

INDUSTRIAL WORKER



OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

September 2011 #1738 Vol. 108 No. 7 \$2/ £2/ €2

IKEA Workers Form Union in Virginia

3

New! IWW News Shorts & Around the Union

5

Joe Hill: The Man Who Never Died

8-9

Exclusive: Report from Gaza Freedom Flotilla II

12

Pizza Hut Workers: Cheesed Off From Paris To Sheffield

Wage theft, union-busting and fighting back at the pizza chain in France, Spain and the United Kingdom

By **Monika Vykoukal**

“The pizzas are better, and they’ve got newer scooters,” observes David as we hang out just outside a Pizza Hut store on a hot, sticky July night in Paris. A fellow worker who is organizing at Pizza Hut in Sheffield, U.K., David is here for a couple of days to connect with local Pizza Hut workers, who have been on strike for over nine weeks at press time.

July 11 was the employment tribunal hearing for two workers who contend, with the support of their union *Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques (SUD)*, that they have been sacked in connection with their strike and union activities. As the entire city seems to wind down for the holiday period, the ruling will not be out until early September, and our comrades have decided it’s best to pause their struggle for now as well.

David, an IWW member since February, has gotten 25 of his 30 colleagues on board for concerted action and to join the

IWW. They are just gearing up to get properly started in Sheffield. The Britain and Ireland Regional Administration (BIRA) of the IWW received their “Certificate of Independence,” which puts the IWW on equal footing with other unions in terms of labor law, allowing for legal strike action. Once we had the certificate, David and his colleagues would really get going. Meanwhile, as we had learned earlier that same day, the *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT)* at Pizza Hut in Cáceres, Spain—who had been protesting since February—had won the reinstatement and back pay for three workers who were found to have been unfairly dismissed because of their union activity.

As I join David in conversations with the workers in Paris, I learn how much their struggle is a shared experience, yet again, of low pay, lack of pay for hours worked, unsafe working conditions, lack of health coverage and other protections, **Continued on 6**



Pizza Hut workers picket in Paris on July 10.

Photo: Monika Vykoukal

Verizon Workers On Strike

By **Mischa Gaus, Labor Notes**

At Verizon locations throughout the northeast, 45,000 workers started walking picket lines on August 7.

Their strike, brought on by a flood of concession demands the Communications Workers of America (CWA) say will pick \$20,000 from each worker’s pocket, is the largest the United States has seen in four years.

Verizon, which has made \$19 billion in profits in the last four years, announced July 29 its wireless unit would pay a special \$10 billion dividend to shareholders. At the same time, its negotiators were pushing for \$1 billion in concessions from workers.

“We’re on strike for our bargaining rights, just like Wisconsin or Ohio,” CWA President Larry Cohen told members on a union-wide conference call on August 7. “We can never end this recession by cutting the wages of workers.”

Continued on 7 Verizon workers picket in NYC.

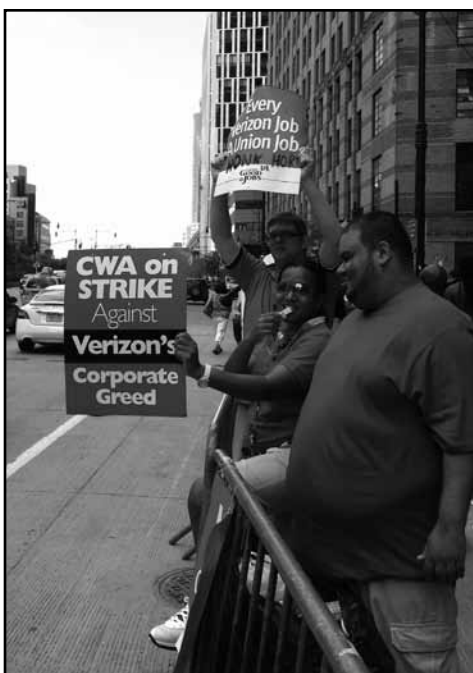


Photo: Diane Krauthamer

London IWW Cleaners Fight Back

By **Chris Ford, London IWW Cleaners**

Cleaners (janitors) organized in the London IWW Cleaners and Allied Industries Branch (Industrial Union 640) have secured a series of important victories with Guildhall, their employer at the Corporation of London—the municipal governing body of the City of London. They have become a leading example of how solidarity and militant action gets results.

The Guildhall was built between 1411 and 1440 as a symbol of the English ruling elite, and many of its labor policies have remained stuck in its medieval past. The workers who maintain the splendor of the Guildhall earn a miserable £5.93 per hour—the legal minimum wage. They also receive no sick pay or pension. They are hired through Ocean Contract Cleaning, a company with a similarly long history worthy of a medieval establishment. In 2006, London Citizens uncovered that workers employed by Ocean at a London University were frequently being underpaid or not paid at all. Those cleaners recovered £50,000 in unpaid wages.

At the Guildhall, the cleaners found themselves in a similar situation of being repeatedly underpaid in their wages for months at a time. Some waited two to three months to receive wages they were owed. They even had the national Public Holiday for the Royal Wedding deducted from their holiday leave. To add insult to injury, the workers—who are overwhelmingly migrants from Latin America, Asia and Africa—are subjected to management abuses now commonplace in the cleaning industry, including petty bullying and being disciplined for almost no reason. If you are five minutes late, you are sent home. If you are late again, you are fired. IWW members have reported threats of dismissal just for being two minutes late.



Photo: London IWW Cleaners and Allied Industries Branch
London cleaners demonstrate at Guildhall.

The Cleaners Fight Back

Many of these workers were born and lived under brutal regimes. The bosses have misjudged their tenacity to fight back. It didn’t take them long, however, to match the management’s arrogance with self-organization. The 34 cleaners at the Guildhall organized, and on June 14-15 they arrived for work. However, without any guarantee of actual wages, they remained in the reception area until they were given clear assurance that they would be paid their wages for their work.

Despite the contractor’s promise that the workers would be paid by June 20, by that date they were left with an average of two weeks’ wages still unpaid. The workers raised a collective grievance, submitted by the IWW, which also failed to resolve the situation. The IWW cleaners responded by stepping up their campaign for solidarity

Continued on 7

Industrial Worker
PO Box 180195
Chicago, IL 60618, USA

ISSN 0019-8870
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Periodicals Postage
PAID
Chicago, IL
and additional
mailing offices



Machinists Union Fights For Justice At Virginia IKEA Factory

By Nicholas DeFilippis

IKEA may be known in Sweden for the decent pay it gives its employees, but workers at the furniture company's first factory in the United States found out that IKEA's progressive image is only a veneer on self-assembled exploitation. On July 24, the workers at the Danville, Va. factory overwhelmingly voted for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) to be their union. IAM and IKEA initially held negotiations, but talks fell apart in the months leading up to the election.

Attracted by Virginia's anti-union right-to-work laws, the furniture company was brought in at a cost of \$12 million to the taxpayers. Paying its workers less than their Swedish counterparts, Swedwood—the IKEA subsidiary that runs the Danville factory—cut starting pay and halted its scheduled pay raises. It also hired the union-busting firm Jackson Lewis to terrorize its workers.

Swedwood fired many of its employees and replaced them with temporary workers that received no benefits and less money. However, under pressure from labor activists, Swedwood was forced to cut down on its use of temp workers in May. IKEA also hired an auditing firm to speak with the workers about their conditions, but many were afraid to tell the auditors their true feelings out of fear of losing their jobs.

The auditors found out that management was forcing the employees to work overtime. Many workers complained that it was common for management to alert them on a Friday that they must work a weekend shift or be punished.

"It's the strictest place I have ever worked," said former employee Janis Wilborne.

African-American workers pointed out the racial discrimination at the factory, and six of them filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. These workers were assigned to the least-desirable shift of 11:00 p.m. to 7:00

a.m. and sent to work in the lowest-paying departments.

"If we put in for a better job, we wouldn't get it—it would always go to a white person," said former employee Jackie Maubin.

The exploitation in Danville became so extreme that the International Trade Union Confederation issued a statement saying that it would dedicate its resources to ensure that IKEA treated its American workers with dignity.

The Richmond IWW also sent a letter of solidarity to the Danville workers upon hearing about their struggle:

"The State of Virginia has a long history of attracting companies that count on weak labor laws, which without a union can leave workers vulnerable to exploitation. This is why, more than ever, it is important to encourage workers in all industries to unite in class struggle. With an organized working class we can build a labor movement that successfully demands dignity and respect, not only at our respective workplaces, but also in our communities.

"Every time we organize and form a union, the power of the working class is magnified... United, we can realize not only increased wages, better and safer working conditions, health care, and paid vacations, but also, quality union jobs, better schools, social services, and the enforcement of civil rights, for all workers."

The Richmond IWW went on to encourage the workers to support the Wood Workers Division of IAM, as well as to pay their dues in order to keep the union functioning financially (something that

"right-to-work" laws aim to stop):

"As the labor movement grows, so will our strength, and ability to demand the eventual abolition of the class and wage system, effectively removing the means of production from the clutches of the bosses, and placing those means into the hands of the workers, where it belongs," concluded the Wobbly statement.

It was through working-class solidarity, our most powerful weapon, that this election was won.

"This struggle was global, with support and assistance from every continent by more than 120,000 workers, various social partners, and many other global union federations," said Bill Street, union organizer and director of the Wood Works Department of IAM.

Once certified as the official representative of the IKEA/Swedwood workers in Danville, the union hopes to buff out these nasty issues.



IKEA workers stand together in Danville, Va.

Photo: mike-servethepeople.blogspot.com

"So we can have a voice," said worker Coretta Giles, explaining why she supports the union. "So we can all be heard and have another leg we can stand on when we need to. I just thank Jesus."

IAM won by the impressive margin of 221 (76 percent) to 69 (24 percent), which seems like divine intervention. But it may just take a real miracle for justice to be served at Swedwood.

On August 1, two workers were injured and needed to leave for treatment. Instead of giving them time off to recover, the workers were put back on the production line while they were still bleeding. At the end of July, a supervisor wanted to distribute Gatorade to the workers, but she was disallowed to do so by management despite the sweltering heat. Management then began harassing the workers, saying they should all be fired and insisting that the shop would close due to their support for the union. A human resources representative went so far as to say that the workers lied to her about how they would vote, acknowledging that the company broke the law and questioned workers before the election. Other bosses have tried to break the workers spirit by insisting that Swedwood would never bargain with IAM, which is a violation of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Company radio was also used to single out union supporters by name.

This situation shows that solidarity and bravery on the part of the working class and its allies can make gains in the struggle for justice. It also shows the demeaning, uncompromising stance the capitalist class takes towards the workers, and that the abolition of capitalism is the only hope for a better world. An injury to one will still be an injury to all until that day comes, so we must, and will, continue to support the Danville workers and IAM in their battle for workers' rights.

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**.

Subscribe to the Industrial Worker

Raise eyebrows! Get ideas!

10 issues for:

- US \$18 for individuals.
- US \$22 for institutions.
- US \$30 for internationals.

Name: _____

Address: _____

State/Province: _____

Zip/PC _____

Send to: PO Box 180195,
Chicago IL 60618 USA
Subscribe Today!

What Industrial Unionism And One Big Unionism Mean Today

By John O'Reilly and Nate Hawthorne

This article is the third in a series discussing the themes of the One Big Union and Industrial Unionism. We believe these themes are relevant to the future of our organization and our organization's vision and values. Through these articles, we hope to push for a discussion about possible ways forward for the IWW and how we can get from where we are to where we need to be to build a new society. We welcome replies, whether in print or sent to us in private at crashcourse666@gmail.com.

In this series we've discussed One Big Unionism and Industrial Unionism as ideas and activities within the IWW. In this article, we turn our attention to how carefully balancing our emphasis on One Big Unionism and Industrial Unionism allows us to build the IWW in the short term. While none of us has a magic bullet answer that will make organizing easy, we can think out and discuss possible solutions to ongoing issues that we face as a way of approaching our work more strategically. How can One Big Unionism and Industrial Unionism guide us towards better practices? They

do so by pushing us to both build members up and build members out.

When we talk about building members outwards, we mean developing practical units of struggle within the industries where we are organizing that most effectively share the message of our union and get more people involved in our work. That is: more members, organized to fight more effectively. Building out is like laying railroad tracks into the vast, unorganized working class; the act of laying the tracks means placing one railroad tie after another, each of which advances the line out farther and each of which is an individual task that can be completed. Yet each tie allows us to lay another tie and we are unable to lay the next tie until we've completed the one we're working on. Even as we lay tie after tie, we continue to find that there's further to go and more ties to be laid. After all, if the destination for our rail line is Industrial Democracy, we have a long way to go!

