all well and good, but it doesn’t necessarily get the right books into the hands of workers trying to educate themselves. I’m one of those people, by the way, who believes that some books and authors are better than others, and that authors are not special just because they’re human beings. With our educational system in rapid decline, the increasing standardization of curriculums, and our general population becoming less literate, perhaps the only thing we can do as workers to protect ourselves from the ruling classes is to educate ourselves, because those who run the show ain’t gonna do it for us. But in order to do so,

sometimes we need to be pointed in the right direction.

Every semester I distribute a reading list to my students just in case they wish to read more than they’re required to read. I’ve had students ask for my list decades after I gave it to them because they lost it. It’s a good list.

But it’s not the *only* list, and I certainly haven’t read all the great books. I’ve never read “War and Peace,” and I’ve only read a few novels by Zola. As well, the list reflects my personal tastes to a ridiculous degree. I tell them never to trust lists of living writers, mine included. As often as not the

living writers included on lists are friends of the person compiling the list. What I tell my students to do is get lists from other people and then cross-reference the lists. Books that are only on one person’s list are probably not worth one’s time. But books that show up on multiple lists just may well be important ones.

The “Industrial Worker Book Review” web page, <http://www.iwwbookreview.com>, has just posted a PDF of my list. I hope some people find it to be of use. A splendid reading list that can be found online is Harold Bloom’s from his wonderful book, “The Western Canon.”



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# World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

## The Beginnings Of Revolutionary Unionism In Romania

By Matt Antosh

Members of the IWW Facebook group may have noticed the always insightful comments from a Fellow Worker under the handle of *Iniciativa Anarcho-Sindicalista Romania (ASIR)*. FW Matt Antosh of the International Solidarity Commission (ISC) reached out to the ASIR and conducted this short interview with the ASIR international Committee Chair.

**ISC:** How and when was the ASIR founded?

**ASIR:** ASIR was founded on Nov. 19, 2010, by a group of anarchists in the city of Constanta. After being involved in other projects, we thought that Romania was lacking genuine class struggle anarchist and syndicalist perspectives, and the result was ASIR.

**ISC:** ASIR is a member of the International Workers Association/Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores (IWA-AIT). What is the history of the IWA-AIT and how did the ASIR first get involved?

**ASIR:** ASIR is a close collaborator with the IWA-AIT, but we are not yet the Romanian section of it. ASIR is trying to get there. We are waiting for approval in the next Congress. The IWA-AIT is an international anarcho-syndicalist federation of various labor unions from different countries. It was founded in 1922 at a Berlin congress of anarcho-syndicalist labor unions. It traces its lineage to the International Workingmen's Association or the First International. The IWA-AIT was famously known for its Spanish section, the Confederación Nacional del

Trabajo/Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores (CNT-AIT), which carried out a social revolution in 1936 during the Spanish Civil War. Our adhesion is mostly due to the awareness and importance of international solidarity; we believe that joining such an organization should contribute to a better assimilation of ideas among members of ASIR that will find a source of inspiration from the long tradition and existence of this organization.

**ISC:** How is ASIR structured?

**ASIR:** At the moment, ASIR is made up of autonomous local groups which are federated with each other. We may grow, and the structure might change, but for now this is the framework.

**ISC:** In what sectors are ASIR currently organizing?

**ASIR:** We individually started penetrating [different sectors of] the labor movement; the construction sector was the main one, but when we started agitating and actually tried to organize, everything got shut down. The business unions here have a tight grip on the labor movement and not only are these unions undemocratic, but monopolist. They have different tactics in shutting down independent forces trying to unionize, from bureaucratic attacks to outright abuse and brute force. As for now, we are currently trying [to organize] in the retail sector, but [we are far from seeing] the results, so we must wait.

**ISC:** How does ASIR see itself within the larger Romanian labor movement? Does it organize within mainstream unions, and if so what role does it play

The IWW formed the International Solidarity Commission to help the union build the worker-to-worker solidarity that can lead to effective action against the bosses of the world. To contact the ISC, email [solidarity@iww.org](mailto:solidarity@iww.org).

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within them?

**ASIR:** I think ASIR is the only revolutionary unionist project in Romania, the only breath of fresh air in a labor movement suffocated by class collaborations, social partnerships, and undemocratic practices. As I mentioned, we are trying to penetrate industries and mainstream unions, but it's a harsh struggle. Almost everywhere the hammer of the "labor aristocracy" hits us, but we won't give up that easily.

**ISC:** What has been the effect of the transition from state socialism to a capitalist economy on Romania? How is the left in general, and anarchism in particular, perceived due to this transition?

