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Special: International Women's Day issue!

Labor Unrest Was 'Straw That Broke The Camel's Back' In Egypt

Photo: Hossam el-Hamalawy, flickr.com/photos/elhamalawy

Telecommunications workers strike in Egypt on Feb. 9, 2011.

By Jane Slaughter, *Labor Notes*

As Egyptian citizens celebrate their first victory on the way to democracy, some are asking whether the fast-spreading strikes were the straw that broke Hosni Mubarak's back. The following is a brief report amalgamated from two pieces which originally appeared in Labor Notes.

On Feb. 9, just two days before Mubarak stepped down, more than 20,000 workers walked out on strike. Kamal Abbas, director of the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services in Cairo, told *Labor Notes*, "This day in the revolution could be named for the labor unions. They have moved all over, with more than 20 strikes in the railroads and also textiles, nurses and doctors, a hospital, in government-owned factories and also private."

Abbas added that women workers from the hospital and textile workers made up a significant portion of the protest, adding that "Eight million people in the country are participating in the protests. There are a million people in Tahrir Square, and there are thousands of workers among them. In the people's movement, they are learning its lessons. Of course, the working class is apt to organize, and they have been moving in a very deliberate, organized way to make demands."

On Friday morning, Feb. 11—the day Mubarak stepped down—the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center reported a massive wave of industrial action. In Mahallah, 24,000 textile workers walked out demanding raises and calling for solidarity with the protesters in Tahrir Square. Some military equipment factories, owned by the military, were struck over wages and benefits. Subway workers walked out. Postal workers walked out. Workers at Egypt Air headquarters walked out. Laid-off workers from the famous Alexandria Library demanded to be rehired. The main shipping agencies in the ports saw walk-outs. Al Azhar, the oldest university in the world, saw strikes at all the hospitals it operates.

Additionally, employers rushed to meet the demands of workers. Public and private employers were all caving on the major demand that temporary/contract workers be made permanent. The government began studying budgets to figure out how to make temps permanent throughout the government sector.

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Three Month Fight Puts Thieving Restaurant Out Of Business

By X362906

In 2008, five members of the IWW started the Seattle Solidarity Network (SeaSol). Since then, SeaSol has been developing a volunteer network of workers and tenants who mobilize in support of whoever among us is currently getting screwed by an employer or landlord (see "Uniting The People With Seattle Solidarity," January/February 2011 *IW*, page 5).

In our most recent fight, we were up against Ciro D'Onofrio, a local restaurant owner who seemed to base his business model on wage theft. Becky, who became a SeaSol member when we took on her fight, had not been paid the wages she was owed for a month of work. This behavior was part of a pattern: we heard reports throughout the campaign of Ciro stealing other workers' pay, including a longtime cook at the restaurant who is now suing Ciro in King County court for unpaid wages.

We offered Ciro a choice: pay Becky or be driven out of business by relentless picketing. Here is how the fight went, in Becky's words:

"For the entire month of September, I worked for Ciro D'Onofrio at his Italian restaurant in Renton, Wash.: Bella Napoli. During this time, Ciro was verbally abusive towards his employees and even customers. He would throw temper tantrums in front of tables and claim we were out of things on the menu simply because he did not feel like making them. He would also hire different people to come in and help out on a weekend night with no prior experience and without training. This proved to be difficult, as I was the only server, bartender, hostess, food runner and busser.

SeaSolers demonstrate at Bella Napoli. Photo: SeaSol

"I still had to pay rent, so I continued to work for Ciro. Things got hairy when I had $110 of my bank 'disappear' one night when only he and I were working. Also, I needed my check and Ciro claimed that he only paid his employees at the end of every month. I thought this was strange, especially after I had seen him give a check to the cook, but I dismissed it. What was he going to do, not pay me? As you might have guessed by now, that's exactly what happened. Ciro has made up every excuse in the book as to why he refuses to pay me the balance of $478, from a missing bottle of wine to incorrect invoices. It is clear that he never intended to pay me.

"That was when I decided to call SeaSol. After meeting with them, we decided to inform Ciro that he had 14 days to pay up or we would start fighting back. Then for two-and-a-half months, we peacefully flyered, postered and picketed. Meanwhile Ciro's response was consistently violent: shouting profanity, spitting at us, assaulting us, throwing water and picket signs at us and more. We went down every weekend, and twice a weekend recently, keeping his restaurant empty (or nearly) for any given dinner rush we desired. And through it all our numbers grew, with 50 picketers at an action on Dec. 19, 2010."

Organizers often say that the boss is your best agitator, and with Ciro this was definitely true. Ciro's violence against SeaSol members, as captured on film and distributed online (www.seasol.net/cirovideo), inspired many more people to join us in protesting Ciro and telling customers, "Don't eat at Bella Napoli!" At our pickets, which happened once or

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100 Years After Triangle Shirtwaist, New Yorkers Continue To Suffer

Dear *IW* Editor,

The issue commemorating the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire makes me think of several things. The corporate media tells us that the world got better and we should not worry about those problems of the past. They tell us that inequality, safety and class differences are in the past. Recently, many more women died in another tragic fire in Bangladesh. I don't feel that these types of tragedies are restricted to the so-called third world nations. In January, a sweatshop worker in Brooklyn, Juan Baten, was killed on the job. Since Michael Bloomberg became the mayor of New York City, I've watched the city government allow the wealthy real estate companies to break any law they want: labor laws, environmental, sanitation, zoning, building safety rules, etc. They also break the walls, roofs, foundations and anything else on the neighbor's buildings. Neighbors and workers were buried alive many times. Construction worker Arturo Gonzales was decapitated on the job, just six blocks from my home.

Can another Triangle-type fire happen in New York City? Our mayor spends over one billion tax dollars on luxury stadiums and he and the governor spent over $700 million more on the GOP convention in 2004, but now Bloomberg wants to "save money" by laying off fire fighters and other essential city workers. The latest rounds of firefighter layoffs were scheduled for Jan. 31. The Uniformed Firefighters and the Uniformed Firefighters Officers Associations have filed court papers demanding an injunction. As the *IW* goes to press, the outcome is not settled.

At the end of December 2010, a snowstorm crippled the city because hundreds of sanitation workers and about 1,000 transit workers had been laid off. Each corporate newspaper reported a few examples of people who died because the ambulances could not get through unplowed streets. Some calls took as much as nine hours to answer and the people in need were dead by then. I spoke to an ambulance crew who said that their coworkers believe at least 100 died in the first night and day. Some streets were never plowed in my neighborhood. Publications such as *The Chief* quoted a transit official as saying that a total of 1,029 busses were stranded on unplowed city streets for several days. The women and men who drive them were ordered to stay with the immovable busses for as long as 38 hours. The transit workers who would normally help those drivers were laid off. In the next storm, the government avoided stranded buses by not letting them run during the storm. This is terrible for the people in the city who need a bus, especially people who cannot afford a car or even a taxi. The head of the transit department gets a limo with a chauffer and Bloomberg raised his salary from $250,000 to $350,000 per year. Meanwhile, transit workers make an average of $32,000.

I know that death in the flames of the Triangle Fire was painfully beyond what we can imagine. The people who have had to be dug out of collapsed sloppy construction sites were in pain also. New Yorkers who died waiting for an ambulance were killed by the same kind of cheapskate greed for profit as the women who were killed by the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. One difference is that the shirtwaist company went out of business, but the administration who laid off thousands of workers are still strong while our taxes pay them to allow our neighbors to die.

- Tom Keough

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Industrial Workers of the World
Post Office Box 180195
Chicago, IL 60618 USA
773.857.1090 • ghq@iww.org
www.iww.org

General Secretary-Treasurer:
Joe Tessone

General Executive Board:
Koala Largess, Ildiko Sipos, Ryan G., John Slavin, Jason Krpan John Reimann, Greg Giorgio

Editor & Graphic Designer :
Diane Krauthamer
iw@iww.org

Final Edit Committee :
Maria Rodriguez Gil, Tom Levy, Nick Jusino, FW D. Keenan, J.R. Boyd, Mathieu Dube, Neil Parthun, Michael Capobianco

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IWW directory

Australia
Regional Organising Committee: P.O. Box 1866, Albany, WA
Albany: 0423473807, entropy4@gmail.com
Melbourne: P.O. Box 145, Moreland, VIC 3058. 0448 712 420
Perth: Mike Ballard, swillsqueal@yahoo.com.au

British Isles
British Isles Regional Organising Committee (BIROC): PO Box 7593 Glasgow, G42 2EX. Secretariat: rocsec@iww.org.uk, Organising Department Chair: south@iww.org.uk. www.iww.org.uk
IWW UK Web Site administrators and Tech Department Coordinators: admin@iww.org.uk, www.tech.iww.org.uk
NBS Job Branch National Blood Service: iww.nbs@gmail.com
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Recreational Workers (Musicians) IU 630: peltonc@gmail.com, longadan@gmail.com
General, Legal, Public Interest & Financial Office Workers IU 650: rocsec@iww.org.uk
Bradford: bradford@iww.org.uk
Bristol GMB: P.O. Box 4, 82 Colston street, BS1 5BB. Tel. 07506592180. bristol@iww.org.uk, bristoliww@riseup.net
Cambridge GMB: IWWCambridge, 12 Mill Road, Cambridge CB1 2AD cambridge@iww.org.uk
Dorset: dorset@iww.org.uk
Hull: hull@iww.org.uk
Leeds: leedsiww@hotmail.co.uk, leeds@iww.org.uk
Leicester GMB: Unit 107, 40 Halford St., Leicester LE1 1TQ, England. Tel. 07981 433 637, leics@iww.org.uk www.leicestershire-iww.org.uk
London GMB: c/o Freedom Bookshop, Angel Alley, 84b Whitechapel High Street, E1 7QX. +44 (0) 20 3393 1295, londoniww@gmail.com www.iww.org/en/branches/UK/London
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York GMB: york@iww.org.uk www.wowyork.org

Scotland
Clydeside GMB: c/o IWW, P.O. Box 7593, Glasgow, G42 2EX. clydeside@iww.org.uk, www.iww-scotland.org
Dumfries and Galloway GMB: dumfries@iww.org.uk , iwwdumfries.wordpress.com
Edinburgh GMB: c/o 17 W. Montgomery Place, EH7 5HA. 0131-557-6242, edinburgh@iww.org.uk

Canada

Alberta
Edmonton GMB: P.O. Box 75175, T6E 6K1. edmontongmb@iww.org, edmonton.iww.ca

British Columbia
Vancouver GMB: 204-2274 York Ave., Vancouver, BC, V6K 1C6. Phone/fax 604-732-9613. gmb-van@iww.ca, vancouver.iww.ca, vancouverwob.blogspot.com

Manitoba
Winnipeg GMB: IWW, c/o WORC, P.O. Box 1, R3C 2G1. winnipegiww@hotmail.com. Garth Hardy, del., garthhardy@gmail.com

Ontario
Ottawa-Outaouais GMB & GDC Local 6: 1106 Wellington St., PO Box 36042, Ottawa, ON K1Y 4V3
Ottawa Panhandlers Union: Andrew Nellis, spokesperson, 613-748-0460. ottawapanhandlersunion@sympatico.ca
Peterborough: c/o PCAP, 393 Water St. #17, K9H 3L7, 705-749-9694
Toronto GMB: c/o Libra Knowledge & Information Svcs Co-op, P.O. Box 353 Stn. A, M5W 1C2. 416-919-7392. iwwtoronto@gmail.com

Québec
Montreal GMB: cp 60124, Montréal, QC, H2J 4E1. 514-268-3394. iww_quebec@riseup.net.

