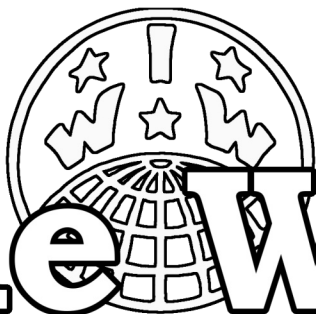


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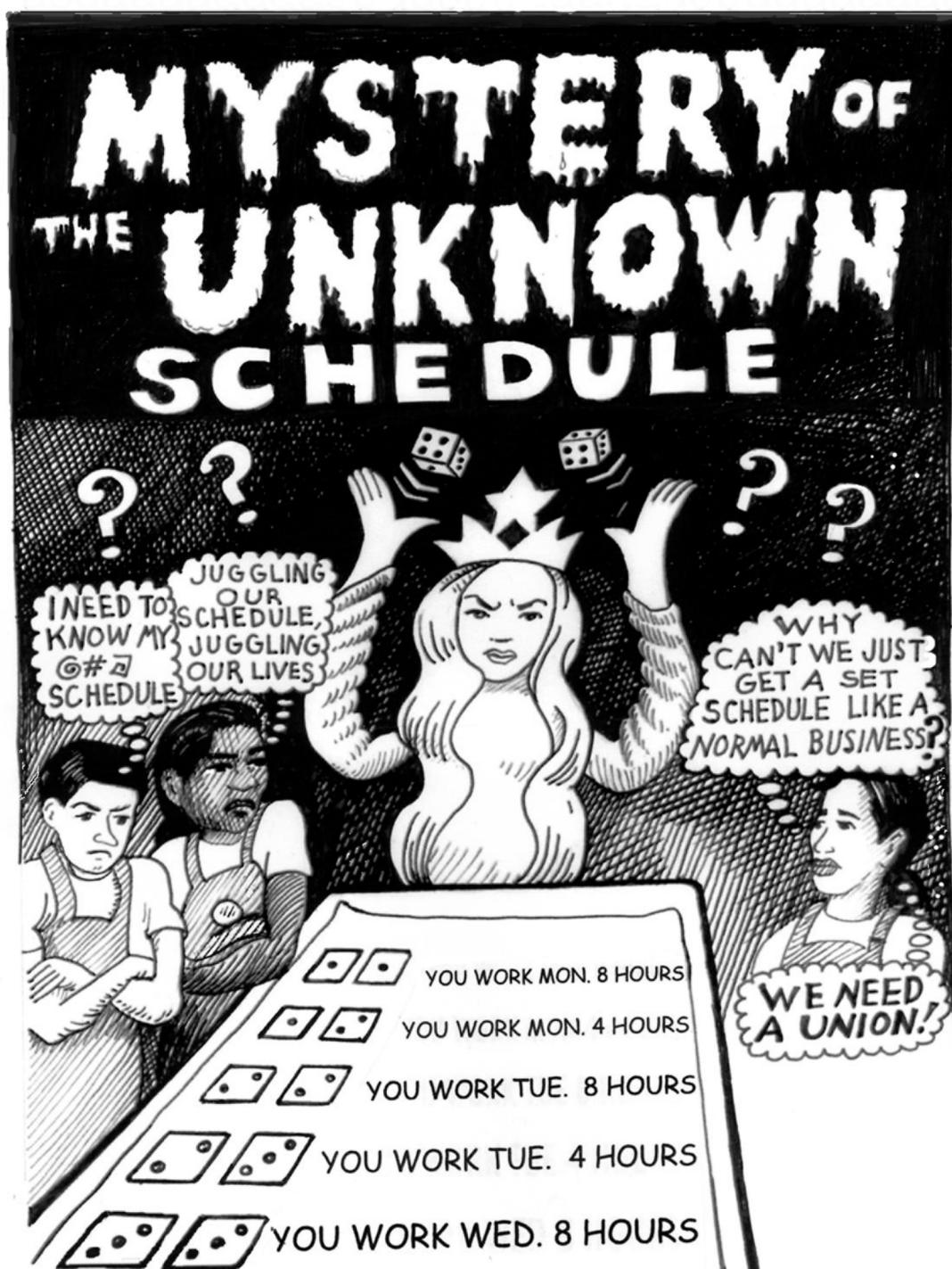
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Tom Keough

