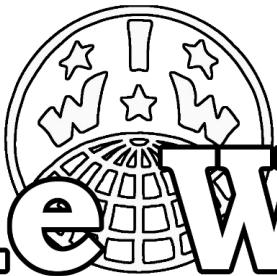


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## When We Fight We Win



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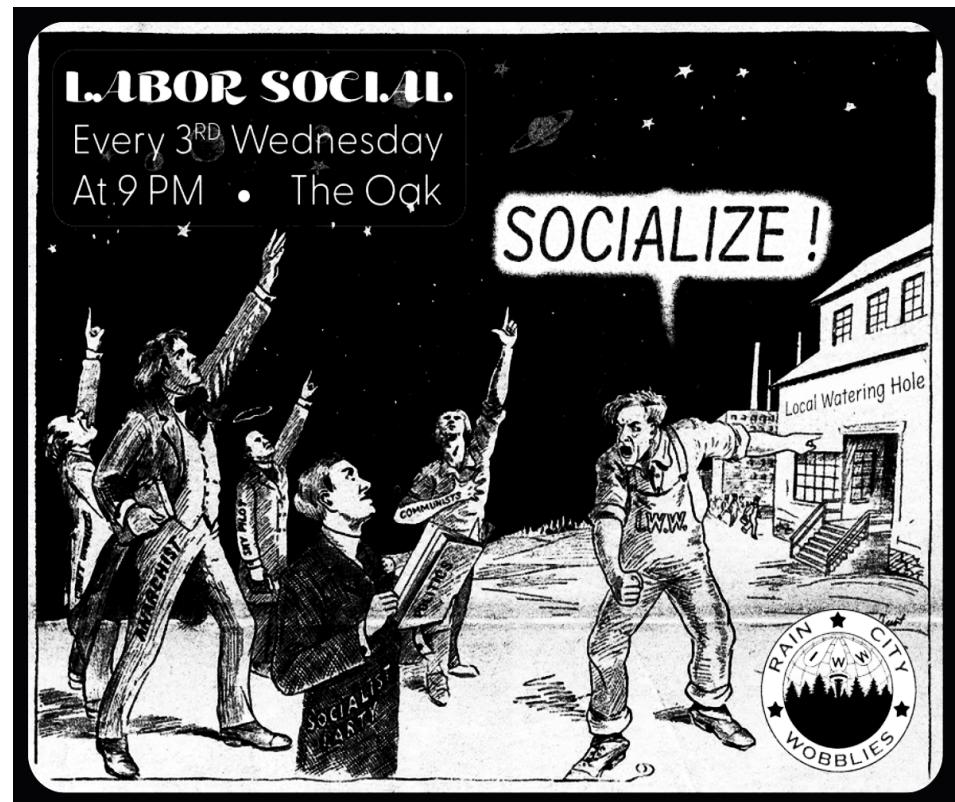
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Cover image from the 2025-2026

Starbucks Workers United strike.



# The View From Camp Contract:

## An Interview With a Starbucks Workers United Strike Captain

Starbucks Workers United (SBWU) baristas have set up a 24/7 camp outside Starbucks headquarters in SODO as part of their ongoing 'Red Cup Rebellion' strike. Camp Contract (as its name implies) intends to stay put until Starbucks returns to the table, agrees to a union contract, and resolves all of its outstanding Unfair Labor Practices (ULP) charges. We caught up with a strike captain at the camp to learn more about the union and its current campaign.



**Can you tell us your name and how long you've been working on this campaign?**

I'm Brenna Nendel, I go by she/her pronouns. I've been working for Starbucks for five years. I first unionized at the Eastlake location in Seattle in early 2022 and then my current store, Elliott, unionized in later 2022.

**SBWU has published a list of demands, including better hours, higher wages, and resolution to hundreds of unfair labor practices claims. Are there any details you'd like to add to the official statement or particularly emphasize with this protest at HQ?**

We've actually been discussing that over the last four or five days. It's kind of, in my opinion, ridiculous that it's come to this point where we've now been camped out at Starbucks headquarters for four days, and all we're asking for is that they return to the table with a new proposal that's more than what they've offered us. A two percent raise is all they've offered, which doesn't count for inflation and it's not enough to live off of. Starbucks is one of the top 14 corporations, with the highest percentage of workers on Medicaid in Washington state. They can afford to pay us enough—to give us a

fair contract, to give us a living wage. They can pay Brian Niccol the equivalent of \$57,000 an hour, but they're unwilling to give us anything more than what, for me, was a \$0.41 raise. So that's why we're camping out. It's not for a deposit to pay for a house. [laughs]

**The 'Red Cup Rebellion' started November 13th, now it's up to around 3800 baristas across hundreds of stores. How early on did your store unionize? Would you be able to speak to how things were toward the beginning vs how they've changed as the union has grown?**

I'd say at first the company wouldn't even give us the time of day. You'll still see in the media—they often will spew this—that it's only a small percentage of stores and we don't have very much bargaining power right now because [the strike involves] a small number of stores nationwide, but we do have a lot of power, and we're growing. Just the fact that Starbucks has union busted [proves it]. If you look at the Seattle market, we've been discussing that every time we hit even 10 stores as an area, Starbucks will shut down two or three of them because they're so afraid. Even the SODO reserve store here at corporate, the only reason they shut that down was because it was a union store. They can tout this whole "Oh, it wasn't making a profit," but I don't think the intention

of the store inside corporate headquarters where all of the workers there get a discount was for it to make a profit. It's very counterintuitive. So, they can say that all they want, but in reality, they just do not want union stores in their corporation because they're terrified of the power it has. And I think it really speaks to why they're trying to wait us out. Because the moment we have a contract, they know that the number of stores that are unionized is going to double or triple. It speaks to their fear of the power we can have, and I think that's an encouragement for our movement and for workers nationwide.

