

# INDUSTRIAL WORKER

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## Snapshots Of The Student Movement In Montréal

By P. Gage

I arrived in Montréal the night the government of Québec had turned the province into a police state, on a hot May 23, 2012. Jean Charest, the premier of Québec, had passed a law declaring any demonstration over 50 people not pre-approved by the police as an illegal gathering punishable by up to \$1,000 in fines for individuals and \$125,000 in fines for any organization endorsing the action. That night, over 25,000 students and supporters defied the law and marched through downtown Montréal. We marched under banners dropped from apartments, past bar patrons cheering with raised fists, and among cars honking in support. In that and other nightly demonstrations, I saw random beatings on the streets by a police force run amok. While we marched, the student delegates met all weekend in their congresses and debated whether to endorse the demonstrations.

There is a strong temptation to write a protest tourism piece that says "I was there," and no doubt that phrase still

makes me smile a couple days after having left Québec for New York. I am still in awe, but this piece is not intended to talk about how amazing it all was. That does not do students, working families or the unemployed any good.

Instead, this article is intended to convey to militants in the rest of the world a few of the things I saw and heard about in Québec and things that any class struggle organization could learn from. The more questions I asked, the more the mask of Québec exceptionalism fell away to reveal a real practical movement that succeeded not because the protesters were at the right place at the right time but because they did things right. Below I will outline three explanations for why this movement has been so successful: The class analysis of the Québec students, the elevation of rank-and-file assemblies over executive power and the central role direct action plays in the movement.



Continued on 6 Thousands march through the streets of Montréal on May 18.

Photo: recomposition.info

## Wobblies Support Fired IWW Jimmy John's Worker In Florida



Wobblies picket Jimmy John's in Gainesville, Fla., on May 26.

Photo: Emily Sparr

By the Gainesville GMB

The summer's controlled burns left smoke hanging throughout the air. With eyes burning, whether from smoke,

sweat or another passion, the Gainesville General Membership Branch (GMB) of the IWW assembled at Jimmy John's of Archer Road on May 26 to demand the

reinstatement of Fellow Worker Ryan F., who was fired after delivering a petition.

The petition was drafted by delivery drivers and in-shop workers of the Archer Road store. In short, the picketers requested that the employee-only back parking lot be fixed. The parking lot had been in a serious state of disrepair for more than a year, to the point where it was damaging the workers' vehicles. Management admitted the parking lot required repair in January 2012, but no progress was ever made.

The petition made the reasonable and understandable requests that Jimmy John's provide safe and adequate parking for its workers, or at least one driver-only spot in the main parking lot. General Manager Dan Jaworski refused.

Instead, Jaworski sent home and later dismissed long-time worker Ryan F. after he delivered the workers' petition. Though Ryan, who had been working at

the Archer Road location for four years, confirmed with Jaworski that he was not being fired at the time, he was indeed terminated during his next shift, ostensibly for "insubordination."

"[Management] received the petition. They fixed the parking lot. They fired me. I guess they figured they had to give in when we showed our power, and that they could avoid further escalation by eliminating me," said Ryan.

"But they probably didn't expect me to be back with numbers," he added smiling, motioning toward the dozen or so Wobblies and community sympathizers picketing with him.

An Unfair Labor Practice is being filed with the National Labor Relations Board.

"We were going to eat there, but now we aren't," shouted one car's passenger from her window while making a U-turn in front of the store to many cheers and raised fists from the picket line.

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## NATO Comes To Chicago

By Mike Hargis

**Wednesday, May 16:** The Chicago Police Department's Organized Crime unit raided an apartment building in the Bridgeport Neighborhood, former Mayor Richard Daley's old stomping grounds, and detained eight people. The police broke down the door to get access to the "6" flat and proceeded to search without a warrant. They confiscated some beer brewing equipment, claiming that it was designed to manufacture Molotov cocktails. Most of the people detained were eventually released, but three were charged with domestic terrorism stemming from alleged plots to firebomb police stations, shoot an arrow through the window of Mayor Rahm Emanuel's home, and attack Obama's campaign headquarters. The National Lawyers Guild and the People's Law Office,

who ran a legal operation during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) demonstrations, denounced the warrantless raid and the subsequent charges as transparently a frame-up intended to discredit the anti-NATO protests and to intimidate people coming to Chicago to protest the war machine. The three activists charged are Jared Chase, Brent Beterly and Brian Jacob Church.

In the week prior to the NATO meeting and protests, police engaged in a systematic campaign of harassment against anyone who looked like a protestor.

**Friday, May 18:** 3,200 people join the National Nurses United in a rally at Daley Plaza to demand a "Robin Hood Tax" on the financial transactions of banks and hedge funds. The city had earlier

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**Focus on Organizing**

**Building Blocks: A New Column On Building Branches**

By Don M.

Building effective and functional General Membership Branches (GMBs) is an important task that is the key to the long-term goals and aspirations we have as an organization. This is nothing new and was mentioned specifically in the article entitled “For A Union of 10,000 Wobblies” (June 2011 *IW*, page 3).

In the Nebraska GMB we have experienced firsthand the necessity of a functional branch to aid local organizing campaigns. We had a public organizing campaign before we even applied for a branch charter. Without the support of a functional branch to raise funds and to effectively organize local support among allies and friends, we were completely unprepared for the company’s retaliation. The company effectively bullied members into quitting, intimidated potential members into becoming anti-union, and eventually fired one of our best organizers. As a branch we were not prepared for this and I feel like we failed these workers.

Through struggle we learn from our victories and defeats. We have been a chartered branch since Jan. 1, 2011, and have made many mistakes and learned a lot. Along with our branch there have been a number of newly chartered branches in the past few years as well; in Greater Kansas City, Tulsa, Richmond, Atlanta, Salt Lake City, Northeast Ohio and the Madison Industrial Union Branch (IUB) 560 come to mind.

Over the next few months I will be reaching out to these branches and asking them to submit articles to this column about their experiences with building a branch from the ground up, and to write about how they build solidarity among members, how they delegate tasks and administrative duties, what kinds of practices have been successful and which ones that have not.

The purpose of these articles is to have our experiences written down for future reference for Wobblies who choose

to start a branch, and also to encourage at-large members to do so. With close to half of our membership being at-large members, we have the potential for another 50+ branches in the union. A chartered branch is important for long-term affiliation with the IWW because people join to feel connected and to be a part of something larger than themselves and hopefully to organize their workplaces and coworkers. One of the best ways to



Graphic: Ben Debnay

accomplish this is to have a local branch that members can plug in to.

The “Workers Power” column is my favorite section of the *IW* because it includes great discussion and debate about organizing and organizational strategies. My hope for this column is to start the discussion around the less glamorous and tough work of building and maintaining functional branches which are vital not only to our local organizing, but also to the long-term health and sustainability of the IWW as a whole.

In the next few months we will be running articles about the nuts and bolts of building a branch, with articles on “How to go from one Wobbly in your town to 10 and applying for a branch charter”; “We have our branch charter, now what?”; and “How do we sustain membership and interest after the excitement of being a newly chartered branch has worn off?”

My hope is that after these first few columns, we generate enough interest throughout the union to get different branches—especially more established branches with a ton of experience like the Bay Area, Portland, Twin Cities, and Edmonton—to submit articles on their thoughts on how to build and maintain functional branches and “best practices,” and to make this a monthly column that complements “Workers Power” on page 4.

If we are going to have a union of 10,000 Wobblies we will need to have more and better branches, and my hope for this column is to help aid fellow workers who want to make that a reality.

**Toward A Union Of Organizers**

By db

At present there is a large contingent of dedicated IWW members who believe in organizing, but who don’t believe that their workplaces are organize-able, and as such, focus their efforts elsewhere.

While I am a strong proponent of focusing our energy, I think the idea that we must organize a whole workplace or not at all is a self-defeating practice and comes more from a business union playbook than our own.

Regardless of workplace size and level of establishment, there are undoubtedly good reasons to take at least some beginning steps towards organizing your workplace. Whether there is an already existing union or the workplace is virulently anti-union, be intentional about social mapping and identifying social leaders, doing one-on-ones with coworkers to build relationships and maybe connect them into improving working conditions and raising their class-consciousness, while also building the IWW.

Let’s consider a few real life examples:

1. You’re a state worker and the government shuts down. You, as well as 20,000 other workers, are laid off. Your existing union is doing nothing relevant to respond to the situation and the only contact information you have for your coworkers is their work emails. If you haven’t taken the first organizing step of gathering contacts, there is no way to plan any type of collective response (outside of your union’s bureaucratic methods), or even check in with your coworkers.

2. You’re a retail worker in a relatively small shop that is mostly composed of a group of conservative Christian workers, generally white, male and anti-union. Many have strong ties to management or are actually related to the manager. There is a significantly smaller group made up of low-income black workers, some white male nerds, a queer worker and two badass women workers: one white, one Latina. These workers all suffer harassment, and are at least curious if not open to the ideas

of working-class solidarity and struggle you’ve discussed with them. If you’re not organizing you can’t effectively respond to this harassment, or you might do so in a way that makes things worse. Moreover, intentionally building and struggling with coworkers opens the possibility of transforming the culture of harassment at work. In fact, taking the first steps might just make it clear that organizing this workplace is a realistic possibility, and might at least get coworkers jazzed enough to join the IWW or stay in touch and start organizing their next job.

3. You’re a nurse in a unionized workforce and most of your coworkers are older than you. They’re counting their days until retirement and are on the high end of the pay scale. Big state cutbacks are expected down the line, but few of the new nurses like yourself know what it was like to work in pre-union conditions and are brainwashed by crazy new-hire propaganda. If you’re not organizing you can’t create a culture that welcomes and also alerts new workers to the conditions they should expect, along with the bullshit the company is putting out to confuse workers. Moreover, the possibility of setting up small events where experienced nurses share pre-union and union organizing experiences with younger nurses can help change the workplace culture to one where workers stand up and contribute to organizing in advance of massive cutbacks that are likely to come in the years ahead.

In all of these real examples, practiced organizing skills can help to understand and empower your fellow workers. Doing so will also make you capable of better supporting other workers’ struggles and give you experience to be able to offer others practical advice.

As such, you should get down to an organizer training to gain the skills and framework you need to begin setting and meeting workplace goals. From there, it’s useful to find yourself an organizing buddy: Perhaps a delegate, another worker in your industry, a coworker, or all three to set a regular schedule for talking about work, setting goals, and making change happen.

You can do it! This is what a union of organizers is all about.

Thoughts? [db\[at\]riseup.net](mailto:db[at]riseup.net).

**IWW Constitution Preamble**

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, “A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work,” we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, “Abolition of the wage system.”

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

**Join the IWW Today**

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers’ ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses’ orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

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

Initiation is the same as one month’s dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under \$2000, dues are \$9 a month. If your monthly income is between \$2000 and \$3500, dues are \$18 a month. If your monthly income is over \$3500 a month, dues are \$27 a month. Dues may vary outside of North America and in Regional Organizing Committees (Australia, British Isles, German Language Area).

