

INDUSTRIAL WORKER



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Happy International Women's Day!

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Pizza Hut Workers Demand A Proper Slice

By IWW Sheffield

Twenty Pizza Hut workers and their supporters in Sheffield braved freezing temperatures and billowing snow on Feb. 4 to stage a protest against what they say are "insulting" conditions and pay.

Supporters staged solidarity protests in the United Kingdom in Birmingham, Glasgow, London, Wessex, Bradford, Hull, Brighton, Liverpool, Bristol, and around the world in Richmond, Va., Portland Ore. and Germany.

Members of the Pizza Hut Workers Union, which is part of the IWW, surrounded the company's tiny store in Crookes, Sheffield, carrying placards and leaflets that demanded management return to the negotiating table to discuss the workers' grievances over holiday pay and mileage rates.

Contrary to traditional practice, Pizza Hut workers do not receive the customary time-and-a-half for working overtime

hours. Often times, Pizza Hut workers pull shifts late into the night and on bank holidays, including Christmas.

Additionally, despite the staggering increases in gas prices, Pizza Hut drivers receive very little compensation for gas costs from the international franchise.

Despite the perceived downward trend in spending, take-out restaurants like Pizza Hut have been bucking the trend and continue to make huge profits. Workers are angry that this boom in business has not been reflected in their own pay.

"Despite our best attempts to talk to management, we feel like we aren't getting anywhere. It's a joke that as Pizza Hut's business continues to grow, the people that work the hardest and who are feeling the pinch are still receiving the bare minimum the company can get away with paying," said a member of the IWW Pizza Hut Workers Union.

Read more on page 9



Wobblies brave the snow to confront Pizza Hut in Sheffield.

Photo: Tristan Metcalfe

Women Workers Fight Back Against Austerity In Poland



Graphic: Women with Initiative

By Women with Initiative

In 2012, Poland and the Ukraine are going to host Euro2012, the European Football Championship. For that reason, hundreds of millions of euros from national and local budgets have been spent

on subsidizing infrastructural projects like football stadiums and highways. According to financial experts, these expenditures will never be reimbursed, and many city budgets are already on the verge of bankruptcy.

As a result, politicians have cut money from education, childcare and public institutions. All over Poland, schools and kindergartens are being closed down or are getting more expensive, the rent in municipal housing is going up, and hospitals and other public property are being privatized. Meanwhile, the prices of gas, electricity, water, and medicine have increased rapidly.

Women are going to bear the costs of expensive football games and the economic crisis. Polish women earn less than men, are typically the first to be fired, and wages for workers in feminized sectors—such as public and healthcare workers—are frozen. It is already more dif-

icult for women to find a decent job than men, and since the government is going to prolong the retirement age, women will spend an additional seven years working long hours with precarious and unstable contracts for a minimum wage of 300 euros a month. In Poland, like in other Eastern European countries, the percentage of unstable, fixed-term labor contract employment is amongst the highest in Europe—almost 30 percent.

Budget cuts and privatization are primarily hitting public and care institutions, where women work and which they rely on. There is a huge lack of adequate infrastructure, such as nurseries and day-care facilities, as only 2 percent of children below the age of three are sent to childcare institutions in the country. We observe the political nature of the care shortage. (Note: When we say "care" or "care work" we are referring to any waged or unwaged activity, run at public institution or at home, which does not produce any commodity but provides conditions for reproduction of the working class. We focus here on

childcare, but this also includes housework, paid housework and elderly care).

In neoliberal discourse—which is obligatory for the Polish political class since the capitalist transformation of 1989—care is considered to be just a cost. In 2010, in Poznań, the city in western Poland, 750 million złoty from the local budget was spent on a football stadium, 22 million złoty was spent on city promotion, and only 15 million złoty was spent on nurseries for kids below the age of three, despite a huge need for childcare. In 2010, 1,600 children at that age couldn't be placed in public kindergarten in the city—and private kindergarten costs as much as the minimum wage workers make. In Warsaw, 1,915 million złoty was spent on a football stadium, city promotion costs 60 million złoty, while subsidies to kindergartens were decreased by 4.5 million and will reach less than 60 million złoty. In this sense, local government policies in Poland continue to operate under a patriarchal model of city management, and these

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Wobblies Picket Scabs In Scotland



Picketing on Jan. 20 in Glasgow. From the Clydeside IWW

Photo: Clydeside IWW

IWW members, along with Solidarity Federation and Anarchist Federation members, picketed the Glasgow offices of

Adecco—the the largest employment agency in the world—in Blytheswood Square on Jan. 20. Wobblies and others protested against Adecco's deployment of scab workers at an ABB factory—a multinational that operates in over 100 countries—in Cordoba, Spain. At press time, Spanish workers of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) have been striking since Nov. 28, 2011 due to Adecco's plans to make subcontractors redundant and replace them with non-unionized workers who have no experience or qualifications.



Letters Welcome!

Send your letters to: iw@iww.org with "Letter" in the subject.

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May Day! May Day!

Announcements for the annual "May Day" Industrial Worker deadline is **April 6, 2012**. Celebrate the real labor day with a message of solidarity! Send announcements to iw@iww.org. Much appreciated donations for the following sizes should be sent to::

IWW GHQ, Post Office Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618, United States.

\$12 for 1" tall, 1 column wide
\$40 for 4" by 2 columns
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Democracy And "Moral Right"

To the Editor,

In their article "Whose Ports? Our Ports!" (January/February IW, page 6-7), Don M. and Brendan Carrell make a vague and semi-coherent argument to the effect that "All workers have a moral right to decide what happens at that port (Oakland)." They then denounce the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) officials for failing to obey Occupy Oakland's demand for a port shutdown, insisting that the union bureaucracy "is shirking its own moral duty to act as the representative of the working class." But it just ain't so.

Firstly, the ILWU does not represent "the working class," just a small slice of it—the majority of the Oakland dock workers and nobody else. Secondly, Occupy Oakland, whatever "moral right" it may claim, does not represent "the working class." There was no mass assembly of the working population of Oakland that elected or mandated Occupy Oakland to speak or act in its name. Sober up. Occupy Oakland merely represents a relatively small group of militants who, according to M. and Carrell, often act out of an "un-

consciousness understanding," or class unconsciousness?

This kind of obscure and overblown rhetoric is typical of Marxist and socialist grouplets who claim to be the "vanguard" of the proletariat, with the right and duty, moral or otherwise, to command the backward masses.

How would Wobblies react to one of these leftist "vanguards" presenting the IWW with a set of marching orders and demanding that we obey them, and then calling us cowards if we did not?

All the more surprising then, that at the end of their essay M. and Carrell completely reverse and contradict their original argument, calling for the "transition from symbolic demonstrations to substantive, collective direct action" based on "democratic decision-making and democratic struggle." That's more like it. Welcome back to Earth. By all means let us educate, agitate, organize and spread direct democracy with our feet on the ground, not with our head in the clouds.

Solidarity,
Martin Comack, X351621



Graphic: redgreenandblue.org

More On Marx

I would just like to say that I really enjoyed the article "Anniversary of Marx's Capital," which appeared on page 2 of the January/February Industrial Worker. I agree with FW Jon Hochschartner's views in the article. I might add that on the internet there is a great series of classes on studying Marx's "Capital" by David Harvey. Harvey has been teaching this class for over 40 years! Just do an internet search and it will pop up.

Thank you,
FW Mike Kowalski
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Corrections

The IW was unfortunately on an inaccurate Western Australia kick in the January/February issue. We apologize for the following errors:

- In the piece "IWW In Brisbane Is Making A Comeback!" (page 1), we incorrectly stated that Brisbane is in Western Australia. Brisbane is in the Australian state of Queensland.

- In "Western Australia Poultry Workers Win," (page 12), we incorrectly stated that Laverton is in Western Australia. Laverton is a suburb in Melbourne, Victoria.

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Virginia

Nigerian Workers, Students Stage General Strike

By Tom Keough

On Jan. 9, thousands of people stayed out of work and school as part of a nationwide general strike, which formed out of the Occupy Nigeria movement. Only doctors, nurses, and essential emergency staff were working during the strike. Some police officers in uniform joined the strike, marching through the streets in formation. Videos show masses of people singing "Solidarity Forever."

Since September, Nigeria's people were inspired by the Occupy movement and started protests against the corruption and exploitation they face. Nigerian poverty is intense. For years, average wages have rested at the equivalents of \$2 per day. Nigeria's minimum wage was recently increased to 18,000 naira, or almost \$110 per month. The new minimum wage has still not been implemented as a law in many states in the country, and is not very well enforced where it is the law. The Nigerian government is seen as one of the most overpaid governments in the world. An average Nigerian senator is paid \$135,802 a month, or \$1.6 million a year in "allowances" and salary.

Austerity & Effects on Oil Prices

Nigeria, Africa's biggest oil producer, is known for corruption. The nation's politicians favor the foreign oil companies—they give themselves large salaries while they cut back on spending for the nation's infrastructure, which includes cuts to the oil refineries and the electric system, causing power shortages. This causes a need for expensive imported oil, and Nigeria imports over 70 percent of its petroleum products.

Families often deal with this by buying gasoline generators. In the past, people protested this system, and the government responded to pressure by subsidizing fuel prices. In an austerity measure, President Goodluck Jonathan ended this subsidy program on Jan. 1, and fuel prices increased by 120 percent. Protests swept the country, with roads and oil facilities

blocked. Government and corporate websites were hacked with protest messages. People started talking about the need for a general strike in response to protesters being killed. At 1:00 a.m. on Jan. 5, police evicted nonviolent Occupy Nigeria protesters in Kano. They used tear gas and reportedly shot unarmed sleeping protesters at the Silver Jubilee Square. Protesters quickly regrouped and began a new occupation at Sabuwar Kofa, 1 kilometer away. When the call went out for a general strike, Denja Yaqub of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) stated, "We are shutting down the Nigerian airspace to local and international flights from Sunday night."

"If a revolution will solve our problems, why not? What is going on already shows that our people are prepared for a revolution...But we will not ask for a revolution that will bring back the military (to govern), they are a part of the problem," Yaqub added.

The major unions joined the call, and on Jan. 9 the working people shut down the nation with a general strike until fuel subsidies were restored.

The strike also included the demand that Goodluck Jonathan and many other politicians resign. The people demanded an end to the luxurious expenses of the politicians, such as the "refreshments" budget, which collects heavy taxes from the working poor. People are demanding participation in the governing process, an end to corruption, and the breakup of the rich "power cabal."