**Is that the tone on the ground then? Either here at this campout, or in the movement nationwide? Are the workers mostly feeling encouraged?**

The longer we're on strike, I think the more encouragement we have, even as discouraging as it is that the company still hasn't come to the table. Here, we were expecting with Camp Contract that we wouldn't be permitted to stay, that there would be police involved. But the support of our movement in the Seattle area—we've had multiple city councilpeople come and speak at our rallies. Future mayor Katie Wilson spoke at our rally, representative Pramila Jayapal came and spoke. The political power we have here and in New York City, the people are on our side. People are showing up. The Teacher's Association is here today, helping out. We are always getting food and product and all these things from people who are supporting us, which really has grown our willingness to keep fighting. And it's given us context: as much as we as baristas can get stuck in just looking for more money, our movement really is history-making, and it is going to change the union movement because it's the first union in retail. We're really fighting. There's been multiple attempts to unionize Starbucks before, and it's never been successful because they're an incredibly powerful corporation with the willingness to fire workers and blatantly break the law without giving a flying fuck, to be perfectly honest. [laughs] But here, we've had workers from all over the country come and join us and camp out here with us. Growing our movement from just 'store-by-store' to this collective where we're all fighting for our rights has been encouraging and has really kept us going as the weeks wear on.

**How does it feel interacting with the wider movement like that? With Seattle being the headquarters city, do you feel any special pressure to lead the way?**

What's interesting is on the east coast, union density is so much greater. I think there's a district in Pennsylvania where every single store is unionized except one. And there's union politics reasons for that. At first, we didn't even have staff out here when we started unionizing, we were just making it up as we went along, which I think is a really powerful part of how this started. When Buffalo

unionized, workers were encouraged to grab their friends and unionize their own stores even without the support network we have now with Workers United helping us set up, educating us on our rights and how we can fight this company for what we deserve. But yeah, I think in Seattle, we have been targeted by union busting really heavily. When we first unionized at Eastlake, the morning after we filed to unionize, they fired our opening server for a bullshit reason. The retaliation was immediate and I think that was very true for the whole Seattle market. But it is encouraging to gather with all these baristas who might have had more success or more networks of solidarity, where we're fighting the good fight and they're here to support us. They uplift us and keep us going.

**Can you say more about the union busting you've seen?**

From the get go, I think a good example of mine was right after Buffalo organized in January or February of 2022. Every single person at my store was scheduled three-on-one meetings where it would be you, your manager, and two district managers sitting down with you and saying, "These are your benefits and this is what could be taken away if you unionize. This is why you shouldn't do it," which is a lie! It's completely illegal for them to take benefits away once you unionize, and they can't withhold benefits from union partners that they offer to non-union partners. Another example of that was with credit card tips. We won this ULP, and they still haven't paid out the backpay owed. But when Starbucks finally implemented credit card tips at the request and demand of union partners really pushing for that because we hadn't had them for so long, the company said, "Any store that unionized before the date it was implemented does not qualify for credit card tips." Which is stupid because it's already installed on all the card readers, they just wouldn't let us use it. So the roastery partners who are now laid off without notice are still owed thousands and thousands of dollars in credit card tips. And they've fired a lot of partners. There's just a lot of retaliation and not bargaining in good faith. A lot of fearmongering. All the things. They've really tried to make union stores turn cold by making it impossible to work there, and they have been successful in certain conditions, which is really unfortunate. But every time they do that, we are unionizing new stores and lighting a fire under another location to combat their disgusting practices.

**I read there were around 170 Unfair Labor Practices cases that have been filed against Starbucks.**

I know that there are over 400 outstanding ULPs that have not been resolved. They're the largest union buster in modern history and the ones that have been resolved, alone, have proven that. For every one that's been resolved, there's three or four more that haven't, which I think is a testament to what this company really cares about. The greed they have for exploiting workers and

keeping workers as poor as possible. Meanwhile, they're flying private jets and having 84 million dollar managerial retreats in Vegas. If they gave us everything we asked for in our contracts—all of our wildest dreams—and resolved all the outstanding ULPs, it would cost less than a single day in sales. That's about 74 million dollars, and the manager retreat alone cost 84 million. So when they say they don't have the money for us, it's very obvious they do. They just aren't willing to give it to the people who are the face of their company.

### **Do you have any advice for workers at non-union stores looking to unionize?**

I mean, I would say to do it. Unionize. Every single job should be a union job, and it's more important than ever that stores should be unionizing actively to show the company that our movement is continuing to grow. I know it might be scary to unionize based on the retaliation that has been so visible for so long as we've fought for this contract, but getting in contact with the Workers United staff, you have such a wealth of resources and the ability to educate yourself on your rights and what you're able to do even without a union. Know your rights and know the law. It's empowering to organize your store and, even if you're not able to, I encourage people to have conversations with their coworkers to discuss pay, discuss what could be better. Even if Starbucks is a decent job, we deserve better. My coworkers deserve a savings account. We deserve to not be on food stamps. We deserve to work hours that don't exhaust us and disable our bodies just because the company demands. Genuinely, with the direction this country is going, the only power we have is our collective power. The labor movement is a unifying movement. Most people are workers, whether they're celebrities in Hollywood or security guards. We're all workers, and that's what unites us. It's the thing that's going to allow us to change whatever's happening in this country that we don't like.

### **So at your store, what did those conversations look like? That whole early process of winning people over?**

A good way to put it is, like, when people aren't able to pay their rent, that is why we should be fighting. People can't afford to pay their rent in this city on the wages that Starbucks offers, and the only way we'll be able to change that is by organizing and having a seat at the table. Labor is all about exploitation. Brian Niccol is never going to care about you. An emotional conversation with an executive isn't going to get them to change their mind or give you more money. The only thing that does is collective power, so I think it's important to grow trust with your coworkers. A union movement fails in a store if you're not trusted by your coworkers, so I think the most important thing is to grow solidarity among your coworkers and a willingness to work collectively even if it's not for a contract.

Have conversations with your manager, use that as a step to organizing in a more full-scale way.

### **Is there a kind of 'withdrawal of efficiency' or other way to 'throw sand in the gears' while that process is ongoing and those early conversations are still happening?**

I think, again, trust is the most important thing. If you don't have trust among coworkers, it's not going to happen, so start slow and be very intentional. A good example of the way we quote unquote 'agitate' at our stores is asking people, "If you could change one thing about this company right now, what would it be?" Then you kind of dig into that. Getting personal, learning why people are motivated to do things and what they care about is really important. Show that unionizing is really for them. Like, I am fighting for this because my coworkers deserve better. Even my coworkers who are scabbing, even the people who aren't willing to fight like we deserve, are still working hard, and aren't being rewarded. Our labor is being stolen, and companies are making billions and billions of dollars off of our bodies. So, having those one-on-one conversations and just being a listening ear is really important when you start. Because then you can start asking them to get involved, starting slow. Ask them, "Hey, would you be willing to hop on a Zoom call with an organizer?" so they can get advice and ask questions. Just having the resources available so that people can come to the decisions on their own is really important, but also advocating for why. Having a deep-set belief that we deserve better and that that's what we're fighting for, I think is at the center of our movement. The trust, friendship, solidarity forever. That's the heart of the labor movement. Standing up for each other is a really powerful thing.