Europe

Finland
Helsinki: Reko Ravela, Otto Brandtintie 11 B 25, 00650. iwwsuomi@helsinkinet.fi

German Language Area
IWW German Language Area Regional Organizing Committee (GLAMROC): Post Fach 19 02 03, 60089 Frankfurt/M, Germany iww-germany@gmx.net. www.wobblies.de
Austria: iwwaustria@gmail.com. www.iww-waustria.wordpress.com
Frankfurt am Main: iww-frankfurt@gmx.net
Koeln GMB: IWW, c/o BCC, Pfaelzer Str. 2-4, 50677 Koeln, Germany. cschilha@aol.com
Munich: iww.muenchen@gmx.de
Switzerland**:** IWW-Zurich@gmx.ch

Netherlands: iww.ned@gmail.com

South Africa
Cape Town: 7a Rosebridge, Linray Road, Rosebank, Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa 7700. iww-ct@live.co.za

United States

Arizona
Phoenix GMB: P.O. Box 7126, 85011-7126. 623-336-1062. phoenix@iww.org
Flagstaff: Courtney Hinman, del., 928-600-7556, chuy@iww.org

Arkansas
Fayetteville: P.O. Box 283, 72702. 479-200-1859. nwar_iww@hotmail.com

DC
DC GMB (Washington): 741 Morton St NW, Washington DC, 20010. 571-276-1935

California
Los Angeles GMB: P.O. Box 811064, 90081. (310)205-2667. la_gmb@iww.org
North Coast GMB: P.O. Box 844, Eureka 95502-0844. 707-725-8090, angstink@gmail.com
San Francisco Bay Area GMB: (Curbside and Buyback IU 670 Recycling Shops; Stonemountain Fabrics Job Shop and IU 410 Garment and Textile Worker's Industrial Organizing Committee; Shattuck Cinemas; Embarcadero Cinemas) P.O. Box 11412, Berkeley, 94712. 510-845-0540. bayarea@iww.org
IU 520 Marine Transport Workers: Steve Ongerth, del., intextile@iww.org
IU 540 Couriers Organizing Committee: 415-789-MESS, messengersunion@yahoo.com. messengersunion.org
Evergreen Printing: 2335 Valley Street, Oakland, 94612. 510-835-0254. dkaroly@igc.org
San Jose: sjiww@yahoo.com

Colorado
Denver GMB: 2727 W. 27th Ave., 80211. Lowell May, del., 303-433-1852. breadandroses@msn.com
Four Corners (AZ, CO, NM, UT): 970-903-8721, 4corners@iww.org

Florida
Gainesville GMB: c/o Civic Media Center, 433 S. Main St., 32601. Jason Fults, del., 352-318-0060, gainesvilleiww@riseup.net
Miami IWW: miami@iww.org
Hobe Sound: P. Shultz, 8274 SE Pine Circle, 33455-6608. 772-545-9591, okiedogg2002@yahoo.com
Pensacola GMB: P.O. Box 2662, Pensacola 32513-2662. 840-437-1323, iwwpensacola@yahoo.com, www.angelfire.com/fl5/iww

Georgia
Atlanta: M. Bell, del.,404-693-4728, iwwbell@gmail.com

Hawaii
Honolulu: Tony Donnes, del., donnes@hawaii.edu

Idaho
Boise: Ritchie Eppink, del., P.O. Box 453, 83701. 208-371-9752, eppink@gmail.com

Illinois
Chicago GMB: 2117 W. Irving Park Rd., 60618. 773-857-1090. Gregory Ehrendreich, del., 312-479-8825, labrat@iww.org
Central Ill GMB: 903 S. Elm, Champaign, IL, 61820. 217-356-8247. David Johnson, del., unionyes@ameritech.net
Freight Truckers Hotline: mtw530@iww.org
Waukegan: P.O Box 274, 60079.

Indiana
Lafayette GMB: P.O. Box 3793, West Lafayette, 47906, 765-242-1722

Iowa
Eastern Iowa GMB: 114 1/2 E. College Street, Iowa City, 52240. easterniowa@iww.org

Maine
Barry Rodrigue, 75 Russell Street, Bath, 04530. 207-442-7779

Maryland
Baltimore IWW: P.O. Box 33350, 21218. baltimoreiww@gmail.com

Massachusetts
Boston Area GMB: PO Box 391724, Cambridge 02139. 617-469-5162
Cape Cod/SE Massachusetts: thematch@riseup.net
Western Mass. Public Service IU 650 Branch: IWW, P.O. Box 1581, Northampton 01061

Michigan
Detroit GMB: 22514 Brittany Avenue, E. Detroit 48021. detroit@iww.org. Tony Khaled, del., 21328 Redmond Ave., East Detroit 48021
Grand Rapids GMB: PO Box 6629, 49516. 616-881-5263. Shannon Williams, del., 616-881-5263
Central Michigan: 5007 W. Columbia Rd., Mason 48854. 517-676-9446, happyhippie66@hotmail.com

Minnesota
Duluth IWW: Brad Barrows, del., 1 N. 28th Ave E., 55812. scratchbrad@riseup.net.
Red River IWW: POB 103, Moorhead, 56561. 218-287-0053. iww@gomoorhead.com
Twin Cities GMB: 79 13th Ave NE Suite 103A, Minneapolis 55413. twincities@iww.org

Missouri
Kansas City GMB: c/o 5506 Holmes St., 64110. 816-523-3995
St. Louis IWW: iwwstl@gmail.com

Montana
Two Rivers GMB: PO Box 9366, Missoula 59807. 406-459-7585. tworiversgmb@iww.org
Construction Workers IU 330: Dennis Georg, del., 406-490-3869, tramp233@hotmail.com
Billings: Jim Del Duca, del., 406-860-0331, delducja@gmail.com

Nevada
Reno GMB: P.O. Box 40132, 89504. Paul Lenart, del., 775-513-7523, hekmatista@yahoo.com
IU 520 Railroad Workers: Ron Kaminkow, del., P.O. Box 2131, Reno, 89505. 608-358-5771. ronkaminkow@yahoo.com

New Jersey
Central New Jersey GMB: P.O. Box 10021, New Brunswick, 08906. 732-801-7001. iwwcnj@gmail.com. Bob Ratynski, del., 908-285-5426

New Mexico
Albuquerque GMB: 202 Harvard Dr. SE, 87106. 505-227-0206, abq@iww.org.

New York
Binghamton Education Workers Union (IU 620): P.O. Box 685, 13905. binghamtoniww@gmail.com. http://bewu.wordpress.com/
New York City GMB: P.O. Box 7430, JAF Station, 10116, iww-nyc@iww.org. www.wobblycity.org
Starbucks Campaign: 44-61 11th St. Fl. 3, Long Island City 11101 starbucksunion@yahoo.com www.starbucksunion.org
Upstate NY GMB: P.O. Box 235, Albany 12201-0235, 518-833-6853 or 518-861-5627. www.upstate-nyiww.org, secretary@upstate-ny-iww.org, Rochelle Semel, del., P.O. Box 172, Fly Creek 13337, 607-293-6489, rochelle71@peoplepc.com.
Hudson Valley GMB: P.O. Box 48, Huguenot 12746, 845-342-3405, hviww@aol.com, http://hviww.blogspot.com/

Ohio
Ohio Valley GMB: P.O. Box 42233, Cincinnati 45242.
Textile & Clothing Workers IU 410: P.O. Box 317741 Cincinnati 45231. ktacmota@aol.com

Oklahoma
Tulsa: P.O. Box 213 Medicine Park 73557, 580-529-3360.

Oregon
Lane GMB: Ed Gunderson, del., 541-953-3741. gunderson@centurytel.net, www.eugeneiww.org
Portland GMB: 2249 E Burnside St., 97214, 503-231-5488. portland.iww@gmail.com, pdx.iww.org
Portland Red and Black Cafe: 400 SE 12th Ave, 97214. 503-231-3899. redandblackbooking@riseup.net. www. redandblackcafe.com.

Pennsylvania
Lancaster GMB: P.O. Box 796, 17608.
Paper Crane Press IU 450 Job Shop: 610-358-9496. papercranepress@verizon.net, www.papercranepress.com
Pittsburgh GMB : P.O. Box 831, Monroeville, 15146. pittsburghiww@yahoo.com

Rhode Island
Providence GMB: P.O. Box 5795, 02903. 508-367-6434. providenceiww@gmail.com

Texas
Dallas & Fort Worth: 1618 6th Ave, Fort Worth, 76104.
South Texas IWW: rgviww@gmail.com

Utah
Salt Lake City IWW: 801-485-1969. tr_wobbly@yahoo .com

Vermont
Burlington GMB: P.O. Box 8005, 05402. 802-540-2541

Washington
Bellingham: P.O. Box 1793, 98227. 360-920-6240. BellinghamIWW@gmail.com.
Tacoma GMB: P.O. Box 7276, 98401. TacIWW@iww.org. http://tacoma.iww.org/
Olympia GMB: P.O. Box 2775, 98507. Sam Green, del., samthegreen@gmail.com
Seattle GMB: 1122 E. Pike #1142, 98122-3934. 206-339-4179. seattleiww@gmail.com. www.seattleiww.org

Wisconsin
Madison GMB: P.O. Box 2442, 53703-2442. www.madisoniww.info
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GDC Local 4: P.O. Box 811, 53701. 608-262-9036.
Railroad Workers IU 520: 608-358-5771. railfalcon@yahoo.com
Milwaukee GMB: 1750A N Astor St., 53207. Trevor Smith, 414-573-4992.

Obituary

Remembering Labor Activist Jayabean Desai

By Chris Leary

The 1970s in Britain were a turbulent time. Strike fever was gripping the nation, the miners defeated the Tories the first time around, and a mood of militancy swept the workers' movement. At the time, however, the movement was still very much white. While mass immigration from Britain's former colonies had brought hundreds of thousands of African-American and Asian workers into the country, the unions didn't take their concerns as workers seriously. Given that they were seen as subservient, pliant workers, and in conjunction with racist social attitudes and the growth of the far right, immigrants were not viewed as a fertile ground for union recruitment.

Jayaben Desai, the leader of the Grunwick strike who passed away on Dec. 23, 2010, was to change all of that.

Born in Gujurat, India in 1933, Mrs. Desai migrated to Tanzania in 1965 before being expelled and moving to Britain. Like many of her fellow immigrant workers, Desai was forced to work in the sort of low-paying jobs that unions didn't reach. She worked a stint as a sewing machinist, then took a job at the Grunwick photo-processing factory in Willesden, an outer West London suburb.

Grunwick was not a good place to work. A majority of the workforce were, like Desai, East-African Asians who had recently arrived in Britain. The management was mostly white and racism was commonplace in the plant, according to contemporary accounts. Overtime was forced and workers were given little notice. While I note that newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *Socialist Worker* were forced to publish apologies to George Ward for calling Grunwick a "racist" employer, he has never challenged the fact that most Grunwick workers were paid £28 per week before the strike when the average wage was £77 per week and that the majority of Grunwick workers were Asian. I'll leave it to the readers to draw their own conclusion.

The Grunwick factory opened on Aug. 20, 1976, during the hottest summer in Britain on record and there was no air conditioning in the factory. A worker, Devshi Bhudia, had been fired earlier in the day for working too slowly and three other workers walked out of the factory in solidarity. When Mrs. Desai put on her coat to leave after her shift, she was called into the office and fired. Her son walked out with her, but not before she said to the manager, "What you are running here is not a factory, it is a zoo. But in a zoo there are many types of animals. Some are monkeys who dance on your fingertips; others are lions who can bite your head off. We are the lions, Mr. Manager."

And with those well chosen, now memorialized words, the Grunwick dispute started. The six fired workers were put in touch with and joined the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX)—a moderate, nonmilitant, white-collar trade union—and they returned to the factory, where 50 workers walked out and demanded the right to union recognition. They were joined by 25 workers at Grunwick's second plant up the road. For the first time, a group of immigrant workers were organizing and building a union—an immense achievement for workers who were considered "unorganizable."

As the strike gained momentum, George Ward sacked all of the strikers. When the case was referred to the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), Ward offered reinstatement to all the strikers if they dropped their demands for union recognition. It would have taken courage beyond comprehension to have refused, as these workers would find it hard to get work elsewhere. But refuse they did.

The union movement, eventually realizing that these were a group of workers who were trying to organize, swung into support. Mass pickets of Grunwick were organized. The National Union of Mineworkers, lead by their president Arthur Scargill, organized groups of miners from South Yorkshire, Wales, and Kent to mass picket the factories. Members of the Union of Post Office Workers blackened Grunwick's mail at Royal Mail offices in Cricklewood. Even the more bureaucratic elements of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Labour Party realized that they had to show support. The "strikers in saris," as the media dubbed them, were making waves.

Photo: feminismisforlovers.tumblr.com

But as the workers' movement mobilized, so too did the boss's movement. Ward saw the fight against his workforce as an ideological battle for his own, somewhat perverse, ideal of "freedom," no doubt egged on by the Tory pressure group National Association for Freedom (NAFF). NAFF members organized clandestine delivery of Grunwick's post, essential for the continued operation of a mail order photo-printing company. High Court Justices were issuing injunctions and judgments faster than Ward and NAFF could file them. Sir Keith Joseph, a prominent Conservative politician, called the Grunwick dispute "a make-or-break point for British democracy, the freedoms of ordinary men and women" and described Labour ministers who joined the pickets as "'moderates' behind whom Red Fascism spreads."

Eventually, though, the union bureaucracy withdrew support when the House of Lords found that ACAS had not canvassed all workers at the plants (despite Ward's refusal to cooperate with ACAS) and left the strikers on their own. The TUC and other unions withdrew support to the strikers, and Desai was forced to undertake a hunger strike outside Congress House, the TUC headquarters, which lead to her suspension from APEX. The strike committee called off the strike on July 14, 1978. None of the strikers' demands had been met, and they remained sacked. There was no union at Grunwick.

The Grunwick strike taught the workers' movement many important lessons. It taught the movement that black and minority ethnic (BME) workers deserved to be organized and taken seriously within the movement. Now, black members' networks are the norm within unions, and the British labour movement had its own "Obama" moment when Bill Morris was elected General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) in 1992 as the first black union leader.

But more importantly it taught the union movement—well, the rank and file of it anyway—that we can't rely on union bosses to fight our fights for us and that we have to do it for ourselves. The strike grew and was at its strongest when it was lead by a strike committee of rank-and-file activists, and depended on the anger, energy and hope of ordinary union members. It faltered when control was wrestled away by unelected union bosses who thought that they could fight the bosses through the courts, and who walked away when they inevitably lost.