The government responded with both violence and promises of reform. They announced that they would start a large mass transit system to ease the cost of fuel, while in many places strikes were outlawed. Police and troops loyal to the government attacked protesters. Festus Ozoze, Vice Chairman of Amalgamated Workers Union, was arrested for disobeying the ban on mass actions. The state tried him instantly and sent him to prison, and he has since been released. Civil rights lawyers, pastors and others were arrested

as well. The news reported that at least 15 strikers killed and others badly injured.

A young woman, Adetoun Adetona, appeared in a powerful YouTube video, passionately yelling, "If I die, I die. I don't care about my life, I care about Nigeria. Stand against corruption, social injustice, public slavery of the greedy 1 percent, and the conniving government. We were born for a time like this." This video rapidly went viral.

During the strike, Christians protected mosques from police attacks and Muslim groups protected churches. Nigeria's people, despite a long history of religious trouble, became united. The office of the Nigerian Television Authority was occupied by hundreds of protesters for broadcasting "state propaganda." An interesting tactic was that the movement paused strike activities during the weekend so people could replenish their dwindling food supplies and restart the strike on Monday.

Support rallies sprang up quickly around the world from Finland's snowy National Day of support Occupy Nigeria, to protests in London, a march to the United Nations headquarters in New York City, and marches throughout Africa, Europe and North America.

On Jan. 16, Goodluck Jonathan announced that he would back down temporarily and restore part of the fuel subsidies. This still leaves the price higher than it was before January, when petrol prices rose from 65 naira per liter to 140 naira or more. His new price is 97 naira per litre (or \$2.27 per gallon).

The NLC leaders called for an end to the general strike. This was called a victory by many commentators, and a stab in the back by others. Goodluck Jonathan said he will pursue full deregulation of the petroleum sector at some future time.



Graphic: Occupy Nigeria

NLC President Abdulwaheed Omar said, "We are sure that no government or institution will take Nigerians for granted again." The NLC described the strike as a success.

Still, many Nigerians remain very angry that gas prices rose at all.

The Nigeria Medical Association and the Nigeria Bar Association condemned the labor leader's suspension of the indefinite strike.

Professor Tam David-West accused labor leaders of betraying the masses. "They have exposed themselves to be suspected, rightly or wrongly, to have been bribed by the government," he said

On Jan. 18 Nigerians marched to protest the agreement. People are calling for new ways to deal with the political and union officials.

The American news media generally ignores news from Africa, and the six-day general strike, which called itself Occupy Nigeria, got little mention at first, in much the same way that they ignored Occupy Wall Street. Such mass industrial actions needs support and exposure from working class militants around the world—the kind of support such actions won't receive in the capitalist media. In the United States the IWW and, indeed, the *Industrial Worker*, is well placed to promote the inspiring actions of the Nigerian working class.

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.



Name: _____
 Address: _____
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 Occupation: _____
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Keeping Your Job While Under Fire

By **Liberte Locke**

I have been publicly organizing at Starbucks for nearly five years. The fact that I have managed to stay employed is no small feat. Since our 13-month trial against the company, Starbucks has been especially careful to fire outspoken unionists via policy violations, set ups, and pushing us to either quit in a fiery rage or go off and be fired for losing composure.

The best position for organizing is being employed at the shop. Keeping your job is priority number one. Here is a brief account of one such time that I protected my job and won.

I worked at the Union Square Starbucks in New York City for years. While there, I helped develop a shop committee at the Astor Place store. After the committee went public, the majority of the shop members were systematically fired and the remaining members endured daily mistreatment from the anti-union management staff. As an act of solidarity, I decided to transfer to that



location to further build the committee. I approached that store with a core focus of seeing an end to the store manager's employment at Starbucks. He inflicted economic violence on my fellow workers; they were still looking for work after being fired for joining the union. Even a week of unemployment in a city like New York can mean homelessness. This is one of the many reasons that I take the firing of our members very personally.

After my month-long battle, which included having the store transfer turned down and filing an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charge, I finally won. During my fourth shift at Astor Place I called an assistant store manager "shady" for refusing to leave proof that my vacation time had been approved. I told her that refusing to leave proof just confirmed my suspicion that management was hoping to do what I feared—schedule me so they could claim I did not show and fire me. Just hours after my argument with the assistant manager, the store manager came to the store to give me a write-up for "threatening and harassing a fellow partner." Despite only receiving two other write-ups in over four years—one for being late and the other for a fight with a coworker who was homophobic to me—I was put on "final notice." One

Feminism And Class Solidarity

By **Ben Debney, x368045**

Feminism gets a bad rap these days. Anti-feminist attitudes range from the puerile ("Feminism was established to allow unattractive women easier access to the mainstream," Rush Limbaugh) to the hilarious ("The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians," Pat Robertson). However anti-feminists choose to voice their disdain for feminism, what is common to them is their tendency to demonize what they don't like.

It seems pretty obvious that most of the crowing about the perceived perils of feminism comes from those who benefit most from socially and economically-entrenched sexism. Is this really surprising? Hardly. In fact, one might argue that it does not seem hard to draw parallels between the demonization of feminism by those who benefit most from sexism and the demonization of the IWW by the defenders of class privilege and inequality. Since feminism and revolutionary unionism might be considered different angles of the same fight (which is particularly true if we consider the fact that women do two-thirds of the world's work while only receiving 10 percent of the world's income), the fact that they are subject to the same process of "othering" seems hardly surprising.

As the historian William Preston has

more violation and I could be fired.

This would be a less than climatic end to a career of fighting Starbucks from the inside. I filed a ULP about the write-up. I went into work the next day and coworkers told me that the store manager, district manager, and regional director had been meeting all day. During my shift, I was called into a meeting with the district and store managers. The district manager said, "I've been going over this corrective action the store manager gave you and I'm thinking that it was not serious enough to warrant a corrective so I will be removing this from your file." I said, "OK, thank you," and started to get up to go back to work.

Then my store manager took out a new corrective action and said, "Do you remember anything strange happening with your till the last shift you worked?"

I laughed and said, "That was two weeks ago, I don't remember but I can go through my notes." He then said that I was being written up for the till being \$13.11 short. I told him I would not sign it and that in almost five years I have never had my till be short until coming to this store. I also told him I did not believe it, because he wrote all the other union members up for shortages too. I said that I would be happy to go to the Starbucks headquarters and meet with Partner Asset & Protection and go over every single transaction I did that shift while watching the camera footage to see where the money went. He said that was impossible.

I laughed again and tossed the write-up on the desk. I looked at him with a half smirk and said, "Really? After all these years and countless times you all have tried to get rid of me, do you really expect the [National] Labor [Relations] Board to believe that I would throw all my work out the window in order to steal \$13.11? You must be outta your mind."

Then the store manager started to yell at me. The district manager took the write-up away and put it in a folder, saying "Well, I'll have to look into this and get back to you." They never gave me that write-up. Also, after a very successful call-in campaign and union pressure, the store manager quit. Now we can push forward and add this boss to the notches on our belt.

noted, the IWW has, from the moment of its inception, been practically "the easiest and most noticeable scapegoat for the anti-labor and anti-radical passions of the country." In fact, from a historical point of view, the corporate aristocracy has defined its opposition to organized labor specifically in terms of its hostility toward the IWW.

Typically the defenders of class privilege have invoked the ideal of freedom in defense of their right to exploit wage labor, while accusing anyone who has tried to hold them to account of being a threat to society, or being authoritarian, or both. Though the irony of the corporate aristocracy accusing anyone else of being a threat to democracy is hard to miss, it has nevertheless successfully managed to shift the blame for class conflict to organizations such as the IWW. This type of blame shifting is enabled through what social psychology knows today as "moral disengagement."

In very simple terms, moral disengagement is the process we use to convince ourselves that unethical and harmful behavior we perpetrate against others is morally justifiable. Its main purpose is to protect the positive self-image we have of ourselves from unsettling or even disturbing realities by shifting the blame for our behavior elsewhere—most typically onto the victim.

Blaming the victim is the most obvious means by which defenders of male privilege perpetuate sexism. Anti-feminists



CHAPTER 51

Street Corner Speaker

With an Irish rebel for a father, and an ardent feminist for a mother, it's no wonder that Elizabeth Gurley Flynn became a Wobbly (a member of the militant Industrial Workers of the World) while still a teenager!

In the summer of 1907, Elizabeth celebrated her 17th birthday speaking on street corners during the IWW-led strike at American Tube & Stamping in Bridgeport, Conn. A popular and effective orator, she soon began traveling across the country to agitate for industrial unionism.



Two years later, in Missoula, Mont., Gurley Flynn organized migrant workers ripped off by racketeering employment agencies. The agencies and employers, to silence her, pressured the City Council to pass an ordinance making street speaking illegal. Wobblies from around the country moved into Missoula, and flooded the jails. The ordinance was revoked.

This was the first of several IWW "free speech" fights: in order to organize, the Wobblies had to first assert their freedom of speech. In Spokane, Wash., more than 100 Wobblies had been jailed for speaking at street meetings by the time a pregnant Gurley Flynn arrived in November 1909. An exasperated local official soon complained, "She makes all the trouble. She puts fight in the men." When the police arrested her and other IWW leaders, Elizabeth chained herself to a lamppost. The 19-year-old mother-to-be continued to "make trouble" in her jail cell. Publicity created by her arrest and imprisonment helped convince the City Council to repeal its ban on street meetings.

Graphic: Mike Konopacki

claim that feminism is divisive because it demonizes women who value family and traditional roles, because it is an agent of Marxism, and because it seeks to eliminate European-American males. Accusing feminists of demonizing others, while calling feminism "an agent of Marxism," is somewhat hypocritical.

Red-baiting is another means by which anti-feminists effect moral disengagement. Here especially the class nature of anti-feminism is revealed as anyone who calls the rich to account for the fact that women are even more heavily exploited under the wage system than men is made out to be authoritarian, anti-democratic and demonic.

Ignoring one's own responsibility and the consequences of one's own actions are other means of effecting moral disengagement. A bizarre blog post entitled "The History of Feminism as a Sexual Trade Union" unwittingly illustrates the classist assumptions of anti-feminism, writing: "The history of feminism is the history of

a female sexual trade union, growing in political power in exact correspondence with the steady loss of female sexual power caused by the continual widening of the sexual market." What this tract appears to infer is that women want to be free of sexist discrimination and be agents of their own destiny, apparently because of an underlying sexual inadequacy. Here we might define irony as someone who regards a strong, empowered woman as a threat, and accusing anyone else of being sexually inadequate.