Concretely, building outwards means several things. Using the social networks that we find in our jobs and our industries and finding ways to tie them together are important aspects of building out. This plays on the importance of Industrial Unionism in our organizing. When a group of fast food workers organizes in their restaurant chain, they may find that they have contact with workers who transport food and supplies to their stores. These delivery workers may work for a different company but likely have grievances of their own. Good organizers can take these contacts and begin a campaign with the delivery workers. By using the relationships that form during work itself, we can grow our membership out across the industries we work in, as well as up and down the supply chains within our industries. This amplifies the union's power.

Industrial links aren't the only way that we can build our membership out. During an organizing campaign, we seek to understand social groups in the workplace as a way to identify and win over key social leaders—that is, people respected by their co-workers and whose opinions carry a lot of weight—in order to move groups of workers to support the union. These same social groups can be useful outside of organizing in one shop. For instance, if an active part of a campaign is made up of members of a certain church, we can use those cultural connections to meet and link up with other workers in the same church. Perhaps the church members in the union could speak about the importance of their

campaign and the vision of the IWW during a service. Or members could convince a social justice committee of the congregation to put pressure on their boss in a way that involves church members and allows organizers to have conversations with different workers and agitate them about conditions on their jobs. Using our members' access and participation in social networks and cultural groups is a great way for us to build our membership outwards, in addition to organizing shop by shop, and it reflects our ideas about One Big Unionism.

While organizing outwards, we cannot neglect another lesson of One Big Unionism: just because our fellow workers leave a job or an industry does not mean that they become less important as a Wobbly. To move our organization forward in the short term, we need to focus more strongly on retention of members who switch jobs. Finding ways for these members to plug in to campaigns in a new industry or job is integral to keeping them in the union.

If one considers how much time organizers spend building relationship with each of their coworkers, agitating and educating them into becoming an IWW member, and helping them acquire the skills necessary for organizing successfully, it's clear that washing our hands of members so that they leave the union when they leave a job is a huge waste of our limited energies.

While we build members out, we must also focus on building our existing membership up. In fact, by doing one thing we also do the other. As members become more involved in the IWW, participate and learn, they increase their ability to do the work of the union, and so they help bring in more members, and begin to build others up. At this point in time, we would argue that it's more important to focus on building members up than out because it allows us to win more fights and improve our organizing strategy, which will lead us to reap greater rewards further down the line. In any case, by educating members into the IWW—getting them to take part in the democratic process, meeting and sharing ideas about our directions and goals, taking on tasks at different levels of the union including local, regional, craft, industrial, administrative, and international—we amplify our ability as organizers by producing more organizers who can do more work. These new organizers in turn help produce more organizers.

One crucial way that we can build our members up is by training them to organize. This work, undertaken by the Organizer Training Committee of the Organizing Department, constitutes the most important work of the union right now outside of shop-floor organizing. It highlights one of the most important values of One Big Unionism: organizing is an interchangeable skill, regardless of industry or craft, and is something that workers can and should do for themselves instead of leaving these skills to specialized professionals. While there are some concrete legal and structural differences between industries, the work of organizing is basically the same. Organizing means the work of creating relationships with fellow workers, building organization, and fighting bosses together to improve our lives. Whether in an eight worker café with one boss or a giant factory with thousands of employees, organizing is the same basic skill set. When we give our members the confidence they need to organize in their shops, we teach them skills that they can use anywhere they work. This fundamental insight of One Big Unionism cannot be overstated in our approach to organizing in the short term.

Currently, more of our campaigns are going public and need support to push to

WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

Chapter 46

Mother Bloor in "The Jungle"

Upton Sinclair's novel *The Jungle* (published in 1906) was a forceful expose of the brutal and unsanitary conditions in Chicago's meat-packing plants. It was also an enormous hit with a horrified public, selling hundreds of thousands of copies. In describing the exploitation of immigrant women workers, Sinclair tried to make a case for unionism and socialist politics. But instead, middle class readers were struck by his descriptions of unsanitary and diseased food. "I aimed at the public's heart," he said, "and by accident hit it in the stomach."

President Theodore Roosevelt, under public pressure to clean up the meat industry, challenged Sinclair to prove the allegations made in *The Jungle*. Sinclair had two fellow socialists prepare testimony for a Presidential commission. Posing as husband and wife, Ella Reeve and Richard Bloor convinced Chicago packinghouse workers to testify before the commission, and arranged extensive publicity exposing conditions in the meat-packing plants. Ella Reeve Bloor's organizing and investigations contributed to passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906.



Ella Reeve Bloor* returned to the stockyards the following year. At a journalist's request, she got work in plants owned by Armour and Swift in order to see first-hand whether the packing companies were obeying the new law. She found evidence of fake and faulty meat inspections. Through widely-published articles and lectures, she exposed the poor pay and horrific conditions in the packing plants and the threat to public health posed by the companies' dishonest practices.

*The name Bloor stuck. As a union organizer, she became known as "Mother Bloor" throughout the country.

Graphic: Mike Konopacki

the next level. Here, we find many opportunities for building our members up. We can create connections between workers in different industries as a way of sharing ideas and experiences about organizing and to create networks that support our organizing work. Starting solidarity committees for public campaigns, providing food or childcare for campaign meetings, discussing important IWW campaigns with coworkers, raising funds or organizing pickets: these and many more are ways that we can give our members tasks that deepen their relationship with the IWW and build new bonds across industries. This builds members up and allows them

to grow as Wobblies and push themselves to further heights.

Like a staircase, the IWW can grow both outwards and upwards at the same time. When we stand on the top step of a staircase we are not just standing on that step, we are standing on all the steps below as well. Depending on the moment, we may emphasize growing out or building up, but the two factors develop together. Each step is built on top of the last one and creates the basis for the next one. As we walk up the staircase, we have to step carefully, the two feet of Industrial Unionism and One Big Unionism guiding us, always in balance and working together.

NEW Wobbly News Shorts

What's Happening Across The U.S. & Around The Union

By Adam W.

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

U.S. Prisoner Strikes Continue

Prisoners across California launched a several-week strike by refusing state issued meals beginning on July 1 at the Pelican Bay State Prison, which is notorious for specializing in 22½ hour per day solitary confinement. The strike spread to 11 prisons over the July 4th holiday weekend. Following strikes and work stoppages in Ohio and Georgia, the California prisoner strike is estimated to involve one-third of the prisoners in the state and is in protest of cruel and inhuman conditions. Supporters announced that a tentative agreement was reached with the prison authorities to end the strike in late July, but as of press time the strike may resume. Read more at: <http://prisonerhungerstrikesolidarity.wordpress.com>.

Bosses Reap Gains While U.S. Workers Lose Ground

More U.S. workers are feeling the squeeze of capitalism as prices of food and energy have risen 4 percent and 8 percent respectively for the first four months of 2011, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. While food and energy costs are rising, the average hourly wage earnings from May 2010 to May 2011 have fallen by 1.6 percent. For those not working, the true unemployment rate—which counts those that



Photo: minnesota.publicradio.org
Wobbly musician Tom Morello.

the traditional government unemployment statistics leaves out—is estimated to be between 15 to 22 percent.

Yet while workers' belts are tightening, the bosses aren't feeling the same, as CEOs saw their compensation rise over 28 percent from 2009 to 2010. One study showed that while productivity has surged, which means more

is being produced by each worker, income and wages have stagnated for most Americans. If the median household income had kept pace with the economy since 1970, it would now be nearly \$92,000, not \$50,000. Sounds like it's time to organize and squeeze back.

New Biography on IWW Songwriter Joe Hill

Joe Hill, the famous Wobbly troubadour made labor martyr by a Utah firing squad, is the subject of a new biography to be released in late August. With new documentary evidence about the life of Hill and his frame up trial backed by the copper mine bosses, "The Man Who Never Died: The Life, Times, and Legacy of Joe Hill," by William M. Adler is the first full-scale biography of Joe Hill. Read a full review of this book on page 8, and read about the author's speaking tour at: <http://themanwhoneverdied.com>.

Los Angeles Wobblies Table L.A. Rising Concert

Members of the Los Angeles General Membership Branch spread the message of the IWW to thousands of attendees at the July 30 L.A. Rising Concert, with a well-stocked merchandise and literature table. With nearly 60,000 in attendance, the day long festival featured Rage Against the Machine, Muse, Rise Against, Lauryn Hill, Immortal Technique and El Gran Silencio from Mexico. Branch members were also joined by IWW General-Secretary Treasurer Joe Tessone, who flew in from Chicago, as well as FW Tom

Morello of Rage Against the Machine and The Nightwatchman, who personally stopped by to visit the table during the concert and helped arrange for the branch to table along with numerous other left and labor organizations. Watch a video of Tom Morello speaking on the concert at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=CGLen4Z5jBo.



The cast of "The Silent Room: A Worker's Musical."

Photo: Ted Dewberry

Wobbly Musical "The Silent Room" Premieres in Twin Cities

Premiering at the Minnesota Fringe Fest from August 5-7 with an all-volunteer, all-worker cast, "The Silent Room: A Workers Musical" tells the tale of a low-wage retail worker, Ray, whose dreams are dashed "by the double-shifts and tyrannical bosses of corporate America until a ghostly visit from martyred union legend Joe Hill shows him that when workers unite, everything can change." According to the musical's Facebook page, "Ray's coworkers begin talking union, and soon find themselves toe-to-toe with corporate union busters. As the fight heats up, Ray has to decide which side he is on." The production was written by Ted Dewberry and based on his own experience of deciding to join the IWW and fight the bosses at the Mall of America Starbucks from 2007-2009. More info: <http://www.facebook.com/thesilentroom?sk=info>.

Food, Distribution and Retail IWWs Step Up Their Organizing

Linking and coordinating their organizing across related industries, members of the IWW active in food, distribution and retail (Industrial Unions 460, 640 and 660) will be holding an Industrial Organizing Network founding convention in Portland, Ore., in late October. Supported by the IWW's Organizing Department, the weekend meeting will bring together or-

ganizers from Jimmy John's, Starbucks, and New York City's warehouse and retail grocery campaigns. "We are laying the foundation for an unprecedented wave of organizing in the new mass industries-food service and retail," says Starbucks organizer Erik Foreman who is helping to organize the convention. See the full announcement on page 12. More info: <http://portlandiww.org/food-chain-workers-organizing-project/founding-convention>.

IWW General Convention

Over Labor Day weekend in Baltimore, the IWW is holding its annual General Convention. On the table for delegates this year were proposals related to an anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policy from the Gender Issues Committee, the union's General Defense Committee, several proposals on due process and representation, and a discussion of the IWW's involvement in the protests and uprising against attacks on labor in Wisconsin. The October issue of the *Industrial Worker* will offer in-depth coverage, and there will be live coverage of the convention on Twitter (for members only) at: <http://twitter.com/IWWConvention>.

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

Global Week of Action Against Starbucks

By the IWW Starbucks Workers Union

NEW YORK – The IWW Starbucks Workers Union (SWU) launched a Global Week of Action on Monday, July 25 in support of affiliate union El Sindicato de Trabajadores de Starbucks en Chile (Starbucks Workers Union in Chile).

Over 200 baristas and shift supervisors that work in Chile's 32 Starbucks locations went on strike on



Wobblies picket in Boston on July 25. Photo: Andrew Wasser

July 7 in an effort to improve workplace conditions and obtain a higher wage. Currently, baristas at Starbucks in Chile make the equivalent of \$2.50 an hour, while drinks are sold for high U.S. prices. They haven't received raises in eight years. The baristas are also asking for a lunch stipend in order to eat during their shifts, which their managers are already allowed to do.

Two weeks after the strike began, a New York City barista and mother of two young children was fired for announcing her membership in the SWU. The company gave no official reason for her termination. They fired her when she refused to meet with higher-ups without her attorney and union representative present, which violated a previous agreement between the union and management.

Tiffany White-Thomas worked at the Canal/Broadway Starbucks for more than two years. She was up for a promotion when her store manager, Rafael Fox,

told her that because she was a mother, she would not have the time necessary to dedicate to the company; therefore, she would not be promoted. A letter delivered to Tiffany's managers by Wobblies in New York City made reference to the collective efforts of the SWU and the Chilean strikers. Both unions feel that that this solidarity across borders is seen as a threat to the company and is, in part, what led to Tiffany's termination.

In New York City, the first solidarity action was a picket in front of the Canal and Broadway Starbucks location on July 25. The IWW demanded the full reinstatement of Tiffany White-Thomas, and that Starbucks negotiate in good faith with the fellow workers of El Sindicato de Trabajadores de Starbucks en Chile.

Similar actions in support of the Chilean strikers occurred in various cities throughout the United States and the world throughout the week.

