

MOTTOS AND WATCHWORDS:

politics and mass organisations



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Mottos and watchwords: a discussion of politics and mass organizations

The IWW Preamble declares that “Instead of the conservative motto, “A fair day’s wages 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.” In what follows, I use this as a jumping off point for discussion about the relationship between organizing and taking on openly revolutionary views.

In the section called “An Undemocratic Organization With Only Paper Radicalism” I discuss a hypothetical situation sometimes used rhetorically against the idea of radical unions and similar organizations. In the next section, “Should Unions Ever Carry Revolutionary Banners?” I answer, “Yes, at least sometimes.” I suggest that even if we answer “no,” there are similar problems that organizations face even if they do not decide to be radical. In the next section, “Militancy Is Not Radicalism,” I argue that whether something is militant or not tells us very little about whether or not something contributes to revolutionary transformation. I argue here that the old slogan “direct action gets the goods” can be misleading. In the next section, “Two Kinds of Struggles in One Messy World” I point out that apparently less radical struggles often do still have radical potentials. These pieces all fit together fairly closely. Together they form an argument in favor of radical mass organizations. The example I am most familiar with today is the contemporary IWW. I personally think that more people on the left should be involved in the IWW, especially if they want to do workplace organizing that doesn’t seek to win recognition and contracts from employers, but the point of this discussion paper is not to argue for involvement in the IWW. Rather, the point is to open up some discussion about the connections between a radical perspective that calls for long term change and organizing for short term change now.

The next few sections relate to each other and to the overall theme, but they do so more loosely. They are closer to independent articles. These form a sort of second half of the discussion paper. The piece, “Shared Interests And Mass Organizations Make And Remake Each Other,” defines what I mean by “mass organization” and tries to argue that mass organizations should not be understood simply and narrowly as bodies of economic self-defense. Instead, they should be understood as having their own internal value system or moral economy. I also draw on a distinction from the writer E.P. Thompson, between struggles to get more goods and struggles that express outrage at

the ways capitalism limits human possibility. These are not mutually exclusive. In the next piece, "Where Do Radicals Come From?," I argue that people with a commitment to fighting capitalism and other forms of injustice are not usually motivated by a desire for more stuff but rather are motivated by a moral outlook and/or emotional attachments. In the next piece, "What is a Fair Day's Wage, Anyway?," I present what many readers will find to be an obvious analysis of why "fair wage" is a contradiction in terms. I also discuss some passages from Karl Marx which influenced the early IWW. The discussion paper ends with a note on some changes in the IWW's preamble during the organization's first few years.

This paper also has an appendix which includes some additional material, lists some of the sources and influences that shaped this paper, and recommends some further reading. The appendix is online [here](#).

An Undemocratic Organization With Only Paper Radicalism

The IWW Preamble rejects "the conservative motto, A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," and says instead that "we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, Abolition of the wage system." Why must we inscribe this on our banner? And who are "we" anyway? This line from the IWW Preamble is a claim that unions and similar organizations can and should take on explicitly revolutionary perspectives at least some of the time.

There are some revolutionaries who reject the idea that unions and similar organizations should take on radical political perspectives. This means that they implicitly take a reverse of the IWW Preamble: they say "we must not inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, Abolition of the wage system; at most our banners should pose the common sense motto "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work."

Some people like to use a hypothetical scenario to explain their rejection of radical unions. The hypothetical scenario goes something like this. "You inscribe on your banner the phrase, 'abolish the wage system.' Well, imagine that a lot of working class people suddenly join the organization. This will create a huge problem. An organization should be democratic. The organization can only be democratic if it reflects the consciousness of its members. Most of the working class currently do not want to abolish the wage system. At most, they want a fair day's wages for a fair day's work. That means if a lot of working class people join up, then either the organization will not really want to abolish the wage system – so the slogan will be just

empty words – or else the organization will not be democratic – the people who want to abolish the wage system will control things and the rest of the people will not have any real input or participation.”

This hypothetical scenario is very compelling rhetorically, but let’s look at it more closely. If most of the working class today do not want to abolish the wage system and are not willing to join an organization that wants to do so, then we don’t really need to worry about how to keep the organization democratic if large numbers of workers join because it simply won’t happen. The problem dissolves.

If most of the working class today do not want to abolish the wage system and are not willing to join an organization that wants to do so, something will have to change before large numbers of workers join such an organization. One thing that could change is that the organization drops its commitment to abolishing the wage system. Another thing that could change is that the working class becomes radical in its consciousness. In that case too, the problem dissolves.

Another possibility is that the working class comes to see some benefit in membership in the organization and so pretends to want to abolish the wage system. This is possible. There is quite simply no way to prevent people from joining who are not sincere in their expression of agreement with radical views. People might lie. We can attempt to test for lies, but no tests are 100% accurate. The same problem occurs to some extent in any organization. Currently unions often face the problem of needing to make members active participants in the organization and its activity, and to build a culture of solidarity. Failure to do this can lead to members crossing picket lines and otherwise not standing with their fellow members.

The problem of people seeking membership and expressing an insincere commitment to “abolish the wage system” is not as pressing as the problem that people might express a shallow or temporary agreement with an organization’s radical principles. To put it another way, the hypothetical situation does not examine what joining is, as an activity, or what it means. There are real problems with recruitment, retention, and member education, but the hypothetical scenario doesn’t help with any of that. While there are no quick fixes, one key piece of the puzzle is to make joining into an interactive activity.

Joining a union can and should involve a frank discussion with a member of the organization about values. This is a conversation about why the organization exists, why the person is joining, why the current member is involved. There can and should be a conversation between two people about their understanding of the world and of the world they would like to see, at whatever small scale and in whatever general terms. That is, there can and should be a conversation about existing shared interests which is simultaneously a conversation that is a small step toward remaking shared interests or creating new ones. Furthermore, after joining, there can and should be educational components of membership in an organization, including written materials, discussions, various parts of the life and culture of the organization, and, above all, relationships with other members, all of which reinforce aspects of shared interests.

Part of the difficulty here for radical unions (to the very limited extent that they exist) is that people are dynamic. They heat up and cool down. Most people who are radicals and who have been for many years will admit that at certain moments they have contemplated, at least in a vague “what if...?” kind of way, the possibility of giving up on their radical commitments. Our lives would be so much easier if we could only accommodate to the system... our views make life under capitalism even harder to endure... and of course many of us have seen fellow radicals waver more strongly, and fall away. This problem happens in existing radical organizations.

There is no simple solution to this. We should have longer conversations about it, about how to reduce the frequency of people cooling off. Many of us who have stayed radical for a long time have managed to take the heat we have experienced — from our outrage at the world, from our passionate relationships with other radicals, from the collective struggles we have participated in — and combine it with other things — ideas, value systems, stories, and more — in order to create our own internal heat source. We need to figure out better how to deliberately replicate this in others, so that we can make more radicals. Beyond that, we must recognize and prepare for the fact that people will cool off, and we should prepare for the consequences this will have. Among other problems, we want to avoid having the situation where members have cooled off and become only paper members.

One mechanism for this is to make dues payments require face to face or recurrent interaction, rather than mechanisms like dues checkoff. This way to handle membership dues keeps organizations financially dependent on having real members, rather than paper members. There is much more to be

said about all of this, but most of that is for a longer conversation for another time.

The hypothetical scenario has one additional flaw – about democracy. To be blunt, why should we care if organizations are democratic? Democracy is not an end in itself, democracy is a means. A bad decision made democratically is still a bad decision. There are two reasons to care about democracy. Democracy is good when it results in good decisions – when groups decide to do good things. And democracy is good when it has good effects on the participants – when it makes them better and more likely to do good things. This results in tensions. Participation in democratic decision-making can have important shaping roles on people’s shared interests. But sometimes people’s shared interests are narrow and conservative.

Say there are two mass organizations, both with a lot of conservative members. One is highly democratic and votes to exclude racial minorities or to oppose a program of member education around racial oppression within the organization and in society. The other is highly undemocratic, with a leadership to the left of its membership. In the second organization, the leadership undemocratically creates a program to educate members about race and changes the members’ attitudes. Clearly both of these situations are highly imperfect. Clearly the second is preferable.

Above all, we should strive to create the conditions wherein an organization can act democratically and make good decisions in a democratic fashion. Sometimes this means encouraging democratic processes even though this will result in worse decisions than if an enlightened leadership made them. Other times, however, certain issues are important enough that being less than fully democratic is worth it because it will avoid catastrophes or create conditions which change members’ consciousness over time.

Should Unions Ever Carry Revolutionary Banners?

The rejection of radical unions expresses important truths. For one thing, we should not overestimate what an organization says – what really matters is what an organization does. But words do matter. More to the point, it matters when organizations make explicit commitments to world-views and ideas. It matters when organizations deliberately try to spread these ideas – or rather, it matters when an organization’s official structures have created space and provided resources for one section of the organization (whether officers, staff, members, or some combination) to propagate ideas among the

people that make up the organization and among other people beyond the organization. For example, whatever else there is to say, it had important effects when the UAW agreed to sign no-strike pledges and urged members to buy war bonds during World War Two, or when it showed opportunistic support for anti-Communist provisions in Taft-Hartley. Union support for racial discrimination similarly has had important effects in U.S. history.

The rejection of unions and similar organizations taking on radical perspectives also expresses the important point that taking radical positions really does limit who will be involved. All things being equal, a radical organization will face additional difficulties that other organizations will not face. Quite simply, it's harder to be radical than it is to not be radical. An organization will have greater difficulties in society the more that it portrays itself as opposed to dominant values in society and even more so as it actually threatens dominant values.

These problems are not limited to slogans like "abolish the wage system." Should organizations make internal efforts to overcome contradictions in the working class such as sexism, racism, homophobia, and others? If so, should these be official positions of organizations? The sad fact is that much of the working class holds racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and other bad ideas. Organizations of the working class that do not take steps to address these forms of oppression implicitly support them. This is because organizations are a product of shared interests but they also create shared interests, including shared interests that segment off some sections of the working class from others or interests which seek for one section of the class to advance at the expense of another.

