

PREAMBLE OF THE IWW

The Working Class and the Employing Class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class have all the good things in life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.

We find that the centring 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 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 organisation 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 days wage for a fair days 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 organised, not only for the every-day struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

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WHAT IS



THE I.W.W.

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WHAT IS THE I.W.W.?

The Industrial Workers of the World, IWW is an international labour union with members in many countries. It is independent of all political parties and seeks to organise workers of all countries into a single union.



ISN'T THE I.W.W. JUST FOR FACTORY WORKERS?

Every worker is an industrial worker - whether they work in health care, tourism, education or publishing. If you earn your living by working with your hands or your mind, then you're welcome in the IWW! Only bosses are excluded from IWW membership.

The Wobblies (as members of the IWW are known) have historically focused on organising those workers shunned by unions affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. In the early part of the 20th century that meant immigrants, women and unskilled labourers.

Today the TUC organises only a third of the workforce and many unorganised workers work

for non profit organisations (charities etc), in shops, are homemakers, co-operative employees, or get work through temporary agencies. The despatch industry and the computing industry count for many more. In short any worker in any workplace regardless of size and structure is eligible for membership.

CAN THE I.W.W. HELP ME TO IMPROVE THE WAGES OR WORKING CONDITIONS AT MY CURRENT JOB?

That depends in part on you. The IWW is a "do it yourself" union, and does not provide an all knowing leadership or hefty finances to fight your battles for you. But if you are willing to organise in your workplace by talking to your fellow workers about the issues that matter to them, then you can count on colleagues in the IWW to lend their full support to your struggle.

Individuals can accomplish little by themselves and are likely to be sacked if they raise a voice in protest. But by joining together in a union such as the IWW, workers are far more powerful when confronting their boss about workplace injustices. Our union can provide tangible, low cost resources such as legal and organising advice, information and bodies on a picket line. You will not get union leaders in suits and ties telling you how to run any strike, just

friends and supporters lending a hand where they can.



THE I.W.W. AND THE MAINSTREAM LABOUR MOVEMENT

For many decades the Trade Unions have worked hand in hand with heads of industry to squelch rank and file militancy, and to incorporate working people into the system. This has been done by promoting industrial harmony and promoting the idea that the interests of bosses and workers are the same. Because trade unions do this they fail to question the basic assumption of our economic system.

While regular trade unions split workers according to their skill or occupation, this allows one union to cross the picket line of another and undermine any action being taken. The IWW believes in one big union of all workers organised along industrial lines. If for instance, the nurses go on strike they should get the support of doctors, pharmacists, administrators, porters and domestic workers in their hospital.

Many wobblies belong to TUC

unions at their place of work. The aim of the IWW in these circumstances is to argue for rank and file control of the union and also to build industrial union networks which would form the structure of IWW unions within the shell of the old TUC unions.

The IWW is happy to support strike activity of TUC unions but keeps the bigger prize, workers control, firmly in its sights.

THE I.W.W. AND THE LAW

In Britain there is no right to organise and no right to take strike action. In fact industrial action is deemed as being a breach of contract and is a dismissable offence. Peaceful picketing is deemed as being a form of intimidation and is also illegal. The state has chosen to get round this by granting immunity from prosecution or from being sued in certain circumstances. Unions in Britain stand or fall by their own organisation and strength, not through the actions of the courts although in some circumstances they may be seen as a tool to be used.

The IWW does not recognise the authority of the courts to impose injunctions on unions. Historically the courts have been on the side of managers mainly because of an in built class bias and because the courts oppose collective action as being in "restraint of free trade". The courts have invented new crimes to subvert the activity of unions and have sought to limit the immunity "granted" by the state wherever possible.

DIDN'T THE I.W.W. DIE OUT? ARE ITS IDEAS STILL RELEVANT?

In the USA the IWW was nearly crushed in the early twenties by a combination of the world wide post war recession and the activities of big business and the government who virtually declared the union illegal. The world economy has changed significantly from those days when the IWW controlled sections of the agricultural, logging and mining industries of the USA.

Unions around the world are under the cosh from the twin effects of international crisis and the union busting policies of business and the state. Be it Britain, the USA, Korea or Australia, unions are struggling to hold on to old sectors of industry while new ones such as fast food, microchip production etc remain unorganised. Today's union wage workers need the IWW even more than their predecessors. With global unemployment and poverty we must define the meaning of work itself and find ways to redistribute wealth for the benefit of all.



DOES THE I.W.W. SUPPORT ANY POLITICAL PARTY?

The IWW is a labour union, not a political party. We believe that economic justice must be achieved through economic struggle, whether against our bosses at our places of work, against our

landlords where we live or against the state in all its forms when it comes to issues such as unemployed benefits and the old poll tax. The institutions of government have always proven themselves to be the allies of industry, so we do not wait for politicians to free us from wage slavery or improve our conditions. We believe that our power lies in the workplace not in "the vote" - as it is our labour on which the bosses are dependent.



The IWW has successfully resisted attempts by various "left" parties to make the union a mere tool of their political ambitions. Our constitution explicitly states "the IWW refuses all alliances, direct and indirect, with existing parties and anti political sects," and we've thus avoided the sectarian feuding that can easily destroy a group.