- I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer.
- I agree to abide by the IWW constitution.
- I will study its principles and acquaint myself with its purposes.



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# The Wages System

By Nate Hawthorne and Matt Kelly

We talked in our last column about the slogan “A fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work.” In capitalism, we can’t get many things we need unless we have money. There are really only two basic ways to get money: Hire someone to produce something which you try to sell for a profit, or get hired by someone to produce something, which they will try to sell for a profit. This is why no wages under capitalism can be truly fair. This is because the basic arrangement is already unfair. Under capitalism we are required to spend our time working for other people. Furthermore, the stuff that capitalists sell...workers made it. The capitalists’ profits generally come from the difference between the price they charge for the stuff we produce and what they paid us to produce the stuff. That difference is inherently unfair.

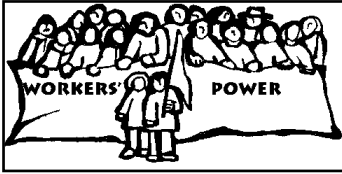
But it’s important to note that capitalists are constrained by the capitalist system, too. These constraints are often more powerful than the actual laws on the books. Whatever the laws on paper, the real law of the land in capitalist society is the law of profits. When the official laws line up with that law, then the official laws tend to be followed. When the official laws no longer line up with the law of profits, then the law of profits tends to win out. This is because the capitalist system rewards employers who reduce costs while keeping prices up. For workers this means that companies that pay employees less (and that spend less on having a safe, sanitary work environment) than their competitors will be more profitable. The system punishes employers who pay employees more than competitors. This will always happen under capitalism. That’s another reason why “a fair day’s wage” is always going to be limited.

Sometimes liberal or progressive capitalists, and more generally people who are in favor of capitalism, will become concerned that wages are too low and conditions are too bad. This is because capitalists need workers. The capitalist class needs there to be workers tomorrow, and in 10 and 20 years. Smarter capitalists and people who support capitalism sometimes realize that if wages get too low then workers may have a hard time coming back to work. You may know this from your own life if you have ever dug through the couch cushions to find bus fare to get to work, or if you’ve had to work long enough hours or in bad enough conditions that your immune system crashes and you get sick and have to miss work. And if wages get too low then in the long term workers might not have enough kids and provide their kids with the sorts of education and training that will make them be what employers will want in 10 or 20 years. Sometimes capitalists behave in ways that maximize profits in the short term but which have the potential to undermine the stability of the company or of capitalism as a whole in the long term. The recent global economic meltdown triggered by financial markets is another version of individual capitalists putting the short term goal of maximum profit ahead of the long term interests of the capitalist class as a whole.

Liberal or progressive capitalists and their supporters recognize that capitalists overall will be better off if there is a balance between the short term profits of individual capitalists and the long term interests of the capitalist class. This leads these progressives to call for fair wages. Capitalist “fair wages” means that individuals get paid enough that they can support themselves in order to keep on working. In the long term, “a fair day’s wage” means that the working class gets paid enough to keep having kids and raising them up so that there continues to be a working class. From our perspective, the perspective of workers, we want more money for our work. But we also need to recognize that

wages and improving working conditions for some workers is often in the long-term interests of the capitalist class. This is why there are minimum wage laws and health and safety laws. This also accounts for the motivation of some capitalists to support initiatives like universal health care. They want to ensure that healthy and productive workers are available for the production of profit.

The labor movement has a long history of fighting against the constraints that capitalism imposes on humanity. There have been important changes in the specifics of the constraints imposed by capitalism. At the same time, obviously capitalism still exists and it still constrains humanity—working-class people especially. The AFL-CIO, Change To Win and

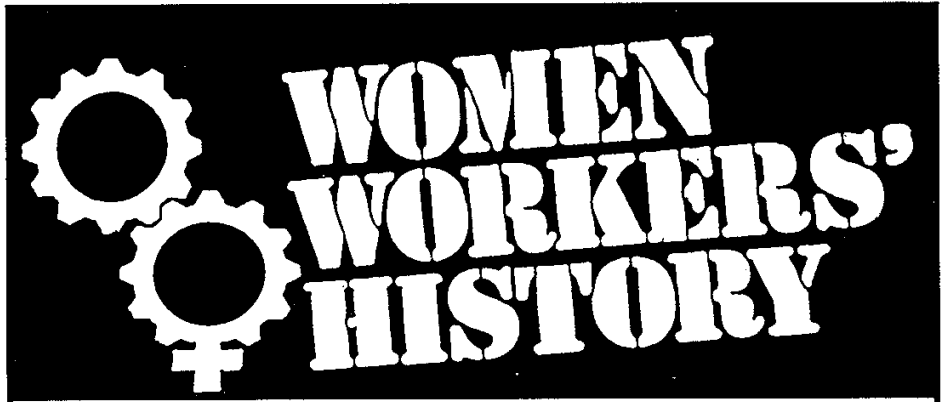


other unions have always based their struggles on the goal of “a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work.” They have never once lifted any section of the working class out of wage slavery, nor have they ever tried. Similar to what we’ve seen with the liberal wing of the capitalist class, the improvements the labor movement has won have often helped to stabilize capitalism. Individual capitalists are often willing to work against the interests of their class if it means they can individually profit, which can make individual capitalists or small groups of capitalists into a threat to the system. Unions can sometimes function as a sort of immune system within capitalism. When unions organize to check particularly greedy capitalists who put their short term needs above the needs of their class, they reduce the extreme behavior of some capitalists who threaten to destabilize capitalism.

That doesn’t mean these unions are worthless or that we should not support their struggles. The labor movement has fought for and won very important changes in working-class people’s lives. To put it another way, the labor movement is a name for working-class people struggling to improve their lives, against the constraints imposed by capitalism, and there are very important successes that have been achieved. Many people would have a much lower standard of living without those successes. These improvements in standards of living apply mainly to union members, but to some extent there are improvements that have been shared with non-unionized workers as well. The eight-hour day, regulations on child labor, the right to organize, workers’ compensation laws—for these things and more we owe a debt of gratitude to the brave men and women of the labor movement.

The improvements in working-class life won by the labor movement show that the constraints imposed by capitalism are not inevitable; demonstrating that the artificial limits that capitalism imposes on humanity can be pushed back and challenged. Obviously, organized workers will generally have better wages and benefits under capitalism. But the degradation of the entire working class is not about having better or worse wages, better or worse benefits. The degradation of workers stems from the fact that the working class doesn’t receive the full value that we produce by our labors and we have to be satisfied with a fraction of that value called “wages.” The AFL-CIO and the rest of the traditional labor movement is blind to this reality, and so can only ever help to make an inherently exploitative system a little easier to live in.

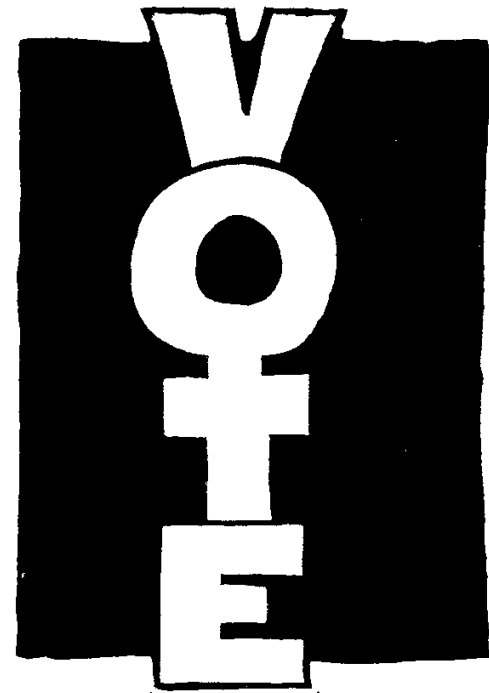
In the IWW, a union where our eyes are open to recognize this stark reality, we should recognize that some improvements, even hard-fought ones, can result in more stable versions of capitalism. Being aware of this can help us plan for what comes after a short-term victory. We especially need to make connections between our fights for improvements now and the fight to end capitalism. This means we must never really settle for any improvements. We don’t simply want a better life under



## CHAPTER 55: Working Women and the Vote

**Having the right to vote didn’t always seem important to working women who labored in sweatshops for 60 hours and more a week, and still had responsibilities for household management, cooking, cleaning and childrearing. Many activists, like Mother Jones and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, rejected suffrage as “irrelevant” compared to the need for union organization. “Woman suffrage is beginning at the other end. What the women need is economic emancipation, and Sister, dear, how they need it! And they can’t get it without organization.”**

**The attitude of many women workers towards the vote was in part a reaction to a suffrage movement dominated by wealthy women. Elitist, conservative, these women were unwilling to ally themselves with workers, blacks or immigrants.**



**But despite these differences, the women’s labor movement and women’s suffrage movement developed alliances. Suffrage leaders like Susan B. Anthony saw the need to establish links with labor, while women labor organizers appreciated the support of middle-class suffrage activists in strikes. Increasingly, the Women’s Trade Union League began to see the connection between the right to vote and the fight for better conditions for women workers. The League hired Maggie Hinchey, a laundry worker, and Clara Lemlich, leader of the 1909 waistmakers’ strike, as suffrage organizers.**

**On the eve of World War I, the Women’s Trade Union League was campaigning for the right of women to vote as a way of abolishing the sweatshop, raising wages, lowering working hours and establishing the right of workers to organize, strike and bargain.**

Graphic: Mike Konopacki

capitalism, because “a fair day’s wages” is still unfair. We must always point this out and educate ourselves and each other about the ways capitalism limits working class people’s lives. We must also recognize that there is a ceiling on how much things can improve in a capitalist society.

The IWW organizer Big Bill Haywood once said, “Nothing is too good for the working class.” This echoes other radical slogans: “We demand everything!” and “everything for everyone!” Whatever we win, we’ll take it. We won’t feel grateful

to anyone on high who “gave” it to us. As soon as we can we’ll fight for more, and we’ll join with our brothers and sisters elsewhere in the working class who are fighting, until we take it all.

### Recomposition

An unofficial publication  
by and for wobblies.  
<http://recomposition.info>

**Wobbly & North American News**

# Statement On The Trayvon Martin Killing

**From the IWW General Executive Board**

The General Executive Board of the IWW strongly condemns the horrific killing of Trayvon Martin and extends our sympathy and solidarity to his family. This unprovoked murder by neighborhood watch vigilante George Zimmerman and the brazen lack of response by local authorities sadly falls within the long history of racialized violence in the United States. Even as the arrest of Zimmerman was recently announced as result of the outcry and attention the issues has received, there is still an ongoing struggle.

As we believe that an injury to one is an injury to all, the IWW has always stood opposed to racial violence, injustice and oppression as well as organizing some of the first interracial unions among workers in the United States. Whether it takes the form of discrimination and systematic violence against African Americans and



Graphic: javiersoriano.com

other people of color, the deportation and denial of basic rights to immigrant fellow workers or the surveillance and persecution of Muslims post-9/11, the deliberate racist dehumanizing of our fellow workers serves to corrode solidarity and to undermine our common struggle for freedom, equality and self-determination.