Taking strong stances means that individuals who oppose those stances will not join the organization unless we manage to change their minds, or they will join in ignorance of, or direct opposition to, those stances. Taking strong stances also provides reasons for other people to strongly oppose the organization and it gives the organization's opponents resources for attacking the organization in rhetorical and material ways.

Taking a stand has consequences. The United Electrical Workers were attacked with a combination of red-baiting and raids, which nearly destroyed the organization in the aftermath of Taft-Hartley. Some unions didn't survive these attacks. The early IWW was attacked with violent state and vigilante repression which reduced the organization to a mere shadow for decades. Unions that practiced civil rights unionism in the Jim Crow South faced

additional obstacles that other unions did not, because of their opposition to racist ideology.

If an organization officially opposes forms of oppression and divisions within the working class and takes steps to combat these problems among members and in the world, this places the organization to the left of much of the working class. This is how unions ought to be. And in reality, this is how many current unions already actually operate: they take stances to the left of much of their membership. Job advertisements for openings in the labor movement often describe the union as building social justice. The union officialdom also poses this in terms like 'standing up for workers' rights,' and 'battling for dignity and fairness and respect,' and they sometimes contribute political funds for lobbying for gay rights and other issues that many workers have reservations about. Now, of course, being revolutionary is much to the left of all this. But the criticism that the organization is to the left of the class and therefore the class won't get involved or therefore the organization is flawed, that applies to most actually existing organizations already, except for those which are truly reactionary.

The issue of whether or not an organization should be radical is on a continuum, and the arguments against organizations taking radical perspectives often imply positions that would fall on that continuum to the right of many actually existing unions.

"Okay, fine," someone will say, "but surely sometimes we have to work with people who do not agree with some of our values. We have to work with people who do not want to abolish the wage system." Yes, absolutely, and this is difficult. This is not something that can be fixed through theoretical maneuvering; we will have to do different things depending on the situation, and we would benefit from more discussion in detail about real examples when we have dealt with these problems in various ways.

At the same time, when we work with people who don't want to abolish the wage system we can not simply say "we want to abolish the wage system and you do not, that's okay, it's just like how I like romantic comedies and you like action movies." Our vision and values are not taste preferences. We must talk about what our vision and values are, and to the best of our ability we must talk in terms and appeal to values held by our fellow workers, and we should try to convince them of our values. This does not mean we should preach. And this does not mean that we should only associate with them if we manage to convince them. If we don't convince them we should still

associate with them, and over time perhaps our relationship with them might help us change their minds. What this does mean is that we should speak frankly about our vision and values, we should build relationships of trust and affection with people who disagree with us, and we should try to get them to hold our views.

Inscribing “abolish the wage system” on our organization’s banner provides a requirement for us to have these difficult conversations with our fellow workers. Often the hesitation about radical unions and similar organizations is a hesitation to speak frankly about, and try to convince people of, our values. It is much more comfortable to group with people who already agree with us, and to do our outreach to the unconvinced in passive ways via media rather than face-to-face, in real time. This effectively leaves it up to people to convince themselves before we talk to them about our vision and values.

Militancy Is Not Radicalism

What distinguishes radical from conservative organizing? Some people answer “militancy.” Militancy is always brave, but it is not always radical. The old slogan “Direct action gets the goods!” expresses one kind of commitment to militancy. This slogan is only sometimes true. Not all direct action gets the goods. That is, direct action is not a guarantee of success. And sometimes people get the goods without direct action. It’s undeniable, though, that in some settings direct action really is the best route to getting the goods.

But who cares? Who wants goods anyway? Imagine that the global economy recovers in a big way. Prosperity is the new order of the day. A rising tide begins to lift most boats. There are increasing opportunities for electoral politics and in the United States NLRB elections begin to genuinely improve many people’s lives under capitalism. In that case, we could “get the goods” in a variety of ways other than direct action. Would this change how we orient toward electoralism and recognition? If our main motivation is getting the goods, then the answer should be yes. But if our motivation is abolishing the wage system, then the answer should be no.

“Getting the goods” under capitalism is a matter of “a fair day’s wage” won through direct action. Of course it’s good if people have better lives, and changes under capitalism really do matter for individuals’ lives. But we can mislead ourselves if getting the goods is all we are about – that is, if the goals is what the struggle gets people in our lives under capitalism, as opposed to how the struggle contributes to the consciousness and ability of the working

class. Engels expressed this misguided view once by calling the idea of a general strike “nonsense.” He said that “whenever we are in a position to try the universal strike,” – Engels’ terms for the general strike – “we shall be able to get what we want for the mere asking for it, without the roundabout way of the universal strike.” The mistake here is to limit the strike to what sort of goods it is about – “we shall be able to get what we want.”

A friend told me a story once about a group of workers who organized themselves independently against a big public facility. This was a relatively small group of workers compared to the size of the facility, no more than 300 people in relation to a facility that has employees numbering in the thousands, serving members of the public numbering in the tens of thousands, and dealing with millions of dollars. The workers had the power to shut the place down, and they used that power to bring the facility to a stop temporarily. They put forward a list of demands they wanted met. The bosses gave in on every one of them. The bosses then said “hey next time you have any problems, let us know and we’ll fix things right away so we don’t need to have any of these headaches.” In terms of “getting the goods,” this arrangement is a victory. The workers got what they wanted and they had an experience of collective action. Most of us would love to be in the position of these workers — more money! making the boss concede! — who wouldn’t want those things? At the same time, what happens next time? Management said “next time, come to us, we’ll give you what you want without all this trouble.” Will the workers do so? Should they? If we think in terms of simply “getting the goods” then the workers might as well get whatever they can without action – after all, nothing is too good for the working class, as Bill Haywood once said — so why not get as much as possible for as little work as possible? But “getting the goods” is not the point. Direct action simply to get goods is merely militancy. We should not care about militancy on its own. Militancy is not necessarily radical. There is no contradiction between militancy and the conservative slogan “a fair day’s wage.”

Our commitment to “abolish the wage system” means that we don’t just want more under capitalism – we want to abolish the wage system. That requires more people to want to abolish the wage system and to understand that an injury to one is an injury to all. Marx and Engels referred to the struggles of the working class as “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.” We should care about direct action when it contributes to this “real movement” to abolish the wage system. This is about how direct action affects the people who carry out and witness the direct action.

We should orient toward making direct action into radical militancy. Radical militancy deepens and spreads class consciousness – “an injury to one is an injury to all” – and a commitment to having a new society – “abolish the wage system.” We should organize in ways that spread a correct and radical understanding of capitalism: there are structural forces which limit the ability for most people to have a good life under capitalism. As long as the wage system exists, even if some people get improvements these will often be threatened in the future.

Another part of having a radical perspective is understanding that an injury to one is an injury to all. That is: sometimes some groups of workers can get ahead at the expense of other workers, or sometimes capitalists will pay for improvements for one group of workers at the expense of another group of workers. This is unacceptable to us, and we need to make it unacceptable to others. Eugene Debs once said, “I want to rise with the ranks, not from the ranks.” The same could be said about groups of workers. Some groups of workers have benefited by rising above the rest of the working class, and by the costs of that rise being shifted onto others. We want all or at least very many of the working class to believe in Debs’s slogan, and to believe that an injury to one is an injury to all. “The ranks” means the global working class. When direct action spreads these qualities, it contributes to “the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.” Then and only then is direct action radical.

Two Kinds of Struggles in One Messy World

Despite what I’ve written so far, the distinction between “a fair day’s wages” and “abolish the wage system” is not a neat and clean one. In theory or ideology, it is. We can and should be able to articulate why there is no such thing as a fair wage. We can and should distinguish between struggles that explicitly call for an end to the wage system and struggles that explicitly aim for fair wages. This distinction is important. But in practice, the line between the two is blurry. For one thing, just saying “abolish the wage system” doesn’t mean we actually make a contribution to ending the wage system. We could put that on our banner but actually just end up fighting for better wages and never winning more than that, if we even manage to win better wages. Really, “a fair day’s wages” and “abolish the wage system” are points on a continuum, and particular struggles that swing quickly from one pole to the other and back.

Even though I wrote above that militancy is compatible with the conservative motto “a fair day’s wages,” militant struggles for a fair day’s wages are potentially transformative. Put simply, there are aspects of conflict with the boss that it is good for workers to experience. The collective organization involved, the relationships we build, the act of standing up for ourselves, all of this has the potential to help people start to understand the world differently. It can help make less politicized people start to understand that we have to abolish the wage system for the good of all (or almost all) humanity. This means that when the boss says “next time, come to us, we’ll give you what you want,” the boss is attempting to create a situation that makes for less conflict and so less moments that have the possibility to radicalize people.

When people collectively fight the powers over our lives, we do various things. For instance, in workplace struggles we discuss and make decisions about tactics and strategy, we march on the boss, we walk off the job, and so on. There are at least two elements of this – running our own affairs and standing up to people over us. These are related but not identical. There are various results that follow from these activities. Experiences of running our own lives can help people have more confidence, more skills, and more of a taste for running our own lives in a way that makes it more intolerable when we don’t run our own lives. Experiences of collective conflict with people in power over us can also help us get more confidence in ourselves and other members of our class, help us get more of a sense that collective action is the way to solve our problems, and it can deepen our sense of opposition to the powers over us.

Among the components these two things have in common in the most general sense is that both of them have the potential to radicalize or further radicalize the people who experience them, particularly if they haven’t experienced them much before. It’s not guaranteed that these experiences will radicalize people, though, and it’s not guaranteed what conclusions people will draw. This is part of why it’s particularly important for revolutionaries to be involved in struggles in ways that place us in relation to people who are having these experiences, particularly if they haven’t had these experiences before or haven’t had them much. That is: revolutionaries should strive to be organizers. If revolutionaries are placed in ways that put us in relation with people having these experiences, then we can shape the ways that these transformative experiences play out. We can potentially make them more transformative and try to make it more likely that folks will eventually become revolutionaries in response to these experiences.

