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The Chicago Teachers Strike & The Privatization Of A Generation

By John Jacobsen

Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) delegates voted overwhelmingly in the last week of September to approve a new contract, just weeks after the end of a seven-day long strike which had effectively shut down all of Chicago's public schools.

The decision came just weeks after the latest round of negotiations between Chicago Public Schools and the CTU succeeded in reaching a deal that negotiators felt they could recommend to the union's embattled teachers.

The strike began on Sept. 10, after the CTU and the city failed to reach an agreement during negotiations. Following the breakdown in the discussions, nearly 26,000 teachers and support staff walked off their jobs for the first time in 25 years.

Teachers immediately hit the streets, followed in suit by throngs of supportive students and parents. Marches were held across Chicago, shutting down traffic in the city center. Pickets were established at over 675 schools, as well as at the Chicago Board of Education.

But with the strike over, and the CTU finally settling on a new contract, those of us concerned with the future of the labor movement need to seriously begin looking at the changes this particular strike embodied—not only for schools, but for the economy itself.

The Contract

The negotiations largely revolved around several contentious issues: pay and benefit issues, Mayor Rahm Emanuel's push for a longer school day and new teacher evaluations (which originally would have tied teachers' pay to their students' test scores), the rehiring of laid-off teachers, as well as pensions.

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Chicago Teachers Union members on strike. Photo: libcom.org

In November We Remember: The Centennial Of The 1912 Little Falls Textile Strike

By Brendan Maslauskas Dunn

A series of ongoing events have commemorated the tumultuous textile strike that hit Little Falls, N.Y., 100 years ago. Lectures, panel discussions and even a play written about the strike have brought many out to learn about the IWW. The Unitarian Church in Utica, N.Y. celebrated Labor Day by having a sermon of sorts given by a Wobbly about the strike. The strike was a hard-fought battle between a largely immigrant and female textile worker population and their supporters against the industrialists, business elite, and the halls of power in what was once a bustling mill town in the industrial heyday of the Mohawk Valley.

The textile strike was one of many fierce strikes that took place in the Mohawk Valley in the earlier part of the 20th century. Utica, Little Falls and many other smaller cities and towns in the area were important manufacturing and knitting centers in the textile industry. Working conditions were harsh. A predominantly Eastern and Southern European immigrant and young female workforce toiled at the mills, laboring away for 60 hours a week in poorly ventilated, dirty and hazardous environments. At the end of each workday the workers left to spend the few hours they had away from the mills in virtual ghettos and slums that were breeding grounds for disease. It took the forces of labor militancy to create much-needed reforms in the textile industry. The strike in Little Falls was one of the major labor battles of its time and the one union that was up to the task of leading the strike was the Industrial Workers of the World.

The strike happened during a time in U.S. history when many workers became attracted to radical and revolutionary ideas. The Socialist Party (SP) was gaining a foothold in the political system. The 1912 presidential election saw SP and IWW member Eugene Debs win nearly 1 million votes. The mayor of nearby Schenectady, George Lunn, was a socialist and Utica had its own active socialist, anarchist and militant labor organizations. Many of the radicals congregated in what is now Garro's Drugstore on Bleecker Street. Radicals of every stripe were organizing strikes, political demonstrations and doing whatever they could to improve the lives of the poor and disenfranchised, in the hopes of creating a nation and a world free of starvation, unemployment, poverty, war and oppression.

Photo: upstateearth.blogspot.com
IWW strikers in Herkimer Jail.

Instead of settling just for better pay and working conditions, the IWW sought to dramatically reorganize society, industry and the economy. The union envisioned creating a "cooperative commonwealth" where everyone's needs were met. It would replace the cut-throat profit-driven capitalist system that created a small elite class of people who owned industry and dictated the economy, and a large underclass that created all the wealth, but did not share in the fruits of their labor. The union wanted to create "a new world in the shell of the old," and fought hard to improve working conditions and create an alternative to capitalism. It still fights for these beliefs to this day.

The IWW had a large influence and was very active in the mines, coalfields, and the timber industry out west, and was actively organizing in the shipyards, factories and textile mills on the east coast. The textile industry organizing erupted into strikes in Lawrence, Lowell and New Bedford, Mass., just before Little Falls. The Little Falls strike started with a spontaneous walkout of workers in the Phoenix Mill on Oct. 9, 1912 following on the heels of a recent law passed in New York limiting the work week for women textile workers to 54 hours from its original 60. The mill owners would not budge so the workers struck to force them to follow the law, improve the work conditions and increase the wages. Soon enough 1,000 workers from the Phoenix Mill and another 1,000 from Gilbert's Mill walked off the job. The IWW came onto the scene and workers voted to join the union. Public nurse Helen Schloss was involved with the strike from the beginning.

The IWW sent in organizers by train such as the Russian-born Jewish Wobbly Matilda Rabinowitz, Ben Legere, Joseph Ettor, "Big Bill" Haywood and anarchist

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Hundreds Rally For Paid Sick Days In Portland

By Ryan G., Portland IWW

Approximately 200 workers, labor activists, family members and community supporters gathered at Holladay Park in Portland, Ore. on a crisp early autumn day to support the IWW-led "Paid Sick Days Now!" (PSDN) campaign. The PSDN strategy, formulated by IWW members and IWW Food & Retail Workers United, is to publicly and loudly demand worker access to wage compensation for missing hours resulting from having to call in sick. This resoundingly popular message was witnessed through the energy and participation at the rally on Oct. 6, further propelling the IWW in Portland to the forefront of the labor movement in the region.

Photo: Ryan G.
Portland activists rally for paid sick days.

The rally was held in a public park adjacent to Lloyd Center, Oregon's largest shopping mall—a location intentionally chosen because of the large number of mall workers who do not have access to paid time off for illness. Many working-class families stroll through this park between the light rail transit station and the Lloyd Center complex, which resulted in high visibility for the campaign's message.

A series of worker testimonies regarding paid sick days were shared from the stage in between musical acts Mic Crenshaw (a local hip-hop artist & activist), The Crossettes, and the union's own house

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Letters Welcome!

Send your letters to: iw@iww.org with "Letter" in the subject.

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IWW members, branches, job shops and other affiliated bodies can get the word out about their project, event, campaign or protest each month in the *Industrial Worker*. Send announcements to iw@iww.org. Much appreciated donations for the following sizes should be sent to:

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For A World Without Wages

Most people throughout the world believe that the wage/market system cannot be abolished, and that it has been tried and failed. They refer to the former Soviet Union, China and Cuba. However, these were/are capitalistic states.

So what is a world without wages? It is a world where goods are produced to satisfy social needs and not for profit; a democratic world system in which each person contributes their abilities to society and takes what they need to live comfortably. There are no borders or frontiers, no social classes or leaders, no employees and employers, no buying or selling, and no money or wages. This is a world without wages, a world of free access.

Obviously the cynic and reformer will think such a system of society is a utopian dream. However, it's those who believe the manifold problems we face today can be solved under the auspices of capitalism, whatever cloak it wears, who are the utopian dreamers.

Why are thousands living on the streets when there's a glut of empty houses and thousands of unemployed building workers? Why are people allowed to suffer and die waiting for hospital treatment while there's no shortage of resources being allocated to the armed forces, which exist to kill people, not to cure them? Why is food locked away in cold storage or dumped as garbage while around the world over 40,000 children under five die daily of hunger and disease?

The United Nations and the World Health Organization have reported that food, clean water and medicine could easily be available, but the capitalist system finds it easier to surround a third world village with land mines than vaccinate its inhabitants. As total world military spending is increasing, alienation and environmental and ecological destruction result.

Is capitalism the social system that you want to live under? Is it a system that you want your children to inherit? Do you think it cannot be changed and is the best that there is or can ever be? Most of us do not.

In many countries throughout the world, people are organizing with the IWW. There are no leaders, and decisions are arrived at through fully democratic means, rather than the sham that all capitalist politicians call democracy today.

If you know a better alternative than this, please tell us. If not, join us!

- Weijagye Justus, Uganda IWW

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Paper Crane Press IU 450 Job Shop: 610-358-9496. papercranepress@verizon.net, www.papercranepress.com

Pittsburgh GMB: P.O. Box 5912,15210. pittsburghiww@yahoo.com

Rhode Island

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

Texas

Dallas & Fort Worth: 1618 6th Ave, Fort Worth, 76104

Golden Triangle IWW (Beaumont - Port Arthur): gt-iww@riseup.net

South Texas IWW: rgviww@gmail.com

Utah

Salt Lake City GMB: P.O. Box 1227, 84110.slcgmb@iww.org

Vermont

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

Virginia

Richmond IWW: P.O. Box 7055, 23221. 804-496-1568. richmondiww@gmail.com, www.richmondiww.org

Washington

Bellingham: P.O. Box 1793, 98227. 360-920-6240. BellinghamIWW@gmail.com.

Tacoma GMB: P.O. Box 7276, 98401. TacIWW@iww.org. http://tacoma.iww.org/

Seattle GMB: 1122 E. Pike #1142, 98122-3934. 206-339-4179. seattleiww@gmail.com. www.seattleiww.org

Wisconsin

Madison GMB: P.O. Box 2442, 53701-2442. www.madison.iww.org

IUB 560 - Communications and Computer Workers: P.O. Box 259279, Madison 53725. 608-620-IWW1. Madisoniub560@iww.org. www.Madisoniub560.iww.org

Lakeside Press IU 450 Job Shop: 1334 Williamson, 53703. 608-255-1800. Jerry Chernow, del., jerry@lakesidepress.org. www.lakesidepress.org

Madison Infoshop Job Shop:1019 Williamson St. #B, 53703. 608-262-9036

Just Coffee Job Shop IU 460: 1129 E. Wilson, Madison, 53703. 608-204-9011, justcoffee.coop

Railroad Workers IU 520: 608-358-5771. railfalcon@yahoo.com

Milwaukee GMB: 1750A N Astor St., 53207. Trevor Smith, 414-573-4992

Northwoods IWW: P.O. Box 452, Stevens Point, WI, 54481. Casey Martinson, del, 608-445-4145

IWW Organizing

Polarization Past & Present

By J. Pierce

Two summers ago, the Phoenix IWW held an event celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution. That same summer, while visiting a friend, I toured various abolitionist, African American, and Civil War historical sites around Virginia. Meanwhile, the struggle over the rights of immigrant workers in Arizona was heating up and everyone, it seemed, had an opinion on the subject. I think connecting these historical dramas could assist our work in the IWW and the concept of social polarization might be the key.

The IWW Organizer Training teaches that organizing leads to a polarization of the workplace. We must get our co-workers to support the union effort or they will side with the boss. Once the union is public, there is no more grey area. Those who attempt to stay neutral wind up helping the boss in the end. When looking at the broader society, however, does this principle remain true?

Civil War in Spain: Fascism vs. Workers' Revolution

In the summer of 1936, Spain witnessed uprisings from both the Right and the Left. Military officers attempted a coup d'état while anarchists responded with factory and land takeovers. These rebellions hardened into the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 as the country polarized into not just fascists vs. anti-fascists, but into a three-way war based on competing class interests.

The Nationalists were a mix of contradictory right-wing tendencies. They wanted a radical restructuring of society based on modernist, fascist ideology or a restoration of the Catholic Church, the monarchy and regionalist separatism. The anarchists, in the form of the CNT-FAI-AIT (the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo, Federación Anarquista Ibérica, and Asociación Internacional de los Trabajadores) acted as the pole that attracted the working class and peasants to libertarian communism. The republicans, social democrats, and Socialists, by and large, wanted to maintain capitalism and liberal democracy. The Communist Party, in attempting to gain control of the government, became a pole for politicians, employers and police within the anti-fascist camp.

The divisions and contradictions were inescapable as the war engulfed every aspect of society and forced people of all backgrounds to choose sides. The fascists led an illegal uprising against the elected government and therefore divided Spanish society into camps supporting the republican government or opposing it. The anarchists were in a strange position of deciding how to fight the fascist uprising and acquire arms without reinforcing the present government. Not only did the population polarize over the uprising, but the anti-fascist camp itself polarized over how to respond. Arguments over the CNT's course of action are valuable conversations for contemporary IWW members.

Civil War in the States: Slavery vs. Freedom

A different type of polarization occurred in the United States surrounding slavery as it led to the American Civil War of 1861-1865. The country divided regionally, between the North and the South, as well as socially on the issue of slavery. Abolitionists engaged in myriad efforts to polarize the nation over the continuance of the slave system. Their task, with respect to whites, was to bring the horrors of slavery into every city and every home, forcing whites to make a choice between righteousness and evil. With respect to Blacks, the task was to arm every African American with the weapons of liberation—be they books, newspapers, escape routes, or rifles.

Similar to the Spanish case, the federal military in the South lined up with their local right wing, in this case the confederate slavocracy, and led a treasonous uprising against their own government. For many whites, the outbreak of war stripped them of their ability to view the conflict from a distance. They were forced to side with either the North or the South, and ultimately, regardless of their own racial attitudes, with abolition or slavery. For African Americans, the war presented an opportunity to liberate themselves and their kin, either as soldiers in the Northern army or as "contraband," escaping bondage to cross Union lines. Many prominent abolitionists threw themselves into the Union cause, and thus behind the republican-led government. Notably, Harriet Tubman worked as a scout, a spy, and an army nurse; Frederick Douglass recruited Blacks for the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, including his two sons. The early abolitionist movement—a handful of Northern church-goers and pacifists, as well as isolated slave rebellions—might be an intriguing subject for Wobblies who are interested in the development of polarization to study.