Solidarity Picket At Starbucks In Poland

By the International Workers Association / Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores (IWA-AIT)

On July 30, the ZSP (Związek Syndykalistów Polski—or Union of Syndicalists—of the International Workers' Association) held a solidarity picket in front of a Starbucks café in Warsaw. The action was meant to express solidarity with Starbucks workers organizing for better working conditions and to draw attention to both the strike of Starbucks workers in Chile and the continued anti-union practices of Starbucks in the United States, where a member of the IWW, Tiffany White-Thomas, was dismissed the day after revealing her union affiliation.

Informational fliers were handed out to customers and passersby describing the



The ZSP pickets Starbucks on July 30.

Photo: zsp.net.pl

situation. The manager of the café acted aggressively towards the picketers, trying (unsuccessfully) to prevent them from leafleting the customers. The picketers held signs in Polish, English and Spanish expressing solidarity with the Chilean workers and demanding the reinstatement of Tiffany. A banner read "Enough repression of unionists."

Wobblies In Ontario Show Solidarity

By Peterborough IWW

On July 11, Wobblies in Peterborough, Ontario, handed out fliers and sang IWW songs in solidarity with Chilean Starbucks workers at local Starbucks stores. We talked to many baristas and sympathetic customers before the managers called the police. The sign in the photo (right) says: "Canadian IWW Solidarity with Sindicato de Trabajadores de Starbucks."



Photo: Matt Davidson

Special

Pizza Hut Workers: Cheesed Off From Paris To Sheffield

Continued from 1

food safety issues at the stores, lack of support from business unions, and union-busting efforts when workers get together to ask not even for improvements, but merely for the adherence to existing rights and protections.

Workers' Struggles At Pizza Hut

Pizza Hut, a U.S.-based global fast food chain, is a subsidiary of Yum! Brands—the world's largest restaurant company. Pizza Hut and Yum! Brands are, under different guises, attacking their workers across Europe once more, apparently going just as far as they can under the different legal frameworks of each country. In France this backlash might be particularly bitter, as numerous earlier struggles at the chain had fought hard for and won the very same demands that now have to be fought for once more.

Strike action has taken place almost yearly since 2000, in the early years significantly led by the business union Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), and largely by its militant organizer and long-time Pizza Hut worker Abdel Mabrouki. Around 2003, concerted action by CGT organizers across the fast food sector also included a major strike in a McDonald's store that lasted for almost a year. Abdel, who worked at Pizza Hut from the late 1980s until 2009, went on to become a co-founder of Paris-based network Stop Précarité (<http://www.stop-precarite.fr>), which remains central in supporting struggles like those at Pizza Hut, and wrote the book "Génération Précaire" (Le Cherche Midi, 2004) about union organizing in the casualized retail sector in France, at companies such as Pizza Hut, McDonald's and Disneyland. In 2005, Pizza Hut also saw strike action in New Zealand as part of the organizing campaign "Supersize My Pay" of the Unite Union (<http://www.unite.org.nz>), who remain active there and at other fast food chains, such as KFC and McDonald's.

Changing ownership of Pizza Hut in France, as well as the gradual franchising of previously directly held stores—a process which forms part of Yum!'s business strategy—have caused the loss of the hard-won gains made in those multiple struggles and have had a negative impact on the Pizza Hut workers' ability to organize. In France, the company tends to retain direct ownership of more profitable locations, while benefiting from the fixed rates it gets from less successful, franchised locations. A watershed moment here appears to be the 2009 sale of its French operations by Yum! to a new "master franchise" holder: the Belgian company Top Brands, which was already running Belgium's Pizza Huts.

Most Pizza Hut workers are in their early- to mid-20s, but some of them have worked for the company for many years. Many workers are also students, and everyone I meet works part time, making just a couple hundred euros a month, while living in a very costly city with a long-term housing crisis. Keeping up with both a fast food job and studies can be tricky, and some of the workers here in Paris are from North African countries such as Morocco, Tunisia or Algeria, so they also depend on their student status to allow them to stay in Paris. This vulnerability to such double pressure was one of the triggers for the renewed action at Pizza Hut stores in Paris.

Workers Strike

"This strike started when a migrant worker, who had been doing a manager's job for an employee's pay, was suspended when the company claimed to 'suddenly'



Pizza Hut workers Saint-Ouen's, a suburb of Paris, on May 29. Photo: Pauline Idalgo

discover this, although they had records that showed they were aware of his circumstances long before, just a few months before he could get legal," explains Hichem Aktouche, the SUD delegate at Pizza Hut. "Not only did Pizza Hut fail to inform him of the situation previously, he also had no other immediate means to support himself."

Additional grievances included the firing of the manager of a store who had been "too nice to his employees." A few days into the protest, organizers also checked out the workers' paychecks, and, to Hichem, "it was obvious that some hours were 'forgotten' every month, from August 2009 on." The demand for the back payment of all hours worked became a key focus of the following strike, in addition to the "usual" demands of timely payment of wages, paid sick leave, complete coverage of work accidents, and the payment of the 13th month salary (*Editor's note: In France and other countries, a "13th month salary" is a common form of a bonus that is not mandatory, but can be negotiated*).

The fight began on May 13, with strikes on weekends at alternating take-out and delivery store locations across the city. This strategy lends an element of surprise and hits the stores in some of their busiest periods of the week. Strikers have been hard-hit financially, and the company appears unlikely to be willing to compensate them for any of their strike days. To raise funds, donations were solicited during the pickets, at the presidential campaign launch rally of the Front de Gauche ("Left Front"), at the "Indignant Assembly" and from other sympathetic political organizations.

Pizza Hut, refusing to negotiate with the strikers, instead asked the representative of the majority union Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) to end the strike, which they attempted without success. Subsequently, management also wrote to a leader of SUD to contend that the strike action was illegal. The result: the contacted union leader appeared at the next picket himself and yelled into his megaphone: "I demand to see Chapalain [the director of Pizza Hut France] now!"

Pizza Hut's next move was to contact Inspection du Travail, a body of civil servants who surveil employment and labor law—yet again backfired when workers provided the inspector with their evidence, who then asked the company to pay workers for their unpaid hours. With a renewed flaring up of support in late June, workers decided to continue their weekend pickets until the day before their employment tribunal on July 11.

While it's impossible to predict the results of this specific tribunal, past tribunals of this kind were won. During the 2009 Pizza Hut strike, one of the workers eventually won his reinstatement and back pay after an 18-month trial. Pizza Hut then gave the worker a substantial additional payment on the condition that he did not return to work.

On July 11, the day of the tribunal hearing, the Communist Group and the elected representatives of the Left Party presented a resolution in support of the striking workers at The Council of Paris, which passed, asking the mayor to write to Pizza Hut demanding they respect employment legislation. However, despite their determined and fierce fight, and after nine weeks of struggle at press time, the company is still unwilling to negotiate, and the workers have not won any concessions. Most notably, the company still owes the workers full payment of all hours they have worked in the last year. Yet at least, they hope, they have shown their anger and willingness to stick together and fight for their rights.

Struggles in Spain and the U.K.

Union busting, meanwhile, has been rebuffed in the CNT's struggle in Spain, where they have organized stores in Cáceres and Badajoz. In February, several workers posted a list of demands—including weekends off, holiday pay and transportation contributions—on a notice board at their store. The company, despite its recognition of the union, promptly sacked three of the unionized workers. In addition to regular pickets on Fridays and Saturdays, as well as a demonstration in Cáceres in April, the union filed a complaint with the labor court and eventually won the reinstatement with full back pay of all three workers. Beyond this initial victory, the struggle for better conditions is set to continue.

Workers' demands in Sheffield are not dissimilar to those elsewhere, but they respond to the slightly different circumstances of the U.K. labor situation and its exploitation by Pizza Hut. Unlike in France, where the CFDT—who opposed the recent strike action, as well as the smaller radical union SUD—had been ac-

tive at Pizza Hut for some time, there was no previous union presence in Sheffield, as is characteristic of the commercial and services sector in general. Since organizing with the IWW earlier this summer, fellow workers have begun to start their union activity for safety in maintaining the scooters they use for delivery and to support workers individually. Their main demands are focused on the working conditions of delivery drivers and on wage increases.

"Working conditions at the company are very bad, the hourly rate is £5.83," David went on to explain in an interview with activists from the youth section of the left-political New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), who covered the strike in their newspaper *Tout Est À Nous*:

"Delivery drivers who have no license for the scooters have to use their own vehicle, but they are only reimbursed £0.6 per delivery. It's a total rip off! We have filed a collective grievance against this situation."

In late July, due to pressure from IWW members, management at Pizza Hut admitted that the IWW's demand for better commission for delivery drivers was justified. However, as David writes, this review does not in any way guarantee an adequate outcome, and it could be used to justify further reduction of the delivery drivers' pay. IWW organizing is expanding to other Pizza Hut stores in Sheffield and elsewhere.

Looking Forward

A few days after David leaves to return to Sheffield, I am chatting with Hichem, who is getting ready for his own summer break. I think this is the first time I've seen him sit still since I came to their picket for the first time a few weeks ago. Having been at Pizza Hut since he was 20, he's seen past strikes, past wins and the losses that followed. He tells me, somewhat wryly, that we can't know yet whether workers will be in a position to renew their strike in the fall. Too many new hires will still be in their trial period. The bosses have also changed shifts, so more militant workers are now surrounded by those new hires. And, perhaps, by the fall, too many people will be desperate to earn a bit of money, or they will need to return to their studies.

Yet, with David's visit, we have given each other a better insight into our shared situation than any abstract analysis of "precarious labor" could have provided. We have also seen each other's determination to keep fighting, and to find ways to not only oppose the attacks of management, but to make demands for—and win—better working conditions. Since the employment tribunal hearing here in Paris on July 11, it looks like our fellow workers in France face even more attacks on their union rights. Meanwhile, Wobblies in Sheffield have now presented their demands and are awaiting the company's response. In September, the heat might be on.

For updates from Pizza Hut Sheffield, see the IWW Sheffield Blog at <http://www.iwgmbsheffield.wordpress.com>.

The SUD Pizza Hut Strike Fund is still in need of donations: SYND SUD COMMERCE SERVICES IDF; BIC: CCOFRRPP; IBAN: FR 76 4255 9000 0121 0264 5370 690.



Photo: Monika Vykoukal



RECOMPOSITION BLOG

NOTES FOR A NEW WORKERISM

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

RECOMPOSITIONBLOG.WORDPRESS.COM

Special

Verizon Workers On Strike

Continued from 1

The company proposed to eliminate pension accruals for current workers and defined-benefit pensions for new hires. Its bargainers want to eliminate job security and shift the cost of health care to workers.

They demanded to replace regular raises with management-determined productivity measures. They want the right to shift more work away from union members and out of the country. They are looking to axe paid sick days and take away Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Veteran's Day as paid holidays. They want to fight items as small as a \$3.00 parking reimbursement.

A hundred concession proposals still sat on the bargaining table shared by the CWA and International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) as the contract expired the night of August 6.

The strike appeared to surprise some, on both the union and management side. One pair of managers who were rushed into the field "fixed" a shorn phone line with duct tape.

Patti Egan-Walters, a business agent for CWA Local 1005 in New York, said another manager confided that he had been dispatched to drive around the city in a Verizon truck—but without any training in how to fix or install anything.

His orders? "When you run out of gas, come on back."

Negotiations in 2003 and 2008 ran through contract expirations. The company flew in a replacement workforce and housed them, but when the unions stayed inside, the cost of keeping a scab workforce idle quickly escalated, prompting a settlement. This time, members say the company's demands are so severe, the unions had little choice but to walk out.

"They want to take 60 percent of the contract and dump it," said Ed Fitzpatrick, president of IBEW Local 2222 in Massachusetts. "These boys are making billions and all they want is cheap labor."

Tashauna Jackson, a CWA Local 1105 steward, noted that the chairman of Verizon's board took home \$55,000 a day last year—and that in four years, the company's top five executives bagged \$258 million between them.

Yet Verizon says union members must suffer to bring labor costs into line with non-union competitors, prompting

London IWW Cleaners Fight Back

Continued from 1

with a day of action on July 15. Once again, the cleaners refused to provide free labor to clean the Guildhall without being paid the wages they are owed in return. This time a demonstration, which was supported by the IWW London General Membership Branch and Wobblies from across London, joined the cleaners' protest called by the IWW Cleaners Branch. This received support from cleaners in other workplaces, University College London (UCL) and School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) workers and students, Colombia Solidarity Campaign and members of National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), National Union of Journalists (NUJ), University and College Union (UCU), UNISON (the Public Service Union) and Unite The Union.

Over 60 people demonstrated in solidarity at the Guildhall, beginning at 5:30 a.m. When police complained that the protesters were disturbing a nearby church, the vicar, David Parrott, stepped in to offer coffee and the facilities to the workers.