There is another way that some fights that are explicitly for fair wages can have elements that go much beyond this conservative motto. To understand this we have to ask the question, why do people fight? People in struggle often take big risks that can have huge effects on them as individuals and on their loved ones. Most people will not fight for a dollar, or for the right to put a piece of paper in a box on voting day, or to sit in the front rather than the back of a bus. You might say to yourself, “this isn’t true – there have been important fights over wages, voting rights, segregation and many other issues.” My point is that people tend to fight over issues that they see as tied to values and relationships. “It’s not about the money, it’s about respect,” many people will say. “It’s the principle of the matter.” I personally want more money and more stable health insurance. This is a desire for economic gains that any liberal could agree with – “you should have a fair day’s pay, including better insurance!” The reason I want these is not as an end in itself, I want these because I worry about the future for my daughter. My desire for my child to have as good a life as I can provide her is not economic but it requires economic inputs. I don’t want it for economic reasons but it requires economic means.

Because struggles are about values, people in struggle can overflow their boundaries and transform themselves. Most of the time when workers fight together for a better life, this fight takes place on terms that the capitalist class has set. Most of the time this fight is thought of in terms that still assume capitalism will continue. That is, usually people imagine victory to mean victory under capitalism – a better capitalism, “fair wages.” And most of the time the understanding that people have of their self-interest is narrow: “the ranks” sometimes means just “my union” or “my job class” or “people of my nationality” and so on. Even so, the collective power and intelligence and outrage of workers gathered together is a powerful and volatile thing, especially when it combines with experiences of collective action. Indeed, the formation of the IWW came out of decades of struggles and numerous attempts to form organizations (such as the Western Labor Union and the American Labor Union), attempts which radicalized people and taught them practical lessons.

At the founding convention of the IWW in 1905, one of the delegates attending, Pat O’Neil, made a short speech from the floor. He said:

I want to ask you just a plain, practical question. You have got a big strike on right here in this city. The teamsters’ portion of your transportation department are out on strike. About two months ago a large shipment of

machinery was made from this city down to Spadra, about thirty-five miles from where I live. Now, mark you, I want to show you that these fellows recognize that an injury to one is an injury to all, in spite of the evidence of John Mitchell to the contrary. When that machinery got there at Spadra our men refused to unload it. Then they went over to Russellville and got a few men, mostly negroes and a few white men, and when they came over there the men had a talk to them, and they too refused to unload it. Now, mark you, the proposition. The president of our district went down there; Peter Handy, the president of the U. M. M. A., District No. 21, went down to Spadra and ordered the union men of Spadra to unload that machinery under threat of losing their charter. They still refused to do it, and on the day when I left for Chicago twenty-five of them were in the United States jail.

O'Neil's short speech makes an important point. The reality is that different organizations and struggles exist within the working class. They have a dynamic relationship to each other. They have different explicit ideologies – revolutionary watchwords and conservative mottoes – and different implicit principles in action.

Organizations and workers in struggle are internally dynamic as well. O'Neil made the important point that workers who started off fighting for what they thought was a fair day's wages came to a class consciousness understanding that "an injury to one is an injury to all," at least to some limited extent. These workers rejected racial divisions and took risks for other workers. A fight has potential to move people. Workers acting together in struggle can develop a sense of their own individual and collective potential and a greater sense of class consciousness. That is, workers can become more aware of and, opposed to, the constraints that the capitalist system puts on us. The struggle can begin to move beyond terms set by the capitalist class and can provoke people to begin imagining an end to capitalism. In the terms I've used here, sometimes the struggle for a fair day's wages can teach workers that we need to abolish the wage system. When the struggle doesn't go beyond fair wages, it doesn't really challenge the system and might even help it. When the struggle begins to move toward a vision and a practice of ending the system, well, obviously this is a very different thing.

We want to identify and amplify the tendencies toward our potentials for revolutionary perspectives within fights for a fair day's wages. We want to move people toward a systematic understanding of capitalism – of how the wage system works – toward a view where it's not enough to just get by as an individual or as a member of a group who has it okay – that is, we want

people to come to the view that capitalism must be abolished for what it does to many people, even if we as individuals may be managing to 'get by'. If these changes in people's consciousness never take place, then no matter how militant a struggle is, it will only ever be reformist. Militancy is not radicalism. Moving people from "a fair day's wage" to "abolish the wage system" means having good relationships with people who currently do not want to want abolish the wage system, struggling alongside them. This also means having an organization of people who *do* want to abolish the wage system. One key piece of this is having unions and similar fighting organizations that aim to spread the awareness of the need to abolish the wage system and to deepen the understanding of people who current see this need.

Shared Interests And Mass Organizations Make And Remake Each Other

I have talked a lot about unions here and sometimes said "unions and other organizations." My preferred term for these is "mass organizations." A mass organization is not the same as a massive organization. That is, "mass" is not a matter of numbers. I once helped organize a committee of tenants in a building in Chicago where the landlord was doing loud, unsafe, and unsanitary construction work in the hallways. He wanted to drive tenants out so he could convert the building to condominiums. He wanted to drive them out by illegally by starting the construction while people still lived in the building. The committee touched off a rent strike and began to reach out to tenants in other buildings owned by the same landlord. There were maybe 30 tenants in the building. The group had maybe 10 people, with a few active people doing most of the real work. This was a tiny, limited group, but it was a mass organization.

As I understand the term, a mass organization is a combative organization that comes together around shared interests and takes action. "Shared interests" must immediately be qualified, because there are easy mistakes to be made otherwise. Interests are simultaneously things that exist that people can be made aware of and things to be constructed and revised. To put this another way, we live in more than one world, or one world made out of many layers which can inform and foster different perspectives. From one perspective, all working class people have an interest in ending capitalism because capitalism is a system that is bad for all working class people (though of course not equally so). From another perspective, many working class people have an interest in capitalism continuing because they benefit from aspects of it, in limited and short term ways. At one level, there is what

would be best for the working class. At another level, there is what the working class thinks is best. While it can be argued at length that one of these perspectives is true and the other is false, in a way they are both true. And both of these perspectives are, in a sense, moral perspectives. They are prescriptive perspectives that are just as much about how the world ought to be as they are about how the world really is. To draw a parallel, think of someone addicted to some substance like alcohol or cocaine. For some people this is an abstract example, for others, we have (or we are) real people in our lives who have wrestled or still wrestle with this difficulty. Anyone who has been or watched a loved one and perhaps tried to help a loved one in the struggle with addiction knows that the person is better off if they can stop using the substance, if they can get their drinking under control, and so on. This is in the person's interest. At the same time, the person has an interest in continuing to use the substance: it feels good; it is likely bound up with their social life and their friendships, such that changing their use of the substance will have an impact on their relationships. For some, substance use is a way to cope with other problems that they will have to face directly if they change their substance use. The person has two interests which are in tension or contradiction with each other. We can, if we like, say that their true interest is in changing their substance use and that it's not really in their interest to continue their current substance use, but this means very little. When we say "their true interest is to do XYZ ..." what this primarily means is "we very much want them to do XYZ." Expressions of interests are as much or more about the world as we want it to be as they are about the world as it is. Of course, we exist in the world as it is. The way we want the world to be shapes our view of what the world is, and what we think the world really is shapes our view of what the world ought to be.

Thus, to say that mass organizations gather around shared interests means that mass organizations gather around shared understandings of the world and shared understandings of what the world should be like. This is too general, of course. More particularly, mass organizations gather around an understanding of the world that has a wide level of agreement and doesn't require a very complicated explicit articulation to exist. In reality, mass organizations do have very complicated understandings of the world, but this is rarely, if ever, conscious or explicit. As an analogy, think about catching a baseball. Catching a baseball involves a complicated set of processes – watch the ball, where it currently is; predict where the ball will be; be conscious of where one's body is in space now; predict where one's body needs to be in order to catch the ball... this involves data coming into the body and brain, data being sorted into relevant data (the speed of the ball, the direction of the

wind) and irrelevant data (the color of the sky, the shouts of other people watching), being processed into information with decisions and estimates getting made, instructions going back to muscles. And in the meantime, one keeps breathing, one's heart still beats... All of this happens, and little of it happens consciously as a result of direct decisions. Humans make history but not in an immediately conscious manner; this happens in much smaller scales than all of humanity, it includes individuals as well. The understandings of the current world and ideas about the future world and the decisions that people make as part of their participation in mass organizations are very complex, but few of them are conscious. To catch a baseball does not require knowledge of any of the above processes. Likewise to be part of a mass organization does not require explicit awareness of the value systems and complex mental work that goes on as part of being part of the mass organization.

The shared understanding that people have of the world as they group into mass organizations are often general in the sense of wanting things like fairness and justice and happiness, or having more control over life. These things are subject to a huge variety of interpretations, including contradictory interpretations. More than generality, some people in mass organizations tend to be involved around localized and specific concerns: "I want this particular problem in my particular workplace to be alleviated and being part of the organization is a way to help make this so." Sometimes involvement is about anger more than a vision of alternative: "I am outraged at this problem, it is unacceptable, so I will be part of this organization who accepts my outrage and will act on this problem." Other people are involved for more abstract, and, in my view, better reasons: "The problems I have will only be solved through collective means; I want all of us to have more power so that all of us can have better lives; I will not have the better life I want unless all of us have more power." All of these sorts of reasons and others can co-exist and people often change their minds. People are complicated, contradictory, and dynamic.

Mass organizations do not just gather people around shared understandings as they currently exist. Mass organizations also shape the understandings of the people they involve. To put it another way: mass organizations are made of people. Mass organizations are people who come together around shared understandings of how the world is and ought to be. In mass organizations, people take action together on the world as it is, motivated by understandings of how the world ought to be. In their interactions with each other and through their experiences of collective action, people's

understandings of the world as it is and as it should be can develop and change. To make a long story short: shared interests are in part made through mass organizations. As such, we should orient toward both shared interests as they currently exist and toward shared interests as we want to make them become. This is a balancing act, but we need both. To orient only toward what we wish to see happen is to have no vision of transition from the unacceptable present to the needed future. To orient only toward current interests is to pander and, perhaps, reinforce, elements of the present which continue to delay or deflect progress toward our needed future.

Shared interests are in part made by mass organizations in their activity. People often do not maintain one perspective which stays the same before they join an organization, while they join an organization, and while they participate in the organization's activities and struggles. People change across those moments. So if people currently do not have radical ideas it does not mean that they will not.

