

A NEW UNION VISION

By Arthur J. Miller

Solidarity is not a matter of sentiment but a fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic elements, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all sentimental pleas for solidarity, and all other efforts to achieve it will be barren of results . . .

Eugene V. Debs, Founder of the American Railway Union

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Foreword

Arthur asked me to write something for this, the first pamphlet issued by the Industrial Transportation Project. His reason can not be because I am a great organizer (I'm not, unfortunately) or because I am an exceptional or long-term member of the IWW (again, unfortunately, I am not). The only thing that could qualify me to be speaking to you on this page is that I, like probably most of you reading this, have been a working person all my life. Like many - or most - workers I thought for years that I could "go it alone", look after myself, using my own skills and brains. I'd been in a couple of AF of L unions before, and found them to be worthless at best, and more of an enemy to me than the boss at worst. But I found, after a while, that one person couldn't beat the kind of power that even an average boss can bring to bear in a fight.

Through the study of the history of the movement in the past I saw that the IWW had played a big part in the movement and had been successful, against all odds, in many situations. What impressed me the most, though, was that it was the only labor organization that was actually controlled by and for the workers still in existence at this time. So the IWW became the first organization that I voluntarily joined in my life. After four years I can now report that it is not perfect - but other members and I can change that - and we are - without having to go begging to either the government or some union bureaucrat.

What can you do?

You can continue to think that you will be taken care of by the government, or by your business union, or that you can take care of yourself.

Or you can:

1. Begin to educate yourself.

Find up why the stock market goes up whenever another 100,000 workers lose their jobs, and why it goes down whenever jobs are created or wages go up.

2. Decide who should make the decisions that affect your life.

You get to cast your vote every few years for some politician that big business has bought and paid for before you had even heard his or her name in the media. You never get to vote on the people who really make the decisions that could put you and your family on the street. For example, how much say do you have in who gets to sit on the Federal Reserve Board, which can make a decision on interest rates tomorrow that could put you out of a job?

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3. Organize.

This starts with talking to fellow workers and sharing what you have discovered about the reality of the system, not the fantasies that you have been told in school and by bosses in politics, industry, and the media. They have, as Arthur says, their own self-interest in keeping you ignorant and happy.

After your self-education, find other people who share your interests and goals and get together with them; no matter if they are unions, community organizations, environmental groups, or whatever. You will be working for yourself by working for others in these groups. Their fight is your fight . . .

All this is more work than you may be used to, and more work than being used by the system seems to be. But it is always harder to be free than to be a slave.

Is it worth it to you?

Then join the IWW!

Paul Harris

A New Union Vision

The Need for a New Vision

In the US and many other countries most unions are unable to function as effective workers' organizations. Strikes are more often lost than won, and when strikes seem to have been won, working people find that there is no real gain. There are many reasons for this, but the following are some of the most important:

1. **Most unions take the power of the organization away from the rank and file workers and place it in the hands of a professional class of union bosses.** Thus you have two classes of people within the union, the rank and file and the ruling class. Like all ruling classes, the ruling class of union bosses will act in their own self-interest, which is not always the same as the rank and file.
2. **Capitalism has evolved, but the organization and tactics of the major unions have not.** Not only have the unions not been able to advance, they have eliminated some of the most effective tactics from the past. Workers today are expected to fight huge multinational corporations with out-dated tactics and organization.
3. **Workers are misorganized into unions of narrow self-interest that compete with one another rather than acting in solidarity with each other.** When workers with a legitimate grievance strike a jobsite, union bosses of other organizations almost always command their rank and file to cross picket lines, resulting, more often than not, in the defeat and firing of striking workers. These same bosses will, when their own union is out on strike, ask other unions not to commit the same self-destructive acts of which they are guilty.
4. **Because of self-interested organizations and deception by union bosses, workers find themselves at odds with their own communities and other potential allies.** All working people share a common need for a decent standard of living, safe and healthy conditions both on the job-site and in the neighborhood, and to have a voice in making decisions that effect their lives; but in spite of these and other shared interests, workers find themselves at odds with their own communities and each other. This is the work of those in power, who manipulate situations to pit one part of the working class against another, and they are aided and abetted in this by their willing allies, the union bosses, and other so-called "friends and protectors" of the working class.
5. **The reliance upon the government, laws and institutions has weakened the power of the working class.** The fact is that government is influenced by wealth. It passes laws that seem to benefit working people, but those laws are weakened by lack of enforcement and lack of funding, and can be changed at any time, sometimes without the working people knowing it. The best way to enforce health and safety and other important concerns is through the force of union action. Giving the responsibility for these things to the politicians is like delegating the fox to guard the hen house.

For these reasons, workers are faced with lost strikes, lost jobs, lost incomes, unsafe conditions, and the inability to resist the social and personal wreckage brought about by the multi-national corporations. It is time for working people to look for a new vision of unionism.