Mrs. Desai wasn't a Wobbly. She wasn't a class-conscious fighter like other women labor leaders, such as Elizabeth Gurley Flynn or Mother Jones. She, after all, just wanted to go home after a long day of working in uncomfortable conditions. When Ward tried to buy off non-union workers with pay rises, Desai said, "The strike is not so much about pay, it is a strike about human dignity."

What Jayabean Desai taught us is that we can't rely on bosses—whether they sit in the House of Lords or Congress House—to fight for us. Only through organizing on the shop floor and hitting the bosses where it hurts, through direct action on the job, can we win.

It is for this, if nothing else, that Jayabean Desai's name should live on forever in the hearts and minds of workers across the world.

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.

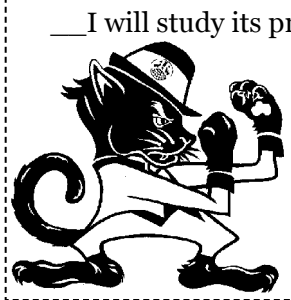
TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618, USA.

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.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Post Code, Country: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone:_____ Email:_____

Amount Enclosed: _____

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

Solidarity Against Sexism On The Shop Floor

By Angel Gardner

If there is anything that I have learned from working in the restaurant and retail industry for over 14 years, it is that sexual harassment and sexism in the workplace is an issue that has not gone away. Perhaps you have become more tolerant of being sexually objectified. Maybe you are afraid that being uncomfortable with sexual advances or comments means that you are a prude or hopelessly outdated. The reality is that sexual harassment and sexism are all about power. We feel uncomfortable about standing up for ourselves in these situations because to do so questions power relations; not only in the workplace, but in society in general.

Is it sexual harassment or sexism in the workplace?

• A district manager asks you and your 40-year old female coworker, "Will you girls make us some coffee for our meeting?"

• Your manager makes all the women in the workplace wear tight baby doll t-shirts which are intentionally a size too small that say, "For a Good Time Call ..." while the men are told to wear plain black polo shirts that do not have to be form-fitting.

• During your training at a retail clothing store, you are told to flirt with potential customers to make sales. You feel uncomfortable with this and despite your efforts to be proactive about sales in a professional way, you are pulled aside later for not being "friendly enough."

• A conventionally-attractive regular customer often sits at the bar and stares at you throughout your shift and has made several comments about your appearance that make you uncomfortable. When you tell him to stop, he says that you should be flattered. Your boss fails to act and your other coworkers, who appreciate his attention, tell you that you are strange for not liking it.

The answer: If any of these policies, attitudes or behavior makes you feel uncomfortable, then you should not have to deal with it. Everyone's comfort level is different. Some of your coworkers might not mind being called "girl" or "sweetie," while others may take offense to being referred to as a "woman" or by any gender-specific pronoun. Different expectations for employee uniforms that force coworkers into stereotyped gender roles are sexist practices that create a potentially hostile workplace. Flirting with customers should never be a given, but a choice. Some people may find that they like the attention and get better tips by flaunting their appearance and flirting, but not everyone should have to interact in a similar fashion. Berating others for what makes them uncomfortable promotes an environment of harassment.

So you feel like a policy or an individual at work is creating a hostile work environment? Going the legal route is not always the best or solitary option. Collectively standing up together with your coworkers against sexist practices, policies or individuals can often be the safest and most powerful way to fight. Though it is technically illegal, it is easier for companies to retaliate against an individual than a group of workers. In addition, sexual harassment cases often result in companies dragging women through the mud and can prove to be very traumatic for the victim. Legal processes can take a long time to resolve, but taking direct action in your workplace is immediate. When workers come together to fight sexual harassment and sexism, we are empowered by taking back the workplace and at the same time, form closer bonds with our coworkers by building mutual trust and respect for one another.

How do I fight sexism and harassment in my workplace?

• Form a coalition with coworkers who share and/or are sympathetic to your concerns. Sexual harassment affects union and non-union members alike, so do not exclude any possible allies.

• Ban customers and clients who are repeat offenders from the store and make sure that the ban is being enforced by the rest of your coworkers.

• Confront your boss as a group about sexual harassment issues (perhaps even a definition) and make it known that you take it very seriously and so should they.

• Confront workers who refuse to support their fellow workers when they feel harassed, violated, or uncomfortable. Have one-on-one conversations about the impact of their actions (not respecting boundaries) and words ("it's not a big deal"), and express your feelings in a genuine, but professional manner.

• Any policy, dress code, or expectations that fellow workers find to be sexist should be addressed, regardless of whether or not you've reached consensus. If you are required by your job to wear a tight baby doll t-shirt, but men can wear polos, you should also be able to wear polo, if you do not want to wear the t-shirt.

Editor's note: This month's "Workers' Power" was replaced by the above for this issue, but will appear in the April IW.

Practicing A Solidarity With Women

By J.R. Boyd

How do working-class men fulfill their responsibilities as feminists? At first glance, this question seems like an obvious one: as working-class men, most of us interact with women on a daily basis. Moreover, as Wobblies we are not unfamiliar with the reality of women's struggles. But how often is this "obvious" question raised?

Just as the industrial struggle requires coordinated action to achieve working-class goals, so too does feminism require its own daily acts of solidarity. Working-class men who understand the spirit and practice of solidarity in one realm already possess what they need to apply it in another. They only need the confidence and determination to begin.

More than any other, the concept of solidarity has provided the working class with an affirmative answer to the question of what we are fighting for: we support each other in the face of injustice, in order to create a more just and supportive world. In this sense, solidarity is both the "means to an end" as well as the "end" in itself. We care about what happens to other people because this always has implications for us too. Veterans of the class conflict know these truths all too well!

But we should also know that any working class that fails to practice solidarity between any of its constituent parts—like that between men and women—leaves itself that much further from its stated goals. We have to remember that building the new society in the shell of the old means establishing the kinds of practices that we hope to develop more fully in the future. Feminism can help us address one problem area that is ever-present in our daily lives.

As working-class men of the IWW, we know the appropriate response to a call for solidarity from others in the broader labor movement, especially when they are engaged in a workplace action. It isn't something we usually need to deliberate over, fight about, or otherwise render ourselves "missing in action" because we don't agree with the leadership or ideology of the affected group. The world and its circumstances may not conform to our preferences or expectations, but we know well enough to offer support when it is asked of us—and that is very much to our credit. Extending ourselves in solidarity to others when they are in need creates possibilities for dialogue that might not be available when we neglect to do so.

Working-class men who want to establish genuine ties of solidarity to women's struggles will have to emulate this "openness of spirit" when it is women who are asking for help and support, and to remain cognizant of the fact that many times support is welcome even if it isn't explicitly asked for. The principle of solidarity remains the same: we give the affected individual or group the benefit of the doubt and offer support, even if the situation is complicated by other legitimate concerns.

One important way that we practice solidarity with other labor activists that should be replicated in our relations with women is, first and foremost, to listen to what they are telling us. Again, as Wobblies it would be very strange to approach another union with a different organizing model by second-guessing the claims it was making from a picket line. We know that it is inappropriate to make firm determinations about what somebody else is going through in a situation that primarily affects them. But when it comes to our relations with women, the "boss" role that is given to men by patriarchy may lead us into a false sense of confidence of "knowing what is best."

Our everyday interactions with women are no doubt complicated by the fact that, as working-class men, we are often implicated in the same situations equally. Unlike in the case of a strike action undertaken by others, if a female activist has the courage to raise questions of sexism in her organization, it might be easy for the men to think, "Well, I was there too, and I don't think sexism has anything to do with it." Both may have firsthand experience to back up their perceptions, but in the case of the men, they may not be assuming general conditions of patriarchy as the woman does.

These aren't easy or straightforward problems to address in practice, but working-class men have a lot to contribute in moving us all in the right direction. One of the best approaches comes from our own tradition as Wobblies: by extending the practice of solidarity to all members of the working class. This necessarily includes women, and it is a development that is ready to be advanced, just as soon as we are ready to carry it forward.

WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

Chapter 41 The Maud Gonne Club

Regarded derisively by the men as "petticoat butchers," women went to work in Chicago meat-packing plants for the first time in the early 1900s -- at pay scales 30% below male rates. Bosses made a point of keeping women's pay low. At one plant, when the take home pay of the fastest piece workers reached a certain level, the rates of *all* the women would be cut -- the slower workers penalized for the productivity of the fastest.

The rate finagling was first noticed by Maggie Condon, one of the fastest workers; she made common cause with Hannah O'Day, one of the slower workers. One day in 1902, Hannah raised her red hankerchief on a stick in the plant, and several hundred women followed her out on a strike. Their job action was unsuccessful, but Maggie, Hannah and other women workers were determined to organize. They formed a club, which they called the Maud Gonne Club after a noted Irish revolutionary.

In 1903 what started as the Maud Gonne Club became chartered as Local 183 of the Amalgamated Meatcutters and Butcher Workmen. Although not long-lasting, the local union twice took important stands for equality. Local 183 delegates to a Meatcutters' convention were instrumental in defeating a resolution calling for a ban on women meat trimmers. On another occasion, the Maudites did themselves proud when a black woman came to a meeting. "What'll I do with her?" asked sergeant-at-arms Hannah O'Day. Responded the president, Mollie Daley: "I say, admit her at once and let yez give her a hearty welcome!" Union members applauded warmly.

Graphic: Mike Konopacki

Starbucks Workers Declare Union In NYC

By Eugene Lerner

On Jan. 17, the IWW Starbucks Workers Union held an energetic march to commemorate this year's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and to publicly announce the union's presence at the Astor Place Starbucks in New York City.

This year marked the fourth annual IWW MLK Day March Against Wage Slavery, and it was the first year that Starbucks workers received holiday pay for the occasion. Dozens of baristas and supporters marched from the Starbucks at Union Square East to the Starbucks at Union Square West in order to lend publicity and support to the active union campaigns at these stores. A brief rally was held outside of each store with musical accompaniment from the Rude Mechanical Orchestra (RMO). The radical marching band energized the crowd with their thrilling brass arrangements of classic revolutionary anthems such as "Bella Ciao" as well as a cover of Lada Gaga's "Bad Romance" while the RMO's resident dance troupe, Tactical Spectacle, performed choreographed interpretations of the music. Several union baristas spoke and cups were distributed to the crowd for a sparkling cider victory toast to mark the occasion.

Photo: IWW Starbucks Workers Union

The march then proceeded several blocks south to the Starbucks on Astor Place and Lafayette Street. The shop committee—consisting of Fellow Workers Kathryn Harris, Cason Bolton Jr., Princess McLawrence, Zelig Stern, Kayla Halstead, Keila Lagara, Catherine Arredondo and Claudio Anzalone—entered the store and delivered a letter of their demands to the management. The workers demanded fair wages and scheduling practices, respect and dignity on the shop floor, workplace democracy and an absolute end to the company's unconscionable union-busting practices.

While everyone was waiting for the shop committee to emerge from the store, two break-dancers regaled the chanting crowd with performances set to music provided by the RMO. As the workers exited the store, they were greeted by wild cheers and exuberant music. Union barista and dance electro pioneer Cason Bolton Jr. provided a triumphant climax to the event's street dancing showcase before rejoining his fellow workers as they took turns reading from the demand letter to the assembled throng.

The march ended on a high note as the crowd chanted "No Union, No Latte!" and promised to return to continue the fight.

Workers Celebrate MLK Day Nationwide

By the IWW Starbucks Workers Union

While baristas at the Astor Place Starbucks in Manhattan were declaring their membership with the IWW, members of the IWW and supporters descended on Starbucks stores throughout the United States to wish baristas a happy MLK Day. As part of these greetings, IWW organizers informed baristas of the recent victory won by IWW Starbucks baristas in securing time-and-a-half holiday premium for working on MLK Day. Workers were positive and appreciative, showing that solidarity unionism and international solidarity are still a very effective strategy.


Photo: IWW Starbucks Workers Union

Baristas celebrate their IWW membership at the Astor Place Starbucks in NYC on Jan. 17, 2011.

The victory came after a spirited three-year initiative by the IWW Starbucks Workers Union (SWU) which made public the company's second-class treatment of Dr. King's birthday and called on the coffee giant to pay the same premium that it pays workers on six other federal holidays. After Starbucks refused to change its policy, union workers and their supporters launched a determined campaign of grassroots actions in Starbucks stores and communities all across the country in support of equal treatment for MLK Day.

The IWW union effort at Starbucks is the first time a labor organization in the United States has succeeded in building a base of organized baristas at the company. With over 300 worker-organizers across the country and growing, the SWU has consistently chalked up victories at Starbucks including across-the-board raises, more secure work hours, and respectful treatment from previously abusive managers whose conduct improved due to union pressure campaigns. The SWU has repeatedly prevailed against Starbucks in the legal arena across multiple cities, including in a lengthy New York City trial over pervasive illegal union-busting, the first time the company had to square off against baristas in open court regarding unfair labor practices.

The IWW Starbucks campaign is just beginning. If you are a barista at Starbucks, or if you are a worker at any unorganized workplace, especially a major chain or fast food franchise, we want to hear from you. Contact us by calling 612-598-6205 or 917-693-7742.

IWWs Host League Of Revolutionary Black Workers Events

By Adam W.