Workers' barricades during the Spanish Revolution. Photo: libcom.org

Both of these civil wars provide disturbing parallels for our time and place. A frenzied and lawless right-wing element panicked over the changing times' resorts to insurrection against their own government—one to which they would otherwise profess the holiest of loyalties. It appears, at times, that we are much closer to right-wing rejection of liberal democracy than we are to proletarian revolution. For those of us in the United States, it would be a strange situation to find ourselves on the same side of a struggle as the American government—but it is not without precedent or plausibility.

The IWW as a Pole

The past is often directly in our midst here in the present. At your average gun show in Phoenix, right wingers can be heard berserking themselves for a civil war against the liberals, the socialists, and the Mexicans. Arizona gun nuts notwithstanding, our task as Wobblies is to shift the divisions away from "politics" and race hatred toward a class-based struggle; the goal being to pit the exploited class—including right wing whites—against capitalism. We need to define the conflict in terms that encourage workers to join our side: slavery vs. freedom; fascism vs. democracy; or perhaps the 1 percent vs. the 99 percent. We must define capitalism as the enemy and sharpen the conflict so that the financially disgruntled elements find themselves, perhaps inadvertently, on the side of their co-workers and against their employers. We must create a situation in which white workers have to decide, "Am I on the side of the bosses and politicians—of fascism, Nazis and slavery? Or am I on the side of working people—of democracy and freedom?"

The IWW is uniquely situated to sharpen this polarization into class conflict. We are the abolitionists and anti-fascists of our time. We have the power to drive a class wedge into the present turmoil and become a pole for multi-racial, social revolution. To do this, we'll need to consider numerous tensions: building coalitions vs. relying on ourselves as the IWW; focusing on the liberation of workers of color vs. focusing on turning white workers against the system; illuminating the contradictions in the unions and on the left vs. organizing for mutual self-defense; and continuing a program of union organizing vs. developing a more overtly "revolutionary" orientation.

The IWW is slowly positioning us to be facilitators, if not leaders, of a powerful class movement internationally. We must be ready to become the pole that attracts the revolutionary working class.

Editor's note: Part 3 of the Building Blocks series on building the Richmond General Membership Branch (GMB) will run in the December 2012 issue of the Industrial Worker.

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.

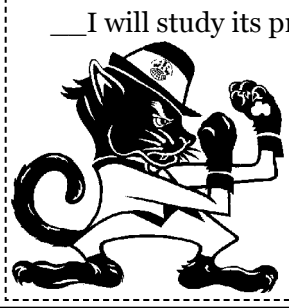
TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618, USA.

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***.

In November We Remember

By Colin Bossen

For more than 100 years it has been a Wobbly tradition to remember all of those who gave their lives to struggle for a better world during the month of November. The historian Franklin Rosemont argued that this tradition predates the founding of the IWW itself, and harkens back to remembering the Haymarket martyrs. In his essay, "In November We Remember: The IWW & the Commemoration of Haymarket," he quotes an unnamed Wobbly writer that this tradition, "gives a sense of continuity to the struggle of workers, not only from year to year but from generation to generation."

As a young Wobbly in the late 1990s, I felt a palpable connection to that tradition when I joined the San Francisco General Membership Branch. One of the elder members, Franklin Devore, had been the long-time lover of the legendary soap-boxer San Francisco Phil Mellman. Mellman was credited with mastering the art of "windmilling." That was the practice of speaking rapidly and dramatically in public to attract attention for the IWW cause. A windmiller like Mellman would stand at a street corner and broadcast as much Wobbly wisdom as possible before the cops came. In the 1910s and 1920s, windmilling was an effective way to spread the Wobbly gospel.

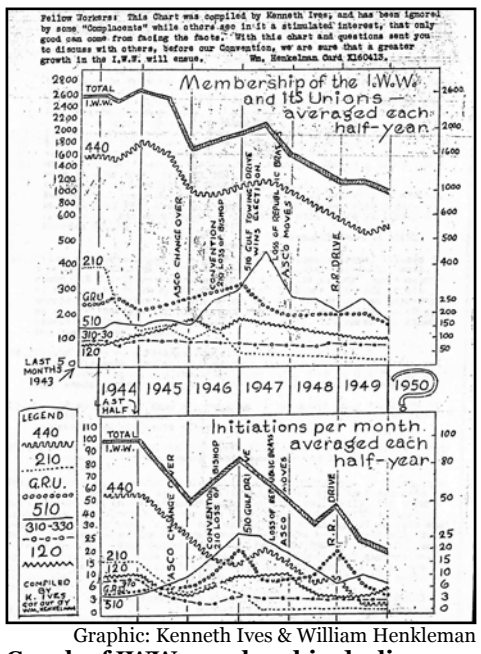
I learned a lot about Wobbly culture, history and philosophy from elders like Devore. I was privileged to know Utah Philips and Carlos Cortez, and Wobblies who joined the union in the 1960s and early 1970s like Mike Hargis, Jon Bekken, Penny Pixler, F. N. Brill and Neil McLean all passed on to me the lessons that they learned from Wobbly elders.

Recently though, I have been wondering if I learned the wrong lessons from those elders. The lessons that they taught me were primarily about the IWW's dramatic successes: our successes organizing migrant workers in the forests and in the agricultural fields; our victories in the free speech fights in San Diego and Spokane; and our dramatic strikes in Lawrence and Lowell.

The narratives of those successes were frequently matched by the narratives around the IWW's decline. I learned three. One was that the union was essentially destroyed around 1919 when the U.S. government jailed the majority of IWW leaders. A second was that the union's demise came about in 1924 when it split into two factions around a debate over centralization vs. decentralization, to generalize. The third was that the union survived these two catastrophes, saw its membership recover in the 1930s with organizing amongst metal workers in Cleveland, only to finally collapse in the wake of a refusal to sign McCarthy-era loyalty oaths.

A couple of weeks ago I received some pages from the August 1950 edition of the IWW's internal publication, the General Organizing Bulletin (GOB), that has me rethinking these narratives. A graph from that GOB depicts the union's membership in a free fall from 1943 to 1949. Over the course of six years the union lost more than 60 percent of its membership. This means that by the time the loyalty oath controversy caused the Cleveland branch to leave the union it was already in an institutional death spiral.

Accompanying the graph is a list of 20 questions drafted by William Henkleman and Kenneth Ives, entitled "Groups of Questions on IWW Problems and Policies." One group of questions runs:



Graphic: Kenneth Ives & William Henkleman

Graph of IWW membership decline as it appeared in the August 1950 GOB.

"Can the IWW make progress best by:

a) Trying to educate and organize individuals, isolated workers as it mostly has done in recent decades..? (sic)

b) Trying to organize individual shops, as we have some times done in the last fifteen years..? (sic)

c) Trying to educate within some inde pendent unions, such as the Confedeated Unions Group..? (sic)

d) Trying to set up an affiliated but self-supporting organization for edu cation as distinct from propaganda... for former members, sympathizers and other workers want to study the extension of workers control and op eration, union democracy, etc., who may feel that the IWW as a union can't help them on their present job..? (sic)

e) Or some combination of those pro grams..? (sic)

- For each of the above methods, what amount of activity by members, what skills, what trained organizers, what funds, what programs are needed, and what types of situations will these be likely to succeed in..? (sic)"

When I read these questions I thought that they were quite contemporary. That observation, coupled with the 1940s membership statistics, has prompted me to ask: How can we learn from the IWW's failures? The IWW's membership now is close to what it was in the early 1940s. Our organizing over the last decade-and-a-half has been quite similar to the organizing that Henkleman and Ives complained about in 1950. It has been targeted at individuals and individual shops, and it is rarely industrial.

This observation leads me to want to know how we can break these patterns. They have haunted our union for most of its existence. They are as much a part of our legacy as the wonderful stories we tell about free speech fights and textile strikes. Studying our failures is the way we learn not to repeat them. This November, instead of just celebrating the rich legacy of the IWW, take time in your branch or at your workplace to think about the ways in which you have been stuck in your organizing. Look to our organization's failures and ask the question: What could have been done differently to avoid the mistakes that were made? It is not an easy question to ask but in its answer may lie what we need to move the IWW up from 2,000 to 100,000 members. And that would be the best way to remember all of our Fellow Workers.

In November We Remember

"Prisons are built with stones of Law,
Brothels with bricks of Religion"
William Blake 1757-1827

Free All Political Prisoners!
from the Lane OR. IWW branch

WOMEN WORKERS' HISTORY

CHAPTER 58 The Ludlow Massacre

Rocky Mountain miners went on strike against the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel & Iron Co. in the fall of 1913. They were fighting long hours and hazardous conditions that killed hundreds of men each year. They and their wives were tired of being forced to live in company towns and of being paid in company scrip. Miners' families lived in tents as the strike continued through the winter of 1913-1914. Despite great hardships, they were prepared to strike until they won.

No one could have been prepared for the dreadful deed of Easter 1914. According to *Labor's Untold Story*: "That night, company-employed gunmen and members of the National Guard drenched the strikers' tents with oil. They ignited them after the miners and their families were asleep. When the miners, their wives and children ran from the burning tents, they were machine-gunned." Two women, 13 children and five men died in the massacre.

John Sloane, "Class War in Colorado," *The Masses*, June 1914.

Outraged by the murder of their loved ones, armed miners battled Rockefeller's thugs, seized mines and set fire to company property. Ten days later, federal troops entered Ludlow and restored "order" by throwing Mother Jones into jail for nine weeks. The National Guard commander hated and feared the 83-year-old miners' organizer. Mother Jones, he said, "seems to have, in an exceptional degree, the faculty of stirring up and inciting the more ignorant and criminally disposed to deeds of violence and crime." No one placed John D. Rockefeller in prison, although it was he who was responsible for the terrible violence of Ludlow.

Graphic: Mike Konopacki

Wobbly & North American News

Ontario Teachers, Students Protest Bill 115

By John Kalwaic

In the Canadian province of Ontario, legislatures have passed Bill 115. This bill has the Orwellian name of the "Put Students First Act," which is slated to freeze teachers' pay and cut some of their benefits, and will also essentially strip away their collective bargaining rights. The bill was proposed by Ontario's ruling Liberal Party, which is essentially the Canadian version of the U.S. Democratic Party.

Students stage a walk-out in solidarity with teachers to protest Bill 115. Photo: rabble.ca

Teachers, represented by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), have been protesting the bill. In late September, 91.4 percent of contract teachers voted to go on strike, despite the ban against teacher walk-outs.

Students have been mostly against the bill as well. Throughout Ontario, students launched several walkouts in support of their teachers against Bill 115. The Canadian "Maple Spring"—when students in Québec went on strike this past spring and won a partial victory in the form of a tuition freeze—may have inspired these students' actions.

"We don't blame our teachers. It's the government. We are definitely not on the government's side," said Jordana Moss, a student at Stephen Lewis Secondary School in Vaughn, in a *Toronto Star* article on Sept. 14. It is important to remember that although students and teachers may have their differences at times, in the end they are both in the same situation confronting restrictions on their freedom and austerity measures.

With files from Rabble.ca and the Toronto Star.

Student Editors Strike At University Of Georgia

By John Kalwaic

Editors of a student-run newspaper, *The Red & Black*, at the University of Georgia went on a two-week strike in late August. The student-workers who write and edit *The Red & Black* were outraged by the administration's dismantling of student control over the newspaper. The newspaper has been running since 1893 and has been independent from university control since 1980. The administration detailed "changes" to the way the newspaper would be run, including hiring a non-student marketing and product manager, a multimedia director, a business manager and a creative director, as well as imposing editorial restrictions on the newspaper's content.

Graphic: Eric Drooker

The student-workers decided to walk out and publish their own articles on a separate website and disseminate information about their struggle on Facebook and Twitter. In the end, the administration relented and restored control to the students. The students kept their journalistic integrity and received much support from the community in their struggle.

With files from Poynter.org and Alternet.org.

Wobbly Pumpkin Carving Contest

...and the winner is...

Rosalie Rein!

Nice job, Fellow Worker :)

Photo: Rosalie Rein

Greetings From The Berlin IWW

By the Berlin IWW

Here in Berlin, we are a group of fellow workers aiming to organize with the IWW. We really like the ideas of revolutionary industrial unionism, but it's also difficult to get started. For now we are planning several actions to make the IWW publicly visible in Berlin and get more members. The situation of working people is increasingly difficult as bosses continue to get richer at the cost of workers.

Graphic: iww.org

Sponsor an Industrial Worker Subscription for a Prisoner

Sponsor an *Industrial Worker* subscription for a prisoner! The IWW often has fellow workers & allies in prison who write to us requesting a subscription to the *Industrial Worker*, the official newspaper of the IWW. This is your chance to show solidarity!