Round One: To The Workers

Workers painted their hands with phrases like "stop the abuse," chanted slogans such as "no pay, no work," and sang the old IWW anthem "Solidarity Forever (For the Union Makes Us Strong)," which echoed around the Guildhall—a place ac-

members to point out that the union would rather lift cable and wireless workers up to their standards. "We're not going the way of Walmart," said John Collieran, a Local 2222 steward.

Verizon signed a neutrality agreement as part of the settlement ending the 18-day strike in 2000. It promised to allow the unions to organize its wireless workforce—but the company violated the agreement as soon as the ink was dry, fighting viciously against every organizing drive. Today, only 50 Verizon wireless workers have a union.

Mobile Pickets

At the Verizon headquarters in Manhattan on Monday, August 8, passing cars and trucks honked in support of picketers, to loud cheers and whistles. Workers chanted and booed as managers entered and left office doors just feet away.

Two cops stood watch under the Verizon sign, while others directed anyone wearing a red shirt into an area enclosed by metal barricades. In Albany, a tight group of picketers blocked doors until police forced them to let managers through. One injury was reported in Monday's picketing.

Thirty managers in Manhattan, some with suitcases, entered the building at 7:00 a.m. Later a group of seven managers in work boots and backpacks (presumably filled with tools) were seen leaving. A dozen picketers followed them into the subway. "Are you kidding, you're going to follow me?" said one manager to a striker.

Workers from the headquarters office normally travel on foot to do installation and repair in lower Manhattan. The pickets would follow struck work throughout the day, said Local 1101 steward Ron Spaulding, making life as difficult as possible for scabs.

At press time, the "mobile picketing" strategy, honed in a four-month strike in 1989, was under way in Massachusetts, too. Techs track the vehicles leaving garages and send out the call. "We can get 50 people in a heartbeat," Collieran said, surrounding a manhole or scab truck in the field.

Members have noticed that many safety precautions have fallen away in Verizon's rush to get managers into the field, and mentioned their concerns to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

customed to hymns of praise to the Lords of capital!

It was only as a result of the IWW members stepping up their campaign that the Corporation of London management intervened, inviting our union to meet with them and their sub-contractor, Ocean. A delegation—composed of Alberto Durango, Secretary of the London IWW Cleaners Branch; Chris Ford, of London General Membership Branch; and three IWW members from the cleaners at Guildhall—then met with the Guildhall management and the Ocean Contract Cleaning.

To facilitate the negotiations, and with the approval of the cleaners, we agreed to relocate the demonstration from the Guildhall Yard—allegedly, we were on private property, even though the City of London Police had twice given us permission to demonstrate there. The bosses were clearly irritated by the demonstration and repeatedly tried to trick the IWW into accepting their offer of a room for the workers to wait while negotiations continued. Wage slaves we may be, fools we are not!

Under pressure, and with the Corporation of London management openly arguing with the Ocean management, the IWW secured an agreement of immediate payment of wages owed and a review of the wages over the last six months. After five hours of protest action, the IWW secured written evidence from Ocean HR department that direct payments to the cleaners' accounts had been made before

Strikers said Verizon's attacks would spread to other unions, and push down non-union workers even further.

Union members don't pay healthcare premiums at Verizon, a plum they have defended through previous strikes—and one which is increasingly hard to defend, because President Obama's 2010 health care reform will levy a tax on their so-called "Cadillac" plans.

"We fought for those benefits for all those years," said Brian Tyrrell, a special services technician in Manhattan, recalling the sacrifices of past strikes, including the 219-day strike in 1972.

Although the tax won't be levied until 2018, thanks to union lobbying, Verizon is demanding that union members start paying thousands of dollars now.

Some leaders, like CWA Local 1400 President Don Trementozzi, argue that the unions should instead push the companies to back single-payer health care plans in East Coast states, which would take the issue off the bargaining table—and off the company's back—without decimating workers' paychecks or coverage.

Off The Picket Line

Both CWA and IBEW leaders are clear that traditional strike tactics won't win this walkout—and that they're not going to play by the usual rules. Heavy automation and outsourcing enable the company to maintain the network and send struck work, especially the sales and service work of call centers, flying around the globe.

"Our work is going to India, China—with globalization, the company is at an advantage," Jackson said.

So the unions are targeting Verizon wireless stores, where pickets are turning away customers and denying the company revenue at its most profitable source.

Union negotiators met with the company on August 8. Rebutting Verizon's claims, they say the company canceled bargaining sessions leading up to the strike, and that they are prepared to talk.

Cohen has said the goal of the strike is not necessarily a contract settlement but simply to stimulate serious bargaining.

This leaves open the possibility that the unions could submit an unconditional offer to return to work, coming back inside to restart talks—and holding open the possibility of walking back out if Verizon's

ending protest.

The July 15th protest, alongside the previous actions in June, resulted in the cleaners achieving their demands at the Guildhall. It has been a significant victory, and all the IWW members at Guildhall and in the Cleaners Branch should be congratulated for what has been an inspiring campaign.

IWW Stops Victimization

On several occasions, the management at the Corporation of London's Guildhall has challenged the IWW that the action of the cleaners is illegal industrial action. Unlike the traditional unions, the IWW is not running scared of the anti-trade union laws introduced by former Prime Minister Maggie Thatcher to stop workers from taking effective industrial action. The IWW does not disown or refute the actions democratically decided upon by members to advance their interests.

However, contrary to what the bosses and even some websites unrelated to the IWW have said, the IWW did not need to call a strike at the Guildhall. Instead, what arose was tantamount to a virtual lockout against the cleaners by their employer. The cleaners have been accused of taking illegal action, but it has been the employer who has repeatedly failed to fulfill their contractual obligation—to pay wages owed to workers in return for their labor. These minimum wage workers are not providing charity.

bargaining stance doesn't improve.

If Verizon, frustrated, locks the workers out, their access to unemployment insurance is triggered and the union could file unfair labor practices over the company's bad-faith bargaining position. Leaning on state benefits would take some of the pressure off the CWA's \$400 million strike fund and help the IBEW—which has no fund—stay in the game.

"It's possible to carry out a guerrilla strike campaign—though there are some risks," says Boston labor attorney Bob Schwartz, author of "Strikes, Picketing, and Inside Campaigns." The company could discharge strikers if it convinces the National Labor Relations Board that the union is engaging in premeditated intermittent strikes.

But the unions are in uncharted territory, he said. He pointed out that the unions maintain their right to shut down all parts of their employer's business—union and non-union—and apply pressure to its suppliers, which both unions are pursuing aggressively.

On the conference call with members, CWA District 1 Vice President Chris Shelton promised more.

"We're going to use some tactics we're not used to," he said. "But we have to, because the old tactics don't work anymore."

Jenny Brown contributed to this story. This piece originally appeared in Labor Notes on August 8, 2011, and was reprinted with permission from the author.

Fighting Scabs In Pittsburgh

By X353983

Members of the IWW in Pittsburgh along with other community members have been out helping their fellow workers on the picket line in the Verizon strike. Local CWA members are legally restricted from certain activities while picketing. Not all these prohibitions apply to community members. We have learned that Verizon opened a business center in Oklahoma recently, and some of the scabs coming in to the Pittsburgh building report they are from Oklahoma and have been threatened with termination if they did not come out to the Pittsburgh office. Scabs are working 12-hour shifts from 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. in Pittsburgh.

At negotiations with the Ocean Cleaning Contractors on July 28, the IWW made it clear that it would defend any member faced with retaliatory actions by the bosses. The very next day, an IWW member was sacked at 6:00 a.m. He had, in fact, been informed in advance that if he joined the union, he would be fired. The IWW responded immediately by informing the employer that it would be mounting an effective defense campaign. By 2:00 p.m. that afternoon, the IWW was notified that our member was reinstated. It was a second important victory for workers' solidarity. In addition to their newfound strength, IWW members have begun rolling back the free reign of local management to intimidate and bully them.

A Major Breakthrough

The dispute at the Corporation of London has not only been a major victory for the workers and an example to traditional unions on how to win their demands—it has also been a major step forward for independent trade unionism. The IWW is on the verge of securing legal recognition from the contractors at the Corporation of London. This has also spurred a great deal of interest in our union from other workers who are tired of the do-nothing attitude of the established unions and are desperate for change. With the victory in this dispute, the IWW in England is now establishing itself as a serious independent workers' union.

Industrial Worker Book Review

On Centennial Of Joe Hill's Death, New Details Uncovered:

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

Adler, William. "The Man Who Never Died, The Life, Times, and Legacy of Joe Hill, American Labor Icon." *New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2011. Hardcover, 249 pages, \$30.*

By Richard Myers

The name "Joe Hill" garners nearly 2 million hits on the Google search engine. By this crude measure, Joe Hill is more popular than William Howard Taft, the U.S. president when Hill was engaged in union organizing and free speech fights along the western coast of the United States. My first awareness of Joe Hill's ubiquity was occasioned by graffiti at a college, noted briefly more than 25 years ago, yet seared into memory: Who was Joe Hill? If you don't know, ask. If you know, teach.

It wasn't simply the question of Joe Hill's identity that piqued my interest. In a hierarchical, supremely credentials-conscious institution, this silent agitation conveys a peculiarly proletarian notion: that Joe Hill doesn't simply belong to the history books, he somehow belongs to all of us. I later came across Joe Hill while continuing my research into a massacre of Colorado's union coal miners in 1927. Five-hundred strikers were fired upon at the Columbine Mine, 30 or more were wounded and six died. In the face of company machine guns and the call-up of the notorious Colorado National Guard, miners were talking about returning from their homes with deer rifles and the .30-30 Winchesters that had seen them through the "Ten Days War," aftermath of Colorado's Ludlow Massacre just 13 years earlier. IWW organizers counseled the miners with Joe Hill's words: Don't Mourn, Organize.

Decades later, by chance, a packet of Joe Hill's ashes was discovered in the U.S. National Archives. In a 1989 ceremony, as 300 of us looked on, Fellow Worker Carlos Cortez scattered a portion of those ashes on the graves of five union miners murdered by corporate greed 62 years before. Publicity for that commemoration—a remembrance of the first Columbine Massacre—resulted in news stories from coast to coast, in Mexico and around the world. The plight of unarmed working folk gunned down with impunity by the state while fighting for a living wage ought to have carried the media's attention that day. But it was Joe Hill that brought the network news cameras to that quiet cemetery in Lafayette, Colorado. Somehow, it seems, the media cannot get enough of Joe Hill.

Ubiquitous and appealing though he may be, Joe Hill has yet remained an enigma.

Not quite a decade ago, the late Franklin Rosemont published a cerebral study of Joe Hill and the IWW called "Joe Hill, The IWW & the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture." Rosemont observed that the Wobbly bard "is one of the most admired, best hated, and least known figures in U.S. history—the story of his life is largely lost in mist and shadow." Rosemont noted that Joe Hill "entered mass consciousness as a 'real' historic figure, but even more as a folk hero and ... a multi-faceted symbol of the downtrodden rising in revolt." Rosemont's study of Hill draws upon a resource largely unmatched in other biographies—comments and reminiscences by Hill's fellow workers and friends. The volume examines "Hill's attitude toward race, gender, law, crime, religion, the arts, and nature." It is an analysis not just of Joe Hill the union man, but also of what Joe Hill meant to the union, and what Joe Hill means to society. Rosemont's book reminds us that a symbol is as useful to the spirit as a tool is to the hand.

From Archie Green, the late labor lore

folklorist, we learn that in spite of esoteric history, with key puzzle pieces absent or misinterpreted, Joe Hill has been the subject of more media accolades than any other labor hero, from novels to videos, from post cards to bumper stickers. Writing in "Laborlore Explorations," Green offers the cultural Joe Hill, recounting poets, novelists, and playwrights who developed protagonists based upon Hill's perceived character. The martyr extraordinaire inspires well beyond the industrial unionists of the radical union to which he belonged. Green remarks that Hill has even been embraced by "enemies" of the IWW, past and present. For example, he traces a Communist Party attempt at appropriation of Hill's symbolism and acknowledges occasional Wobbly irritation that orthodox unionism dares to adopt the Wobbly icon without conveying the radical context that was necessarily part of Joe Hill's life.

Wallace Stegner penned a controversial book of fiction about Hill, portraying the revolutionary song writer as a flawed hero. Stegner's fictional Joe Hill was rough and tumble, opportunistic, sporadically violent, and probably guilty. The real opportunistic party was doubtless Stegner himself; with so few facts known about Joe Hill's life, the author saw him as a blank slate upon which to create a fictitious anti-hero with an already built-in reputation, presumably conducive to selling novels. Artistic and ethical questions aside, controversy ensued, with the Industrial Workers of the World picketing the New York office of *The New Republic*, which had published an article Stegner wrote about his fictitious Joe Hill. Much later, Stegner regretted having used a "person with living relatives who can be hurt" as his model.