"Four-thousand workers shut down the Dodge Main assembly plant [in May 1968] in the first wildcat to hit that factory in fourteen years. The issue was the incessant, nerve-destroying, and accident-causing speed-up of the line...Black workers had been kept out of many auto plants entirely until the Second World War; now they were the holders of the lowest-paying, most dangerous jobs, and they had the least seniority and job security. In the old, unsafe, and overheated Detroit plants, the auto companies kept up the pressure to produce more cars with fewer people. Black workers, especially, paid the price; they called this process 'niggermation.' -Ernie Allen, "Dying From the Inside."

This past February, in celebration of Black History Month, IWW groups and branches throughout the United States and Canada hosted public events celebrating and discussing the history and legacy of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW), a unique revolutionary union and community formation that developed out of the urban black rebellion in Detroit in 1967, encompassing black militancy in the auto plants and schools at that time.

The genesis of the group began with the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), which was based out of the Dodge Main plant taking up the fights over working conditions such as speed-ups and discrimination against black workers inside the plant and with the United Auto Workers (UAW). After the DRUM organization successfully organized two wildcat strikes in 1968, the latter honored by 3,000 black workers as well as some of the white workers. At that time, Revolutionary Union Movements (RUMs) began appearing in numerous other auto plants in the Detroit area and even among United Postal Service (UPS) and health care workers.

The LRBW was formed to bring together the RUM movements, though it was short-lived. The LRBW lasted only several years before political infighting divided the group's leadership and rank-and-file participation within the RUM groups declined. Still, the LRBW represents an inspiring example of a militant black-led form of revolutionary unionism in the United States. The LRBW also organized themselves along the lines of what we now in the IWW refer to as "solidarity unionism," taking independent action around workplace issues without formal recognition from the employers and often in direct confrontation with the leadership of the officially-recognized UAW.


Members of the LRBW. Photo: unknown

The February IWW events included a showing of "Finally Got the News," a 1970 documentary made by members of LRBW, along with a selection of readings by former members which will be used as study materials. The goals behind the events were to develop among IWW members and supporters a better understanding of the legacy and lessons of the LRBW's community and workplace organizing among black workers in Detroit. In turn, we hope to help grow a culture of discussion and thinking about workplace organizing by those of us involved in and connected to workplace organizing ourselves.

Cities that hosted events were Portland, Oakland, Los Angeles, Phoenix, Minneapolis, Chicago, Miami, New York, and Grand Rapids which hosted two key LRBW leaders as speakers: General Baker and John Williams.

Jimmy John's Union Election Nullified Due To Employer Labor Rights Violations

By the IWW Jimmy Johns Workers Union

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) approved a settlement on Jan. 11 nullifying the results of the historic union election at Jimmy John's on Oct. 22, 2010, and putting victory back on the table for the nation's first-ever union in franchised fast food. The settlement validates workers' claims that franchise owners Mike and Rob Mulligan were able to squeak out an 87-85 victory in the election only by resorting to unlawful tactics including threatening a wage freeze, intentionally fabricating rumors that the union engaged in sabotage, retaliating against union supporters, and numerous other labor rights violations.

With the tainted election results nullified, the union is asking the franchise owners to negotiate over its "10 Point Program for Justice at Jimmy John's"—a comprehensive package of reforms that will bring respect, dignity, and democracy to the fast food workplace.

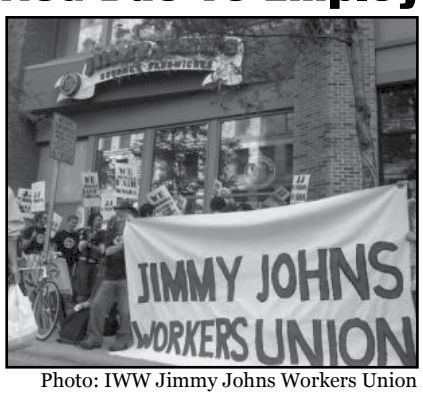


Photo: IWW Jimmy Johns Workers Union

"There can now be no doubt that our rights were severely violated, but we're willing to put the past behind us. We are calling on Mike and Rob Mulligan to make a fresh start and work with us, rather than against us, to improve the lives of Jimmy John's workers and their families by negotiating over our 10 Point Program for modest but urgently needed changes," said Micah Buckley-Farlee, a delivery driver at Jimmy John's and active member of the union campaign.

Based around benefits that workers in many other industries take for granted, the program is the response of Jimmy John's workers to their most pressing problems on the job. Core demands include sick days, improved job security, guaranteed work hours, a reasonable pay increase and regular raises, improved harassment policies, other basic job benefits, and the establishment of a system of shop committees giving workers a democratic voice within the company.

If franchise owners Mike and Rob Mulligan refuse to cooperate, the union has indicated a willingness to return to the trenches and continue the fight for union recognition, this time on terms that are much more favorable to the union due to the settlement agreement.

Under the NLRB settlement, Jimmy John's must cease engaging in a wide range of unlawful anti-union activities, post notices informing employees of the company's new commitment to obeying the law, and host a series of mandatory employee meetings in which a representative of the NLRB will read the notices in the presence of the company owner.

The union will also be eligible to file for a fresh election at any point in the next 18 months, with an abbreviated "campaigning period" of 30 days, 12 days shorter than what is customary for NLRB elections.

Union member Ayo Collins said, "Mike and Rob Mulligan can either continue their losing battle against their employees, or they can work with us and distinguish themselves as leaders in bringing much-needed change to the nation's fast food industry. For our part, we're hoping for the best and preparing for the worst. We are more confident than ever that in the end, we will win, setting an example for 3.5 million fast food workers to follow."

International Women's Day

Celebrating A Rich Tradition Of Women In The IWW:

By Autumn Gonzalez, Nicholas DeFilippis and Donal Fallon

The Industrial Workers of the World has always distinguished itself in its resolution to be the One Big Union for all workers. "All workers" means just that: all wage workers, "regardless of creed, color, nationality," or for our purposes here, gender. How women have made their mark within a union that embraced them—while the employer's regime relegated them to the status of "the slaves of slaves," in the words of Lucy Parsons—is a story too few labor organizations have to tell.

Women have been at the forefront of the IWW since its inception. The IWW was the first union of its kind to attempt to organize prostitutes in major U.S. cities. While the percentage of female representatives at their inaugural convention (around 12 in total) may seem quite small, the issue of gender equality was always at the front of the organization's agenda.

Photo: inkbluesky.wordpress.com

Women of the IWW march to Madison Square Garden in support of the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913.

During the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike—commonly referred to as the "Bread and Roses" strike—female strikers carried homemade placards proclaiming "we want bread and roses too!" committed to improving not just the conditions of the working class in the work place, but indeed the general living conditions of working-class people. Local media reported that more female strikers than males were arrested by the local police force. Their crimes included, according to the police, "intimidating strikebreakers."

Women were also at the forefront of the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913, when around 25,000 striking silk workers shut down the three hundred silk mills and dye houses in Paterson, N.J., for almost five months.

There are countless other chapters to the history of women within the IWW, and the women profiled here are just some of the female faces among the Wobblies of the past. There are many others whose names remain unknown.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn is one of the many women who stand out in the history of the IWW. She was just 17 years old when she shared the platform with a certain James Connolly, who she described as a "Short, rather stout, plain-looking man, [...] a scholar and an excellent writer [whose] speech was marred for American audiences by his thick North of Ireland accent." Connolly thought very highly of her too:

"*She started out as a pure utopian, but now she laughs at her former theories. Had she stuck by her first set of opinions she would have continued a persona grata with the Socialist Party crowd...but her advocacy of straight revolutionary socialism and industrial unionism alienated them and now they hate her.*"

Photo: spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in Paterson, N.J.

Shortly after becoming a socialist, Flynn began making speeches for the IWW and was expelled from high school in 1907. She then became a full-time organizer for the IWW, standing at the forefront of organizing support for the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike, along with famous Wobblies Big Bill Haywood and Carlo Tresca. In the face of police brutality and hunger, the striking workers agreed to evacuate their children out of Lawrence. Flynn was in charge of this evacuation effort, though many of the children were subsequently arrested and beaten after they left town.

Flyn, Haywood and Tresca also grew involved in fanning the flames of the Paterson Silk Strike. Flynn held successful weekly meetings for women only and delivered powerful speeches to mass meetings throughout.

After the Lawrence Textile Strike and the Paterson Sil Strike, Flynn helped to organize campaigns among garment workers in Pennsylvania, silk weavers in New Jersey, restaurant workers in New York City, and miners in Minnesota. Flynn was arrested ten times during this period but was never convicted of any criminal activity.

In 1915, Flynn visited Wobbly Joe Hill in his jail cell. Hill immediately composed a song in honor of Flynn—a sentimental tune that championed the women of the IWW, titled "The Rebel Girl."

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn once famously remarked, when responding to criticism of the IWW for using women as shields: "The IWW has been accused of putting the women in the front; the truth is: the IWW does not keep them at the back – and they go to the front."

Lucy Parsons

Lucy Parsons was one of the founders of the IWW. She had been involved in the foundation of the International Working People's Association (IWPA) journal, *The Alarm*, in 1883. In a piece entitled "To Tramps, the Unemployed, the Disinherited, and Miserable," published in 1884, she called on the poor and disenfranchised to: "Avail yourselves of those little methods of warfare which Science has placed in the hands of the poor man, and you will become a power in this or any other land. Learn the use of explosives!"

In 1905 she displayed similar radicalism when speaking at the IWW's foundation—a speech that was reputedly interrupted several times by loud applause. "We, the women of this country, have no ballot even if we wished to use it, and the only way that we can be represented is to take a man to represent us. You men have made such a mess of it in representing us that we have not much confidence in asking you! We [women] are the slaves of slaves. We are exploited more ruthlessly than men. Whenever wages are to be reduced the capitalist class use women to reduce them, and if there is anything that you men should do in the future it is to organize the women....."

A very powerful orator, said to be more dangerous than "a thousand rioters" by the Chicago police force, she quickly took to editing *The Liberator*, the newspaper of the IWW in the Chicago area. While class struggle was always to the front of her political agenda, she used the space this paper offered to push for, among other things, women's right to access birth control and the legalization of divorce. Interestingly, Parsons was highly critical of the idea of "free love," and disagreed with attacks made on the traditional institutions of marriage and family by other anarchists, in particular by Emma Goldman. It is thought that Lucy Parsons married twice, firstly to Oliver Gathing, and later to Albert Parsons—a fascinating character who had fought as a Confederate soldier before becoming involved in union activism and gaining an interest in anarchism, leading to his eventual execution as one of the famous Haymarket martyrs.

Mother Jones

Mary Harris Jones, better known as "Mother Jones" and born in the rebel county of Cork, Ireland, was once described as "the most dangerous woman in America," which must be up there with being "more dangerous than a thousand rioters"! She stated in her autobiography that her family had been involved in the "struggle against British rule" in Ireland. Indeed her grandfather was hanged as a result of his activity in the nationalist movement. Mother Jones played a huge role in bringing the issue of child labor to the forefront of the political agenda, writing in her autobiography:

"*In the spring of 1903 I went to Kensington, Penn., where 75,000 textile workers were on strike. Of this number at least 10,000 were little children...I called upon the millionaire manufactures to cease their moral murders, and I cried to the officials in the open windows opposite, 'Some day the workers will take possession of your city hall, and when we do, no child will be sacrificed on the altar of profit.'*"

Mother Jones famously led a group of striking children on a march all the way to the front door of former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. The march, from Pennsylvania to New York City, was designed to take the issue of child labor right to the president's doorstep. Around 100 children took part in the march, designed to show what she termed the "New York millionaires" the suffering of working-class children. She led the children all the way to the president's Long Island home, and when they reached the home, she was informed by the president's secretary that Teddy himself was "unavailable." Still, the campaign had succeeded in drawing public attention to a shocking issue. In her words: "We are told that every American boy has the chance of being president. I tell you that these little boys in the iron cages would sell their chance any day for good square meals and a chance to play. These little toilers whom I have taken from the mills—deformed, dwarfed in body and soul, with nothing but toil before them—have never heard that they have a chance, the chance of every American male citizen, to become the president."

The children carried banners with slogans like "we want time to play" "we miss our parents," and "we want time to go to school" and demanded a new federal law prohibiting the exploitation of children in the work place. While they failed in this, it was clear Mother Jones was standing by her own life philosophy to "pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living."

Matilda Rabinowitz

As a young woman, Matilda Rabinowitz traveled the country with the IWW supporting organizing drives and striking workers. She may be best known for her participation in the Little Falls textile strike of 1912, where she was able to gain the trust and confidence of a diverse group of mainly immigrant workers, rebuild the organizing committee, and reform a completely female strike and picket line. While the long battle with the mill in upstate New York dragged along, Rabinowitz organized for the children of strikers to be housed by IWW-sympathetic families in neighboring communities, which prompted further community support for the mostly-female strikers. She also lead a legal defense fund for arrested strikers, going on a months-long speaking tour for those who were arrested in the battle at the mill, raising money and awareness for the effort. Her leadership was key in the strike's successful conclusion.