For only $18 you can buy one full year's worth of working-class news from around the world for a fellow worker in prison. Just visit:
http://store.iww.org/industrial-worker-sub-prisoner.html
to order the subscription TODAY!

Remember, Remember, The 5th Of November: IWW Legal Battle With U.S. Army Rages On

By Brendan Maslauskas Dunn

The *Industrial Worker* has reported on the case of *Panagacos v. Towery* in the past. The case comes out of the street battles in the Ports of Olympia, Tacoma and Aberdeen, Wash., between 2006 and 2009. In November 2007, the Port of Olympia was shut down by a direct action of hundreds of anti-war demonstrators connected with the Port Militarization Resistance (PMR) movement, who were resisting the shipment of military vehicles through Pacific Northwest ports

Although it was only one of many large actions at the port, the 2007 demonstrations effectively kicked out the U.S. Army. The Army has not used that port for military shipments since that fateful autumn. PMR, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Iraq Veterans Against the War, anarchists, Wobblies and others were situated in what many called the "ground zero" of the anti-war movement. Olympia is just south of Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), Bangor Naval Base and Bremerton Naval Base. This is one of the most highly militarized areas in the United States. It has also acted as a central location for soldiers resisting and refusing deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.

JBLM is home to kill teams and, as Julian Assange of Wikileaks has written about, a program on base contracting out for surveillance. Due to the success of PMR—who engaged in the most militant activity of the anti-war movement—and the close connections made between the PMR and resisting soldiers (many of whom are veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan), the Army infiltrated and spied on PMR, anarchists and Wobblies.

Through public records requests, prompted by the Olympia police stealing an *Industrial Worker* newspaper box, the Olympia IWW helped to expose John J. Towery II, known to us as "John Jacob," as an Army informant and spy. He worked with a "Fusion Center," a shadowy government operation which blurs the lines between the State, police and military in monitoring threats to "U.S. interests," including gangs, al Qaeda, terrorists, anti-war activists and anarchists. We now know that the Occupy movement was added to the list, through the recent exposure of a police infiltrator in Occupy Austin, Texas, who entrapped and facilitated the arrest of activists there. The infiltrator has connections to a Texas Fusion Center.

The scope of spying on PMR, anarchists and others was, and perhaps still is, widespread. Along with the U.S. Army, the Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and countless police agencies were involved with infiltrating, data mining and spying on many activists. Police constantly harassed many of us, anarchists in Tacoma had a surveillance camera installed by the police across the street from their house, and a number of them were put on terrorist watch lists and have FBI files.

On Nov. 5, attorney Larry Hildes will appear on behalf of Panagacos and other plaintiffs, including myself and another Wobbly, in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in Seattle. We are suing the U.S. military for $11 million for violating our civil rights and civil liberties. Hildes knows all too well about government repression. He joined the IWW in the 1980s to participate in Redwood Summer. Judi Bari was a Wobbly, Earth First!er and a leader of that struggle who effectively united timber workers, steelworkers and environmentalists to save old growth redwood forests in California. The FBI and big timber worked together to try and assassinate her by blowing up her car.

John Towery, Army spy. Photo: johntowery.com

Some of the older activists in PMR have also known political repression. Peter Bohmer, a Wobbly and veteran SDSer from the 1960s, had an attempt on his life when the "Secret Army Organization," a paramilitary group created by the FBI, tried to murder him in the 1970s. Others have their own stories about the Black Panthers, American Indian Movement, and countless other groups targeted by the U.S. government. The name of this repression is COINTELPRO—the FBI and government program to essentially disrupt and destroy the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s. Although the program was exposed, it continued in later years as evidenced by the attempt on Judi Bari's life, and as experienced today.

The latest attack comes in the form of FBI-orchestrated witch-hunts targeting communists and anarchists in grand jury investigations. Katherine Olejnik, a roommate of mine in Olympia, was the most recent target along with a few others in a grand jury witch-hunt of anarchists in the Northwest. She will spend the next several months, if not longer, in prison for the crime of being an anarchist and refusing to cooperate with the witch-hunt by pleading the Fifth Amendment.

It is interesting that this grand jury was convened leading up to the hearing on Nov. 5 in Seattle. Is there a connection? Are the FBI, U.S. Army and U.S. government afraid of anarchists? Is this modern-day war the Feds are waging—this continuation of COINTELPRO against anarchists and others—part of a nationally coordinated program to disrupt and destroy anarchists, radicals and the Occupy movement? These questions cannot be answered yet. But I guarantee that if and when the case against the spy John Towery goes to trial, and if it must go to the U.S. Supreme Court, we will have a chance to expose Fusion Centers and government and military surveillance, and reveal the extent to which they are shredding our rights.

For this exposure to come out in the most militarized area in the United States, where soldiers believe they are "fighting for our freedom," one can only imagine what type of reaction soldiers will have when they find out that the military is doing the exact opposite, both here and abroad. I can only imagine what type of lengths this government will go to ensure this trial does not happen. If they can't do it legally, will they prevent it from happening illegally? We know they have a history of breaking the law in the past. COINTELPRO is messy, especially when it is exposed.

This 5th of November will certainly be one for the history books.

Special

The Chicago Teachers Strike & The Privatization Of A Generation

Continued from 1

Negotiators recommended a new three-year contract to the membership, which includes a number of concessions for both the city and the union.

The contract includes a four-year agreement to raise teachers' pay by 17.6 percent over that time—just over half of the original 30 percent increase the union originally sought, but still far better than Chicago Public School's original offer of 2 percent.

Mayor Emanuel boasted that teachers' workloads will also increase with the school day and year, adding more than two years of instruction over the course of a new student's career, even though teachers in Chicago already work an average of 10 hours a day at school with an additional two hours at home (or roughly 800 hours more per year than their current contracts require).

Additionally, the union was able to fight off Mayor Emanuel's push for a teacher evaluation system, which would have linked teachers' pay directly to student test scores. The controversial system had been criticized by many in the education system for punishing teachers for factors largely outside of their control, especially in low-income neighborhoods, where a student's performance can and often is impacted negatively by problems at home, in access to transportation or research tools, and a myriad of other issues.

"Either way," concluded Agnieszka Karoluk, an education worker close to the Chicago teachers' strike, "CTU is not looking for a perfect contract. They just want a fair one."

Many workers, however, remain skeptical of the city's promises, she notes.

Chicago teachers were infuriated, for instance, when last year the newly appointed school board voted to cancel contractually-mandated pay raises for teachers. It surfaced later that the public schools had secretly diverted millions of dollars from teachers' salaries and pensions in order to claim they were too broke to afford the pay raises.

Some in the union, however, were equally concerned with what was not in the contract.

In an article published on Sept. 17 on http://www.libcom.org, Karoluk said that during negotiations, "CTU members criticized the lack of language about school closings in the contract. This was evidently the number one concern of both the union delegate and all the CTU staff and teachers who were present at the meeting this morning at Jordan."

"[Chicago Public Schools] already has an agreement with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to open 60-plus charter schools in Chicago, causing the closing of neighborhood schools in the process."

The New Schools

The debate surrounding charter schools in Chicago—while not explicit in the teachers' press releases—has nonetheless been an implicit and ongoing subject of contention during the strike.

The appeal of charters isn't particularly difficult to understand. As their budgets have shrunk during the recent economic crisis, local governments across the country have found the idea increasingly attractive.

Between 2000 and 2010, in fact, the number of students enrolled in charter schools across the country has risen from nearly half a million to more than 1.5 million, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Because charter schools pay their teachers lower average salaries, supplement public funding with increased private donations, and introduce private management firms into the school structure to help keep costs down, many charter schools have proven to be significantly less costly than traditional public schools. In fact, while the schools themselves are still considered public, nearly 16 percent of charter schools are managed by for-profit Education Management Organizations.

The rise in charter schools in recent years can also be accounted for by the amount of federal money being invested in them. As of 2002, nearly two-thirds of charter schools had received federal money in their start-up phase. As of 2010, over $130 million had been awarded to various charters around the country by the U.S. Department of Education's Charter Schools Program alone, only one of several government programs which now provide support and assistance to charter schools.

Of note was also assistance provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which by June 2006 was reimbursing charter schools for "costs related to repair, restoration, or replacement of disaster-damaged facilities," according to the National Charter School Resource Center's website, thereby helping the school district effectively restructure the whole city's education system. This connection between FEMA and charter school funding can be seen in New Orleans, which remains the only city in the United States where a majority of public school students attend charter schools.

We must remember that these shifts towards charter schools have come from both Democrats and Republicans alike, and with good reason—this is their perspective.

The New Economy

The State recognizes that we no longer live in a society in which strong, publicly-managed programs can be the solution to many of the economy's needs.

During the reign of Keynesian policies—the era of the G.I. Bill and the public works programs—it was not only possible to enact policies which provided a strong social safety net for the population, but structurally necessary. It was possible because capitalists had little recourse or opportunity to move their production overseas (following World War II, the infrastructure of most other industrial countries had been bombed out)—meaning higher tax rates were easier to impose on less mobile capitalists—and necessary because the United States was still reeling from the Great Depression, with millions of its citizens who needed jobs returning home from the war.

It goes without saying, of course, that we no longer live in that society. We live in a time when it is not only possible to offshore production and service work, but often more profitable; a society in which capital is less and less bound up by nation states (which, of course, makes it possible to impose high tax rates on its largest earners), and more and more needs to circulate globally in order to remain competitive.

As Peter Brogan writes in his piece which appeared on http://solidarity-us.org, titled "What's behind the attack on teachers and public education?":

"...an arena of economic investment and capital accumulation the global market for educational services is tremendous! Two-and-a-half trillion dollars globally as of last year, and in the U.S. it's close to $600 billion that [investors are] looking to get their hands on. This is why we have what have been called 'venture philanthropists,' most prominently the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Eli and Edyth Broad Foundation and the Walton Foundation have been the chief financial backers of the 'school choice,' so-called 'education reform' movement. Education needs to be recognized as a vital arena for economic development and capitalist accumulation."

Privatization has thus become the great policy goal behind our economy's ability to remain competitive within a global marketplace, as well as meeting the growing needs of industry in training the new workforce (without the budgets which previously were able to support public schooling as we knew it).

This shift is having a profound effect on the ways in which education is structured domestically—not only how we fund education, but in how the classroom itself is now being reorganized.

"[Workplace] practices have significantly altered in the last few decades," notes Amanda Credaro, in her 2006 paper "Innovation and Change in Education."

Evoking images of the new workforce—increasingly employed in providing services and forced to change jobs frequently—she continues, "No longer is the accumulation of skills and knowledge the primary prerequisite for employment, but an ability to be able to adapt to new situations, to continue to learn independently, and to work cooperatively have become imperative."

The Strike, In Context

In good business union fashion, during this strike there was a disconnect between what may be considered more "political demands" and purely "economic" ones.

While individual members of the CTU have rightly come out against the charter school system, the union still chooses to frame its opposition in terms of "shifting funding away from public schools"; in other words, to couch the debate in terms of its economic impacts on public schools.

Indeed, this must be the case, as the union is expressly prohibited from striking over anything else.

Simply stated, however, the knee-jerk reaction of defending our traditional public institutions—be they public schools or even the unions themselves—is not realistic.

Unless teachers, parents and students can begin re-imagining what schooling should look like in this new economy, and unless they can begin organizing around a new vision for education—one which neither looks to the past of a dreary assembly line public school or to the hyper-alienated and profit-driven system of the charter school—they will be swept aside by the steady march of capitalism.

In a time when not just unions, but the very institution of public school as we have known it is undergoing enormous changes, it would bolster the teachers' defenses to add more to their rightful fight over pay, class sizes and job security—and to offer a deeper critique and more far-reaching proposal for reforms to the education system.

There is a frenzy in this country over the state of our public schools, and for the union to focus this strike purely around economic issues—caring rhetoric surrounding children aside—was naïve and short-sighted, as it cedes liberals a monopoly on school reform, allowing a *Seattle Times* editorialist to claim, without challenge, "...reasonable reforms, such as stronger teacher evaluations and innovation through public charter schools, transcend partisan politics."

This limitation—the union's inability to move beyond traditional "bread and butter" issues—is directly related to the CTU's legal status and structure. If unions continue to see themselves as they are legally defined—more or less as legal bargaining agents tasked only with bickering over wages and benefits—they will remain unable to effectively combat the coming changes to the schools.

In November We Remember:
The Centennial Of The 1912 Little Falls Textile Strike

Continued from 1

IWW members Carlo Tresca and Filippo Bochinno. Helen Keller, also a socialist and IWW member, gave critical support to the strike. Haywood and Schloss both came to Utica on separate occasions to drum up support for the strike and set up fundraising committees. Wobblies in Utica held meetings at the Sons of Italy Hall and did all they could to support the strike. Tresca would later come to Utica for anti-fascist activities and demonstrations before he was assassinated in 1943 by a pro-fascist Mafioso.

Workers held daily pickets and parades and were aided by a group of socialists from Schenectady, led by that city's socialist Mayor Lunn, who was arrested for speaking in support of the strike. Leaders and strike committee members were arrested and jailed and Police Chief Long attempted to violently suppress the strike by attacking peaceful strikers and raiding the Slovak Hall, which acted as the strike headquarters. He let the public know his true feelings about the IWW and strikers when he stated that: "We have a strike on our hands and a foreign element to deal with. We have in the past kept them in subjugation and mean to hold them where they belong." He did not keep his promise.

