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THE ORGANIZER



TOWARDS A UNION OF ORGANIZERS

AND

DULUTH IWW EDITORIAL
FROM 1913

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The Organizer is the blog of the Twin Cities General Membership Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Our goal with this blog is to publish news and info about our union, as well as be a resource for on-the-job work stories and perspectives on both the IWW and the wider situation and experience of working class people in the Twin Cities.

We welcome leads, ideas for stories, reviews and original writing. If interested please email us: theorganizertc@gmail.com

This article reflects the opinion of the author and not necessarily the opinion of any official part of the IWW.



gotten gains. He believes in any method that will close the mouth of the worker who insists on telling his fellow workers of the injustice of capitalism and shows them the way to organize so that some day they may come into their own.

“Men are all by nature honest.” What rot is this? The babies are honest because they are not old enough to steal and scheme and live from the toil of others. What cares the downtrodden slave whether some capitalist was born honest or a criminal? We know we are up against a criminal system that starves the workers, debauches the home and throws the child into the factory that profits may be wrung from its little hide. No one wants a monopoly of the street or the halls and we are here to say to this mental prostitute that he would last about as long as a snowball in hell anytime an I.W.W. meets him squarely to his face before the working class of Duluth or any other slave pen. The mental prostitute that penned the above is the hired slave who peddles the “Peace” talk while his cohorts are out with bludgeons, beating the workers to death because they dare to rebel against the rule of the master class of so-called FREE AMERICA. It’s a joke! Cut it out!

This editorial from 1913 attacks the capitalist press in Duluth for their biased coverage of the Dockworkers' strike. The workers were striking for safety equipment following the death of two ore-handlers, who were crushed by machinery on the job. Over 500 workers participated in the strike.

-Grace Parker

STRIKE IN DULUTH

Thursday, August 21, 1913

The strike of dockworkers and ore handlers in Duluth has so riled the mental prostitutes of the master class that these so-called editors of Free and Independent papers are beside themselves with rage and are spending tons of ink and miles of paper in their frenzied effort to stop the growth of the Industrial Union among the ore workers. The following is a small part of a lengthy editorial which appeared in the Duluth News-Tribune:

“No greater calamity can come to any community than to have the I.W.W. fastened upon it. It should be fought with every peaceful weapon. It should be met with counter appeals, with the wisdom of common sense and should not have a monopoly of either the street or ball as a debating ground.

Men are all by nature honest, inherently none want in moral sense and what is right and honest will prevail when the issue is squarely presented and courageously, frankly and openly presented.”

Who ever heard of a capitalist or any of their agents fighting any one who got in their way with “Peaceful Weapons”? It was a “peaceful weapon” used when a bunch of steel trust thugs captured Fellow Worker Frank Little and hid him away under guard in a farm house 35 miles from town. It is “peaceful weapons” that are being used in the clubbing of harvest hands in Minot and other places because they refuse to be gulled in by some more mental prostitutes who are offering on paper free rides about the city, ice cream guzzles, dances and bands of music, etc. All this for slaves who are wanted to work for their board. It was “peaceful weapons” that the masters used against the I.W.W. in San Diego, Fresno, Spokane and a thousand other places. Bah! It's to laugh. Peaceful Hell! No capitalist believes in peaceful methods. He believes in any method that will save his ill

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

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

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

Let's consider a few real life examples:

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



(outside of your union's bureaucratic methods), or even just check in with your coworkers.

2. You're a retail worker in a relatively small shop that is mostly composed of a group of conservative Christian workers, mostly white, male and anti-union. They have strong ties to management and many of them are actually related to the manager. There is a significantly smaller group made up of low-income black workers, some white male nerds, a queer worker and two bad-ass women workers: one white, one Latina. These workers all suffer harassment, and are at least curious if not open to the ideas of working class solidarity and struggle you've discussed with them. If you're not organizing you can't effectively respond to this harassment, or might do so in a way that makes things worse. Moreover, intentionally building and struggling with coworkers opens the possibility of transforming the culture of harassment at work. In fact, taking the first steps might just make it clear that organizing this workplace is a realistic possibility, and might at least get coworkers jazzed enough to join the IWW or stay in touch and start organizing their next job.

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

In all of these examples practiced organizing skills can help to understand and empower your fellow workers. Doing so will also

make you capable of better supporting other workers' struggles and give you experience to be able to offer others practical advice.

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

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

Thoughts? db[at]riseup.net.



Duluth IWW editorial from 1913

While doing research for a school project, I came across an archived collection of the Industrial Worker in the basement of Wilson Library at the University of Minnesota. The microfilm collection dates from 1905 to around 1945, with some selected years missing (mostly from the years when the IWW was most suppressed). I have since spent hours down in that basement reading articles about our union, and I have been surprised to find how relevant so many of these topics are to us today. I think it is important to share these stories from our union's past. While it is necessary for us to look forward to the future, we cannot neglect to remember the struggles and celebrations of our fellow workers in history.