At any rate, the pattern of demonization common to enemies of gender and economic justice is indicative of a society that sees women the same way it sees workers and the environment—as things to be exploited for economic gain. Therefore it would seem fair to conclude that in the interests of building solidarity and promoting justice, all class-conscious workers have a responsibility to recognize anti-feminism and to expose it wherever and whenever they can.

Wobbly & North American News

Commemorating The Bread & Roses Strike

By Steve Kellerman

The Lawrence, Mass., textile workers' strike of 1912 was one of the most momentous events in labor history, one which continues to resonate a century later. In response to a cut in their already severely inadequate wages, 25,000 women, men and children walked off their jobs in January 1912, striking the American Woolen Company (or "The Woolen Trust") and the other textile employers of the city.

IWW organizers created a strike committee and a relief effort that facilitated the workers' complete victory at the conclusion of a nine-week effort. This occurred in the face of bitter winter weather, martial law enforced by the state militia, large-scale police violence, an attempted bomb frame-up, murder frame-ups, attempted scabbing, and opposition from government, religious groups and press.

On Jan. 12, 2012, approximately 500 people, including a contingent of Wobblies, gathered at the Everett Mills building in Lawrence, where the 1912 strike originated. They participated in a reenactment of the strike's beginning and marched to City Hall, IWW banners flying, through the mix of rain and snow. The City Hall program featured presentations by local dignitaries of plans to erect a permanent monument to the strike, which will include two depictions of the IWW label. The Lawrence High School chorus also sang the revolutionary anthem "The Internationale."

Participants then marched back to the Everett Mills for the ceremonial opening of a permanent exhibit on the strike that



Graphic: "Bread and Roses 1912-2012" Facebook page

featured presentations by representatives of the labor movement, historians of the strike and politicians. People knowledgeable of the events of 1912 found it ironic that representatives of the city and state government and of the state AFL-CIO praised the strikers and laid claim to their heritage, despite their predecessors having opposed the strike with great brutality and, in the case of the AFL, attempting unsuccessfully to scab.

Other programs commemorating the strike have and will continue to take place throughout the year in Lawrence, San Francisco, Boston, London, Tokyo, and Haledon, N.J. For a schedule of these events, visit <http://breadandrosescentennial.org>. **Read more on pages 6-7.**

Flight Attendants Protest Layoffs, Pay Cuts



Flight attendants protest in L.A. Photo: calaborfed.org

By John Kalwaic

The flight attendants' union, Association of Flight Attendants-Communications Workers of America (AFA-CWA), as well as other concerned citizens, started a protest at various airlines in Los Angeles on Feb. 6. OccuFLY is an effort to protest

layoffs and lack of pay raises. The union was also protesting a "secret deal" that the airline companies were making with lawmakers in Washington, D.C., which would affect workers' right to unionize. This deal would undermine workers' decisions on whether to have union representation by altering the Railway Labor Act, one of the oldest labor laws in the United States. Although the U.S. Senate has not passed such a bill, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) now has a provision to make it difficult for flight attendants to unionize. Meanwhile, the firm known as Bain Capital, which is associated with presidential hopeful Mitt Romney, has recommended massive layoffs of 13,000 American Airline employees.

Pittsburgh IWW Solidarity Against Racism

By Kenneth Miller

The Pittsburgh IWW loaned its support to the Pittsburgh Summit Against Racism for the third or fourth consecutive year. Throughout January, members of the Pittsburgh IWW did outreach for the Summit in conjunction with Occupy Pittsburgh, "What Does Trouble Mean? Nate Smith's Revolution" (the movie), and the Starbucks Workers Union's recent victory of winning time-and-a-half pay on Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) Day.



Photo: J.L. Martello / New Pittsburgh Courier
Summit Organizers at the end of a hard day.

This was the 14th Annual Summit Against Racism, hosted each year on the Saturday after MLK Day in the Social Hall of East Liberty Presbyterian Church. The summit is a fundraiser for the Jonny Gammage Scholarship. Jonny Gammage was murdered by police who never went to jail. In honor of his death, the Pittsburgh's Citizen Police Review Board and the scholarship were established. In previous years, the Pittsburgh IWW has co-hosted the October 22 National Day of Action Against Police Brutality and the Criminalization of a Generation with the group who organizes the Summit Against Racism.

Two years ago, the Pittsburgh IWW and the IWW International Solidarity Commission joined the National Garment Workers Federation of Bangladesh for an MLK Day celebration. Other than May Day, MLK Day might be the most important day of the year for the global labor movement.

A special thank you to the members of the Pittsburgh IWW whose consistent support for the Summit Against Racism is providing us with another global launch pad to celebrate MLK Day with workers all over the world.

Where The Fraser River Flows

By the Vancouver Island GMB

Fellow Workers, pay attention to what we're about to mention, for it is the clear intention of the Vancouver Island General Membership Branch (GMB) to commemorate the centennial of the IWW-led Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific Railroad Strikes with a Wob Camp on the banks of the Fraser River.



Graphic: Robin Thompson

On March 27, 1912, in response to dreadful working conditions and exploitation, the IWW led the walkout of 4,000 railway *navvies* (navigational engineers) on the Canadian Northern Railroad. By early April, Joe Hill was on the scene and wrote "Where The Fraser River Flows." IWW members working on the Grand Trunk Railroad struck on July 20, making for a total of 8,000 men out on strike and tying up work from Hope to Kamloops and from Prince Rupert to Edmonton.

This strike established the "thousand-mile picket line," east to Minneapolis and south to San Francisco.

Due to the distance of the camps along the track, the delegate at strike headquarters set up the first system of camp delegates that later became refined as the

"job delegate" system of the Agricultural Workers Organization (AWO).

It was during this strike that the term "Wobbly" as a nickname for the IWW came into popular use. (*Editor's Note: This is debatable.*)

On July 27-29, 2012, the Vancouver Island GMB will establish a Wob Camp just north of Yale, British Columbia. This is the location of the former IWW strike headquarters, and alongside of the rail grade that Wobblies carved out of the rugged mountains under dangerous working conditions for low wages and long hours while living in terrible camps.

Plans are in the works for speakers, an IWW art show and soapboxing.

For more information contact the Vancouver Island GMB at iwwvi@telus.net.

St. Louis IWW Pickets Facility Services



Wobs of all ages picket. Photo: St. Louis IWW

By the St. Louis IWW

On Jan. 23, 2012, members of the St. Louis IWW, along with about a dozen other activists and supporters, walked a picket line outside the corporate headquarters of WFF Facility Services (WFF) near downtown St. Louis, Mo. This company, which is subcontracted by Lansing Community College (LCC) in Michigan to provide custodial labor, recently fired worker Jeff Pillon after he was involved in a physical altercation with supervisor Stony Radic. Another worker, Cedrick Webb, quit the job in solidarity.

Cedrick Webb worked for WFF for seven years. He was promoted to crew leader at the Lansing Community College Gannon Building in 2006 and was also made employee of the month at least once every year afterward. Jeff Pillon was hired by WFF/LCC in 2009 and was also made employee of the month on more than one occasion. When a new management team came in to WFF/LCC in 2010, the atmosphere changed. Just doing your job was no longer enough; you had to know your place.

Pillon was quickly targeted by Radic, who caused a number of problems for the employees who worked under him. He went about turning worker against worker, spreading false rumors and sharing confidential information. Among other things, he was also a racist. When he was with other white workers, Radic

regularly used racial slurs to describe non-white workers. On one occasion, Pillon was within earshot when Radic referred to Webb using a derogatory slur. Later, after hearing about this, Webb followed company policy and reported the incident to the WFF/LCC site director Arnold Witte. Witte defended the racist supervisor and refused to take action.

On Nov. 21, 2011, a verbal confrontation occurred between Pillon and Radic, which ended in a physical altercation. Pillon was injured during the scuffle. The entire incident was captured on surveillance video. Webb and Pillon then contacted the Lansing Workers' Center (LWC), an independent community organization that provides advocacy and support for workers who are dealing with problems on the job and in their communities. Members of the LWC met with Pillon and Webb and also contacted other WFF employees, who

corroborated their stories. However, on Dec. 21, before the LWC could organize another meeting with workers to address these issues, Pillon was fired. Webb, after hearing of Pillon's termination, walked off the job in solidarity. WFF also terminated Radic at this time.

WFF has refused, after repeated requests by the LWC, to reinstate Pillon or Webb. After news of this incident reached the Workers Solidarity Alliance—an organization several St. Louis Wobblies belong to—a solidarity demonstration was organized to coincide with one occurring in Lansing, Mich. Around mid-morning on Jan. 23, half a dozen St. Louis Wobblies gathered in front of the inconspicuous WFF headquarters building to show their support for Webb and Pillon and demand they be offered their jobs back. Soon, the picket grew to around 20 people with others coming and going until the early afternoon. While there was little foot traffic in this mostly industrial area of the city, numerous cars honked their horns in support, and one or two stopped for more information.

Webb and Pillon are the victims of an abusive and racist supervisor and a management which has effectively worked to maintain an intimidating and hostile work environment. An injustice to workers anywhere is an injustice to workers everywhere! We demand that WFF rehire Jeff Pillon and offer Cedrick Webb his job back!

Special

Bread And Roses A Hundred Years On:

By Andy Piascik

One hundred years ago, in the dead of a Massachusetts winter, the great 1912 Lawrence Textile Strike—commonly referred to as the “Bread and Roses” strike—began. Accounts differ as to whether a woman striker actually held a sign that read “We Want Bread and We Want Roses, Too.” No matter. It’s a wonderful phrase, as appropriate for the Lawrence strikers as for any group at any time: the notion that, in addition to the necessities for survival, people should have “a sharing of life’s glories,” as James Oppenheim put it in his poem “Bread and Roses.”

Though 100 years have passed, the Lawrence strike resonates as one of the most important in the history of the United States. Like many labor conflicts of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the strike was marked by obscene disparities in wealth and power, open collusion between the state and business owners, large scale violence against unarmed strikers, and great ingenuity and solidarity on the part of workers. In important ways, though, the strike was also unique. It was the first large-scale industrial strike, the overwhelming majority of the strikers were immigrants, most were women and children, and the strike was guided in large part by the revolutionary strategy and vision of the IWW.

