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Wobblies and Workers in the Arts

Mujer con Frutero a
la Cabeza / Bowl of Fruit
on Woman's Head (fruit
vendor)
Alfredo Ramos Martinez,
1943
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MWA-IWW/IWOC statement

Revolutionary greetings, fellow workers:

On behalf of “Mandingo Warriors & Associates—IWW/IWOC,” we would like to express our most sincere gratitude and appreciation regarding the valuable time, efforts, and sacrifices that you, along with the entire IWW/IWOC revolutionary family of this struggle, have put into this difficult and complex “dilemma” of pursuing the necessary steps required to “effectively” assist in the organizing of those of us who are incarcerated within the numerous “business corporations” disguised as “reformatory institutions” (a.k.a. prisons), around unifying principles and a universal philosophy that is inclusive of all of humanity (this is definitely a struggle rooted in equality for all of humanity and not just the few and wealthy!).

We shall hope and pray that all of our comrades in the “semi-free society” are doing well and are enjoying the best of health possible. Your most recent communication (dated: 10/20/17) was well received, and we look forward to receiving future communications from any and all IWW/IWOC members (with a robust invitation to the African People’s Caucus) in the near future.

Before we/I begin to address your most recent letter, comrade, it is our responsibility to inform and make you guys aware of the latest developments concerning the movement of our Branch. You guys will have no doubt noticed the change in name/title to “Mandingo Warriors & Associates—IWW/IWOC” (MWA-IWW/IWOC) from the previous name.

A meeting was held on 10/27/17 in response to your letter and concerning IWW/IWOC’s agenda in general. Among the few issues that were discussed and resolved was included the uncertainty of some as to whether IWW/IWOC represents the realities of true revolutionary movement, or will the Tribe (another name used to describe the entirety of the MW organization) as a revolutionary organization in and of itself be bound by mutual agreement to honor, respect, uphold, and abide by the Constitution, By-Laws, Principles, and General Philosophy (whenever related to IWW affairs) of a bunch of “armchair” revolutionaries, who pontificate upon

revolutionary concepts but fall far short of actual revolutionary movement. (The Tribe has been “burned” by such “revolutionary organizations” before, wherein “they talk a good game,” but



when the “heat” is turned up they are nowhere to be found.)

However, after a few of our elder/senior Tribal members expounded upon the true significance of the “Statement on Prison Abolition Adopted by IWW at 2017 Convention,” specifically its wide margin of success (51 in favor) and coupled with the consistent efforts by you guys, our comrades within IWW/IWOC, in organizing campaigns in support of prisoners and assisting with the actual organizing of prisoners themselves, the statement declared by IWW is profound and proclaims revolutionary movement far more reaching than we would have expected—at least from “armchair” revolutionaries. ☺

Our initial agreement, regarding the partnering with IWW/IWOC, consisted of a project that was narrowly tailored and confined to a specific single prison, in order to evaluate how successful the project

would be in becoming an IWW branch, with the prospect of seeking membership for the entirety of the Tribe and promote IWW/IWOC’s agenda throughout the state prison system (the Tribe has a community/village present at practically every prison in the state).

Before the closing of our meeting, it was determined, declared, and resolved that IWW/IWOC is “the real thing!” We moved to include the Tribe as a whole to the membership base of IWW/IWOC and promote its/our agenda throughout the state prison system. Therefore, because of this resolution, a motion was presented to change the name of our IWW/IWOC Branch to MWA-IWW/IWOC (although MWs account for the majority and significant portion of our IWW/IWOC membership base at the IWW Branch, we’re not all MW. Hence, “A” for “Associates”: some are Moors, of the Moorish Science Temple of America, and of course there will be others who will join with no organizational affiliation). The motion passed unanimously. We are aware that the GEB reserves the right to “regulate the name of the body.” However, we request that due consideration be given and at the least, the initials “MWA-IWW/IWOC” be accepted as an official name. We must continue to honor those fallen comrades who gave their life in order that the revolutionary movement continues with the Tribe moving forward. **IW**



Longtime Wobbly in need of solidarity

By New York City General Defense Committee

Mike Pesa is a longtime member of the Industrial Workers of the World, currently belonging to the Baltimore General Membership Branch and previously the New York City GMB. Describing Fellow Worker Mike, FW Daniel Gross of the NYC GMB says, "Mike is one of the greatest Wobblies and human beings out there, an extremely hard worker for the union . . . a humble, generous spirit and consistent Wobbly for years and years." Being a committed Wobbly, Fellow Worker Mike should be able to rely on the IWW and our comrades around the world during his time of need.

In February of 2017, FW Mike's wife, Heidi, a former kindergarten teacher, suffered a brain injury, putting her in a coma for months. Following an undoubtedly difficult

10-month hospital stay, she was finally able to return home, although she still requires extensive care. Due to her injury, Heidi's mobility and functionality have been limited, necessitating 24-hour supervision, not to mention physical,



Heidi Pesa

occupational, and speech therapy, as well medication, medical equipment, and supplies, and transportation to and from

appointments. FW Mike estimates, "Even in a best-case scenario, Heidi's recovery is going to take years, and she will likely need some type of care or assistance for the rest of her life."

It should come as no surprise to us, as anti-capitalists, that the insurance company supposedly obligated to cover the cost of Heidi's healthcare is shirking its responsibility. As anti-capitalists, we know that insurance companies will abandon us for a buck, but also that we will always support each other.

In the spirit of solidarity, we ask that you support FW Mike through this tragic ordeal. If you are able to make a financial contribution, please donate to Heidi's healthcare fund through this GoFundMe page: <https://www.gofundme.com/helping-hands-for-heidi#>. If you cannot give financially, please help

share this appeal as widely as possible.
Solidarity Forever,
NYC GDC

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Television sitcoms and workers' issues

By Raymond S. Solomon

How often are workers' issues shown on television situation comedies (sitcoms)? To what extent are the characters' problems, struggles, lives, realities, aspirations, and abilities presented on TV sitcoms, and to what extent are the lives of workers and their families distorted or ignored on situation comedies?

The Life of Riley and *The Honeymooners*

Television sitcoms of the 1950s did not usually deal with workers' lives. *The Life of Riley*, which showed the post-World War II prosperous suburban factory worker's life, was an exception. In fact, "the life of Riley" became a cliché for a carefree life. But the frustrations of this wing riveter are also shown in the popular TV show. Actor William Bendix played Riley in a radio show in the 1940s and a television series (1953–1958) as a good-natured, blue-collar family man. Chester A. Riley is a blundering guy who frequently exclaims, "What a revoltin' development this is!" when a bad idea from his friend and co-worker Gillis gets Riley into trouble. However, his friend "Digger" O'Dell (an undertaker) would provide him with information that would "help him out of a hole" reinforcing a blue-collar stereotype that presents workers as simple, non-intellectual people



The Life of Riley

Jackie Gleason's *The Honeymooners* presents the other side of the story that was shown in *The Life of Riley*. *The Honeymooners* was the first television comedy to deal with the non-idyllic aspects of American families. He purposely wanted to portray the lives of poor Brooklynites, which was never shown on television. Ralph Kramden, a New York City bus

driver, is frustrated with his working-class station in life and continually attempts to get above his situation with "get rich quick" schemes. All of these efforts fail. His best friend Ed Norton is a municipal sewer worker. Norton is happy with his work and his life, but he joins Ralph in his schemes anyway. Whereas the Riley family lived in a suburban home, the Kramdens and Nortons live in two-room apartments—designed to look like the apartment building in which Gleason grew up.



The Honeymooners

Ralph takes his frustration out on both Norton and wife Alice. Norton's easy-going nature irritates Ralph, who hurls verbal abuse at him. Alice returns Ralph's insults with sarcasm, which ultimately defuses his anger. The kind of love shown between Ralph and Alice was unique of television, where couples might bicker but rarely exhibit the possibility of actual physical violence. Ralph threatens, "One of these days . . . one of these days . . . pow! right in the kisser!" frequently, but the domestic violence implied in the threat never manifests. Though Ralph never hits her, this kind of interplay between husband and wife was not usually shown on American television. When the Kramdens hit harder-than-usual economic times, Alice gets a job, but because employers preferred to employ single women, Alice needed to lie about her marital status. Saying she lived with her brother created a comedic situation, but it also pointed out a prejudice in the era against hiring married women.