**That's really well said. Returning to the current struggle for a moment, the SBWU statement mentions "components" of the 'Back To Starbucks' initiative that have led to a situation where "sales are down, customers and baristas are unhappy, and stores are understaffed." Could you speak on what components of that—**

Ignite a fire in my veins?

Exactly.

Oh, let me tell you! The biggest issue with the 'Back to Starbucks' policies is that they're changes without bargaining. They're enforcing these new changes to working conditions without us bargaining over it, which is completely illegal because that's why we have a contract. But I just think it's very indicative of the way that Starbucks is trying to change. When Brian Niccol says he's trying to bring back the 'third place' and bring back community coffee houses, his community coffee house does not include

people that he deems unworthy of being there. It disgusts me that he took away free water and free bathrooms because in Interbay, we have a large unhoused population. Kinnear Park is right behind us, and historically we've had a lot of regulars who come into our cafe for a warm place, for water. We have a great relationship with these people, but now we have to say no just based on their status, because they can't afford to live. And we're one step away from that. Starbucks and Brian Niccol are forcing us to withhold necessities and basic human needs from the people that we're one paycheck away from becoming and I think that's very disheartening. You can't be a community coffee house if you're not serving the people in your community who are in most need.

**Could you say more about that? The relationship between workers and people in the community who aren't able to work?**

Every Starbucks barista has some crazy stories. Insane things happen. People overdose in our bathrooms, and we've been asking for training to deal with it. Because in this capitalist society with no safety net, people who work in cafes are almost like frontline workers. We are community care workers. We're talking people down from mental breakdowns when they're not well. We're helping people. I carry Narcan all the time. Thanks Seattle Public Library, we love you! [laughs] This is the crazy world we're living in, and that's what we want to do: we want to help people and we want to be able to provide those spaces. I think what historically has made Starbucks very special is that it has been that. Even customers will buy coffee for other people there. Starbucks has a history of telling cities, "You don't need to build a public bathroom because we exist in that spot," but now they're taking that away. In Interbay, there is no public bathroom for miles. And what am I going to do? Tell customers to piss in the parking lot? It's just very frustrating. But I think those policies ignited a fire under a movement that was getting put out. Which is another testament to how Starbucks can union bust all they want, but we are fighting for a better Starbucks, a Starbucks that cares for people, [and for] a more equitable future. The more they try to take those things away, the harder we're going to fight to ensure that we can care for each other and we can care for our communities.

**That's really cool. I'd honestly never really thought of Starbucks as still being community spaces.**

They could be!

**Is that something the corporatization really takes away from?**

Yeah, in most stores. There's some really cool Starbucks out there, though. Eastlake is an example. We had the same people come in every single day, and they got to know us. Like, we had a woman who fostered bulldogs, and there was this bulldog named Lucy who

came in every day and got her pup cup. Even at a busy drivethrough, like at our location on Elliott, we know our regulars and we know the community. That is the cool thing Starbucks has done in the past, is being coffee shops for the community, being gathering places. They have had a desire to help. They do donation matches; of course, it's only for nonprofits that they approve. But I do think for a long time, Starbucks was pretending at least to be a progressive company that cared for the environment, cared for the community, cared for its workers. In the last five years, that has really kind of transitioned. I think there's a misalignment in trying to go 'Back To Starbucks' when you're inherently anti-working class, anti-homeless, forcing us as baristas to create a space that would not be welcoming to us. It's a space for the wealthy right now, and that shows with how high prices are. They don't care about their customers. They don't care about their workers. They don't care that I wouldn't be able to afford a cup of coffee from Starbucks if it wasn't for my discount. And it's just inherently against what they're trying to go 'back' to.

**And how does that work with all the different locations? Is it a top-down thing like McDonald's, where every store has to be exactly the same?**

Every store has the same training, so it is very systematic. I think that's one of the appeals of a nationwide corporate chain, is that there is consistency. I do think you should support your local coffee shop. In Seattle, we have a wealth of options. But in other places—small towns—maybe it makes sense for there to be a Starbucks.

**Does the sameness across stores make it easier to communicate and structure organizing efforts across locations?**

Because every store serves the same drinks, it's the same routine and the same training, I'm able to pick up shifts at any store I want. So if I'm looking for hours (which most people usually are) and someone calls out or needs their shift covered, I have the ability to just pick it up and go work at that store to cover it. So, that is a way that we can all communicate. There were existing networks, too. Like there's a Facebook group—this national group—The Siren Safe Space For Partners To Venti. So there have been existing places for baristas to talk, but I think that was still the challenge of unionizing at first, that you had to know someone. But we do say "the Seattle Starbucks orgy" is a thing because everyone knows everyone, and there's almost like a barista community, of former and current Starbucks baristas that have grown to know each other. One of the really cool things that partners have done on their own is create these spaces with some of the coolest people you'll meet. I really do love all my coworkers. There's really cool people who work here. So, the kind of people who work here are

interconnected. There's already existing networks, and now that we have an infrastructure in place to support that, it's easier to grow on the ground because we have staff people with capacity to help build those connections and organize new locations.

### **Does that ability to switch between stores allow you to kind of salt stores and go somewhere with the intention of organizing?**

It's definitely a practice that people do. We definitely do store visits as well, because you can get one free pound of beans a week as your 'markout'. So, I'll go to the store closest to my neighborhood and get my markout there, and even just doing that, it's growing trust. Doing store visits and borrowing at stores—I guess if I'm giving advice to people, it's a really useful way to help grow our network and our union, but we can't move too quickly when we do that. It's about building trust. Getting your coffee markout and talking to the baristas every single week, growing trust, and then talking about, "Oh, this is why I appreciate that I'm unionized," or, "You hear about those store closures? Thank God for the union stores that were able to negotiate for better terms [when] getting laid off as opposed to the rest of the baristas who kind of got fucked over." And using that as a way to be a resource for people. I really think the most important thing is for people to be educated on their own and learn and come to their own decisions, have their own opinions. But giving them a resource to ask those questions and putting the thought in their head, "Oh, this is an option. I could unionize," and showing them what that can look like, it's a cool opportunity we have to support non-union stores and help them with whatever they need if they want to join our cause.