The strike ended on Jan. 3, 1913 with the IWW prevailing. The workers' demands were met, including the 54-hour work week at the previous 60-hour pay. Despite severe government suppression that nearly destroyed the union during the "Red Scare," the IWW still exists today and in many ways continues the struggles the union fought in its early days. The union organizes immigrant workers in New York City sweatshops, created the Starbucks Workers Union and is currently involved in a campaign to create the nation's first fast food union at Jimmy John's, among other activities. There are plans underway to form an IWW branch in Utica, but until then we can celebrate the history of the union in Little Falls that fought for a new world in the shell of the old.

Hundreds Rally For Paid Sick Days In Portland

Continued from 1

band, I Wobble Wobble. There were stories from IWW members employed in food, retail, and social service sectors regarding their experiences both with and without paid sick day access. While many of these stories focused on the financial and emotional toll of not having paid sick day access, there were also several mentions of the stresses and obstacles that workers who do have paid sick day access must face when calling in sick. Retaliation from the boss and social pressure to "just stick it out," for example, are employed as mechanisms to prevent workers from using the benefit.

The PSDN campaign, while primarily led by the IWW, is a coalition of several other labor unions, social/economic justice organizations and public health groups in the city. In addition to providing material aid and outreach to help promote the rally, this coalition represents the solid work that the IWW has undertaken to develop ties of solidarity with these groups, with the anticipation that they will one day be called upon to support workers pressing their boss for the paid sick days demand.

From the get-go, the IWW made the message clear that the campaign is not focused on bringing about legislative reform for paid sick day access to the city's workers, nor is it interested in courting the favor or support of local politicians and "progressive" business owners. Instead, the campaign intends to directly put pressure on business owners to adopt paid sick day coverage, with the union providing the organizational training, support, and solidarity needed to put this power in workers' hands. A series of biweekly public meetings will be held by PSDN, giving workers a place to go if they're interested in learning more about the campaign and how they can get started.

Stay tuned to the Industrial Worker *for further coverage and analysis regarding this industrial campaign, or visit the campaign website for more information at: http://www.paidsickdaysnow.org.*

I.W.W. Literature DEPARTMENT

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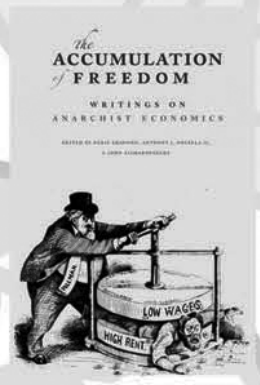
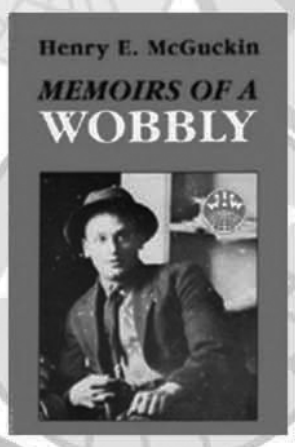
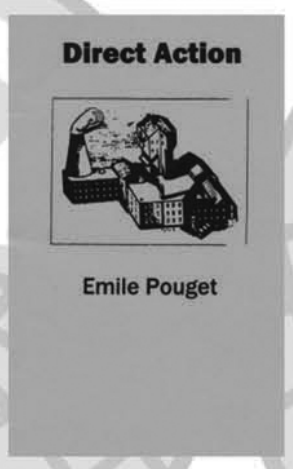


The only crisis of capitalism is capitalism itself. Let's toss credit default swaps, bailouts, environmental externalities and, while we're at it, private ownership of production in the dustbin of history. The Accumulation of Freedom brings together economists, historians, theorists, and activists for a first-of-its-kind study of anarchist economics. The editors aren't trying to subvert the notion of economics—they accept the standard definition, but reject the notion that capitalism or central planning are acceptable ways to organize economic life. $21



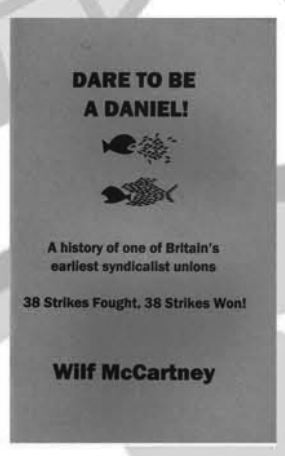
Published here for the first time, this lively narrative by old-time Wobbly Henry McGuckin (1893-1974) is not like any other book on the Industrial Workers Of The World. Although 'Mac' knew and worked with many of the best-known Wobblies - Big Bill Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Frank Little and others - his purpose here is not to discuss prominent personalities or world-famous events, but rather to tell of the unsung tens of thousands of militant working men and women who, in the 1910s, made the IWW one of the grandest labor organizations the world has ever seen.
$7

In this classic work of American nonfiction the greatest labor organizer in US history details her three quarters century fight for labor's liberation, and her unswerving belief in industrial unionism as the key to that struggle. In steel, railroading, metal mining, textiles, and above all, the coal industry, Mother Jones fought alongside strikers. Here too is the exciting story of her crusade against child labor, her innovative efforts to organize working women, her experiences in court and in jail, and her daring involvement in the Mexican Revolution. Mother Jones' lively narrative—every page bristling with her characteristic humor, indignation, and uncommon sense—is a masterpiece of American radicalism.
$7



Direct Action is the classic statement of revolutionary syndicalism. Against the slavery that is capitalism, Pouget proposes not faith in the go-betweens of parliament (or union leaderships!) but workers' own action. Action to win small victories, strengthening and inspiring the working class for the big one: the destruction of capitalism and rebuilding society from the bottom up.
$2.50

Black Flame is the first of two volumes that reexamine anarchism's democratic class politics, its vision of a decentralized planned economy, and its impact on popular struggles in five continents over the last 150 years. From the nineteenth century to today's anticapitalist movements, it traces anarchism's lineage and contemporary relevance. It outlines anarchism's insights into questions of race, gender, class, and imperialism, significantly reframing the work of previous historians on the subject, and critiquing Marxist approaches to those same questions.
$23

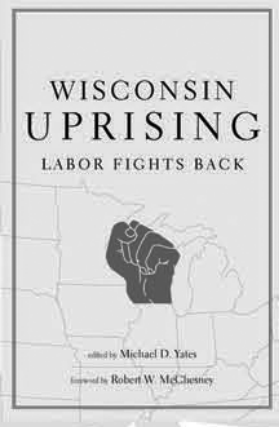


The life and struggles of an agitator and the fight to free the catering slaves of the West End of London (1910-1914)

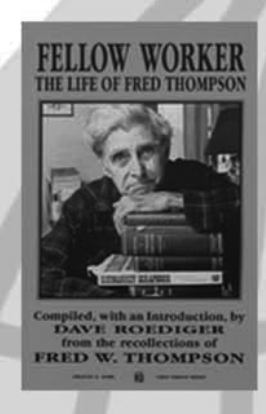
Wilf McCartney (1877-1949) was a cateringworker from the age of ten. Here he gives a vivid description of the conditions in the kitchens of London's West End restaurants (some of which haven't altered much) and the way a revolutionary syndicalist union was built in 1910, to be smashed by the 1914-1918 war.
$3

¡Sí, Se Puede! / Yes, We Can! is a bilingual fictional story set against the backdrop of the successful janitors' strike in Los Angeles in 2000. It tells about Carlitos, whose mother is a janitor. Every night, he sleeps while his mother cleans in one of the skyscrapers in downtown L.A. When she comes home, she waves Carlitos off to school before she goes to sleep. One night, his mamá explains that she can't make enough money to support him and his abuelita the way they need unless she makes more money as a janitor. She and the other janitors have decided to go on strike. $8

Which Side Are You On? tells the story of the classic union song that was written in 1931 by Florence Reece in a rain of bullets. It has been sung by people fighting for their rights all over the world. Florence's husband Sam was a coal miner in Kentucky. Many of the coal mines were owned by big companies, who kept wages low and spent as little money on safety as possible. Miners lived in company houses on company land and were paid in scrip, good only at the company store. The company owned the miners sure as sunrise.
$18



In early 2011, the nation was stunned to watch Wisconsin's state capitol in Madison come under sudden and unexpected occupation by union members and their allies. The protests to defend collective bargaining rights were militant and practically unheard of in this era of declining union power. Nearly forty years of neoliberalism and the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression have battered the labor movement, and workers have been largely complacent in the face of stagnant wages, slashed benefits and services, widening unemployment, and growing inequality.
$19



Compiled, with an Introduction by Dave Roediger

from the recollections of Fred W. Thompson

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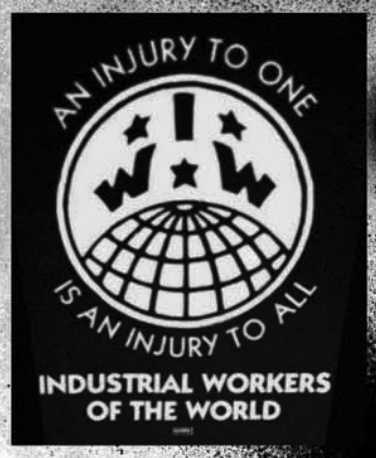

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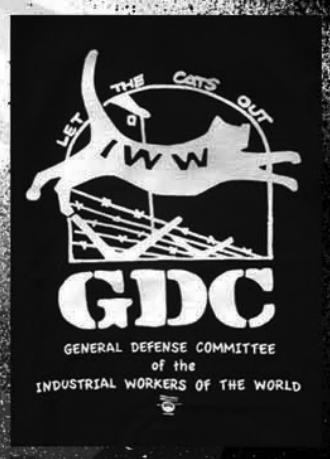

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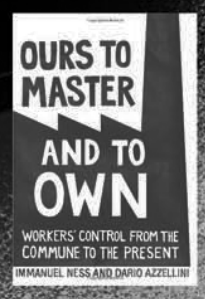

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by Tim Acott

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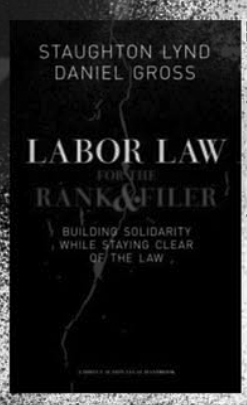
THE IWW: ITS FIRST 100 YEARS
The IWW: Its First 100 Years is the most comprehensive history of the union ever published. Written by two Wobblies who lived through many of the struggles they chronicle, it documents the famous struggles such as the Lawrence and Paterson strikes, the fight for decent conditions in the Pacific Northwest timber fields, the IWW's pioneering organizing among harvest hands in the 1910s and 1920s, and the wartime repression that sent thousands of IWW members to jail.
$16



LABOR LAW FOR THE RANK AND FILER
is a guerrilla legal handbook for for workers in a precarious global economy. Blending cutting-edge legal strategies for winning justice at work with a theory of dramatic social change from below, Staughton Lynd and Daniel Gross deliver a practical guide for making work better while re-invigorating the labor movement.

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Reviews

Valuable Lessons From The Sojourner Truth Organization

Staudenmaier, Michael. Truth and Revolution: A History of the Sojourner Truth Organization, 1969–1986. *Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2012. Paperback, 304 pages, $19.95.*

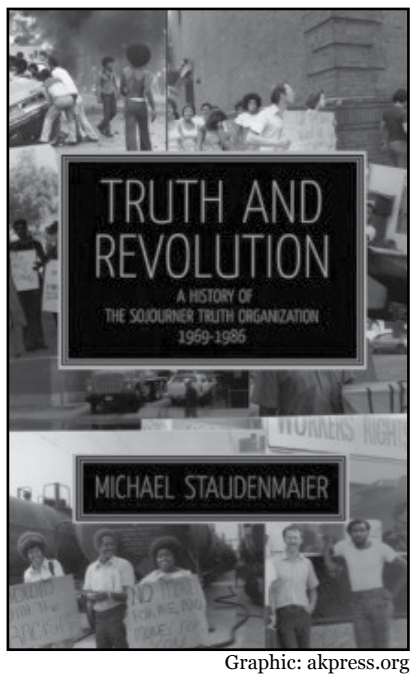
By Nate Hawthorne

"Truth and Revolution" is about the Sojourner Truth Organization (STO), a small radical group based in Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s. Historian Michael Staudenmaier presents a good overview of the political world that the organization lived in. The STO first formed during the tail end of the civil rights movement and the New Left of the 1960s. STO members paid attention to rising black radicalism in the United States and social upheavals in France and Italy. Later, the group engaged with political events, including the Iranian revolution, the movement for Puerto Rican independence, the feminist movement, the anti-nuclear movement and the anti-fascist movement. Staudenmaier summarizes each of these important pieces of history, and his footnotes offer a lot to people who want to do further reading on any of these topics.

IWW members in particular should read this book because the STO focused heavily on workplace organizing and wrote about that experience. I will return to this, but first I want to say that the STO's flaws make them particularly good for IWW members to read about because the limits and failures of the STO speak to the problems that we are still working on as we build the IWW we want to see. The STO was predominantly white, probably never had more than 100 members, repeatedly split in a way that left them on the edge of collapse and held some really bad political perspectives, tied in large part to their Leninism.