We need to have a rich and dynamic understanding of "interests." People often think mass organizations gather together around "economic" interests, by which they mean "more money" and similar things. That's not the case. People gather together in mass organizations because of their outlooks on the world. Above all, for people to engage in combative behavior in mass organizations, they do not simply want lower rent or more money. They want value-laden things, like more time with family, more respect, a sense of dignity. These often translate into economic costs for employers. But fundamentally, mass organizations of the working class, at least to the degree that they matter for radicals, are about the ways in which the capitalist economy forecloses human possibility. (Of course, mass organizations can sometimes be conservative in their outlook and in their effects: seeking or achieving only a different allocation of the foreclosure of human possibility, or to expand one group's possibilities at the expense of another group's possibilities.) The marxist writer E.P. Thompson put the point well: "The injury which advanced industrial capitalism did, and which the market society did, was to define human relations as being primarily economic." Above all "the injury [that capitalism inflicts] is in defining [humanity] as 'economic' at all." Working class people in struggle and in mass organization "desire, fitfully, not only direct economic satisfactions, but also to throw off this grotesque 'economic' disguise which capitalism imposes upon them, and to resume a human shape." The term "direct economic satisfactions" might be better put as "narrowly economic satisfactions."

These two impulses, toward “direct economic satisfactions” and toward throwing off, or at least, resisting, the grotesque economic guise into which capitalism casts human life, both exist within mass organizations. Mass organizations take actions around both of these aspects of human life under capitalism – not in the same way or to the same degree, of course; this varies by circumstance and location. Furthermore, in some cases, mass organizations can play a role in furthering the reduction of human life to narrowly (capitalist) economic forms, reinforcing the grotesque economic guise or at least abandoning objections to it in favor of more money. For example, in contract negotiation, a union might be forced to or choose to abandon a demand for safer staffing levels and more control over hours in order to get higher rates of pay. Or, there is sometimes an “obey now, grieve later” mentality which argues against fighting major injustices on the job when they occur in order to obey the law and prevent consequences. Mass organizations face tremendous pressures to behave in this way. Those pressures can be contested, however, to at least some degree. But if our perspective on mass organizations concedes too much ground to a narrowly economic perspective – if we allow the money economy to predominate too much over the moral economy – we will have less to contribute toward pushing mass organizations away from exchanging more “directly economic satisfactions” in return for less efforts at pushing back the grotesque economic guise capitalism pushes onto our lives.

Failure to recognize that both of these elements exist in mass organizations is a failure to recognize that, in the words of the marxist writer Raymond Williams, “Practical consciousness” which is to say, the actual consciousness of the working class under capitalism, “is almost always different from official consciousness (...) practical consciousness is what is actually being lived, and not only what is thought is being lived. Yet the actual alternative to the received and produced fixed forms,” that is, to the official version of working class consciousness which tend to privilege directly economic satisfactions over opposition to the reduction of our lives to economic factors and capitalist ideology which encourages this reduction, “is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange. Its relations with the already articulate and defined are then exceptionally complex.” As noted above, mass organizations are people grouped together around complicated understandings that are often not *consciously* complicated. These understandings overlap with, reinforce, contradict, and escape official working class ideology and capitalist ideology. Above all, these differences co-exist dynamically in the working class and in mass

organizations. Mass organizations are both a product of and a shaping factor in these understandings.

Where Do Radicals Come From?

It may seem strange or simply dishonest to say that mass organizations express an interest in ending the grotesque reduction of human lives to a narrow economic calculus. In fact, though, many of us who see ourselves as radical have experienced this interest in action. That is, we have been part of moments where people have opposed aspects of life under capitalism in ways which begin to open onto the reduction of our lives to simply salable labor power.

A friend of mine talks about how his union has won grievances that apply to large numbers of workers, and the union officials have totaled up the dollar value of this grievance per person and said “look at this massive sum of money we have won from the employer!” This is true in a sense but it’s misleading: a grievance spread across 3,000 workers may add up \$150,000 but that is only fifty dollars per worker, which sounds very different. It’s understandable why organizations will want to talk in large numbers like that, it sounds more inspiring.

Ultimately, though, for many of us who are committed to struggle at some level, the main sources of inspiration are not dollar amounts. The things that have gotten us fired up and kept us going are harder to quantify, mostly respect and dignity issues and workplace control issues. Those indignities have been really intolerable so we feel strongly a gut-level need to fight on them, and the aftermath that we carry with us is more than the experiences of the fight and the relationships we built in the process—it is more than the contents of the win. And when we do get fired up about the contents of the win it’s usually mixed and it’s usually about management having to eat crow more than it’s like “work is fine now” because work *isn’t* fine. That is: we are motivated more by opposition to the grotesque reduction of our lives to a narrow form economy and by attempts to limit this reduction, as well as the experiences of the fight and the relationships we build during it, than we are motivated by a desire for more goods and greater amounts of narrowly economic satisfactions.

We don’t really want money in exchange for our time and for the horribleness of being at work and being bossed around. We sometimes settle for that, and are sometimes asked to and sometimes the other side will raise

the amount of money to get the settlement but... The equivalency in that exchange is a false one, the quid pro quo (“this for that”) doesn’t make quid (“this”) and quo (“that”) identical. Even if they’re rendered monetarily equal they’re not **really** equal. The employer, and more broadly the employing class, can be made to want to give money instead of our other demands, and there’s a reason why they want that.

What we really want is not the equivalent of our demand in money because what we **really** want is not really representable in monetary terms. You can’t buy what we really want, even if we might be willing to agree to undergo this shit for a sum of money, but that doesn’t really mean that the undergoing and the money are truly equivalent. There’s an element of this sensibility in every movie and TV show whenever someone shouts all melodramatically “I don’t want your dirty money, I want XYZ that I want!” There’s a fiction in some of the laws that cover injuries and that cover work and workplaces, about this equivalency that isn’t really an equivalency, the idea of being ‘made whole’ via being given a certain amount of money. We reject that, we’re not going to be made whole by more money — we’ll take the money if that’s our only option, but that’s not really what we want. Those of us who reject this capitalist world, many of us come to this understanding through things we’ve read. Experiencing groups of workers in action who share this rejection – however momentarily and however unclear it is articulated – is incredibly powerful, even for people who already thought this. And many mass struggles and mass organizations have this at least temporary recognition that the equivalency at the heart of capitalism – money for labor time – is a false one and a rip-off. A mass organization inscribing on its banner “abolish the wage system” can and should be a commitment to this perspective, a commitment to proceeding in mass struggle in a way that spreads this recognition among workers and which aims eventually to end capitalism.

What is a Fair Day’s Wage, Anyway?

The line from the IWW Preamble that rejects “fair” wages in favor of abolishing the wage system is an almost exact quote from Marx’s Value, Price, and Profit. The passage from Value, Price, and Profit that the IWW Preamble quotes is worth looking at closely. Marx wrote that “struggles for the standard of wages are incidents inseparable from the whole wages system, that in 99 cases out of 100 their efforts at raising wages are only efforts at maintaining the given value of labour, and that the necessity of debating their price with the capitalist is inherent to their condition of having to sell

themselves as commodities.” This means two important things. First of all, capitalism will always involve conflict between workers and employers. Secondly, these conflicts will usually revolve around fighting against continued lowering of wages, worsening of conditions, and layoffs. That makes attempts to achieve or maintain “fair wages” more likely.

Marx continues, saying that “[t]he working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights incessantly springing up from the never ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market.” Marx adds later in this piece that “Trades Unions work well as centers of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system.”

That is to say, fights about limiting the effects of capitalism are limited fights if they don’t become fights to end capitalism. Organizations that fight for “fair wages” are organizations that seek to limit what Marx calls “the encroachments of capital.” These organizations and these fights have important potentials but they are unavoidably limited unless they come to recognize the need to end capitalism and take steps to act on this need. This is why Marx argues that instead of being “exclusively absorbed in (...) unavoidable guerilla fights” with capitalists, workers need to consciously organize toward ending capitalism: “Instead of the conservative motto: ‘A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!’ they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: ‘Abolition of the wages system!’” Readers will no doubt see that that this is almost exactly the same line as the IWW Preamble, except the Preamble says “we” instead of Marx’s “they,” because the IWW was a working class organization as opposed to Marx’s position outside the working class.

This brings us to the issue of a fair wage. What is a “fair” wage? “A fair wage” is a contradiction in terms, like “deserved abuse” or “good injustice.” In capitalism, people can’t get many things we want and need unless we have money. There are really only two basic ways to get money: hire someone to

produce something which you try to sell for a profit, or get hired by someone to produce something which they will try to sell for a profit. This is why no wages under capitalism can be truly fair (and we can ask, would there be wages under any other, better society?). This is because the basic arrangement, the starting point for it all, is already unfair. Under capitalism we are required to spend our time working for other people – if working class people don't work for wages or find someone who works for wages who will share their wages with us – then we can't get money and so we can't get things we want and need. Furthermore, the stuff the capitalists sell: workers made it. The capitalists' profits generally come from the difference between the price they charge for the stuff we produce and what they paid us to produce the stuff. That difference is inherently unfair.

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

Liberal or progressive capitalists and their supporters recognize that capitalists overall will be better off if there is a balance between the short term interests and profits of individual capitalists and the long term needs and interests of the capitalist class. This leads these progressives to call for fair wages. Capitalist "fair wages" – and really, would there be wages under any economic system other than capitalism? – means that individuals get paid enough so we can support ourselves in order to keep on working. In the long term, "a fair day's wage" means that the working class gets paid enough

to keep having kids and raising them up so there continues to be a working class. From our perspective, as workers, of course we want more money for our work, not less. But we also need to recognize that higher wages and improving working conditions for some workers is often in the long-term interests of the capitalist class. This is why there are laws for minimum wage and health and safety. This also accounts for the motivation of some capitalists to support initiatives like universal health care– they want to ensure that there are healthy and productive workers available for the production of profit.

One of the most important dynamics in the capitalist system is that some sections of the capitalist class try to use the struggle of the working class to identify ways to reform the capitalist system in the long term interests of the capitalist class. That is, they use the working class's struggle to identify places where capitalism needs a course correction, ideas for what this course correction would look like, and as a club to push stubborn capitalists into line with the over all interests of the capitalist class. Fights for fair wages, even fighting in a very militant way, often play this stabilizing role – they whack the capitalists upside the head with the need to preserve a basic level of well-being for workers, for instance. This is one reason why many countries give legal recognition to unions.

