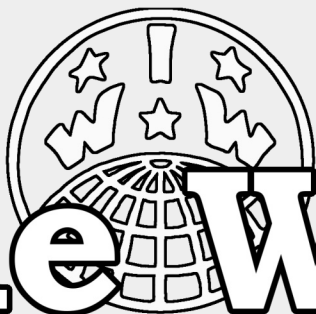


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# Seattle Worker

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**LUCY** PARSONS

# Editor's Desk

This themed issue of the Seattle Worker considers how the lessons of Black Lives Matter apply to the workplace. The labor movement has long struggled with racism, exclusion, segregation, and erasure of the contributions made by people of color. How do we turn that around?

Please send any feedback and questions to [seattleworker@gmail.com](mailto:seattleworker@gmail.com). Next month's theme will be "Organizing Nuts and Bolts."

## Editorial Committee:

Chair: FW Phil  
Editor: FW x348565  
FW Alana L.  
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FW Noah



Email: [seattleiww@gmail.com](mailto:seattleiww@gmail.com)  
Social: [facebook.com/seattleiww](https://facebook.com/seattleiww)  
[twitter.com/seattleiww](https://twitter.com/seattleiww)  
Phone: 206.429.5285  
Mail: 1122 E. Pike Street, #1142  
Seattle, WA 98122  
Website: [seattleiww.org](https://seattleiww.org)

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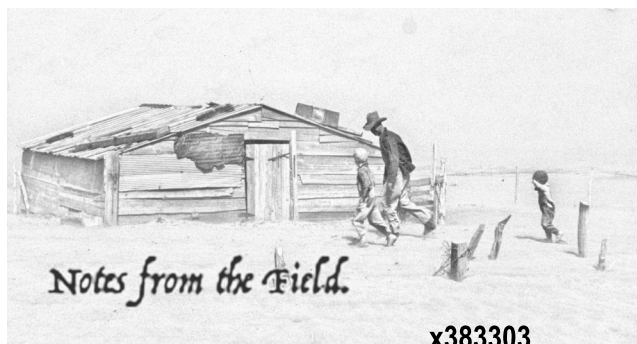
Produced and edited by the Seattle IWW. Articles not so designated do not reflect the IWW's official position.

**Submissions welcome! Email articles, article ideas, news items, editorials, artwork, and photographs to:**

[seattleworkeriww@gmail.com](mailto:seattleworkeriww@gmail.com)

This month's cover art features Lucy Parsons, whose organizing, fiery oration, writings, direct action, defiance of the police, and free speech fights shaped the labor movement from the 1870s through 1941. She was a founding delegate to the IWW and her remarks in the founding convention became central tenets in the IWW. To learn more about Lucy Parsons, visit:

<https://archive.iww.org/history/biography/LucyParsons/1/>



The Great Resignation has gained momentum through StrikeTober and is now threatening the bottom lines of many companies. US workers are voting with their feet. The injustices, inequality, and oppressive work conditions are driving them to reexamine the nature of work and life. The owners and bosses are at wits end. Rather than treating and paying their workers better, their "new" solution is to expand the workforce.

In Wisconsin, the oligarchs' legislature is attempting to expand the hours that children are allowed to work. They even have a new term for child workers: Opportunity Employees. The new legislation will allow 14-year-olds to work as late as 11 p.m.

Current state and federal child labor laws say that workers under the age of 16 must stop work at 7 p.m. during the school year and 9 p.m. during the summer. Already we allow children to work in agriculture as young as 12 years old. In Oregon, McDonald's is actively recruiting 14-year-olds.

It's clear our capitalist system is broken when we bring back child labor.

We all need music to get by every day. Old time Wobs used music to teach and tell the stories needed to organize workers. Now, a couple of red carders are performing under the banner "We Want It All" in Olympia, WA. The self-described Libertarian Communist cooperative band, The Window Smashing Job Creators, is educating us with their unique Punk Klezmer indy songs.