Despite the improvement, the IWW remains a small organization. Our successes are inspiring and exciting but often temporary and partial, while our failures are often heartbreaking for the organizers involved. This reality of our organization means that Straudenmaier's book offers us a kind of mirror to help us think about ourselves. While the STO was briefly national in scope and engaged in dialogue and published for a national audience, at its largest the STO was the size of a mid-to-large IWW branch today. There are both positive lessons we can learn and inspiration we can draw from the STO and there are negative lessons from which we can learn about things we should avoid.

STO members did some workplace organizing throughout the organization's lifespan, but the group only focused heavily on this for about five years. The STO's workplace activity will be familiar to people active in IWW organizing. The group printed and distributed leaflets at workplaces, both where they had members and where they did not, ran workers' centers that offered legal support, engaged in strike and picket support, and helped create job actions in members' workplaces.



Graphic: akpress.org

The STO confronted a few persistent difficulties in their organizing, which also speaks to both the strengths we have and the difficulties we face in the IWW today. The STO rarely managed to recruit members out of its workplace organizing, in part because they weren't sure how, or if they should even try to do so. Likewise, the organization often built new organizations depending on the facility or company they were organizing in, and encouraged non-members to participate. This approach had its strengths, like placing a priority on collective action, but it had one major downside: it inhibited organizational growth. While this approach seemed like it was based on respect for the independence of the workers involved, it resulted in STO members specifically being able to make decisions that had an impact on the workers without the workers' input. This happened above all because of the organization's decision to make workplace organizing into much less of a priority.

One quality of the STO that was both positive and negative was that the organization tried to pay a lot of attention to and analyze changing social and economic conditions. This is important, but the way that the STO did it resulted in a sort of ambulance-chasing mentality whereby the organization repeatedly changed its priorities based on an analysis that assumed that the latest social/economic change meant that something really big was going to happen next. Staudenmaier quotes one former member of the STO who criticized the organization for sometimes having a "get rich quick" mentality whereby the group would drop everything and focus on the latest new development in the class struggle in the hopes of finally hitting the revolutionary jackpot. This resulted in a neglect of long-term organization building, as well as a turn away from the slower but ultimately more productive practices of long-term workplace organizing. IWW branches often have these same problems. This is not to say that workplace organizing is the only thing that matters, but rather that, since we see the IWW as a workplace organizing group, we should make that our main emphasis in terms of time and energy. We should also be very honest with ourselves about what our non-workplace activities actually do to help build the organization and to improve our workplace organizing.

Finally, one of the STO's most enduring contributions that the IWW can learn from is its writings. This matters in at least three ways.

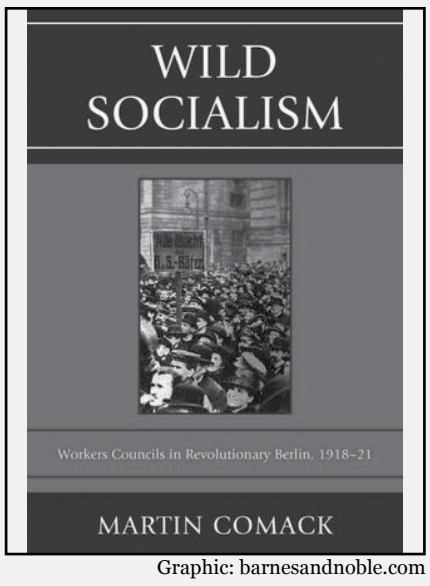
First, despite the organization's deeply flawed Leninist perspective, the STO consisted of a group of radicals who were very serious about understanding and analyzing capitalist society. The group's intellectual efforts were engaged with struggle and were intelligent and thought provoking. These writings remain worth reading today because they convey important information about race, gender, sexuality, and the history of the Left, among other topics, but they also remain worth reading because reading serious revolutionary thought is one of the things that makes us better radicals.

Second, the STO's collection "The Workplace Papers" lays out views shared within the IWW about the limits of state-recognized unions and about the importance of building workplace organizations outside the normal labor-law framework. Indeed, when I first joined the IWW in Chicago, organizers in the branch spoke repeatedly of the power of the political and theoretical perspective in "The Workplace Papers" and its relevance for our style of workplace organizing.

Third, the IWW can learn from the simple fact that the STO had such a commitment to writing. Writing helps people think. As individuals, putting ideas into writing makes our ideas clearer, and identifies the areas where our ideas and practices are still murky. As an organization that is too big and dispersed to interact face-to-face or by phone, we can only think collectively by writing, reading and responding, over and over. This is an area where the IWW could improve. While reading this book, I was repeatedly struck by the fact that the STO was doing good workplace organizing of a type that I was basically already familiar with because IWW members are doing this stuff. But I only know about it because I'm friends with a lot of IWW members. By not writing that stuff down (and by not being better about saving and distributing and systematically using the writing that we do produce), we don't learn as much from it and we don't share those lessons as much across our organization and beyond, and newer members often have a hard time learning about the IWW's own activity in our recent past. I was also struck that the STO often had a clearer and better idea of what they were doing while they were doing it, while our organizing is often less theoretically clear while in the middle of our actions. That is actually a strength of the IWW, as it means that we put our emphasis on fighting bosses even if we can't dot all the theoretical i's and cross all the t's about what exactly our every move contributes to ending capitalism. Still, in the aftermath of our actions we could stand to write and reflect more.

I hope I've convinced you that this book is worth your time to read, and after you read the book, read some of the STO's original writing, especially "The Workplace Papers." You can find them online at http://www.sojournertruth.net. If you do read any of this, consider writing a letter to the *IW* to make some points about it and engage other members in a discussion.

Great But Unrealized Possibilities In Germany



Graphic: barnesandnoble.com

Comack, Martin. Wild Socialism: Workers Councils in Revolutionary Berlin, 1918-21. *Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012. Paperback, 108 pages, $24.00.*

By Steve Kellerman

In Germany from 1918 to 1921, the possibility of transforming the world was briefly present. Had a libertarian form of workers' control succeeded in such an advanced and powerful a country as Germany, it would have been able to aid the Soviet Union and help prevent its decline into tyranny. It could further have encouraged similar movements in France, Italy, Britain and even the United States.

IWW member Martin Comack has written a welcome addition to the literature on post-World War I Germany, where the possibility of a substantial and permanent change in social relations was on the agenda. He writes with clarity and is able to describe complex situations in an accessible manner.

In Germany as well as the rest of the world, there existed a widespread disgust with the system which had produced the horrors from 1914 to 1918 and the desire to replace it with a new social order in which such enormities would not be possible.

Comack skillfully delineates the bureaucratic degeneration of the German Social Democratic Party and trade unions during the previous 30 years which led them to become complicit with the Imperial regime and its war.

The trade union officialdom came to be divorced from the union membership through its wartime cooperation with the authorities and the bosses. In response, workers' committees sprang up to defend the workers' interests during the hard wartime period and to enunciate radical doctrines of workers' control. When the war ended in defeat and the Imperial order collapsed, these committees transformed themselves into workers' councils, moving to take control of workplaces and form a society administered directly and democratically by workers' and soldiers' councils. A revolutionary mix of groups, including the Social Democrats, Independent Social Democrats, *Spartakusbund* (the Spartacus League)/Communist Party, the Communist Workers' Party, and Workers' Councils, occupied the most advanced position advocating and, to the extent they were able, practicing worker control of industry and society. Unable to gain sufficient following among workers, the Councils were forced into retreat and by late 1920 were marginalized by the advancing rebureaucratization of the German workers' movement.

These experiences subsequently gave rise to the school of Council Communists, the best known of whose representatives are Anton Pannekoek, Hermann Gorter, and Paul Mattick, Sr. This movement teaches that workers' councils are the natural and spontaneous organs of workers in revolutionary situations. Council Communists emphasize vigilance about carrying the revolution to completion and resisting the pressure of aspiring bureaucrats to force affairs back into authoritarian channels.

Comack should be commended for illuminating a little-known period and movement of great but ultimately unrealized possibilities.

In November We Remember

A Tale Of Two Crises: The Little Steel Strike And The Steel Mill Shutdowns

By Staughton Lynd

I am beginning to write these comments on Labor Day, that effort by the governing class to substitute an innocuous celebration of labor (or rest from labor) for May Day.

If my remarks appear in print, it is unlikely to happen before November, the month in which the Industrial Workers of the World remembers its fallen. When I was six years old, I was present at an enormous May Day march in New York City. I was carried on the shoulders of Sam Levinger, a young man from Ohio who became a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and was fatally wounded at the Battle of Belchite in September 1937. (Sam Levinger disregarded the rule that after twice being wounded, members of the Brigade should return to the United States. He walked out of a hospital, returned to the front, and was fatally wounded as he carried ammunition to comrades outside the walls of Belchite who were pinned down by enemy fire. See Laurie Levinger's "Love and Revolutionary Greetings: An Ohio Boy in the Spanish Civil War," [Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2012]).

All my life I have attempted to live as I believe Sam might have wished to live, had he been spared.

So too I remember the Little Steel strike of 1937, and John Sargent, departed leader of the rank and file at Inland Steel in East Chicago, Ind. I also remember the fight against shutdowns in Youngstown, from 1977 to 1980, and its spokesperson, the late Ed Mann. When my wife Alice and I moved to Youngstown there was a monument to those who died in the Little Steel strike in the central public area of downtown. It was the spiritual center of the community, our communal hearth, so to speak. One November a few of us sprinkled Joe Hill's ashes at the monument. It is no longer there, having been removed on one of the many occasions when the city's downtown streets were re-configured. All the more reason, then, that we remember it together on the strike's 75th anniversary.

Guards at the entrance of Youngstown Sheet & Tube in 1937. Photo: academic.csuohio.edu

The Little Steel Strike

Even historians from the bottom up, who do oral history with ordinary people, are hesitant to trust their interlocutors with the interpretation of history. Informants, it is assumed, can be counted on for local color. Informants may also be critically useful for facts, although the facts they provide must be corroborated from independent sources. However, in the view of most oral historians one cannot trust mere participants to analyze and understand the facts.

Even one of the best books of labor history published in recent years, "Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers" by Frank Bardacke (London and New York: Verso, 2011), disparages history as understood by observant participants. The introduction features farmworker Frank Camacho. When asked how the United Farm Workers (UFW) "got beat, and to what extent it was responsible for its own demise," Camacho responded:

"The main thing that went wrong was that the Republicans won the governorship in 1982. And the governor put the friends of the growers on the Agricultural Relations Board. And they wouldn't pay any attention to our grievances. Also, the peso collapsed, and more people had to come here to work. We were swamped with workers from Mexico."

Raul Medina, another honored veteran, had a similar answer to the question: "We got sold out. Some gabacho [Anglo] working for the union, he was supposed to be representing us…We lost everything… [W]hat did we have? Traitors in our midst." These participants, Bardacke tells us, fail to appreciate the "context" in which the story unfolded.

The history of the Little Steel strike demonstrates the fallacy of the well-nigh universal preference for the analysis of the historian rather than the assessment of the historical protagonist. Whether mainstream or radical, historians are united in concluding that the Little Steel strike was a dramatic failure. Bruce Nelson, in "Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality" (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), states that the strike ended in "a crushing defeat for the union." Marty Glaberman, in his "Punching Out and Other Writings" (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2002), writes of the "catastrophic strike in Little Steel." This common assessment of the Little Steel strike lacks, well, context.

John Sargent was president at the time of a members-only United Steelworkers (USW) local union at what may have been the largest steel complex involved in the strike: Inland Steel in East Chicago, Ind., with 18,000 hourly workers.

John reported that the Little Steel strike of 1937, which most labor historians consider a defeat, was, from his point of view, a "victory of great proportions." (The following account of Sargent's views is drawn from the expanded edition of "Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers," edited by my wife and myself, and published by Haymarket Books).

As Sargent told it, true enough, the striking steelworkers did not win a collective bargaining agreement or status as exclusive bargaining representative. But what they did get was an agreement through the governor's office that the company would recognize and bargain with "the Steelworkers Union and the company union and any other organization that wanted to represent the people in the steel industry." As Sargent wrote:

"Without a contract, without any agreement with the company, without any regulations concerning hours of work, conditions of work, or wages, a tremendous surge took place. We talk of a rank-and-file movement: the beginning of union organization was the best kind of rank-and-file movement you could think of. John L. Lewis sent in a few organizers, but there were no organizers at Inland Steel…The union organizers were essentially workers in the mill who were so disgusted with their conditions and so ready for a change that they took the union into their own hands."

Without a contract, Sargent continued:

"…we secured for ourselves agreements on working conditions and wages that we do not have today [1970]. For example, as a result of the enthusiasm of the people in the mill you had a series of strikes, wildcats, shut-downs, slow-downs, anything working people could think of to secure for themselves what they decided they had to have. If their wages were low there was no contract to prohibit them from striking, and they struck for better wages. If their conditions were bad, if they didn't like what was going on, if they were being abused, the people in the mill themselves—without a contract or any agreement with the company involved—would shut down a department or even a group of departments to secure for themselves the things they found necessary."