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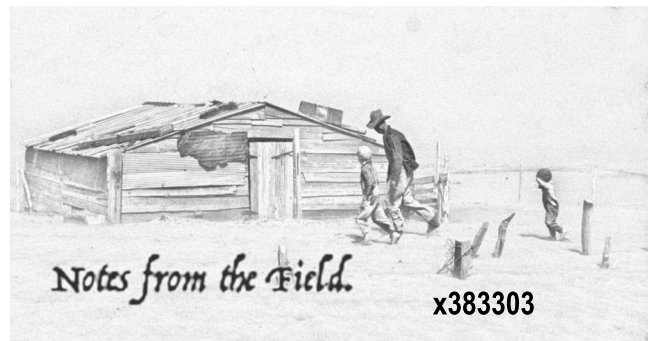
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Cover image by Tom Keough, used with permission



In this issue, we chat with Wobblies about the nuts and bolts of organizing the workplace. A fellow worker from Seattle's campaigns committee talks about how she became an organizer, how she manages burnout, and how Seattle's organizing mentor program works. Fellow workers from the IWW's Organizing Department Board and Education Department Board, both seasoned organizers, weigh in on general strikes and what the law does—and doesn't—protect.

Look forward next time to our "May Day" issue!



In a report by Kroger Foods, "State of the Associate" (2017), the food chain revealed that their workers struggled to afford the basics, that 20% of their "associates" are on various types of government assistance, and that the trend is increasing. The report also pointed out that almost 20% of workers live below the "official" poverty line, even with some government support.

Another report surveying 10,000 Kroger workers in Southern California, Colorado, and Washington State commissioned last summer by their union, the United Food and Commercial Workers, found that 78 percent of workers are food insecure,

Unfortunately, Kroger hadn't taken the problems outlined to heart. And when entering negotiations with their workers, the cookie jar was empty. Why was it empty? Well, just two years ago, the CEO got an almost 50% raise. That \$6 million elevated his wage to over \$20 million. Sorry, worker—the cookie jar is empty. There's none left for you.

So, Kroger chose to oppose worker demands, and this January forced a strike in Colorado. Fortunately, the solidarity

continued on page 6

Every Member an Organizer:

Interview with Fellow Worker Constance

For this issue, Fellow Worker Noah interviewed Seattle organizer Constance about the joys and challenges of organizing workplaces.

Fellow Worker Noah: So Constance, how did you get to be involved in the IWW in the first place?

Fellow Worker Constance: In 2019, a few of my coworkers had been talking about organizing at my shop. One of our coworkers, an IWW member, got a few of us together and we started chatting about day to day issues in the workplace. We tried to get an organizing committee together, but it ended up falling apart for a number of reasons, not the least of which I don't think any of us knew what we were doing. Our hearts were in the right places, but it was just really tough. That campaign fell apart, and a bunch of us ended up getting laid off.

But one of my coworkers continued on his journey with the IWW and periodically touched base with me. My former co-worker kept encouraging me to take Organizer Training 101 (OT101), and while I initially dropped out on the second day the first time I took the course, thanks to my coworker a year later I retook the course and finished it. Keeping in touch with the Seattle branch as well as other members encouraged me to be a more active member—take meeting notes, pitch ideas, and so on.

I was asked to become an organizing mentor, and started helping out with other campaigns, and then was asked to

It's a marathon, it's not a sprint.

become a branch delegate to help with onboarding new IWW members. Since then, I've taken OT101 several more times, helped start a campaign at one of my former workplaces, and recently become an OT101 trainer myself!