For nearly a century, the man executed by the state of Utah in 1915 has remained "shrouded in legends concocted by worshipful admirers and venomous detractors" [Rosemont]. We know well what Joe Hill represents to us. What of Joe Hill, the man?

Numerous writers have sought to distill the non-fictional Joe Hill, weighing evidence and testimony, searching documents for clues, arguing Joe Hill's presumed character. Yet through uncertainty or obfuscation, all existing accounts of Hill's life and death have failed to adequately address the question: was Joe Hill guilty of murder? They tend instead to answer in the negative, the much easier question: did Joe Hill receive a fair trial? Rosemont noted liberal biographers in particular who split the difference, acquiescing that in the fog of history, Joe Hill may have been guilty, balancing their equivocation with what has long been beyond refutation—that his trial was flawed.

This is an easy conclusion: the judge short-circuited the jury selection process, assigning hand-picked jurors to the case in spite of defense objections. Jury instructions delivered by the judge mischaracterized Utah's laws of evidence. Any attempt to introduce evidence that might have exonerated Joe Hill was routinely ruled out of order. Evidence that didn't fit the facts was made to fit by prosecution attorneys given leeway to lead witnesses. When Joe Hill, angered at the travesty that had become his trial, fired his first set of attorneys in court, the judge basically overruled him, ordering those same attorneys to remain on the case.

The appeals process was likewise inexcusable. Three judges who sat on an appeals court made up the pardons board as well, in essence reviewing their own decisions. Stung by widespread criticism of the trial (including two inquiries from the president of the United States), the pardons board itself became a source of "malicious and deceitful" falsehoods about the condemned prisoner.

Even considering that Hill was railroaded to his execution, what of the fact that Hill received a gunshot wound on the

very night of the murders? Joe's off-the-record explanation attributed the gunshot to a dispute over a woman. That story never came out in court, and to the extent it has been explored in subsequent published accounts, it has generated far more muddled speculation than insight.

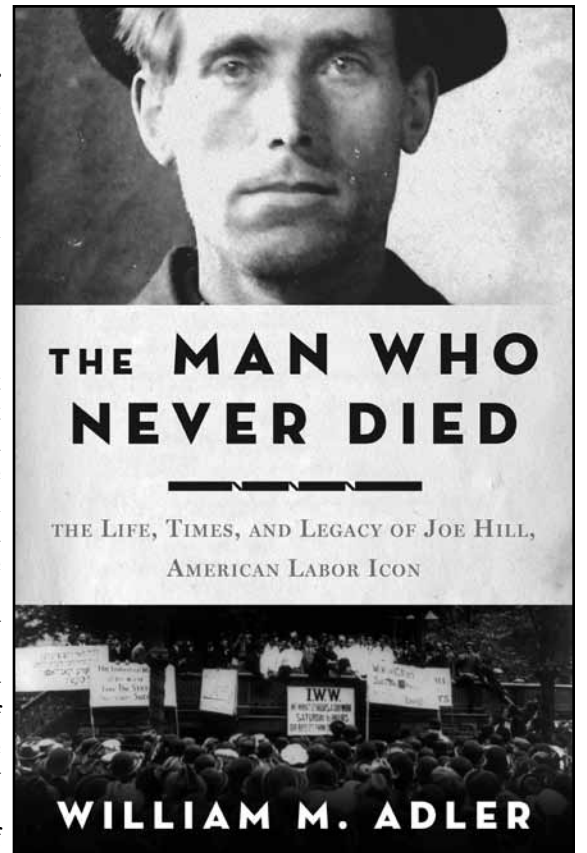
Biographer Gibbs Smith provides a wealth of Joe Hill detail, conveying many original documents related to Hill's trial, yet leaves the reader wondering about that unexplained gunshot wound and culpability for a capital crime (forgive the double meaning). In his 1969 book "Joe Hill," published in Utah, Smith asserted that "the question of Joe Hill's guilt or innocence is no more certain today than it was in 1915." Smith concludes, "Hill may have been a guilty man seeking to create for himself a martyr image, or [he may have been] an idealistic and unusually stubborn man."

On the other side, many of Hill's supporters portrayed the prosecution of Hill as an attack on the union from the outset. Articles, books, and songs have attributed Joe Hill's persecution to Governor Spry, the Mormon Church, or the Copper Bosses. Marxist biographer Philip Foner's most significant contribution may be a clarification of this assertion. Foner writes, "In establishing the frame-up of Joe Hill, it is not necessary to subscribe to the theory advanced by many writers, especially those associated with the IWW, that he was arrested and charged with the murder of [grocer] J. G. Morrison ... in a plot to get rid of a militant union organizer." Foner concludes that although Hill may not have been initially targeted by Utah authorities for his union activities, the locomotive bound for execution left the station after they realized who they had. Unfortunately, Foner's 1965 publication of "The Case of Joe Hill" is marred by accusations of extensive plagiarism from an unpublished Master's thesis written by James O. Morris.

Joe Hill we have in plenitude, as working-class symbol and literary icon. Yet none of Hill's earlier biographers deal convincingly, nor to biographical satisfaction, with the question of innocence or guilt. Now comes a book—the product of five years of intensive research—in which new, intimate secrets of Joe Hill's life are revealed. William M. Adler's excellent work, "The Man Who Never Died," provides significant, previously unpublished information. Adler walked the ground, poked into the dark places, and discovered long-hidden truths. He traveled to Sweden to meet Joe's family, to explore the work of Swedish biographers, and to research Hill's childhood. Adler then followed Joe to America, to California and Canada, through his brief role in the Mexican Revolution, and subsequently, to the bitter end in Utah.

Like much of North America at the time, Utah was experiencing labor discontent. Railroad construction workers carrying the banner of the Industrial Workers of the World won a strike in the summer of 1913, and business leaders vowed that it wouldn't happen again. Joe Hill arrived a short time later, and within a year, the popular Wobbly troubadour would be condemned to death.

In the aftermath of two murders at a grocery store, Utah authorities let slip from their grasp a real criminal, a thug now known to have been engaged in a notorious and violent crime wave throughout the region. Magnus Olson did time in Folsom State Prison in California, the Nevada State Penitentiary, and at least seven other lockups during his fifty year crime spree. While the Salt Lake City police took Olson into custody on suspicion related to the



Graphic: themanwhoneverdied.com

grocery store shootings, they were thrown off by his artful lying and his routine use of pseudonyms. In spite of some incriminating evidence, they failed to identify Olson as the notorious wanted criminal, and they let him go.

Ironically, when they arrested Joe Hill (who resembled Olson) for the crime, Utah authorities suspected that Olson (under a different name) was the murderer. For a time they even believed Hill and Olson to be the same man. Having failed to sort out the real identities of their detainees, Utah authorities eventually settled on the union agitator as their trophy prisoner. After all, Hill's gunshot wound seemed persuasive enough for a conviction, and they tailored their case to that one unalterable fact.

Was the real Olson a more likely perpetrator of the grocery store murders than Joe Hill? Adler notes that during a career of some five decades, Olson "burglarized homes, retail stores, and boxcars; he blew safes, robbed banks, stole cars, committed assault and arson, and in all likelihood, had committed murder." Adler's painstaking research places Olson in the Salt Lake City area at the time of the murders, and most probably, in the very neighborhood where the murders occurred. The murdered grocer—a former police officer—had been attacked before and believed that he was being targeted. Olson had a reputation for violent revenge against his adversaries, a probable motive which nicely dovetailed with the crime for which Joe Hill would die. Joe Hill was newly arrived in Utah and no motive was established for Hill as perpetrator. In spite of uncertainty whether either of the two assailants at the grocery store had been fired upon, let alone wounded, Hill's gunshot injury was all the evidence necessary.

But what of Joe Hill's alibi that he'd been shot over a woman, a person whose identity was never officially revealed to the court? Adler identifies Hilda Erickson, of Hill's host family in Utah, as his secret love interest. Joe's unofficial—yet far from unnoticed—sweetheart, Hilda must have been much on the minds of onlookers throughout Joe Hill's trial. She visited Joe through the prison bars every Sunday, yet at Joe's direction, they were careful to prevent anyone from overhearing their conversations. When Hill, facing death, was allowed a private meeting with associates, Hilda was among the few people he saw. Hilda later stood vigil at the prison when Joe was executed, and she was one of the pall bearers at his funeral.

Moving Joe Hill's secret romantic saga from conjecture to historical record, Adler's book includes a sensational discovery, a letter penned by Hilda Erickson

Industrial Worker Book Review

A Review Of “The Man Who Never Died”

describing what had happened many years before, and her account confirms Joe Hill’s ostensible alibi. She had been the sweetheart of Joe Hill’s friend and fellow Swedish immigrant, Otto Appelquist (who had arrived in Utah before Joe). Hilda broke off that engagement after Joe arrived, leaving Otto and Joe to become rivals for her attention. One day, Erickson returned to her family’s home (where the two men were boarding) to discover that Joe had a bullet wound, while Otto was making excuses for leaving—for good, as it turned out. Otto Appelquist had shot Joe in a fit of jealousy, then regretted the deed, immediately carrying Joe to a doctor. Perhaps fearful of arrest for the shooting and uncertain whether Joe would survive, Otto left (to find work, he had declared) at two in the morning, and never returned. The doctor would later turn Joe in after hearing of the grocery store murders—and a sizable reward.

Why didn’t Hilda voluntarily step forward when her testimony might have saved Joe Hill? She was just 20 years old, and there is some indication that Joe Hill advised her not to. He probably sought to shield her from publicity, an instinctive reaction for the Swede with roots in his family’s experiences in their homeland. Ever the idealist, Joe Hill may also have sought to avoid testimony that might endanger his friend, countryman, and fellow worker, Otto.

At first, Joe was convinced that Utah couldn’t convict him because he was innocent. Utah society had sought to throw off its reputation for frontier justice and it was almost possible to believe that the rule of law meant something. Somewhat surprisingly, Joe Hill accepted implicitly the legal principle that a defendant would not be considered guilty for not testifying and he overvalued the judicial aphorism of innocent until proven guilty.

Utah courts routinely disregarded both of these principles in the Joe Hill case. Throughout the trial it became increasingly apparent that the Utah system of justice intended to claim its pound of flesh. A prominent union man had been accused of a heinous crime and evidence to the contrary simply wasn’t to be considered. Joe Hill’s full appreciation of the danger of his predicament came too late, his course had already been set.

The circumstances of Joe Hill’s trial in Utah—a union man accused of murder and fighting for his life—may be profitably compared with another murder which occurred during, and as a direct result of, the trial. Inveighing against injustice, 25 year old Ray Horton—president of Salt Lake City’s IWW branch—publicly cursed the imperative that causes some men to wear a badge. For his vocal audacity, Horton was abruptly shot by an onlooker and then received two more bullets in the back as he staggered away. The killer, a retired lawman, was initially jailed for first degree murder, but was held for only one day. Upon his release, the killer was hailed as a hero at the Salt Lake City Elks Club with a luncheon in his honor. Newspapers editorialized that this cold blooded murder was justified because Horton—a union man exercising free speech—was asking for it.

That a union man in Utah may be killed with impunity for his attitude seemed to likewise play a role in Hill’s pardons board hearing. One cannot say that Joe Hill had no chance whatsoever to save his own life. His pride and his contempt for a flawed process played a significant role in his fate. As intransigent as Utah justice seemed for a union man, one has the sense from the recorded pardons board discussion that even at that late date, Joe Hill might have derailed his imminent execution if he threw himself upon the mercy of the court, explaining at long last how he had been wounded by a gunshot. The board dangled a pardon or a commutation before him, but Hill insisted

that wasn’t good enough, calling such a possibility “humiliating.” In response to entreaties to explain the gunshot wound, Hill promised the pardons board that he would offer them the full story, if he was granted a new trial. The pardons board declared it had no authority to order a new trial. Having embraced the slogan “New Trial or Bust” before his many supporters, Hill told the pardons board, “If I can’t have a new trial, I don’t want anything.”

Equally stubborn in its own way, the pardons board determined that Hill would either “eat crow” (as Hill described it) in the manner that they demanded—tell all with contrition before the pardons board, with no guarantees that it would make any difference—or die.

Adler explains why Joe Hill may have seen martyrdom as a noble and worthwhile cause. Joe Hill was too idealistic, too stubborn, and too proud to give them the satisfaction of breaking him. Joe Hill effectively told the pardons board, “Gentlemen, the cause I stand for, that of a fair and honest trial, is worth more than human life—much more than mine.” In his estimation, they hadn’t proved him guilty; why should he be required to prove himself innocent?