Sargent went on to say that in the late 1930s, USW Local 1010 made an agreement with Inland Steel that the company would not pay less than any of its competitors throughout the country. All that a union representative had to do was to prove to the company that a particular category of workers, for example on the picket line, was being paid less than similar steelworkers at, say, Youngstown Sheet & Tube. "And if that was a fact, we were given an increase of wages at Inland," Sargent wrote.

Nick Migas, who was a grievance committeeman in the Inland Steel open hearth, offered further particulars. "We organized departmental meetings," he remembered. "Every month the department would meet at the union hall, and discuss their immediate problems, work things out, and decide what to do about it." In later years, a worker would file a grievance, the steward would take it up, and that was the last the worker heard about it. But in those early days, "the man who had the grievance came right along with me…He went with me to the next step…He was always there, he knew exactly what his case was, he knew exactly what position the company was taking," said Migas.

Migas recalled an incident when the company wouldn't settle a grievance for the charging car operators. Management had increased the tonnage without increasing the rate. "So that night it started to slow down, and by the next morning there were two furnaces where they had to shut the heat off. They settled the grievance in a hurry. Nobody told anybody to strike. There was just that close relationship, working with the people, where they knew what was necessary," he said.

Clearly what John Sargent and Nick Migas felt they learned at Inland Steel was very similar to the analysis projected a generation earlier by the IWW. A comprehensive collective bargaining agreement, assumed by today's labor historians and union organizers to be self-evidently desirable, was for these men an obstacle.

Continued on next page

The San Francisco Bay Area GMB Remembers:

Archie Green (1917-2009) Union Activist and Folklorist
and
All Those Fellow Workers and Comrades-in-Struggle
Brought Before Political Grand Juries

"They Chose Silence over Betrayal, Incarceration over Collaboration"

Puerto Rican Independence Carlos Alberto Torres, Oscar Lopez Rivera, Cintron Fiallo, Christopher Tores, Tania Frontera and Julia Antonio Pabon

Black Liberation Richard Brown, Richard O'Neal, Ray Boudreau, Hank Jones, Francisco Torres, Harold Taylor, Herman Bell, Jalil Muntaqim (*SF-8*) Palestinians Ghassan Elashi, Shukri Abu Baker, Mufid Abdulqader, Abdul Raham Odeh, Muhammad El Mezain (Holy Land Five) Dr. Abdelhaleem Ashqar, Dr. Sami Al-Arian AntiWar/International Solidarity (Colombia-Palestine) Carlos Montes (Los Angeles), Maureen Murphy, Jeff Sundin, Anh Pham, Hatem Abudayyeh, Meredith Aby, Mick Kelly, Sarah Martin, Sarah Smith, Steff Yorek, Stephanie Weiner, Thistle Parker-Hartog, Tom Burke, Tracy Molm (Minneapolis/Chicago) Free Speech/Press Lynne Stewart, Rod Coronado, Josh Wolfe Seattle May Day Occupy Dennison Williams, Leah-Lynn Plante, Matt Duran, Katherine OIejnik (Seattle,Portland,Olympia) Eco/Animal Liberation Jeffrey Hogg, (Eugene) Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, Nathan Block, BJ Viehi, Alex Hall, Jordan Halliday (Salt Lake City) Nicole Fink, David Agranoff, Danae Kelley (San Diego) Carrie Feldman, Scott Demuth (Iowa) Briana Waters, Marie Mason, Eric McDavid *[and so many courageous others]*

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

REMEMBERING

Photo: libcom.org

THE 40+ MARIKANA MINERS MURDERED BY SOUTH AFRICA'S KILLER COPS

By Harry Siitonen, SF Bay Area GMB

In November We Remember

A Tale Of Two Crises: The Little Steel Strike And The Steel Mill Shutdowns

Continued from previous page

At Inland Steel, local union officers were empowered by the 1937 strike settlement that obligated the company to bargain with their members-only union. They felt that they were in a stronger position before the union was "recognized" as the exclusive bargaining representative than they were afterwards. Today's typical contract clauses prohibiting strikes during the life of the agreement and giving the company the sole right to make investment decisions like shutting down a plant did not yet exist. The local union could decide for itself into what agreements with the company, if any, it wished to enter.

This is a perspective almost unimaginably heretical from the standpoint of today's union leaders and their academic supporters. We need to see clearly that John L. Lewis imposed on incipient CIO unions such as the Steelworkers not only officers of the United Mine Workers like Murray and Van Bittner, but also a particular pattern of collective bargaining demands that Lewis came to champion in the process of imposing top-down, dictatorial government on his own union. The pattern included: (1) a management prerogatives clause that gave the company sole authority to make investment decisions like closing a plant; (2) a clause prohibiting strikes during the life of the contract; and (3) a clause obliging every worker to join the union and have union dues automatically deducted from their paychecks.

This pattern of demands was bitterly opposed by Roger Baldwin of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Throughout the 1920s, the ACLU supported rank-and-file movements within the United Mine Workers (UMW), and finally, the effort of thousands of soft coal miners in southern Illinois to leave the UMW and form their own union, the Progressive Miners. Baldwin feared that the Lewis template would take away from workers positioned like the Progressive Miners the opportunity to obtain what the newly-enacted Wagner Act called a "union of their own choosing."

Youngstown's Steel Mill Shutdowns

Precisely this same cluster of contract provisions was at the heart of the shutdown struggle here in Youngstown.

I recall a day in the summer of 1980 when I visited what then was the local union hall of Local 1330, United Steel Workers of America. It was the building from which Ed Mann led protesters "down that hill" in January 1980 to occupy U.S. Steel's headquarters in the Mahoning Valley. Bob Vasquez, president of Local 1330, was alone in the building, sorting papers. He looked up at me and said, "I understand you're a historian," and he gave me some typewritten pages. The papers consisted of several drafts of the very short, first contract into which U.S. Steel and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) entered in March 1937. One clause was the same in all the drafts, and indeed remained essentially unchanged in the Basic Steel Contract in effect at the time of the shutdowns. The clause stated:

"The management of the works, and the direction of the working forces, including the right to hire, suspend, or discharge for proper cause, or transfer, and the right to relieve employees from duty because of lack of work or for other legitimate reasons, is vested exclusively in the Corporation…"

This was the contract language that frustrated all our attempts to do something by conventional legal means about the impending shutdown announced by the company. I filed a charge with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), who then deferred to the management prerogatives clause. I orchestrated the filing of a grievance, and, besides relying on the management prerogatives clause, the International Union insisted that the International, not the local, was the representative of the workers in administering the contract. Finally, together with our incumbent congressman, six local unions, and a grouping of local church groups called the Ecumenical Coalition, I filed an ultimately unsuccessful lawsuit.

This is why, in his ever-memorable speech before he led people down the hill to occupy the U.S. Steel headquarters, Ed Mann made it clear that when he used the words "the union" he had in mind not the International, restricted as it was by the management prerogatives clause, but the people.

Looking back, there were three critical moments when we might have made our protest even more precedent-setting and effective.

On Sept. 19, 1977, Youngstown Sheet & Tube announced that it was closing its largest facility in the Valley, the Campbell Works.

What was to be done? Gerald Dickey, editor of the local union newspaper at Brier Hill (another, smaller Sheet & Tube mill), recalls a meeting of union officers at which he advocated nationalization. District Director Frank Leseganich, however, channeled energy toward a petition. The petition was directed not to the company but to the U.S. government. The government was declared to be the cause of what had happened. The petition, signed by 100,000 people, asked "the Honorable Jimmy Carter, and the Congress to give immediate Relief to the American Steel Industry by Imposing Emergency Import Quotas, Relaxing the E.P.A. [Environmental Protection Agency] Standards, and Allowing the Steel Industry to [and here the petition broke into capital letters] EARN A FAIR PROFIT." The petitions were dutifully carried to Washington, D.C., where White House guards turned the complainants away without being able to speak to the President or even to one of his aides.

Recently, 32 years later, my wife Alice, Bobby Sands' biographer Denis O'Hearn and I spoke to friends assembled at the Pump House of what had once been the largest steel-making complex in the world, the Homestead Works near Pittsburgh. I suddenly imagined what I now think we should have done. The day the shutdown of the Campbell Works was announced in September 1977, every wage worker in the Mahoning Valley should have walked off the job until the Board of Directors of Sheet & Tube agreed to renegotiate its shutdown decision.

The second such missed opportunity came on Nov. 27, 1979 when U.S. Steel announced the permanent shutdown of its Youngstown Works.

Workers at U.S. Steel in Youngstown and McDonald believed that their jobs were secure because the company had promised that so long as it made a profit on its Mahoning Valley operations, those mills would not be shut down. The chairman of the board of U.S. Steel, as well as local management spokespersons, assured workers during the summer and fall of 1979 that the Youngstown area operations were profitable and therefore would stay open. That is why the company's shutdown announcement came as such a shock and was perceived to be so unfair.

There was a mass meeting at the union hall on Nov. 29, and the next day seven chartered buses carried steelworkers and their wives to the U.S. Steel headquarters on Grant Street in Pittsburgh. After picketing in the cold and chanting "We want jobs!" the demonstrators occupied the lobby. There, after a time, they pushed aside company police and occupied the mezzanine. U.S. Steel turned off the power on elevators leading to the upper floors.

None of this had been anticipated. At the end of the afternoon, unsure what to do next, demonstrators took the buses back to Youngstown. Looking back, had we stayed in place the corporate executives might have been obliged to leave the building by helicopter, or, in the alternative, to sit down with their blue collar employees and talk.

Finally, of course, there was Jan. 28, 1980—the day when Ed Mann led us down the hill to break into U.S. Steel's Mahoning Valley headquarters and take over the building. Demonstrators made their way onto the roof and displayed banners demanding "Work Not Welfare" and "Keep Our Mills Open." An executive game room was discovered on the top floor and Ed Mann's daughter changed her infant son's diaper on the executive pool table.

I have two personal memories, both painful. I had not joined the building occupation because I was lead attorney in the federal lawsuit. After the occupation was in place, Bob Vasquez, president of the local, briefly emerged from the building to talk with myself and a few others. He was worried that if the occupation were prolonged the police might intervene and some of his members might lose benefits to which they were entitled. I failed to say what I now wish I had said: "Stay. Whatever else you do, stay put."

At the end of the afternoon I went home for supper. The occupation was on the "CBS Evening News," and to my dismay, Walter Cronkite said the occupiers had left the building. I hurried back to Local 1330. At the door I encountered Reno DePietro, president of one of the four embattled local unions at U.S. Steel, with his arms full of the groceries he had purchased for an overnight stay.

After it was over, everyone—Bob Vasquez, president of the largest of the four local unions; Gerald Dickey, who took a leave of absence from his work at Youngstown Sheet & Tube to become a volunteer organizer for the Ecumenical Coalition; Ed Mann, and myself—agreed that, "We should have stayed." It would have made a profound statement, Gerald told the two young women who made the documentary movie "Shout Youngstown!" Bob Vasquez said that another time he would ask all 3,500 workers and their families to sit in, and see how many people the company was prepared to fire. Once people began comparing who had most to lose, Bob said, you were beaten. Instead, there has to be a spirit of one for all, and all for one.

Conclusions

What is the moral of the two tales told above, of what John Sargent made out of the apparent defeat of the Little Steel strike, of what Ed Mann sought to achieve by leading other protesters "down that hill"?

I believe that the instruction emerging from these experiences is twofold.

First, solidarity is very difficult and very demanding. How many of us live as if committed to the vision that "An Injury to One Is an Injury to All"? It is a little like Jesus' directive to the rich young man: Give all that you have to the poor (Matt. 19:16-21). One can see the logic. It is just very hard to do.

On the other hand, the good news is that the self-activity of poor and working people can be wondrously effective. When steelworkers slowed production in the Inland Steel open hearth, management was more likely to settle a grievance. Closer to home, our beloved comrade John Barbero remembered, "Youngstown sure died hard."

Arguably, to quote a line from Ralph Chaplin's song "Solidarity Forever," it remains the case that "In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold/Greater than the power of armies magnified a thousand fold/We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old/ For our union [our solidarity] makes us strong."

Towards A Wobbly Methodology

Building Relationships & Community In An IWW Workplace Committee

By X359217

This piece is the first in a series articulating a methodological framework for developing Wobbly organizers and identifying key features of workplace committee building at the micro-level.

When I first started out as a Wobbly a number of years ago, my organizing was very detached from my co-workers, and the thought of focusing on them never crossed my mind. Because of that I kept the majority of my co-workers at a certain arm's length and even with my fellow committee members, I was emotionally unavailable.

As a young Wobbly, I was too inexperienced, uncomfortable, and uninformed about integrating the seemingly disparate spheres of my life ("home," "friends," "work," "IWW," "family," etc.) to see between and beyond the "stages of a campaign." Instead I was fixated on a numbers game of growing the committee, and ultimately the union.

At the time, I didn't realize that it is the process—developing dynamic individual relationships, sharing skills, experiences, lessons and laughter with co-workers—that will ultimately determine quality, character, and content. Instead my organizing was concentrated singularly on rushing to obtain an end product: going public with the campaign, but without a focus on building tight relationships and strong militants.

