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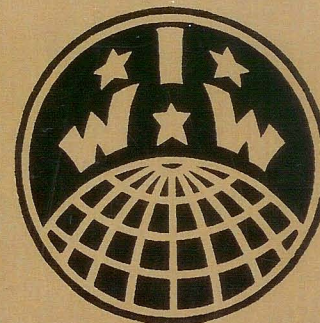
JOHN SILVANO

NOTHING IN COMMON

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NOTHING IN COMMON

AN ORAL HISTORY OF IWW STRIKES
1971-1992



EDITED BY
JOHN SILVANO

NOTHING IN COMMON:

**An Oral History of IWW
Strikes 1971-1992**

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For Sarah and Rachael

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PREFACE

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, also known as “Wobblies” or “Wobs”) is a radical labor union. Founded in 1905, the IWW was organized in opposition to the conservative trade union philosophy of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Wobblies advocated industrial unionism, in which workers are organized along industrial lines rather than by craft or trade. Rejecting political action, the IWW hoped to organize the working class into industrial unions and to then call a general strike to secure possession of the means of production and distribution. Their goal was to achieve a democratic, classless world in which workers would control their workplaces and the economy at large. From its beginning, the IWW sought to organize immigrants, the unskilled, migratory workers and the working

poor, groups traditionally ignored by the AFL. Wobblies advocated the use of strikes, boycotts, direct action and sabotage to force concessions from employers. They quickly developed a reputation as fearless, incorruptible, uncompromising militants, dedicated to democratic unionism and the struggle for better wages and working conditions.

During its first twelve years, the IWW organized extensively among textile workers, miners, construction workers, loggers, agricultural workers, maritime trades and factory workers. They engaged in frequent strikes as well, which were often bitter, violent struggles that pitted Wobs against intransigent bosses, town officials, company thugs and vigilantes. Prominent among their activities at the time were strikes among textile workers in Massachusetts, silk workers in New Jersey, iron workers in Minnesota and miners in Nevada. Wobblies also fought numerous free speech fights to establish their right to soap box on street corners. Although their membership never exceeded 100,000, the IWW struck fear into the hearts of employers and America's ruling classes.

IWW opposition to the First World War earned it the enmity of the federal government. In 1917, federal agents arrested nearly 200 Wobs and raided IWW halls and offices all over the country. The entire leadership of the union was jailed. Wobblies were also subjected to vigilante attacks and violent persecution. Crippled by the imprisonment of its leadership, financially strapped by its legal fights and torn apart by internal factional disputes, the IWW never regained its prewar strength.

Despite these setbacks, the IWW persisted in its organizing efforts. Up until 1950, Wobs continued to organize among

lumber workers, public project employees, construction workers, longshoremen, and farm workers. They successfully established locals of metal workers in Cleveland, marine transport workers on the Gulf Coast, and miners in California. The union suffered a critical blow when it was placed on the Attorney General's subversive list in 1949. The IWW was further damaged when it refused to sign the noncommunist affidavit required by the Taft-Hartley Act. As a result, the union lost its large Cleveland metal workers local in 1950. With the IWW unable to engage in collective bargaining, membership plummeted and the union began a long period of further decline that was not arrested until the IWW's revival in the 1960's. The activities of the IWW subsequent to this resurgence are the subject of this book.

There are several individuals who generously aided me in my research. Penny Pixler and Kathleen Taylor provided contacts for various IWW organizing drives. Rochelle Semel and Paul Poulos offered insight, provided materials, and answered my many questions. The staff at the Walter Reuther Archives, in particular Mike Smith and William LeFervere, were an invaluable help. I also wish to extend a special thanks to Paul Mier for his assistance with research and editing.

Pittsfield, Massachusetts
June 1999

INTRODUCTION:

A SUMMARY OF IWW ORGANIZING 1971 - 1992

The strikes profiled in this account occurred during a time of heightened activity in the Industrial Workers of the World. The years 1971 through 1992 saw sustained IWW involvement in organizing, strike support, international activities and defense work. The antecedent to this activity was an unexpected resurgence of the IWW in the 1960's.