**ASIR:** The transition was vastly different in comparison with other Eastern European countries, because there were two unique things. For one, Romania was the only Warsaw Pact member, which forcibly overthrew the government and executed the country's head of state. Romania is also the only country where the actual revolution was considered a coup d'état, orchestrated by the Nomenklatura (the high officials in the Communist Party). So against this particular background, the transition was weird and very suspicious because the state's capital simply disappeared and was privatized overnight. The former secret police members/collaborators and [Communist] Party members landed in high positions in the government, and ironically many became the multimillionaire businessmen of Romania. So in reality, this once again proves the "new class" theory: the former ruling class is now the new ruling capitalist class. The left in a traditional sense is practically non-existent; the parties are extremely similar due to the fact that the mainstream parties are the offshoots of the National Salvation Front, the governing body of Romania in the first weeks

## Initiativa Anarho Sindicalista

after the revolution, which was formed by the former Communist Party elites. So in mainstream political discourse the left wing is a thing of the past, every discourse is dominated by either pseudo-populist rhetoric coupled with a national Stalinist sentiment, or by traditional capitalist discourse. For anarchism it was worse, because the movement was literally destroyed by two dictatorships: the fascist one during WWII and the Stalinist one after WWII, so people have no idea what anarchism is and what it represents. For some years now, anarchism was associated with only the "punk" scene, so it's hard to present it as a legitimate socio-political point of view. Our recent work in discovering some old anarchist newspapers from the 1900s and a study about the anarcho-syndicalist movement up until WWII have given us hope in the quest to historically and politically legitimize it.

**ISC:** We see across Europe—in Greece, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom—the effect of austerity and the fight back it has provoked. How has austerity in the rest of Europe affected Romania? How has the Romanian government and the Romanian people responded to the global crisis?

**ASIR:** It's ironic because Romania is among those countries that were hit in the worst way by the crisis, and alongside Greece I think, here in Europe, Romania borrowed the biggest sums of money from the International Monetary Fund, so the international debt is staggering and they are thinking to privatize everything now. But the irony in this story is that the Romanian people are asleep and the only time they awake is when an opposition party bribes them. It's ridiculous, most of them crave for authoritarian dictators to solve their problems, and it's pathetic and sad.

### IWW Food & Retail Workers Union Founding Convention

October 21, 22 & 23, 2011: Portland, Oregon

Hosted by the Portland General Membership Branch of the I.W.W.



FOUNDING CONVENTION | OCTOBER 21-23  
PORTLAND, OREGON | PORTLANDIWW.ORG | PDX.FOODWORKERS@IWW.ORG

The IWW Food and Retail Workers Union is an organization of workers at every link in the supply chain of food and retail products, from processing facilities to warehouses to restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, strip malls, big box stores, and other retail shops. We have come together to fight for fundamental change in our industries. In the short term, we seek to build power with our coworkers to win improved wages, guaranteed hours, healthcare, and other crucial improvements to our working conditions. In the long term, we aim to establish industrial democracy through worker self-management of production for human needs, rather than capitalist profit.

The convention will lay the organization's structural foundation, develop an organizing and outreach strategy based on our approach of solidarity unionism, and plan for the building of industrial unionism in the food industry.

#### Convention Schedule:

Friday, October 21: Welcoming Evening Dinner and Discussion Panel

Saturday, October 22 & Sunday, October 23: Convention

#### Attendance:

Attendance is open to all IWW members, though voting is limited to IWW members of Industrial Unions 460, 640, and 660. All IWW members working in food service, processing, and distribution are invited to attend.

#### Registration:

Registration for the convention is closed. To receive details about the convention's proceedings, sign up for the Food & Retail email listserve at <http://lists.iww.org/listinfo/foodandretail>.

#### Travel and Accommodations:

The Portland GMB is coordinating both needed accommodations and travel assistance. To request a stipend to assist in covering the cost of travel costs, please complete the Travel Reimbursement Request form (available online) and a convention organizer will contact you.

#### Donations:

Organizers from around the United States and Canada will be traveling to Portland for this Convention. In order to ensure all interested members are able to attend regardless of financial circumstances, all donations made to the Founding Convention will go towards assisting our fellow workers with their travel expenses.

#### Contact:

To receive more information about the Founding Convention or the IWW's organizing within the food and retail industries, please contact us at by email at [pdx.foodworkers@iww.org](mailto:pdx.foodworkers@iww.org).

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Signature: Joe Tessone, General Secretary-

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