### **Circling back to what you were saying about how most people are always looking for more hours, union data says that the average Starbucks barista receives just 19 hours a week, one hour short of the cutoff for company benefits. What strategies is corporate using to maintain that average and deny people their benefits?**

An example is January 1st, they always cut hours. They say you can make up the labor if you earn enough money, but January 1st, it doesn't matter how much you worked the week before. They typically cut hours to save themselves money because labor costs money, and it means that we're incredibly understaffed. My coworkers will beg for more hours and say, "I cannot afford rent," and to some managers' credit, some of them will do their best to manipulate the hours they're given on a corporate level, but most managers don't give a shit. They'll tell you, "Well, you can pick up hours at other stores," but they'll schedule people 17 hours a week and then hire someone new when everybody else is still looking for hours. They'll claim it's an availability thing—that they 'have' to hire someone new to fill the time—then the hours drop again. Another

example that was a big one that hit our store in particular really hard was about two or three years ago, they did this thing called 'shift complement,' where they cracked down on the number of supervisors in stores because they're more expensive to pay. A supervisor does the job of barista and a supervisor both. We're allowed to work full shifts, but they don't like having the overlap. So what they ended up doing was they just cut everyone's hours. My coworker, Leo, went from having 30 hours a week to having nine. They were like, "You'll have to transfer a step down. We don't have the hours for you," when they're just pinching pennies for no reason.

### **Can you say more about the role of supervisors and management? Obviously in terms of union busting, but also have you found anyone in that role being supportive of organizing efforts?**

Shift supervisors and baristas are kind of the two roles that are in our bargaining unit. Supervisors still count as 'not management' because all we do is run the floor and handle the money. We have a lot of responsibility, but we're not in control of scheduling. I can't fire anybody, I can't write anybody up as a supervisor. As for managers, campaignwise, there have been a few managers who have stepped down to unionize their store or to support the strike. Our last manager, well... What I've noticed is that any manager who seems to care about their workers or will do things to help us get as many hours as we can, the company will find a way to fire them or write them up for something. I think our district manager got fired for being "too compliance-driven" and "not innovation-driven".

### **What does that mean?**

Right? [laughs] We all asked the same thing, "What does that mean?" I think she didn't union bust hard enough, and they punished her for it. But yeah, I think managers should unionize as well. Genuinely, they're in this weird spot right now. There's a manager shortage and a lot of managers don't agree with the direction this company is going—the whole 'Back to Starbucks' thing—but they're kind of in a place where they're being forced to enforce it, and they get flak from all sides. Obviously we're incredibly unhappy with it, and we're going to tell our managers that because that is their role, but they're also getting a lot of pressure from above to be compliant with these new policies and a lot of them are just burning out and quitting. So I think Starbucks has made it hard for management to even be sympathetic to a union. Which, I'm like, "Unionize management!" but they've made it very hard.

### **One last question before we go. Is there anything non-Starbucks workers can do to show solidarity with the**

## union other than, obviously, showing up to pickets and not buying Starbucks?

When we're back from our strike, starbucksworkersunited.com has a store map, and it will show you union locations in your area. So if you are going to shop Starbucks, shop union and show your union baristas you support them. Other than that, we always encourage people to start asking baristas they know questions like, "Have you guys talked about unionizing?" Just be what we are: an education resource and a listening ear, or help get them connected with any causes you're involved in. That's really helpful. You can call stores. There's always things we can do. Just spread the word about the movement because some people haven't even heard about our union.

## Are there any fund efforts for striking workers in the meantime?

Workers United has a national strike fund that people can contribute to. Same thing, if you go to our website (<https://sbworkersunited.org/>), there should be a place you can do that. There's a lot of local and regional strike funds as well. Like, we do bill reimbursement for striking workers in a region for people

who do want to donate locally. I can give you the link to our little local strike fund if you want.

[<https://www.gofundme.com/f/pnw-relief-fund>]

Obviously it is a financial risk being on strike, but one of the really cool things is that we have been blessed to have our strike mainly funded by union dues from workers who aren't with Starbucks. A lot of laundry workers and people who don't make too much more than we do. They've been financially supporting our cause since the beginning, since without a contract, you don't pay dues.

**That's so good to hear. That solidarity is so important. Do you have anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?**

Just that any support from the public to help us is always welcome to beef up our strike fund so we can keep fighting the good fight, waiting out Starbucks for a contract!

**Thanks so much for your time. We have so much admiration for what you're doing. Solidarity!**

Solidarity forever!



# Organize. The Rest Is Irrelevant.

## Encampments, Tenant Unions, & Tacoma [Scrunch Cut]

FW John (x430192)

Credit: Josiah Devine Johnson (12/6 reference footage)

### RENTERS UNITE

SATURDAY DECEMBER 6TH AT 1PM

322 N G ST TACOMA, WA 98403



JOIN THE NYA TENANT UNION AND  
SUPPORTERS TO LAUNCH

### TACOMA'S FIRST MAJORITY TENANT UNION

**S**itting with the overflow in a fluorescently lit sideroom, I felt a genuine smile spreading for the first time that night hearing the Tacoma city employee struggle to speak over the steadily growing crowd in the hall outside. After shouting out where to sign up to provide public comment, they started directing people upstairs; in under 10 minutes, they had to find more space for the overflow.

People were pissed.

Not over the lack of space, but at those extracting everything they can from Tacoma's tenants.

Seattle Worker readers likely know that, in 2023, Tacoma voters passed Initiative 1. Codified as the Landlord Fairness Code Initiative (LFCI), it contains some of the strongest renter protections in Washington state (despite some significant loopholes).

Two years on, while the weather worsens, our landlords and our City Council try to dismantle tenants' democratically earned victory. The first reading and public comment session on December 2nd—for proposed amendments to the LFCI—led me to City Hall among an outraged crowd.

People are realizing how angry they are and where to aim it. Fed up, they're organizing.

—

Although most people providing public comments on December 2 had organized *against* the proposed LFCI amendment, one particular group organized themselves *for* something instead, arriving that night to announce direct action already happening.