True our commitment to workers control and the abolition of capitalism has not won us any friends among the ruling elites, and our disavowal of any of all political party affiliation has not prevented us from being "red-baited". We address the root causes of society's problems, and that makes us radical, but we have the common sense to leave our electoral political views outside the union meeting where they belong.

WHAT IS DIRECT ACTION?

The labour movement has been at its most successful when it relied on the direct intervention of the workers to obtain their demands. Rather than allowing professional negotiators to speak for them, Wobblies have engaged in those tactics which they could control themselves - strikes, slowdowns, work to rule, and workplace occupation.

The IWW has never advocated violence. By fighting injustice with non violent tactics the IWW has often won the support of an initially mistrustful public.



WHAT IS THE GENERAL STRIKE?

The General Strike has long been touted by militant unionists as the ultimate expression of workers power and it still plays an important part role in the IWW programme for social change. Simply put, a general strike is a massive worker stoppage on a local, regional or national scale, and may involve either staying home or occupying the workplace and refusing to work.

A General Strike halts business as usual, and serves notice on those in positions of power that those of us who do the work have the ultimate say in whether or not that work gets done. It debunks

the myth that power flows downwards, and proves instead that all real power still resides at grassroots level, if only we choose to exercise it.

The general strike is a common tactic in many countries of the world, yet most British workers are only familiar with the failed general strike of 1926. This was not a general strike at all as the vast majority of workers played no part whatsoever in the action. The TUC unions are opposed to the tactic of a general strike for a number of reasons. Firstly they do not want to rock the boat and appear either political or revolutionary. Secondly a general strike cannot be successfully controlled by union leaders and losing control is their abiding fear.

A great deal of education and organisation must take place before workers in Britain are ready to wage a successful general strike, and it is to this end that the IWW dedicates itself.



THE I.W.W. AND FEMINISM?

Women have been active in the IWW since its inception. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, one of the IWW's best-known agitators, once said that "The IWW has been accused of pushing women to the front. This is not true. Rather the

women have not been kept in the back, and so they naturally moved to the front."

Much of the work that has traditionally been done by women was not recognised as such by the male-run TUC unions. The IWW the right of women in all occupations including homemaking to organise for better conditions and wages just like other workers.



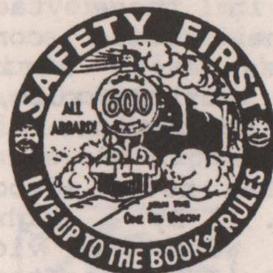
THE I.W.W. AND MILITARISM

Wars between or within nations have never benefited the working class and they never will. The war profiteers, safe in their mansions and boardrooms, never consider the human cost of their military adventurism. Working people are mere cannon fodder for their corporate and imperialist ambitions.

Real working class solidarity does not recognise borders erected artificially between nations, but instead unites against a common class enemy. Working class people and especially those in poverty or unemployed make up a disproportionate part of the armed forces simply because there few other options available.

To put an end to war, working people must lay down their arms and refuse to fight for their "leaders". Unfortunately many have been

brainwashed into thinking that their interests are the same as those of the people in power, so this is easier said than done. Nevertheless, the IWW is committed to fighting patriotic propaganda by educating workers about where their real interest lies.



THE I.W.W. AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Bhopal, Chernobyl, the Shetlands and Piper Alpha... These are just a few examples of how dangerous it can be to put profit before people. Government regulation can at best slow down the destruction of our planet, not reverse it.

Workers and their families suffer the worst effects of pollution. The workplace continues to be an extremely dangerous environment, and working class communities are often the site for toxic dumps, incinerators, and the like.

Workers control of industry is the only practical strategy for assuring the practice of sustainable and environmentally sound forms of production. For if the workers in all the polluting industries were to withdraw their labour, the poison factories could be shut down in a short time. The workers themselves must decide whether or not what they produce is socially useful.

WHAT ABOUT THE I.W.W. IN BRITAIN?

The union in Britain has been around since 1906. The first branches were set up shortly after the union was launched in Chicago in 1905. IWW influence and activity has not been great owing mainly to the perceived strength of the TUC unions. However in 1908 an offshoot of the IWW had 4,000 members in the Singer Factory in Glasgow.



During the period of the "Syndicalist revolt" before the first world war union members were active in the Industrialist League, one of a number of organisations including the Industrial Syndicalist Education League, which were "responsible" for the militant working class action which was a feature of the years 1910-14.



In 1920 the Shop Stewards Movement agreed the interchange of membership cards with the IWW but the recession on both sides of the Atlantic hit hard.

A British Administration was chartered in 1946 and was very active in the dockers strike of 1947. As with the rest of the IWW activity declined until the 1960s when union members were involved in the creation of industrial networks which were part of a national rank and file revolt against the passivity of the unions and the incomes policies imposed on workers by successive tory and labour administrations.



In the mid 1970s the union set up a workers centre in Oldham and launched a magazine "the Industrial Unionist" which lasted to the early 1980s.

In February 1993 a group of IWW members met in London to re-form and revitalise the union in Britain. With the financial backing of the union in San Francisco and the energy and enthusiasm of British based members the union looks forwards to creating a new history.

The union will help any class conscious worker organise their own workplace in an IWW union. The IWW will also help with the creation and building of industrial union networks in the organised workforce in order to promote IWW policies of solidarity and workers control and industrial unionism. These networks would form the basis of new industrial unions within the shell of the old organised labour force.