We call on our members and branches to show their solidarity and active support for local organizing around the killing of Trayvon Martin. Further, we call on our members and organizers to take the conversation around Trayvon Martin and racism into their workplaces and campaigns. While pundits proclaim that the United States has entered a “post-race” era, the killing of Trayvon Martin and subsequent inaction of the local authorities exposes the realities of racism that still exist.

Justice for Trayvon Martin!  
An injury to one is an injury to all!

## IWW Cleaners Secure London Living Wage

The cleaners at St. George’s Hospital Medical School will be paid a new hourly rate of £8.30 per hour beginning on Aug. 1—an increase from their current wage of £6.08 an hour. While this is a significant victory, the cleaners could face having their hours cut, which would make the pay rise futile. Pictured here is an IWW protest to raise awareness around the issue on May 25.

With files from <http://yourlocalguardian.co.uk>.



Photo: yourlocalguardian.co.uk

## IWW CANROC Supports Air Canada Workers

**By the IWW Canadian Regional Organizing Committee**

The IWW Canadian Regional Organizing Committee (CANROC) extends its congratulations and support to the workers who are taking direct action and engaging in spontaneous work stoppages at Air Canada.

Air Canada has shown it does not respect its contract with its workers nor is it meeting its obligations to negotiate contracts in good faith. The federal government has unwisely sided with Air Canada by claiming its operations are an essential service to the Canadian economy and by bringing in back-to-work legislation.

In a situation where workers are denied their right to strike and the government compromises their right to negotiate their working conditions, workers must take action to defend themselves and their families. Laws passed in parliament or any other venue only have meaning for working people if they are founded in justice and fairness. Back-to-work legislation and forcing arbitrated contracts



Photo: blog.cheapoair.ca

onto workers meets neither criteria.

We demand the government rescind its back-to-work legislation and for Air Canada to return to the bargaining table in good faith. We support the Air Canada workers who are taking the necessary risks to win this fight.

For more information about the IWW in Canada, please contact [iww@iww.ca](mailto:iww@iww.ca) or visit <http://www.iww.ca>.

## Solidarity From Norway!

The IWW Norway group was formed in August 2011. We have since been working on building the IWW in Norway and spreading the word through solidarity actions, issuing statements, leafletting, maintaining our website, <http://www.iww.no>, having a



Graphic: IWW Norway

presence on social media, attending union conferences, picketing, recruiting new members to the One Big Union, and more. The IWW has no historical presence in Norway, but its influence on Norwegian unions and labor politics, through its ideas, has been vast. The reintroduction of revolutionary unionism to the opposition in the union movement, and the building of the IWW in Norway, seems a natural

historical development. In the short time that we have been organizing we have gotten a few members around the country, but even more friends and supporters.

We appreciate contact with branches elsewhere, the fantastic support from our fellow workers in the British Isles Regional Administration (BIRA) and help from lots of other friends in the IWW around the world.

We are excited to build the IWW in Norway and being a part of the One Big Union!

**In Solidarity,**  
**Jan-Robert Fevang, X369425**  
**Secretary**

## Up To Speed: Labor, May Day And Education Activism Around Philadelphia

**By John Kalwaic**

The last few months in Philly have been awash with activism around labor and education due to massive school cuts and the unionization of security guards around the city. There were decent protests and events for this year’s May Day as well. The following is a report on some of these activities.

### Security Guards

The major organizer of security guards in Philadelphia, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 32BJ, held a large rally on March 29 for more respect and dignity on the job. Security officers at the University of Pennsylvania decided not to unionize with the SEIU but with the Philadelphia Security Officers Union (PSOU), which until now had only represented the security officers at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The PSOU was formed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art when the SEIU abandoned an organizing campaign because the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) failed to pass. When EFCA failed to pass in the U.S. Congress, the SEIU bosses figured that the Philadelphia Museum of Art security guards had too small of a chance to win, so the guards persisted with their own campaign and formed the independent PSOU. After a year, the PSOU security guards finally won recognition and a contract at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in April 2011. This year security guards at the well-to-do Quaker University of Pennsylvania, which is a major employer in the city, decided to organize with the PSOU. The SEIU had made attempts to persuade them to go with 32BJ, but to no avail. The security guards work for Allied Barton, which is a private company the University of Pennsylvania uses for security. In the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election

only two people voted against the union. The SEIU also tried to get in on the NLRB ballot but was not able to. As of now, the PSOU represents security guards at both the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the West Philadelphia area of the University of Pennsylvania.

### May Day

May Day 2012 was more vibrant in Philadelphia than it was in the previous years. Occupy Philly had a rally against the banks, including Wells Fargo in Center City and around City Hall. Occupy Philly protesters blocked a Wells Fargo and ATM around Rittenhouse Square in Center City; Wells Fargo has notoriously “burrowed” millions of dollars from the school system, which it never has paid back. When Occupy protestors tried to block the ATM, a customer tried to put his hand in one of the protestor’s mouths, which then lead to a scuffle that would involve the police, and two people were arrested. There was also a march in West Philadelphia against police brutality, as well as education and postal cuts, that did not receive any media attention. The evening culminated with the large annual May Day picnic in Elmwood Park by the labor monument.

### Education and Postal Cuts

Philadelphia has gone through several draconian cuts to public education this year. The governor of Pennsylvania Tom Corbett has slashed the education budget and is tyrannizing many schools programs—even in the sorrowing suburb of Upper Darby, the arts program at the local high school has been cut. In Philadelphia, the school budget is controlled by the School Reform Commission (SRC), which is not elected but appointed by the governor’s administration. However, even before the governor announced his major cuts, smaller cuts were already hap-

pening. Nurses at several Philadelphia high schools were laid off, and in protest, a group called Occupy 440 was formed (named after the 440 building where the SRC meets). The nurses were laid off at local high schools as well as middle and elementary schools, some of which have now no nurses at all. Occupy 440 was formed to push the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) into action because the nurses believed that the PFT leadership was dragging its feet in supporting them. Some student teachers and members of Occupy Philly and Occupy Temple came to support the nurses and Occupy 440 every week for several months. Janitors and other staff from SEIU 32BJ are also getting laid off, as massive education cuts were announced. On May 24, they held a rally with thousands of people in attendance—one of the largest demonstrations seen in Philly in recent times. People were arrested when they approached City Hall. Some turned back and obeyed the orders of the police, which is why the others were arrested. The following week, on May 31, SEIU 32BJ held a demonstration to protested the fact that their pensions were not going to be recognized after they were laid off. SEIU members and other union members and activists demonstrated at City Hall to demand that the City Council pass a resolution that the SRC recognize their benefits. The City Council did pass the resolution but unfortunately its effects are non-binding on the SRC. Later on that same day, there was a massive rally at the 440 building when the SRC held its vote to close the schools. The rally was made up of PFT members, some people from SEIU



Photo: bigeducationape.blogspot.com

32BJ, Occupy Philly, and the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU). Decarcerate PA was there protesting the amount of money spent on prisons while funding to schools is being cut. Around 500 people showed up. The rally started outside the 440 building and went half way across the street. A crowd of PFT teachers and nurses as well as students from the PSU crowded into a small SRC meeting room, and everyone else was forced to watch the meeting by video downstairs in the lobby of the SRC building. Members chanted to the SRC board members throughout the hearing. When the SRC did not listen to the demands of the PSU they walked out, opening up more available seats. When the PSU walked out more PFT members and other activists tried to get into the SRC room but the police were on orders not to let them in. In the lobby more people tried to go up the elevator to the floor where the meeting was, but the police did not let them go up. The demonstrators played cat and mouse with the police until eventually the police had the maintenance staff shut off the elevators. The result was a good turn out and the SRC got the message that they were being watched.

## Special

# Snapshots Of The Student Movement In Montréal

Continued from 1

## The Student Union System in Québec

Like in the rest of Canada, student unions in Québec are united into various federations of campus unions. In English-speaking Canada, the two main federations are the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), who generally line up politically with the New Democratic Party and the Canada Labour Congress, and the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), a more right-leaning federation with ties to the Canadian Liberal and Conservative Parties. Québec is an exception, however: Neither of those student federations has a strong presence there. Instead the three main federations are the Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ), the Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec (FEUQ), and the Fédération Étudiante Collegiale du Québec (FECQ).

The FEUQ and the FECQ both have strong ties to the Parti Québécois, a nationalist populist party in the province. The FECQ is based in the Cégeps, a school system that sits between high schools and the post secondary system that many Québécois go to before moving on to a trade school, a career or university. The FEUQ is based in the universities.

ASSÉ (pronounced *ah-say*, a play on the French word for “enough”) is different in that it is hostile toward political affiliation and openly anti-capitalist, feminist, and anti-colonial. They have no formal connection to the mainstream labor movement, though many workers are now looking to the students for how to move their own struggles forward (this worker included).

La Coalition large de l’ASSÉ (CLASSE) is the “coalition large” of ASSÉ and allows the members of other federations to affiliate with ASSÉ through their local. During strike mobilization, student associations joined the coalition as a way of strengthening their numbers and improving coordination of the strike. This allows the militant anti-capitalist politics of ASSÉ to influence the politics in other federations while at the same time keeping their separate organizational identity, their militant autonomy from the official left, and their radical politics intact.

CLASSE has also allowed ASSÉ to spread the assembly system of decision-making and organization to schools where the students were represented by other student federations. As the strike gained momentum, more and more student organizations claimed dual affiliation with ASSÉ through the CLASSE coalition. The strict requirements placed upon this affiliation shifted the decision making power in the local organizations: All associations that joined had to hold regular general assemblies and these assemblies had to be the highest decision-making power in the association, even above the local union executive.

This took control of the strike and the collective actions of the students out of the student politicians’ hands and placed it firmly in the hands of the rank and file. Soon ASSÉ transitioned from being an anti-capitalist student union to also being the central hub in a network of student militants fighting against the steadily rising debt load of student graduates.

## The Assembly System

There can be no doubt that the charismatic, articulate and brave leadership in ASSÉ and CLASSE has played a major role in the public perception of the strike, and these spokespeople should be commended for putting forward a point of view that runs counter to that of every powerful person in our society (that is a lonely place to be). However, the strength of the student movement lies in the limits it has placed on reliance on leadership, and the way that its politics revolves around direct action

rather than charismatic personalities.

The assemblies are organized either by department (like biology) or faculty (like sciences). For example, the geography department at Concordia has very strong support for their strike, and they meet every week to debate the strike’s effectiveness, tactics and demands, and to vote on whether or not to renew the strike for another week. Other departments or faculties, like the science faculty at McGill, decided not to strike and classes continued there.