Their newest album Full Unemployment features stirring songs like "Barricade Blues," "Red Sky Rag," and "Ecology Boogie." A big favorite is "Communism in Space." The first line, "I'm looking through these bottles of change, I can't afford to pay my rent," hits home.



Check them out at:

<https://thewindowsmashingjobcreators.bandcamp.com/>

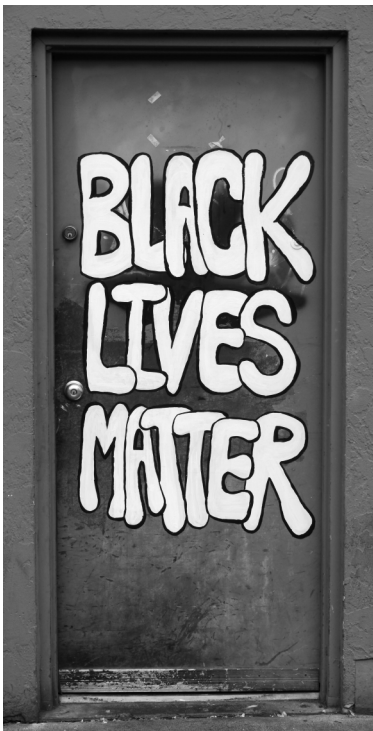
*continued on page 5*

# Solidarity Unionism and Black Lives Matter

by FW X406170

Finding an intersection between the lessons stemming out of the Black Lives Matter movement and where they meet with bartending might be a little strange, but there are some meaningful lessons to be brought "behind the pine." As the protests surrounding the murder of George Floyd began to dramatically increase in the summer of 2020, my coworkers and I decided we wanted to make a substantive change in the way we approached our job—not just putting up a sign, but making a material alteration to the way our work intersected with our community. Unfortunately, we had one big barrier: the owner of our bar. The spouse of a Chicago Police Officer, our boss had internalized misinformation and had no interest in anything to do with the Black Lives Matter movement. Fortunately, we were able to find a workaround that allowed our solidarity union to change how we operated, without needing to expose ourselves to too much workplace retaliation.

Our bar is a pretty small operation—the owner and four employees. We've had a solidarity union for about two years now—three of us together, with the one "old hat" bartender who has no interest in working together with us. On our shifts, we already work solo, so this makes it easy to work around the outlier. By and large our boss is fantastic. We've done two marches on the boss, and both times she's agreed to our demands on the spot, no fuss. But when it came to making changes as a result of the Black Lives Matter movement, we knew we had to get creative in winning the changes we wanted.



*Rick Obst, Wikimedia Commons,  
CC-BY2. Desaturated.*

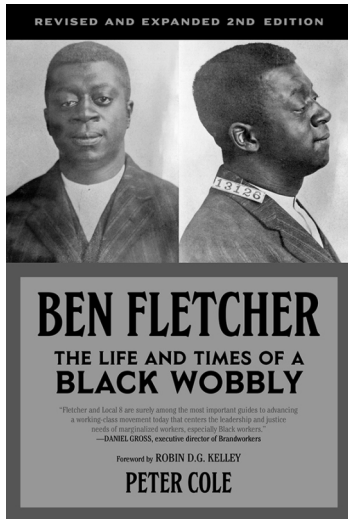
Working at a dive bar, we've found there's a propensity for mischief and mayhem that can unfold at night. As patrons get deeper into their cups, cutting a customer off or asking them to leave can mean a real, material risk. What if they get violent, either with me or another patron? What if another patron tries to "help" and makes things worse? It's for this reason that nearly every bar and restaurant counsels their employees to use some variation of "ask once, call the police immediately afterwards if they refuse." However, it's been made abundantly clear that police respond differently based on race. For the safety of all our patrons, the three of us decided that we needed to make calling the police the absolute last resort.