Managing multiple campaigns and switching jobs in 2021 gave me a lot of insight. There was great coaching from my fellow workers. It was a lot to handle for one person, but I realized the more of us stepped up, the less work there would be on everybody's shoulders. One of the biggest roles you can set for yourself as an organizer is to replace yourself.

Noah: So you became an organizer? What does that entail?

Constance: The IWW considers anyone who is organizing their workplace to be an organizer. We first recommend folks attend OT101, which is free and open to all workers, regardless of union membership, which helps teach folks how to organize their own workplaces. Someone who is actively following the steps to organize, which is connecting with fellow workers, finding common cause on how to improve working conditions, taking steps to build solidarity towards collective action—anyone who takes these steps is an organizer.

Noah: You mentioned previously that you were taking care of multiple campaigns in the past, which can be a lot to handle. What are some other challenges about working in organizing?

Constance: Definitely the emotional labor. Organizing can sometimes make you resentful, angry, bitter, that your free time and energy are being given to this particular thing. That was really difficult for me personally, but I generally have problems saying no to begin with. But we organize because we care. How can you put bounds on passion? It's hard to put balance in principle, but your spiritual and mental energy and your health absolutely can put a hard stop to your ability to organize for the long term. And so if I didn't want to burn out as an organizer, I needed to be very real about what I can and can't take on. That is an ongoing lesson that I am still trying to learn.

Noah: I've certainly found myself close to that edge of burnout, in my work for the Seattle Worker and the Wob Radio Hour. I'm on two or three different committees at the moment, and there's this very definite line of "If I accept anything more, I'm gonna start getting a little bitter and resentful at my fellow workers." What helps you get through those periods of emotional or mental exhaustion?

Constance: I think it's good to remember: don't rush. I think that we should harness existing dynamics about life, about relationships. You know, you're not always hanging out with your friends at full blast right? There are also times where you just have to remind yourself, it's a marathon, it's not a sprint. It's important to take time off, and we're all the better for it. We're human.

Noah: What's one way workers can still stay motivated to work collectively together at a particular shop, even if a campaign falls apart?

Constance: One thing that we often encourage people to do is—especially if you're already a member of the IWW and you've gone through OT101—take advantage of Seattle's Organizing Mentor Program.

Noah: What is Seattle's organizing mentor program?

Constance: The organizing mentor program, which is coordinated by the Campaigns Committee, connects workers who want to be doing organizing work, but can't do so for various reasons, with campaigns who could benefit from an experienced organizer. In general, folks who are organizing mentors are “red card holders” (union members) who have had experience organizing their own workplaces or have helped out on other campaigns. They've typically taken OT101 more than once. Workers who have taken OT101 but are unable to organize their workplaces can still become organizing mentors, and will usually be paired with a more experienced organizing mentor.

The mentor program actually has an advantage that can be easy to overlook: a lot of industries like white collar companies turn people into pseudo managers. They're not actually managers, they don't have hiring or firing power or direct influence over compensation or benefits or anything like that, but they make you a “creative lead” or something like that. And it just creates this mindfuck for people where they think they're management when they aren't. “But I'm still screwed over like a worker, but my interest should be with management” they say, and so people are confused. And I can't tell you how many people that we've sort of recruited into our organizing mentor ranks that occupy that exact space where they have solidarity, a strong class consciousness that they're a worker. And yet, because they're pseudo managers, it's probably not a good idea for them to be heading up or pushing the organizing at their particular shop. And so whether your campaign falls apart or you find yourself in this weird position, you can't be the one that's driving the organizing efforts.

Definitely becoming an organizing mentor is the path that we want for you to get great experience. Seeing all sorts of different types of shops and how they might organize you begin to understand better what it might be like to organize outside of your industry. Organizing is just all about experience. You just have to have those experiences whether someone shares them with you, or you've personally gone through them. And so yeah, I would, I would definitely recommend and not to mention, the

campaigns committee would love to have more organizing mentors.

Noah: You said there was an organizing mentorship program, right? Yes. How would fellow workers find out more about that?