The IWW began a period of slow but steady growth following the bottoming out of the union's membership in 1961. Failure to recruit new members, the deaths of older Wobblies, and severe repression and subsequent disinterest in radicalism combined to drop IWW membership to a low of 115 members.¹ The first signs of new life occurred in San Francisco and

Berkeley, where in 1963 Wobblies began targeting college students in their organizing efforts. Student organizing was not a new concept for the IWW. In the late 1940's and early 1950's Wobbly college groups had organized in New York City and Cleveland, but these groups were small and short lived.² Aided by the rising tide of student radicalism spreading across college campuses, Bay area Wobblies achieved strong membership gains in their student organizing efforts at the University of California at Berkeley. By late 1964 the Bay area branch had over 100 members, composed primarily of students. This branch accounted for two thirds of the IWW's total membership at the time. Branch activities increased correspondingly. IWW members engaged in street meetings, leafleting, soapboxing, and picketing. Wobblies were also active in the Berkeley free speech fight in 1964. They mounted several organizing efforts as well, including a drive to organize railroad workers and an unsuccessful strike at a San Francisco coffeehouse.³

IWW activity was also on the rise in several other cities in the mid 1960's, including New York City and Chicago. In New York, new members were attracted from various libertarian groups and from the left wing of the Young People's Socialist League. As early as 1959, New York members had attempted organizing drives among restaurant workers and greenhouse employees.⁴ Wobblies in Chicago also picked up new members and engaged in several ambitious organizing campaigns. Student organizing at Roosevelt University resulted in a brief free speech fight. The Chicago branch also organized a union of the unemployed, led a strike of farmworkers in the Michigan berry fields, and sent members to help organize apple pickers in Washington's Yakima Valley.⁵

IWW membership began accelerating rapidly in 1968.⁶ The

force behind this increase was a continued influx of students into the union. In the 1960's climate of campus protest, student radicalism and unrest, many student militants were attracted to the IWW traditions of democracy, tolerance, and direct action and conforation, as well as the IWW's opposition to the war in Vietnam. Although the Wobblies had long admitted students, the 1968 general convention made this policy official, and welcomed college students to join Educational Workers Industrial Union 620.⁷ This resulted in the formation of IWW campus groups, including large branches at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan, and the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada.⁸ These college branches participated in educational reform efforts, student demonstrations, strike support and anti-war work. They also led several on campus organizing drives, most notably an attempt to organize non-professional college employees at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, which culminated in a one day strike in 1972.⁹ College students also came to the IWW by way of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Wobblies had been active within SDS for several years and had representatives at SDS conventions in 1967, 1968, and 1969. Disgusted by internal power struggles and the elitist, authoritarian tone that SDS had developed by 1968, many rank and file members quit and signed up with the Wobblies. This factor, along with the IWW Convention resolution admitting students, resulted in a 44% increase in membership in 1969.¹⁰ This increase in membership significantly changed the demography of the IWW. In the decade prior to the union's revival in the 1960's, it was predominantly elderly in composition. By 1972 over 67% of IWW members, and most of its national officers, were 30 years of age or younger.¹¹

Although student organizing and campus activity dominated IWW efforts in the 1960's, on the job organizing gradually increased, particularly in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Small Counter Culture businesses, primarily cooperatives, printing presses, food distribution outlets and underground newspapers, formed IWW job branches. By 1970 over two dozen of these shops were in the IWW.¹² Chicago Wobblies led strikes at Three Penny Cinema and Hip Products in 1971. That same year saw IWW drives among silver miners in Colorado and factory workers in Iowa and Oregon.¹³ Wobblies were active in other areas as well. In the early 1970's, the IWW fought free speech fights in San Diego and Tacoma, and was heavily involved in community work in Chicago.¹⁴ Although the IWW's organizing drives were unsuccessful, membership in the union continued to grow. By the end of 1971 the IWW had tripled in size from its low in 1961, and by 1972 membership reached nearly 500.¹⁵ Better still for the union, it now had a core of enthusiastic, organizing oriented activists who were to play a large role in subsequent organizing efforts. Realizing that the resources of the IWW were limited, this young generation of Wobblies focused their efforts on small shops and factories, where they hoped to find young, militant workers.¹⁶ Although the union established several national organizing committees during this time, most organizing work was done at the branch level or by individual Wobblies. Always done on a shoestring budget, and with few resources other than their own ingenuity, IWW members were to fight valiant but often unsuccessful drives in small workplaces and businesses from 1971 to 1992.