The Bunkers, the Stivics, and the wisdom of Edith

All in the Family presents a working-class family, headed by the "lovable bigot" Archie Bunker. *All in the Family* debuted in 1971, during the last years of

the United States' post-World War II economic boom, which benefited eighty per cent of the population. The strength of unions, and the post-World War II labor struggles between 1946 and 1948 greatly contributed to the prosperity. The basic few effective weapons that workers have include the threat of a strike, a strike, and labor solidarity. But a strike can result in hardship. During a strike at the factory where Archie works, Archie and Edith Bunker (Jean Stapleton) get down to their last few hundred dollars. They

take aid from neighbors, and the strike eventually is settled. But many middle class viewers got their first glimpses of the hardship workers undergo during a strike.

In another episode, a friend of Michael Stivic, Archie's live-in son-in-law and political antagonist, is coming to visit Gloria (Archie's daughter) and Michael and stay for supper. The friend

is visiting from Canada, where he went in order to avoid the draft during the Vietnam War. Archie is worried about the FBI finding out, and he has a dislike for people he considered draft dodgers. But the major problem is that Archie's World War II army buddy is also coming for supper, and Archie worries about his reaction to a draft dodger. It turns out that Archie's army friend's son was killed in Vietnam, and the friend is sorry that he didn't tell his son to go to Canada. The underlying issue is that during the Vietnam War, rich and middle-class young men could often employ legal means of avoiding the draft—including college deferments, teaching, and psychiatrists' letters. Young men from poor or working-class backgrounds usually did not have these options.

The working-class Edith is also the conscience of the show, and in her own innocent way, the wise one. Lionel Jefferson (Mike Evans), the son in an African-American family who recently moved into the Bunkers' neighborhood, explains in one episode to Michael why he slightly favors Edith as a friend over Michael. This is because Edith, a working-class person through and through, has treated him well, but not as a member of his



All in the Family

he will never have the opportunities that Michael has; and Michael yells at Archie, Edith says, because he knows he will never be able to repay Archie for what he has done for him: After all, Michael and Gloria are living in Archie's and Edith's house while Michael is finishing college.

The Golden Girls and real-life crises

Most sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s presented an idyllic America through such programs as *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, *The Patty Duke Show*, and *The Dick van Dyke Show*. These shows took place in the suburbs, the husbands had good jobs, and the wives were stay-at-home moms. Paying bills did not seem to be a problem.

By the 1980s, the post-World War II prosperity was starting to crumble. This new situation that workers suffered is shown in *The Golden Girls*, which ran from 1985 to 1992. In many of its episodes, it clearly shows working-class issues, especially those of older people and of women. Sophia Petrillo was a poor Sicilian immigrant child. Sophia, like Blanche and Rose Nylund, is a widow. Sophia's daughter Dorothy had placed her in an ill-equipped nursing home, after Sophia's stroke, but she left the home after a fire. The only one of the four Golden Girls who is not from a working class background is Blanche Devereux, whose house they all share.

Along with many very funny episodes, working-class issues are also presented, especially those of women and older people. They all have ups and downs over the course of the series' seven years.

Rose loses her late husband's pension when the company goes bankrupt and has to find a job, then she loses a job and fears she may become homeless. Rose is deliberately overworked in a job she finds at a TV station—a job she almost didn't get because of her age. And Rose has to explain to her daughter that her estate is so small because her husband, though a great person, was not the super-successful insurance salesman she has led her children and grandchildren to believe but instead was a horseshoe salesman. And after Rose

race, in contrast to Michael who is nice to Lionel, but first sees and treats Lionel as a member of his race. One time, Edith explains to Michael why Archie yells at him, and why he, Michael, yells at Archie. Archie yells at Michael, Edith says, because

undergoes heart bypass surgery, her daughter is concerned that insurance will not pay for Rose's physical therapy. Blanche tells her that that is why "houses have mortgages." Rose's daughter is surprised that Blanche "would do that," and changes her attitude towards her mother's housemates.

There is elder neglect at an underfunded nursing home, where one of Sophia's friends lives. Blanche decides not to have plastic surgery on her breasts, but to use that money so Sophia's friend can go to a better nursing home than Rose found for her. But the Golden Girls lament all the other people who live in nursing homes they can't help.

Dorothy works as a substitute teacher, but at one point, she becomes sick and doctors can't diagnose her illness. So they give her a psychiatric label. In real life women are much more likely to get a psychiatric diagnoses than are men when doctors can't figure out what illness they have. Eventually, a virologist explains that Dorothy has chronic fatigue syndrome.

Always just getting by, the women infiltrate a homeless shelter in the hope of recovering a coat with a winning lottery ticket in its pocket. In this shelter Sophia meets an old friend. She explains to Sophia that getting old is not free, as she thought. For example medicines are expensive. Sophia says that good people will not let these conditions continue. But they still continue. Another homeless resident tells Rose that people are not eager to hire an unemployed Black hotel porter who is over 55. A young white professor suffers from alcoholism. They find the ticket, but finally donate the ticket to the shelter and hand it to the priest who operates the shelter. The theme song for that episode was "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?"



The Golden Girls

Blanche's house, for which the other women pay rent, has a bad roof that needs fixing but they can't afford a proper repair. Dorothy's uncle Angelo can't find a place to live that he can afford. One Christmas, the women volunteer to serve homeless people at a church, and Dorothy's ex-husband Stanley turns out to be one of the homeless. At one point Sophia praises the Chinese for venerating their old people, as distinct from our culture where old people are discarded. The Golden Girls make a covenant that they will take care of one another in case any one of them gets sick and/or poor. That's what many of us might want to do. **IW**

A Spider's World

By Duane Morrison

The spider can afford to wait

no mirage there it's simply dinner or lunch as time allows

but one could assume that there is little misunderstanding about roles in his game

only one will do the eating

the capturing is over the feast begins

and only the outsider can see that it is the structure of the spider's world that allows for the killing

Rock that cradle

By Ellie Sawyer

It is 2018, and we are watching a century-old conflict play out, one that has been playing out in the developed world since the Bolsheviks overthrew the Cossacks, and imperialists realized a new fear: the labor movement. Long has the world's elite required the sheer manpower the working class has offered, and it has done its best to ensure we are divided enough to never realize the power we could potentially possess should we band together. Undermining education and turning it into a commodity, much like what Betsy DeVos seeks to do with her plan for private school vouchers and "school choice," taking away money from public schools, where so many low-income students received an already imperiled education (thank you, President Reagan, for your famous line, "the state should not subsidize intellectual curiosity" and stigmatizing critical thinking) has done part of the trick.

Fear mongering and stirring up suspicion of each other—encouraging divisive attitudes against people who are different—have also played a part in preventing unity amongst the workers of the world. People like Newt Gingrich have been caught on tape using this tactic, making statements like "the average American . . . does not think that crime is down, does not think they are safer" (Gingrich said this when he was corrected on his stance that crime was up

in 2016—it was down significantly that year, and his response reflected that he did not care, so long as his constituents felt fear). Donald Trump and his cronies play that tune now, using stereotypes to divide and strike fear within our heart with such rhetoric as "Haitians have AIDS" and "Mexicans are drug dealers, criminals, and rapists."

In the 1999 movie, *Cradle Will Rock*, set in the 1930s and based on actual people and events, we see this struggle between capitalist elitism and the labor movement. Though the movie itself centers on the playwright, Marc Blitzstein, who wrote the musical *The Cradle Will Rock*, the script broadens out to speak of a larger scope—the struggle of the WPA's Federal Theater Project (FTP). Its task was to make literature and theater more accessible to the common man and thereby educate through exposure to new thoughts and cultures, which are then normalized and become acceptable. We are exposed to the nuances of this struggle, the subtle ways the labor movement is sabotaged and undermined, and the revolt of the working class to reclaim their right to a seat at the table.

There are many instances in this film in which education becomes a topic of discussion, even if it is often brief. Aldo Silvano (based on the actor Howard Da Silva), an Italian-American actor in the FTP struggling to support his growing family, has taken his wife and children

with him from his parents' home to a rented room after coming to blows over his family's support of Benito Mussolini. His children ask him if they will lose their room, and they tell him of a child they knew whose employed father could not pay rent anymore. The child subsequently could not attend school anymore, a cause for concern for Silvano, who is himself uncertain about his children's future.