Historical Note

The part of the IWW Preamble I have been focusing on did not appear in the first version of the preamble adopted at the IWW's founding convention in 1905. The line was adopted at the 4th convention in 1908, the convention which resulted in the group around Daniel DeLeon leaving the organization. That convention added a whole new paragraph to the Preamble, as follows: Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wages for a fair day's work,' we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system.' It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the every-day struggle with the 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. That convention also replaced the line "between these two classes a struggle must go on until all the toilers come together on the political, as well as on the industrial field, and take and hold that which they produce by their labor through an economic organization of the working class, without affiliation with any political party" and with the line "between these two

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

Mottoes and Watchwords – Additional Material

This document is an appendix to a discussion paper I wrote called Mottoes and Watchwords. A variety of material shaped Mottoes and Watchwords. Some of that material is included in this document.

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Mottoes and Watchwords has other sources which are not included in this document. For several years the Industrial Worker newspaper has run a column called Workers Power. Some of the material in this document first appeared in Workers Power. Many of the columns that have most influenced my thinking are available in a pamphlet put out by some members of Twin Cities IWW called “Weakening The Dam.” Contact the Twin Cities IWW if you want a copy.

Mottoes and Watchwords arose in part out of discussions around a pamphlet called “Direct Unionism.” That pamphlet never quite became what the people involved wanted it to be and at the present it has not been published. The conversations around it were hugely important for those of us who had them, and it’d be good if the paper saw the light of day in order to provoke conversation. Direct Unionism is online at <http://zinelibrary.info/direct-unionism-discussion-paper>

I’m an editor and occasional contributor to a blog called Recomposition. Recomposition is written by seven people who met through involvement in the IWW. We set up that blog to reprint things we’ve written

and things we've read and liked. Most of the stuff on there has been at least an indirect influence on where I'm coming from, including some stuff I wrote but even more so the stuff by other people. That blog is online at <http://recompositionblog.wordpress.com>

An additional reading that influenced the discussion of the idea of "fair wages" is Marx's discussion of English laws regulating working hours, in chapter ten of volume 1 of *Capital*. That section is about 20 pages long. It is worth reading closely whether or not people have read the rest of the book or the chapter. It's available online at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm#S6>

My sources for the historical note are the proceedings of the IWW's founding convention, which are worth reading closely in their entirety – <http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/unions/iww/1905/convention/ch09.htm> – and an early account of the IWW's history written by Vincent St. John – <http://www.iww.org/culture/official/SaintJohn1.shtml>.

An Orientation Toward Mass Work

<http://recompositionblog.wordpress.com/2010/10/24/an-orientation-toward-mass-work/>

It will take time for the working class as a whole to become able to liberate ourselves from capitalism. Our class has various internal problems which limit us and help keep us in our place collectively. It takes work to move us beyond these problems.

At a smaller scope – not the whole class, but smaller numbers of people within our class – and at a lower level – not the abolition of capitalism but smaller steps that move us somewhat closer to that – I think the process works similarly. We have internal problems and it takes time to move us forward.

I think it's important for anarchists to do work that fights directly against the state, capitalists, landlords and so on. I call it mass work. I'm not attached to the term, we can call it whatever. Mass work, and particularly anarchist involvement in mass work, is important for the process of changing people, at the class level and at a smaller level.

In anarchist involvement in mass work, it's important that we keep sight of both our need to be effective in the mass work, and of our political goals in the short term and the long term. In order to be effective in this work politically, anarchists have to be decent at doing the organizing work. If we're not good at and experienced in organizing then we won't be taken seriously by people involved in struggles. On the other hand, if all we do is build struggles and don't build relationships and spread ideas then we are little different from non-radical supporters of working class struggles. We have to

strike a balance between these two related but different priorities: we're not just about working class victory in struggles in the short term. We're about a long term and a bigger picture.

I think it's crucial that anarchists be involved with mass work in ways that place us in relationship with people who are having specific experiences. When people collectively fight the powers over our lives, we do various things. For instance, in workplace struggles we discuss and make decisions about tactics and strategy, we march on the boss, we walk off the job, and so on. There are at least two elements of this – running our own affairs and standing up to people over us. These are related but not identical. There are various results that follow from these activities. Experiences of running our own lives can help people have more confidence, more skills, and more of a taste for running our own lives in a way that makes it more intolerable when we don't run our own lives. Experiences of collective conflict with people in power over us can also help us get more confidence in ourselves and other members of our class, help us get more of a sense that collective action is the way to solve our problems, and it can deepen our sense of opposition to the power over us.

Among the things these two things have in common in the most general sense is that both of them have the potential to radicalize or further radicalize the people who experience them, particularly if they haven't experienced them much before. It's not guaranteed that these experiences will radicalize people, though, and it's not guaranteed what conclusions people will draw. I think this is part of why it's particularly important for anarchists to be involved in struggles in ways that place us in relation to people who are having these experiences, particularly if they haven't had these experiences before or haven't had them much. If we're placed in ways that put us in relationship with people having these experiences we can shape the ways that these transformative experiences play out. We can potentially make them more transformative and try to make it more likely that they eventually become anarchists in response to these experiences. Finally, if we are involved in experiences that change people in the way that I suggest and we are successful, we will have more anarchist comrades to work with. These comrades will have skills and experiences from their experiences of mass work which will be useful in building anarchist organizations. What's more, these comrades becoming anarchists through working class struggles, they will have relationships with other people involved in the struggles, making the process more effective.

Two bits I didn't know how to fit in to the body of Mottoes and Watchwords:

1. People are not made radicals (in a meaningful, non-armchair way) head first, at least not all are and those who are made head first often have to have their feet and guts and hearts catch up. Many people are made communists first below the neck, and their ideas catch up. There is a heat that is generated by struggles, and the closeness of a struggle to the heart of one's social position/social existence, the higher one's potential to experience this heat. I think even more so when one is in the fight because one has a direct/material/economic stake in it, and deep human ties to people who have such a stake in it. Standing in solidarity with someone else's workplace action is great and transformative. Taking action on one's own job can be even more so - at least the first few times anyway. About struggles transforming people... it's a mistake (one I used to make all the time) to just leave it to the struggle alone to change people. Struggle is a necessary raw material, but not a sufficient one. Radicals have to relate to nonradical people who experience struggles, to make sure the right lessons happen (for the radicals too). It also seems to me that at levels much smaller in scale than insurrection, we can create these situations. We can build walkouts and other job actions and strikes. We build them in terms and conditions not of our choosing, but we can build them. This to my mind is what radicals should be doing.

2. In organizing people are held back by fear or futility or both. I don't think there's any real correlation between political ideology and getting over fear and futility, I think it's something else. I think a lot of people on the left are sometimes an organized voice of futility when it comes to projects like some of ours and to some extent the a response to fear, building to a point where stuff more like I'd call real organizing won't feel too frightening/futile. I also think that to some extent the insurrectionary anarchist milieu is a voice against fear and futility to a limited extent -- with their whole "ATTACK!" thing. I think this is a lot less a matter of theory than it is an expression of where they're at otherwise. I wrote a thing for ideas and action using this idea from Raymond Williams called a "structure of feeling," but it got held up and now won't be appearing and is irrelevant now (it was in the immediate aftermath of the shootings in Arizona), I'm gonna chop it up and put some of it as a blog post, I think some of that idea could be helpful -- there's the whole Glaberman "action precedes consciousness" thing, which I agree with, but I think it's really more like a process of action-then-consciousness-then-action-then-consciousness with tiny improvements each time, and I think "consciousness" is at least as much or more about gut level impulses and vague terms like right and wrong and fairness and justice (terms that are so vague that they're almost meaningless in terms of their idea content but which still express people's deeply held emotional responses to their world).

In terms of people in anarchist circles who are in the grip of fear and futility, I think they're not going to be talked out of it, no more than anyone is, some of those cats just aren't believers right now. The apparent ideological agreement we may have with them is confusing but is only somewhat relevant, if they're not in the same place in terms of lived outlook/emotional orientation.

A Fair Day's Wages For A Fair Day's Work

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/05/07.htm> and

Friedrich Engels, "A Fair Day's Wages For A Fair Day's Work"

This has now been the motto of the English working-class movement for the last fifty years. It did good service in the time of the rising Trades Unions after the repeal of the infamous Combination Laws in 1824 [1]; it did still better service in the time of the glorious Chartist movement, when the English workmen marched at the head of the European working class. But times are moving on, and a good many things which were desirable and necessary fifty, and even thirty years ago, are now antiquated and would be completely out of place. Does the old, time-honoured watchword too belong to them?

A fair day's wages for a fair day's work? But what is a fair day's wages, and what is a fair day's work? How are they determined by the laws under which modern society exists and develops itself? For an answer to this we must not apply to the science of morals or of law and equity, nor to any sentimental feeling of humanity, justice, or even charity. What is morally fair, what is even fair in law, may be far from being socially fair. Social fairness or unfairness is decided by one science alone — the science which deals with the material facts of production and exchange, the science of political economy.

Now what does political economy call a fair day's wages and a fair day's work? Simply the rate of wages and the length and intensity of a day's work which are determined by competition of employer and employed in the open market. And what are they, when thus determined?

A fair day's wages, under normal conditions, is the sum required to procure to the labourer the means of existence necessary, according to the standard of life of his station and country' to keep himself in working order and to propagate his race. The actual rate of wages, with the fluctuations of trade, may be sometimes above, sometimes below this rate; but, under fair conditions, that rate ought to be the average of all oscillations.

A fair day's work is that length of working day and that intensity of actual work which expends one day's full working power of the workman

without encroaching upon his capacity for the same amount of work for the next and following days.

The transaction, then, may be thus described — the workman gives to the Capitalist his full day's working power; that is, so much of it as he can give without rendering impossible the continuous repetition of the transaction. In exchange he receives just as much, and no more, of the necessaries of life as is required to keep up the repetition of the same bargain every day. The workman gives as much, the Capitalist gives as little, as the nature of the bargain will admit. This is a very peculiar sort of fairness.