The assemblies are run on a majority rules system with clear rules of order spelled out in a constitution. There are some hallmarks of consensus, however, such as designated people who watch the room for students who might be upset, or not speaking up, and who can alter the meeting stack according to these dynamics. Many of the assemblies have a huge turnout, especially around strike votes, but they also grow and shrink depending on what is going on. The faculties that are on strike have strong strike mandates, often well over 80 percent. This is a typical outcome of the practice of voting by a show of hands and why trade unions traditionally take strike votes this way. Often it is the fear of being alone, more than the fear of taking action, which affects the outcome of a strike vote. Seeing those around you who openly show their willingness to strike by raising their hand emboldens everyone. In fact, the McGill administration tried to reduce momentum for the strike by requiring strike votes to be taken online—not too different from government-supervised strike votes for union workers. This failed when students voted overwhelmingly in favor anyway.

## Trade Union Bargaining and Direct Action

Many commentators have raised the issue whether students can really form effective unions the way grocery store clerks or steel workers can. Of course this shows a certain short-sightedness in how we as a society define a union. Fortunately, working people don’t generally let semantics get in the way of what they want.

As far as effectiveness is concerned, a union is a collective body of working-class people organized to exert pressure on the capitalist system in order to extract concessions in the short term, and to advance the political interests of its members in the long term. The student movement in Québec is a union movement because it is organized on a class basis and uses direct action to achieve its goals. In fact, by these lights, the student movement is a better example of a union than many unions in North America.

Student unions in Québec are regulated by laws and register and certify like other unions. They have access to a formal grievance procedure and the equivalent of a collective agreement. However, their right to strike is ambiguous, and they only have negotiators now because the government asked for someone to bargain with once the strike started.

In general, the way that unions advance their agenda is through disruption of capitalist profit. If businesses don’t make money, either by striking, sabotage, boycott, or social disruption, they are brought to their knees very quickly. The students’ capacity to bargain likewise comes from their capacity to create a disruption. They have two main fronts in this disruption: Their picket lines on campus and their demonstrations in the streets, especially in Montréal but also at Jean Charest’s office and home, or at Liberal Party gatherings like in Victoriaville, where a police riot ensued.

As far as picket lines go, some militants I spoke with felt that the best pickets let students cross but block professors—often other union members who were sympathetic anyway. This was very effective because it minimized the group of angry

anti-strike students stubbornly trying to get through the classroom doors while ensuring class wouldn’t happen anyway.

As far as demonstrations go, these had been happening for 30 straight days by the time I arrived in Montréal and continue at the time this article is going to press. Students have now been joined with other Québec residents in “casserole” marches, where people march in the streets banging back pots and pans in solidarity to protest the passing of Bill 78, a law that undermines basic civil liberties and the right to free assembly. There have also been weeks of targeted economic disruption—blockading the National Bank building early in the morning, blocking delivery routes to the port, blocking doors to the Ministry of Education’s office, blocking the doors of Hydro Québec, or the headquarters of the Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ), or the Association of Cegep Administrators...the list goes on and on and on.

## Decision-Making in the Assemblies

The discipline required to carry out the strike on such a massive scale relates directly to the way decisions are made in the assemblies. Even those who were opposed to the strike were encouraged to attend and debate. At the end a vote would be taken that was considered binding on everyone. This sort of collective, horizontal discipline is the root of all unionism.

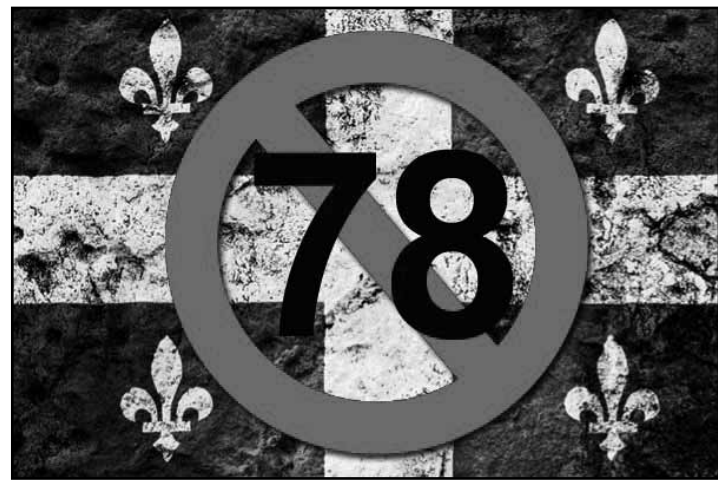
One practice that made all of these separate votes and separate picket lines work together on a larger scale was a practice called “the floor.” Basically student groups would vote to strike but hold off on walking out of classes until enough other students likewise voted in favor of striking in their own assemblies. So, for example, one association might vote in favor of a strike, but pass a motion not to walk until at least 2,000 more students, in other assemblies at that school, voted in favor. This would contribute to the sense of momentum while at the same time allowing for a high degree of coordination amongst a large group.

It is telling that there were attempts to break up this kind of organization and encourage the more “moderate” student unions to take the lead, with the Charest government eventually kicking CLASSE out of negotiations. But barring them from the negotiating table more than anything proved the strength of ASSÉ and the CLASSE, since it showed that the capacity to negotiate came from the power to disrupt, and an end to disruption was only likely to come through the assemblies.

The assemblies, as a place for decision-making that included everyone, short-circuited the crisis of leadership that exists, and has existed for decades, in most unions and left-organizations in Canada. Rank-and-file students were radicalized by their own sense of power and at their first taste of an actual, living democracy they began to become less and less interested in cutting a deal regardless of what their leaders might think. Student leaders, some emboldened and others held hostage by their radical constituents, have become caught up in a process that is much bigger than any single personality. In fact when CLASSE was barred from negotiations the two more moderate federations stopped negotiating in solidarity. This move is especially significant considering the bad blood between these groups.

## Conclusions

By the end of my weekend in Québec, CLASSE had announced that they would not only refuse to condemn the “illegal”



Graphic: facebook.com/mcgillgradschool

marches, but would actually endorse them. The following day, an illegal march celebrating the 100th day of the strike drew over 400,000 people in what was described as the largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history. Now, regular “casserole” marches are drawing in growing sections of the Québec population in solidarity.

It’s easy to think that these things come out of nowhere, that there is such a thing as spontaneous social combustion. There is an element of spontaneity, and the social foment that exists on the streets in Québec is partly a product of the tensions that can explode anywhere in society at any time. But from the militants I talked to, one thing that stood out was a strong connection between the veterans of the failed strike of 2007 and the new generation of strikers in 2012. The veterans have brought their past experiences in struggle to the current strike.

As their struggle progresses, the Québec students have become a rallying point for workers’ unions. Let’s be clear though, the workers’ unions’ support did not come earlier because the student movement represents something completely different. CLASSE has the courage to defy the legislation that trade unions like the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) did not. These business unions are offering their support now because they can advance their own bargaining agenda by making the students appear to be an ally of theirs. But it is not enough to line up the big old unions behind CLASSE. The next step is to build similar structures to the ones that facilitated this strike. We need structures across workers’ unions like what CLASSE contributed to the student federations: Assemblies grounded on the shop floor that plan and manage direct action without the interference of political specialists.

Building a stronger movement isn’t simply a question of a sharper analysis, but of useful practices. A broad conception of the problems with the education system, and with capitalist society more generally, is empty until it is linked to practical proposals regarding the strategic decisions movements have to make on a day-to-day basis. For many people, action precedes consciousness in a very real way, and analysis is generated from the struggle. Capitalism is no different than any other machine: You don’t really learn how it works until you take it apart. The Québec struggle has revealed a way for us to struggle that makes it harder to turn our organizations against us, and we need to learn from that.

*Information for this article was generously contributed by Amber Gross, Rémi Bellemare-Caron and the Montréal IWW. Thanks to Marianne for editing and research.*

*For more information on the student strike in Québec, see <http://www.bloquonslahausse.com> in French and <http://www.stopthehike.ca> in English. You can use [paypal.com](http://paypal.com) to donate to support the strike via CLASSE. Make your donation to [executif@asse-solidarite.qc.ca](mailto:executif@asse-solidarite.qc.ca).*

## Special Le Printemps Érable (The Maple Spring): Direct Action Gets The Goods In Canada

By Jean-Martin Veilleux  
Edited by Sean Carleton

The flames of discontent are raging in Canada. Members of the IWW in Canada outside of Québec have endorsed and stand in solidarity with students and workers across Québec. Since early February, the Québec working class have been taking a courageous stand against rising tuition fees and other austerity measures. By refusing to go to school, and by taking to the streets in the hundreds of thousands, Québec students and workers are showing the rest of Canada that direct action really does get the goods. Recently, Quebeckers have begun taking to the streets every night. Now people across the country and around the world are joining them in weekly “casserole” nights, where people march in the streets banging back pots and pans in solidarity to protest the passing of Bill 78, a law that undermines basic civil liberties and the right to free assembly. The uprising is known as “Le Printemps Érable” in French, or “The Maple Spring.” The symbol of the uprising is a square of red felt, symbolizing that under austerity, we are all “squarely in the red.”

News of the inspiring actions in Québec and across Canada is getting very little media coverage. Little is known about how members of the IWW in the province are involved in organizing on the ground. In the following interview, Jean-Martin Veilleux of the Montréal General Membership Branch (GMB) of the IWW attempts to identify the key issues and organizing strategies of the strike and brings attention to how IWW members are participating in this inspiring struggle.

**Sean Carleton:** What is the Le Printemps Érable about?

**Jean-Martin Veilleux:** Students are striking against a proposed tuition hike. Tuition fees have already increased 30 percent between 2007 and 2012. Now, as part of an austerity budget and an attempt to impose “use pay principles,” the Québec provincial government is trying to impose a 75 percent tuition hike over five years. The government claims that the raise in tuition will help to fund universities in Québec so that they can stay competitive on the international “education market.” The money that will be generated by the hike will go into campus branding and financing student loan programs, with little money being directed to help improve education. Such measures will reduce the access of university education for many students. Independent studies claim that the proposed tuition hike will lower the overall student population by 11 percent, and even reports from the Minister of Education acknowledge that such an increase will negatively affect student attendance.

What is important to realize about the strike is that most students are not just fighting for themselves but for the interests of future students. Some student groups are just focusing on the tuition hike, but many are pushing people to see the proposed rise in fees as part of a larger corporate attack on society in the age of capitalism’s global crisis.



Photo: strikeisaverb.net

**SC:** How has direct action played a role in defining the strike?

**J-MV:** The strike is a collective direct action by the students. Some groups, like the Fédération Étudiante Universitaire du Québec (FEUQ) and the Fédération Étudiante Collegiale du Québec (FECQ), are promoting lobbying and the ballot box as the keys to victory, without much success. In contrast, ASSÉ has adopted the principle of *combative unionism* (or struggle unionism) since its foundation in 2001, and openly promotes civil disobedience and direct action.

Direct actions have also been undertaken on an autonomous basis, including smashing the Education Minister Line Beauchamp’s office, building a brick wall in front of her house, painting the doors of a government building red, and blocking the Port of Montréal and some of the town’s bridges. These actions have been planned and organized outside of student associations. Also a “Black Square Manifesto” (“*Manifeste du Carré Noir*”) has been circulated on Facebook, which states that “violent demonstrators” (*les casseurs*) are not infiltrating the student movement; they are a part of it and are students in equal measure to “peaceful demonstrators.”