Olive Stanton, a homeless stagehand at the FTP, tells the theater's union leader, John Adair, that she knows very little of the world, when he tries to discuss politics and world news with her, saying that she has been too focused on being hungry to care about the state of the world or to find herself education. Even in the ritzy home of Gray Mathers, a steel mogul, his wife Countess Constance La Grange laments at how he does not tell her anything or speak of important matters to her, in which he brushes her off, saying that she would not understand. Despite her insistence that she would, he refuses throughout the movie to involve her in his important business deals. It is a feedback loop of sorts: One is easy to control when one is uneducated, and one is easy to keep uneducated when one is under someone else's control.

We see the inverse of this in the friction-filled relationship between Nelson Rockefeller and Diego Rivera: Rivera is incredibly intelligent, and as



Diego Rivera's "Man, Controller of the Universe," his revision of "Man at the Crossroads."



Moguls Hearst, Rockefeller, and Mathers in fancy dress at a society gala.

Rockefeller attempts to force Rivera to paint a mural in Rockefeller Center that is to the young socialite's liking, Rivera only revolts more, painting the likeness of the communist, Lenin, and syphilis cells directly above a depiction of a society gala. This, of course, infuriates the young Rockefeller, and while Rivera is still paid for his work—albeit forcefully and accompanied with an armed guard escorting him off the premises—the mural is immediately destroyed. Rockefeller will not risk being perceived as a supporter of social egalitarianism.

Hallie Flanagan, head of the Federal Theater Project, is also seen as a threat to the status quo and is punished for her worldviews. When the FTP faces congressional investigation and subsequent slashes in funding, Flanagan barrels full-steam ahead into her hearing with Congressman Martin Dies, confident that she will prevail. She is, instead, put under fire over her own theatrical education and for attempting to expose young children to the same sort of education. This leads to the other tactic: Though she is not called a Communist outright, Dies consistently directs the hearing to make frequent inferences about Flanagan's loyalties, based on a few months spent studying Russian theater, on plays that she has approved for FTP production that have unionist overtones, and on the egalitarian ideals that she spreads both orally and through the written word. He does so to play on fears of Communist and even anarchist infiltrations in the FTP—and largely succeeds in discrediting her and the FTP. Flanagan and her companions leave the hearing feeling largely defeated, despite that the ideals of the FTP will never truly be forgotten.

Once the FTP funds are slashed, and all current productions are frozen, the

production of *The Cradle Will Rock* is also stalled—a day before their opening. Unions for both the actors and musicians tell their members that if they perform

readily available for public consumption because of the FTP's ideals for social egalitarianism.

Despite the machinations of the capitalist elite, most of us now enjoy a minimum wage, forty-hour weeks, overtime pay, and many public utilities, such as municipal electricity, water, libraries, and in some more progressive areas of the country, Internet service—something that may catch on if the repeal of net neutrality holds. Oh, and

Rivera's "Man at the Crossroads" was ultimately recreated—albeit on a smaller scale—and renamed "Man, Controller of the Universe."

2017 was, undoubtedly, a hard year full



Hallie Flanagan and WPA and Federal Theater Project staff head to Congress for their hearing with Congressman Dies.

on a stage, they will be out of the job. Out of fear, all the actors and musicians tell each other that they will not perform, even after a new theater and piano are acquired for the non-union Blitzstein to perform alone. John Adair, an actor and the union steward for Orson Welles's theater, is especially set on doing exactly at the union dictates: While the actors and musicians are all decided on at least attending Blitzstein's performance, Adair leaves, telling Olive that if she wants a place to stay, she will leave as well, trying to control her through her own fears of destitution.

Ultimately, progress prevails, and in our contemporary settings, we must remember that. The actors and musicians still put on their play, using a technicality in their union contract barring them from using a stage. Countess La Grange finally sticks it to her husband, giving financial aid to Orson Welles and his production instead of acting as the dutiful and silent wife. Olive Stanton becomes able to feed and clothe herself, and be part of a meaningful and thought-provoking, pro-union play. The FTP set out to make theater more accessible to low-income citizens, and though it did not last more than a decade, through many different types of organizations, theater is more

of long struggles, and as we progress, we find that our adversaries—the CEOs, the Wall Street bigwigs, and the corporate fat cats—are more than capable of adapting to new rules and regulations to protect the common worker. The other mogul in the film, William Randolph Hearst, advises Gray Mathers in the face of political pressure to allow his steel company to unionize: "Killing strikers doesn't play to the public. You've got to find a way to give them a dollar—and take two!" They would not concede the battle to hoard as much money at the expense of as many people as they could. But there always beats the hard-earned drum of hope—we will always find a way to flourish and fight back against those with power. If watching *Cradle Will Rock* taught this writer anything, it is that hope is truly the thing with feathers, and as long as we have it, we will out-soar anything—even in our darkest hour.

Ellie Sawyer graduated from Montana State University in 2016, with a degree in Fish and Wildlife Ecology. She plans on getting a Master's degree in Wildlife Biology/Ecology and working as a research professor. In the meantime, she works at Home Depot, where she continues to learn about the ongoing struggle between workers and bosses. IW

Workers' films

By Sean Morrison

The Great Depression and the years that led up to it were fertile ground for films about workers that understood the meaning of “work.” Many writers, directors, and actors weren’t far from their own experience of a working class, many of them immigrants or first-generation Americans, as well as from families that were marginalized. So it’s not surprising that many movies in the first few decades of cinema were reflections of a director’s (or producer’s or actor’s) working-class birth. But the studio system that sprung up in the mid-1920s started to change that. The movies, becoming big business, moved from the tiny nickelodeons of the 1910s to huge movie palaces through the silent era. A cartoon of the time depicted the lavish decoration of these palaces with a film onscreen of a man roasting a sausage over a campfire. The two seemingly divergent styles—realism and fantasy—heralded two of the most horrific decades for working people in the US: the growing economic disparity between workers and management of the ’20s to the complete economic disruption of the ’30s. The dialectics of socialism permeated everything from comedies and musicals to drama and action films.

Did that die on the vine as the transnational world stage became dominated by huge conglomerates and took over theaters, then television, and now the Internet? It didn’t die, but it has morphed as the decades have rolled on. It also was reinterpreted far from Hollywood in the American independent cinema and in every country of the world, despite those countries’ political leadership. Five neglected films that got it right—King Vidor’s *The Crowd*, Jules Dassin’s *Thieves’ Highway*, Akira Kurosawa’s *Stray Dog*, Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep*, and Paul Schrader’s *Blue Collar*—are excellent examples of the fire being kept lit in the most unusual places

King Vidor’s 1928 silent film *The Crowd* reads like a multigenerational epic, but it’s told in a modest way about a modest family, the Simses. John Sims loses his mother at an early age, but his idealism stands him in good stead and eventually draws him to the big city, determined to make a good living with

his art and imagination. What he lands is a boring job in a huge room with small desks and piles of “in” and “out” boxes.

He meets a young woman, they fall in love, marry, and have a child, but John never realizes his dreams—at least not in



Charlie Chaplin’s Little Tramp prepares to eat his shoe on the screen of an ornate movie theater.

the way that he has dreamt them. One of the most striking images is of John and his then-girlfriend seeing a sandwich-board sign walker dressed as a clown. They laugh good-naturedly at him but there is an edge of fear in John’s face that he could well end up in a job like that.

Vidor was born in Galveston Texas, the son of a lumberman, his grandfather a refugee of the Hungarian Revolution of the mid-1800s. He worked his way up as a newsreel cameraman and projectionist. He had a fine feel for the rhythms of ordinary life and small heroics. *The Crowd* is considered his masterpiece, though he went on to direct films until the ’70s. However, despite his love of the common man and his enlightened (for the times) ideas about race, Vidor joined the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, the organization that aided the blacklisting of many people in the film industry by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) on charges of their being part of the Communist conspiracy.

Jules Dassin was influenced by his Ukrainian and Polish-Jewish background and became a member of the Communist Party in the 1930s, but he left it after

the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact in 1939. He spoke his philosophy of life loudly through his early films noirs: *Brute Force*, *The Naked City*, and *Thieves’ Highway*. The 1949 *Thieves’ Highway*—his last film before he left for Europe—has a documentary feel to it, and the actors, including Richard Conte and Lee J. Cobb, have the grittiness that suited the realism of the film.