But let us look a little deeper into the matter. As, according to political economists, wages and working days are fixed by competition, fairness seems to require that both sides should have the same fair start on equal terms. But that is not the case. The Capitalist, if he cannot agree with the Labourer, can afford to wait, and live upon his capital. The workman cannot. He has but wages to live upon, and must therefore take work when, where, and at what terms he can get it. The workman has no fair start. He is fearfully handicapped by hunger. Yet, according to the political economy of the Capitalist class, that is the very pink of fairness.

But this is a mere trifle. The application of mechanical power and machinery to new trades, and the extension and improvements of machinery in trades already subjected to it, keep turning out of work more and more "hands"; and they do so at a far quicker rate than that at which these superseded "hands" can be absorbed by, and find employment in, the manufactures of the country. These superseded "hands" form a real industrial army of reserve for the use of Capital. If trade is bad they may starve, beg, steal, or go to the workhouse [2]; if trade is good they are ready at hand to expand production; and until the very last man, woman, or child of this army of reserve shall have found work — which happens in times of frantic over-production alone — until then will its competition keep down wages, and by its existence alone strengthen the power of Capital in its struggle with Labour. In the race with Capital, Labour is not only handicapped, it has to drag a cannon-ball riveted to its foot. Yet that is fair according to Capitalist political economy.

But let us inquire out of what fund does Capital pay these very fair wages? Out of capital, of course. But capital produces no' value. Labour is, besides the earth, the only source of wealth; capital itself is nothing but the stored-up produce of labour. So that the wages of Labour are paid out of labour, and the working man is paid out of his own produce. According to what we may call common fairness, the wages of the labourer ought to consist in the produce of his labour. But that would not be fair according to political economy. On the contrary, the produce of the workman's labour

goes to the Capitalist, and the workman gets out of it no more than the bare necessities of life. And thus the end of this uncommonly "fair" race of competition is that the produce of the labour of those who do work, gets unavoidably accumulated in the hands of those that do not work, and becomes in their hands the most powerful means to enslave the very men who produced it.

A fair day's wages for a fair day's work! A good deal might be said about the fair day's work too, the fairness of which is perfectly on a par with that of the wages. But that we must leave for another occasion. From what has been stated it is pretty clear that the old watchword has lived its day, and will hardly hold water nowadays. The fairness of political economy, such as it truly lays down the laws which rule actual society, that fairness is all on one side — on that of Capital. Let, then, the old motto be buried for ever and replaced by another:

Possession of the Means of Work —
Raw Material, Factories, Machinery —
By the Working People Themselves.

Notes

1 On June 21, 1824, under mass pressure, Parliament repealed the ban on the trade unions by adopting "An Act to repeal the Laws relative to the Combination of Workmen, and for other Purposes therein mentioned" (the reference is to the repeal of "An Act to prevent unlawful Combinations of Workmen 12th July 1799"). However, in 1825 it passed a Bill on workers' combinations ("An Act to repeal the Laws relating to the Combination of Workmen, and to make other Provisions in lieu thereof 6th July 1825") which, while confirming the repeal of the ban on the trade unions, at the same time greatly restricted their activity. In particular, mere agitation for workers to join unions and take part in strikes was regarded as "compulsion" and "violence" and punished as a crime. p. 376

2 The Poor Law adopted in England in 1834 provided for only one form of relief for the able-bodied poor workhouses with a prison-like regime in which the workers were engaged in unproductive, monotonous and exhausting labour. The people called the workhouses "Bastilles for the poor".

The Wages System

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/05/21.htm>

Friedrich Engels, "The Wages System"

In a previous article we examined the time-honoured motto, "A fair day's wages for a fair day's work", and came to the conclusion that the fairest day's wages under present social conditions is necessarily tantamount to the

very unfairest division of the workman's produce, the greater portion of that produce going into the capitalist's pocket, and the workman having to put up with just as much as will enable him to keep himself in working order and to propagate his race.

This is a law of political economy, or, in other words, a law of the present economical organisation of society, which is more powerful than all the Common and Statute Law of England put together, the Court of Chancery [1] included. While society is divided into two opposing classes -- on the one hand, the capitalists, monopolisers of the whole of the means of production, land, raw materials, machinery; on the other hand, labourers, working people deprived of all property in the means of production, owners of nothing but their own working power; while this social organisation exists the law of wages will remain all-powerful, and will every day afresh rivet the chains by which the working man is made the slave of his own produce -- monopolised by the capitalist.

The Trades Unions of this country have now for nearly sixty years fought against this law -- with what result? Have they succeeded in freeing the working class from the bondage in which capital -- the produce of its own hands -- holds it? Have they enabled a single section of the working class to rise above the situation of wages-slaves, to become owners of their own means of production, of the raw materials, tools, machinery required in their trade, and thus to become the owners of the produce of their own labour? It is well known that not only they have not done so but that they never tried.

Far be it from us to say that Trades Unions are of no use because they have not done that. On the contrary, Trades Unions in England, as well as in every other manufacturing country, are a necessity for the working classes in their struggle against capital. The average rate of wages is equal to the sum of necessaries sufficient to keep up the race of workmen in a certain country according to the standard of life habitual in that country. That standard of life may be very different for different classes of workmen. The great merit of Trades Unions, in their struggle to keep up the rate of wages and to reduce working hours, is that they tend to keep up and to raise the standard of life. There are many trades in the East-end of London whose labour is not more skilled and quite as hard as that of bricklayers and bricklayers' labourers, yet they hardly earn half the wages of these. Why? Simply because a powerful organisation enables the one set to maintain a comparatively high standard of life as the rule by which their wages are measured; while the other set, disorganised and powerless, have to submit not only to unavoidable but also to arbitrary encroachments of their employers: their standard of life is gradually reduced, they learn how to live on less and less wages, and their

wages naturally fall to that level which they themselves have learnt to accept as sufficient.

The law of wages, then, is not one which draws a hard and fast line. It is not inexorable with certain limits. There is at every time (great depression excepted) for every trade a certain latitude within which the rate of wages may be modified by the results of the struggle between the two contending parties. Wages in every case are fixed by a bargain, and in a bargain he who resists longest and best has the greatest chance of getting more than his due. If the isolated workman tries to drive his bargain with the capitalist he is easily beaten and has to surrender at discretion, but if a whole trade of workmen form a powerful organisation, collect among themselves a fund to enable them to defy their employers if need be, and thus become enabled to treat with these employers as a power, then, and then only, have they a chance to get even that pittance which, according to the economical constitution of present society, may be called a fair day's wages for a fair day's work.

The law of wages is not upset by the struggles of Trades Unions. On the contrary, it is enforced by them. Without the means of resistance of the Trades Unions the labourer does not receive even what is his due according to the rules of the wages system. It is only with the fear of the Trades Union before his eyes that the capitalist can be made to part with the full market value of his labourer's working power. Do you want a proof? Look at the wages paid to the members of the large Trades Unions, and at the wages paid to the numberless small trades in that pool of stagnant misery, the East-end of London.

Thus the Trades Unions do not attack the wages system. But it is not the highness or lowness of wages which constitutes the economical degradation of the working class: this degradation is comprised in the fact that, instead of receiving for its labour the full produce of this labour, the working class has to be satisfied with a portion of its own produce called wages. The capitalist pockets the whole produce (paying the labourer out of it) because he is the owner of the means of labour. And, therefore, there is no real redemption for the working class until it becomes owner of all the means of work -- land, raw material, machinery, etc. -- and thereby also the owner of THE WHOLE OF THE PRODUCE OF ITS OWN LABOUR.

Notes

1. The Court of Chancery, or Court of Equity -- One of the high courts of England which after the judicial reform of 1873 became a division of the

High Court of Justice. The jurisdiction of the court, presided over by the Lord Chancellor, covered matters concerning inheritance, contractual obligations, joint-stock companies, etc. In a number of cases, the powers of this court overlapped those of other high courts. In counterbalance to the English common law accepted in other courts. The level proceedings at the Court of Chancery were conducted on the basis of the so-called law of equity.

The Struggle Between Capital and Labour and its Results

<http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/value-price-profit/ch03.htm#c14>

Excerpts from section 14 from *Value, Price, and Profit*, by Karl Marx

Periodical resistance on the part of the working men against a reduction of wages, and their periodical attempts at getting a rise of wages, are inseparable from the wages system (...) We can only say that, the limits of the working day being given, the maximum of profit corresponds to the physical minimum of wages; and that wages being given, the maximum of profit corresponds to such a prolongation of the working day as is compatible with the physical forces of the labourer. The maximum of profit is therefore limited by the physical minimum of wages and the physical maximum of the working day. It is evident that between the two limits of the maximum rate of profit and immense scale of variations is possible. The fixation of its actual degree is only settled by the continuous struggle between capital and labour, the capitalist constantly tending to reduce wages to their physical minimum, and to extend the working day to its physical maximum, while the working man constantly presses in the opposite direction.

The matter resolves itself into a question of the respective powers of the combatants. (...) As to the limits of the value of labour, its actual settlement always depends upon supply and demand, I mean the demand for labour on the part of capital, and the supply of labour by the working men. (...) Ricardo has justly remarked that machinery is in constant competition with labour, and can often be only introduced when the price of labour has reached a certain height, but the appliance of machinery is but one of the many methods for increasing the productive powers of labour. The very same development which makes common labour relatively redundant simplifies, on the other hand, skilled labour, and thus depreciates it.

The same law obtains in another form. With the development of the productive powers of labour the accumulation of capital will be accelerated, even despite a relatively high rate of wages. Hence, one might infer, as Adam Smith, in whose days modern industry was still in its infancy, did infer, that

the accelerated accumulation of capital must turn the balance in favour of the working man, by securing a growing demand for his labour. From this same standpoint many contemporary writers have wondered that English capital having grown in that last twenty years so much quicker than English population, wages should not have been more enhanced. But simultaneously with the progress of accumulation there takes place a progressive change in the composition of capital. That part of the aggregate capital which consists of fixed capital, machinery, raw materials, means of production in all possible forms, progressively increases as compared with the other part of capital, which is laid out in wages or in the purchase of labour. (...) the very development of modern industry must progressively turn the scale in favour of the capitalist against the working man, and that consequently the general tendency of capitalistic production is not to raise, but to sink the average standard of wages, or to push the value of labour more or less to its minimum limit. Such being the tendency of things in this system, is this saying that the working class ought to renounce their resistance against the encroachments of capital, and abandon their attempts at making the best of the occasional chances for their temporary improvement? If they did, they would be degraded to one level mass of broken wretches past salvation. I think I have shown that their struggles for the standard of wages are incidents inseparable from the whole wages system, that in 99 cases out of 100 their efforts at raising wages are only efforts at maintaining the given value of labour, and that the necessity of debating their price with the capitalist is inherent to their condition of having to sell themselves as commodities. By cowardly giving way in their everyday conflict with capital, they would certainly disqualify themselves for the initiating of any larger movement.