Constance: There is an email for the campaigns committee that people can reach out to: organize@seattleiww.org. There are more people reaching out asking us for help, and so we need more organizing and campaign mentors so we can reduce the overall workload. Once you reach out, we just take it from there. We have conversations with folks, there's some training, a lot of it is just on the job. We almost always pair a new member with a senior organizing mentor, someone who is very experienced in the practice of organizing and campaigns work. You just get to like slowly become comfortable with it until you can take on more.

Noah: Within the past year and a half there's this huge interest in unions again, as people begin to realize that the infrastructure and their bosses really don't give a damn about them. How has COVID changed the nature of campaigns?

Constance: That's a really interesting question. I think COVID has made folks reprioritize what's important for them. The disparity for people who can work from home and people who can't, and the myriad ways in which the different ways that different companies handle it, have exposed how corporations and bosses lie. At one of my previous shops, the boss swore up and down that working from home was the thing that we could never do. But when COVID hit it was just fine. It was more than fine. In some cases it was better, especially for that stage of the work that we were in.

I also think it affected folks from marginalized backgrounds (women, people of color, and so on) in a tangible way as well. Women in my industry have told me they will never accept a job that requires them to go back into the office because they are so relieved at not having to deal with all this stuff that they should not be subjected to, that they should be able to get a redress for in the workplace, but they don't because the bosses don't care. People are also changing jobs and seeing the difference in benefits. To see what bosses and businesses are willing to offer really made people go, “Oh, I'm way more valued,” and “There are people beating down my door who want to hire me, so why should I work for you?”

However, it's really heartening to see as an organizer that a lot of people are choosing to stay at their workplaces and go, “I would rather fix the place that I'm at.”

Ask an Organizer

Is it Time for a General Strike?



Seattle Worker asked Kait Murphy, chair of the IWW Organizing Department Board, Greater Chicago IWW organizing committee co-chair, and contract administrator for the Dill Pickle Workers Union.

SW: With May Day coming up, a lot of people are putting out calls for a “general strike.” Is that effective?

Unfortunately, simply making proclamations on the internet does not typically lead to workplace organizing. I reached out to the “October Strike” steering team last year to try and talk strategy, bringing along a few SEIU staffers I happen to know, and we had a call that went absolutely nowhere because folks did not want to hear that workplace organizing is hard, and often slow, work. Their ideas relied primarily on creating an attractive website and social media accounts, posting graphics that would get peoples’ attention, and gaining the endorsements of labor unions. Of course, none of those things actually build worker power, and the last item is pretty much an impossible ask.

SW: What’s the quickest way to build for a general strike?

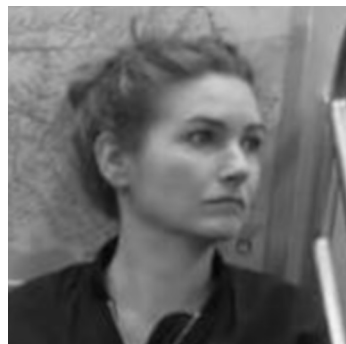
I don’t believe that there is a quick, as in, from a few months to a year, method for this. The way that general strikes work is that unions build up a high density in specific industrial sector and face conditions that make a strike authorization vote a no-brainer. I believe that in order for a general strike to happen now, people in the United States need to get wise to the fact that the National Labor Relations Board is in place to stifle battles in the class war such as general strikes, or even regular strikes

and single-occurrence direct actions. Folks need to move towards a more Wobbly idea of unionism that emphasizes shop floor relationship-building and militant direct action, and de-emphasizes the legalistic approach and reliance on parties that chase a bottom line (service unions, politicians, and the like). In my view, most unions do not have a financial interest in making militant labor organizing happen among the working class in a general sense, so it will be majorly uphill for any lone actor who sets out with the end goal of “organize a general strike.”

SW: What’s one thing that we can do right now?