Conte plays a WWII vet who comes home to find his truck-driver father crippled by a beating from a corrupt produce dealer in San Francisco’s burgeoning produce market. Conte’s character decides to strike back, after he tries with little success to revive his father’s business. The scenes in the produce markets of San Francisco, at the farms of the Central Valley, and on the road were all shot with real workers. Film noir-themed movies, produced from the ’30s through the ’50s, were often ripe for social commentary, with a dark view of a dark period in American politics.

HUAC drove Harlem-raised Dassin out of Hollywood to France, where he revived his career.

Japan’s post-WWII film industry was plagued by the American occupation’s censorship and a lack of production funds. But out of that period, one of Japan’s most famous film directors, Akira Kurosawa, managed to fashion several near-noir films that starred his leading man Toshiro Mifune—who Kurosawa went on to work with in 15 films. In *Drunken Angel* and *Red Beard*, Kurosawa glorified doctors fighting for the dignity of their poor patients. Both films are masterpieces, but his independently produced 1949 movie *Stray Dog* demonstrates the wide-ranging eye of a director who loves the common man.

Mifune plays an army veteran, now a police detective, who early in the film has his gun stolen—a tool so highly valued in post-war times that armed police were personally responsible for their replacement or retrieval. In Mifune’s wide ranging hunt for his gun, we are exposed to a cross-section of a Tokyo barely recovering from a crippling defeat, where starvation is common and dispossessed vets have turned to crime. Unlike other police procedurals, *Stray Dog* makes you feel the sweat and dirt of the policeman’s world. Violence



King Vidor's aerial opening shot of New York city narrows down to John Sims at his one desk among hundreds of other desks.

may be endemic, but it plays out as the result of a failed society. There are no clear good guys or bad guys. Although Kurosawa came from a samurai family on his father's side and a merchant family on his mother's side, he had a spiritual awakening from the 1923 earthquake that devastated Tokyo, the suicide death of his favorite brother, and then the war. A painter by preference and a member of the Proletarian Artist's League, Kurosawa moved into the film industry when he saw that painting couldn't fulfill his political ideals. His protagonists—even in his samurai films—are down-to-earth professionals possessed of strong wills and love of life.

Charles Burnett was a child of Watts, the largely African-American neighborhood of South Los Angeles. He was 21 when Watts erupted in racial violence in 1965 that killed 34 people, injured a thousand, and destroyed much of the area. Burnett had a strong desire for a career and studied to be an electrician, but he got sidetracked by a writing class, which led him to the UCLA Film School. At that time the UCLA Film School was wide open, essentially giving students cameras and saying, "Go forth!"

Burnett's thesis film was *Killer of Sheep*, written, directed, and edited by him. It's an amazing, unique record of a Watts family whose patriarch has a job he hates in a meat-packing plant, where he kills sheep and butchers them. Although the

scenes on the killing floor are brief and purposely disjointed, *Killer of Sheep* is one of the strongest films made that captures the everyday life of a working-class family of any color. Its rough editing and use of a wide range of Black music—from Paul Robeson to Dinah Washington—punctuating short, punchy scenes draws you into the life of Watts and the struggles for survival of its residents.

The child actors (all amateurs, as were the adults) provide a fantastic counterpoint to the grown-ups, and many of the scenes with the children stand on their own with the strongest dramatic scenes. Burnett made the film in 1970 and released it in 1977 to little acclaim, but it has been rediscovered and dubbed a generational masterpiece.



Toshiro Mifune and Takashi Shimura, as cop partners, find their way through post-war Tokyo's underworld in the search for Mifune's gun in *Stray Dog*.

In Burnett's words, "That's one of the reasons why we haven't made social progress. We don't use film as a means to confront real issues that over time will create a better society." Milestone Films has restored the film and re-released it. It's not an easy film to watch, but it's a necessary film for anyone to see.

In 1978, a year after Burnett released *Killer of Sheep*, Paul Schrader, coming off his success as the screenwriter of *Taxi Driver*, directed and wrote *Blue Collar*. Starring Harvey Keitel, Richard Pryor, and Yaphet Kotto, it was filmed in the Checker Cab plant, and it captures what it is like on the production line. Pryor walks a tightrope between a comedic loudmouth and a frustrated worker who is loyal to his union. The film was sold as a crime drama, but it really isn't. There is attempted robbery, a cover-up, corruption, and a murder, but Schrader seemed more concerned in his script with depicting the lives and friendships of the three principals.

A creepy character, played by Cliff DeYoung, is an FBI informant trying his damndest to alienate workers from their union. Schrader had a mental breakdown on the set, mainly because the three starring actors didn't get along, and Richard Pryor at one point pulled a gun on Schrader. Their real-life tension, however, makes the film's characters all the more volatile and believable. At a budget of 1.7 million, *Blue Collar* was a low-budget indie. Large theater chains didn't pick it up because of its union-friendly politics, but the new industry of independent art houses embraced it.

The rise of documentaries as popular art-house fare in the last 15 years in particular has camouflaged many narrative films that address important labor and working-class issues. That's a shame, particularly when we have so many ways of seeing a film now.

The information streams are many. Among more recent films, *The Florida Project* should be must-see viewing. And mining the past can turn up eye-opening archaeological finds—among them Charlie Chaplin's *The Kid* and *Woman of Paris* and William Wellman's *Heroes for Sale* and *Wild Boys of the Road*. Seek, and ye shall find. **IW**

The “vicious but brilliant exploitation” that drives right-wing economics

By Hamilton Nolan
Splinter, Jan. 4, 2018

This month [January 2018], Thea Lee took over as president of the Economic Policy Institute, America's premier left-wing economic think tank. We spoke to her about Trumponomics and the fight for equality.

Lee spent two decades as an economist at the AFL-CIO, America's largest federation of unions, before taking over as head of EPI—a group that produces some damn good charts.* She will have her work cut out for her.

Splinter: What do you think are the root causes of the decline of unions and organized labor in America, over the past several decades?

Thea Lee: There's probably not a single cause. But I think that I would start with the pretty concerted attack on unions and workers by the right. And it's been a successful attack. They identified unions as the biggest threat to consolidation of power by the wealthy and corporations, in terms of electoral impact. And they were right. Unions are a successful organizing force, both in elections and in the political debate.

That concerted attack happened at the state level and the national level. We've been decades and decades without any modernization or strengthening of our labor laws, as the world has changed around us. For labor it becomes a vicious cycle, where you're small and you're weak so you don't have enough political power to change the laws to make union organizing easier and fairer, and then you become smaller and weaker and you lose power.

Splinter: Are there any realistic ways for labor to break out of that vicious cycle you describe?

Lee: That is the question, isn't it? Is there a turning point, a point at which you hit bottom? Sometimes it feels like we're at that turning point right now. Things have become so bleak and grim in terms of the political landscape, and there's been so much overreach on the part of Republicans in Congress, that maybe that has created the opportunity for both political change and cultural change and institutional change. And we need all of them. . . .

Splinter: Do you think the rise in economic inequality is at the heart of our current political insanity?

Lee: I think it is. What's happened is there has been a really vicious but brilliant exploitation of that inequality to

create racial and other divisions within the working class. And that's been remarkably successful, unfortunately. It's an age-old thing, and we've seen historically that when the working class is divided amongst itself and set to squabbling between immigrants and native-born, and black and white, and Latino and Asian, that's something that never benefits workers in the long run. And that's something that we're seeing now in a really grotesque version.

Splinter: Who's driving that exploitation? Is it just the investor class trying to enrich itself, or is there more to it?

Lee: At the end of the day, if you look at who the big beneficiaries are of the recent tax reform bill, it does feel like the investor class not just tolerated Donald Trump, but was complicit in that trend because they saw that there was a personal and class benefit. . . .

Splinter: How much of the rise of inequality in America is a result of a

together, and are part of a single package. The kind of corporate dominated globalization that the United States has engaged in over the past couple of decades, through both Democratic and Republican administrations, is a key part of that—a key part of undermining the bargaining power of workers by giving multinational corporations massive mobility, massive flexibility, and political power, and leaving workers stranded. . . .

Splinter: Is it really possible for a group like EPI to get your message heard widely at a time when the media environment is so polarized politically?

Lee: All we can do is to stay strong and to stay true to our voices and what we believe, and hope that people recognize after a while that there are lies that are told over and over again and have never come true. Taxes are one of the biggest areas. You start with Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush, and Kansas, and every other time that this same phony narrative has been put forward: that if

we cut taxes, then business will be so successful, and they'll bring jobs home, and they'll pay their workers more. There has not been a time in history where that has worked out as promised. At some point maybe people will stop falling for the same cheap rhetoric.