We each researched de-escalation techniques, compiled our notes, got together and compared what we found. We synthesized our notes together into a new plan: how to remove a drunk and unruly patron without calling the police. In mid-July of 2020, we put the plan into practice and checked back in with each other to see what worked and what wasn't working. With time, we honed it in, and we finally told the owner what we were doing. By couching it as "protecting the business from the risk of increased insurance rates," we got the owner to sign on board. They then went to the one worker outside our solidarity union and required that the lone standout adopt our plan as well.

As 2021 comes to a close, the business has dialed 911 only twice—this is down from an average of 2-3 times per month. The difference has been noticed by our community as well; we've gotten a noticeable increase in our BIPOC customers, and patrons have remarked that they feel safer with us than at other bars, because they see how we can calmly defuse a situation.

None of this would have been possible if one of us went to the owner alone. It was because we had three of us, working together in solidarity with a common goal and demonstrable results, that we could make this meaningful change for our job and our community.

# Ben Fletcher, Leader of Interracial Unionism



by FW Murray

Peter Cole's new edition of *Ben Fletcher: The Life and Times of a Black Wobbly* is a fascinating account of a black labor leader in the early 20th century. Consisting of a long essay by Cole and numerous primary sources relating to Fletcher and his organizing efforts, the book provides a thorough view of how Fletcher served as a key leader in Local 8 of the Marine Transport Workers union and how this local functioned as a dominant force on the Philadelphia waterfront after unexpectedly winning a strike in 1913.

Nobody at the time thought the Philadelphia docks could be organized, due to the racial heterogeneity of the workforce (40% black, 60% white) and the multiplicity of companies owning piers. People just assumed that black workers would compete with white workers for the limited number of jobs, and the companies would sow division among the workforce through preferential hiring.

The organizing drive actually started when longshore workers approached Wobblies at the IWW hall and asked them for support. These workers had no knowledge of industrial unionism and limited understanding of capitalism, but they were desperate for a change from the tyrannical authority of the bosses and the extraordinary physical demands of their labor. They routinely pushed dollies weighing a thousand pounds or

lifted five hundred pound slabs of bacon, and the bosses often forced work gangs to toil for extended periods of overtime—in one case 110 consecutive hours of hard labor.

After consulting with IWW organizers, the dock workers formulated a set of demands: more basic pay, limits on overtime work, and union recognition. These modest demands galvanized the waterfront, and hundreds signed up immediately. Initially, most of the workers were white (Poles and Lithuanians), but then black workers started to join. Cole believes that Fletcher was instrumental in persuading many African-Americans to join. He cites numerous accounts of Fletcher's powerful and engaging soapbox oratory, which often attracted large groups of workers eager to hear him speak. The strike was relatively brief. It began peacefully, but tensions mounted as the local press and business establishment attacked the workers for being "putty" in the hands of dangerous radicals who threatened "the basic institutions of civilization." When the shipping companies attempted to bring in strikebreakers, the workers responded by encircling them with a much larger group of picketers. Some fights erupted, with both sides resorting to fists, pipes, and clubs. As news of the conflict spread, about a thousand people from the dockside community poured into the street to support the strikers. A large group of union carpenters, employed to repair some piers, put down their tools. Grocers and barbers and preachers all pledged their support. Faced with this overwhelming display of solidarity, shippers and pier owners capitulated, and Local 8, with about three thousand members, was established. Apparently, the capitalists had decided that granting some basic rights was not really a grave threat to "civilization."

One key to Local 8's success was its recognition of black workers as an integral part of the working class. Previous efforts to organize the Philadelphia docks had failed because companies had successfully pitted one group against another. But the IWW was different. It accepted people of all creeds and colors as a matter of principle.

During the strike, the IWW leaders made sure that all strike-related groups, including the 15-member negotiating committee, included people from all ethnic and racial groups. The union also insisted that all work groups be fully integrated, a practice that continued as long as Local 8 existed.