Beyond its historical significance, elements of this massive textile strike may be instructive to building a radical working class movement today. It is noteworthy that the Occupy movement shares many philosophical and strategic characteristics with the Lawrence strike—direct action, the prominent role of women, the centrality of class, participatory decision-making, egalitarianism, an authentic belief in the Wobbly principle that We Are All Leaders—to name just a few. During the two months of the strike, the best parts of the revolutionary movement the IWW aspired to build were expressed. The Occupy movement carries that tradition forward, and as the attempts at a general strike and the shutting of the ports in Oakland as well as solidarity events such as in New York for striking Teamsters indicate, many in Occupy understand that the working class is uniquely positioned to challenge corporate power. While we deepen our understanding of what that means and work to make it happen, there is much of value we can learn from what happened in Lawrence a century ago.

A town on the brink of labor unrest

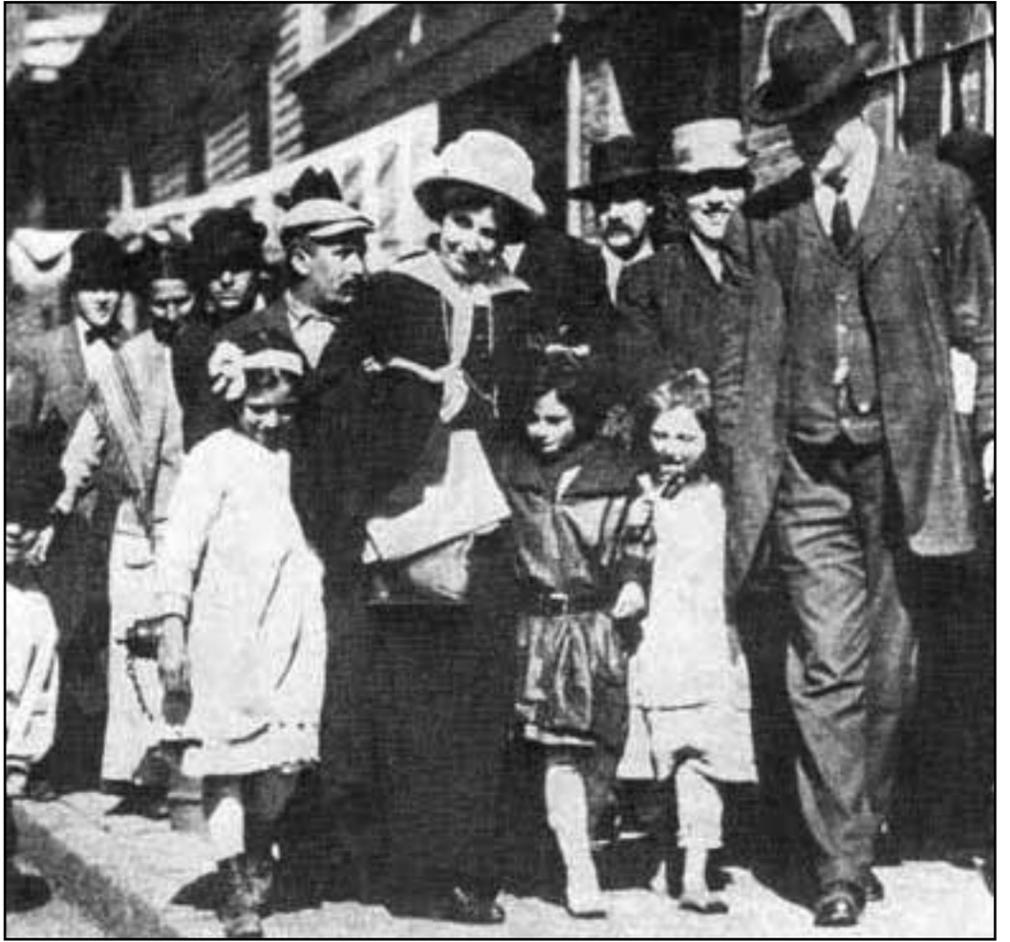
The city of Lawrence was founded as a one-industry town along the Merrimack River in the 1840s by magnates looking to expand the local textile industry beyond the nearby city of Lowell. Immigrant labor was the bedrock of the city’s development. Early on, French Canadians and Irish

predominated. In 1912, by which time Lawrence was the textile capitol of the United States, its textile workforce was made up primarily of Southern and Eastern Europeans—Poles, Italians and Lithuanians were the largest groups, and there were also significant numbers of Russians, Portuguese, and Armenians. Smaller immigrant communities from beyond Europe had also been established, with Syrians being the largest. Though very small in number, a high percentage of the city’s African-American population also labored in textile.

Mill workers experienced most of the horrors that characterized 19th century industrial labor. Six-day workweeks of 60 hours or more were the norm, workers were regularly killed on the job, and many grew sick and died slowly from breathing in toxic fibers and dust while others were maimed or crippled in the frequent accidents in the mills. Death and disability benefits were virtually nonexistent. Life expectancy for textile workers was far less than other members of the working class and 20 years shorter than the population as a whole. It was a work environment, in short, that poet William Blake, writing about similar hellholes in England, captured perfectly with the phrase “these dark Satanic mills.”

Living conditions were similarly abominable: unsanitary drinking water, overcrowded apartments, malnutrition and disease were widespread. Thousands of children worked full time and were deprived of schooling and any semblance of childhood because families could not survive on the pay of two adult wage earners. Constituent unions of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) had no interest in organizing workers who were immigrants, “unskilled,” and overwhelmingly women and children. The local of the United Textile Workers (UTW) had a small number of members drawn, true to the AFL’s creed, exclusively from the higher-skilled, higher-paid segment of the workforce.

The IWW was also in Lawrence. The Wobblies led several job actions in 1911 and its radical philosophy resonated with mill hands far beyond the several hundred who were members. Faced with lives of squalor and brutally difficult work, despised by their employers, the political sub-class, the press, and mainstream labor, textile workers, once introduced to the IWW, came increasingly to see that militant direct action was both viable and necessary. Many had experience with militant working class traditions in their native lands—experience the IWW, in contrast to the AFL, not only respected but culti-



Elizabeth Gurley Flynn & “Big Bill Haywood” w/ children. Photo: breadandrosescentennial.org

ated. Though there was an undeniable spontaneity to the Lawrence strike, the revolutionary seeds the IWW planted in the years before 1912 were also a catalyst.

Workers walk out on strike

The spark was lit on Jan. 11, 1912, the first payday since a law reducing the maximum hours per week from 56 to 54 went into effect on Jan. 1. Because mill owners speeded up the line to make up the difference, workers expected their pay would remain the same. Upon discovering that their pay had been reduced, a group of Polish women employed at the Everett Cotton Mill walked off the job. By the following morning, half of the city’s 30,000 mill hands were on strike. On Monday, Jan. 15, 20,000 workers were out on the picket line. Soon, every mill in town was closed and the number of strikers had swelled to 25,000, including virtually all of the less-skilled workers. The owners, contemptuous of the ability of uneducated, immigrant workers to do for themselves, did not bother to recruit scabs, certain they would prevail quickly. By the time they realized they had a fight on their hands, the strikers were so well-organized that importing scabs was a far more difficult proposition.

Several days after the strike began, workers in Lawrence contacted the IWW’s national office for assistance, and Joe Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti were dispatched from New York to help organize the strike. Though Ettor would spend most of the two-month strike as well as the rest of 1912 in a Lawrence prison, the work he did in the strike’s early days was indispensable to victory. Radiating confidence and optimism, Smilin’ Joe had the workers form nationality committees for every ethnic group in the workforce. The strike committee consisted of elected reps from each group. THE meetings, printed strike updates and speeches were thereafter translated into all of the major languages.

In addition to the democratic nuts and bolts, Ettor brought an unshakable belief in the workers to the strike. The IWW had a faith in the working class that is markedly different from the often self-serving proclamations of union organizers of today who are mostly out to build their organizations. In contrast to the all too common practice of organizers “taking charge,” Ettor displayed a

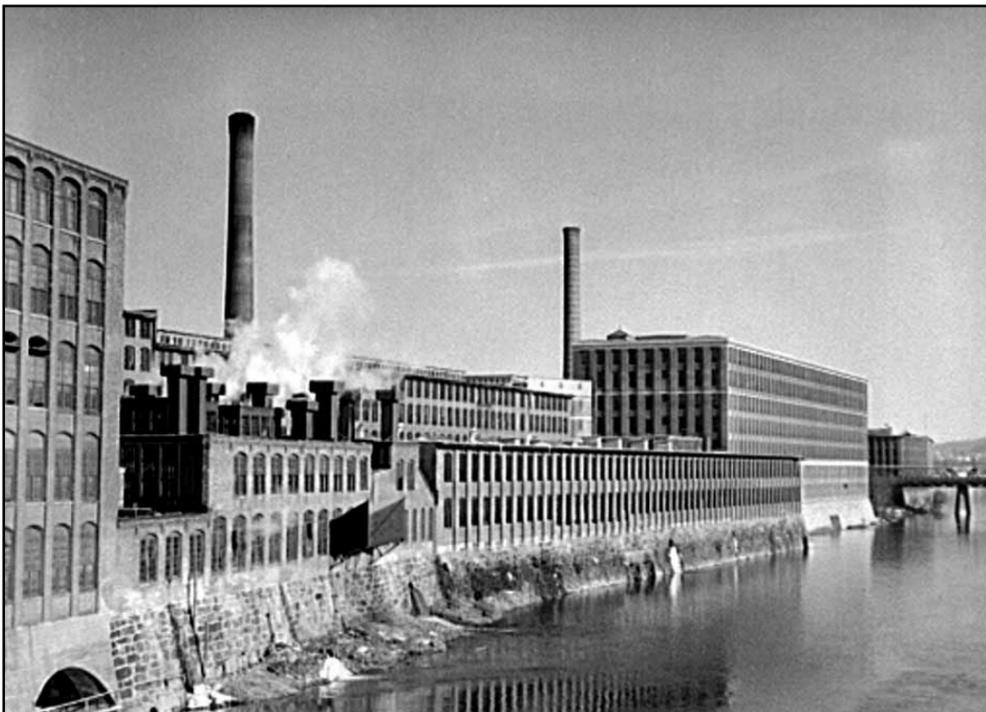
fundamental belief in the ability of workers to do for themselves. He, Giovannitti, and, later, Bill Haywood and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, made every aspect of the strike a learning experience. As the strikers worked to achieve greater power in the short term by winning their demands, many came to see that the society could not function without workers and that there was no job or task that was beyond the collective skill of the working class.