Splinter: Is there anything you're hopeful about in the near term, or are we just in for three bad years?

Lee: I think there's a lot of room for progressives to put forward a powerful set of pro-worker policies that will be attractive and that are needed and wanted right now. We've had a year of the Trump administration's broken promises and fake populism. It really has failed on so many different fronts.

This is our opportunity to show what international solidarity looks like, what a non-racist, non-xenophobic, non-sexist, non-divisive real populism looks like. There's a hunger for it.

*EPI's charts are at <http://www.epi.org/publication/top-charts-of-2017-12-charts-that-show-the-real-problems-policies-must-tackle-not-the-made-up-ones/>
Find the article at <https://splinternews.com/the-vicious-but-brilliant-exploitation-that-drives-ri-1821740882> **IW**



political agenda, and how much of it is us being at the mercy of broader global trends like technological change and globalization?

Lee: I think it's definitely the outcome of a very clear political agenda of disempowering and undermining workers. Through the attacks on unions, "right to work" in Wisconsin and Michigan and other key states, failure to increase the minimum wage, taxes and so on. That's real. Things have gone

I was not protected from Harvey Weinstein. It's time for institutional change

By Mia Kirshner

The Globe and Mail, Oct. 13, 2017

I could waste this precious space on Harvey Weinstein by describing my own ordeal with him. An ordeal in a hotel room where he attempted to treat me like chattel that could be purchased with the promise of work in exchange for being his disposable orifice.

But I'm not giving that man, a newly crowned figurehead of sexual abuse, the privilege of more ink. There are broader and more urgent issues to address. And if we don't address them now, I fear that when the headlines about Harvey Weinstein fade, what will remain is a disease in my own industry.

The disease is the act of turning a blind eye to sexual harassment and abuse carried out by those who wield power in the film industry. Fear of speaking out has become malignant, silencing the majority of the community. In my case, I was encouraged by former managers and agents to forget about what happened to me. People in Mr. Weinstein's position have the power to make or break careers, to blacklist someone who protests against their advances. In turn, my own representatives at the time did nothing. Their silence spoke volumes about power and fear within the film industry. And I was far too quiet myself. All I did was tell my peers what happened to me and warn them about this dangerous man. In turn, both my unions—the Screen Actors' Guild (SAG) and the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA)—offered inadequate protection should I have launched a complaint.

In a business climate like this, what recourse does an actor have if they experience sexual harassment or abuse? Very little. This goes to the heart of why so many actors probably remained silent.

... There is little comfort in being met with silence. There is shame, rage, and isolation. Should an actor buck the system by speaking out, the fear of seeing your career destroyed is real—especially if you are not yet well established in the industry. Actors may fear that speaking out could cost them their ability to pay bills and support their families.

That is why, in spite of the current groundswell, it is still not safe to speak against sexual harassment and abuse in the film industry as of today. SAG and ACTRA do not have holistic policies and

procedures should their members file complaints. That needs to change now. And change does not mean publishing another well-meaning brochure or e-mail blast about anti-harassment policies. Statements pledging support for survivors of sexual harassment and assault are not going to cut it.

So, how can the unions support their members in a more meaningful and tangible way?

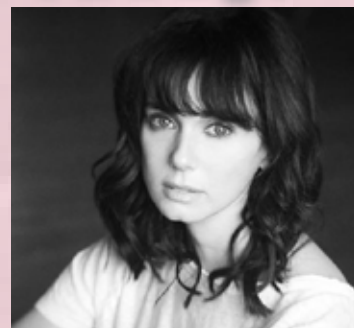
First of all, can we agree that no more meetings for anything related to work be held in hotel rooms? That would be up to the unions to firmly enforce.

Second, the unions need a new system for investigating allegations of wrongdoing.

Currently, if a SAG member launches a complaint, the union writes a letter and asks that the production house or studio involved conduct an internal investigation of the alleged abuse. You can imagine its effectiveness. An in-house investigation by the very nature of being in-house does not cultivate impartiality. Especially when the person being investigated runs or owns the studio. Complaints about these matters that are raised within our unions should trigger an independent third-party investigation.

Third, what do the unions do to protect a member should they be blacklisted by the alleged perpetrator after speaking out? Again, very little. ACTRA, for example, has no system or database that monitors missed work opportunities of those who launched a complaint. If an actor is never hired by the alleged perpetrator again, what penalties are in place by the union? If an industry member is found to have a pattern of blacklisting an individual who launched a complaint against them, what will the union do? Will it continue to allow the member to work with other union members? Any effort to blacklist an actor who refuses sexual advances (by a producer, director, etc.) should trigger real consequences against the offender. But again, how can the unions produce evidence of blacklisting if no monitoring is in place?

Fourth, better mental-health supports should be put in place to treat the psychological impact of sexual abuse. Yes, the unions do have a health-care plan that covers therapy, but the allotted amount will cover only a handful of sessions. That is not enough. Most actors



cannot afford costly, long-term therapy. And finding free psychological support is extremely difficult, especially with exploding wait-lists. The toll of being without mental care is enormous, eventually affecting all areas of life.

So what now?

My industry, filled with vital talent, shares my desire for overhauling the current system. As a proud Canadian, I would like to see my union, ACTRA, create the gold standard for how complaints of sexual harassment and abuse are handled in the workplace. It can do it. Dedicated and smart people work within this union. We need the unions to be mighty with strength in creating radical new policies and procedures, which will make it impossible for members to work with proven sexual predators.

In doing this, I hope that the unions will not work in isolation, but in concert with all of the unions and major stakeholders in the industry, speaking with one firm voice.

Beyond film-industry stakeholders, lawmakers need to act. Stronger laws and punishments are needed to curb sexual impropriety.

This will not be easy, but we cannot go back to the status quo. We have had enough.

Speaking out is powerful, and cathartic but it won't change the status quo.

Don't give us another brochure or hotline to call. Please don't release a statement about how the union supports its own. It's not enough. Protect us. Change this ineffective system.

Men and women need to look within their own workplace cultures and demand immediate change. And if we don't, all of us are complicit in our silence and indifference. And if that happens, the disease will continue to spread.

Mia Kirshner is a Canadian actor, writer, and social activist. **IW**

The inspiration of art and the IWW

By John Kaniecki

Any movement first begins with an idea. This is true with anything, including the IWW. When the "One Big Union" was formed, its concept was revolutionary. The idea was based on the truth that the workers did all the work. If only those who labored united, they could control the world.

Of course, things don't change overnight. There is struggle in life, and class warfare is part of that fight. On one hand you have the worker, just trying to stay alive on their meager wages. On the other hand, you have the boss, who wants to accumulate more, despite his already fantastic riches. As a result, when the worker wants to claim their fair share, he is met with resistance, sometimes violent and deadly. History is full of these clashes. It is the job of the artist to tell the brave deeds of the working class.

There is a fine line between art and propaganda. I don't write to move people. Rather I am moved to write. I look at all the brave people in history who fought for the common person and a feeling touches my heart and soul. I take this shared flame and through my artistic gift I write words of inspiration. In my book *Poet to the Poor: Poems of Hope for the Bottom One Percent*, I have poems about Joe Hill, Pete Seeger, Mumia Abu Jamal, Fred Hampton, Chief Joseph, Jesus, the Haymarket Leaders, Mother Jones, and others. This list of recognizable names is mixed with unknown stories

of individuals from my own life. The combination is a book I assembled to inspire the average person and tell the stories of working-class heroes.

In addition to poetry and song lyrics, I write fiction. In my stories I also incorporate my working class ideas along with a myriad of others. It is the job of the storyteller to keep a person entertained, and I feel challenging people with new ideas and making them think helps fulfill that calling. To teach new things, many times the subtle approach is more effective than the blatant.

I close with my award-winning poem, "Tea with Joe Hill" from *Poet to the Poor*.