Nearly two hours in—as if embodying the howling-wolf artwork they've represented themselves with—three Tacoma tenants strode up to the mic in solidarity to share something historic. The residents of Stadium District's New York Apartments (NYA) proclaimed they'd recently organized into Tacoma's first Supermajority Tenant Union.

[NYATU clarified: "There have been other units who've organized and won major fights with landlords in Tacoma. We are the first, to our knowledge, that formally formed into a tenant union with a tenant union structure."]

Speaking on behalf of NYA Tenant Union (NYATU) regarding the proposed LFCI amendment, Francis Faye Oak concluded:

"You've heard us loud and clear. What your continued actions demonstrate is that you have no plans to listen. But that doesn't mean that you've silenced our voices.

"My neighbors and I at the New York Apartments in Stadium District have formed an unbreakable union: Tacoma's first Supermajority Tenant Union.

"We have no intention of accepting compromises to our dignity. We have every intention of exercising our collective power in catalyzing a city-wide movement of community protection.

"Frankly, where this lame-duck Council chooses to go from here is irrelevant. Because all power is coming back to the people."

—

Finding the New York Apartment building was super easy on Saturday, December 6. With the community standing in solidarity by 1pm, a cacophony of bullhorn-led chants, and more people continuously joining, you couldn't miss the growing crowd (or all the red) on the Stadium street corner.

If Tuesday's organizing had been fueled by anger and advocacy, Saturday's was overcome with optimism—but the uplift wasn't about any City Council decision. Instead, you could feel a buzzing belief echoing NYATU's public comment.

"Irrelevant" was right.

Getting a chance to speak with Ann Dorn—who handles press matters for NYATU, chairs Tacoma for All, and helped lead on Initiative 1 in 2023—that sentiment about City Council's (ir)relevance solidified as she described for me the resurgence of tenant unions across the US with infectious enthusiasm.

Five founding tenant unions (located across Kansas City, MO; the Nutmeg State (CT); Louisville, KY; Bozeman, MT; and Southside Chicago) and more currently make up the Tenant Union Federation. Hearing about "a union of unions organizing tenants to wield power at a massive scale" probably sounds rather familiar to Wobblies and other Seattle Worker readers.<sup>1</sup>

Ann further informed me TUF's KC Tenants has grown to 10,000 members and managed to put one member on their City Council. Their victories include stopping thousands of evictions through direct action, redistributing tens of millions captured by gentrifying developers, and ensuring that tenants in Kansas City brought to eviction court are guaranteed an attorney.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after speaking with Ann, the bullhorn picked back up.

"When I say 'Whose power?', you say 'Tenant Power'!!! WHOSE POWER!?"

"TENANT POWER!!!"

"When I say 'Whose power?', you say 'Union Power'!!! WHOSE POWER!?"

"UNION POWER!!!"

"When I say 'Whose power?', you say 'People Power'!!! WHOSE POWER!?"

"PEOPLE POWER!!!"

"WHOSE POWER!?"

"PEOPLE POWER!!!"

It felt fitting that Francis Faye was on the hype mic.

"WHEN TENANT LIVES ARE UNDER ATTACK,  
WHAT DO WE DO!?"

"STAND UP, FIGHT BACK!!!"

It's a simple message of community protection, but NYA tenants live it. They've organized as a union to improve each other's lives amidst deteriorating conditions and landlord neglect in their very own corner of 'Hooverville'. Per NYATU's extensive public document research, their landlords—the Hoovers—hold over \$20 million in property assets across Tacoma alone.

Building	Units
New York Apartments, LLP	30
NewCastle Apartments, LLP	16
611 N J St.	12
523 N I St.	10
Marguerite Apartments LLC	10
301 N I St.	5
American Lake Town Homes	5+ (x3 Properties)

Info provided by NYATU

<sup>1</sup> TUF. About. <https://tenantfederation.org/about/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

What's NYATU fighting for? In summary:

- Standardized rental rates, utilities, and fees, as well as a two-year rent freeze
- Allow current tenants to keep their pets, and extend the same to new tenants
- Major structural repairs—including plumbing, heating, and windows
- Fulfillment of maintenance requests in a timely manner
- Basic quality of life—including working laundry, pest control, and safe units
- Respect for tenants' dignity, privacy, and right to organize

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Haley Miler, NYATU member, shared with the community the types of experiences that pushed her and her neighbors to organize.

Returning home from work one day, Haley found water pouring from her ceiling. Following an off-hours maintenance request to an overseas call center, relentless calls to the property manager's office, more leaking, and empty promises, she came home a week later to a similar discovery of dirty, brown water all over her kitchen. Twelve more calls, and Haley was informed they could slap some paint over the water damage once dry.

The 'Landlord Special'.

What about mold? Or more leaks?

Haley was loaned a dehumidifier and given another empty promise to fix the rusty pipe responsible. The apartment upstairs—rented by Francis Faye—received three separate repair calls that merely hooked up a new U-trap to the old plumbing and said, "Good enough."

The problem persists.

This—along with Haley's faulty deadbolt, window rot, and mangled blinds (left covered in the previous tenant's cooking grease), among other issues—wasn't addressed by the last or current property management company, but it did start conversations with Francis Faye and other tenants.

Far from isolated cases, Haley and her neighbors gradually learned that they'd all experienced something similar with maintenance requests.

The smoldering discontent ignited upon seeing communications posted by management outside everyone's apartment door—with zero protections for personal or financial information on display and a heads-up that employees had tried to enter apartments without notice.

Francis Faye started a text thread, and the tenants began to learn: an upstairs neighbor lacked hot water for nearly a month, some

tenants resorted to washing dishes in the bathtub, tenants had gone multiple winters without heat, tenants were still dealing with mold and rot and wall-critters and things climbing out of the floor.

NYA's tenants got together—realizing their neighbors are as diverse as Tacoma itself. Out in our community, you'll find NYATU members serving food, counseling students, caring for the elderly, cleaning houses, making art and music, and writing poetry.

NYATU sent their demands to the Hoovers' \$5 million Hunting Beach property, their office, and their \$2 million property on Day Island. They await a response.

In the meantime? They're talking to the Hoovers' other Tacoma buildings about organizing—some of those tenants also present for the historic afternoon, standing on the Stadium street corner in solidarity with NYATU. Francis Faye remarked, "The conditions are bad everywhere."

"No more 'Hoovervilles'!!!," someone shouted.