At the same time, and quite apart from the general servitude involved in the wages system, the working class ought not to exaggerate to themselves the ultimate working of these everyday struggles. They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of those effects; that they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction; that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady. They ought, therefore, not to be exclusively absorbed in these unavoidable guerilla fights incessantly springing up from the never ceasing encroachments of capital or changes of the market. They ought to understand that, with all the miseries it imposes upon them, the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for an economical reconstruction of society. Instead of the conservative motto: "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword: "Abolition of the wages system!"

(...) Trades Unions work well as centers of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerilla war against the effects of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organized forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system.

Selections from Workers Power

<http://forworkerspower.blogspot.com/2010/10/pinchpoint-target.html>

Pinchpoint Target

December 2008

Some people think the IWW should pour all of its resources into organizing in an industry which is particularly important to the economy, to maximize our impact on capitalism--I call this the "Pinchpoint Target" idea.

Pinchpoint Target is the idea that there's one key sector or a few key sectors of the economy where organized workers could shut down capitalism. This means workers in that sector or sectors have a certain level of objective power, at least potentially. For instance, if every dockworker in the United States went on strike the global economy would stop. Dockworker strikes stop an incredibly valuable amount of machinery and goods. Every minute of the strike costs the bosses of the world a great deal of money. This analysis is correct. It does not mean that the IWW should focus only organizing dockworkers.

The problem with Pinchpoint Target is that it takes a correct objective analysis of the economy--some sectors are more important to the global economy than others--and argues that the analysis should dictate organizational strategy. The mistake is that Pinchpoint Target says that we'll organize that key sector or sectors and then be able to end capitalism. That is, the idea is that workers in that sectors or sectors will lead the charge for everyone else.

There are at least three problems with this idea. One is that workers in other industries need unions too because their jobs also suck. Some of those workers are currently IWW members and not all of them can change jobs to some key industry. The IWW needs to support and train and develop those members too. To do otherwise would be undemocratic.

A second problem is that the current level of training, experience, and

dedication in the union is insufficient. The procedures for educating new members and developing a sense of Wobbly culture and community need to be better. I don't mean to put down the hard work of my fellow workers. I simply think that we still have a lot of work to do in this area. If we're talking about key sectors where we want to not only build unions but push forward revolutionary transformation then we will face tremendous repression. We have to be prepared for this repression. That means we have to develop better networks of solidarity and union infrastructure and a stronger Wobbly culture. The union busting we face when we organize image conscious restaurant chains or in the public sector is nowhere near as fierce as in manufacturing. We still have a hard time handling this in our campaigns. If we organize dockworkers or oil refinery workers the union busting we face will be much more intense than anything we have seen before. We need to get better at winning smaller campaigns in less important sectors of the economy before we charge up the mountain.

The level of repression which workers in pinchpoint industry face is an argument for not prioritizing those sectors for another reason. If workers in those industries are isolated, they will be more easily defeated. If organization and revolutionary consciousness is spread throughout the working class across different sectors then we will have a better chance at defeating that repression. If it's not, then the struggles in the pinchpoint sector or sectors will be more likely to lose--and the workers in other sectors may be less likely to unite with the workers in the pinchpoint sectors.

The experience of class struggle on the job can have a radicalizing effect. I've argued that we should organize in a way that maximizes this effect. This is important to counteract divisions between parts of our class. More important sectors of the economy are more likely to be well paid, and one response to major unrest is to improve conditions. The difference in income between the pinchpoint and nonpinchpoint workers can lead workers in the non-pinpoint sectors to be less disposed toward solidarity.

I want to close by saying that the Pinchpoint Target is motivated by a sense of urgency. The idea is that prioritizing one sector or some key sectors will move the abolition of the wage system along faster. That's a worthwhile goal and that impatience is totally understandable. The world is a bad place in many ways and it needs to change. I'm not convinced that the Pinchpoint Target will help us, but I respect and share the sense of urgency of the fellow workers who hold to this idea.

<http://forworkerspower.blogspot.com/2010/10/forget-about-industrial-power.html>

Forget About Industrial Power
September 2008

The old wobbly song “There Is Power In A Union” goes “There is power there is power in a band of working folks, When they stand hand in hand.” This is the basic idea of a union, strength in numbers. We're lacking in the numbers department in the IWW today. So our power is small, at least in one important sense. We need to recognize this if we're going to grow quickly and efficiently, without cutting any corners in terms of member education and development

Some people in the IWW think we should organize big companies that dictate conditions for the rest of their industry because they have such a large share of the market. If we make changes at the industry or market leaders then we make change across the whole industry. That's true, and we should organize these companies (we should organize everywhere). But the reality is that our power is small compared to big companies.

More than that, our first priority right now should not be to make change for as many workers as possible across an industry. Our first priority right now should be to have members improve their own lives at work and to recruit other organizers out of our co-workers. That will build our pool of committed, capable organizers so that we can eventually have really enormous impacts for our whole class.

On the short term we should focus on small companies instead of big ones. We are tiny compared to a multinational company and so is our relative power. But compared to a small “mom-and-pop” grocery store or a locally owned restaurant with 20 employees, or a fast food franchise where the owned has 5 stores and 75 employees, we are huge. We have branches that are bigger than companies of that size. We can run picket lines and other actions against those companies which can really hurt them economically (as opposed to picketing, say, WalMart) because every shop is a huge portion of the company's total income. This will maximize the relative power of our branches and make for more winnable campaigns in a shorter time frame. Those wins will result in more members with greater organizing experience and higher morale. It might also reduce organizer burnout by giving us more victories to restore our spirits in the short term.

Of course, gains in smaller companies will be limited by the conditions in the industry which are mostly set by industry leaders. We'll have to explain this to the workers we organize and turn them into organizers dedicated to organizing their whole industry. The small shops will provide us with a larger base and more concrete examples to work from as we turn to organizing larger companies in those industries.

Reply: Industrial Unionism is the IWW Strategy

By Patrick B

October 2008

While I don't think the Industrial Worker is the proper forum for debate over organizing strategy, the readers of the IW should be offered an alternative view to that presented by the September 2008 IW article entitled "Forget Industrial Power," by Fellow Worker Nate H. In the article he argues that the IWW should avoid placing organizing efforts in large companies because of our relative weak position and that organizing large companies is likely to create failure and burnout for our organizers.

The main disagreement I have with the argument is that it is a self-fulfilling prophesy. The more we believe we can't do something, the more that becomes a reality. We have refused to take on large targets for over 40 years. As a result we have grown little. It was only when the IWW took on Borders in 1996 and Starbucks in 2004, both large companies, that we saw significant increases in membership and activity.

Furthermore, the argument is grounded in circular logic. Acquiring big resources only comes after we take on big targets. It is tantamount to saying "we need resources to organize big targets, but we can't get resources until we organize big targets." We've been saying this for decades. Where has it gotten us?

The early IWW was not afraid of any targets. They took on companies and industries thousands of times larger (review the copper mine organizing in Arizona or the Textile companies in New England for example) than their membership and made not only changes for the workers of the industry but also for the labor movement as a whole.

The article further contends that we should focus our organizer recruitment

at the small workplaces of our current membership. The problem with this argument is that it assumes we would not acquire organizers at large targets, which is, of course, likely. IWW-style

organizing anywhere creates new organizers out of workers. The argument also completely ignores the good possibility that the quality of the organizers recruited from large targets may be better. Because of the larger size, there is a larger pool of talent to draw from. He also believes we should focus on small companies instead of big ones. The grounding for this is that we could potentially build enough power on the backs of small capitalists to eventually fight the large businessmen. While I agree with FW H that we should not solely focus on large companies, I think focusing on small ones is just as problematic, and may even require more time and energy than a large company and may be more prone to failure.

Businesses act in predictable ways if the basic economic laws are given consideration. Occasionally these laws are broken, or a business owner will act irrationally, or outside agencies (i.e. Government) will interfere with economic laws, but the vast majority of businesses comply and therefore act predictably to internal and external pressures (labor rebellion, etc.). If we apply the pressure of unionism to small companies than we should be able to predict, given a long enough time frame, the effects on the company, the industry, or the economy as a whole.

Instead of providing power for the IWW, organizing small companies is likely to lead to eventual weakening of our union. Smaller companies are required to compete with the big companies, who set industrial standards, to survive. Any hindrance to this is likely to either limit what we can gain from employers or entirely push the small shops out of business. The larger companies will acquire the customer-base left by the exterminated businesses, the Wobblies will be out of work, and capitalism's wheels keep on turning. The amount of real economic pressure we could apply to small businesses is therefore very little.

Organizing small companies is a bigger drain on resources. Even the big business unions, with extensive resources, have had trouble organizing the little shops. They are just too hard to organize.

However, I will not argue that the best alternative is organizing one large company either. On a long enough timeline, the end result of focusing on one large company will reflect that of the smaller ones (look at the Teamster

organizing in the Nineties). Large companies can go out of business like any other and when they do, their competitors in the industry will assume their former market share.

What's the alternative? The answer to the problem of limited resources, unemployment prevention, and organizer burnout is to organize industrially. By organizing industrially, we have a large pool of talent to draw from that is often limited in both small and some large companies. We can choose where in the industry to place emphasis to prevent firings and ensure negotiating leverage.

Moreover, taking on an entire industry eliminates the ubiquitous problem in small companies of high turnover. Turnover creates extra stress for organizers and affords little negotiating leverage to the workers. When the pros and cons are carefully considered, organizing industrially is actually much more likely to yield success with less effort than organizing small companies or single large companies. While the endeavor may seem intimidating, industrial strategy is easier and more appropriate for our current resources.