Ettor, Haywood, and Flynn also provided a vision of workers managing society, underscoring that it was an achievable goal. Without ever downplaying the particularities of the strike or of the strikers’ lives, they boldly proclaimed their opposition to the capitalist system and encouraged the Lawrence workers to explore what that meant. In practice, the vision of a new world played out in the decision-making process; the support services the strikers established with the help of contributions from around the country (soup kitchens, food and fuel banks, medical clinics, free winter clothing and blankets), in direct action on picket lines, in the courts, during the strike’s many rallies and parades, and in the IWW’s insistence that all negotiating be done directly by rank and filers.

Perhaps the most important of the IWW’s contributions was its incessant emphasis on solidarity. The only way to victory, they emphasized, was unity and the only way to unity was to respect the language and culture of each nationality group. Ettor, Haywood and the other Wobblies understood that solidarity did not mean dissolving differences; it meant enriching the experience of all by creating space for each to participate in their own way. They encouraged the workers to view each other that way and emphasized again and again that the only people in Lawrence who were foreigners were the mill owners (none of whom lived in town). With each passing day, the strikers’ solidarity increased. They came to understand that solidarity was not just the only way they could win the strike; it was also the only way to build a better world.

So inspired, the strikers rose to every challenge. They circumvented injunctions against plant-gate picketing with roaming lines of thousands that flowed through Lawrence’s streets and turned away would-be scabs. After early incidents where some scabs were attacked, they embraced Ettor’s emphasis on nonviolent

Continued on next page



The textile mills of Lawrence.

Photo: breadandrosescentennial.org

Special

Lessons From The Lawrence Textile Strike

Continued from previous page

direct action without ever diminishing their militancy. When Massachusetts Governor Eugene Foss—himself a mill owner—pleaded with them to return to work and accept arbitration, the workers refused, recognizing the offer as a ploy that would leave their demands unaddressed. Whenever strikers were arrested (as hundreds were), supporters descended en masse to Lawrence's courtroom to express their outrage.

The involvement of women was absolutely crucial to victory, beginning with the rejection of the self-destructive violence of some male strikers. Though the IWW's record on promoting female leadership was spotty at best, Ettor and the other Wobblies in Lawrence were sensible enough to let the women's initiative fly free. The presence of Flynn, the "Rebel Girl," was a factor, but the large-scale participation of women resulted overwhelmingly from the efforts of the women themselves. Knowing all too well that violence always reverberates hardest on those who are on society's lowest rungs, women strikers called the men on their beatings of scabs and their fights with police and militia. It was women who moved to the front of many of the marches in an effort to curtail state violence against the strike (though the police and militia proved not at all shy about beating women and children as well as men). It was also the women who led the way in the constant singing and spontaneous parading that was such a feature of the strike that Mary Heaton Vorse, Margaret Sanger and numerous others remarked at length about in their accounts of Lawrence. It was the women who made the decision to ship children out of town to supportive families so they would be better cared for. A common practice in Europe unknown in the United States, the transporting of children drew much attention to the strike, first because it revealed much to the world about living conditions in Lawrence, and later because of the stark violence of the police who attacked a group of mothers attempting to put their children on an outbound train.

State violence was so extreme that it may actually have aided the strikers' cause, as there were outcries from around the country over the police killings of a young woman and a 16-year-old boy as well as the large-scale beating of women and children. There were also national howls of outrage when strikers were arrested for "possessing" dynamite in what turned out to be a crude frame (it was later determined that a prominent citizen close to the mill owners had planted it). Similarly, the Stalin-esque jailing of Ettor and Giovannitti without bail as "accessories before the act of murder" in the police killing of Annie LoPizzo, was widely criticized and served only to spur the strikers on.

In the end, in the face of the state militia, U.S. Marines, Pinkerton infiltrators and hundreds of local police, the strikers prevailed. They achieved a settlement close to their original demands, including significant pay raises and time-and-a-quarter for overtime, which previously had been paid at the straight hourly rate. Workers in Lowell and New Bedford struck successfully a short while later, and mill owners throughout New England soon granted significant pay raises rather than risk repeats of Lawrence. When the trials of Ettor, Giovannitti and a third defendant commenced in the fall, workers in Lawrence's mills pulled a work stoppage to show that a miscarriage of justice would not be tolerated. The three were subsequently acquitted.

In the long term, the strike focused national attention on workplace safety, minimum wage laws and child labor. Though change in these areas was still too slow in coming, it did come and it came much sooner because of Lawrence. Locally, patriotic forces campaigned vig-



The workers of Lawrence celebrate the end of a hard-fought strike.

Photo: breadandrosescentennial.org

orously against "outside agitators" in the years after the strike and IWW membership eventually slid back to pre-strike levels. Still, despite tremendous repression, the IWW maintained a solid local chapter in Lawrence until the state effectively destroyed the organization with a massive campaign of jailings, deportations, lynchings and other violence after U.S. entry into World War I.

However, just as it was never the IWW's objective to gain official recognition from employers, its accomplishments should not be measured by its membership rolls or the limited span of its organizational presence. The goal was to build a revolutionary movement of the working class and the Wobblies implemented the strategy for achieving that end in Lawrence. This is not to say the IWW was without weaknesses in building lasting organization; it was and there are lessons for Occupy and all future movements to learn from those weaknesses. However, the IWW's weaknesses are ones that virtually every radical group from the Knights of Labor to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) share. These weaknesses speak more to the difficulty of building a revolutionary movement than to specific organizational flaws. The fact that the Wobblies were not able to sustain the great work they did over a longer period does not detract from the thoroughgoing way they imbued the Bread and Roses strike with revolutionary values, strategy and vision.

Lessons from the Strike

There are several aspects of the Lawrence strike that may be helpful to building a radical working class movement today. One is the symbiotic relationship between the strikers and the IWW. Since at least the bureaucratization of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) 70 years ago, unions have approached organizing workers with the goal of building membership rolls, as opposed to building working-class power. The type of organization workers may want, not to mention what they may want beyond organization, has been largely irrelevant. The choices that workers are presented with are quite limited: join one or another top-down union, or else fight on alone. The best features of pre-union formations—direct democracy, easy recall of representatives, requirements that all officers remain in the workplace, widespread rank-and-file initiatives, and so forth—are almost always killed quickly after affiliation. Workers will reject top-down approaches and embrace unionism that speaks to their needs if they are given the chance. The fact that they are

not presented such an option is neither accidental nor inevitable; it is because the union bureaucracy is as threatened by an independent rank and file as any employer.

Workers are not even really free to join the union of their choosing. Once an exclusive bargaining representative is chosen, no matter how that's determined, the affected workers cannot join any other labor organization, often at the risk of expulsion and loss of employment. The IWW, rather than seeking to ensure itself a steady flow of dues revenue, sought to challenge capitalism. Through direct action, particularly strikes, the working class would learn how to fight capital and in so doing would discover and develop its own potential until it was strong enough to wrest control of work away on a massive scale. That goal remains. To build such a movement today and on into the future, we will either have to do away with many of organized labor's entrenched ways or increasingly circumvent mainstream unions altogether, much as is happening so far with Occupy.

The flip side of the IWW/striker relationship in Lawrence is that the workers did not strike to gain unionization or even to get a contract. They struck over specific demands while understanding the need to change the balance of their relationship with mill owners. Early on, they sensed intuitively what they came to understand explicitly as the strike lengthened: that politicians and the courts were against them almost as completely as the bosses and Pinkertons were. When Governor Foss offered arbitration in an attempt to end the strike without addressing any of their demands, for example, the workers refused. Their distrust extended not just to the owners but to the machinery of the state, not to mention the top-down UTW, whose head attacked them relentlessly throughout and whose members scabbed from the outset. The strikers embraced the IWW philosophy of doing for themselves while utilizing its highly developed solidarity network, because their experience showed them it was the only way they could win.

A second lesson from Lawrence is a feminist approach to organizing. Though the IWW too often adopted an approach premised on rugged (male) individualism that relegated women to secondary roles, that was not the case in Lawrence. Rather, its radical approach encouraged women strikers and supporters to act in highly creative ways. Whenever women workers in Lawrence struggled with the men for full participation, Flynn and the other Wobblies sided with them. It is impossible to imagine the strikers winning otherwise,

and though Ettor, Haywood and Flynn's efforts on this score were not insignificant, it was the tireless work of thousands of rank and filers that proved decisive.

The degree to which women took to heart Ettor's declarations that striker violence would inevitably boomerang a hundredfold was also crucial. Few believed that a non-violent approach would cause the state to reciprocate, certainly not as the strike progressed and state violence escalated, nor did it necessarily mean that an absolute principle of nonviolence was appropriate in all situations. In Lawrence, however, it was clear early on that the strikers would lose if the physical confrontations that have been so prominent in the almost apocalyptic vision that many men through history have brought to the class struggle continued. The women, more than the men, understood that the complete withdrawal of their labor was the strongest blow the workers could strike. In the end, it was the ability to keep the mills almost completely non-functional for two months that won the strike.

Women were also at the heart of the singing and parading that characterized the Bread and Roses strike. Surrounded by enemies, with death a very real possibility, the Lawrence strikers, the women most of all (much like the black liberation activists in the Deep South in the early 1960s, also mostly women), sang to foster strength, courage and solidarity. Their songs and that tradition echo as loud and true as a drum circle through Occupy.

Lastly, Lawrence was the first major strike along industrial lines. Not only did the strike inspire other textile workers, it made real the IWW goal of organizing wall-to-wall. The violent suppression of the IWW forestalled capital's day of reckoning, but the seed had been planted. When industrial organizing exploded two decades later, it was thoroughly Wobbly-esque, especially in the sit-down strike with its explicit challenge to private ownership. Again, the degree to which Occupy implicitly understands the importance of such approaches is one of its great strengths. The massive withdrawal of labor, the large scale occupation of workplaces—these are lessons of Lawrence, direct and indirect, that Occupy (as well as movements of the future) carry forward and do well to consider more deeply. In so doing, we can perhaps begin to create a world where everyone has both sufficient bread to eat and "life's glories" as vivid as the reddest roses.

Andy Piascik has written about working-class issues for the Industrial Worker, Z Magazine, Union Democracy Review, Labor Notes and other publications.

Industrial Worker Book Review

Where Are The Working Class Women Novelists?