Rabinowitz wound her way in 1931 from upstate New York to Michigan, where her soapbox speeches began drawing

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International Women's Day

They Weren't Kept At The Back, So They Went To The Front

Continued from previous page

lunchtime crowds of 3,000 at a Ford plant, causing Ford officials to abolish lunch privileges. Ford also had Rabinowitz and four other IWW organizers arrested for their activities, but the damage was done, and autoworkers in the area took the IWW messages to heart. Workers at a nearby Studebaker plant began organizing and calling for the eight-hour day and weekly paychecks—rather than the bi-monthly paychecks that they were receiving—held a combined skilled and unskilled walkout on June 17, 1913. This action, considered to be the first major strike at a U.S. auto plant, may not have occurred without Rabinowitz's work. The fire spread to a nearby Packard plant, where workers were attacked by police, but in the end concessions were won on the paycheck issue, although the eight-hour day would wait. The IWW would not gain a foothold in the auto industry, but it proved to the union movement that both skilled and unskilled workers in one industry could work together in one union to fight the boss.

Photo: upstateearth.blogspot.com
Matilda Rabinowitz.

Jessie Ashley

Sometimes remembered tangentially for being a love interest of Big Bill Haywood, Jessie Ashley was an IWW figure in her own right. As one of the few women attorneys in the early 20th century United States, she dedicated her career to defending jailed unionists, and later in life, to advocating for a woman's right for access to birth control. From a highly-educated and wealthy background, Ashley and many of her East Village compatriots were looked at with suspicion by some in the ranks of the IWW, but she threw herself into solidarity work without hesitation. Ashley is particularly known for her work on the Paterson Strike Pageant of June 1912, in which over 1,000 striking textile workers traveled from Hoboken, N.J., to New York City, marched up 5th Avenue and held a spectacular IWW solidarity event in Madison Square Garden to raise funds for the striking workers. The event was successful in drawing attention and sympathy to the strike, although it did not pan out financially for the strike fund and the strike itself ended in defeat.

Ashley continued to work in New York with the IWW, supporting the movement by providing legal advice and assistance to unemployed workers, fighting to protect free speech rights, and during World War I, providing free legal counseling to draft resisters and conscientious objectors.

Pearl McGill

Pearl McGill was a product of the Midwest, born and raised in Iowa. At the age of 16 she worked at a freshwater-pearl button factory in a town called Muscatine. In 1910, the button workers formed their own union and McGill was at the forefront of the organizing. McGill was soon the recording secretary of the local, as well as a member of the arbitration board. Her intelligence and spark lead to her being recruited by the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) to travel to Chicago as a speaker for the union. Her work with the WTUL next lead her to Boston, where she and other labor activists were drawn to Lawrence, Mass., where the IWW was leading the huge 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike. McGill dove in, becoming a valuable IWW organizer, and consequently had her credentials revoked by the WTUL and the American Federation of Labor (AFL) due to her involvement with the IWW. The strike was a radicalizing moment for the Midwesterner, who wrote to her family: "*There is a big war being fought here. A battle for bread and a battle for life. And this is only the beginning of a revolution which will take place all over the world, between Labor and Capital.*"

McGill was soon traveling as an IWW organizer throughout New England, speaking to factory workers and doing solidarity work. However, when the Paterson strike was crushed in 1913, along with a series of strikes later in the year, McGill experienced burnout and disillusionment with the movement and looked to other organizations, such as the Socialist Party, for leadership. McGill eventually moved back to Iowa, became a teacher, and sadly, was killed in a domestic violence incident by her mentally ill husband in 1924.

Helen Keller

We've all heard of Helen Keller and her work for the disabled. The fact that she was the first blind and deaf person to earn a Bachelor of Arts makes her revolutionary in that sense alone, but what they avoid telling you in school is that she was also politically radical. After being appointed to investigate the conditions of blind people, Keller realized that many people suffer from blindness not because of an accident of birth, but because of poor industrial conditions caused by the carelessness and greed of the bourgeoisie. She became so upset by this that she began to study the works of Karl Marx and became a socialist. She wanted a better life for workers and eventually saw the downside of only engaging in political action. She joined the IWW and advocated for taking the workers' struggle directly to the workplace.

Wobbly Helen Keller reading. Photo: iww.org

During the 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike the IWW had to provide food, shelter and other such support for 50,000 people, so Keller toured various cities in the north to raise money for them. Helen Keller and famous Big Bill Haywood were both members of the U.S. Socialist Party, but Haywood was expelled from its executive committee in 1913 for being too radical. Keller campaigned to have him reinstated. She also campaigned for the release of Joe Hill, who was executed for a crime he did not commit. During the Red Scare of the 1940s and 1950s, notable IWW rebel girl and Communist Party member Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was imprisoned. Keller fought for her release and even wrote a letter to the president demanding Flynn walk free. Speaking out for an imprisoned leftist during the Red Scare was one of the bravest and most dangerous things one could do during those days.

Keller also fought for women's suffrage and birth control, helped found the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and opposed war. She often wrote in defense of socialism and the Russian Revolution, demanding an end to the economic blockade against the Soviet Union.

Amelia "Milka" Sablich

A lesser-known rebel girl who is definitely worth mentioning is Amelia "Milka" Sablich, also known as the "girl in flaming red" after her bright red clothes. Hailing from Trinidad, Colo., this 19-year-old was compared to the famous Mother Jones, however, the media decided Milka was much tougher. Given that she was known to get into physical fights with men, including police, it's hard to take that away from her!

In 1927, after the male mine workers were jailed for "illegal picketing and vagrancy," Sablich and other working-class women lead over 200 strikers at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Ideal Mine in the town of Huerfano. At one point during the strike she was hospitalized, visited by the police, and given the option of either staying away from union activity or going to jail. Sablich chose jail and spent at least five weeks behind bars on two separate occasions.

Milka Sablich. Photo: rebelgraphics.org

After she was released, Sablich went on a speaking tour around the United States to raise money for the miners. She did not accept a salary and lived off of the bare expenses. Upon speaking at the Work People's College in Duluth, Minn., the students gave individual contributions to Milka so she could stay with them and attend the school.

Felix Arrellano

Another Colorado coal mine strike-leader was a mother of Mexican-descent named Felix Arrellano. The *Denver Morning Post* reported that when striking husbands and sons were jailed during the IWW coal strike at Walsenburg, Arrellano was able to assume leadership, marching women into a battle with the authorities. She roused the crowd, some of whom were shot and seriously injured by the police, with the words, "If we were asking for diamonds we wouldn't deserve them, but we are only asking for bread." Unfortunately, she has all but disappeared from the pages of the history books, so we are unable to provide more information on this Wobbly.

Annie Westbrook

Down under we have sister workers such as Annie Westbrook, a famous Australian soapbox agitator who tried to appeal to the revolutionary potential of Australian women. Westbrook helped establish a union local in Perth and became its secretary during the years of World War I. She worked to free her fellow workers who were charged as being part of a "criminal conspiracy" in 1916 when the Australian government outlawed the IWW. Westbrook was eventually forced to leave the IWW in 1919 while the Australian government continued to suppress the union. By 1934 there was no active IWW in Australia, but Westbrook continued to distribute the IWW newspaper and advocate its ideals until she was in her 80s.

May Ewart

May Ewart was also a key figure in the Australian IWW. She was convicted under the Unlawful Associations Act of 1917 for her union work. Her mentor, Lena Lynch, faced a similar fate and was jailed and given four months hard labor.

Lesbia Keogh

Lesbia Keogh (later Lesbia Harford) was one of the first women to graduate law school in Australia, earning a degree from Melbourne University. During her youth she witnessed her family's decline from the middle class, causing her mother to enter the paid workforce so she could give her kids an education. Keogh made many radical friends while attending school, including Italian-Australian communist Guido Barrachi, leftist book salesman Percy Laidler, and Kate Lush. Keogh and Barrachi worked together to oppose the university's pro-war stance during World War I.

Though troubled with a congenital heart defect her entire 36 years of life, she was very active in the Clothing and Allied Trades Union as well as the local Socialist Party. Keogh sat on the Dressmakers' Wages Board and was elected to be vice president of her section of the union. She was originally drawn to the Australian IWW for its strong stance against conscription, its direct action, and its egalitarian structure and she tutored IWW members throughout the war years. When the Wobblies were outlawed in 1916 she used her knowledge as a law graduate to defend the imprisoned activists.

Keogh was also a poet. She believed that art should reach a wider audience than educated individuals, which prompted her to write poems about revolution, social justice, and the working class life.

Keogh's heart condition once caused her to be hospitalized after wearing herself out preaching the anti-conscription message, but she snuck out of the hospital and was back on her soapbox the next day. Unfortunately, her ill health caused her to stop activism and take up white-collar jobs in the early 1920s. Her health continued to decline rapidly and she died in 1927.

The future of women in the IWW

What women have brought to the industrial struggle since the early days of the IWW is nothing less than a new understanding of themselves in the shell of the old. By organizing around the concerns of their class, women have assumed their natural place alongside their brothers—and not infrequently in front of them, leading the way.

But ask yourself this: In the time since the IWW was formed, what has the boss's example communicated to women workers of the world? That their work is less valuable, their skills less sought out, or their presence less missed? A full century gone by, and still the employing class cannot abide by what the IWW stood for in 1905!

The women mentioned here are only historical examples of the kind of women who are active in the IWW today. Let their example be a lesson to women and men alike that our roles are not to come down to us in the form of orders from above; they are best forged alongside one another, in open defiance of the bosses.

With contributions from Ryan Boyd and Diane Krauthamer.

International Women's Day

100 Years Later, We Remember Those Who Struggled:

By Mike Ely

Growing up in the 1960s, I would wander with friends through New York's Greenwich Village. Often we passed the plaque on a New York University office building that marks the site of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. Then and now, it would not take much for us to imagine that narrow street piled with the smoldering bodies of women workers, or imagine their screams as they plunged down from above, trailing flames behind them. Often, in those heady days, we would swarm out of Washington Square Park, flying our red and black flags high, and take the streets of the Lower East Side. And many among us would imagine that marching alongside us were those fearless sisters of the Twenty Thousand whose dreams of revolution and socialism had echoed, like ours, through the narrow streets of Alphabetland.

And now, decades later, young women all over the world are relentlessly herded in unprecedented numbers into brutal sweatshops and the global sex trade—worked without mercy, threatened, underpaid, raped, beaten, and then discarded.

This story of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory is not a world of the past, it is the world of our present. The bitterness of this fact shatters claims of social progress over the last century. All the accumulated wealth and technology has brought us to this: we need a revolution.

* * * * *

NYC Garment Sweatshop

March 25, 1911—It had been a long work day for the workers of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company. Five hundred of them were packed into the three crowded top floors of the Asch Building, within sight of Manhattan's Washington Square.

Hundreds of women bent over their sewing machines turning out tailored women's blouses, one after the other, as their feet pumped floor pedals to drive the bobbing needles. A few gas lights cast long shadows across the factory lofts and left the workers straining to see in semi-darkness. The floors were littered with piles of scraps. And the stagnant air was heavy with a haze of cotton fibers.

Women were paid by the garment—and even the fastest and most skilled could barely bring home $4 in a six or seven-day work week. It hardly covered the rent for tiny rooms in the nearby cold-water tenements, and it was often not enough to feed the workers' families.

Many children were forced to leave their grade schools and follow their parents into the sweatshop. In the "children's corner" of Triangle, school-age kids worked as "cleaners," trimming threads from the garments that were piled up around them in stacks of hundreds.

1938 mural commemorating the Triangle fire by Enest Feeney. Graphic: kasamaproject.org

Foremen paced the floors of the Triangle factory—watching every move and timing bathroom breaks. One worker pointed out that many bosses bought newly invented rubber-soled shoes—and they would sneak up to overhear the workers' hushed conversations in Yiddish, Italian and a half dozen other languages.

Firings were common for even minor infractions, even for staying home sick–and especially for any connection with the energetic socialist organizing efforts in the ghettos. A sign tacked on the wall read: "If you don't come in Sunday, don't come in Monday."

No Warning, No Protection

No one knows how the Triangle fire started. But only a year before, during the great strike known as the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand," the workers in this factory had warned that the place was a firetrap. At 4:50 p.m. on March 25 long yellow flames spread rapidly on the eighth floor, feeding on the scraps of cloth.

Someone screamed out a warning, "FIRE!" The narrow spaces between the rows of tables filled with women trying to escape to the stairs or the tiny elevators. The workers had nothing at hand to fight the fire. The only thing they could do was warn others and try to escape.

There had never been a fire drill—few workers even knew there was a fire escape that descended the narrow vertical air shaft in the very center of the building. Those who could rushed down the front stairs before the flames blocked it off. A waiting elevator was packed. Women crawled in over the heads of those standing in the elevator, until there was no room or air left. The elevator cage descended a few times to the ground floor and then stopped working.

Up above, the eighth floor became a mass of flames. Someone telephoned the tenth floor and alerted the office workers there. Many of them had time to find their way to the roof. And the two sweatshop owners, Isaac Harris and Max Blanck, escaped with them.

The Fire on the Ninth Floor

On the ninth floor, however, the workers had no warning. Flames seemed to erupt everywhere at once, flaring from underneath the worktables. Smoke quickly filled the floor. It was a death trap. Charred skeletons were later found still bent over some machines. Others workers jumped on the work tables as their clothes caught flame, and died there.