Once established, the union flourished as the voice of the workers for almost ten years. Local 8 engaged in general work stoppages against recalcitrant companies and sometimes used direct action to protest specific employer practices. They might walk off the job after a full day's shift if increased overtime pay was not guaranteed. They might refuse to load cargo if working conditions were unsafe. And they might slow down the pace of work if the bosses insisted on a speed-up.

Local 8 was a strong group in part because it had loyal community support, especially from the black community. As W.E.B. Du Bois documented in his 1899 book *The Philadelphia Negro*, the city was deeply racist, with limited opportunities for black workers and growing residential segregation. But in the dockside community and on the piers there was a hopeful sense of general equality. Black and white people worked together, they marched in community parades together, and they participated in picnics and educational meetings together. As many as four hundred workers, black and white, would gather in weekly forums to discuss economic theory, racism, and the politics of the day.

This vibrant political culture did not withstand the overwhelming oppositional forces arrayed against it. The federal government greatly weakened Local 8 by imprisoning Fletcher, along with 105 other Wobblies around the country, on bogus "sedition" charges prior to American entry into World War I. When Fletcher was released three years later, he had to limit his union activities as a condition of his parole. Moreover, the IWW itself was in turmoil, decimated by the post-war Palmer raids and divided over organizational and political disputes.

Also, the local's economic leverage was weaker because the shipping companies were larger, owned more piers, and had developed alternate ways of transport in the event of a strike. Many of them were also subsidized by a federal shipping board determined to break the union. The workers were less unified, with many new black workers coming from the Deep South in search of jobs, along with numerous white Wobblies from the Pacific Northwest coming to take advantage of the IWW rule that members could transfer from one local to another. The white Wobblies from the Northwest were more interested in immediate revolutionary activity, rather than maintaining a stable union. At the same time, says Cole, many of the newly arrived southern blacks had limited experience with unions, and were therefore more open to recruitment from other groups, such as the rival AFL business union or the separatist UNIA movement of Marcus Garvey. In 1922 the shipping owners took advantage of this disunity and decreased union leverage, forcing a lockout of all IWW members. Eventually the local was drained of resources, and workers had to renounce the union in order to keep their jobs.

Even after the local was broken, Ben Fletcher persisted as a committed advocate of industrial unionism. He briefly left the IWW in 1923 but returned in 1924. An attempt to rebuild Local 8 in 1927 was not successful, so Fletcher spent more time as a traveling IWW speaker and a supporter of other union struggles. He retired from organizing after a serious stroke in 1933 but continued to live until 1949, often passing time with fellow Wobblies.

Now, with the publication of this book, readers have a chance to study his lifework and develop new ideas and approaches for achieving a genuine interracial union movement. A brief essay from 1923, "The Negro and Organized Labor," might be of special interest. It outlines a bold program of erasing race exclusion clauses, creating more powerful unions on an industry-wide basis, breaking down craft jurisdictions through intensive education, securing "political enfranchisement" in the South, and forming cadres of organizers to start black caucuses within predominantly white unions. He even envisions "Organized Labor Banks, Political Parties, Educational Institutions, cooperatives", all in order to "get somewhere near the goal of economic emancipation from the thralldom of the rich." Clearly, Fletcher was a serious, consequential person. His ideas, and the interracial movement he helped organize in Philadelphia, both deserve our respect.



## Notes from the Field (cont.)

Attacks on journalists have been a hallmark of our society from the beginning. As usual, the only effective way for journalists to protect themselves and build a better society is to ORGANIZE.

The IWW Freelance Journalists Union, recognizing that freelance journalists work all over the world, has a goal of bringing them all together as one forceful group. This month the FJU celebrates the chartering of Industrial Union 450, which brings together workers from the printing and publishing industry. Congratulations!