By William Hastings

Knowing this issue would be devoted to International Women's Day, I thought I would review a novel whose themes and core focused on issues of class and labor. The novel had to be written by a woman. I ordered books I hadn't read before, I reread old ones. Now, with a deadline bearing down on me, the house empty of whiskey, I have to face the ugly truth and write about it: there has never been an American novel, written by a woman, that holds class and labor at its core.

The majority of fiction written by women that comes close to looking at class and labor always ends up eschewing the issues of class in favor of issues of race, gender identity or minority struggles. Let me be clear from the outset: we need those types of novels. For without them we would be avoiding the truths held by large segments of our population, and that neither makes for good fiction nor for an accurate representation of American life. However, as close as these novels come to raging down hard on the issues of class and exposing them for readers to witness and feel, these novels never shine their focus on class at their core. By rendering the focus of a novel on issues of gender or race, the underlying issues of class are hidden. Beyond that, it continues the idea that there are differences between working-class whites and African Americans and Mexicans and Brazilians and women and children. There are differences, yes, but when I lived in a \$200 per month apartment in Boulder, Colo., and drank Tecate beer with my Mexican neighbors on the long afternoons when none of us were hired for day labor, it didn't matter where we came from. None of us had jobs. All we had to do, and we did this often, to remind ourselves that something was wrong was to walk around the corner and head down Arapahoe and watch the mountain yuppies cruise by in their SUVs with Greenpeace stickers plastered on the back windshield.

I've digressed. The novels produced by women in this country are admirable and strong, but I am left to wonder why we have not seen a female version of Nelson Algren or Upton Sinclair or Jack London or John Steinbeck or Sinclair Lewis. Why has America not produced, especially after the second wave of radical feminism in the 1970s, a female novelist who focuses her talents on the issue of class? One would think that the fallout of that second great wave of radical feminists would have produced such a novelist. That wave of anger and protest created incredible literature,

but most of that came in the form of manifestos and essays. The wake of that protest, a protest where women radically and forcefully broke away from the other student and youth movements of the day, where they found themselves asked to take a back seat to the male majority, should have produced a novelist who wanted to claim a bit of turf too long held by men, but it didn't, and we must ask ourselves why. I have no clear answers and it bothers me.

Now, in a nation wrecked by never-ending war, massive debt and corporate-political whoredom, one would think that a female novelist would rise forth and write of the issues at hand from a female perspective. Let me also be clear about this: writing from a female perspective is not the same thing as writing about issues of gender. It is simply the lens through which the issues at hand are viewed. We need that perspective to be heard, for without it we will not gain a clear picture of how life in America is lived. I argue for this to happen in fiction because it is in fiction that the greatest truths about the human heart, about people, are shown on the grandest scale.

Other writers will argue that Bonnie Jo Campbell is the writer doing this. She has made a name for herself in the past few years as being a woman writing about an underclass of America. However, Campbell's books, especially the short story collection "American Salvage," lack something other writers of fiction concerned with class have—and that is sympathy or compassion for her characters. "American Salvage" is an excellent book. It is well crafted, the stories shift enough stylistically so that it reads as something greater than the sum of its parts and it is fairly nuanced. In other words, it is a pretty perfect book. Its very perfection is what mars it almost irredeemably. It doesn't swell with passion and lust and anger and indignation. It doesn't scream. What is more important is that the book is a look at an underclass in America from the outside in, as if Campbell were peering through a window at a bunch of people screwing away on the kitchen floor while she wondered how to describe it all. Nelson Algren, in his story "Otto Preminger's Strange Suspensjers," details his time in Hollywood dealing with Preminger over the script for the movie being made of Algren's novel, "The Man with the Golden Arm." Preminger said, "You like underdogs?" Algren replied, "I like some people who are under, but not because they're under. Under is just where they happen

to be." This is the compassion lacking from Campbell's fiction, and I would say, the majority of so-called "working class" fiction today, regardless of the author. Campbell, like others, has chosen her subject because they are under. They are specimens and not people. Compassion—true compassion, which means in the religious sense, "to suffer with"—lacks from her fiction. She writes of these people but does not feel with them. Gustave Flaubert said, "I am Madame Bovary." Campbell would not say that about her characters.

Algren knew this and this is why he chose to live amongst the people he wrote about. He wasn't much different than the people he wrote about, which is the point anyway.

This past year Sibohan Fallon released "You Know When the Men Are Gone"—a collection of interlinked short stories set on the Fort Hood army base. The stories concern the women left behind while the men have been sent over to Iraq or Afghanistan. The book was very much under the radar, no doubt because of the writing establishment's fear of overtly political works, and it is the closest thing we have to a class-focused book written by a female. Still, it is not a novel. It is her first book and as writers tend to do, she has linked the stories together to give the book the sense of a novel while avoiding the novel's particular problems and structure. "You Know When the Men Are Gone" is structurally similar to Ernest Hemingway's "In Our Time" and Sherwood Anderson's "Winesburg, Ohio," for as close as the stories come to focusing in on class, class still remains just far enough outside their core to not be the central theme of the work. That being said, the collection is a start, and Fallon is worth reading and watching.

In 2000, Diana Garcia released "When I Was Living in a Labor Camp," a collection of poems focusing on the struggles of the migrant laborers in California's San Joaquin Valley. Political, lyrical, forceful, and dynamic, it is a superb collection that focuses on the issues of class and labor and genuine human struggle. But it is a collection of poems and not a novel.

I hope that female writers as talented as Fallon and Garcia focus their efforts on



Industrial Worker Book Review

Fiction Issue

April 2012

Featuring A Dozen of America's Best Writers
Continuing the Tradition of Jack London, Upton
Sinclair and Nelson Algren

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the novel. In "The Lonely Voice," Frank O'Connor argued that the short story is the form that is best able to deal with a "submerged population group." O'Connor writes:

"Defeat?"—what does this mean? Here [in the novella or short story] it does not mean mere material squalor, though this is often characteristic of the submerged population groups. Ultimately it seems to mean defeat inflicted by a society that has no sign posts, a society that offers no goals and no answers. The submerged population is not submerged entirely by material considerations; it can also be submerged by the absence of spiritual ones."

As American society funnels its resources toward the top and the vast cities of this continent are left to be hollow, wrecked hulls. As our laboring class remains both submerged and poor and uneducated, defeat will continue and we will then be left with hollow, wrecked souls as well. We are without sign posts. We must create our own. Because of its size and scope, and its ability to deal with the same people the short story does, perhaps it is time, now more than ever, to use the novel to write of American life as it is lived by the submerged and defeated, instead of focusing it on the minor troubles of the wealthy few. Perhaps the novelists best suited to do this are women, for they have held back for too long.

Industrial Strength Homecoming

By Eric Miles Williamson

Last month I went back to Oakland, my hometown, the town I was raised in, and my father before me, and his father before him. I hadn't been back for over 20 years, since my father died. I've been trying to escape that town ever since I can remember.

The reason I went back was to receive the PEN/Oakland Josephine Miles Literary Award for my most recent book of fiction. PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists) is an international writers' organization, and Oakland is a local branch. Norman Mailer won the award once, and the *New York Times* called it "the blue collar PEN," probably not in a flattering context. I'm proud of it though, winning the "blue collar PEN." It's the greatest honor of my life, other than writing for the IWW. I've got my Laborers' union card, Local 304, Oakland, Calif., in my pocket as I write this. All my novels are set in the Bay Area, and my characters are the workers I grew up with and toiled with and bled with and drank with, the men and women who reared me.

When I got off the plane and into the arc-welded ozone air where I could

smoke a cigarette, the first person I saw was a shirtless man with hippie hair and an Oakland Raiders logo tattooed beneath his chest fur. I made my way to the Alamo Car Rental booth (\$9 a day—it's Oakland, after all), and behind the counter was a large black woman in a purple dress, fake pearl necklace and fingernails long as chisels and painted red. She asked for my license and my credit card, which I gave her, and to which she laid scrutiny. My driver's license is from Texas and has been since 1986, when I took my first tour.

I was dressed in my usual duds: a heavy flannel shirt, a white undershirt, torn Levi's, beaten-up cowboy boots, my 30-year-old black Stetson fedora.

She gave me the up-down with her quick eyes. "You from here," she said, and she cut me a look.

"What?" I said. "What's the deal? What gives me away?"

"It's in your blood," she said. She didn't laugh. She looked at me hard, a chastisement, an accusation, a look that condemned me for abandoning my home.

I walked toward my rental car in shame.

My first Oakland stop was Dick's Res-

taurant (featured, for some reason, in a Radiohead video). It's a diner on the railroad tracks in the industrial/warehouse blear of San Leandro, on the Oakland border. Both my younger brother and my father had their wedding receptions at Dick's. There I met Ken Franklin, with whom I grew up. Neither of us had known who our fathers were, as is the fashion in Oakland. He's now a lawyer, and I'm a professor. Jim Blewer, another childhood friend who now stocks vegetables at Safeway, also met up with me there, and we walked into the unmarked bar, the door a secret to all but regulars.

"Hey, it's Eric, the skinny Williamson boy!" yelled J.R., the bartender. People raised their drinks in toast. It had been 20 years since I'd been in Dick's, but there at the bar sat the men I pumped gas for in my youth. Now they were old, but I am too. An oldster sat at the end of the bar rigged up to an oxygen tank and smoking, his wife at his side. At the other end of the bar a 94-year-old man slammed boilermakers. J.R. brought me a Scotch and a beer without my asking for it, my two-fister of choice for 30 years now. A train passed and the ice in our glasses rattled and nobody talked

until the whistle dopplered away into the petrochemical dark. Dogs howled. At the end of the night I helped the 94-year-old man off his bar stool and into his wheelchair so he could sleep away the ache and the loneliness of having outlived most of his family and friends; everyone but the people at Dick's.

On the way to my hotel, I stopped at Taggart's Liquors on Dolittle, the road that runs from Alameda, through Oakland, and ends in San Leandro. It's a road built on landfill, on the garbage dumps that ring the San Francisco Bay. Taggart's is where we used to buy our booze when we were teenagers, Taggart himself taking our cash and telling us to shove the pint bottles down our pants before we left the store so the cops wouldn't bust him or us. Now it was manned by a Chinese guy, but the same ice-bin of malt liquors—Old English, Mickey's, Schlitz, High Gravity, Colt—sat in front of the register. I bought a few Schlitz tallboys and a pack of Newports. I bought a pint of Gilbey's gin and tucked it into my pants in nostalgia. I was home.

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

Women Workers Fight Back Against Austerity In Poland

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policies deepen the unequal division of work among the sexes.