The crowd concurred.

NYA's tenants love their neighbors, their community, their quirky building, and even their apartments. Like many of us who've built a life here (Tacoma's townies and transplants), they recognize it's hardly perfect. But it's home, and we love it.

Those of us in Tacoma who are fed up with being treated as assets rather than people—we're fighting for this city, its tenants, and its workers.

Francis Faye frames a simple proposition: "Because we all deserve to live in a safe, healthy, and stable home—free from neglect and exploitation. Right?"

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Stepping to the podium, Ann expressed how you can fight for these outcomes, too: Just show up.

"We—as the community, as Tacoma, as a tenant movement—must be in solidarity with NYATU."

What does that mean to Ann?

When NYATU or another tenant union calls us to a picket line—show up.

When they raise money for legal fees—show up.

When they're tired and hungry and they've been organizing—show up (with dinner).

"When tenants are making difficult decisions..., when tenant leaders face pressure from the landlords, NYATU needs to know you're with them... It's time for Tacoma to make a commitment to this movement and this tenant union, and I am counting on all of you to be in this fight."

Closing out, Francis Faye added:

"Meet one another. Meet us... Recognize that our shared condition in this building is simply [an extension of our] conditions in this city, in this state, in this country, and everything that's happening in this world right now.

"Believe with us that we can make a difference, and we will work together to improve our lives. Today is just the beginning..."

"Welcome to the start of Tacoma's tenant union movement."

—

We're facing threats to Tacoma's tenants and unhoused populations alike, but Grit City is organizing—for and against, with growing volume and increasing impact. Even so, more of us need to show up.

*Us poor folks haven't got a chance  
Unless we organize<sup>3</sup>*

We're agitated.

We're educating ourselves on tenant unions.

Show up—in our town or yours—and you'll see we aren't waiting. We're organizing.

[NYATU adds: We encourage our neighbors in Tacoma to take the further step of contacting Tacoma for All ([tacoma4all.org](http://tacoma4all.org)). For those interested in organizing their neighbors, they can reach out to [info@tacoma4all.org](mailto:info@tacoma4all.org), and a tenant union organizer will connect with them.]



Crowd gathers outside New York Apartments. (400TX)

<sup>3</sup> Florence Reese. *Which Side Are You On?*

# Tacoma: Washington's Battleground for State's Strongest Renters Rights

Josiah Devine Johnson (with contributing research by FW John)

**T**acoma fights an ongoing battle. Bold lettering plastered over a blood-red background pleads for its end, "Stop the City's war on Workers and Renters."

This war has casualties. People dying from easily avoidable homelessness: a trend sure to worsen under Council member Sarah Rumbaugh's amendments to the Landlord Fairness Code, a.k.a. the Tenant Bill of Rights (TBR). Passed December 9th, the amendments partially strip key protections and implement damaging additions. Only through the overwhelming community outcry were some wins gained, too. Here's what you need to know.

The TBR, approved by city residents via ballot initiative in 2023, protects Tacoma's tenants from radical rent hikes, exorbitant late fees, and—among other things—eviction during Washington's harsh winters (November - April).

Rumbaugh and a number of her colleagues stepped in, successfully pushing steep rollbacks as soon as Tacoma allows and just a month prior to the new City Council's swearing in. Tacomans showed up to fight back.

At the December 2nd meeting, over 150 written comments added to the nearly 600 previously submitted. An additional 90 people from labor unions, migrant advocacy groups, community leaders, and landlords signed up to speak about the proposed amendments. Even more impressive were the hundreds of tenants and community supporters who packed City Hall—filling three overflow rooms. The largest number of people City Council has seen in more than a decade, Mayor Woodards called the three hours of public comment "unprecedented."

TBR advocates' cries protested the removal of Tacoman renters' limited protections. Even with them, some landlords still break the law and dismiss residents' needs, causing them to live in slum-like conditions surrounded by mold, lacking heat, crumbling walls, and no water.

Renters like Kaitlyn Foster are permanently disabled from mold exposure in her former St. James Apartment at 821 S. Yakima Ave. causing her to combat fatigue, nausea, headaches, cramps, stiffness, and weakness in her lower extremities. Foster sued the apartment's owners, The Neiders Company, who own another 30 other local complexes around Tacoma. Foster alleges that a failure

to fix broken water pipes led to rampant airborne mold, causing bodily harm, reported the Tacoma News Tribune.

Tired of putting up with their own units' poor conditions, Tacoma tenants of New York Apartments (NYA) in Stadium District formed a tenant union (the first-of-its-kind in Tacoma). With their continuously rising rents and unresolved problems, the NYA tenant union sent their formal demands to negotiate with their landlords, Rob and Candy Hoover, who own over \$22 million dollars worth of property in Pierce County.

"We have formed together an unbreakable union. It comes from care for one another, not just for each other but to catalyze a movement for others for protection," said Francis Faye, a tenant leader from NYA. Faye continued, "The Tenant Bill of Rights is a lifeline for us, and if Council member Rumbaugh's proposition passes, our lives—and your districts—are going to get worse."

For Tacoma renter Aria Jocilynn, these tenant protections would have kept a roof over her and her child's head. Prior to the TBR's implementation, Jocilynn became houseless during the winter months, struggling to survive with her baby for nearly a year. "I support this Tenant bill of rights so that no other mother has to go through what my family went through," said Jocilynn. Urging the Council to vote down the proposed changes, she continued, "I am begging you, do not repeal this...Leave the Tenant Bill of Rights in place."

Tyron Moore, Co-Executive Director of Tacoma for All, also opposed Rumbaugh's proposed changes before the December 9th vote. "This is not simply a watering down of those protections. It would essentially gut protections, gut relocations assistance, and reopen the door to excessive rent hikes and fees." Tacomans' community efforts stopped some of the gutting Moore described—a substantial win.

Under the 2023 TBR, some landlords stacked multiple rent hikes per year without exceeding the 5% that'd initiate relocation assistance. Under the new 2025 TBR, as Moore explains, "most landlords will choose to keep rent hikes under 5% annually. And when they raise rents higher, pricing tenants out, landlords must pay relocation assistance equal to 2-3 times the monthly rent. This is a real victory for tenant economic stability."