Tea with Joe Hill

Joe Hill and I had tea
He let his biscuits soak
They say America is free
Man how they love to joke
Ask Sacco and Vanzetti
Ask Red Cloud and Crazy Horse
And the way I see
Is things are getting worse

I said "Joe why ain't you dead?"
Righteousness is like Love my friend
Laughed Joe as he shook his head
Spirits never die and never end
A thousand tyrants and all their force
In truth could never compete
With the Love that is the source
Of one of my melodies sweet
You see death and life they coexist

Some never die and some never live
So songs of revolution will always persist
For unto themselves my songs give

So open your eyes and organize
Never give in to their lies and organize
Do not hate and despise but organize
Raise your voice in mighty cries and organize

Joe slurped the last of his tea
And bid me a final farewell
Above all fight to be free
You'll get heaven when you give them hell

FW John Kaniecki volunteers in his community, is active with New Jersey Peace Action, and advocates for the mentally ill. You can find John's poetry and writing at <http://johnkanecki.blogspot.com/> as well as <http://lamzn.to/2wIoX7G>. John is open to hearing from composers who'd like to set his poetry to music. **IW**



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Cut on the dotted line.



Workers' art

By Craig Bledsoe

"The work of art is a scream of freedom."—Christo

When we talk about workers' art, what do we mean? Is it art depicting the lives of working-class people? Is it art created by working-class people themselves? Is it art about the lives and circumstances of the working-class produced by the working-class? The likely answer would be all of these.

Is art an essential component of resistance to fascism, capitalism, and other manifestations of tyranny, oppression, coercion, and slavery? Is it essential because art is "a scream of freedom," as the artist Christo asserted? Is it "propaganda of the deed"? Is the production of art, as an expression of humanity, fundamental to freedom? Can true freedom manifest and endure without art?

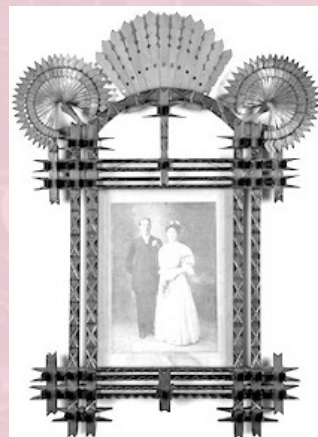
Surely, workers' art must include what is commonly referred to as "folk art." And although the terms "worker" and "working-class" didn't really come into common use until the advent of the Industrial Revolution, art produced by common people prior to then should be considered workers' art. Even the ancient peoples of prehistory, the hunter-gatherers, who had no "bourgeois" class lording over them during their time must have worked hard, and worked very hard indeed, to create the "wealth" of their subsistence. We should regard their cave-paintings, carvings, and other artistic creations, no matter the purpose, as workers' art.

All in all, there is quite a lot to consider when undertaking such an examination, and that examination goes hand in hand with the history of the working class. And although a lot is certainly encompassed within the history of workers' art and music prior to the Industrial Revolution, for the purposes of this article, the Industrial Revolution can be seen as the real beginnings what we call the working class of today and, therefore, workers' art.

Realism was an artistic movement originating in France during the 1840s that rejected idealist images in favor of more realistic depictions of day-to-day life. The Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution influenced this reaction against traditional art and literature. Realism did not shy away from the unpleasant or sordid aspects of life, seeking to portray them with truth

and accuracy. It was a reaction against monarchy and the bourgeoisie—and against the rarefied institutions and academies that dictated the definition of art. The Realists developed a new form of painting, using earthy colors in their palettes to accurately portray the a society changed by political and cultural developments. With the advent of photography, Realism took workers' art to a different level.

Tramp art was a world-wide art movement dating from the 1870s into the 1940s; however, it was created primarily in the United States. Over fifty different ethnic groups have been documented as having made tramp art.



Sometimes referred to as a "democratic" art form, it was practiced at home by farmers, people who worked in factories, and laborers from many different trades and occupations. The art produced was utilitarian in nature, with picture frames and boxes being the most popular types of art produced. Materials used for construction were scavenged from commonly available items of the time, such as cigar boxes and wooden crates. They were often carved and layered into intricate geometric patterns to achieve the desired effect. Simple tools, such as pocket knives and the like, were used to do the work. Although some hobos and tramps made some tramp art, the name "tramp art" was not associated with the movement until a much later time than when it was being practiced. Tramp art truly was a form of workers' art, because most of folks who participated in producing tramp art were working-class people with a home-based life.

Dadaism (Dada) was an early 20th century avant-garde art movement that arose as a reaction to World War I in 1916 and rejected the logic, reason, aestheticism, and nationalism of modern capitalist society. It expressed, among other sentiments, anti-bourgeois protest. Dadaist artists expressed their disdain

for violence, war, and nationalism and maintained political affinities with the radical left. Their art took form in sculpture, painting, poetry, performing arts, photography, and collage.

The Surrealist artistic and cultural movement developed out of Dada and was strongly influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud. Surrealism affected the visual arts, literature, film, and music, as well as political thought and practice, philosophy, and social theory. Surrealist André Breton asserted that above all Surrealism was a revolutionary movement. The Surrealists' split with Dada can be seen as a split between communists and anarchists, with the Surrealists supporting Trotsky.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA), established in 1935 at the height of the Depression, was part of the U.S. government's New Deal program. It was renamed the Work Projects Administration in 1939. It employed large numbers of unskilled men to carry out public works projects, such as the construction of public buildings and roads. Another aspect of the WPA was known as Federal Project Number One, which employed musicians, writers, actors, directors, and artists to produce theater, media, and literacy projects. Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko, best known as pioneers of Abstract Expressionism, were among the thousands of artists and other creatives employed by the WPA during the years of 1935 and 1943. Although these painters were able to create their own art during this period, their designated jobs were to create illustrations and posters for the other projects under the WPA, to provide art classes to communities, and establish art centers around the country.

Workers' art is still present in our society, reacting against the same things as the Realists, Dadaists, and Surrealists. The visual arts, film, and television—especially with the advent of on-demand media—create historical and fictional presentations of workers' struggles. Graphic artists create comics, posters, and anarchist graffiti and street art. Music has developed beyond the "folk" music of the people, into Country, Rock, Punk, and beyond with the common theme of celebrating working people. There is much more, but I leave that for another article. **IW**

Washington's L&I begins enforcement of sick leave

State agency provides a variety of services for workers

Jan. 11, 2018

New Year's Day in Washington State began with a higher minimum wage and enforcement of new paid sick leave for workers statewide.

It's the role of the state Department of Labor & Industries to enforce those laws. But that's only part of what the agency does for workers. Making workplaces safe is the top goal, besides helping injured workers heal and return to work, and helping honest workers, businesses, and medical providers by cracking down on dishonest ones.

More resources for workers can be found at www.Lni.wa.gov/workplacerrights. This includes filing wage complaints online, rights of farm workers, and teen-worker safety.

Sick leave

Mandatory sick leave for workers took effect Jan. 1, 2018. Under the new paid sick-leave law, employees earn at least one hour of paid sick leave for every 40 hours worked. The law also requires employers to carry over up to 40 hours of an employee's unused sick leave from one year to the next.



"Paid sick leave is important for all of us. No one wants employees to come to work sick. It's bad for them, their coworkers, and customers," said L&I Director Joel Sacks. "The new law allows employees to take care of themselves, or their family members, when they're sick. It makes our state a better place to work."

Washington is the seventh state to have a paid sick leave law. Others include California, Oregon, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Arizona, as well as the District of Columbia.

What the specific regulations cover can be found at www.Lni.wa.gov/Sickleave.

Higher minimum wage

Initiative 1433, approved in November 2016, also instituted a series of minimum



wage increases. For 2018, the minimum wage is now \$11.50 per hour.

Previously, the state's minimum wage was pegged to the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). With passage of the initiative, the minimum wage will increase to \$13.50 by 2020. L&I will then resume calculating the minimum wage for calendar years 2021 and beyond using the CPI-W.

In fiscal year 2017, L&I investigated 5,895 wage complaints and collected \$3.5 million in wages owed to workers. Since the state's Wage Payment Act took effect in 2006, which is the law that sets the agency's responsibilities for investigating and citing, L&I has returned more than \$27 million in unpaid wages to more than 22,000 state workers. The agency investigates all wage payment complaints it receives, as required by state law.

Make workplaces safe

Washington State already is a leader in the effort to make workplaces safe. Washington's worker fatality rate is one-third lower than the national average.

Among the agency accomplishments:

- Washington had the lowest construction fatality rate in the nation in 2015 (most recent data available). This occurred even while construction in the state is booming and continues to be a high-risk industry. Overall, Washington's fatality rate was third lowest in the nation.
- The agency's Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) received a 2017 award for Onsite Consultation Achievement Recognition from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The award acknowledges DOSH's safety outreach efforts to the agricultural industry, a new pocket guide for agriculture industry safety and health, and a certification program taught in both English and Spanish—unique in the U.S.