The Freelance Journalist Union can be followed at:

<https://freelancejournalistsunion.org/>

# Black Inclusion and the IWW

by FW Noah

The IWW prides itself as a union that, since 1905, belongs to all workers, regardless of race. At the time of its founding it was still widely considered a radical idea that a union was willing to take on black workers or value them as much as they valued white workers, while other unions had created a palpable rift between the black and white working class—and exacerbating the racial wealth gap—by segregating their members or excluding black workers entirely. The effects on this discrimination can still be felt widely to this day, and despite the better efforts of labor organizers over the years, there is still hesitation in large segments of the working class—including black workers—towards getting involved with union activism. This has created a stereotype that unions are predominantly white-led fields of activism.

Although the IWW has been racially inclusive from the beginning, a question needs to be asked: what are labor unions, including the IWW, doing to ensure racial equity and solidarity in the workplace today? Are unions effective at doing so, or have they taken the mantle of the capitalists we fight by using placating language and a vague notion of “being in it together”? These questions need answers now more than ever, as the hands of capital make quick work to deflect and downplay the role of capitalism in racial discrimination, pay disparity, and wealth inequality. As the younger generation like myself puts it, white workers in the union need to “vibe check” ourselves and take stock of our own biases and blind spots when it comes to making sure that black workers are fully included and respected, have the same opportunities for active involvement and leadership, and generally get their fair share.

One thing the IWW must take into account to ensure the better inclusion of our black fellow workers is fighting against the notion that labor organizing and unions are white-dominated fields of activism. While it is important to remember our past history of organizing, such as Ben Fletcher's work with the Philadelphia dock workers, let's not refer to these events for some kind of social credit, but instead explore the lessons that

can be learned from Fletcher's example of unionizing racially diverse shops.

While there are important lessons to be learned from previous organizing, one thing we Wobblies need to do is to value and learn from the efforts of black workers and organizers attempting to create better conditions in the present. Black workers are more likely than workers of any other race to be unionized, according to the Department of Labor Statistics. Current organizing efforts, such as the Amazon Workers Union on Staten Island or organizing at Amazon in Georgia, show that black workers have both an interest and a drive to lead organizing efforts and educate their coworkers on the benefits of a union. Black-led organizing is often underrepresented or unreported in the media, causing us not only to forget these actions but potentially lose lessons learned from these experiences. Our union has the chance to create spaces where anti-racist education and strategies become a normalized part of labor organizing, and to use our funds for aid in current organizing efforts. Our recent internal union elections approved of the Ben Fletcher Fund, a considerable sum of money set aside specifically for workers of color to travel to attend organizer training and union conventions for no cost. I believe this is a step in the right direction, just as the Charlie Sato fund encouraged and assisted women in the union, and just as the Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC) supports incarcerated workers, who are disproportionately black and people of color. I hope that we continue to take steps to include and recognize black workers in the IWW.



Another way the IWW can defeat this notion of unionism being a white dominated field is to continue discussing and strategizing around the collaboration of black workers in organizing projects. Direct inclusion as a member of an organizing committee, training or outreach better ensures that the needs of black workers are met head-on, rather than by indirect representation or considering the needs of black workers as an addendum to workplace-related

*(continued on page 7)*



# Remembering Larry Hildes



On Saturday morning, November 20th, at 3:30 AM, Fellow Worker Larry Hildes, our friend, musician, social activist, and defense attorney for the downtrodden and oppressed, passed away quietly, surrounded by the love of his family who were close by. Larry had been ailing with congestive heart failure for nearly four years which steadily progressed in severity and ultimately was the cause of his death. He was preceded in death by his beloved wife FW Karen Weill, who died in March 2020 as the result of complications related to the removal of a brain tumor. Larry lived in Bellingham, WA. He was a paid-up, charter member of the Whatcom-Skagit GMB.

A public funeral service was held Tuesday November 23rd at 11:30 AM in Bellingham. A few dozen fellow workers attended from around the region to pay their respects.

