

# **Who do you Call when you don't have a Labor Union?**

**An Introduction to the Industrial Workers of the World**

Industrial Workers of the World

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## **When You Need a Labor Union**

Jobs can be hard to find these days. You may have heard some smug boss lecture about how you should be glad to even have a job and you shouldn't complain about how you are treated by your employer or being poorly paid. Even if your boss acts nice, all you have to do is look around carefully to see that what they really care about is money. In most cases the money generated by business comes solely from the workers with little actual work from bosses or owners except to count the money. Your boss wants to keep as much money as possible from the earnings of the business but, to do so they have to pay you as little as possible and spend as little as possible on the business itself.

In order to prevent the slave-like working conditions in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America and many third world countries, labor laws were passed requiring them to pay a minimum wage, provide breaks from work for rest and lunch, and provide a safe and healthy work place but, employers often see these as unnecessary costs to them and try to cheat their employees. Workers with problems like unpaid wages or overtime, pay below the minimum wage, denial of time for lunch or morning and evening breaks, an unsafe or unhealthy work place, discrimination, or sexual harassment are often afraid that there is nothing they can do about these abuses.

Those who try to fight back on the job are often subjected to harassment, disciplined without cause, or fired. If you have a problem you may be afraid to complain. This is why labor unions were first formed. Problems which seem insurmountable for you alone are often easier to correct when you act as a part of a group of employees. When you have a group behind you, you have a lot more resources to draw upon to help you make things right. It is harder for bosses to get away with things than if it is just your word against theirs. If your work place is not currently organized, many unions will simply not want to get involved. The IWW is different.

## **We Fight For Working People**

When you need a friend in the Labor movement, the IWW can help you with your labor problems. We provide free technical assistance, labor counseling, and legal aid assistance to help you settle your labor disputes. IWW members are all workers like you so we understand the problems of working people. Our members have a wide variety of skills and personal contacts which can be used to go after bosses and make things right for their workers.

The IWW fights to give workers control over their salaries, working conditions, workplace responsibilities, job training, health care, child care, etc. Unlike other unions, we don't view these things as "benefits" but, as the true cost of doing business which bosses should be obligated to pay.

## **Tired of Wage Slavery?**

The clearest examples of wage slavery are the minimum wage job and the sweatshop where workers submit to the most menial, humiliating, and unhealthy work conditions for a salary that won't even pay their rent. If they get sick and can't come to work, they will probably lose their job because their boss doesn't allow them sick time off or provide medical insurance. Their boss is able to get rich off workers who toil under these conditions because the work relationship is

a coercive relationship. The boss can fire people at will at no cost to him or her but, people must work under the threat of going hungry or homeless or watching their family starve and get sick if they lose their job and can't find work. Bosses like unemployment and homelessness so they can tell the rest of us that we should be glad to have a job and not take notice that their profits are stolen from our labor!

## **Organize Your Workplace**

Labor law gives you the opportunity to complain in court but, if you really want to have a say over how you are treated at your job, you and your fellow workers need to get organized. The IWW's strength comes from its members. It is a do-it-yourself union organized by the workers themselves without any union agents or bureaucrats who want to take over and tell you what to do. If you are willing to organize at your job site by talking to your co-workers about the issues that matter to them, then you can count on your fellow workers in the IWW to lend their full support to your cause. Our union can provide tangible, community based resources like low cost printing, speakers, legal advice on tactics, and how-to manuals. With the IWW you have friends to help you when you need it but, you are always in charge. After all, you do the work and you know what is best for yourself and your fellow workers.

## **The IWW Welcomes All Workers**

The IWW was the first union to treat all workers equally regardless of their ethnic ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, or physical ability. Every working person who earns their living with their hands or their mind is welcome in the IWW. Only Bosses (persons with the power to hire or fire who make money off of the toil of others) are excluded from membership. The IWW is organized from people of all types of business, industry, or services; even those the AFL-CIO trade unions think are too small or unimportant to organize. In the modern economy with its small work places, minimum wage jobs, and focus on services, the IWW approach of organizing by industry is the ideal way to insure that all the workers in janitorial, parking, restaurant, retail, construction or similar industries have the same contract and can't be fired and replaced by a non-union worker.

## **The IWW is Truly Democratic**

The IWW is the most democratic union in America. Each work place is organized by its workers who make all the decisions and have complete autonomy from any national organizational structure. All locals are organized by industry so that no IWW union will compete with another. We believe an injury to one is an injury to all and that unions need to stick together when one local is in a fight. All IWW locals are organized internationally as a federation. Each sends recallable delegates to national meetings which advocate the interests of their local and report back to them on the activities of any coordinating meetings. The IWW does not believe in professional union leaders who may be tempted by bosses to sell out, compromise, or be corrupted. We believe that the best protection against racketeering or back room deals with bosses is for the workers

themselves to be in charge. For over 100 years union leaders have eventually sold out to those who elected them. We want to avoid this mistake.

## **Direct Action...**

The IWW believes in using direct action to accomplish its goals. When there are labor laws to protect workers' rights, we will use the law to prosecute bosses who violate it. Where there is injustice, we will use whistle blowing, pickets, strikes, sick outs, work slowdowns, monkey wrenching, and other tactics to punish the bosses in their pocketbooks. When the bosses try to turn the government against us with court orders and police harassment we will defy them. If the bosses use violence, we will resist them! The IWW does not advocate violence. Violence is the last resort of cowards, bosses and police states who are losing control.