Student federations are not the only ones to see the ballot box as the proper avenue to achieve progressive reforms. There is the social-democrat Québec Solidaire and its sympathizers inside La Coalition large de l’ASSÉ (CLASSE) and the student movement in general that plays a role in waving electoralism as an outcome for the strike. The influence of electoralism is, I believe, pushing organizing efforts in a wrong direction. We should be questioning how the student movement and unions can construct a working class solidarity movement that would, in struggle, force governments to give concessions. In Québec there have been talks about the concept of a social strike, which means students, workers and community groups united in a strike movement. Unions seem to lose sight of this idea while community groups are considering it as a long term option. By autonomous initiative, a group has put together a website which encourages the social strike: <http://www.grevesociale.info>.

**SC:** What role has the IWW played in the strike?

**J-MV:** IWW members are involved on an individual basis. The Montréal

GMB is not organizing directly, except for making links with the movement to push an international day of solidarity and to spread information about our branch’s focus campaign, called “Reclaim Your Pay.” Many members are involved in the organization of local student association mobilizations and solidarity picket line mobilization squads. Some members have been on various committees of CLASSE, but not for a long time. From the perspective of the education workers—Industrial Union (IU) 620—there are teachers in the Montréal GMB, but there is sadly little student mobilization.

I personally feel that it would have been possible to bring out a more collective perspective for IWW members in student movements. There could have been a link built between Québec and the rest of the IWW and a revolutionary industrial unionism perspective brought inside the strike since this movement is a good occasion to question itself on social issues and organization of struggle. Since there are a lot of practical things to do on the day-to-day basis during the strike it makes it difficult to take a break do things related to the IWW. Since the start of the strike we haven’t seen many student members at meetings and have received only a few updates from IU 620 members, as they are understandably otherwise occupied. Though I am not a student, I’m convinced that building the branch helps the movement widen its perspective and gives an opportunity for activists to explore union models that can reproduce the kind of social upheaval and class confrontation that succeeds at producing a strong protest culture. Sadly, some student militants will likely follow the path of business unionism. That is why it is important, from a long-term perspective, to build the IWW, so that the movement doesn’t feed collaborationist organizations and tendencies.

**SC:** How can IWW members outside of Québec offer solidarity?

**J-MV:** I don’t really know how laws frame student associations/unions in the rest of Canada and in the United States. I am unsure whether other administrative structures would allow the possibility of general assemblies to be organized at all. For the time being, check out the current call for solidarity and talk to your favorite local student organization. In general, there might be an interesting job of building an international and industrial perspective for IU 620.

I also believe it’s important that people outside Québec don’t idealize Québec. If it weren’t for the hard work of constructing the Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ), there wouldn’t be an organized strike today and the tuition hike would have already passed, since non-combative student groups only organize, at best, parade-demonstrations. I disagree with CLASSE spokesperson Jeanne Reynolds when she said that “protest is in our blood.” On the contrary, I would say that there are struggles anywhere there are people who strive to build combative structures, practices and organizations.

In the case of campuses where there is a strong collaborationist student association firmly in place, it might be worth trying to organize a parallel student organization. This idea could also be widened to fit more to what an IWW education industrial union branch can look like.

**SC:** What can members of other unions do in solidarity with strikers?

**J-MV:** They can ask their unions to endorse the strike and donate money to CLASSE and to support the drive for affordable, even free, education. People can also donate money to Concordia University TV (CUTV), which does an awesome job of providing live video streams during demos, but because of police repression, needs to replace many cameras.

You can stay informed at by reading the “News from the 2012 Québec student General Strike” Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/News-from-the-2012-Quebec-student-general-strike/332377376800387> and checking the following blog which translates important movement texts: <http://translatingtheprintempsérable.tumblr.com>. You can also follow the Facebook account of the Montréal IWW for updates and information. The Canadian Regional Organizing Committee of the IWW (CANROC), of course, urges its members to walk the picket lines and fill the streets in this struggle for education and freedom.

In the hope of creating a strong and solid network of radical industrial activists in the IU 620, subscribe yourself to the IWW student Facebook account, join the CANROC email list, as well as the IU 620 email list: <http://lists.iww.org/listinfo/iu620>.

The CANROC encourages its members and branches to donate to student associations, like ASSÉ and CLASSE, and independent media outlets, such as CUTV. The CANROC also urges its members to walk the picket lines and fill the streets in this struggle for education and freedom.

Ultimately, students, teachers and workers are now building a strong solidarity movement like never before. This powerful movement allows us to hope that one day the education system will be controlled by those who work, teach and study there so that the fruits of this labor provide universal benefit to social and human development rather than be enslaved to the logic of profit which benefit banks and capitalists of all kinds.

Find out more about the IWW in Montréal and throughout Canada: <http://www.iww.ca> and <http://sitt.iww.org>.

## IWW Solidarity With The Québec Student Strike!

By the IWW Canadian Regional Organizing Committee

Members of the IWW across Canada stand in solidarity with students and workers across Québec who are taking a courageous stand against rising tuition fees and the government-backed capitalist attack on the working class in the age of austerity.

By refusing to go to school and by taking to the streets in the hundreds of thousands, Québécois, including IWW members in Montréal, Sherbrooke and the Outaouais, are showing the rest of Canada that direct action really does get the goods.

The IWW calls on the police to stop attacking independent media in Québec, such as Concordia University TV (CUTV), as their live broadcasts and coverage are essential to democratic change.

The IWW also calls on the provincial government to repeal its new laws that outlaw free expression, free assembly and the rights of all Québécois to defend their vision of the future of education. The government should listen and acknowledge the legitimacy of student demands and reply to them at the negotiation table instead of using legislation to end this conflict repressively in order to establish a false “social peace.”

The IWW Canadian Regional Organizing Committee (CANROC) encourages its members and branches to donate to student associations, such as the Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante (ASSÉ), and independent media outlets, such as CUTV. The CANROC also urges its members to walk the picket lines and fill the streets in this struggle for education and freedom.

Ultimately, students, teachers and workers are now building a strong solidarity movement like never before. This powerful movement allows us to hope that one day the education system will be controlled by those who work, teach and

study there so that the fruits of this labor provide universal benefit to social and human development rather than be enslaved to the logic of profit which benefit banks and capitalists of all kinds.



Photo: Sean Carleton

To join the IWW, contact the nearest delegate:

Montréal: 514-268-3394  
Sherbrooke: 819-349-9914  
Québec: [iww\\_quebec@riseup.net](mailto:iww_quebec@riseup.net)  
Ottawa-Outaouais: [ott-out@iww.org](mailto:ott-out@iww.org)

## Industrial Worker Book Review - Exclusive Essay

## Labor: A Romance

By Dawn Potter

In March 2011, Maine's newly elected Republican governor, Paul LePage, made an executive decision to remove a large commissioned mural from the lobby of the state's Department of Labor. The mural's subject was the history of Maine's working class. It depicted loggers, shoemakers, ironworkers, women riveters working during World War II, a paper mill strike, and child laborers before reform laws were passed. It was a record of simple historical fact.

Why did the governor want to rid himself of this mural? In the words of a scathing editorial in the *New York Times*, "his office cited some complaints from offended business leaders and an anonymous fax declaring that the mural smacked of official brainwashing by North Korea's dictator," whatever that might mean. The governor never explicated his contorted comparison between the oppressed citizens of a totalitarian regime and a democratic state's vigorous working-class history. Merely, "Mr. LePage's acting labor commissioner suggest[ed] replacing the mural with neutral paint."

At the time of this debacle, I'd been living in the small central Maine town of Harmony for close to two decades—virtually all of my adult life. Both of my children were born here. I'd raised animals and a garden, kept house and written books, hung laundry in the spring air and shoveled out barns in the snow. I had immersed myself in Maine and the governor's actions made me not only angry but also hurt by this blow to the honor of the state and its people.

Yet at the same time, my thoughts kept flying away from Maine—back to southwestern Pennsylvania, to my mother's hometown of Scottdale, to my grandfather Jim Miller, to my own automatic, childish, unthinking assumption of the definition of labor: A small, strong, rough-skinned man in a white T-shirt and green workpants, his clothes spattered with burn holes from the molten steel he'd been pouring at the mill. I also thought of his sweetness—the fidgety hours that my sister and I spent waiting for him to come home from his shift, to sit down on a kitchen chair, to take us both into his grimy lap. We loved him so much, not least for his patient ease in his own skin.

To us, he never revealed a sign that he cared to rise in the world, to become another sort of man. But perhaps that apparent acceptance of his lot in life was tragic endurance rather than simplicity. Perhaps I didn't comprehend his resignation. Human motivations are always more shadowy than we know and our



The Maine Department of Labor Mural.

Graphic: judytaylorstudio.com

own are often the most obscure. Consider the governor of Maine, for instance. In removing that mural, he also erased his own Franco-American history from public view. Writing in the *Portland Press Herald*, columnist Bill Nemitz notes that one of the panels depicts "the 1937 shoe mill strike in Lewiston-Auburn," twin cities that span the Androscoggin River and that have a long industrial history.

Seventy-four years ago, 5,000 of the area's 6,300 largely French Canadian shoe workers voted to walk off the job over low wages, dangerous working conditions and discrimination, to name but a few of their grievances.

They shut down 19 shoe factories before it was over, but paid dearly when police and then the U.S. National Guard moved in and forcibly put down the insurrection.

Just a thought, but how many of those workers do you think might have been named "LePage"?

Why are people so prone to distorting the image of the laborer, even at the cost of distorting themselves? The Maine governor's bizarre conflation is only one version of that pattern, for sometimes the unlikeliest of suspects have fallen into the opposite camp—the one composed of the romancers. Andrew Carnegie is one, for instance. In "Triumphant Democracy," his 1886 opus on the wonders of American capitalism, the Pennsylvania steel magnate rhapsodized about his workingmen, among whom "wife-beating is scarcely ever heard of, and drunkenness is quite rare." Like many people before and since, he had succumbed to the romance of the laborer; and literature, which he read voraciously, was undoubtedly a great promoter of this vision. If you consider that the Gilded Age was also an era of public recitation, you can easily imagine how many of his contemporaries, young and old, must have admired, for instance, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1841 "The Village Blacksmith"—that sentimental narrative of the mighty smith swinging his hammer, "week in, week out, from morn till night... Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing." With such a vision in mind, Carnegie

could have had no trouble declaring that a modern worker was equal to his employer, bearing the "dignity of an independent contractor" and holding a "sacred" right to unionize, even as the boss quashed strikes, ignored dangerous working conditions, and lengthened factory shifts.