I think that folks should engage as fully as they can in the OT101 model of solidarity unionism, focusing on building organizing committees where they work and helping others to do the same. I really believe that the only way we will see widespread labor action in our lifetimes is by forging real relationships with folks, sharing knowledge, and training as many people up as possible to be confident operating outside of the established labor relations status quo.

Does the Law Protect Workers?



Seattle Worker asked Marianne Garneau the editor of *Organizing.work* and a member of the IWW Education Department Board.

SW: What legal protections do workers have from the U.S. Department of Labor? What can they get in trouble from? Does it vary by industry? What if there’s a non-traditional work environment?

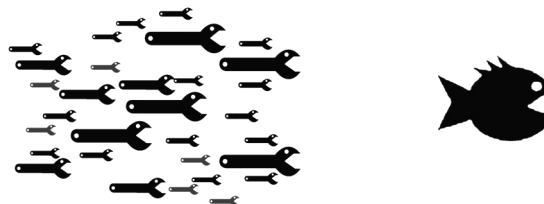
The best answers and really the universal advice for organizing are to be found in our very hard-earned training program,

which distilled some 20 years of organizing lessons. You map out the workplace. You collect contact information. You have one-on-one conversations. Eventually, you map out an issue and intelligently formulate a campaign around that issue, etc. (I am leaving out the 102 which is about building scalable and sustainable long-term structures for any size workplace.)

Not only do I think the important lessons are to be found there, but I think that getting any more granular with things like a legal context or peculiarities of a profession or employment situation is actually counterproductive. It convinces you that there is something unique about a particular work situation that overrides the general lessons we otherwise know about building worker power. And then you might unintentionally turn around and transmit that to the workers.

I say this as someone who has organized in a multitude of different contexts (for profit, not for profit, regular employees, so-called independent contractors or freelancers, private

companies, publicly traded companies, large employers, small employers, private employers, public employers, Canada, the United States, etc.) I've organized with the IWW and I've organized with mainstream unions. Some of my opinions about organizing have evolved fairly significantly over time. But the more I organize, the more convinced I am that the IWW approach, with its forsaking of labor law and concentration on building direct power in the workplace wielded by workers, is the only thing that is actually effective.



Notes from the Field (continued)

of workers and the community resulted in a winning combination. After nine days on the line, the workers won raises between \$2 and \$6 per hour, and just as important: respect.

But what about the yearly theft by Kroger executives, directors, and stockholders that continues? How will we get back into balance?

They won't just give it to us. We need to ORGANIZE!

With the beginning of a new year, the wave of strikes that started last year is continuing. The Cornell University Labor Action Tracker reported that there were 346 strikes or job actions in the US in 2021, and the first months of 2022 are keeping up the same blistering pace. From coal miners in Alabama to concrete drivers in Seattle, to nurses in Massachusetts, and to grocery workers in Colorado, workers are stepping up and taking a stand.

To start off this year, workers at a Buffalo Starbucks voted to unionize, and over 50 Starbucks locations throughout the U.S. have filed for union representation. One of them is here in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood.

A worker's response to a reporter's question summed it all up: "They try to tell us 'The union's a third party, don't let them come between us.' But I'm like, 'Who do you think the union is? It's not separate: The union is us.'"

Yes, WE are the union. Solidarity Forever.

The Sundance Festival has a history of featuring cutting-edge social films. Over the years, the focus on non-mainstream films has waxed and waned as the festival became more corporate. This year's slate of movies has an exception. A film by Abigail Disney (grand-niece of Walt) puts in focus the reality of working for Disney.

The American Dream and Other Fairy Tales details the plight of all those smiling hosts you meet every time you go to a Disney park, and those who work on the back lots to do those basic jobs that keep things going. The film details how workers are on assistance, sleeping in their cars—many with families and many with no ability to pay for basic medical emergencies, working long, hard hours with little or no hope.

Possibly the most controversial thought coming out of the documentary relates to the American Dream message "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps." The film points out that offering educational benefits is a way of solidifying the thought that workers should be happy at their wage-slave job because they have the ability to pull themselves up and out with education. Unfortunately, the truth is that every ladder of success must have a bottom rung. Education makes you free? There are only two types of people: workers and bosses. All other categories are created by someone to divide us.