IWW organizing efforts increased sharply in the 1970's.

The major drives of this period occurred in Portland, Chicago, Ann Arbor and California. These four areas accounted for over 50% of the unions organizing drives from 1970 to 1979.¹⁷ In Portland, Wobblies tried unsuccessfully to organize Winter Products, a brass plating plant, in 1972.¹⁸ They also led a strike at Winchells Donuts, where an IWW member was fired by management. Eventually the union won an NLRB decision and the worker was reinstated with back pay. Although the Wobblies achieved this victory, as well as the enforcement of state labor laws and some pay raises, it did not result in the establishment of a permanent shop.¹⁹ Portland Wobs also organized child care workers at Albina Day Care, a head start program in Portland. Here the union won some of its key demands, including the firing of the Day Cares Director.²⁰ Organizing drives of health care workers were conducted at West Side School and Portland Medical Center, where the union fought harassment and employer discrimination.²¹ In 1974, the Portland IWW launched a campaign to organize agricultural workers employed harvesting beans. The union opened a hall in Burnside, Oregon, to combat the unfair practices of day labor agencies and agricultural hiring halls, and formulated a list of demands.²² Unfortunately, the drive was eventually lost, and the activities of the Portland branch seemed to fade away by the mid 1970's.

In California, IWW activities centered around Santa Cruz. In 1977, the Santa Cruz branch initiated a drive among workers at the government funded Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA). One of the few large-scale IWW efforts of recent years, organizers intended to organize 3,000 CETA workers in Santa Cruz County.

Wobblies registered many gains for CETA workers, including pay raises, an effective grievance procedure, and medical and dental coverage, but the drive failed to establish the IWW as bargaining agent.²³ The Santa Cruz IWW also attempted to organize bus washers at the Santa Cruz Transit District. Although this attempt proved unsuccessful, Wobblies were able to organize several small shops. These included the Janus Alcohol Recovery Center, the Santa Cruz Law Center, Project Hope, and the Santa Cruz Community Switchboard.²⁴ Other organizing attempts in California occurred in San Francisco, where Wobblies tried to organize radio workers, food service employees and workers at a sweatshop in Benecia.²⁵ The IWW also organized and took out on strike workers at International Wood Products in Long Beach in 1972.²⁶

The IWW branch in Chicago was quite active during this period. As well as the strikes they fought in 1971, Chicago Wobs worked on an organizing drive among furniture factory workers, established organizing committees for health care workers and construction workers, and coordinated a city wide metal workers drive.²⁷ The formation of a fast food workers organizing committee in 1973 led to an organizing campaign at a Chicago McDonalds.²⁸ While these drives did not succeed, the metal workers campaign did lead to a shop drive and strike at Mid American Metal in Virden, Illinois in 1978.²⁹

Wobblies in Ann Arbor, Michigan began their long period of activity in the late 1970's. This branch was to participate in a wide variety of organizing efforts over the next ten years. The IWW won an NLRB election at a college bookstore, the University Cellar, in 1979.³⁰ Following a strike

during the initial contract negotiations, the IWW established a strong job shop that remained in the union until the bookstore went out of business in 1986. The IWW also organized and took out on strike workers at Charring Cross Books, a small bookstore in Ann Arbor. Although a settlement was reached in the dispute, it failed to establish a union shop.³¹ By 1980 the Ann Arbor branch had over 75 members and two shops under contract.³²

The IWW's Printing and Publishing Workers Industrial Union 450 was very active in the 1970's. IU 450 shops constituted the majority of IWW shops during this time. Numerous print shops, most of them small printing cooperatives, organized into the Wobblies. These included Glad Day Press in New York, New Media Graphics in Ohio, RPM Press in Michigan, Babylon Print in Wisconsin, and Hill Press in Illinois.³³ In 1978, IU 450 organized Eastown Printing in Grand Rapids, Michigan and negotiated a contract improving wages, benefits and working conditions.³⁴ The IWW also attempted to organize printers at the Word Processors Print Shop in Ann Arbor, but lost a close vote in an NLRB election.³⁵