Seeds of a New Vision

To create that new vision there needs to be a foundation to build upon. In the beginning of the labor movement, workers organized into single-shop organizations. When they found that this was not effective, they organized many single shops into trade unions, and then these unions later organized into a federation of trade unions. The main drawback to this system was that many jobsites had more than one union, or in some cases had some union workers and some non-union workers. Such an arrangement weakened the possibilities of labor power, and also led to disputes between trades and between skilled and unskilled workers.

The solution to these problems came in the form of industrial unionism. All workers on the same job were organized into the same union, regardless of whether they were "skilled" or "unskilled". Western miners, for example, over one hundred years ago began the same process as many other workers. They found they needed not only to organize miners, but also to organize all other workers in the mining operation in their areas. After finding out the national federation of trade unions (the AF of L) did not meet their needs, do to its "one trade per union" organization and its refusal to include "unskilled" workers, they set of the Western Federation of Miners. Realizing that even this did not create a strong enough force against labor's enemies, the turned their regional organization into a national one. But even the national organization did not have the power that was needed, so they set out to create a national organization, in league with other like-minded unionists, that would organize all workers to their greatest strength. That new organization became known as the Industrial Workers of the World.

The ideology of the IWW did not come out of any book, nor did they arise from any political "ism". Rather, they were the direct result of the on-the-job experiences of working people.

The ideas were rather simple:

1. All workers on the same job belonged to the same job organization.
2. All workers in the same industry belonged to the same industrial union.
3. All related industrial unions belonged to the same industrial department.
4. All working people belonged to the One Big Union.

The IWW's ideology also stated that "all members in one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all."

The IWW foresaw the need to make changes not only in how workers were organized, but also in how industry and society were run. Otherwise they realized that they faced endless conflicts. Thus they stated: "By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old."

Because the IWW believed in direct industrial action, rather than on delegating its power to union bosses and politicians, those who sought to enrich themselves on the backs of the working people grew to hate the IWW. It was hated as much by the Communist Party as by the Republican Party.

In its early days the IWW had great success organizing workers in many industries, including many that conventional unions thought were impossible to unionize, such as sailors, loggers, and migrant workers. Many thought the IWW's new society was a reality in the immediate future.

They could not foresee, however, the combined attack on the IWW from all who opposed its vision of industrial democracy; employers, governments, union bosses and politicians of every stripe. It seemed that the one thing that the ruling classes - be they industrial bosses, political bosses, or labor bosses - could agree on was that they were all against the self-determination of the working people. There fore they allied themselves against the IWW, and sought to bring it to its knees by every means imaginable, including lynching, frame-ups, judicial murder and media slander.

But in spite of suffering hundreds of murdered and thousands of jailed members, the IWW has survived and continues to evolve.

New Hope for a New Vision

No idea or organization would become stagnant, for it then becomes nothing more than a relic of days gone by. The following are ideas for a new vision in working class organization:

1. The IWW has always been an international organization, but in today's world this has become more important than ever.

Corporations are now multinational, and today's organizations of working people must no longer think on just the local level, or even the national level. They must realize that the interests of the working class are also international in scope.

From this global labor viewpoint comes:

A. International Solidarity

We stand together. Black, white or yellow; Jew, Christian, Muslim, or Hindu; male or female; we will not allow ourselves to be divided and conquered.

B. International work agreements and pay scales.

In other words, rather than workers around the world competing to work for the lowest wages, cooperation among workers from different countries could produce enough work at good pay for all.

C. International union enforced standards for environment, health and safety.

We must defend our homes, and our families. In a system that puts profits before people, we can not expect industry, or their bought servants in government, to make sure that our living and working environments are safe, that our air is clean, or that the products we use are truly safe.

2. The world is a very diverse place, and different peoples have different ways of doing things.

And there are already unions that are very close to the IWW's way of thinking, like the CNT-AIT of Spain and Solidarius in Finland. So, through practical application, the IWW's idea of the One Big Union represents the evolution from that of one organization to that of the many organizations; organized in solidarity for the working class.

3. The working class has been manipulated and divided by the ruling class for far too long.

The ruling class has diverted the minds of the working people away from the true cause of their problems. They create the myth that black people are out to take jobs from white workers, that so-called "illegal aliens" or "foreign" workers are trying to steal jobs away, or that women are taking jobs from men. In reality, these workers only want what every worker wants, a decent living. Rather than blame each other, working people need to place the blame for low pay and rotten conditions where it belongs, and that is on the employers who profit from our misery.

All workers are oppressed by classism; some workers are oppressed by race, sex or age discrimination, and other issues. To build unity against those responsible we must do two things: first we must weed out those things that the ruling classes use to divide us, and then, we must support the peoples' right to organize to end their oppression. People of color have a need to organize themselves to deal with the years of racist oppression that they have faced, and the rest of us have an obligation to support them in reaching their goals. Likewise women have the need to organize themselves to deal with years of sexism, minority religions and nationalities must deal with years of prejudice and bigotry, and we have the obligation to stand by them.