Our response is to break their resolve by not being intimidated. Our strength is in our numbers, our solidarity with each other, and our resolve to protect our rights as honest hardworking people.

## **...Not Political Action**

The IWW doesn't support politicians or political parties because these people are always allied with the bosses. People with money realize that they have to buy protection from the government if they want to stay in charge. They do this with political campaign contributions, industry groups (corporate alliances) with full-time professional lobbyists, and an army of lawyers that know how to work the professional bureaucracy and massage the rules and regulations to work for them. For over 100 years Labor Party, Socialist, Social Democrat, Democrat, Communist, or Green politicians who claimed to be a friend of Labor turned on the workers once they got a taste for the money and power of the government. Other political parties openly side with corporations against workers! The government has carefully crafted their interpretation of the Bill of Rights to give civil rights to corporations, to protect corporate executives and stockholders from legal liability for the actions of the corporation, and to deny workers the right to free speech, assembly, search and seizure protection, due process, excessive bail protection, etc. when it threatens the economic ambitions of their employers.

## **Anti-Militarism**

The IWW believes that wars are fought to make rich people richer and weaken the power of workers and ideas like patriotism are a smokescreen exploited by bosses to trick us into cooperating. Multinational corporations encourage governments to go to war to help them exploit workers, control natural resources, and monopolize food production in other countries. Wars force the workers of one country to kill the workers of another country and to die to promote the economic ambitions of corporations and bosses which watch from the sidelines. The IWW believes that unions should exist to improve the lives of the workers they represent and not to help kill off other workers so the bosses can get richer.

## Pro-Environment

The IWW believes that labor must forge strong ties to the community to fight the exploitation of workers and their families by businesses which degrade our environment. Historically, working people have paid the greatest price for the destruction of the environment caused by the same bosses and stockholders who exploit their labor. When bosses pollute, landfill, and develop they don't just reduce a cost to them, they force it on the rest of us who have to live in that environment. Tainted food, slumlord housing, exposure to toxic chemicals, hazardous consumer products, and on the job toxin and hazard exposure are all created by bosses who place their profits before the welfare of people. The IWW believes that we cannot rely on government regulation when the bosses are the ones writing the regulations. The militancy we bring to helping our fellow workers on the job is the only way to protect our communities and the World in which we live.

## Fire Your Boss!

The IWW believes that the only antidote to wage slavery is the abolition of the wage system itself. By abolition of the wage system we mean that the workers themselves should own the workplace, operate it democratically, and share the benefits from all they produce. One day, unions will be so powerful that we can force the bosses to cede control of the workplaces to those who do the work.

Historically, employee-owned workplaces have been able to turn out a better product at a lower cost with a greater return to their workers than their capitalist counterparts. This is because those who do the work are free to put their ideas into motion on how to make a better product and don't have to share the benefits of their labor with bosses and stockholders who produce nothing. People who work in groups and exchange their knowledge solve problems easier than those who work in highly regimented workplaces or rigid bureaucracies. People who work for themselves are more motivated to do the best possible work than they are when they are paid only a fraction of the value of the work that they do and their boss takes credit for all their hard work.

Once workers at other workplaces see how good employee-owned shops have it, they will want to know how they can join up. The goal of the IWW is for all workers to be unionized and united under a single labor federation that will be able to protect workers from the underhanded tactics of bosses, politicians, and organized crime who cooperate to maximize their power and profits at the expense of labor.

## Join the I.W.W.

**No Bureaucrats** — aside from the modestly paid General Secretary/Treasurer, the I.W.W. has no paid officers. The General Executive Board is elected annually by the entire membership, and its job is to oversee the running of union affairs, not to set policy. All officers may be recalled at any time by referendum.

**Real Democracy** — all policy decisions are made by the members themselves by referendum. All branches maintain full autonomy on matters within their respective jurisdiction. Job branches

(I.W.W. groups composed of workers at a single job site) set their own demands and strategies in negotiation, free of meddling internationals or sellout business agents.

**Low Dues** — Our dues are structured on a sliding scale basis. Unemployed and low-income workers pay \$5 a month; those making between \$800 and \$1,700 per month pay \$9; members making more than \$1,700 per month pay \$12 monthly dues; and workers in extremely poor financial situations may pay only \$3 per month. Initiation fees equal one month's dues; so a very low income worker can join for as little as \$6.

**To Join** — Fill out the questions below and send a copy of this form with your check or money order (in U.S. funds) to: I.W.W., 103 W. Michigan Ave., Ypsilanti, MI 48197 USA.

I affirm that I am a common worker without direct power to hire and fire. I agree to abide by the constitution and regulations of this organization. I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Occupation\_\_\_\_\_ Industry\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

City\_\_\_\_\_

State/Province\_\_\_\_\_ ZIP/Post Code\_\_\_\_\_

Phone\_\_\_\_\_ e-mail\_\_\_\_\_

Total amount enclosed \$\_\_\_\_\_

Initiation \$\_\_\_\_\_ Dues \$\_\_\_\_\_

When you join the I.W.W., you will receive a free subscription to our newspaper, the *Industrial Worker*, in addition to your membership card, constitution, button, and the One Big Union pamphlet which describes the structure and function of the I.W.W. in detail. You will also get a monthly publication for members only called the *General Organization Bulletin*, which contains Board motions, financial reports, and members' discussion of various internal matters such as upcoming referenda. Also, if you have e-mail, you will be invited to join a growing network of I.W.W. members engaging in on-line communications.



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