Piles of bodies were later found huddled behind exit doors. Foremen had locked at least two major exits—after accusing the workers of stealing rest breaks and scraps of cloth. Other exit doors opened inward—and became extremely difficult to open in the press of frantic people.

A few made their way toward the rear fire escape. Under the weight of 20 workers, the flimsy fire escape itself started to twist and come undone. It collapsed, sending the workers falling through the haze.

From the Ledges

Many workers simply couldn't get to any door and the flames quickly drove them off the factory floor. Women jumped or fell into the elevator shaft—at least 20 bodies were later found at the bottom.

Many were forced out the windows. They lined up on the narrow ledges outside, looking down to the crowded street below.

The first hook and ladder crew—Company 20—came rushing up Mercer Street. And the horrified on-lookers who had gathered from nearby factories and university classrooms demanded: "Raise the ladders!" The team of firemen quickly cranked the lifting gears as a hush fell over the crowd. The ladder rose to the sixth floor—and stopped. It could reach no higher. On the ninth floor ledge, the dress of one girl suddenly flared up in flames. She tried to leap to the top of the ladder, 30 feet below her. She missed and plunged to her death.

Firemen tried to use their hoses to protect those trapped on the ledges. It didn't work. To the horror of onlookers, the flames forced more and more workers onto the ledges. There was literally no room and those closest to the window caught fire.

A working class organizer wrote:

"*I was coming down Fifth Avenue on the Saturday afternoon when a great, swirling, billowing cloud of smoke swept like a giant streamer out of Washington Square and... two young girls whom I know to be working in the vicinity came rushing toward me, tears were running from their eyes and they were white and shaking as they caught me by the arm. 'Oh,' shrieked one of them, 'They are jumping.*'"

Often the young workers, who had been comrades in life and work, hugged each other close and jumped together. The firemen's nets were useless—the force of the falling bodies tore through the cloth, and even cracked the sidewalks underneath.

The *New York World* wrote:

"*Screaming men and women and boys and girls crowded out on the many window ledges and threw themselves into the streets far below. They jumped with their clothing ablaze. The hair of some of the girls streamed up flames as they leaped. Thud after thud sounded on the pavements.*"

The firemen's horses panicked at the smell of blood and the horrifying sound of bodies hitting ground. They reared on their hind legs, their eyes rolling. As their teamsters tried to lead them away, several horses wrenched themselves loose and bolted wildly down the crowded streets. The firemen could do little but drag dozens of bodies of the fallen workers into piles that grew along Greene Street.

Not a Thought to Lives and Safety

The feverish city seemed to freeze in horror. 146 workers died. The name Triangle Shirtwaist Company was quickly telegraphed and discussed around the planet.

It was one of those days in history when countless eyes focused in on a single defining event, when lies buckled under the weight of facts, when hidden injustices suddenly became undeniable.

For a century, the United States had promoted itself as a "promised land"—as a refuge for the poor of Europe to make a wealthy future. But on that one horrifying afternoon, the whole world could see the desperate exploitation that awaited immigrant workers in New York.

Colonial powers of Europe and the United States insisted that their "Christian civilization" had a moral superiority that gave them the right to rule over "barbaric peoples." But when young girls plunged in flames onto New York City streets, this smug self-praise stood exposed. Suddenly, there were countless questions about the lives and treatment of the eight million "factory girls" in the United States.

New machinery, methods and efficiencies of modern industrial production had been hailed as the hope of humanity. But that terrible day, March 25, suddenly revealed that capitalist use of technology had gone toward profit—and not a moment's thought had been assigned to the safety or survival of the workers. On those crowded factory floors, there had been no sprinkler systems, no fire hoses or axes or chemical extinguishers, no emergency lighting—no way to fight the fire at all. Half of New York's working class spent their days above the seventh floor—but not a single fire crew had equipment that could rescue them.

Grief and Determination

"I looked upon the heap of dead bodies and I remembered these girls were shirtwaist makers. I remembered their great strike last year in which the same girls had demanded more sanitary conditions

Continued on next page

A tragic image of the fallen victims. Photo: kasamaproject.org

International Women's Day

Women Of The 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

Continued from previous page

and more safety precautions in the shops. These dead bodies were the answer." - Bill Shepherd, newspaper reporter

"I would be a traitor to those poor burned bodies if I came here to talk of good fellowship. We have tried you good people of the public and we have found you wanting. The old Inquisition had its rack and its thumbscrews and its instruments of torture with iron teeth. We know what these things are today: the iron teeth are our necessities, the thumbscrews, the high powered and swift machinery, close to which we must work, and the rack here is the `fire proof' structures that will destroy us the minute they catch fire." - Rose Schneiderman, strike leader, at the memorial meeting

While there was a shock in many places over the horrors of the Triangle fire, the working people of New York already knew the dangers and suffering they lived with. And they knew that these deaths could have been avoided.

Two years before, in November 1909, the women of Triangle Shirtwaist factory had joined the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand"—in a general strike of garment workers from 500 different sweatshops in New York. The strike had been heroic and hard-fought. The workers—and especially the many young women—had stepped out of the shadows and taken over the streets of New York, raising their demands for dignity, living wages, shorter work hours and union recognition. In many sweatshops—including the Triangle Shirtwaist factory—the workers demanded fire escapes and open doors.

Photo: kasamaproject.org
Garment workers demonstrating.

After weeks of hard strike, the workers in some shops won their demands—but the strike was broken in others. Many capitalists simply refused to negotiate. The owners of Triangle Shirtwaist Company, the largest manufacturers of the tailored women's blouses (which were called "shirt waists"), hired strikebreakers and waited to starve out the workers. The women and men returned to work at the Triangle factory with a partial settlement—but their safety demands were rejected.

When 146 workers died in the Triangle fire, the masses of people responded with sorrow and a deepening class consciousness. On April 2, a huge memorial meeting was held at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Heavy rains soaked the crowds of hundreds of thousands on the day the workers of Triangle were buried. Working people, dressed in black, filled the streets, joined by many better-off women and suffragettes—and marched past sidewalks packed with onlookers and mourners.

The newspaper *America* wrote: "It was not until the marchers reached Washington Square and came in sight of the Asch building that the women gave vent to their sorrow. It was one long-drawn-out, heart-piercing cry, the mingling of thousands of voices, a sort of human thunder in the elemental storm–a cry that was perhaps the most impressive expression of human grief ever heard in this city."

Police captains mobilized their forces, fearful that they would lose control of Washington Square Park and of all New York.

The Legacy of Triangle

"It is an undeniable fact that several millions of men and women in the United States are today engaged in occupations that yearly take their toll of human life and health as inevitably, as inexorably as the seasons roll in their grooves." - *Solidarity* journal, 1904

"*We accept and welcome, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves great inequality of wealth and environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of the few, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future of the race.*"- Andrew Carnegie,a leading monopoly-capitalist

There was tremendous debate and struggle within the larger ruling class over how to respond to the fire. Many factory owners widely insisted that "government regulation" was un-American and even unconstitutional.

But, meanwhile powerful forces within the ruling class were determined that they, and their system, would be protected from a tremendous danger that was building in the ghetto tenements of New York City. The immigrant garment workers of New York were being forged—by the brutality of the system, by their experience in many countries, by the active organizing of revolutionaries and socialists—into a powerful class conscious force. They were starting to play a major role in the development of a new, massive, revolutionary current within the working class in the United States.

Government agencies at the city, state and federal levels felt intense pressure to show they could enact reforms. Official commissions released research, documenting the nightmares in U.S. mines and factory sweatshops—and the ways that tens of thousands every year died in capitalist production. The New York City Council and legislatures around the United States started a publicized burst of safety ordinances and protection laws. Inspectors were hired. New firefighting techniques were developed.

But the truth is that the machinery of capitalism ground on ruthlessly after the

Photo: kasamaproject.org
Thousands march in memory of the Triangle victims on April 2, 1911.

Triangle fire—despite the reforms and new laws. Within three days Harris and Blanck, the owners of the Triangle Company, resumed operations at a new location a few blocks away on University Place. They quickly blocked off one fire escape at this new factory to set up two extra rows of sewing machines. Eight months later, these sweatshop profiteers were acquitted in court of all guilt in the Triangle fire. The capitalist press widely blamed the fire on a worker's cigarette.

Over the decades since 1911, capitalism continued to spread, penetrating and restructuring human life on this planet like an uncontrolled cancer—bringing with it the plague of industrial death, poisoning, explosions, lung diseases and nightmarish conditions for working people.

In just the last two decades, the explosive growth of new sweatshop districts have produced new "industrial massacres" that mirror the Triangle fire. In 1991, 25 workers died behind locked doors in Hamlet, North Carolina—in a "modern" chicken factory that had no sprinklers or fire alarms. In 1993, 188 workers died, trapped behind locked doors in a fire at the Kadar Industrial Toy Company in Thailand. In, 2000, a fire broke out in a building housing eight sweatshops on Manhattan's 36th street, killing garment worker Bienvenido Hernandez and injuring several coworkers. In December 2010, a garment factory in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka killed 25 and injured at least 100 workers.

Today, the fire at Triangle shirtwaist factory remains a vivid symbol of capitalism's heartless nature, which has not changed one bit over the last century.

* * * * *

Those women workers of Triangle and their fellow garment workers in New York left behind a powerful legacy of struggle that is celebrated every year. In 1910, delegates at Copenhagen's Second International Conference of Socialist Women proclaimed that March 8 would be International Women's Day–in honor of the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand" and the fighting women workers of New York City.

On March 8, 1911, just days before the Triangle fire, the first celebrations of International Women's Day were held in the streets of Germany, Austria, Denmark and several other countries.

Reflecting on the women who took to the streets in the Uprising and those who died at Triangle, one commentator said:

"*You know, it is a very heavy chain we're living with today. The woman is always pushed to think of advancing her family, and she knows what it is to fight for others. She lives under the oppression of generations and she knows that her daughter will follow the same path, it's all laid out. When the woman fights she often fights with a bigger vision, a bigger push, a strong motivation that united in struggle our situation can change. This is what we saw in the Uprising of the Twenty Thousand. Their movement sparked another one for broader change. They weren't fighting for themselves, they were fighting for all the poor people.*"

In memory of our dead in the Triangle fire, in honor of our sisters who have died for liberation, in determination to press forward the revolutionary struggle to end all the capitalist exploitation, sexual slavery, and ancient patriarchy that weighs so brutally on the women of this planet, we raise our revolutionary banners on March 8, International Women's Day.

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Reviews

Lessons For Today From The Golden Age Of Factory Unrest?

Director: Nigel Cole. "Made In Dagenham." *Produced by Audley Films, BBC Films, BMS Finance, HanWay Films, Lipsync Productions, Number 9 Films and UK Film Council, 2010. 113 minutes.*

By Steve Early

In 1968, the world was transfixed by global student unrest. Less attention was paid to factory uprisings that occurred at the same time and overlapped with campus protests in places like France. In one small corner of the Ford Motor Company's huge production complex in Dagenham, England, several hundred women did their part in the "year of revolt." Toiling in their own sex-segregated department, the only females in a plant of 55,000 had walked out many times in the past over strike issues dear to their male coworkers. Now, it was their turn to shut down sewing machines, stop production of seat covers, and picket Ford over a pay dispute with broader social implications.

"Made in Dagenham" is the story of their strike—born of working-class feminist consciousness in a labor movement even more dominated by "the lads" 40 years ago than it is today. Schmaltzy, upbeat, and out of synch with our current workplace gestalt of hopelessness and defeat, this film is just what the head doctor ordered for holiday entertainment. It is, by far, the best popular depiction of union activist creation since Ken Loach's "Bread and Roses" and Martin Ritt's "Norma Rae." If unions don't use it to train shop stewards and bargaining committee members, that failure of labor education imagination will be understandable because "Made in Dagenham" captures the frequent tension between labor's full-time officialdom and its working members, particularly during strikes.

The strike leader played by Sally Hawkins in Nigel Cole's new movie is a very British version of the Southern textile worker portrayed so famously by Sally Fields in 1979. Rita O'Grady is not even a union steward in the film's early scenes of shop-floor life and work. She steps into that role only because her older coworker, Connie, is dealing with the suicidal depression of her husband, a damaged survivor of wartime duty in the Royal Air Force (RAF). Unlike the mill where Norma Rae toiled, the Dagenham plant is completely organized. (The union in the film is actually a composite of several actual unions with members at the plant.) Unfortunately, with the exception of Albert, a loveable chief steward ally (wonderfully played by Bob Hoskins), the Dagenham local seems to function as an arm of Ford's human resources department, a labor-management relationship not unknown to autoworkers in this country.

The political traditions of British trade unions give this arrangement humorous left cover. In one memorable scene, a clutch of worried officials, in jackets and ties, are trying to talk Rita out of strike action that might upend some murky, big-picture strategy the leadership is pursuing. While condescending to the only worker in the room, they address each other as "comrade" and invoke Marx as the final authority on what should and should not be done!