Your Boss Isn't Your Friend

by fw Phil

We're shocked by the firings. We thought we could just talk to them and by the power of our words and the righteousness of our goals, they would agree and even thank us for making a better world, right? —WRONG.

Why didn't it work? The reason is: your boss isn't your friend.

But wait, you say: my boss takes me out to lunch. I've been over to their house and gone fishing with them. Surly they respect me and have my best interests at heart. We're partners. —Well, at least until it hits the fan.

In the working world, your boss's job is on the line—just like yours. So, when push comes to shove at the job site, your boss will choose their needs over yours. They will cut your pay before theirs, and they will do their best to bust your union. They will say they have no choice and are "truly sorry, friend, but. . ." as they walk you out the door.

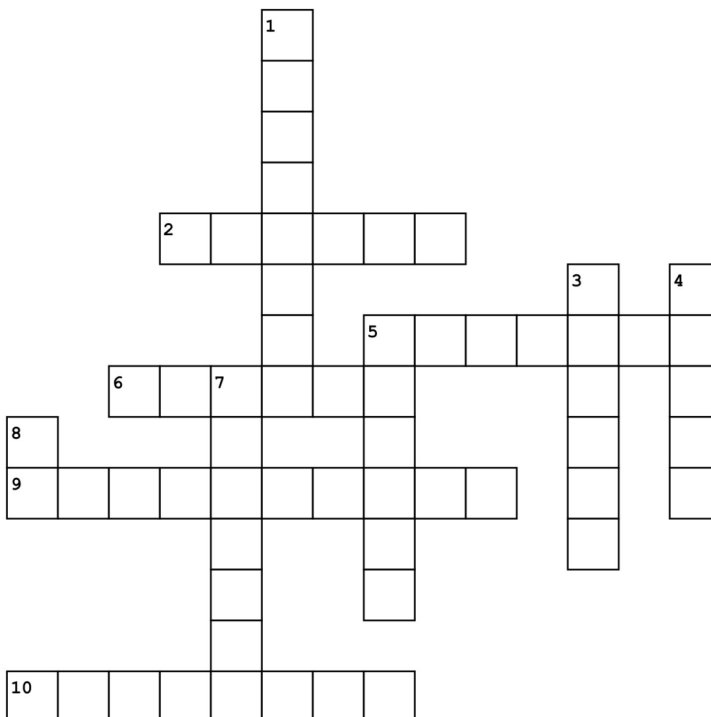
A great article in *The Guardian*, "Target Directs Managers to

Prevent Workers from Unionizing," reveals that Target has a very comprehensive anti-union plan that includes advising managers to watch for: small gatherings of workers, team members emerging as leaders, team members meeting with those recently terminated, and parking lot meetings with non-Target people. In other words, spying. —Just like a friend would.

Please also remember, you don't own company property. Recently, employees of a coffee chain in Memphis used the chain's store to film union-related interviews. They were fired for trespassing. The whole organizing campaign was destroyed. Please be smart, careful, and vigilant. We are not involved in a casual game.

Be aware of wolves in sheep's clothing—but organize regardless. The best way to build union support is to take one of the IWW's Organizer Training 101 courses. In it you will learn how to build and sustain a worker-positive space. The Seattle branch offers OT 101 and more advanced training on a regular basis. Visit the Seattle branch OT web page: <https://seattleiww.org/ot101registration/>

Organizing Nuts and Bolts



Across

- 2. shows organizers the ropes
- 5. strike without striking
- 6. type of collective action that wins demands
- 9. stronger together
- 10. working at a snail's pace

Down

- 1. building power person to person
- 3. IWW member
- 4. training program
- 5. collectively withholding labor
- 7. union card
- 8. the union is ____

<https://crosswordlabs.com/view/organizing-nuts-and-bolts>

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://seattleiww.org/ot101registration/>

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

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 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.

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LUCY PARSONS

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