In "Meet You in Hell," a brief history of the fraught relationship between Carnegie and coke king Henry Clay Frick, writer Les Standiford remarks that "Carnegie continued to make noble statements about the workingman to the very end of his life, seemingly untroubled by those who criticized his business and labor practices. As to why he might have done so, Standiford suggests that "the history of American business shows that Carnegie is scarcely the only man of prominence who wanted very much to be liked." Perhaps so. But I can't discount the power of romance; for I, too, a century later, also succumbed to it. My version differs from Carnegie's to be sure, as our lives differ. Nonetheless, we share certain traits that may have predisposed us to idealism—notably a skewed sense of ourselves as eternal members of the underclass even as we cut paths into lives that sever us from any true fellowship with those grubby roots.

Our stories are equivalently simple, though his was far more dramatic. Carnegie, son of a handloom weaver, became an industrialist. I, granddaughter of a mill worker, married the grandson of a mill owner. There must be millions of parallel family tales and sub-tales, sequels and editions, revisions and remakes. Even Governor LePage has lauded his own Horatio Alger-like rise—"the oldest son of eighteen children in an impoverished, dysfunctional family...[leaving] home at the age of eleven...liv[ing] on the streets of Lewiston for two years, making a meager living shining shoes." Maybe it's human nature to tinker incessantly with our own narratives. Maybe Henry Clay Frick, Carnegie's partner and eventually his bitter rival, was the exception. As Charles M. Schwab recalled in the 1930s, Frick was a man "without emotion or impulses. Absolutely cold-blooded...The most methodical thinking machine I have ever

known."

You might imagine Frick to be the last person on earth to share a story with my humane and noble grandfather. But you would be mistaken. Among other things, they shared Scottdale. Frick was born in West Overton, a hamlet that lay just over the town line. For many years the H. C. Frick Coke Company was headquartered in Scottdale—though the town was known as Fountain Mills until 1874, when it was renamed in honor of Thomas Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Scottdale is located directly over the Connellsville seam, which journalist Dan Rottenberg describes in "The Kingdom of Coal" as a bituminous "coking coal basin...about thirty miles long by an average of two and a half miles wide" running through what today is hawked to visitors as the Laurel Highlands. By the 1870s the Connellsville seam was well on its way to becoming "the backbone of [Carnegie's] newly created United States Steel Corporation," and already the Pennsylvania Railroad was the region's major purchaser of steel. In the matter of names, a railroad magnate's clearly trumped a fountain's. By the 1970s, when my sister and I were waiting for my grandfather to come home from the mill, the coal seam had been played out, and the Pittsburgh steel industry was dying. As for the fountain, it was never heard from again. Nonetheless, despite the Rust Belt decay around us—the empty, eyeless buildings on Pittsburgh Street, the lingering particulate grime in the air—we always, without question, thought of his labor with pride. During my mother's childhood, he had worked in the mines—night after night winching his way down the Leisenring shaft into the pit. During our childhoods, he poured steel, though he never told us exactly what his job entailed.

Perhaps it was similar to how one 1880s mill worker described the process of transforming pig iron into steel: "Little spikes of pure iron like frost spars glow white-hot and stick out of the slag. These must be stirred under at once... I am like some frantic baker in the inferno kneading a batch of iron bread for the devil's breakfast."

## Songwriter Sessions: An Interview With Kevn Kinney

By William Hastings

In honor of the tradition of the IWW's "Little Red Songbook," and the union's legacy as the singing union, the *Industrial Worker Book Review* has begun a new section, the "Songwriter Sessions," to explore the craft of songwriting with some of today's finest musicians. Since song is as much a part of our literature as novels and poetry are, and every much an equal part of our psychic makeup, we felt that songwriters could no longer be ignored in the larger literary discussion. This month we got in touch with Kevn Kinney about his new album, "A Good Country Mile," and his work with his band Drivin' N' Cryin' who are slated to release four EPs this year. What follows is an excerpt of the interview.

**William Hastings:** You started out wanting to be a writer, ended up formfitting for a while before becoming a musician. Let's start with the writing. How does your initial desire to write affect how you approach writing a song? The Kerouac influence is obvious in your songs, but there's much more at work there than him. What other literary influences do

you find creeping into your work? Who should aspiring songwriters be reading?

**Kevn Kinney:** most recently my friend LENNY KAYE gave me an assignment to read the ALEXANDRIA QUARTET by LAWERNCE DURRELL which lead me to NAQUIB MAHFUZ and the CAIRO TRILOGY. I love how the chapters or books see the same scenario from different perspectives... i also enjoy RUMI translations by COLEMAN BARKS and on a more airport library i always enjoy a good STEPHEN KING or MICHEAL CRICHTON, JOHN GRISHAM.... they are all kinda of the same formula but i can dig it ....and of course you can't forget THE HOBBIT..... but the American classics of KEROUAC and JACK LONDON and STEINBECK.... ARE ALWAYS PRESENT IN THE WORKS OF AN AMERICANA SONGWRITER.... but aspiring songwriters should read whatever inspires them to flip the switch....from comics, newspapers or SHAKESPEARE....THEY HAVE ALL BEEN USEFUL TO ME



Graphic: kevnkinney.com

**WH:** Where do you write? When?

**KK:** everywhere and anytime..... but mornings are the best.....fresh dreams and new tomorrows..... a broken heart is always useful but i hope I am done with that....i love a more ZEN OF THE WORKING CLASS subject matter..... i love a good spiritual well read iron worker...gets me every time

**WH:** With songs like "In the Land (Of Things That Used to Be)" and Drivin' N' Cryin's album "The Great American Bubble Factory" you're one of the few songwriters out there willing to tackle class and work in America. Yet, class and work (or the lack thereof) have always been currents in our "folk" traditions—bluegrass, blues, soul, country. You've been writing about these issues for a long time and our best music has been singing about them for even longer. Is it difficult to keep writing about these issues when change seems so far off for so many, or does the difficulty arise rather from casting yourself into this long tradition and trying to find your own

space to say what you've seen?

**KK:** Well, I am still a member of the middle class and some days lower...i was raised in the middle and was surrounded by fringe politics...nothing too radical, but my Grandfather was a union mediator and former president of Machinists.... a strong influence on me growing up was my parents' ex pastor FATHER GROPPI .... look him up ex communicated by the catholic church for his radical views ...he marched with MARTIN LUTHER KING and defended the rights of WISCONSIN NATIVE INDIANS ....I always kind of hope JOHNNY DEPP could revive his memory.....i am only partly kidding ...but if Hollywood is good at any thing it can at least draw awareness

**WH:** What makes a good song? What makes a powerful song?

**KK:** I think a powerful song sells YOUR truth.... tell me YOUR STORY..... and a couple awesome guitar riffs don't hurt

The full interview can be found at <http://www.iwwbookreview.com>.

Editor's note: At the author's request, this piece retained a "beat" style.



**Wobbly Arts**

**Call For Submissions**



**WE ARE THE WORKING CLASS**

Imagery of the working class has long been monopolized by drawings of white, muscle-bound men swinging hammers, but the truth is that the majority of the working class has never been made up of white men. If we seek to create a movement that captures the whole of the working class, the imagery that we choose should also reflect the whole of the working class. Allies for Gender Equality, a committee of the Portland IWW General Membership Branch, is putting a call out for submissions for an art showing entitled, "We

Are The Working Class." We hope to put together a collection of photos, posters and drawings that truly grasps the diversity of workers (and the work we do) that the working class is made up of. Original Wobbly art would be our preference, but we won't be shy if it's from Wobbly supporters. We hope to have this exhibit up in time for the General Convention, and so are asking for submissions no later than Aug. 20, 2012.

Email: Turniptheheat@gmail.com  
Snail Mail: Portland IWW, C/O AGE, 2249 E. Burnside St., Portland, OR 97214.



Graphic: radicalgraphics.org

**NATO Comes To Chicago**

**Continued from 1**

canceled the nurses' permit because they claimed that the appearance of popular musician (and Wobbly) Tom Morello would attract more people than the original permit allowed. They wanted to shunt the rally off to Grant Park, but the nurses fought back in court and the city relented.

Following the rally, as the nurses climbed back on their buses, others decided go on an impromptu, unpermitted march through the Loop. There was no discernible reason for the march except, perhaps, to assert the right to march without permission, although the raid on the house in Bridgeport and the frame-up of three activists could have been a good reason.

The march eventually meandered its way to the bridge on Michigan Avenue leading to the Magnificent Mile shopping district. Here the cops kettled the demo and arrested a fellow who had torn down a banner welcoming NATO to Chicago. The march finally petered out at the corner of LaSalle and Jackson, site of the Chicago Board of "Thieves" (Trade) and Occupy Chicago's rallying point.

**Saturday, May 19:** No planned demonstrations today, but people who came to town to demonstrate self-organized unpermitted protests anyway.

Chicago's Mental Health Movement held a demonstration at Mayor Emanuel's house in Ravenswood. Dressed in hospital gowns the protesters denounced "Mayor 1%" for closing down 6 of Chicago's 12 mental health facilities, leaving patients without any alternatives. The Mental Health Movement, with the support of Occupy Chicago, briefly occupied a clinic slated for closing. After being evicted by the cops they set up a camp across the street in a vacant lot.

At 3:30 p.m., people gathered at LaSalle and Jackson to begin a march to protest the terrorism charges leveled against three activists arrested in the Bridgeport raid. This demo eventually linked up with an anti-capitalist march that rallied at Haymarket Square at 6:30 p.m.

The unpermitted march of over 1,000 people snaked through downtown Chicago, turning this way and that, depending on what streets the police were blocking. The police's crowd control strategy

seemed to be to keep the protesters in the street and keep them moving until they exhausted themselves. However, at some point the cops decided to unleash the agro: They used billy clubs, bikes and their fists to beat people and push protesters back repeatedly, with medics reporting numerous injuries. One protestor was run over by a police van that sped through the crowd. Several arrests were also reported. The march finally dissipated around 11:30 p.m. as folks headed home to get some rest for the big day on Sunday.

**Sunday, May 20:** An unusually hot spring day in Chicago, 90 degrees. People began gathering at the Petrillo Band Shell in Grant Park for the permitted rally and march, organized by the Coalition Against the NATO/G8 Agenda of Poverty and War (CANG8). As many folks tried to get out of the sun, others stood on the concrete in front of the band shell, listening to speeches. Others moved through the park peddling their propaganda. It seemed like every socialist group in the world was there, even the Communist Party showed up. There was, of course, an anarchist contingent of several hundred dressed in black—the "black bloc." There were quite a few Wobblies present from all over the country, but you couldn't say there was Wobbly contingent.

Tensions between the so-called "peace guides" (marshals) and the anarchists ratcheted up early as the peace police tried to keep the black bloc from moving in front of the official banners to a space right behind the Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) contingent. The bloc, however, was not terribly tight from what I observed, with black-clad, masked-up folks spread out all over the march route. As the 15,000 or so marchers made their way down Michigan Avenue towards Cermak Road, the column was surrounded by thousands of cops—city cops, state cops, and even cops from Indiana and Wisconsin. At first it was mainly regular cops with the blue shirts with their bullet-proof vests. As the march drew nearer to its destination the real black bloc—the riot cops with their Kevlar, shields, truncheons and guns—became more evident.