Rita's first bargaining session is a face-to-face meeting with Ford officials about their misclassification of sewing machine operators as unskilled labor. Both Rita and Connie (Geraldine James) get a day off from work and overdress for the occasion. Monty, their full-time union representative (played by Kenneth Cranham), first takes them out for a well-lubricated lunch, a perk designed to put Rita and Connie in his debt. Monty has obviously been off the job and out of the plant for years; his main preoccupation now seems to be eating and drinking at dues-payer expense, dressing nicely, and seeing the company's side of things. When the union delegation finally sits down with management, Monty does all the talking and fails to give Ford a firm deadline for fixing the problem.

Shocked by the incompetence of her own union negotiator and his coziness with employer representatives, Rita commandeers the meeting. She interrupts Monty and pulls out samples of the seat covers stitched by the workers in her department. She explains the complexity of the labor process involved and insists that Ford properly reward the skill and experience necessary to do the job. The scene is a great tutorial in how to make effective job upgrade presentations—and, believe me, they're always done best by those who do the actual work. The bosses are so taken aback that one can only respond with a threat of discipline for Rita's lifting of the material used in her demonstration.

The radicalization of Rita that follows is a sight to be seen. Hawkins' character in this film is no Poppy, the loopy Cockney in Mike Leigh's "Happy-Go-Lucky" that won her a Golden Globe and a slew of other awards in 2008. She is a mother with two children, working the proverbial "double shift" in a traditional marriage to a fellow Dagenham worker (played by Daniel Mays) who is sweet but weak-willed. She's a woman previously lacking in personal self-confidence, a stranger to public speaking, and bereft of "political experience" (as Ford officials discover when they scour her file expecting to find evidence of left-wing party connections).

Under the tutelage of Albert (a far more appealing version of the union mentors played by Ron Leibman in "Norma Rae" and Adrien Brody in "Bread and Roses"), Rita finds her own voice, a streak of determination, and the capacity to move others. As in many strikes, rank-and-file

Protest scene from "Made In Dagenham." Photo: laceysfilms.wordpress.com

unity is stronger at the beginning. Then, as the job action spreads, thousands are thrown out of work and the recriminations begin to fly. For some workers, organizing strike relief, attending rallies, maintaining picket lines, and meeting other union members is a learning experience, liberating and even euphoric. Others—in this case, mainly fearful or disgruntled guys—slink away to the pub. There, they watch strike coverage on the telly and grouse about the economic hardship inflicted on the real breadwinners in the community by a handful of unreasonable women.

Rita's own Norma Rae moment occurs at a union conference, not standing on the picket line or a work bench in the plant. Monty and the other "comrades" have scheduled a vote among the entirely male conference delegates that will end this costly "industrial action" at Ford without a favorable resolution of the job grading issue. Rita and her roving pickets are the only women at the meeting. Rita takes the stage and delivers a moving, but simple, speech recalling the wartime courage of her coworker's husband, the now deceased RAF veteran. "Men and women, we are in this together," she tells the stone-faced crowd. "We are not divided by sex. Only by those willing to accept injustice." Moved, shamed, and/or inspired by her message, the delegates vote to continue union backing for the Dagenham strike, which, by then, was creating widespread disruption of Ford production.

The company responds by sending a hard-nosed executive from Detroit to read the riot act to Britain's then-Labour Government. If the strike is not ended, Ford strongly hints, it might shift Cortina production to a land where the blokes and birds aren't so strike-happy. The prime minister at the time was the wishy-washy Harold Wilson. His first Secretary of State was Barbara Castle, a longtime member of Parliament (played with flair by Miranda Richardson) who takes charge of the situation when Wilson does not. In the film, with a little waving of Castle's magic wand, a dispute over pay-grading in a particular auto plant job classification gets transformed, for PR purposes, into a broader demand for "equal pay." Two years after the walkout was finally settled with an increase for the sewing machine operators (that still left them earning less than men in the same job grade), Parliament did enact legislation against pay discrimination, based on gender. The measure was not fully implemented until 1975.

But the social reality, in the meantime, was a bit more complex, as several British commentators, including Sheila Cohen, have noted. The real-life Labour Party feminist shown negotiating with Rita and her friends in London triggered a trade union revolt in 1969 with a white paper entitled "In Place of Strife." Castle (who would later become Baroness Castle of Blackburn) created a backlash against Wilson's government and contributed to Labour's electoral defeat in 1970, when she tried to curb union rights and quell the broader strike wave that the women of Dagenham surfed so impressively.

The finer points of British left and labor history aside, if you liked "Brassed Off," "The Full Monty," or "Billy Elliot," then "Made in Dagenham" is the film for you. The lyrics for its theme song, performed by former Dagenham worker Sandie Shaw, were written by the British protest rocker, Billy Bragg (who has a street in Dagenham named after him). It's not coal miners or steelworkers who take center stage this time, but sewing machine operators who were no less skilled in the hard work of union solidarity.

This review originally appeared on Dec. 9, 2010 in "Working In These Times," and was reprinted with permission.

Reviews

Society Needs 'Radical Restructuring' To Confront Racism

Alexander, Michelle. The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness. *New York: The New Press, 2010. Hardcover, 290 pages, $27.95.*

By John Maclean

In "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness," Michelle Alexander writes that from the days of the "founding fathers" in the United States up to the present, evolving tactics have been used to maintain racial hierarchies. Today the label "criminal" is used to discriminate. A few short decades ago prisons were seen as failed institutions, as creating more crime than they prevented, and now the United States has one of the highest incarceration rates in the world. Alexander says that "the stigma of criminality" works as race did under segregation and that "all those who care about social justice should fully commit…to dismantling this new racial caste system."

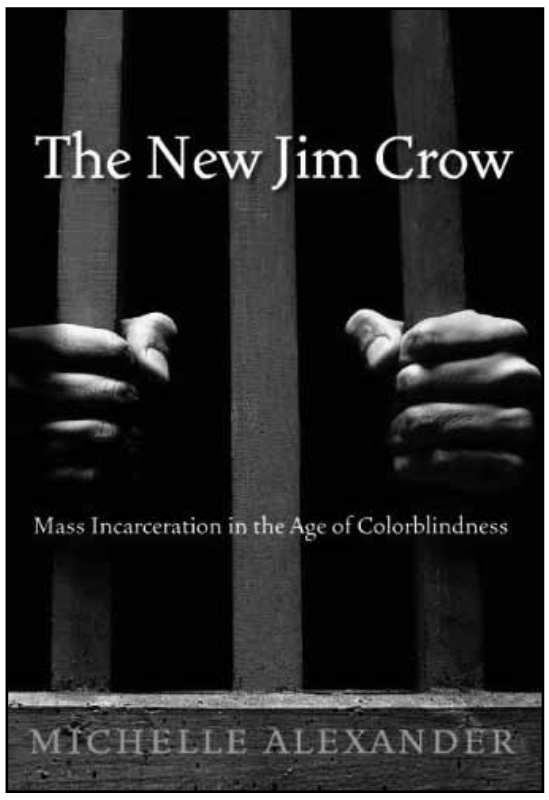
Throughout U.S. history, racism has shown itself to be "highly adaptable" and white privilege has been preserved in being transformed. Alexander notes a "racial bribe" as having been handed to poor whites from Bacon's Rebellion in 1675, to the Populist betrayal of freed slaves after the Civil War, and with the more recent reactionary Southern Strategy. During the Southern Redemption period in the 1880s, it was ruled by a Virginia court that the one exception to the 13th Amendment (abolishing slavery) would be for those found guilty of crimes. These people "were understood, quite literally, to be slaves of the state." This legal development nurtured "the nation's first prison boom" and like today, most of those incarcerated were black. In the late 1950s, prior to the assassination of Dr. Martin King Jr. a "race neutral" law and order rhetoric was implemented "to generate and mobilize white opposition to the Civil Rights movement." This was furthered under former U.S. President Ronald Reagan's "War on Drugs," which saw "drug treatment, prevention and education" programs gutted, while punitive law enforcement budgets rose dramatically. Alexander cites two sociologists as saying that crack "was a godsend to the Right" and now even the Democrats sing of law and order—the Clinton Administration oversaw the largest prison boom in U.S. history.

In a matter of decades, from 1980 to 2000, the incarcerated population in the United States jumped from around 300,000 to more than 2 million. By 2007, one in 31 adults, or more than 7 million Americans, were "behind bars, on probation, or on parole." Drug convictions are the main cause of this popular explosion, and Supreme Courts have paved the way by "eviscerating 4th Amendment protections against unreasonable searches and seizures by the police." The drug war has undermined all of our supposed civil liberties. Many court decisions have nudged us down the "totalitarian path," and today with "consent searches" police can "search for drugs [on] just about anybody walking down the street." If police are not confronting people and using intimidation to execute a search, they can invent a pretext to search ("pretext stops"), and courts have blessed this abuse as well. A legal scholar, cited by Alexander, calls the Drug Enforcement Administration's 1984 program, "Operation Pipeline," a systematic use of consent and pretext searches. She explains that this is "'exactly what the Framers meant to prohibit: a federally-run general search program that targets people without cause for suspicion, particularly those who belong to disfavored groups.'" The cops of today are awash in cash, Pentagon-granted military equipment, and paramilitary drug raids have soared, from a few hundred in the 1970s, to 40,000 raids in 2001. These destructive changes have actually given law enforcement a "pecuniary interest" in the profitability of the drug trade, and Congress, in what Alexander terms a "true revolution," allows agencies "to retain and use" property seized in operations, even that of the innocent.

In this war the enemy is not drugs, but it is "racially defined." In 2000, Human Rights Watch documented seven states in which blacks made up 80 to 90 percent of those put away for drugs. All around the country the number of blacks incarcerated for drugs by far surpasses the number of whites. This of course has nothing to do with patterns of drug use. In 2006 "One in every 14 black men was behind bars" and with white men it was one in every 106. Alexander writes that what is "painfully obvious" about all this is that it sweeps "people of color off the streets, locks[s] them in cages, and then release[s] them into an inferior second class status." The courts have made it impossible to bring racial discrimination cases under the 4th Amendment, done the same for the 14th Amendment in *McCleskey v. Kemp*, and finally closed all avenues with *Alexander v. Sandoval*. The author writes that "the dirty little secret" of criminal justice is that "the Supreme Court has actually granted the police license to discriminate."

Criminals, as it turns out, are "the one social group in America we have permission to hate." The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 made it okay to force criminals out of public housing, and, under Clinton, this was furthered to squeeze out all those with records. In 2002 the Supreme Court reversed a ruling which found that those innocent of wrong-doing, but caught up nonetheless, could not be evicted. Most states allow "private employers to discriminate on the basis of past criminal conviction." According to Alexander this constitutes a form of negative "branding by the government." People leaving prison face an array of fees ("pre-conviction service fees," "jail book-in fees," "jail per diems," "public defender application fees," "bail investigation fees," and others, along with child support garnishments) such that they sometimes can't afford to get out, and end up homeless if they do. The welfare reforms of the late 1990s denied public assistance to drug-related offenders. Only Maine and Vermont allow inmates to vote, and the United Nations has condemned these practices as discriminatory and in violation of international law. When someone gets convicted of a crime today "their 'debt to society' is never paid."

Alexander writes that there are more African Americans "under correctional control today…than were enslaved in 1850 a decade before the Civil War began." We are in denial about this racial caste, we "know and don't know." We brutally imagine that "illegals" deserve this treatment. Alexander details the "parallels" between the current system of mass incarceration, and the older Jim Crow; beginning with how in both periods "elites" decided to "exploit the resentments, vulnerabilities, and racial biases of poor and working-class whites for political [and] economic gain." She shows that both eras were characterized by "legalized discrimination," "disenfranchisement," exclusions from jury duty, limited access to courts, complex segregation, and the defining of the "meaning and significance of race." Both systems were, and are, "race-making" institutions. This is all a nation's choice; as the historian Lerone Bennett Jr. notes, "'we choose to be a nation that shames and blames its most vulnerable,



Graphic: sfbayview.com

affixes badges of dishonor upon them at young ages, and then relegates them to a permanent second-class status for life.'"

Michelle Alexander sincerely wonders why the War on Drugs is not "the top priority of every civil rights group in the country." She says that the "centrality of litigation" has advanced lawyers and left behind the grassroots. Lani Guinier, in a memoir, said of a professionalized civil rights movement: "'litigators like me became like the Washington insiders we were suspicious of…We… distanced ourselves from the very people on whose behalf we brought the cases in the first place.'" Similar criticisms have been brought against a professionalized legally-constrained labor movement. We cannot turn away from passionate "advocacy on behalf of criminals" if we want to undo the abuses of mass incarceration. Public policy which enshrines profit must be confronted, and even more so a "public consensus" which recreates racial caste, must be uprooted. Alexander wonders if "affirmative action" does not function like a "racial bribe;" if it does not give just enough to encourage people to abandon change which promises "to alter the nation's economic and social structure." She worries that it "lends credence to a trickle-down theory of racial justice." She concludes in calling for a "'radical restructuring of society,'" as did Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and with the sad thought that "traditional civil rights organizations" may not be up to this.

Labor Unrest Was 'Straw That Broke The Camel's Back' In Egypt

Continued from 1

Leaders of the official government-controlled union federation, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, were not involved in the strikes and negotiations. Workers were ignoring the existing structures and forming their own committees to negotiate. Specifically, on Jan. 30, 2011, the Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (FETU) was established across many cities in both the private and public sector, and was recognized across the globe.