Organizers Not Agitators

Reflecting on the historic Bread and Roses strike, early IWW organizer Elizabeth Gurley Flynn said "[they] were wonderful agitators, but poor union organizers" and despite the importance of the strike in the imagination of the U.S. labor movement, its outcome was a reflection of short-term gains that didn't build long-term organization. The IWW enjoyed a radically democratic and inclusive structure with a revolutionary aim, but we were still ill-equipped to systematically develop new organizers/leaders and weather the fluctuations of mass militancy in the class struggle.

While Wobblies were beginning to improve and mature their organizing work in agriculture and along the Philadelphia waterfront before facing massive repression during the World War I era, they were still making first steps towards overcoming the "hot shop" approach of organizing; and in many ways we're still overcoming this today. A "hot shop" is a workplace or industry were workers may be fired up and "red hot" over an immediate grievance (such as pay, policy changes, or treatment by management), but not necessarily committed to the work of long-time organizing. In this sense, the workers are likely to "go cool" as quickly as they went hot when their immediate grievances are addressed.

Lesson Learned

What I have learned over the last several years is that in order to build a revolutionary union movement we need to identify and implement more nuanced Wobbly practices that contribute to developing and strengthening organizers. The Organizer Training program, along with the lessons and concepts laid out in IWW pamphlets like "Weakening the Dam," have provided us with excellent reference points by focusing on the individual organizer in the workplace.

But I'd like to magnify the discussion by homing in on the level of conversation and organizing that takes place among co-workers and between committee members. I believe we need to better understand how to form new individual relationships, particularly those that transcend the personal/political dichotomy that compartmentalizes our lives and limits our connection and contribution to our co-workers, our community, our class, and the struggle. We need to place greater emphasis on the process of building the kind of relationships necessary to developing a revolutionary organization.

The Committee as Community

The paradigm shift for me occurred when I began to organize alongside an IWW member with years of on-the-job organizing experience. He quickly began mentoring me—introducing me to important IWW history and struggles, pointing out interesting parallels and lessons from different revolutionary union movements like the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and Italian auto workers in the 1970s, and generally pushing me to think about the larger class context "beyond the campaign," as we like to say. More importantly, we began to develop a more intimate relationship by getting to know each other as friends.

We hung out together often and got to know each other's partners, close friends and family. We talked about our backgrounds and experiences growing up, cooked food, went on camping trips, and generally made it a point to socialize and do things together outside of organizing. Over the course of several months we forged a strong friendship, one that transcended our initial connections as union organizers and co-workers.

It was during this time that we started to think more deeply about methodically building our Wobbly workplace committee, what that process should be like and how it should reflect and inform the revolutionary product we strive for.

Decompartmentalization: A Framework for Developing Relationships

What developed out of our work was a concept that we added to our organizing philosophy which we began calling "decompartmentalization," which is simply a many-syllabled way of actively integrating the different spheres of our lives into the class struggle. At its core, we see decompartmentalization as an approach to the type of relationships we want to develop as Wobbly organizers. The practice is a reciprocal one. Dynamic working-class social relationships inform how and why we struggle and struggle informs, nurtures, and transforms our relationships to one another in a flexible process. Our lives are complex and our organizing should fit into all the aspects of our lives, as capitalism doesn't end when we leave the workplace nor are we no longer human when we're at work.

Graphic: iww.org

Working-class intellectual Stan Weir coined the term "singlejack solidarity" to describe the nature and significance of developing a close bond with co-workers and other working-class organizers on your committee (the term is also the title of a great edited compilation of Weir's essays). From this I would argue that "singlejacking" should be a principle method of Wobbly-ism because it draws out the underlying commonalities we have in class struggle by penetrating the personal and breaking through the "compartmentalization" that tends to separate our lives into separate spheres of work, personal issues, identity and politics. Babysitting, helping someone move, and going camping might not at first seem like things we would associate with workplace organizing, but they are essential to building a broader and mature sense of solidarity, comradery, and community in our workplaces and within our committees.

In my mind this type of organizing implies a strong emotional component. For example, having just organized a successful workplace victory around a leave of absence policy involving a co-worker—a strategy in which the co-worker was a principle architect, and which moved management to change their position by allowing the co-worker time off to visit grandparents in Mexico before they passed away—the co-worker opened up to me in a way I will never forget. With tears pouring down their face, they expressed how much we (another committee member and I) had opened their eyes to the systematic injustices at work and how empowering it was to realize our collective strength as workers in a way that allowed them to take what they described as one of the most important trips of their life.

If we can agree that building a powerful and sustainable workplace committee depends on organizing that practices and promotes a decompartmentalized approach to relationship building, we are able to release the pressure to rush quantitative growth in our campaigns. We are able to devote more attention to our own qualitative development and to ensure that new organizers receive the skills, capacity and competence to be leaders. This approach has required unfamiliar patience for me, but the rewards were immediate.

After spending several months agitating and educating the aforementioned co-worker on issues at work and relating them to broader class relations, as well as spending time together socially and getting to know each other on a personal level, we developed an emotional connection, won a deeply significant workplace victory, and recently became fellow committee members!

To me this emotional component should be emblematic of Wobbly organizing. There is a reason why much of our rich history and other thoughtful accounts of class struggle are couched in spiritual language: revolutionary organizing requires an understanding that working-class solidarity must transcend the daily forms of isolation and alienation reproduced under capitalism. In crafting a spirit of revolutionary community with our co-workers and within our committees we are actively "building a new society" by forming new types of relationships "in the shell of the old."

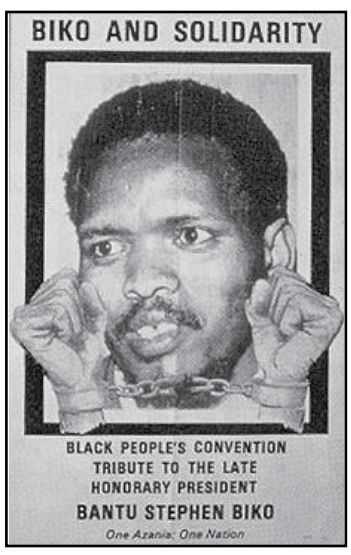
Social Experimenting from the Shop Floor

Some of the more methodical ways we've tried to develop these kinds of relationships and decompartmentalize our organizing is to devote time in our committee meetings to "go-arounds" (going around a circle of people for each person to contribute), which allow organizers the opportunity to open up to the group about what's going on in our lives, where we need support, what's bumming us out, what's really exciting us, where the party's at, where the picket's at, etc. We also intentionally plan social events or invite each other and co-workers to events our friends and comrades plan. More recently, we've created a structured mentoring program where more experienced organizers pair up with other organizers in the committee and with co-workers who are in the queue as potential committee members.

One of the most technologically innovative ways we've decompartmentalized our organizing as a workplace committee is communication through a "text loop," which works like an email list for texting. We use the loop to communicate on the shop floor about workplace issues, arrange lunch meetings, and coordinate two-on-one's with prospective committee members. We also use the loop to tell jokes, plan spur-of-the-moment parties, and offer words of encouragement if someone's having a bad day. The ease and informality of this type of group communication has really strengthened our connection to each other by allowing us to have daily interactions in spite of unpredictable and conflicting work schedules.

Of course, there's no substitute for face-to-face interaction. Ultimately we need to know our co-workers, not just know about them. Whether you're a committee of one or one member in a larger committee, the method of decompartmentalized organizing is universally applicable. Building one strong relationship is one of the most difficult things to do as an organizer. It is also the most important.

Adam Weaver contributed to this piece.



Plebs' College sends greetings. And a reminder that it is important not to be bigoted dogmatists.
If anyone has some strip cartoons from the IW in the 1940s featuring Ollie Garch or his cousin Pluto Crat please scan them and send to plebs.col@virgin.net and to the Editor of the Industrial Worker.

Workplace Organizing

Today's Union Movement: Challenges & Opportunities For Revolutionaries

By db

We are in a period of significant union decline in the United States. How long this will be the case is largely dependent upon shifting the balance of power in the class as a whole, along with building the organization and experience necessary to translate the major battles coming down the pipeline into victories which lay the ground work for a radically transformed society. Both a shift in power and a positive transformation of society seem possible but unlikely, and, as such, making these possible is our task.

As is the case with much of the class, we are bound to see a continuation of union sector blow-ups, with thousands of workers resisting the attacks on their livelihoods and unions. This seems likely to be the case in every vulnerable unionized sector, though many of these changes will happen without a significant fight across the board. Instead there will be signal battles determining the way the wind is blowing, like what happened in Wisconsin.

The general attacks on the class as a whole will also continue to create blow-ups outside the union sector—prisons being a current high point. Transforming this deterioration of conditions into mass action will require some rethinking of our organizing model, but one that is not too different from figuring out our dual-card strategy. We need to be actively organizing, building networks and common analysis within sectors of the class with much determination. In doing so, when things move towards decision points or explosions we will be an already known and respected force, capable of expanding our work to new possibilities rather than scrambling to get rooted from the outside.

We are also in a period in which unions are finally realizing that their existing structures are unable to cope with the changing rules, but for the most part I don't think unions will be willing or able to adapt. Why? Their separate basis from the workers they represent, legal and financial vulnerabilities and investment in them, ties to the Democratic Party, and a lack of a class struggle framework. They may also be unable to adapt due to their general hollowness, with limited-to-no rank-and-file organization and little-to-no experience with day to day actions on the job, much less militant strikes or the creation of class-wide committees to fight for collective goals

Graphic: iww.org

These weaknesses are also played upon via the use of state-wide ballot initiatives which move struggle to the voting booth and reinforce the short-term importance of electoral politics. While we shouldn't ignore such initiatives and should even participate when able in fighting the expansion of unbounded state and corporate power, we need to direct such struggles into grassroots action and into the workplaces impacted by them. Right-to-work laws mean nothing if you have unions not built on dues check off, and a $2 minimum wage for servers means nothing if servers are organized into unions where they get paid a living wage. This is the message we need to get across.

As such, there is a need to build a militant pole of the labor movement that is explicitly anti-capitalist and revolutionary but also that is oriented towards building rank-and-file power and self-organization. I believe the best hope for this formation is the IWW, which has gone through a steady transformation over the last decades from a largely paper organization to a tiny union of roughly 2,000 members with an impressive set of increasingly experienced and dedicated organizers. Moreover, the IWW's organizing training program has significantly increased the effectiveness of its members organizing efforts and as organizing at Jimmy John's, Focus on the Food Chain and a few other campaigns demonstrate, the IWW seems on a cusp of taking on significantly more important and powerful campaigns. There is also a large subsection of the IWW that are dual carders in other unions and if focused, this can have a powerful impact in shaping struggles, as was seen with the call for a general strike in Wisconsin, and in the most recent Canadian Union of Postal Workers' strike.

That said, the IWW is still at 10 percent of where it needs to be to serve as the vehicle any of us would like to see, and has serious internal obstacles to overcome in terms of race, gender, composition, strategy, and organizational infrastructure if it is to do so. I strongly encourage any dedicated revolutionaries participating or interested in union organizing to join the IWW and help make this possible. There is no other anti-authoritarian formation within the existing labor movement that can potentially fulfill this function, though if such a formation came into existence I would support it. To be clear, the IWW's dual card strategy is neither "bore from within" nor "let them rot," but creating a powerful, active, and independent rank-and-file tendency across the labor movement to do what needs to be done, in workplaces and in the class as a whole.

Before closing we should mention that if the trajectory of the labor movement is to rise, then sit-down strikes and occupations will very likely be the lever that initiates change. Given the state of capitalist transition, the ongoing shift into scarcity of oil and climate instability, any revolutionary path must emphasize the importance of taking what we need—everything is ours not the capitalists! "Occupy" as a concept has greatly increased the possibility of waves of sit-down strikes, as does the increasing precariousness of most jobs. As such, we should not restrict our vision to currently unionized workplaces but to fast food, prisons, trucking and logistics and much more.

International Analysis

Mexico's Labor Law Changes Undermine Worker Rights

By Dan La Botz, *Labor Notes*

The Mexican Congress were set to pass a piece of fast-track labor law "reform" during the last week of September that could be devastating for millions of workers' legal rights and incomes.

The changes both pro-business parties are agreed on would undermine the 44-hour work week by permitting subcontracting and temporary or part-time work for the first time.

Additional changes that would make it virtually impossible to organize or maintain genuine unions or to strike were part of the legislation introduced on Sept. 1, but it appears that some of those changes may be withdrawn under pressure.

The head of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) delegation in the lower house announced that his party would pass the bill, but specified that it would not affect the right to strike or union autonomy.

Mexico's unions almost universally opposed the changes, though different unions did so for very different reasons. The package being pushed by both outgoing President Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party (PAN) and incoming President Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI terrified both the official Congress of Labor and the independent National Union of Workers (UNT).

Throughout more than five years of the Calderón administration, Mexican unions succeeded in blocking conservative labor law reform. The question is how much of the package they can stop now, in the final stage of the last year of his term.

With the PRI and the PAN together sharing a majority in Congress, more assaults from Peña Nieto are inevitable.