- Washington is the first in the nation to adopt rules that encompass emerging telecommunications technology. Cell-tower deaths are increasing nationally: For tower climbers, the death rate is 10 times the average for construction workers. While there are no federal standards, L&I's rules are expected to serve as a model for OSHA and other state plans.

It's worth noting one of every six claims to L&I for which benefits are paid is a sprain or strain of the back from overexertion or repetitive motion—making it the most commonly reported workplace injury. A lack of fall protection or protective equipment is among the most frequently cited hazards.



In fiscal year 2016, workers' comp covered 2.8 million workers in the state, and the agency received 110,490 claims. Eighty-five percent of the claims were accepted.

Help injured workers heal and return to work

L&I is recognized as a national leader in innovative return-to-work programs and incentives.

L&I has several initiatives underway that are lowering costs by focusing on better outcomes for injured workers. Some examples include promoting workplace safety, ensuring injured workers receive quality health care, providing vocational services to workers, and supporting employers who want to keep injured workers on a job.

In the last four years, these and other improvements have resulted in a more than \$1.7 billion reduction in projected long-term costs for the workers' compensation system.

Both workers and employers pay into the system to help cover the cost of providing wage and disability benefits, as well as medical treatment of injuries and illnesses. The agency is working to keep premium rates steady and predictable. In fact, the 2018 rate dropped 2.5 percent, the first decline in the hourly rate since 2007. In the last five years, the average annual workers' compensation rate increase has been under 1 percent.

Also in recent years, L&I has been providing vocational support and assistance much earlier in claims. This is helping reduce long-term disability and improving return-to-work results for those hurt on the job. The agency's Stay at Work Program is also making a difference, providing employers more than \$58 million to help keep more than 25,000 workers on light duty while they heal.

In all, there have been great gains made in helping injured workers return to the job and avoid long-term disability. In fact, the long-term disability rate is down 19 percent since 2012 — that equals more than 800 workers annually who don't become disabled.

Help honest workers, businesses

Through its investigations, prosecutions, and audits, L&I is achieving its goal to help honest workers, businesses, and medical providers by cracking down on the dishonest ones.

The list of these sorts of cases is lengthy:

- A Kent landscaper with a history of illegal contracting charged in consumer scams;
- A former insurance agent jailed in a \$233,000 workers' comp scam;
- Fines against a firm for violating conditions in hiring ag workers

—just to name a few.

In fact, for every dollar spent on Workers' Compensation fraud prevention, \$11.45 was returned to the state. And the agency has been focusing more on late premium payments, fines, and penalties while reducing its operating costs.

There is more the agency does to protect workers, of course. L&I last year provided nearly 250,000 electrical inspections and pursued non-licensed contractors doing unpermitted work. The agency also has boiler and elevator inspectors, who hold owners accountable for safety testing and maintenance. **IW**

Preface to “The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists” by Robert Tressell

From the Editor: The author of *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* rejected his upbringing and an income from absentee landlordism to make his own way on his own terms. He was born to Mary Noonan in Dublin, Ireland, in 1870, the illegitimate son of a married man, Samuel Croker. Robert went by Croker and then by his stepfather Sebastian Zumbühl's name until, when he was 16, his burgeoning radical political consciousness caused him to leave middle-class safety and make his own way in the world. He took his mother's maiden name as his surname, but the name he is remembered by is his pen name, Robert Tressell. His short life was a sad but inspiring one, worth learning about. But for now, read his own words about why he wrote his one and only book, *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists*, published in 1914, which is still a relevant piece of art for workers today.

In writing this book my intention was to present, in the form of an interesting story, a faithful picture of working-class life—more especially of those engaged in the Building trades—in a small town in the south of England.

I wished to describe the relations existing between the workmen and their employers, the attitude and feelings of these two classes towards each other; their circumstances when at work and when out of employment; their pleasures, their intellectual outlook, their religious and political opinions and ideals.

The action of the story covers a period of only a little over twelve months, but in order that the picture might be complete it was necessary to describe how the workers are circumstanced at all periods of their lives, from the cradle to the grave. Therefore the characters include women and children, a young boy—the apprentice—some improvers, journeymen in the prime of life, and worn-out old men.

I designed to show the conditions relating from poverty and unemployment: to expose the futility of the measures taken to deal with them and to indicate what I believe to be the only real remedy, namely—Socialism. I intended to explain what Socialists understand by the word “poverty”: to define the Socialist theory of the causes of poverty, and to explain how Socialists propose to abolish poverty.

It may be objected that, considering the number of books dealing with these subjects already existing, such a work as this was uncalled for. The answer is that not only are the majority of people opposed to Socialism, but a very brief conversation with an average anti-socialist is sufficient to show that he does not know what Socialism means. The same is true of all the anti-socialist writers and the “great statesmen” who make anti-socialist speeches: unless we believe that they are deliberate liars and imposters, who to serve their own interests labour to mislead other people, we must conclude that they do not understand Socialism. There is no other possible explanation of the extraordinary things they write and say. The thing they cry out against is not Socialism but a phantom of their own imagining.

Another answer is that *The Philanthropists* is not a treatise or essay, but a novel. My main object was to write a readable story full of human interest and based on the happenings of everyday life, the subject of Socialism being treated incidentally.

This was the task I set myself. To what extent I have succeeded is for others to say; but whatever their verdict, the work possesses at least one merit—that of being true. I have invented nothing. There are no scenes or incidents in the story that I have not either witnessed myself or had conclusive evidence of. As far as I dared I let the characters express themselves in their own sort of language and consequently some passages may be considered objectionable. At the same time I believe that—because it is true—the book is not without its humorous side.

The scenes and characters are typical of every town in the South of England and they will be readily recognized by those concerned. If the book is published I think it will appeal to a very large number of readers. Because it is true it will probably be denounced as a libel on the working classes and their employers, and upon the religious-professing section of the community. But I believe it will be acknowledged as true by most of those who are compelled to spend their lives amid the surroundings it describes, and it will be evident that no attack is made upon sincere religion. **IW**



Lost in translation—strike at Amazon in Italia

By Peter Olney

Even though there is no Thanksgiving in Italy, the lack of a “Giorno di Ringraziamento” [Thanksgiving Day] does not mean that there is no Black Friday. In fact, for many years now Italian merchants have celebrated the last Friday in November with discounts that fill their stores with the same bargain-hungry masses as in the United States. So Black Friday this year was the day that the three Italian trade union Federations chose as a strategic day to strike Amazon’s million square foot distribution center in Castel San Giovanni near Piacenza in Northern Italy. This was the first strike in Amazon’s history in Italy. There have been some job actions at Amazon in Germany. Italy is a growth market for Amazon and two more warehouses have opened in Northern Italy in Vercelli (mid-way between Milan and Turin) and Passo Corese in the region of Lazio in Central Italy.

The warehouse in San Giovanni is the size of 11 football/soccer fields. The facility opened in 2015. At 5 AM on Friday, November 24, about 50% of the 1,600 “Blue Badge” permanent employees stayed off of work and struck. There are however another 2,000 temporary “Green Badge,” short-term and seasonal employees, most all of whom came to work. Amazon spokespersons insisted that the strike was only 10% of the workforce because, of course, they were factoring in the temporary employees. Amazon had agreed to sit down with the unions on the Monday following the strike (November 27) but subsequently canceled that meeting and unilaterally moved it to January 18th. The unions warned that if there were not substantive face-to-face discussions by December 6th that there would be more actions. Amazon on December 5 agreed to meet on December 11th! On December 6th the pressure on Amazon was heightened by a ruling by AGCOM (Autorità per Le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni [Authority for Guarantees in Communications]) the Italian authority charged with regulating all communications. AGCOM ruled that the operations of Amazon were substantially similar to Le Poste Italiane and therefore Amazon was warned that within 15 days they would have to comply with the collective labor contract negotiated for Italian postal workers! Talk about tightening the noose . . . !