"The Egyptian workers actually turn[ed] a new page, breaking the pattern of what was past," said Abbas.

They had ample precedents. Though seemingly invisible outside the country, more than two million Egyptian workers have struck, sat down, and protested for higher pay since 2004, when a neoliberal government stepped up privatization.

"Egyptian society suffers from two things: hiking prices all the time and unemployment," said Abbas, adding that salaries are also very low. Teachers, for instance, make about $34 per month, government workers make about $70 per month, and private sector workers make about $110 per month, he said.

Additionally, Abbas said, "four million people are without any rights to health care, anything. They are not even recognized as part of the working force in any contractual way."

Shortly after the news came that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had resigned, *Labor Notes* talked with teacher unionist Abdel Hafiz in Cairo.

Asked what will happen next, Hafiz said, "What will happen next is people are going to take five minutes and celebrate, and then we will start building our new Egypt."

"Everyone wants to be in control now. We know tomorrow there will be a big debate in Egypt about the future, about how in our new Egypt we will have democracy and civil rights," he added.

This story is a recombination of two stories that appeared on Feb. 9 and Feb. 11, 2011 in Labor Notes*, and was recombined and reprinted with permission.*

Three Month Fight Puts Thieving Restaurant Out Of Business

Continued from 1

twice each weekend, we yelled chants such as "No justice / No pasta / We're gonna make it cost ya" and "Work for Ciro / Get paid zero."

We also sang a song composed especially for the fight: "Hey Ciro can you hear me? / How does it feel? / To finally know justice / For the wages you steal / Hey Ciro listen up / Can you hear that sound? / It's Bella Napoli / Running into the ground."

Becky tells the rest of the story:

"Ciro broke down week by week. Despite sending in faulty documentation, Ciro was forced to pay [the Washington State Department of] Labor and Industries a portion of my wages, although he still refused to pay the entire amount. His business dwindled, while our numbers and dedication grew. Finally at the end of January, in a matter of days, Ciro spent a night in jail (with assault charges pending) for attacking a group of SeaSolers while they were postering; SeaSol and my fight received some much deserved radio attention on [radio station] KCBS 91.3's "One World Report"; and most importantly, Bella Napoli closed!!!

"The day we delivered my demand letter was one of the happiest days of my life, I felt so supported and strong. With our strength and persistence we have shown—and will continue to show—bosses like Ciro that they can't get away with abusing their workers. And if they resist we are ready, willing, and able to shut them down so that they can never again commit such a despicable crime against the working class. There is power in numbers and support out there if you have a similar situation. Solidarity Forever!"

The story on "One World Report" confirmed what we had already believed to be true: Ciro admitted that we were costing him hundreds of dollars and the majority of his customers every time we picketed.

Now that Ciro's restaurant has closed its doors for good, we hope its demise will serve as a warning to other bosses: if you decide to rip off workers and refuse our demands for justice, your business might just go the way of Bella Napoli.

World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

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.

Global Solidarity And Pecan Pie

By D.M. Kloker, ISC Chair

Fellow Workers, if I may, I would like to tell you about the most satisfying piece of pecan pie I have ever tasted. In the summer of 2009 I had the distinct pleasure of meeting some of the workers at Ladismith Cheese in the little Karoo of South Africa. On July 4th that year I marched with the workers from the town center out to the plant where the milk these workers harvested, from cattle they helped raise, was processed into fine cheeses sold throughout Africa and Europe. The marchers ranged in age from children to the elderly and everything in between. The spirit of solidarity and community in this march was unlike anything I had experienced as a long time activist in the United States. We arrived at the locked gates of the plant under police surveillance, which did nothing to discourage the assembled crowd. Workers on shift came and cheered us on from the other side of the locked gates. I understood little of the speeches, as they were in Afrikaans—a West Germanic language, spoken natively in South Africa and Namibia. But the message was clear from the body language of all present: we are the workers that made this town. We will no longer be mistreated; we will not be silenced.

That afternoon I toured some of the company-owned housing where workers were forced to live with damp dirt floors, soot covered walls, and pit toilets. I learned that the rally of hundreds of workers would have been thousands had the company not intimidated the taxi cab drivers into not taking fares to the march. The workers told me about how the company had refused to promote any worker of color into the all-white management structure. But most of all, I came to understand the resolve these workers had to organize and fight the system that tried to keep them impoverished.

I committed myself to doing everything I could to support their struggle. The day before I was set to fly back to California, I received a package at my hotel. It was from some of the workers at Ladismith Cheese. They picked a bag of pecans from their boss's farm for me. This small gesture meant the world to me. After returning home my first priority was to find an appropriate way to honor this gift. The resulting pecan pie was the best dessert I can remember. It is the taste I associate with global solidarity.

That experience inspired me to write my first article for the *Industrial Worker* (see "Ladismith Cheese Stinks: Farm Workers In Rural South Africa Fight For Their Rights," October 2009 *IW*, page 9) and propelled me onto the International Solidarity Commission (ISC). The ISC continues to support the tireless work of the Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers' Union (CSAAWU) and the workers of Ladismith Cheese. Further, solidarity with those workers has become a major focus of the Cape Town IWW. Yet I would have never have made that connection had I not reached out to Fellow Workers and asked them who they knew in South Africa. Helping workers all over the world make connections and find solidarity with one another is a key function of the ISC. Whenever a Wobbly is about to leave their home to visit another country, part of their preparation ought to be reaching out to the ISC and other Fellow Workers. As I write this, Fellow Workers are bringing support to workers in Haiti and building networks with workers in Cambodia because they reached out to the ISC.

The world is in a period of great flux. Authoritarian regimes are being toppled in some countries as essential services are being slashed from public budgets in others. All of these developments are bringing workers into the streets. Global solidarity could not be more important. Workers need one another not just for support in our respective struggles, but to help each other understand how connected our seemingly separate fights really are. The internet offers us an unprecedented opportunity to forge these connections in real time. Yet nothing replaces the kinds of connections that can be made face-to-face. And I have yet to receive an attachment of fresh pecans in my email.

Already Fellow Workers are discussing ways to send an IWW delegation to Egypt, as we have already done to Haiti, Mexico, and Palestine. The resources of the ISC to create global solidarity are meager when compared to the resources put into global repression by governments and corporations. But our impact can still be enormous if we never miss an opportunity to make connections between workers, whether across town or across an ocean. Start by making sure your Branch or Industrial Union has a liaison to the ISC. And remember to reach out to Fellow Workers and the ISC next time you plan to take an international trip. The taste of global solidarity awaits you.

Rage Supports Guitar Makers' Strike

By John Kalwaic

The newly-reformed popular rock band Rage Against the Machine has come out in support of striking guitar makers in South Korea. The companies are Cork and Cor-Tek, which produce electric guitars in much of the world. Workers at Cork guitar plants in South Korea have taken industrial action and brought guitar making to a halt after years of abuse. Guitar workers at these companies have worked under questionable conditions in many parts of the globe. Now, band members Zack de la Rocha and (Wobbly) Tom Morello have come out in support of the workers. Rage Against the Machine was a popular left-wing band in the 1990s that was influenced by both punk rock and hip hop. The band was known for its ant-imperialist and anti-police brutality statements.

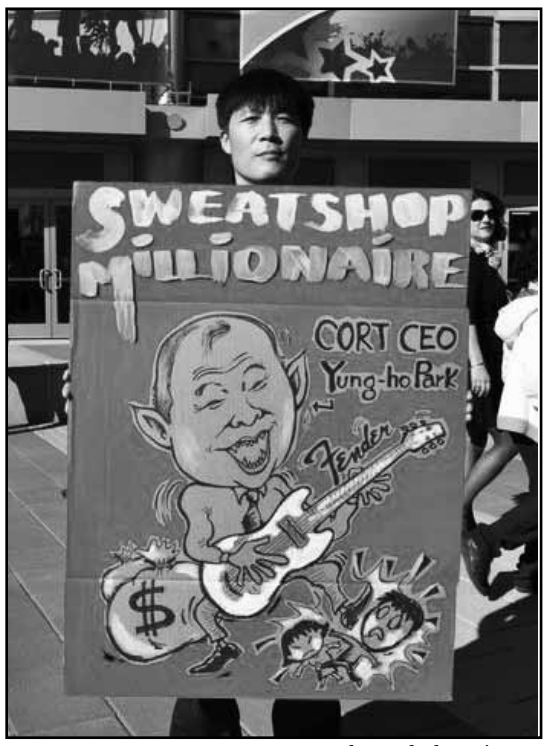


Photo: clashmusic.com
Cort worker protesting CEO Yungho Park.

The workers made the following statement:

"The Cort and Cor-Tek guitar workers of South Korea produced guitars at Cort's factories for famous brands such as Fender and Ibanez for decades, but were abruptly fired in 2007 for forming a union to change their sweatshop-like conditions. Both Korea's National Labor Relations Commission and the Seoul courts judged Cort's mass dismissal and the sudden closure of its Korean factories to be illegal.

"The Commission and the courts also found the company's claim of financial hardship to be false and fined the company. However, despite these rulings, Cort has used intimidation and violence to secure forced resignations from the workers to deny them unemployment benefits and to retaliate against the union through hired thugs. The workers' case is now in Korea's Supreme Court.

"Cort Guitars has profited in the billions of dollars from making guitars for the global market. But at NAMM, the guitar workers and supporters from all walks of life will call on Cort, Fender and Ibanez to respect basic worker rights and re-open Cort's ilegally shuttered factories."

With files from http://www.clashmusic.com

Abused Indonesian Maids Jailed In Saudi Arabia

By John Kalwaic

Nearly 2,000 maids from Indonesia have been jailed in Saudi Arabia. The Indonesian women were not citizens of Saudi Arabia but guest workers as maids in the country.

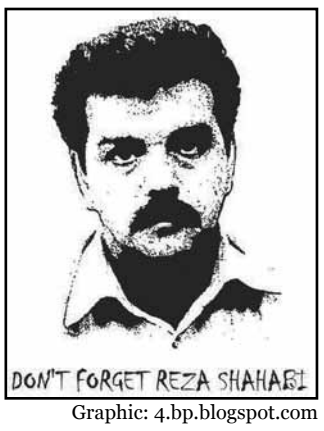
Most of the maids are accused of "immorality" for being alone with male members of their sponsors' families, which is illegal in Saudi Arabia. The maids say that they were being raped and molested by the male patriarchs of their hosts' families. They remain in jails or are taking refuge inside the Indonesian Embassy. The imprisoned maids are going to be deported or "repatriated" to Indonesia. Some Indonesian Muslim groups are also calling for their government to stop sending maids to the Saudi Kingdom altogether, as many of them face verbal and physical abuse, sexual harassment and non-payment of wages.

Some 2,770 maids were "repatriated" back to Indonesia in 2010, and a 24-hour hotline has been established for maids in distress. In all the cases of maids in distress reported, 50 percent had to do with non-payment of wages and 10 percent had to do with sexual abuse at the hands of male sponsors.

Reza Shahabi Hunger Strike In Iran's Evin Prison

By J. Pierce

Reza Shahabi's health remains in critical condition as repression of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) continues. An officer of the Vahed Syndicate, Reza Shahabi, went on hunger strike from Dec. 4 – 19, 2010, to protest his continued unlawful detention. He was arrested on June 12, 2010 and has been held without charges since that time. He has consistently demanded that the Islamic Republic formally charge him and clarify his status, yet the government has seen little reason to do so. This frustration and desperation led Reza Shahabi to take the drastic step of declaring a no-food, no-liquids hunger strike. As Shahabi's health deteriorated rapidly, Reza's family, friends, and fellow unionists pleaded with him to end the strike, for it seems the regime would just as soon see him die. Shahabi finally agreed to begin taking fluids. On Dec 11, Shahabi was moved to Evin prison's clinic where his health remained fragile.



Graphic: 4.bp.blogspot.com

As a result of his hunger strike, Shahabi appeared in court on Dec. 19. Denouncing the regime's attempt to assign him a lawyer, Shahabi insisted on his own council—Masoud Shafiee, a progressive lawyer who is helping Shahabi *pro bono*. Shafiee demanded proper visitation and assistance rights to Shahabi, which authorities have so far denied. On that same day, Shahabi declared an end to his hunger strike after it appeared that the regime had finally activated his case file.

According to reports, Shahabi's family had raised the bail demanded by the regime but as they offered the money, and Shahabi's four-month detention order passed, Shahabi was still refused release. Since early December, the bail has been increased from $60,000 to $100,000. With Reza in prison and his family dependant on him, Shahabi's friends have been supporting his wife, Zohreh Rezaei, and their family financially since his detention in June.

An earlier victory for the Vahed Syndicate was the release of union officer, Saeed Torabian, who was arrested in June 2010 and after a flood of protests for his release, was set free on July 19. Remaining behind bars from the Vahed Syndicate is celebrated unionist Mansour Osanloo, whose case remains an international appeal, Ebrahim Maddadi, Gholamreza Gholamhosseini, Morteza Kamsari, and Ali Akbar Nazari.