The Joe Hill that shines through Adler’s work is idealistic, unselfish, proud, impulsive, principled, protective, stubborn, and at times, a little naïve in the face of implacable authority. That the governments and courts of Salt Lake City and the state of Utah should prove themselves as intransigent and unprincipled as the captains of industry about whom he’d so often sloganeered, may have caught Joe by surprise. Having discovered the truth of the matter, he dedicated his very being to the principle that justice must prevail, that sacrifice for such a cause was a worthwhile endeavor. In spite of incarceration and a capital sentence, Joe Hill managed to the very end to exercise some measure of control over his own life. And, to the extent he was able, over his death.

There are now two biographers of Joe Hill whose work stands above the rest. Franklin Rosemont’s “Joe Hill, the IWW and the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture” speaks to the meaning of Hill’s life—Joe Hill as folk hero and symbol of the downtrodden rising in revolt. But Rosemont’s text isn’t just about Joe Hill, it is a summation of the entire Industrial Workers of the World experience. Rosemont’s Chicago base and his close association with Charles H. Kerr Company frequently lend a sense of “inside baseball,” allowing him to reveal details of the IWW’s history found in no other account. His broad grasp of Marxist theory, as well as of the revolutionary industrial unionism philosophy of the Wobblies—what Rosemont describes as an “anti-authoritarian Marxism”—lends itself to comparison, with the IWW’s “hobo philosophers” coming off rather well. Rosemont observes, “Socialists, Communists, and Trotskyists published papers for workers—some of them admittedly of high quality. The IWW, however, always published *workers’ papers*: of and by as well as for.”

William M. Adler largely skirts questions of theory, relying upon demographics to build a case for radical unionism. For example, of 90 million Americans at the time, he reports that 10 million lived in poverty. Two-thirds of male workers earned less than the minimum considered necessary for a decent life. Adler nicely sets the scene in Utah, exploring the history of the Mormon Church and, with the appearance of the IWW, the conflict between a radical utopian materialist organization and an older, utopian-socialist theocratic

order. Curiously, the Mormon Church had a historical tolerance of unions. But the tolerated economic organizations had always been comprised of *believers*.

“The Man Who Never Died” explores the deck stacked against itinerant workers—the wealth and power of union-devising Harrison Gray Otis, editor-owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, for example. It details Hill’s participation in organizing campaigns and the free speech fights in Fresno and San Diego.

Adler also contributes a sympathetic chapter on the Morrisons, the other victims frequently ignored by previous historians.

Stylistically, Adler’s book is a direct and pleasant read. Photos and illustrations relate closely to the history, and while adequate, they are not the main selling point of the book. Never before seen photos of Hilda Erickson, mug shots of the presumed villain, Magnus Olson, and family photos

are the exception, with one Olson photo revealing a startling resemblance to Joe Hill. Rosemont’s photos and illustrations in “Joe Hill” tend toward the curious, the delightful, and the rare; for example, a copy of the “IWW Preamble” written in Chinese. Rosemont’s tendency to include esoteric information may be considered either a plus or a minus; some, but not all readers will be intrigued by speculation on printing technologies available to early IWW publications.

Rosemont writes with an affection for his subject that is apparent on page after page. Adler’s style is a little more sober, providing carefully marshaled facts to detail the times, the circumstances, and the essence of Joe Hill’s life. If Rosemont is the supremely knowledgeable champion of his subject matter, Adler is the dispassionate investigator, unveiling a narrative all the more credible for his careful scrutiny. For five years his singular focus has been on objectivity. Having become acquainted with William Adler and aware of his ongoing research for this book, I once invited him to a local performance of the Barrie Stavis play about Joe Hill. He politely declined, explaining that while still assembling the historical account to the best of his ability, he dared not pollute his thoughts with the myth.

Yet the resulting historical account is not dry, nor lacking in innovative thought. For example, at one point Adler compares Hill’s legacy to that of John Brown, the “mouldering abolitionist” whose own cause went marching on long after his death. Adler also distills much of the “personal” Hill; for example, the fact that, just before his execution, Hill might have delayed the date by affirming a fraudulent claim—a supposed alibi sent forth by an unknown supporter, perhaps in a misguided attempt to forestall the terrible end. Hill calmly chose the truth, and imminent execution, rather than embrace the lie.

Rosemont, in publishing his first edition of “Joe Hill, The IWW & the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture” in 2002, provides one very important service to those interested in Joe Hill lore—an overview and critique of all previous such histories. It is a very significant and comprehensive contribution, valuable not only for what it tells us, but also for what is missing.

In the end, Adler provides something that Rosemont cannot—a very plausible narrative of Joe Hill’s injury on the night in question. When educators, scholars, or future biographers inquire what really happened in Joe Hill’s life and death, they will turn to Adler’s work because of the essential new information that it provides.

While Rosemont offers a brief para-

graph about the career criminal Magnus Olson (under one of his many pseudonyms, Frank Z. Wilson), Adler provides more than a chapter. Rosemont devoted a speculative chapter entitled “The Mystery Woman” to what are now known to be false leads. Like all other biographers, Rosemont failed to note Hilda Erickson, despite her frequent but reticent visits throughout Hill’s trial, incarceration, and execution. Adler not only identified Joe Hill’s mystery woman, he provides Hill’s explanation of the shooting as recorded in her own words. The Erickson letter describing what appeared, at least from the two suitors’ purview, a love triangle amounts to a metaphorical smoking gun in this century-old mystery.

With the back story of Hill’s love relationship as an important touchstone, Adler traces how Joe Hill’s plight, and the publicity generated by the campaign to set him free, gradually changed Hill’s consciousness and, perhaps, his purpose in life. This, likewise, is a contribution which heretofore had remained unconvincing, for the simple reason that no other biographer had the facts as a foundation for such reflection.

Adler’s prose is first rate, his analysis of history impeccable. He draws conclusions where appropriate and presents an honest account, yet acknowledges there is much that we still do not know. Why did Hill choose death when he might have chanced a different course? Why did he protect Hilda to the end when she might have held the sole key to his ultimate vindication? Was his protective nature grounded in the travails of his family so many years before? Adler acknowledges the questions and offers some thoughts, yet allows the reader to put together the final pieces of the puzzle.

At the end, do we know for certain who committed the grocery store murders? No. But we have a narrative which clearly demonstrates: Joe Hill *never* fit the profile of a killer, while another man detained momentarily for the same crime *definitively* fit such a profile. The other man was released to continue his life of crime, while Joe Hill, the union man, was sent to his death.

If by some alchemy Utah society in 1915 had been privy to the research collected in this book, with its powerful evidence that a lovers’ triangle was behind the mysterious gunshot wound, the yellow journals of the period may have come alive with sensational gossip. Yet I believe the circumstantial evidence is persuasive enough that Joe Hill would have gone free. Instead, he sacrificed his life to become the man who never died, the Joe Hill that we all have come to know.

So who, then, was Joe Hill? If you know, *teach*.

“The Man Who Never Died” by William Adler became available on August 30, 2011, for \$30. For tour dates, music samples, and a photo gallery, please see <http://www.themanwhoneverdied.com>.

William M. Adler has written for many national and regional magazines, including *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, *Mother Jones*, and the *Texas Observer*. In addition to “The Man Who Never Died,” he has authored two other books of narrative nonfiction: “Land of Opportunity” (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), an intimate look at the rise and fall of a crack cocaine empire, and “Mollie’s Job” (Scribner, 2000), which follows the flight of a single factory job from the U.S. to Mexico over the course of fifty years. His work explores the intersection of individual lives and the larger forces of their times, and it describes the gap between American ideals and American realities. Adler lives with his wife and son in Denver, Colorado.

Richard Myers is a writer, author, and union activist in Denver, Colorado.

An abbreviated version of this review has appeared elsewhere.



Photo: Randy Nelson

William Adler.

Industrial Strength

Customer Satisfaction, Capitalism And The Ivory Tower

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

By Eric Miles Williamson

Texas A&M University and the University of Oklahoma have instituted bonuses for professors who get the best ratings on their student evaluations. These are not insubstantial bonuses: they range from \$2,500 to \$10,000 (10K). If we figure that an assistant professor makes about 50K, a 10K bonus is a 20 percent raise for the year. For professors who are not from wealthy families, this is potentially a life-changing raise. With ten grand (six or seven after taxes), a professor can move out of his cockroach-infested apartment in the slums and slap down a down-payment on a splendid, dilapidated shack.

I teach at the University of Texas, Pan American, and it's been several years since I got a pay increase of any kind. My last raise was about \$1,600 a year, which, after taxes, amounted to \$100 a month, money that instantly got chewed up by increases in food, gasoline and utilities costs. Every year I work without a raise, my inflation-adjusted salary goes down. Every year I'm a professor, I get poorer. Over the past 27 years, the only way I've been able to keep up with inflation has been to quit my job and get a job at another university, where, inevitably, my salary stagnates and I have to once again seek another job. I began professing full-time in 1987, and if I adjust my 1987 salary for inflation, I make less money now than I did when I was a rookie.

Mike McKinney, A&M's Chancellor, says, "Money is not an incentive for [faculty]. They show up every day and do the best they can. They can't logically do better than their best. I call it [the bonus program] a reward."

We might not be able to do better, but we can sure as shit do a lot worse and get the same pay, or even worse than that and get a raise. What planet is this dude living on, that he thinks faculty don't care about their paychecks?

If I were told that at my university all I had to do to get a 10K bonus was to get perfect student evaluations, I'm pretty sure I could pull off the trick. No problem.

Since the early 1980s, colleges and universities across the United States have moved, under legislative pressures and dictates, increasingly toward a corporate, capitalist model. Whereas 30 years ago students were students, now they are "consumers" or "customers." Of course, if students were once students, and professors were professors, now, if the students are "customers," what are the professors? They're not salesmen, because salesmen try to get people to purchase goods: student-customers have already decided to make their purchases. Perhaps professors are now "servers," academic waiters and waitresses serving up intellectual platters in hopes that what's on those platters pleases the customers enough that the customers give the academic wait-corps tips in the form of good student evaluations.

The question that arises next, of course, is: just what are the professors serving?

At Texas A&M and the University of Oklahoma, they're serving, according to Mike McKinney, Chancellor of the Texas A&M University system, "customer satisfaction."

Next: how does a professor "satisfy"? An anecdote or two is in order here.

Eleven years ago I got a job teaching at Central Missouri State University. Among the first classes I taught was American Literature. I required the students to read Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." I gave the students a very simple reading quiz—anyone who'd read even the first few chapters of the book would have gotten an A.

Every student in the class—40 or 50 of them—failed. I asked them how many of them had even begun the reading. Not

one student had even cracked open the book. The next class period, in an effort to be a "nice" professor, I gave them the same quiz. The results were the same: not a single student had even yet cracked the book open. During the course of the semester, I gave a dozen or so quizzes. Always with the same result: no student had read any of the assignments.

I decided to eliminate the portion of their final grade that demonstrated that the students had actually read the books. Every student passed, most with A's and B's, and I got exemplary student evaluations. I knew the game: don't make the students do any work, give them high grades, and they rate you as a superior professor.

One semester there, however, right before I quit and moved to Texas (to get a raise—I hadn't had one in five years in Missouri), I decided to give the students the grades they actually deserved. I graded the students on whether or not they'd read the texts. Most of the students got C's. Many failed. No one got an A. My student evaluations reflected this: the students hated me. Some called me an asshole. Others called me Satan.

Even before Texas A&M and Oklahoma led the charge for professor "accountability" in the form of student evaluations, professors' jobs, tenure and promotion depended on student evaluations. In all my years as a college teacher (27), only four times have I been subjected to mandatory teaching observations and consequent evaluation by a professor. If I want a peer evaluation of my teaching, I ask one of my professor friends to come to class and write me up. The resultant glowing letter is, of course, a given, since I'll likely return the favor with a six-pack of beer.

So usually the students decide if the professor is any good or not. Sorry—the customers decide. It's like asking the prisoners to rate their favorite guards. It's like asking people to rate their favorite IRS agents. If you have two construction foremen, one who makes you bust your ass all day with no breaks, and another who lets you goof off and sit on your ass and then at day's end buys the crew a couple cases of beer, who do you think the workers will prefer?

There's another twist, however. Times have changed in the past dozen years. My second year at the University of Texas, Pan American, where I now teach, I directed a Master's thesis. After reading the psychobabble gibberish and showing it to my wife, we both agreed that the language being used was not quite *normal*. Each sentence read like something written on LSD or heroin. So my wife began looking up phrases on Google. What she found was that nearly every sentence was an amalgam, a collage, a pastiche of phrases taken from articles easily found on the internet. The student had plagiarized her Master's thesis.