While women are going to pay off the debt after Euro2012 by taking care of children for free, or almost for free, politicians and investors are going to drink champagne while sitting in a stadium V.I.P. section. The message is clear: men are invited for games, women to the kitchen! Without subsidies, care work is going to be the private duty of female workers, not the responsibility of the entire community. The state is pushing women back to the private sphere, as in the end someone will have to do the care work. Women will stay home with kids and they will ask grandmothers for help while care-takers will earn starvation wages, and single parents (mostly women) will get no support at all. There will not be a way to escape the gender trap: those who try to escape poverty and decide to emigrate to Western Europe will work as domestic workers or take care of the elderly. This is a growing trend, as almost 3 million Polish citizens have left the country since 2004, when Poland joined the European Union. Half of them are women.

These politics have led to a growing resistance. When proletarian households suffer from social spending cuts and the state withdraws from its responsibility to support care work, this is no longer a private problem for individual families. In 2011 and 2012 there have been protests against the increasing costs of living and against closures of schools and kindergartens. Parents are getting together with teachers to express their anger. For instance, in the town of Biskupice a nursery was occupied for nearly three weeks by approximately 100 parents, who stood outside the nursery during the day so the workers could take care of the children, and stayed in the building overnight.

In Poznań, female workers, local activists, and parents have been protesting against the increasing costs of public kindergartens for more than half a year. Besides lower fees and higher wages, the coalition has demanded more funding for childcare institutions from the city budget. For many months, they have been attending meetings in the town hall and putting pressure on the councilors responsible for social policy and the budget. They have also been trying to garner support from other groups of workers, organizing open meetings and debates and staging pickets and other street actions. Kindergarten workers are demanding higher wages. They currently earn 300 to 350 euros per month, and their wages have not adjusted according to the inflation rate for

many years. Nearly 150 of them have joined the militant Workers' Initiative trade union to enter the wage conflict with the bosses, which are the local government since the reform in 2011. Workers have written letters to the mayor demanding higher wages, and they have organized rallies and decided to enter a collective labor dispute, which might end with a simultaneous strike action in several nurseries.

An important part of this struggle is resistance against the privatization of nurseries. As kindergartens are being closed down all over Poland, the local government in Poznań wants to get rid of them by handing off these institutions to private foundations. Ironically, the authorities have called this process "socialization," but it is in fact the marketization and commercialization of the childcare sector in order to reduce costs. Thanks to the protests, the authorities had to give up their plan to give childcare institutions to profit-based foundations, and now only workers' cooperatives could take over and run them. The local government might still transfer the burden of running non-profit facilities onto workers without providing them with any protection, guarantee of employment, or regular subsidies. In response, workers have refused to run these facilities on the terms proposed by the city halls. Instead, at the beginning of 2012, together with union activists, they created a working group to research the possibilities of taking over the nurseries for the benefit of workers and parents, not the authorities.

What is special about the struggle for cheap access to childcare and for higher wages of care-takers in Poland is that it is not limited to a conflict in a particular workplace. This struggle is trying to change the way people are thinking about care overall. As we could see, care workers are poorly paid and undervalued in Poland. These workers are hit by the crisis first, as they are employed by the local governments that are nearly bankrupt. However, there is a potential for change as the field of care opens up the possibility of new allies and new forms of self-organization. It connects different groups: parents, children, grandparents;



Blockade of trainway against low wages of kindergarten workers and expensive nurseries. Poznań, December 2011.

Photo: paspartoo

those who are formally employed together with unpaid workers, domestic workers, migrants; care-takers, teachers, doctors, nurses, and receivers of social benefits. As we observe in Poland, there is a crisis of traditional unionism (only approximately 10 percent of the workforce is unionized), and the lack of a strong independent workers' movement forces us to look for other ways towards self-organization. That means we also have to address the broader issues and change the overall conditions of the reproduction of the working class. Childcare workers can link resistance in workplaces with protests against national and local state policy, and demand a share in local budgets. This could lead us to a discussion about other forms of the *commons* (resources that are owned in common or shared between or among communities/populations) provided by the city that can't bring in profits, such as public transport, municipal housing, and public parks.

To satisfy our social needs, we have to change the conditions in our workplaces, but also how the local and state budget is created. The aim is to create a society in which care will be a priority, not just another cost, and in which it will be considered beyond the market and the state, and beyond the gender-based work divisions that put the double burden of low wages and undervalued reproductive work on women.

Women with Initiative (Kobiety z Inicjatywą) is a working group within the Polish grassroots militant trade union Workers' Initiative (Inicjatywa Pra-

ownicza). The group was created in 2009 in order to focus on analyzing the problems of female unionists and the specific situation of female workers in the Polish labor market. The group has been supporting protests and actions run by female workers (e.g., an occupational strike of seamstresses in the city of Opatów in 2010, annual International Women's Day demonstrations in Warsaw, a demonstration of nurses, nursery workers and other members of Workers' Initiative), and tries to strengthen the position of women within the workers' movement. To do so, Women with Initiative also conducts interviews with female unionists, runs a column in the union bulletin, and organizes discussions. Members of the group take active part in resistance against higher fees and privatization of nurseries in Poznań. In order to improve the exchange among women from local sections of Workers' Initiative, the group is planning a national meeting of its female members in April 2012 in Warsaw. In June 2012, Women with Initiative will co-organize a demonstration during the Euro2012 football championships to protest against spending money on games while workers, especially female workers, pay the costs of the crisis.

This article summarizes the brochure "New Strategies and Analyses: Crisis of Care. Challenge for the Militant Workers' Movement," by Women with Initiative.

For more information, visit the Workers' Initiative website: <http://www.ozzip.pl>. To contact Women with Initiative, email kzi@ozzip.pl.

Solidarity Picket With IWW Pizza Hut Workers Union In Birmingham

From the West Midlands IWW

On Saturday, Feb. 4, members of the West Midlands IWW picketed the Pizza Hut on New Street in Birmingham in solidarity with Sheffield workers who are fighting for improved pay and conditions. This was part of a national day of action, with pickets also held in Sheffield, London, Bristol, Liverpool and Hull. The IWW has been organizing amongst Pizza Hut workers and delivery drivers in Sheffield with the following demands:

Improved driving conditions: Regular modifications of all moped drivers' safety gear, and an increase to the delivery drivers' commission, which now stands at 60 pence per delivery and does not cover costs.

Fair pay: Pay increases in line with inflation, as the pay currently decreases on a regular basis. We also deserve time-and-a-half for working bank and national holiday days. This is industry standard, we are not demanding the earth!

Union recognition: We believe as the workers that make Pizza Hut what it is, we deserve to be on an equal footing

with management and have the right for our union to be recognized, giving us all stronger voice.

With Pizza Hut management not budging on these issues, a national day of action was called for IWW branches around the United Kingdom to demonstrate outside Pizza Hut's local restaurants.

In Birmingham, 10 members picketed the New Street branch of Pizza Hut during the busy lunchtime period, leaving as the snow began to fall to ensure a safe return home. With the cold and predicted snow, the city center was quieter than expected for a Saturday afternoon, but there were still plenty of people around, and many customers heading for Pizza Hut stopped to listen to our reasons for being there. We had some success in turning people away, and many who still entered expressed sympathy with the demands, particularly of the delivery drivers' rates.

Management noticed our picket and took a photo, presumably to send on to Pizza Hut's headquarters, and asked us to move.



Birmingham picket. Photo: West Midlands IWW



Snow in Sheffield. Photo: Tristan Metcalfe

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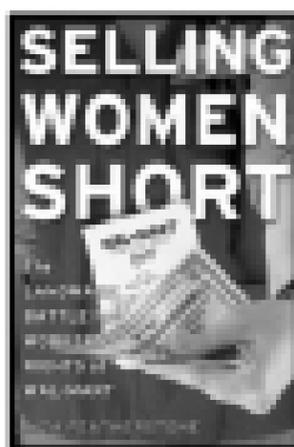


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about women wobblers & women of the labor
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Wobbly Arts

All The Union Ladies

By x371988

I'm a Fellow Worker in I.U. 660 from the Twin Cities branch. For the past couple months, I've been rewriting popular songs into union songs, Joe Hill style. This is one of my favorites, and it's to the tune of "Single Ladies" by Beyonce. You can listen to and download a version I recorded on my ukulele at: <http://www.soundclick.com/beerandroses>.

All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 Now throw your cards up

Up in the job
 Tryin to hold up
 I'm doing my own little thing
 The boss is a jerk
 And I'm doing all the work
 When a sister worker approaches me
 She's tired of being screwed
 She said she's through
 She said, "Let's start a union"
 I said, "Sounds nice
 Like good advice
 Now we've got some organizing to do."

Chorus:
 So if you like it then you should sign a card on it
 So if you like it then you should sign a card on it
 Don't you worry bout your boss and what he say
 bout it
 Cause if you like it then you should sign a card on it
 Oh oh oh ohhh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh
 Oh oh oh ohhh oh oh oh oh oh

Boss is on a power trip
 My wages look like shit
 So us workers we are organizing
 We're taking control
 Of everything they stole
 In our workplace we will soon be free
 We need no permission
 Did I mention
 Don't pay the boss any attention
 Cause he had his turn
 And now he's gonna learn
 That us workers have solidarity

Chorus
 Tell all your fellow workers of the world
 We are the rebel girls
 A union's what we prefer
 What we deserve
 If someone did ask me what would save me
 And would guarantee solidarity
 And class unity and beyond
 I'd say go sign a card
 Say a union's what you want
 If you don't you'll be alone
 And like the boss you'll be gone

All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 All the union ladies, all the union ladies
 Now throw your cards up
 Oh oh oh ohhh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh
 Oh oh oh ohhh oh oh oh oh oh

Music For The Working Class



Photo: Wobbly Dave

Music For the Working Class was held in January 2012 at the Red and Black Cafe in Portland, Oregon. This photo is of I Wobble Wobble (the Portland Branch house band of sorts).



Photo: Tom Keough



Abortion Song

By (@anonymous)

The following song was pulled from a new edition of the "Little Red Songbook," to be produced by Wobblies in Melbourne, Australia!

In Australia, in Australia
 Where abortion is a crime
 You can die of septicemia
 Yes, it happens all the time

In the city, there's a woman
 Where the welfare workers are
 Have the baby it won't hurt you
 And she quietly suicides.