4. The ruling class will also try to divert attention from itself by blaming the effect that their exploiting practices have on the economy on other groups.

For example, they will blame the lack of fish available to the fishing industry on Indian fishing treaties, or they will blame the decline of the timber industry on the environmentalists. Again, the reality of the situation is that the responsibility lies with those who exploited the natural resources in the same ruthless way that they exploited the workers.

5. The dominant society, controlled by the ruling class, is based on a Eurocentric viewpoint.

In other words, European or "Western" civilization is the center or standard of the "civilized" world. A good example of this is a world map familiar to most of us where Europe and North America dominate the center and occupy two thirds of the map, with the remainder of the world squeezed onto the edges and the remaining third. The map distorts the world and our perception of it to the apparent advantage of the dominant (white) countries. For example, India appears on this map to be smaller than Scandinavia, even though the subcontinent is three times the size of the combined Scandinavian countries.

The Euro-centric ideology often views indigenous peoples as "uncivilized", even though many of these peoples live in social systems far older and more complex than Western society. Accordingly, the dominant society sets out to "civilize" the native people by stealing their land and natural resources, and turning them into wage-slaves or corpses to facilitate the theft. The working class must cast off this Euro-centric ideology and try to develop a more international view, where all people who work within any sort of social system are regarded as being of equal importance and worth, and where indigenous people, like all working peoples, have a right to their land, their lives, and their self-determination. If the labor movement fails to do this, it will be nothing more than a pawn used by the ruling classes to defeat fellow foreign workers and, ultimately, to defeat itself.

6. Working people have been misled by the ruling class and the union bosses into thinking that environmentalism is a threat to their well being.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. First, those toxic pollutants that threaten communities and the environment often come from industries where workers are the first to suffer from exposure to them. It must also be pointed out that working people live in the communities that are exposed. The ruling class does not expose their communities to toxic waste - when is the last time that you saw rich people living next to a plant that was polluting the air?

The earth has an ecological balance that we all must work within. That balance has been upset by the exploitation of the earth for maximized profit. The ruling class will pollute, over-log the forest, and over-fish the seas for that maximized profit, and it is the working people who will end up paying the cost with a polluted environment and lost jobs. Thus, working people need to become the forefront of the environmental movement and, through the force of their unions, demand an environmentally sound and safe industrial system.

7. The traditional unions limit the scope of the organization to the workplace only.

A new vision of unionism must realize that working people live in communities and that they are consumers. What happens inside a workplace also effects the working class community. In times of job actions the united working class community can make the difference. Also, as workers produce they need to keep in mind that working people may be those who will consume the product that they are producing.

8. When workers are on strike, or the owners move a plant to avoid union activity, the goods that are produced are scab goods.

Unfortunately union workers will handle many of those scab goods, or union production and transportation will supply that scab plant. Thus a plant can continue to operate during a strike with the collaboration of the labor movement.

A new union vision must take another stance on scabbing. No union worker should provide production, transportation or services going into a scab plant, nor should any union worker handle scab goods coming out of that plant. If union workers could just learn to stop scabbing on each other, then labor struggles would be much easier to win.

For example: If ship repair workers were to go on strike, the ships they were working on would be declared scab ships and no union worker would be willing to touch them. No longshoreman would load or unload those ships, no seaman would sail those ships, no services would be provided to those ships, and if they could be moved by scabs to be worked on somewhere else, no shipyard workers in other locations would repair those ships. Everything would be at a standstill until there was a settlement.

Conclusion

A new union vision is about people acting in their real self-interest. The self-interest of the employing class is to increase their wealth at the expense of the earth and of working people. This can be clearly seen in the wealth distribution in the United States - 1% of the population controls 40% of all the wealth, and their share is increasing. The next 9% control another 30% of the wealth, which is also increasing, while the remaining 90% of the population controls only 30% of all the wealth. Whenever working people scab on one another or compete for wages, they only increase the owners' wealth while decreasing their own.

Only working people can act in their own self-interest. The employers will not. The government, controlled by the wealthy, will not. Politicians will not, for they seek to control the power of the many for their own personal gain. The union bosses will not, because they, like the politicians, act only in their own self-interest.

If all these can work for selfish gain (with the approval of society), why then are working people, who are the majority, denied the right to do the same?

The self-interest of the working people is a society that is based upon the well being of all, not a society that is designed for the benefit of a few. Think about it; think of your own well being, and that of your family and your fellow workers. Think about the well being of future generations. If you are tired of working for the benefit of the wealthy few, then think about joining the Industrial Workers of the World, and start to work for those who really matter to you.

In Solidarity,

Arthur J. Miller

IWW PREAMBLE

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people; and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things in life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the machinery of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping to defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class has interests in common with its employers.

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

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

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