Often times, there is a tendency to fear big targets because of the size of the employment is intimidating. I used to think this way. But a close friend and fellow worker once told me I was looking at it from a "glass-is-half-empty" point of view. He said, Don't think of all those workers as a barrier, think of it as an opportunity.

A workplace or local industry of 1000 workers should not be viewed as "1000 members until success," but rather "this industry offers us potentially 1000 new members." That optimism never left me. I think if it was adopted by more Wobblies, we would grow significantly.

Response to "Response to Industrial Unionism is the IWW Strategy"
October 2008

I thank FW B for taking the time to reply to my column. I disagree with FW B that the Industrial worker is not a proper forum for debate over organizing strategy. That's the biggest disagreement we have, I think.

I argued that we should focus on small targets, because we can have more victories at small targets because our branches are bigger relative to small

companies. That way we can win things more quickly and make more organizers by having inspiring victories. I think inspiring victories are important for making organizers, and making more organizers is one of the three most important tasks facing the IWW right now. (The other two are retaining organizers and getting better at organizing.)

The heart of my column, the bit I feel most strongly about, is this pair of sentences: "Our first priority right now should be to have members improve their own lives at work and to recruit other organizers out of our co-workers. That will build our pool of committed, capable organizers so that we can eventually have really enormous impacts for our whole class." I think FW B and I agree on this.

FW B points out that this can also be done by targeting big companies and industry-wide campaigns. He points to the Starbucks campaign as an example. The Starbucks campaign is important and impressive. It's made more organizers for our union and that's awesome. FW B is absolutely right and this is a gap in my column's argument.

All of that said, I still think that a new GMB that is looking for a first organizing target is better off trying to organize a smaller shop. The smaller the shop, the less resources management has to dump into union-busting and the more of their business we can shut down with pickets and other actions given our currently small numbers.

Let me put it this way. Let's say hypothetically that three new branches form in three different counties in the great state of Minnesota and they host a joint organizer training. One says "we have a member who works at Wal-Mart so we're targeting all the Wal-Marts in our county." The second says "we have a member who works at a local magnet factory with 50 workers so we're targeting that." The third says "we haven't made up our mind yet - we have Walmarts here and we have a magnet factory with 50 workers, and we have one member at each."

If someone from the third branch asked my advice, I would urge them to follow the lead of the second branch, not the first. I would wish the first branch nothing but success and they would certainly deserve support. But would I predict that at least in the short term the second branch is more likely to succeed and to have more of the victories necessary for sustaining organizers.

Of course, I would be happy to be proven wrong by more victories and organizer recruitment within really big campaigns.

<http://forworkerspower.blogspot.com/2010/10/what-does-iww-do.html>

What Does the IWW Do?

November 2008

People become IWW members in two ways. Some people join because of ideology and people join because of the union's activity. Along the same lines, the IWW does two main things. First, it helps workers solve problems at work by helping them organize. Second, it transforms people. That is, the IWW improves some people's lives on the job and radicalizes some people through collective action alongside discussion. In doing so it gives them practical skills and confidence to do things. Another way to put this is as a pair of principles: building industrial power and building organizers.

We need room for both of these principles. Our organizing should radicalize workers. And our organizing should make people who think of themselves as radicals more effective in fighting bosses and capitalists.

In practice these principles are closely related. For instance the NYC warehouse campaign really got running because of the hard work and dedication of a handful of IWW members. This is basically true across the board for the IWW. The bulk of the work of maintaining and building the union rests on a relatively small percentage of IWW members. In this we're like most unions I think. So, we build industrial power by using our current organizers. These principles work together.

While these principles overlap, it can be useful to think about them separately sometimes. This gives us two different ways to evaluate success and set priorities. Let's say in one shop we win an awesome contract for 100 people and develop no members of that shop into class conscious workers and active IWW members and organizers. Let's say in another shop we lose and the campaign dissipates. But five people who were already IWW members become better organizers and five new members join from the shop and become organizers. The first hypothetical is better if our main priority is industrial power. The second is better if our priority is developing organizers.

Personally I think if someone only cares about one or the other principle then

the IWW may be the wrong group for them, depending on what industry they work in and what role they want to play. If someone wants to organize and all they care about is industrial power, other unions do a lot better at building industrial power most of the time. If someone wants to organize in a way that only focuses on developing class consciousness I think there are groups that do a better job than us. However, the IWW is one of the only groups I know that does both at the same time and is reasonably good at both.

While both of these principles are important, my personal view is that right now the priority for the IWW should be to develop organizers. This doesn't mean neglecting industrial power, because we can only meaningfully develop organizers by aiming at industrial power. But the reality is that the IWW relies too much on people who joined with their vision and values already formed and their skills already developed. Plus, turnover in the IWW is far too high. We need to get better at creating organizers, improving organizers over time, and retaining organizers for the long haul. This is a key part of building the One Big Union and ultimately abolishing the wage system.

<http://forworkerspower.blogspot.com/2010/10/informal-workgroups.html>

Informal Workgroups

By M. Jones

December 2007

In every workplace throughout all of history, workers have come together and worked together for their common interests. This takes many forms. Sometimes its at the level of two workers next to each other in cubicles who support each other and make work less miserable by being able to laugh with one another; other times it forms into a group that encompasses enough people that they can informally control the speed of production and the work conditions that surround them; and sometimes it grows into a union a group of workers within a shop, ideally across and industry who can directly exercise power in relation to the boss. In whichever form it takes it is significant. In each form it challenges the isolation that exists in other aspects of our lives as workers. In these relationships we begin to see the possibilities of what it means to take collective action and what it means to control the means of production. We are empowered by these relationships, and where we can build on them we can have success and begin to make changes.

These bonds we form with our fellow workers are the basis of our

organization, the basis of Industrial Unionism and the basis of a working class movement. Where these bonds originate and where they are most intense is in our workplaces, where they come out of our day-to-day interactions and struggles.

The first two forms mentioned are incomplete. Little can be done if our work group remains isolated in a group of two or three; and if we begin to informally control production we still may be isolated within a larger company or industry. These have to be expanded through organization. But look at these small groups as the seeds, and the tiny cells within a larger muscle of organization (a muscle that must be constantly exercised).

Through organization these small work groups branch out, around an issue or as part of a campaign. They encompass other workers, get further defined through this organization, and identify workplace or industrial issues to struggle against. Again this often happens informally and we should not overlook it or believe that workers are not capable of acting outside of formal organization. Small informal actions are happening all over the place, and even in this context workers begin to see their power, but in small ways. It has to grow and it has to become formal in order to grow to a position of strength and push forward demands.

As the struggle grows it becomes more formal, the definition it gets is one of class. It moves from a group of friends or acquaintances that want to make things better on the job, to a group of workers making a demand on the boss and having an action to follow this demand up. In this action we must come together and confront things directly ourselves. This means not relying on a third party, on the government, a lawyer, or the press to enforce our demands, but doing it ourselves, with other workers inside our workplace and outside of it. This is direct action and is present in informal struggle and in formal struggle.

In this struggle we as a group are defined by our relationship to the boss and to production, in a way that is not possible when we act as individuals. This is when we become the working class, a group acting in its own interests.

We all identify ourselves as part of this group, the issue we have been organizing around now becomes one of the working class verse the employing class. And though these actions we begin to see what is possible, not just for ourselves and our families but also for our fellow workers, for our organization and for our union. Out of these small seeds, informal work

groups, organization, direct action, our class is defined. We cease to be individuals, left to the whims of the bosses and become a force that can push our own issues and agenda.

<http://forworkerspower.blogspot.com/2010/10/what-were-changing.html>

What We're Changing

By M. Jones

In our organizing we are trying to establish power on the job. This power can be seen and felt in different ways depending on the job. But what we want from our organizing is control over our day to day lives on the job, this control will come from the power we can establish through collective action.

The collective actions we take on the job change the conditions on that job; they change how we daily interact with our bosses and with each other. This results in a bettering of conditions. I believe old time Wobblies called this job conditioning. It comes out of workers collectively and directly confronting the boss on an issue, and sticking up for one another. It is done with or without a contract; often the contract is an impediment to actions that can condition the job.

One of my first experiences with this came on my first job out of high school, throwing boxes at UPS. The workers here, although only informally organized exerted strong control over the job, and had no fear in voicing their opinions to the boss. The workers rallied around one or two strong leaders on the job. These leaders were the first workers to extend a hand to me and the other fellow I got hired on with, these were the workers when there was an issue would between two other workers would get it worked out, and these were the workers who were the first (but not the only ones) to bring up an issue to the boss. These confrontations often happened on the post break discussion session, they were often loud and confrontational. In this I saw the first application of our power as workers, and what it meant to be organized. The result was we worked the pace we wanted, worked with who we wanted, and stuck up for on another. Eventually, this experience would culminate in a threatened strike sticking up for a fellow worker who was in danger of being fired.

When I moved on to another job, this one at a truck manufacturing plant, I found a much different situation. Workers did not condition the job in the same way. They did not stick up for each other. Moreover, the leadership that

had existed on the job at UPS did not exist here. The leadership that did exist was found in the “team lead” who often was a good leader and a company man. This of course led to workers following this person, falling in line, and not sticking together. In this situation our job conditions were much different. We were more at the mercy of the company. They had us out organized, and because of this we had no control over our daily lives on the job.

On my current job we are early on in a long process of organizing. One of the first tasks has been to get my fellow workers to take action together and to stick up for one another. Most of them are decent folks, willing to help each other out but with no experience of being organized. Most want to confront problems as individuals, thinking they may get a fair hearing from the boss. In small ways though, I can already see some changes, from a willingness to be critical of how things are handled to having each other's backs and helping each other out. These are some of the small changes that can lead to larger ones.

Job conditioning, I have learned is based on the small confrontations that happen everyday. When the boss comes out ready to tell us a decision he or she has made and is not confronted by workers as a group, they set the conditions for that day. If we workers confront them, stick up for one another, and lay out our demands for what we want, we set the conditions for that day. We are making a point with our action. The boss is learning their role. Workers are learning our power.

ANARCHO SYNDICALISM *
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**Nate Hawthorne takes on some of the contradictions of
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