A prominent voice speaking in favor of Rumbaugh's proposal was April Black, Executive Director of Tacoma Housing Authority. "Renters are going delinquent for a year or more and it's impossible for them to resolve their debts and avoid eviction... (which) shows on credit and rental histories and will keep them from being housed in the future." Black later credited delinquent renters for causing millions in damages. The TBR only protects against evictions due to a financial inability to afford rent, not for standard reasons such as willful destruction to units.

Black's right that eviction and bankruptcy status undeniably strain one's ability to easily access housing in the future; however, it does not bar them permanently. Carrying eviction status, whether in the winter or summer, hurts tenants' ability to rent in the future. The immediate reality of winter eviction and potentially dying from the effects of homelessness are much more threatening—and much more likely, given City Council's recent expansion of the camping ban amidst numerous homeless shelters shutting their doors.

Since the implementation of the original camping ban in 2022, street deaths increased by an estimated 77% throughout 2023 according to Common Good. Roughly 300 people in Pierce County died while homeless that year alone. Pleading with Council member John Hines, who led the ban's expansion during a November meeting, a homeless woman asked, "Where do I go? I have nowhere. Where do you want me to go?"

Homelessness is an even more clear and present danger for those in affordable housing following the passing of the amended TBR.

Now, the TBR no longer applies to nonprofit and public landlords, who succeeded in acquiring exemptions, making possible and more likely winter evictions for those in affordable housing who cannot afford rent. For renters of regularly priced units, the timeline for staving off winter evictions decreased to four months.

Rumbaugh's proposed 'means testing' was voted down. This avoided Tacomas in standard priced units from jumping through legal and bureaucratic hoops to argue their case for relocation assistance only weeks before their eviction date—far too late to help those most desperate from being able to put a roof over their heads while potentially dealing with unforeseen medical bills, jobloss, or God knows what else.

For Tacoma's tenant population, the TBR "isn't politics for us, this is home," said Martell Hall. "This is our kids' sense of safety. This is our shot at building something solid and real." For Hall, like many others, removing the TBR would "push families back into survival mode, the very thing this law was created to prevent."

Armed with their voices, painted signs, and a passion born from desperation, Tacoma residents poured out of Council chambers. This meeting was but one battleground, and more will surely come. But with nearly 1,000 letters sent to council members supporting the TBR, and thousands of doors knocked, Tacomas are prepared to defend these hard-fought protections. When asked why they keep fighting, one audience member was overheard saying, "What other choice do I have? What choice would I leave my neighbors if I didn't?"



NYATU igniting Tacoma's tenant movement (400TX)

# Solidarity Unionism Primer

## The First, Hardest Step of Talking to Your Coworkers

FW Noah

**A**ny organizing campaign for a union starts with building solidarity with your fellow workers. Words like “solidarity”, “community”, and so on are often thrown around rather flippantly within left-wing and activist circles, and parsing out the difference between these kinds of terms is often overlooked even within unions and the labor movement as a whole.

Practically speaking, solidarity means building relationships with your coworkers, understanding who they are and what motivates them, and finding common causes that you can come together and organize to change.

Fellow workers, the simple fact is that you need to actually engage with the people you work with to begin developing real relationships in the workplace. This doesn't mean trying to date your coworkers or becoming suddenly chummy the minute you clock in, but actually getting to know the people you work with. Some union members have told me in passing that they sometimes struggle with the “talking-to-people part” of organizing, or they have other social barriers that can make socializing more difficult than for others, such as social shyness or conditions like autism. Overcoming this is quite simple: take an interest in what your coworkers talk about in the workplace, and what they like or want outside of it. I've personally found organizing conversations much easier to start by talking about something else entirely; for example, one coworker's interest in horror and manga novels, and another coworker's interest in guns or rally cars.

Politics doesn't need to come to the conversation table when having one-on-ones unless your coworker brings it up themselves, or if it is somehow relevant to workplace organizing. Getting to know the politics of your coworkers can even be an advantage in some instances, especially if the politics they espouse are explicitly pro-union.

However, don't rely on politics as the only litmus test for whether to invite them to the next steering committee meeting, or whether you can drop the word “union” with them. Just because they have a Bernie Sanders or Kamala Harris bumper sticker doesn't automatically make them pro-union, and just because they happen to have voted for Trump in the past or are outspoken about their Christian faith at work doesn't necessarily make them anti-union. Avoid assumptions and knee-jerk reactions, and focus your conversations more on what you have in common: poor pay,

inflexible or inconsiderate management, faulty equipment, or any other aspect of your work that you mutually recognize as a problem.

A good process of agitation involves getting your fellow workers to think about the problems in the workplace, what they are caused by, and how you and others could potentially act in order to solve them. Encourage your coworkers to think of themselves as the source of possible change, and ask them how others in the workplace could help them or encourage them to take on the task. If your coworkers seem indifferent, depressed, or overwhelmed by the issues you're facing at work, it might be better to try lifting their spirits with case examples of how such actions—taken in solidarity and with the collective strength of others—have worked in other workplaces in the past and present.

Finally, be a good educator to your coworkers by bringing in knowledge or experience that they can use to build solidarity with each other. Taking the IWW's OT101 course on union organizing can be a great start, and it will provide you with all the skills and practice you need to get your campaign off the ground. Reaching out to a local branch of the union, and bringing along a couple of coworkers who are interested in organizing a union to make your workplace better for everyone, can bolster solidarity-building efforts.

You may also want to discuss with your coworkers—once you've built a good repertoire and trust with them—what a union campaign looks like, what coworkers they could reach out to next, and what actions need to take place to build up a steering committee or a direct action on the job.

With these ideas in mind, ask yourself:

How can I approach that first conversation at work? Who should I talk to first about the issues we face in the workplace? What issue would be a good place to start?

Building real solidarity—built out of trust and mutual support—is the starting place of every successful union campaign. Don't just think, but talk it over, too!

# A Contact List for the Revolution

FW Donovan A.

**K**eeping a contact list for the long term helps institutional workplace knowledge stay in the hands of the workers. Without a contact list, workers are left to the rumors and whims of managers to tell the narrative. Here, I'll describe the changes my organizing committee contact list has gone through, some debates we had, and how the list has been useful to us over time.

All union organizing efforts begin with a contact list. It's simple. First, write down who works at the workplace, and then make notes about how they are or aren't connected to the union effort. Eight years ago, our organizing committee had a small group of co-workers begin writing down names by ourselves before combining the lists a little later. After ten minutes, the big takeaway we had was about who is missing from the list and why. Seeing the gaps in the contact list starts to reveal the social structures of the business. Our new goal became writing down descriptions of co-workers and remembering to say hello when we see them in the hallways. This reminds organizers to create social connections to all groups of people, not just our friends.