Peanuts for Part-Time

Benedicto Martínez Orozco, co-president of the Authentic Labor Front (FAT) and a UNT leader, said that the bill was "intended to flexibilize the world of work, to make the workers' wages even more precarious, and to close the door to independent and democratic unions."

The UNT, which brings together several of the country's more independent unions, called for demonstrations. On Friday, a march through the capital that filled the streets and snarled traffic included more than 10,000 university workers, telephone workers, electrical utility workers, and dissident locals within the teachers' unions.

On Sept. 24, 4,000 workers from the independent union at the Nissan factory in Cuernavaca marched through the streets in their red company uniforms and white caps. In Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city, UNT and public employee unions announced a "megamobilization" for Sept. 26. Large demonstrations were also expected in Mexico City as Congress deliberates and votes.

Opposing the bill within Congress are several left parties. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who received nearly one-third of the vote for president in July on the Party of the Democratic Revolution ticket, said, "Now they don't want to pay a minimum wage of 60 pesos [about $5] for eight hours; they want to pay 30 pesos for four hours, which isn't even carfare."

The Trinational Solidarity Alliance, which brings together many of the largest federations and unions in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, said that the new law would harm worker rights and collective bargaining while leaving the real problems of government-aligned unions untouched.

U.S. unions, federations, and organizations, including the AFL-CIO, have condemned the labor law overhaul, saying it slashes worker protections and violates international law. Ten U.S. Congress members asked Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to address the situation.

Mexico's Two Types of Unions

By far the largest group of unions in Mexico is a group that is historically dependent on the government—or the "official" unions. A smaller and struggling group is made up of independent unions that chart their own course.

The official unions have longtime ties to the PRI, which ran the government for 70 years, and are often "ghost unions," unknown to the workers they represent.

To protect employers from genuine unions, the official unions often collaborate with management to create "protection contracts" that contain only the legal minimums. Independent unions attempt to organize genuine unions and to bargain but face constant challenges from the labor authorities and the employers and repression from the army, police, and gangsters hired by the official unions.


Eletrical utility workers protest. Photo: labornotes.org

According to the U.S. Labor Education in the Americas Project (USLEAP), about 90 percent of union contracts in Mexico are negotiated with company-funded unions. "Independent unions can wait up to 10 years to be legally recognized by the government while employer-backed protection unions are normally recognized almost immediately," USLEAP says.

The official unions liked the parts of the labor law bill that would protect them from challenges by independents, but they opposed the legislation because it would also require financial transparency about union dues, income and assets. This would reveal that some unions exist only on paper while others, awash in graft, receive enormous government subsidies of dubious legality.

The Mexican Petroleum Workers Union, for example, would have to reveal the millions of dollars in government contracts and other government funds that it receives, and perhaps also its contributions to political candidates—the subject of several probes in the last decade.

Joaquín Gamboa Pascoe, head of the official Congress of Labor, suggested that the incoming president, Peña Nieto, should remember that he was elected with the support of 4 million organized union workers and that "they would like to continue being his friend."

Eliminating the Independent Unions

The proposed changes had their origins in plans first hatched by the Mexican Employers Association back in the 1980s. Their goal was to strengthen employers against the unions, particularly the independent unions.

In a process comparable to U.S. union representation elections, Mexican unions may file for an election to take over responsibility for the existing contract (a process called "titularidad"). Most independent unions have their origin in those challenges to the official unions and their phony contracts. According to labor lawyer Arturo Alcalde, the proposed changes would make such challenges virtually impossible, since the new union would have to notify the company and practically ask it for permission to change unions.

But the most onerous aspect of the law is a requirement that workers who want to change unions must sign a statement stating so and present it to management. Employers typically fire and blacklist those who try to organize independent unions.

It is currently illegal in Mexico to hire workers temporarily or part time, or to contract out their jobs, though it happens frequently.

Mexico has between 14 and 28 million people working in the informal economy as street vendors and in small shops, restaurants, and garment sweatshops. Thus out of a total working population of 51 million, between 28 and 55 percent of all workers already have no labor law protection at all. Even in the formal economy, many employers evade the law in non-union workplaces and even in some unionized ones.

Opponents have said the 30-day fast track the labor law is hurtling down may violate the Mexican constitution or existing laws. An opposition lawmaker was more blunt: "This is a bill strictly for the bosses," he said.

This story originally appeared on Sept. 25, 2012 in Labor Notes*, and was reprinted with permission.*

South African Miners Win Through Wildcats

By Mischa Gaus, *Labor Notes*

Miners on strike in South Africa. Photo: labornotes.org

South African miners won a dramatic pay increase in September, following a wave of strikes that spread to many gold and platinum mines. But their struggle exposed fractures in South African society that won't heal soon.

The miners demanded a rise in wages to $1,500 per month, from the $500 to $1,000 they earn now. At the Marikana mine at the heart of the conflict, they won $1,350.

The strikes grew after an August massacre by police that left at least 34 dead (see "Striking Miners Killed In South Africa" on page 12 of the October *IW*). Human rights advocates have brought forward evidence and eyewitnesses saying police shot miners as they attempted to surrender or flee.

Tens of thousands of miners suspended work for six weeks in wildcat strikes, halting production in a platinum industry responsible for 80 percent of global output. The government put the military on alert and cracked down on "illegal gatherings," thereby preventing a march from occurring.

Platinum miners returned to work in mid-September, but 15,000 gold miners continued their wildcat as mine owners resisted the wage trend.

The conflict has its roots in tectonic shifts in South African society, its union movement, and its crucial mining sector. Almost two decades after the country's liberation from white minority rule, unemployment hovers around 25 percent, old forms of exploitive migrant contract labor persist, and the country has been convulsed by near-daily protests over the government's failure to deliver basic services.

For some observers, the mine massacre has become a turning point for a country struggling to make its way since a movement fusing Black liberation, radical politics, and militant unionism upended apartheid in 1994. They have called into question the legitimacy of the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

"By sending police to attack workers, the ANC moved to defend the new elite in South Africa: old white business owners garnished with a sprinkling of politically connected Blacks," said Leonard Gentle, director of the International Labour Research and Information Group in South Africa. "The ANC is stepping squarely into the shoes of its apartheid predecessors, acting to secure the profits of corporate mining interests through violence."

Conflict Between Unions

Others trace the origin of the conflict to the mine corporations' plans to divide union strength.

Mine bosses have acted to undermine the master agreement that coordinated bargaining in the minerals sector by aiding the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), said Sidumo Dlamini, president of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the major union federation in South Africa, in a speech.

Dlamini accused mine bosses of fomenting the split by ignoring contracts and "developing a resignation form, parading and forcing members to resign" from the COSATU-affiliated National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The AMCU now claims a membership of 30,000 workers at coal, chrome, and platinum mines, and is recruiting at gold mines. Before the recent strikes, NUM had 300,000 members.

Dlamini accused "individuals" affiliated with the breakaway union of coercion and violence, saying NUM officials have been "attacked in their office [and] forcefully removed, [and that] the office's keys [were] handed over to management." AMCU officials called that a lie and defended their willingness to strike as more effective for workers than NUM's more cooperative approach.

COSATU and its allies have charged the rival with being a company-financed "yellow union," pointing to a history of shadowy groups in the mining camps that try to play off different unions and workers against each other.

But COSATU's own founding president, Jay Naidoo, has rejected such claims.

"Let us ask ourselves if splinter unions are just the work of opportunists," he wrote in an open letter to his former colleagues. "Are we saying that seasoned trade unionists are so weak, pliant and intellectually inferior that they will risk losing their jobs and their lives—and for what?"

Naidoo said established unions like the NUM are no longer a visible force in the workplace, adding, "The fact is that there is a deep and growing mistrust of leaders in our country, and the expanding underclass feels it has no voice through legitimate formal structures."

Shifting Membership

Leonard Gentle says changes in mine work and union membership have generated friction.

Much of the hard work underground is now done by contract workers, he says. These are the most exploited and insecure workers, who work the longest hours and have short-term, unstable jobs. The mine companies exploit divisions by recruiting along tribal and regional lines.

NUM grew out of the less-skilled job categories of South African mineworkers, Gentle says. But they make up just 40 percent of the membership now. An increasing portion of the NUM's membership is skilled, higher-level mining staff which dominates the union's structures.

The shifting composition of the workforce affected union decision-making. According to the trade journal *Miningmx*, NUM stipulated a 50 percent-plus-one member threshold for recognition in 2007 contracts, foreclosing any way for workers to form new unions and challenge the company-recognized NUM.

NUM has also struck deals that benefited more skilled workers. One such agreement sparked a strike at another platinum mine earlier this year after rock drillers learned they had been denied an 18 percent bonus granted to other workers.

Gentle says NUM is becoming a union of white collar above-ground technicians, which led to the formation of the AMCU in 2001.

The breakaway sped up when NUM ousted a popular leader in the platinum sector who now heads the AMCU.

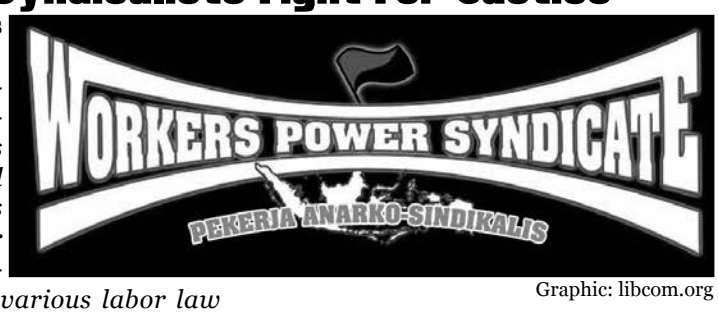
COSATU says it faces a "coordinated political strategy to use intimidation and violence, manipulated by disgruntled former union leaders."

Critics, like South African analyst Dale McKinley, say it is hypocritical of COSATU and its allies to call for organizing vulnerable contract workers and then slam another union for actually attempting to organize those workers.

This piece originally appeared on Sept. 21, 2012 in Labor Notes*, and was reprinted with permission.*

Indonesian Syndicalists Fight For Justice

From the Workers Power Syndicate



Graphic: libcom.org

Indonesian anarcho-syndicalist comrades of the Workers Power Syndicate and other fellow workers face retribution for attempting to organize in response to various labor law violations and other summary behavior at a garment factory in Indonesia.

PT Garmindo Jaya KNH is a garment company in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia, with approximately 700 workers. Numerous labor law violations have occurred, and the company continues to refuse to comply with the law. Some of the offenses they have committed include: shifts exceeding 12 hours, overtime wages that do not comply with the regulations, and agreements that are unclear.

The Workers Power Syndicate tried to make the workers of KNH aware of the oppression. We held a discussion in the beginning of the dispute with six workers. After our initial meeting, more comrades there began to realize what was happening, and there was a significant follow-up discussion.

A larger meeting with 50 people was held on Sept. 22, and at the KNH our friends became aware of the need for an organization to fight for the rights of those who are constrained by the factory.

After this meeting, on Sept. 25 one of the KNH workers named Patrisia Rumiati was called in by the head of human resources. The KNH chief of personnel questioned her about the meeting and when she explained the purpose of the discussion, the chief of personnel was angered, assuming that the union was the provocateur. Then she was made to sign a letter of resignation.

Other comrades present at the discussions were called to face the head of human resources and they were also interrogated. They were forced to sign an agreement not to organize or establish a union at the factory, and if they violated this, they were told they would be put in jail.

The factory workers' bags were also searched in the presence of soldiers. This made our friends very frightened because they did not understand why, or anything about the laws that are said to apply. We ask for support in addressing this matter, whether through mass action or position statements.

Workers Power Syndicate comrades can be contacted via freak-zone@live.com, and can be found on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/groups/workerspowersyndicate.

This story appeared in its original format on Sept. 29, 2012 on Libcom.org.

Textile Workers Go On Strike In Turkey

By John Kalwaic

Textile workers on strike. Photo: libcom.org

In early September, textile workers in the industrial zone of Antep, Turkey, which is right on the border of Turkey's southeast Kurdish corridor, walked out on a wildcat strike. The strike started with 3,000 to 5,000 textile workers and snowballed into about 7,000. They went on strike against their working conditions and the fact that they have to work an average of 12 hours per day.

The strike from the start was independent from the direction and orientation of the Oz-Iplik-Is Trade Union, which represents these workers. The workers didn't hesitate to criticize the union, who negotiated an almost-zero pay raise.

One worker who participated in the strike expressed how the Turkish bourgeoisie, which recently has taken an important step in furthering its solid integration into the web of international imperialist relations under the slogan "Becoming a Superpower," was spreading nothing but false hopes in its "addresses to the nation."

"They say we are second only to China in the economy. They say we are pioneers when it comes to exports. No one is asking how much this reflects on the workers, how much bread the workers can afford when going home. No one cares about the worker. We've been on strike here for days, and the human demands of thousands of people are being ignored," the worker said.

The strike was inspiring but, unfortunately, an unrelated bomb attack which led to the deaths of nine civilians in Antep right after the strike quickly came to dominate the atmosphere in the city and dispersed the atmosphere created by the strike. Despite this, the strike was an impressive example of worker solidarity.

With files from Libcom.org.