At the rally at Cermak Road and Michigan Avenue, about three or four blocks from the NATO meeting, the Iraq

**International Solidarity**

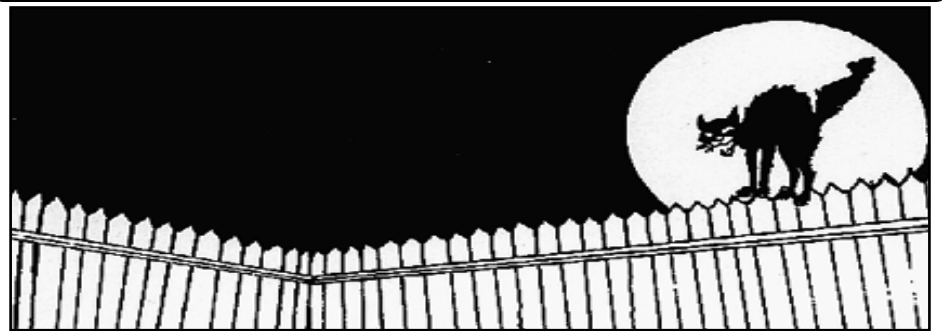
**Pittsburgh Solidarity With NGWF**



Photos: Amirul Haque Amin

**By Kenneth Miller**

Amirul Haque Amin of the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) of Bangladesh sends updates to groups like the IWW, the Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance, the Steelworkers, SweatFree Communities and many other groups several times a month. The ideas, intentions, strikes, protests and persecution of garment workers in Bangladesh could not be any more clear. The *Industrial Worker* has published news about workers in Bangladesh more consistently than any other labor union newspaper. The IWW's International Solidarity Committee, and others, celebrated Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Dhaka at the office of the NGWF. Members of the IWW have participated with United Students Against Sweatshops and SweatFree Communities at anti-sweatshop conferences in several parts of the United States. For more information about the National Garments Workers Federation of Bangladesh for IWWs, call Kenneth of the Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance at 412-867-9213.



Graphic: iww.org



Thousands march through Chicago to protest NATO. Photo: chicago.indymedia.org

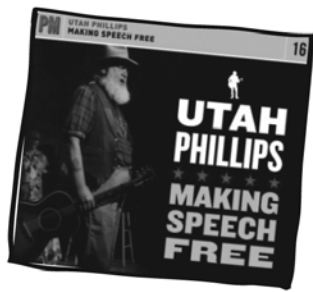
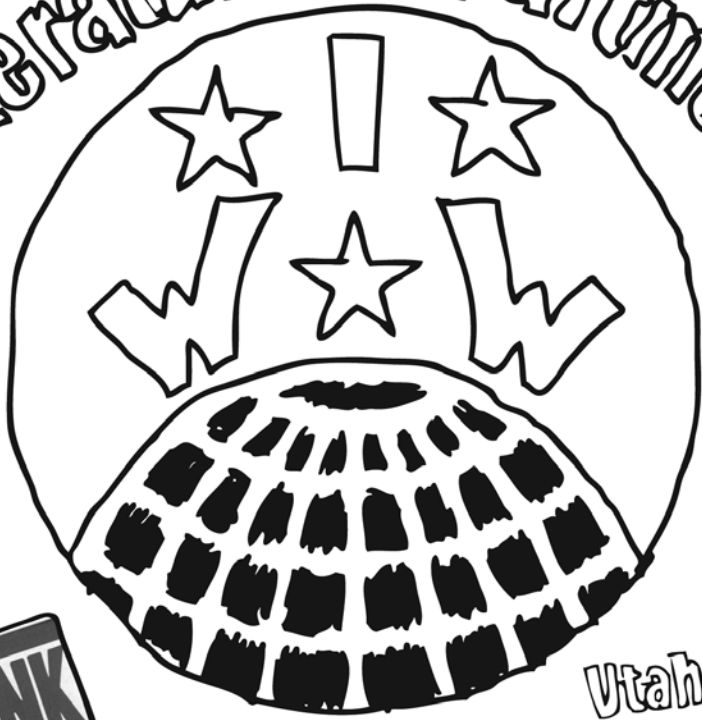
and Afghanistan veterans threw their campaign medals in the direction of McCormick Place in a symbolic rejection of the part they played in the U.S./NATO war on the world. After this action, the march's organizers urged people to make their way west where there were buses to take them back downtown. There were those, however, who wanted to continue the demo and march to the convention center where the NATO war mongers were meeting. However, a phalanx of police had maneuvered to block any exit to the east, south or north, leaving a sliver of an escape route to the west, but the crush of the crowd who wanted to go east prevented many people who wanted to leave to do so. A two-hour shoving match developed as the crowd was trying to push east and the cops were pushing back, using their clubs to crack skulls. There were at least 100 arrests and some serious injuries to protesters, including broken bones. One cop was apparently stabbed in the leg.

**Monday, May 21:** In a rather anti-climactic gesture, Occupy Chicago held a demonstration at the headquarters of Boeing, denouncing their profiteering from war. Boeing, however, had told its employees to stay home that day and it is very doubtful that the demo had any effect on Boeing whatsoever.

Corporate media coverage of the events was, as usual, cynical and dismissive: The demonstrators were unfocused, and it was unclear what the message was. There were also those who came to town, not to peacefully exercise their First Amendment rights but to cause trouble, to destroy property and attack police. The police, for their part, received praise for their fine work protecting the city, guaranteeing the rights of dissent and keeping the troublemakers in line. Their violence was only defensive and restrained. The specter of 1968 was finally banished. This time the police didn't lose control and riot. No, this time the police were disciplined and systematically brutal. Throughout the week folks who were in town to protest were stopped, searched and interrogated by the police. Snatch-and-grab operations were used to nab individuals out of the crowds. Undercover cops were used to infiltrate and instigate violence. On the word of two provocateurs, "Mo" and "Gloves," five anarchists are facing terrorism charges.

In the streets of Chicago on the weekend of May 18-21, the mailed fist of the state was on full display. Also on display was the courage and determination of people to stand up for their rights, against militarism and the state. The clash was/is inevitable.

# Literature Department



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## Workplace Organizing

## Organizing In The Nonprofit Industrial Complex

By FW Atrain, with contributions from FWs Selene & Mackel

Two Chicago Wobblies were laid off last November and permanently replaced because they were organizing at their workplace. This workplace is a “grass-roots” environmental community-based organization (CBO) called Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO). Nonprofits, like many industries, have been hit hard by global depression and austerity. Corporate foundations and government grants largely fund CBOs. As documented in “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,” edited by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, these finances have been drying up, causing a downward pressure on many nonprofit agencies and CBOs to reduce hours, benefits, pay, and the number of employees.

LVEJO practiced a loosely-organized democratic process in its community-based campaigns for environmental justice. Meanwhile, its nonprofit structure consisted of a board of about six, outnumbering the only four paid employees by the end of 2011. As grants began to dry up a couple years ago, LVEJO’s board reduced employees’ hours by 25 percent. The “coordinator” (executive director) and the board presented organizers with a question of whether the director’s hours should be reduced along with the staff’s. Staff voted that all should share in the burden until enough funding could restore hours and possibly provide for bonuses to offset the many hours that would have to be worked without pay to get the work done.

This cut had a major impact. Organizers at LVEJO had already been informed by their fellow workers at sister organizations that LVEJO was underpaying them, even for the nonprofit industry. The new cuts forced staff to work anywhere from two to three jobs at a time to make ends meet, while carrying on the hard work of organizing. Furthermore, organizers are generally expected to go far beyond their paid hours and be fully dedicated to their work. This included evenings and weekends, and in contradiction of Illinois labor law, any time worked over 40 hours was billed as “volunteer” time.

Yet after years of hard work yielding major victories—such as progress toward an agreement to close two coal-fired power plants; the transfer of 23 acres of private land for a new public park in one of the densest, most industrial neighborhoods of Chicago; establishing vibrant community gardens; building public funding and support for new transit projects; popular education on climate justice; and environmental direct action—organizers were laid off. The board and director claimed that funds were running out, due to delays by funders. Behind the scenes, the workers had discovered that their manager had been receiving 40 hours of pay, including a raise, even though it was decided that everyone would take a cut. Being the “co-

ordinator” of a community-based organization centered on “democracy,” “dignity” and “justice”—she was meant to be on the same level of the workers. Workers confronted the board and director about the lack of transparency and democracy. They were met with a delay in pay without any promise of when they would be getting paid, a week before Thanksgiving. Two of the workers pressed on to demand payment. The workers went on a mission to confront the boss and board members about their pay. They continually called, texted, visited the boss’s home, and after one day of agitation got paid. They won their last pay and vacation, but also received insulting criticism, layoffs and permanent replacement.

#### Keeping it in the family

One issue, which is a major problem in the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC), is nepotism. Nepotism is the fine art of keeping everything in the family, like all of Chicago politics. The director’s mother is the treasurer and her father sits on the board. The board also consists of close family friends. This means that pay issues go to the daughter (director), then to the mother (treasurer), and if it requires a vote, the mother and father represent one-third of the board. This is not uncommon in this industry and is an absolutely corrupt practice that creates disproportionate power because of personal interest to protecting family.

#### Look! They are exploited! So should you be, too!

When confronted about budgetary issues, the LVEJO board president went into length about teachers and described his experience of living by a school and seeing “some teachers who leave right away while others work late and take home their work.” The employer was hinting that they should go “above and beyond,” which they already had, and in fact, up to 60 hours a week when needed. The message was clear—volunteer hours were just part of the job, and they need to get used to it. What is for certain is that it was the workers, not management, who were making the sacrifice.

As a public school teacher, I found this extremely insulting. It points to the exploitation that I experience, through low pay and never having a moment to relax at home. I take home student work and lesson plans because I’m not granted the time to do so at work, all while “teacher bashing” is becoming increasingly common. I never have a night that is “mine” or a weekend that is carefree because of the extra work I have. Sunday? Forget about it, I have 100 papers to look over. We cannot allow bosses to use the excuses: “Look at how mistreated other workers are,” and “Why do you not do the same?” No worker, in any industry, should accept this thinking. The trend and acceptance

of pointing to “lazy” and “undedicated” workers is completely backwards. I remember last summer when I took my family to the Alps in Italy. Oh wait, that was my employer.

#### It’s not just the 1 percent, it’s all authority

The growth of the Occupy movement has brought class back on the table. This is very exciting. It is great to see people angry with the people that are making life miserable for workers all over the world and grasping for solutions and alternatives. Yet we have to extend our understanding of class beyond just the 1 percent. Criticizing the president and corporate America is necessary but not sufficient. Putting our faith in fair trade and buying local from small businesses will not get us there.

If we are sincere about abolishing the capitalist wage system and creating a truly free society, we have to confront any and all exploitation and oppression, at every level in society—in the prisons, in the form of domestic and sexual violence, and even small business owners and nonprofits that mistreat the people who work for them and influence politics at a local level. Even nonprofits, which practice democracy at the base and do important work to address environmental racism, can exploit their workers and the community. It’s really just a matter of scale. Industrial democracy means that worker justice and environ-



FW Selene in action at LVEJO.