I was on tenure track, having given up tenure in Missouri for a raise in Texas. I was not in a position to attempt to fail this Mexican-American female Master's student. I'd be accused of being both a racist (I'm white) and a sexist (I have a penis). When a professor accuses a student of malfeasance, the professor always suffers more than the student, getting raked over the sulphurous coals in an academic inquisition: the student is, after all, an asset, while the professor is an economic liability, snorting funds from the trough through his liberal snout.

After all, the student is a customer. Accusing a student of malfeasance is like a waiter telling a customer that it's not the cocktail that sucks, but the customer's taste in fine liquor that's sub-par. Or like telling the customer that the *tête de monde* is not bad—the customer is just an idiot. I reported the incident through the appropriate channels. Their opinion? Let her take a couple of classes instead of writing a thesis, and just let her get her degree.

Then, after she'd gotten that degree,

the department called me to ask if I thought she should be given a job teaching at the university. I declined to have an opinion: if I said no, I'd be a racist and a sexist; if I said yes, I'd be a sniveling scumbag just like most of the other professors in the country.

She ended up going to another University of Texas campus to work on a PhD. This is an extreme and disgusting example of what is now merely the norm. And the norm now is this: academic dishonesty.

For five years now at the University of Texas, Pan American, I have been teaching literature and giving essay examinations and quizzes. And for five years the quizzes and exams have come back nearly identical. Students, generally, do not write essays: they copy and paste information they've found on the internet.

When I've had graduate students—professors-to-be—many haven't read the books. I've heard they even chuckle and boast about getting away with not studying. They might pass, but fuck them. I don't get a raise for giving students the grade they deserve: I get a raise for *pleasing* them. Great job, young *scholars*. Go to Harvard.

When I began teaching college in 1984 at the University of Colorado, if students wanted to plagiarize, they had to go to the library to do so, and it was an arduous task for students to perform, a difficult one for professors to detect.

Now students sit in their seats with their smart phones and do a Wikipedia search and copy down the entry, thinking the professor is such a moron that he can't figure out that since every student answer is the *exact same*, uses the *exact same language*, *word for word*, something is amiss. Forty students using the same exact phrases.

So, what to do. Well, if you fail them all, you get shitty student evaluations, and therefore don't get a raise. If you give them all A's, you get called into the Chair's office and are accused of pandering to the students trying to get high student evaluations. What you do is this: you find some grammar errors on the scholars' papers and give them B's; to the rest of them, the scholars who don't make as many grammar errors, scholars who will soon be running America, who will soon be your bosses, who will be managing your retirement funds, who will be drilling holes in your teeth, who will be fixing the broken bones of your children and who will be the teachers of those kids and the caretakers of your rotting carcasses, you give A's. You got a choice: your job, or your dignity. Unless you're independently wealthy, you choose your job. In the new corporate-model academia, dignity and honesty don't pay very well.

By choosing your job over your morals and dignity you get good student evaluations. Then you get a raise. The only cost is your soul. Not much to lose when you're talking about 10K and the chance to climb out of student-loan poverty (I'll be paying on mine for another 20 years—I owe more on my student loans than I did on my first house).

Oh, this: all the other professors are thinking the same thing. Don't think they're not. I want the bonus, but so do they. Golly, that means we're *competing*, just like we're supposed to in the corporate and capitalist academic model. So let's compete for those raises and bonuses. We all want them. But how do we go about competing with each other?

How's about this for starters: we actively work toward destroying each other, toward *defeating*, *annihilating each other*. We work to ruin each others' reputations. We try to ruin each others' marriages and cause each other nervous breakdowns. We try to catch each other in some wrongdoing. We seek to discredit each others' service, teaching methodologies, research findings. In capitalism, if you're not a

winner, you're a loser. In capitalism, one person's loss is another's gain.

It's hard for me to comprehend how pitting professors against each other, like pit-bulls in a dirt ring in Matamoros or Reynosa or El Paso, could possibly benefit students.

Other than health care, if anything in this capitalism-run-amok country needs to be socialized, it's education. Enticing teachers to compete against each other instead of work together toward a common good is a splendid way of ensuring the absolute destruction of the minds of our children. I care more about my four children than I do about the tens of thousands of students I've taught, and if it comes down to getting a raise for my kids by handing out A's or not getting the raise by being a responsible professor, I choose taking care of my children without hesitation. At my current university we already have in place an incentive to publish.

It's called "College-Level Merit Pay": if we publish better than the other faculty in our departments, we get an extra \$500 a year (of course, for the past three years, we haven't received jack shit). The people who decide if we get this huge pile of loot that we could earn in a few days mowing lawns (my God! \$40 a month before taxes for publishing a book!) are our colleagues—often our subordinates—"lecturers" on short-term contracts who have no obligations to the university. They are *elected* onto the committee that *votes* on whether or not the professors' achievements are adequate, even if they themselves have done nothing but ingratiate themselves to the unknown and poorly (if at all) published faculty members running the show all across the country. You'll note that the best professors in the nation are rarely, if ever, *administrators*. I've never been given a raise by someone with more published books than me.

Since the cash is handed out by vote and not by objective standards, the professors who *please* everyone, who have the best hallway smiles, get the merit raises.

Socrates didn't please everyone, and neither did Jesus of Nazareth. Nor his daddy the Big G. Shakespeare and Milton don't please illiterates, and exacting bosses don't please lazy slobs and idiots. Anyone who *pleases* everyone is a suspicious person, likely a megalomaniac. If everyone in the world were pleased by me, I'd know I was a total shitbag.

But I want that \$40. I want it, and so does everyone else. I want it really, really bad, if for no other reason than I want my *colleagues* not to get it. That's the new name of the game in academia. As a professor, I no longer have "colleagues": I have competitors.

If I want my College-Level Merit Pay, and all I have to do is ruin my colleagues/competitors, it's not all that hard to do, since I know hundreds of editors around the country and internationally. I know dozens of agents. I know many, many hundreds of professors. It's not that hard to tank someone's career and their chances for publication. As in any business, it's not that hard to be blackballed, backstabbed, and secretly screwed over. It's happened to me a time or twenty.

There are some really, really nasty tricks I can pull if I want my raise. And I want my raise. I'm not going to tell you my tricks. I'm sure I'll need them soon and, in the capitalist/corporate model of higher education, continually. Oh, and the students? They'll get what they pay for. After all, they're consumers, and they're purchasing a *product*.

What that product is ultimately worth is a question taxpayers, who have pit professor against professor, college against college, university against university, might consider asking themselves the next time they vote for public officials who want to slash funds for education and who demand that competition be the name of the game for the teachers of their children.

Environmental Justice

Capitalism And The Environment: An Interview With Chris Williams

By Jon Hochschartner

Chris Williams is a long-time environmental activist and author of "Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis." His writings have appeared in the International Socialist Review, The Independent, Socialist Worker, Truthout and Znet. He is a chemistry and physics professor at Pace University, and chairperson of the Packer Collegiate Institute science department. This interview was conducted on July 5, 2011.

Jon Hochschartner: Children in Fukushima [Japan] recently tested positive for trace amounts of radiation exposure. Is concern about nuclear plants in the United States alarmist?

Chris Williams: I think Americans should definitely be concerned about the nuclear power plants that exist in this country, all 104 of them. There have been several reports out recently, since the spotlight has been shone on the murky and obscure world of nuclear power and nuclear power regulation. I don't know if you're familiar with the Associated Press reports that came out recently saying that three-quarters of plants have leaked radioactive tritium, some of which has been accompanied by longer-lived isotopes, such as cesium 137. There have been a whole number of fires. There are many plants that are not up to standard in terms of being subjected to large earthquakes. The San Onofre plant in California is built on the beach, for example. The nuclear plant at Indian Point, just 30 miles north of New York City, is on two earthquake fault lines and has had leaks and so on and so forth. The nuclear power plant in Fort Calhoun, Nebraska, is practically underwater. Any time that they're putting sandbags up to protect a nuclear power plant—it's kind of problematic (laughs).

So it's not just a question of a catastrophic accident. We've already had one of those: Three Mile Island in 1979. It's just the daily operation of nuclear power plants that make them inherently unsafe, not to mention extremely expensive.

JH: The Center for Biological Diversity has said that the Obama administration has been as secretive regarding meetings

with oil industry lobbyists as the Bush administration was. What's your take?

CW: The British government was recently found out to be colluding with the nuclear industry to play down the effects of Fukushima through Freedom Of Information requests. If the British government is doing it, I find it hard to believe that the American government is not doing similar things. We all know about the secret meetings that were led by Dick Cheney when he set up his energy policy group. T. Boone Pickens, multibillionaire who is advocating for massive expansion of natural gas, has written a bill that he wants to present to dictate the energy policies of the country. Ted Turner, another billionaire obviously, has done something similar, advocating natural gas expansion. There are some people who clearly have the ear of politicians much more than ordinary people. We don't get any say over what our policy should be. Most people are against nuclear power, and yet they want to expand it regardless. Whether there were secret meetings or not, dictated by the corporations, these people meet all the time.

JH: The American Association of the Advancement of Science, the world's largest general scientific society, recently released a statement condemning the harassment of climate researchers by conservative groups. What's the motivation behind these attacks?

CW: I think that it follows the tried and true method of shooting the messenger in order to discredit the message. It's been done numerous times before. But it's very difficult when the overwhelming majority of climate scientists agree on two things: first, that the climate is warming and changing quite radically; and secondly, the cause of that is overwhelmingly human activity, specifically the burning of fossil fuels. The only thing [corporations]

can now do is fund climate denial the same [way] that they funded studies to show cancer wasn't caused by smoking cigarettes.

JH: So is it just a stalling mechanism?

CW: The United States' infrastructure, because of when it was mostly developed, is centered around the automobile. The layout of cities and so on, unlike other developed countries—which developed earlier, not around cars—is predicated on cheap gasoline, with far less public transport provision. That's why it's been one of the most intransigent [countries] in all of the international climate change negotiations. On the other hand, Europe can see that it can obtain an economic advantage by pressing things more. Not because they are a more far-sighted set of capitalists or anything, but they can see a competitive edge where they're better able to adapt their industry, to be less carbon intensive than the United States is.

JH: In the midst of a recession, carbon emissions reached the highest level in history last year, according to the International Energy Agency. What will it take in a systemic sense to avoid global climate meltdown?

CW: We are really reaching a critical period. Nobody knows whether we're about to reach it. Or maybe, possibly, we already have reached it. But we certainly need to make some significant changes in the next ten years or so, radically reduce the amount of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere. Most scientists, as you probably know, see 350 parts-per-million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as the maximum allowable amount before we start losing control of our ability to moderate climate change. And we're already at 390. So we're over and above what most scientists will say is safe.



Photo: Jeffrey Boyette

Chris Williams.

In September We Remember 100 Years Later, Joe Hill Lives On

From the Bread and Roses Workers Cultural Center

The Denver-Boulder IWW and the Bread and Roses Workers' Cultural Center in Denver produced a multimedia event to celebrate the legacy of the great union organizer and songwriter, Joe Hill, held from August 26-27.

Exactly one century ago Joe Hill, a Swedish immigrant, was fighting on the side of the Mexican peasants and workers for freedom. In the next four years, Joe would become heavily involved in many famous strikes and free speech fights throughout the United States. In the process, he penned dozens of the most beloved songs of the labor movement of the time—songs that eventually inspired Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and others.

Then, the state of Utah accused Joe of killing a shopkeeper in Salt Lake City, convicted and executed him, despite international pleas for a fair trial. Denver writer and activist William M. Adler has recently finished a book that convincingly shows Joe was innocent of the charges and wrongly executed—something the public has believed for generations and was popularized by Baez in the famous song "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night" at the Woodstock Festival in the 1960s. The release of this significant new book was an important part of the festivities.

Now as we approach the 100th anniversary of Joe's untimely death, the festival kicked off a tribute to Joe to re-inspire the global movement for workers' power and to win his formal exoneration. Among the

A Tribute to **Joe Hill** with **John McCutcheon** and special guest **Elena Klaver**

Live at the Mercury Cafe Friday, Aug. 26, 8pm

Featuring songs by Joe Hill and performances from the new Joe Hill play by Si Kahn and multi-Grammy nominee John McCutcheon. Celebrating the release of a new book that puts a lie to Joe's conviction and execution by Utah nearly 100 years ago, the legacy of Joe's death and life survives within the ongoing global working class rebellion as it draws upon the undying spirit of the IWW organizer, songwriter, poet and immigrant.

In 1914, Joe Hill was convicted of murder and later put to death by a Salt Lake City firing squad, sparking international controversy. After intensive investigation Denver author William Adler presents startling new evidence that finally clears Joe's innocence and the guilt of another man. Film, agreement to set against a live and exciting performance by U.S. folkies where class warfare raged and Hill was the union's preeminent songwriter. In death he became the symbol of the working class, celebrated as the Man of the Hour by Bob Dylan, and immortalized in the ballad "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night."