Larry's work in taking on the legal struggles of those among us least able to defend ourselves in court was relentless and ongoing. Over the years Larry never wavered in his commitment to seeking justice for those who had been victimized by the system. For the last few years FW Larry was Leonard Peltier's attorney. Larry first joined the IWW in 1990, when as a young attorney he participated in legal defense for IWWs and Earth First members during the famous "Redwood Summer" environmental and organizing efforts. But despite this tremendous professional commitment to what were often frustrating and losing causes, Larry maintained a hopeful and optimistic outlook. He also had a deep love of music, of travel, and of sports. To the very end of his life he religiously attended online folk music circles during Covid, and was a contributor of many beautiful and powerful songs. He loved baseball, enjoyed football, and was looking forward to being a Kraken fan. Larry

was also one of the wickedly best punsters this world has ever produced.

Larry will be deeply missed by those who loved him, and yet those who cared for Larry breathe a deep sigh of relief as well today, for the simple reason that Larry is for the first time in a very long time, not suffering the pains of a disease that came to limit his life to the hotel room that he and Karen had come call home.

Larry, you may be gone, but you are still with us.

Your Wobbly friends and comrades,

Tuck, Scott, and Linda

Whatcom-Skagit GMB

## Black Inclusion (cont.)

concerns. Furthermore, we should also "show up," demonstrate solidarity, and offer assistance with black-led or black-majority workplaces attempting to unionize, whether or not they intend to unionize with the IWW. Offering the skills and services of the IWW and showing up to actions can be instrumental to assisting the efforts of workers who might not have the access or the funds, and can illuminate the efforts of black organizers while creating greater solidarity between unions and other labor-related efforts.

Let's be clear: all of this will be for naught if unions are only concerned with appearing more "progressive" or appealing to black workers. Like many capitalists or businesses, this would only be mimicking the tactics used by them to promote a false sense of security or complacency in the workplace regarding racism. "Tokenizing"—using black workers as a defense from criticism or dialogue—would only undermine our efforts to create genuine racial solidarity and anti-racist practices in our workplace, and would fly in the face of how we Wobblies define a union. We should understand that many of our spaces—including the union—are often white-dominated and fail to account for the input or concerns black workers may have about union spaces. These concerns should be taken seriously by the union, and with much greater consideration.

The IWW has the capability and the passion for ensuring that all of our workers have their specific needs met in the workplace or the union itself. Now is the time to double down on those values and create a better union for all.

## About the Seattle IWW

Founded in Chicago in 1905, the IWW is open to all workers. Don't let the "industrial" part fool you: our members include teachers, social workers, retail workers, construction workers, bartenders and computer programmers. Only bosses and cops are not allowed to join. If you are currently unemployed, you can still join. We are a volunteer-driven union, and this means we run the union. Membership dues are used to maintain the union and assist organizing campaigns. As a result, monthly dues are low. To join, visit:

<https://iww.org/membership/>

### Take the Organizer Training!

The Organizer Training 101 (OT101) is an intensive, four-day training that teaches you all the basic skills and tools they need to build an organizing committee at your workplace—from the ground up. You will learn what constitutes a union, how to have one-on-one conversations with coworkers, the basics of labor law, and how to organize and carry out a direct action.

The Seattle General Membership Branch holds regular trainings—free during the pandemic. If you'd like to be notified of the time and date, visit:

<https://forms.gle/q9edxoGrEVXhMVd89>

### Organize Your Workplace!

The Industrial Workers of the World want to help you improve the conditions of your workplace. If you have questions, or would like to begin organizing your workplace, visit:

<https://seattleiww.org/organize-your-workplace/>

## Preamble to the IWW Constitution

**T**he 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 the 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 in 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 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.



**In November. . .  
We Remember**



On what is now called the Vancouver B.C. waterfront, indigenous workers from the Squamish and Tleil-Watuth communities formed the first waterfront union: IWW Local 526.

## Support the Seattle Worker

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