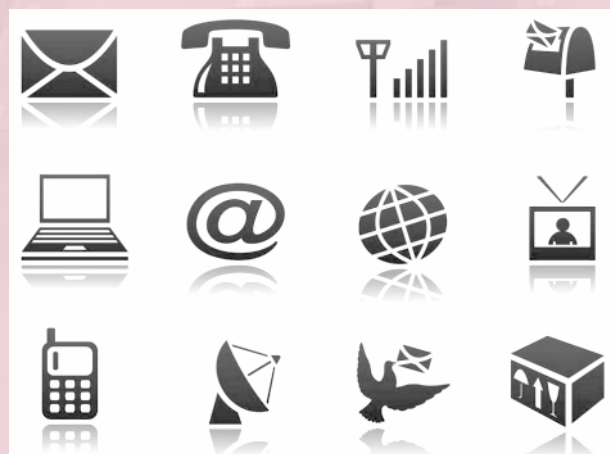


The strike, of course, received widespread coverage in the world business press. In the United States an excellent article from the left daily *Il Manifesto* by Massimo Franchi was translated and circulated in progressive labor circles. The issues that led to the strike are certainly universal: pay, health and safety, and arbitrary treatment. It is estimated that Amazon workers walk about 20 kilometers on average per day without coffee breaks and with a miserable 30-minute lunch break that is consumed by travel time from one’s work post to the cafeteria: often about 8 minutes. What gets lost in translation are the differences in the industrial relations systems in the two countries.

Three labor federations with their particular sectoral affiliates all calling and leading a strike of their members in one company? Striking without winning certified majority support among the workers? What, are we on the moon here? Italy in the aftermath of WWII and mandated by Article 39 of the Constitution has a national system of sectoral negotiations coupled with a very detailed and complicated system of labor jurisprudence. Labor is even sanctified in Article 1 of the post-WWII Constitution that states: “L’Italia è una Repubblica democratica fondata sul lavoro” [Italy is a democratic republic founded on labor]! Sectoral bargaining happens because of the historical power of the largely Communist-led labor movement (coming out of the anti-fascist struggle for liberation), which included large-scale strikes against the Nazi Fascists. Originally in 1947 there was one labor federation, but the interests of the Christian Democrats and the Western-capital led to the founding of an additional two major federations

(CISL and UIL) in the late ’40s. The employer associations in different sectors meet with the unions and establish a national contract that regulates basic wages and conditions for all the workers in a particular industry. Such is true for warehousing and logistics, and Amazon is not exempt from such basic provisions, even if not one Amazon worker is a member of one of the unions in that sector. Our US system, of course, is enterprise based, and it is a ferocious struggle particularly in the private sector to win a union in one location and apply the basic terms of a contract. It can often take years and much grief and heartbreak for a union to prevail, even with the support of 100% of the workforce. Conceptually the idea of sectoral bargaining resonates with many American trade unionists looking for a way out of the isolation and powerlessness of company-specific organization. The Italian sectoral agreements apply to 85% of all Italian workers in companies large and small. Our private-sector contracts only cover 6.7% of the workforce, down from 35% in 1955. Such sectoral agreements, of course, don’t come out of a “good idea” or “an enterprising thought”; these agreements and this system are the product of some of the most violent and militant struggle in the Western world. Thinking doesn’t make it so . . .

However the Italians, while representing most of the workforce in their national agreements, only have 30% of the workforce signed up as members (all 3 Federations). This is not good news as the



Industries under AGCOM authority

Amazon case illustrates. The unions are free to demand meetings with Amazon to discuss improving on the national agreement. Such improvements are needed. For instance, Amazon has basically insti-

basically instituted a permanent Sunday shift. The national agreement calls for a 5% shift premium, but given that this is a permanent shift not an occasional interference with the Sabbath, the unions are demanding a 40% differential for those who regularly work that day. But Amazon feels no compulsion to meet, let alone agree to, such conditions unless the workers can flex their muscles in strikes, slowdowns, etc. So when the Piacenza facility first opened about three years ago, there were initially 23 members of the CGIL. Through patient organizing meetings at work and away from work, etc.—all tactics American organizers would recognize—the membership has grown and the strike can go forward. The Vercelli warehouse has just opened, and there are only a handful of members among the 500 employees and there is no capacity to strike, but the organizing continues there and at Passo Corese.

Italian law does not permit the firing or “permanent replacement” of strikers that US law allows in many situations, but nevertheless on-the-job retaliation and favoritism are not unheard of, even for employees who have “permanent” employment under Italian labor law. For instance, often employees prefer to pay their union fees on a monthly basis direct to the union rather than having the employer deduct them from their checks. This is protective anonymity in workplaces where the union is still nascent and struggling to build power.

Amazon has become a symbol of the new economy in Italy, and the unions are determined to make these new workplaces union fortresses. While the Italian system has many advantages and represents a far more developed system than our own, patient worker-based organizing remains the fundamental building block of any “sectoral strategy.”

Stay tuned, negotiations and maybe more strikes and job actions to come, good organizing permitting . . .

*This article was first published under the name “Saggio da San Frediano # 8 – Lost in Translation – Strike at Amazon in Italia” on December 10, 2017, in The Stansbury Forum. You can find the original of this article at <http://stansburyforum.com/saggio-da-san-frediano-8-lost-in-translation-strike-at-amazon-in-italia>. Peter Olney is one of the operators of The Stansbury Forum, which features regular discussion by writers, activists, and scholars on the topics that Jeff Stansbury focused his life on: labor, immigration, the environment, politics, and world affairs. **IW***

*The gravedigger
knows where he
fits . . .*



Fiefdom

By Vince Veritas

Some Americans have come to believe
Life would be great in a fiefdom
Where the lords have their way with fetching ladies
Have bloodhounds and servants to feed them

A fiefdom needs a fearsome leader
Who can raise an army when he needs to
So the lords are safe to feast and conspire
As their mounds of gold grow ever higher

And the peasant knows where he fits
The soldier knows where he fits
And they all get just enough so to fear
They could lose what little bits they've got

The castle has walls thick and tall
And a moat deep and wide
The drawbridge can go up and down
Unless they're too scared to let a stranger inside

The Black Death is ever a threat
And the priests say it's ever god's will
The mead is sweet and helps one to forget
And the serf falls into debt to pay his bill

And the scullery drudge knows where she fits
The midwife knows where she fits
And they all get just enough so to fear
They could lose what little bits they've got

Some Americans have come to believe
Life would be great in a fiefdom
Where the lords can lie about anything
And the peasants are keen to believe them

When the Black Death takes its toll
They burn a witch or two at the stake
The priests say it's ever god's will
The lords giveth and the lords take

And the jester knows where he fits
The gravedigger knows where he fits
And they all get just enough so to fear
They could lose what little bits they've got

When the serfs are steeped in misery
They find a dead horse to beat on
Like a dog barking up the wrong tree
That's life in the fiefdom

But we live in Canada
And as Frank Zappa said, “it can't happen here”
This is Canada
Don't want a fiefdom 'round here

Watch “Fiefdom” at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3SFJLvTcs>



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Chicago, IL

Application for Membership Aplicación para Membresía

☐ I affirm that I am a worker and that I am not an employer. [Afirmo que soy trabajador/a y no soy empleador.]

☐ I agree to abide by the constitution and regulations of this organization, and will study its principles and acquaint myself with its purposes. [Pacto de obedecer a la constitución y las reglas de esta organización, y estudiaré sus principios, y me informaré de sus objetivos.]

Name/Nombre: _____

Address/Dirección: _____

City/Ciudad: _____ State/Estado: _____

ZIP: _____ Country/ País : _____

Email: _____

Telephone/Teléfono: _____

Employer/Empleador: _____

Occupation/Ocupación: _____

☐ I would prefer to receive copies of the IWW's General Organization Bulletin in paper form, by mail (Default is electronic, by email).

[Prefiero recibir copias del Boletín General por correo. (No sobre e-mail)]

☐ I would like information about the IWW's General Defense Committee. [Me gustaría recibir más información sobre el Comité de Defensa General.]

Dues Rate Based on Monthly Income	Cuota Dependiente de Paga Mensual
Under \$2,000 = \$11 per month	Menos que \$2,000 = \$11 por mes
\$2,000 – 3,500 = \$22 per month	\$2,000 a 3,500 = \$22 por mes
Over \$3,500 = \$33 per month	Mas que \$3,500 = \$33 por mes
Initiation fee is equal to one month's dues.	Iniciación = cuota de un mes

For more information, please go to

<https://www.iww.org/content/join-one-big-union>

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

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

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs that 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 has interests in common with their employers.

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

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

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