Photo: littlevillageland.org

mental justice are the same, and we are not sacrificing one set of workers in the name of justice for other workers and letting the nonprofit bosses get all the credit.

#### Update

After, taking time to get back on their feet, LVEJO ex-workers renewed efforts to gain justice. This April, they filed an Unfair Labor Practice regarding arbitrary disciplining and questioning by the boss, delay in pay and their layoffs and replacement. They met with community members to explain the situation, and are also launching a petition that explains their story further and will help to build support for their case. The workers want a public apology, back wages, and guarantees that future community organizers will not be subject to the treatment they experienced.

## Attention Organizers!

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The Survey and Research Committee (SRC) helps IWW organizing efforts by providing the union with useful information, research, effective materials, and other research-based resources for your organizing needs. We are here to help fellow workers help themselves by organizing effectively with the right materials, knowledge and resources.

## Donate to the Sato Fund!

This fund, established in memory of fellow worker Charlie Sato, supports the participation of our members who are women, genderqueer or trans men in the IWW, for example by contributing to their travel costs to attend important meetings like our annual international convention.

A tireless fighter for social justice and the rights of working people, Charlie was a supporter of the Hawaiian-based LACASA (a Latin-American solidarity organization) and the People’s Fund, other projects in Europe, Australia and Japan, and an active member of the O’ahu General Membership Branch of the IWW.

Donate online at <http://store.iww.org/sato-donations.html>, or send checks payable to “IWW” (mentioning the Charlie Sato Memorial Fund) to: Industrial Workers of the World - General Headquarters, Post Office Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618- U.S.A.



# World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE  
INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

The IWW formed the International Solidarity Commission to help the union build the worker-to-worker solidarity that can lead to effective action against the bosses of the world. To contact the ISC, email [solidarity@iww.org](mailto:solidarity@iww.org).

## A Wobbly Report From Greece

By Erik Rothgard for the ISC

Riots, general strikes, austerity measures, a vibrant anarchist movement, a threatening fascist resurgence... these are all words that come to mind when we think of Greece. I spent two weeks in Greece at the end of May with comrades from Eleftheriaki Syndikalistiki Enosi (ESE, or the Libertarian Syndicalist Union) in order to find out what life is like behind the headlines.

I found a country that is traumatized and scarred by two years of economic crisis, made much worse by a structural adjustment package forced on the country by the European Central Bank, the European Union, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Because of the cuts agreed to by the country's former "Socialist" ruling party, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), at least 20 percent of the Greek population is unemployed, wages are as low as €2 an hour, and workers sometimes go for six months or a year without being paid. Healthcare has been semi-privatized and homelessness and mental illness are on the rise. It's a bleak picture.

But I also found reason for hope. Greek workers are fighting back. My hosts in ESE introduced me to rank-and-file activists who are rebuilding the Greek labor movement from below; under the radar of the mass media and outside the now-broken framework of European social democratic labor relations, a new workers' movement is cohering.

There are many, many instances of workers reopening their businesses under workers' control after their bosses stopped paying them and closed the doors. In other cases, laid-off workers have formed cooperatives, mostly in restaurants and cafes.

Often this is just done temporarily to make back the money they were owed, and the new cooperatives do not break with the logic of the market and commodity production, but the prevalence of these examples is powerful proof that the spread of workers' self-management is an organic response to capitalist crisis.

Workers have also begun building new unions, outside the control of the main PASOK-affiliated confederation. They call these "base unions." Like the IWW, they typically have few or no paid staff; workers make decisions together, democratically and view collaboration with the state system of labor control with skepticism. Here's a quick summary of the unions I met with:

**Courier's Union (Athens):** Founded in 2004, this union has about 200 members, with an active core of 20-50 members. It organizes workers from multiple shops and uses picketing and direct action to win unpaid wages. It has no paid staff and low dues. It's a lot like the IWW. I met with them at length and discussed solidarity unionism and industrial unionism. They are the linchpin of a new, alternative confederation that is currently forming in Athens.

**Servers and Cooks Union (Athens):** This is another group in Thessaloniki. It engages in many struggles over wage theft and has helped workers take



Photo: voidmanufacturing.wordpress.com

over their cafes when the boss went out of business without paying them. Their most high-profile struggle was the worker takeover of an Applebee's in Thessaloniki around the New Year in 2010. The workers operated the business for one to two months after the boss suddenly shut it down.

**Media Workers:** One of Greece's six main network TV stations shut down suddenly in 2010, laying off 500 of its workers. They took over the station for one to two months and operated it as a workers' TV station, focusing on worker struggles. In the wake of the takeover, they have formed a cross-craft network linking workers throughout the production process at different media outlets, à la IWW.

**ESE:** Sort of the IWW equivalent in Greece, but newer. They are currently wrapping up a struggle over unpaid wages at an upscale bakery/cafe with three locations in Thessaloniki. The boss has not paid the 100+ workers in about a year. A few of the workers started discussing taking legal action, and were fired right away. They came to ESE, which helped them develop a direct action and legal strategy. They held several aggressive pickets and plastered the town with posters denouncing the boss. ESE is connected to many of the new base unions and worker struggles that are emerging in the crisis, and continues to innovate tactics, strategy, and theory.

There have been many other struggles—a strike at the port led by a Communist Party of Greece (KKE) union, a strike by fuel truck drivers which shut down the economy, the occupation of a fertilizer plant in Thessaloniki. Some of these have won favorable settlements for the workers. However, there is no coordination between the workers directly because the Greek Communist Party and PASOK control the unions from the top down.

As most of the world descends into economic stagnation and crisis, there are powerful lessons we can learn from the Greek workers. Political reform in Greece, like in the United States, will not bring back social democracy. Rather than seeking to resuscitate an expired New Deal, we should build on the wave of workplace takeovers and push for a genuine industrial democracy. We should seek to dramatically hasten and expand the growth of new base unions and worker committees, and infuse the movement with a revolutionary vision. As a new workers' movement grows in response to the crisis around the world, we should be immersed in it, seeking to expand its boundaries and deepen its content.

We believe another world is possible, so let's follow the example of our Greek comrades and start building it right now.

## Paying The Price For Free: Workers Strike At The French Telecommunications Provider's Subcontractor, Totalcall, In Casablanca

By Monika Vykoukal

Workers of the Union Marocaine de Travail (UMT) on strike against Totalcall, a subsidiary of the French internet service provider Free, on April 13 blasted a fog horn outside of the call center on the outskirts of Casablanca, Morocco



Striking Totalcall workers.

Photo: Monika Vykoukal

to prevent work as usual inside and were attacked by private goons working for the Swedish international security company Securitas. The attack came after Totalcall company management failed to block the noise by stuffing the windows with mattresses.

Totalcall's hired agents encircled the strikers, insulting, harassing, and beating them. One union organizer was injured so severely they were taken to the hospital in an ambulance. The goons also hit a female passer-by in the face. The strikers called police to the scene and have filed a formal complaint to police about this attack by Securitas agents.

Totalcall is part of a web of independently named but centrally owned and directed subsidiaries of Free (itself owned by parent company Iliad), a mobile phone and wi-fi service licensed in 2009. The company's head, Xavier Niel, is France's version of Steve Jobs. Niel, the eighth richest person in France, is Free's associate director and main shareholder.

The Totalcall strike, which had been planned for some time, began in March, and at least 300 members of the 1,700-strong workforce have been on strike for most of the time since (a figure management denies). The workers' main demands are for improved working conditions and union recognition.

Totalcall operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Its phone calls are rerouted from France, especially at night and on weekends. After a large increase in calls since the launch of Free Mobile in 2009, the heavy workload made it almost impossible for workers to take their permitted 30-second break between calls. Insufficient training (only two hours) about the new product has made matters worse. Even with an already low salary compared to other Moroccan call centers, Totalcall management wants to reduce pay while increasing working hours. In addition, bus connections are lacking between Casablanca and the call center, which is 12 kilometers (about 7.5 miles) away.

The workers did not sign an agreement with management during the first round of negotiations because Free wanted to fire all striking Totalcall workers. A general assembly of workers thus voted to continue the strike. Because Totalcall management, under Free's orders, refused to meet face-to-face with the Moroccan UMT strikers, the work inspectorate of the Moroccan government mediated a second meeting between the workers and management on April 27. The French director of Free's call centers was notably absent. An agreement was signed at this second meeting, but Totalcall continues with its plans to sack strikers on a case by case basis, so the strike continues.

While the workers' struggle at Totalcall displays true rank-and-file democracy, there have been allegations of corruption within the leadership of the UMT, including alleged misappropriation of funds on a national level. As a result of these accusations, the Moroccan government has abandoned its role in the negotiations between Totalcall and its

striking workers. Yet even under these increasingly difficult circumstances, about 100 workers continue to strike (at press time), supported by local UMT organizers.

In recent months, the cost to the workers of Free's sharply reduced rates has been gaining visibility in France and has brought the dire conditions of outsourcing and call-center work to public attention, yet again. Union organizers of the Confédération Nationale du Travail (CNT)-f in France had already been in touch with their Moroccan fellow workers and had been assisting them in getting public attention and media coverage in France, as well as the support of other French unions.

Their efforts have exposed the agenda behind Free's nifty mechanism to set up their call centers as independent businesses in order to keep them conveniently separate from the main company—while retaining complete control over all of the call centers' operations. Free's call centers, amongst them Centrapel in France and Totalcall in Morocco, are thus technically separate businesses, but have the same director and shareholders as Free. That they are, nonetheless, entirely under central control has been shown again and again during the current strike at Totalcall by the fact that Totalcall management has not been able to negotiate with the strikers without instructions from France.

Conditions at Free's subcontracted call centers in France are none the rosier. Centrapel workers have experienced ongoing health issues, including nausea and fainting, in recent times. Former Free workers in France have been talking to the media about public humiliations by their bosses and the company's brutal management methods. In an interview with television station RTL, a former call center worker recalled her trial period, during which time she witnessed colleagues crying in lavatories and workers sacked in front of their team.

While Free claims it's a creator of jobs, these jobs are part time and turnover remains very high, perhaps the highest in the sector. Union organizers say the turnover rate is almost 45 percent from one month to the next. At the Centrapel call center in Paris, a CNT-f organizer was fired in December 2011. His case is currently going to court.

Meanwhile Free grabs a bigger share of the pie for offering cheaper rates at the workers' expense, even as other companies in the sector are laying workers off. Beyond the telecommunications sector itself, the situation of call center workers is symptomatic of the effects of the privatization of public services: Competing companies squeeze wages and worsen working conditions while providing increasingly poor service to users.

The workers of Totalcall need donations for basic necessities while they continue their strike. To send money to the CNT, contact Monika ([movyk@thing.net](mailto:movyk@thing.net)), or send a check with the following written on the back: "solidarité grévistes CALL CENTER CAS" to CNT-PTT-RP 33 rue des Vignoles 75020 Paris, France.