This contact list alone reveals the beginning of a clear, structured organization of information. How many people are there who can be organized in the workplace? In our case, we knew there were over 100 people, but we didn't know the exact number of 135 until we started the list. Then, after adding a business title next to their names, we found about 50 managers who aren't allowed in the union. We created a shared spreadsheet and added multiple tabs for different groups of coworkers—leaving the main tab for potential new members. To keep it clear as to who we wanted to organize, we decided to move managers into their own section.

Instead of deleting information about our fellow coworkers, we moved information of workers who quit or were fired to a "former workers" tab, then added a new column detailing when and why they left. Shockingly, we found that each year we saw a 10%

turnover rate! Even more interesting was the fact that half of the workers who left were fired. This decision to keep track of what we knew about our former coworkers paid off so many times over the years, and it gave us real data on how the workplace is poorly managed. Last year, the organizing committee proved managers were falsely claiming that 6% of the workforce was laid off by showing it was actually 11%!

New workers tend to have rose-colored glasses about their new jobs. Telling new workers who were hired to replace former workers breaks through that glass quickly. However, we also found new members uncomfortable with the level of detail this contact list started to take on. "How is the union keeping this information safe?" and "Why is there so much data collected?" are common questions brought up. The organizing committee talked about it as a group and decided each new person in the committee needs a short training on how and why this information is important. We also decided not to share this list unless they are ready to help organize the workplace.

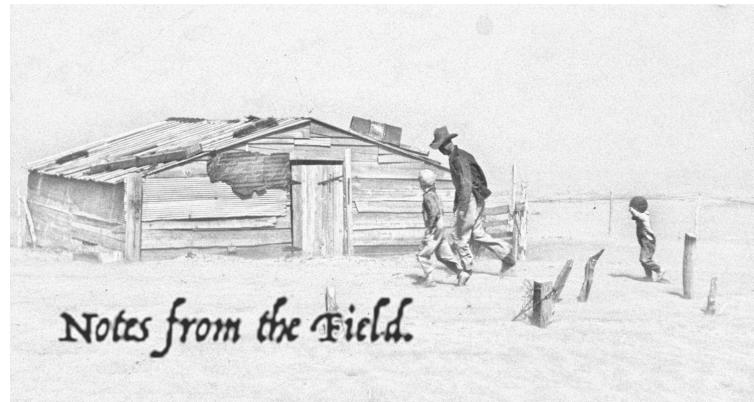
We teach how the contact list is broken down into methodical, social, and personal information. We respond to questions about security and come to an agreement as a group about how we keep this information safe. We keep tracking and fact checking managers' statements for ourselves, so we can check the truth of what managers are saying. This is what it takes to build a permanent revolution in the workplace.

*If you haven't made a contact list yet at your workplace, here's your chance.*

*Take two minutes to write down as many co-workers as you can.*

Now look at the list. You are probably comfortable enough to talk to one of these people about organizing. Give them a copy of this Seattle Worker article, and ask them what they think. If the two of you decide you want to learn more about contact lists and what to do next, email [seattleiww@gmail.com](mailto:seattleiww@gmail.com) to tell them you've got two workers who've completed a task and are ready to learn more!

# Our National Guard



X383303

Our National Guard has a long and storied history. Growing out of local militias of the Revolutionary War, the Guard is constituted from local citizens. After the Civil War, the Guard generally was disbanded.

In the late 1800's, a local railroad workers' strike developed into the national Great Railroad Strike (1877). Although labor unions as we know them now didn't exist, workers were starting to flex their unified muscle. Fearing a revolution like the Paris Commune of 1871, West Virginia Governor Henry Mathews sent in the Guard to break up picket lines, escort scabs, and protect businesses. The resulting chaos throughout the US saw over 100 workers killed.

Following the Great Railroad Strike, the nation re-established hundreds of local National Guard groups and built many armories. Unfortunately, the re-created Guard adopted a decidedly anti-union bent. Most times financed and supported by business interests, the Guard started to "enforce" property rights over human rights.

Over the next decade, with the newly constituted Guard firmly in business's control, they put down over 300 civil disorders and strikes; this cemented the view that the Guard was the tool of the employing class.

Finally—as workers became sufficiently fed up with their conditions and grew together in solidarity—that's when we see the rise of general strikes and full-fledged labor unions. In 1886, Samuel Gompers formed the American Federation of Labor (AFL).

Two decades later, the Colorado Mining Wars of 1903-04 involved many National Guard clashes that set the stage for the formation of the IWW in 1905. Most of the confrontations were brutal and violent. Last month's cover of the Seattle Worker shows bayonet-wielding Guardsmen facing off against unarmed strikers in Lawrence, Massachusetts (1912). During this brutal period, the Guard resorted to increased violence to control workers. For

example, in 1914, the Guard fired upon strikers and families during the Ludlow Massacre, killing 20.

In response to the continued and increasingly numerous labor actions, it became apparent to the business class that the Guard needed to be transformed from an amateurish, disjointed local organization to a standardized, highly trained national army. Thus, by 1933, the Guard resembled the highly trained military units we see today.

With many of today's citizens questioning their relationship with their government, that government's default response to protests has been threatening to "send in the Guard!" The Guard has been deployed to major cities already: Portland, Chicago, LA, Washington DC, Memphis. And, soon, possibly Seattle.

But does it have to be that way? We see a glimmer of hope with some National Guard Commanders questioning the lawfulness of their orders, as in the case of the Oregon National Guard.

We somehow need to nurture inclusiveness with the Guard. Our long and painful history with them needs to be just that—history.

We need the revolution to reach their ranks, too.

So, if you know a guardsperson, try to educate them and appeal to their better nature. Give them a hug if you meet one on the street; they are a part of us, they come from us—and maybe they can be turned for the better.

# Submissions welcome!

All Seattle Worker content is written by workers who volunteer their time and energy to help us spread news about our branch, our union, and our communities.

Our Editorial Committee welcomes essays, articles, photographs, art, cartoons, and announcements.

email: [seattleiww@gmail.com](mailto:seattleiww@gmail.com)

# 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.

## 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/>



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