In a sweet church on the hill side
 Father Joseph saves a soul
 While there's women out there frantic
 Cos they can't afford to go

Foetus lovers, foetus lovers
 Can't you see the life you save
 Grow into a little baby
 Bashed and battered while you rave

I'm a woman and my body
 Must remain for me alone
 Throw your fucked laws out the
 window
 My decisions are my own.



WHEN BOSSES SCREAM

Many bosses have trained themselves to get what they want from workers by screaming, as though their accompanying threats aren't enough.

Wobblies and supporters in NYC have witnessed the spectacle of bosses screaming at us as we leaflet customers alerting them to a current injustice. The psychosis of the bosses extends to the level of sincerely believing that by screaming at us, even though we don't even work for them, they will get their way. They are furious that our flyers connect their businesses with worker oppression at another shop.

Watching bosses who are so drunk with authority and arrogance that they would go so far as to howl at workers who don't work under them provides us with the wonderful pleasure of clowning a boss with out worrying about being fired. In the faces of the bosses can be seen the horror from their sudden realization that they do not control anyone who has an objection to how their businesses are run.

Perhaps the thought of our rebelliousness infecting their workplaces sinks in, but so far our leafleting campaigns have forced the bosses to stop buying from sweatshops whose workers have proven to be rebellious.

-Benjamin Ferguson

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RECOMPOSITION BLOG

NOTES FOR A NEW WORKERISM

An informal blog of new and reposted material by IWW members. Recomposition includes Worker's Power columns, reflections and discussions related to our organizing and solidarity unionism as well as classics by Martin Glaberman, Stan Weir and others."

RECOMPOSITIONBLOG.WORDPRESS.COM

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.

Labor Solidarity Around The World

By the ISC

The new year started with a bang for the international working class, and we have hit the ground running. This article is an excerpt of a longer report highlighting major developments in the labor movement around the world, and summarizes the current projects of the ISC. For the longer report, check the ISC page on IWW.org.



South Africa

In early January, 5,000 workers at the Implant Platinum mine 80 miles northwest of Johannesburg, South Africa, went out on a wildcat strike demanding a pay increase to match a raise given to the “more skilled” workers at the mine. The union representing the workers condemned the strike and urged workers to go back to work, but the 5,000 strikers were successfully able to get all 17,000 miners to lower their tools. The company has fired all 17,000 workers in retaliation, and the strike has escalated into violence, with the torching of a police substation, some looting, and one death so far. The mine is still shut down, costing Implant over \$150 million in economic damages to date (at press time).

Kazakhstan

In December 2011, police attacked striking oil workers in Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan, killing at least 15 and injuring hundreds. Since May 2011, over 18,000 workers across Kazakhstan have joined the strike, with thousands more in other industries participating in solidarity actions. Local authorities declared the strike illegal. In August, the union’s lawyer was arrested and is now serving a six-year sentence in prison for “inciting social conflict.” The oil company has fired over 1,000 strikers and is seeking to bring in scabs. Kazakhstan’s oil industry is booming with investment from the United States, United Kingdom, and China, but oil wealth is concentrated in the hands of elites, while most oil workers live in poverty. Kazakhstan’s western and Chinese-backed autocratic ruler, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has imposed martial law on Zhanaozen, allaying fears that the unrest in Kazakhstan would disrupt oil supplies and increase crude prices. Since the massacre, Chevron announced a new \$25 billion investment in the Kazakh oil industry.

India

The All-India Trade Union Congress has called for a nationwide general strike on Feb. 28 over government policies which promote low wages, long working days, layoffs, unemployment, and the rise of contract employment. If successful, a general strike in this country of 1.2 billion would be the largest in history.

China

The year 2012 began much the same way 2011 ended in China—with strikes and rebellions. In September 2011, the 12,000 villagers of Wukan in Guangong province rose up against corrupt local Communist Party leaders who had sold off communal village farmlands in exchange for bribes. The villagers successfully expelled all Communist Party officials and police from the town. After a standoff with Chinese police, the Communist Party agreed to allow the villagers to elect their own leaders by secret ballot—the first such election

General Strike In Israel

By John Kalwaic

On Feb. 8, thousands of workers staged a general strike and walkout over negotiations failed between the Israel Finance Ministry and the Histadrut labor federation, the umbrella union for hundreds of thousands of public sector workers. This is Israel’s first general strike in about five years—a long time considering the country’s history of frequent general strikes. Ben-Gurion International Airport was shut down because the airport was using non-union security staffers who were paid less than the union staffers. The use of temporary non-union staffers is also a problem in schools and other public sector institutions. The Israeli Supreme Court rejected a petition from the Federation of Chambers of Commerce, which wanted to place an injunction on the striking workers. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has considered intervening in the situa-



Photo: info-wars.org

tion, saying that the economy was in “a delicate situation,” according to the *New York Times*. This signals a greater shift to use government intervention against strikes, though in Israel this has not happened yet. Netanyahu is allegedly trying to make a compromise, which signals an austerity attack on workers around the world.

With files from the *New York Times*.

Hose Streets? Our Streets!



Photo:guardian.co.uk

By John Kalwaic

Firefighters in Belgium went on strike against tougher retirement plans at the beginning of February. Several hundred of Belgium’s 17,000 firefighters broke through police barricades and hosed down

the prime minister’s office in protest at the government’s tougher retirement plans—forcing the firefighters to retire in their 60s instead of the age of 58. The striking firefighters turned their hoses on the police, giving them a good soaking. Belgium seems to be a far cry from the United States, where there is often a close affinity between firefighters and police officers. Belgium’s Deputy Prime Minister Diederik Reynders said caving to the firefighters would “send the wrong signal,” reports *The Guardian*. However, the strike will probably continue.

With files from *The Guardian*.

Egypt

In Egypt, thousands rallied in Tahrir Square on Jan. 25 for the one-year anniversary of the protests that toppled dictator Hosni Mubarak and inspired popular movements across the world. This year’s protest was directed at the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), a military junta which shares power with the newly-elected Egyptian parliament. Since the January 2011 revolution, over 12,000 Egyptians have been jailed by the military. Exact figures are unavailable, but experts estimate that the Egyptian military controls 15-40 percent of the nation’s economy through direct ownership of factories and other assets. The Junta has pledged to cede authority to the civilian government this summer. Left groups and some unions called for a general strike on Feb. 11, demanding that SCAF hand over all power immediately, but the call failed to gain traction.

Palestine

Protests took place across the West Bank against layoffs, austerity measures, and increased taxes proposed by the Palestinian Authority (PA), as well as the PA’s failure to end Israel’s occupation of Palestine and the attendant chokehold on Palestinian economic life. Unemployment stands at 20 percent in the West Bank and 35 percent in Gaza, where there is also widespread poverty. The western-backed Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, a former World Bank economist, faces a deficit of \$350 million for his budget of \$3.5 billion. The shortfall is caused by the stagnation of the Palestinian economy under the Israeli occupation, as well as the U.S. decision to withhold \$150 million in aid this year in retaliation for Palestine’s bid for statehood at the United Nations.

Israel

The Histadrut, Israel’s largest labor union, launched a four-day general strike against the Israeli government demanding an end to contract employment by government agencies. See full story on right.

Turkey

On Feb. 13, Turkish police raided the homes and arrested 15 women leaders of public sector trade unions. All 15 women were active in the union’s preparations for International Women’s Day. The union has appealed for international solidarity and protest against the Turkish government.

for the town. This successful uprising has inspired the already-militant Chinese working class, which has launched dozens of strikes for improved pay and conditions in state-owned and private enterprises in the first months of 2012, usually without the approval of the state-run All-China Confederation of Trade Unions.

Greece

In February, Greece was rocked by a two-day general strike and street fighting in opposition to austerity measures proposed by the Socialist-led government in order to qualify for a European Union bailout of \$173 billion to float Greece’s banks. The proposal would cut the minimum wage by 22 percent and lay off 150,000 public sector workers, inflicting further misery on the Greek working class. Illustrating the breadth of opposition to the measures, the largest Greek police union has issued “arrest warrants” for the ministers of international finance for “subverting democracy,” while protesters have burned down scores of buildings across Athens. Workers have occupied a hospital in Kilkis, declaring their workplace under “direct and absolute workers’ control.”

United Kingdom

British Electricians, or “Sparks” as they are known in the United Kingdom, are celebrating their defeat of an attempt to undermine wage levels established by pattern bargaining in the construction industry. The employers had presented a contract offer in Fall 2011 that would cut pay by 30 percent or more, down to around £10 per hour. The Sparks won through a multi-month campaign of direct action, including a wildcat strike when the courts refused to let their union launch an official strike. IWW members were on the front lines of this struggle.

Spain

Spanish unions called for mass protests on Feb. 19 in opposition to government austerity measures which make it easier for employers to cut pay and fire workers. Unemployment is at 22 percent in Spain.

Columbia

Since 2007, 195 trade unionists have been murdered in Colombia since 2007, including 26 between January and November 2011. Only six suspects have ever been prosecuted, and no one has ever been convicted. Two workers have been killed so far in 2012. On Jan. 9, the agricultural workers’ union leader, Manuel Hilarion Palacios, disappeared en route to an event in Río Nevado. He was killed by the Colombian Army who then returned his body, which was found with visible signs of torture. On Jan. 17, the oil workers’ union leader, Mauricio Redondo, and his wife were murdered, leaving behind five children. The United States provides over \$500 million in aid to the Colombian government annually, most of which goes for military and police purchases.

ISC Projects

In January, a representative of the ISC met with the Federation of Independent Unions in Palestine at the Workers Advice Center/Ma’an in Israel to discuss ways we can support the revolutionary anti-capitalist internationalist labor movement in the Middle East. A full report will be out soon. Our primary tasks for the next month are to continue to get branches to elect liaisons to the ISC, and continue to recruit regional experts to strengthen our union’s ties to the global labor movement.

Questions? Want to help? Get in touch! Email us at iww.isc@gmail.com.

Support international solidarity!

Assessments for \$3 and \$6 are available from your delegate or IWW headquarters: PO Box 180195, Chicago, IL 60618, USA.



Come To The Work People’s College!

From June 30 - July 5, 2012, Wobblies will come together at Mesaba Co-op Park in Northern Minnesota for the 2012 Work People’s College: a six-day intensive training on all the skills workers need to know to build a fighting union branch. Our goal is to strengthen IWW branches by giving a new, diverse generation of leaders the



tools they need to fight and win the next battles in the class struggle. Learn more and pre-register your branch at <http://www.workpeoplescollege.org>.