Also as part of the Joe Hill festival weekend, on Saturday, Aug. 27, at 2:00 PM, 2:00 PM, Denver (27 Social Center) — feature films and documentaries about Joe Hill, followed by a poetry reading and reading the evening with a singalong with local musicians. See www.breadandroses.org for times, dates and locations.

\$17.55 (includes fee) available from BrownPaperTickets.com Mercury Cafe located at 2100 California. The author will be available to sign books at all events, unless \$5 book discount to bookshoppers, courtesy Left Hand Books. Not proceeds benefit the Denver Rocky Mountain and Bread and Roses Workers' Cultural Center, in concert with the Denver-Boulder Industrial History of Joe Hill.

Graphic: Bread and Roses Workers Cultural Center

continuing Joe Hill events will be the book tour and the extended performance of at least one new play honoring Hill's legacy.

Headlining the Denver events was Grammy-nominated folksinger, songwriter and balladeer John McCutcheon. Together with local folk artist Elena Klaver, they performed a number of Joe's songs and a portion of the new musical play about Joe Hill written by Si Kahn at a Friday night concert at Denver's Mercury Café.

Then on Saturday, August 27, the festival featured films, documentaries and poetry dedicated to Joe Hill's immigrant rebel legacy, and ended with a sing along with several of the area's finest musicians.

Sports

The NFL Lockout Is Over!

By Neil Parthun

At the outset, things did not look good for the players. There were worries about DeMaurice Smith, the new executive director of the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA), having to learn the ropes during the first labor standoff since 1987. Another question mark was the potential for solidarity. During the 1987 strike, it was star players like Mark Gastineau and Joe Montana who crossed the picket line to continue to play. There were real beliefs that since players have short and precarious careers, some may split away and demand a quick end to the lockout. Add in the perceived public animosity against complaints of labor—especially "millionaire players" and a television deal that would guarantee money to owners even if no games were played, it appeared that the union had little chance of success.

However, the players surprised everyone. The players won in court by proving that the television deal was indeed a lockout fund and thus prevented the owners from touching the money during the lockout. The public also rallied around the players once people saw the realities of the game. An average career for an NFL player is 3.4 seasons. Studies have shown that NFL players are dying approximately 20 years earlier and we're seeing more research about the detrimental effects of

We're already locked into a certain amount of global warming. There's nothing we can any longer do about that. But we need to reduce things back down.

So what are the possibilities for doing that? On one hand, I think the possibilities are immense. This is not really a technical issue at all. This is purely a social and political issue. The amount of just solar energy coming down onto this planet each day is 10,000 times more than we use globally. So we only have to harness a tiny fraction of one percent of what's available to power the planet. I'm not saying we'd go just solar. But it gives you an indication. Similar things have been shown for wind [and] geothermal [energy], and so on.

JH: Are capitalism and ecological balance mutually exclusive?

CW: I believe so, very strongly. I'll give three reasons for that. Number one, capitalism is based on constant expansion. Whatever it's producing today has to be exceeded tomorrow. The inner logic of competition and profit-driven growth dictate that if any world economy is not growing at 2-3 percent a year—then what happens? Well, we see today. The whole economy goes into a spiral of layoffs, unemployment and cuts to social services. So built into the way the system operates is this expansion—which means that energy use, waste streams, material inputs, all have to keep increasing too. The [second reason is] the fact that [capitalism] is based on profit means that they don't just make things that we might need. They make things based on what will make the most amount of money in the shortest amount of time. So that means we get all kinds of useless crap produced, that we don't really need. But they convince us that we do need [it] through huge and extremely wasteful advertising and marketing budgets.

I think the third thing is connected to those in terms of capitalism being inherently short-term. It's impossible to have a long-term outlook, which is exactly the outlook that we need right now. [Corporations] need to compete against each other on a daily basis by lowering their costs, by paying their workers less, and by disregarding the environment.

hits to the head and concussions in long-term brain injuries, dementia and chronic traumatic encephalopathy—a degenerative brain disease. But the most shocking aspect of this, the longest NFL labor dispute in history, was the intense solidarity amongst the players. They rallied around support of their interests in one voice.

The tentative collective bargaining agreement that ended the lockout was a huge success for the players. While owners got a rookie wage scale that limits rookie compensation, the players have almost guaranteed increased pay for veterans by establishing not only a salary cap, but a minimum spending requirement for owners across the league. The players prevented the regular season from being expanded from 16 games to 18 games and got other significant gains in safety. Off-season activities were cut by five weeks, contact levels are limited at practices and players have received more days off to recover. Most importantly, players can now remain in the medical plan for life rather than the previous limit of five years.

Now that we have football back for this fall, let's not forget that amongst the breathtaking bombs, screens, sacks and touchdown rushes, NFL players not only show what ability and focus can do on the field, but they show what it can do off the field as well. They provided a shining example of labor solidarity, and what can happen when united workers fight back.



World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

The Gaza Freedom Flotilla II

FW Steve Fake, X359328

Direct action on the high seas—that was the core of the idea. The Freedom Flotilla II: “Stay Human” was the latest iteration in a tactic begun in 2008, which has attempted to subvert the Israeli blockade of Gaza by sailing ships to Gaza’s shores. From those first small fishing boats, the actions have grown into this year’s 22-nation Freedom Flotilla II Coalition, with ten boats and hundreds of participants.

This summer also marked the fifth year of the blockade in its current iteration, though the territory has endured some form of external control of its borders for many years. The Gaza Strip, an extremely youthful society and one of the most densely populated areas on Earth, has been placed under the current “medieval siege,” according to U.N. official John Ging, since 2006. The ostensible reason for the U.S.-backed Israeli policy is Gaza’s election of the Hamas party to replace the Fatah party. The prevailing thought is that the people of Gaza voted the wrong way and must be punished. The blockade, widely regarded as a form of collective punishment—imposed, as noted, largely upon children—is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and therefore a war crime under international law.

After the brutal executions of passengers in the 2010 Freedom Flotilla, activists in the United States immediately recognized the need for a U.S. boat to join the next flotilla. I had the remarkable privilege of joining 36 other passengers, as well as a small team of (almost exclusively volunteer) organizers, and a five-person

crew, on the U.S. vessel, christened “The Audacity of Hope.”

After several days of meetings and media, as well as medical and nonviolence trainings, we were prepared to sail. However, it quickly became evident that our boat, and those of the rest of the coalition, would have difficulty getting out of Greek waters. An error-filled complaint had been lodged against our ship that ludicrously alleged to have knowledge that our boat was un-seaworthy. The paperwork was lodged by Shurat HaDin, a Tel Aviv-based organization dedicated to using litigation to repress dissent against the Israeli government.

It was clear that the boats would face interminable delays. By late Friday, July 1, the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection, an Orwellian name if there ever was one, issued a general statement of policy that no boats would be permitted to depart for Gaza. The U.S. contingent, unable to wait any longer without losing passengers and the corporate media we had secured, decided to make a symbolic run for it.

After an emotional half hour of clear sailing, we were confronted by Greek Coast Guard authorities and a two-hour standoff ensued. The Coast Guard captain asked us to return to dock, citing the alleged un-seaworthiness of our vessel. Our captain responded, asserting—with far more plausibility—that in light of the incidents of sabotage suffered earlier in the week by two of the other coalition boats, one in Greek waters, it was necessary for our vessel to depart for safety reasons. Coast Guard commandos with M16s arrived to

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.



Unveiling the boat on June 30.

Photo: Johnny Barber, U.S. Boat to Gaza

be subjected to our chants and speeches. Eventually, under the threat of a forceful boarding of our ship, we agreed to be escorted to a new port where our boat was placed on lockdown and our captain arrested. He was later freed, though not before four tense days passed while he faced the unheard-of threat of a felony charge.

In response to the expansion of the blockade to European waters, the inspiring Greek protestors of the “real democracy” movement based in Syntagma Square quickly organized a demonstration of some 650 people in support of the flotilla on July 3, which passed in front of the Ministry of Citizen Protection and then marched on to the U.S. and Israeli Embassies.

This was followed on July 5 with a march by the Freedom Flotilla II Coalition, carrying a banner composed of the flags of the 22 nations represented, plus Palestine. We marched to the Spanish Embassy in Athens, where members of the Spanish initiative had begun an occupation of the building that would continue on for many days. In stark contrast, a similar action at the imposing, fortress-like U.S. Embassy would have been unthinkable, though a number of passengers from our boat did engage in a multi-day fasting outside the Embassy’s walls until our captain was released.

The parliamentary figures participating in the flotilla from many nations served as a further reminder of the wildly different political contexts at play outside of the United States, which operates in virtual international isolation in its full-throated backing of Tel Aviv’s oppressive policies.

A few days after The Audacity of Hope attempted to depart for Gaza, the Canadian boat, the Tahrir, also made a break for it, creatively employing kayakers to block a Greek Coast Guard boat from preventing the Tahrir’s departure. Learning from the fate of the U.S. boat, the Canadians left their crew on shore and, when finally boarded by Greek authorities and asked to identify their captain, triumphantly declared “we are all captains!”

A French yacht, the Dignité Al Karama, did eventually escape the clutches of U.S.-

Israeli pressure and reach international waters, nearing Gaza on July 19 before being stopped by Israeli forces. As the sole representative of our coalition to near the beaches of Gaza, it served as a promise of what will come. The flotilla movement will not stop until the blockade is ended.

In the midst of our preparations, the conflict over the austerity package being imposed upon Greek society by the global financial elite reached a climax. Due to our unexpectedly extended stay in Athens, we managed to participate in, and forge connections with, the Athens protest movement.

A two-day general strike was held on June 28-29 to coincide with the Papan-dreou regime’s passage of the austerity package through parliament. The militancy of the protests, the widespread and broad-based support they drew from the general populace, and the ruthlessness of the police were all on full display. As much as we have drawn energy from the Arab Spring that emerged as plans for the flotilla were being finalized earlier this year, we drew considerable inspiration from this courageous movement for real democracy by the Greek people.

I have emerged from my time in Athens with a sense of invigorated re-commitment to the work ahead. The strength of solidarity between us and the unity of purpose, the sense of immediacy, and the full time devotion to the cause at hand all combined to forge a very strong sense of mutual support and camaraderie within our group that I will not soon forget.

We are well placed to continue the struggle. While we did not reach Gaza, but vessels have not fallen into Israeli hands. Contrary to Tel Aviv’s spin, by most meaningful criteria, the Freedom Flotilla II has been a major success. The early attempts of a few years ago utilizing small fishing boats did in fact succeed in reaching the beaches of Gaza. Yet the much larger flotillas are far more concerned with publicizing the cruel and deliberate suffering imposed upon Gaza’s society.

The people of Gaza must be free. Until they are, we will continue to sail.

IWW Food & Retail Workers Union Founding Convention

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

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



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

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

Convention Schedule:

Friday, October 21: Welcoming Evening Dinner and Discussion Panel

Saturday, October 22 & Sunday, October 23: Convention

Attendance:

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

Registration:

Registration is required and can be done online at: <http://portlandiww.org/founding-convention/>
Deadline for registration is August 31.

Travel and Accommodations:

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

Donations:

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

Contact:

To receive more information about the Founding Convention or the IWW’s organizing within the food and retail industries, please contact us at by email at pdx.foodworkers@iww.org.

Importance Of Dockworker/IWW Solidarity

The importance of labor solidarity in strengthening the movement was brought home for us in a direct and personal manner by the engagement of the International Dockworkers Council (IDC), representing some 50,000 workers, which issued a statement in support of the flotilla and its right to sail freely into international waters and against the Greek government’s political interference. The IDC statement was initiated through the involvement of a Swedish passenger in the flotilla, Erik Helgeson, who is a member of the Swedish Dockworkers Union.

This is not the first foray by dockworkers into solidarity with the people of Palestine. On June 7, 2010, Palestinian labor organizations issued an international call to blockade Israeli ships, effectively reversing the blockade. The responses were not long in coming. In California, Bay Area dock workers in the International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU) conducted a 24-hour strike when the Israeli Zim Lines shipping company tried to dock on June 20. The action recalled a similar work stoppage against Apartheid South African cargo in 1984 by the same ILWU local. Similar actions have been taken by South African, Australian, Swedish, and Indian port workers and their unions.

Unsurprisingly, the IWW is far ahead of most establishment labor unions in its support for the workers and people of Palestine, becoming the first U.S. union to support the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions Campaign. Nonetheless, there are signs of local pressure for change among the larger unions: the San Francisco and Alameda County Labor Councils of the AFL-CIO both stated their support for the actions of the ILWU workers last June.

Fellow Workers are encouraged to join the Friends of Palestine contingent within the IWW to support the further development labor solidarity on this issue.