Musicians Industrial Union 630 was also active in the 1970's. An Entertainment Workers Organizing Committee was formed in Chicago in 1976. The committee published a model contract that was subsequently distributed among musicians.³⁶ Musician organizing efforts were made in Cleveland in 1977 and in Ann Arbor in 1978. IU 630 also established a musicians clearing house, a manned telephone line for booking information, and issued an assessment stamp for IWW members.³⁷ IWW musicians such as Utah Phillips, Faith Petric, Bob Bovee and Jim Ringer toured,

recorded, and performed at union benefits, keeping alive the tradition of Wobbly bards.

The IWW organized in a number of other areas in the 1970's. In 1973, Wobblies in Milwaukee tried to organize workers at a Shop Rite Supermarket, but lost an NLRB election.³⁸ That year the union also made organizing attempts among packers at Coronet Foods in Wheeling, West Virginia, and hospital workers in Boston.³⁹ IWW student members in State College, Pennsylvania conducted a city wide drive of fast food workers in 1973. They led a strike at a Kentucky Fried Chicken and tried to organize at a Roy Rogers restaurant. The State College IWW also attempted an organizing drive of chemical workers.⁴⁰ 1974 saw IWW drives targeting shipyard workers in Houston and restaurant workers in Pittsburgh.⁴¹ The following year brought unsuccessful union campaigns at Prospect Nursing Home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a Pizza Hut in Arkadelphia, Arkansas, where the IWW lost an NLRB representation election.⁴² Increasing IWW activity in Albuquerque, New Mexico led to an organizing drive of construction workers in 1978. Wobblies of General Construction Workers Industrial Union 310 organized at the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District in a campaign targeting 175 construction workers, office staff, and maintenance workers. This promising drive petered out after the firing of three Wobs and a mire of protracted litigation.⁴³

The 1980's began with a full assault on unions in the United States. With Republican ascendancy to the White House and the accompanying conservative political atmosphere, the power of influence of organized labor was vastly diminished.⁴⁴ Union membership dropped steadily while

concessions, lost strikes and layoffs became commonplace. In this environment of decline, the IWW continued its organizing activities unabated, and managed to score a few small victories in the years 1980 through 1992.

Ann Arbor remained a focal point of IWW organizing. In 1980, the IWW successfully organized Leapold Blooms, an Ann Arbor restaurant. The union negotiated a contract that substantially improved wages and benefits. Attempts were also made to organize two taverns near the restaurant.⁴⁵ In 1983, Ann Arbor Wobs won an NLRB election to represent 30 workers at People's Wherehouse, a food distribution warehouse. This shop was to remain in the union for nearly nine years. Here the IWW battled to improve working conditions and negotiated a series of hard fought contracts that emphasized both benefits and worker input in decision making.⁴⁶ The Ann Arbor branch also tried to organize assembly workers in 1983, office workers in 1984, and maintenance employees in 1985.⁴⁷ In 1986 a job shop was successfully established representing office workers at the Ann Arbor Tenants Union.⁴⁸ Branch membership peaked at 150 members in the mid 1980's, but was to decline drastically following the loss of the University Cellar shop in 1986.⁴⁹

Educational Workers Industrial Union 620 was consistently active during the 1980's and the early 1990's. In 1985, Wobblies in Ohio tried to organize educational workers in Cincinnati.⁵⁰ Dormitory workers at a private school in Pittsfield, Massachusetts organized in 1987 and established an IWW job shop.⁵¹ Student workers at the University of California at Santa Barbara mounted an IWW organizing drive in 1989, and a drive targeting teaching and research assistants was conducted at Champaign, Illinois that same

year.⁵² Clerical and technical workers at the New College of California at San Francisco were the object of an IWW organizing campaign in 1991.⁵³ 1992 saw efforts to organize graduate students in Hawaii.⁵⁴

Printing and Publishing Workers Industrial Union 450 continued their activities into the 1980's. Small presses forming IWW shops included Partners Press in Ann Arbor, Harbinger Publications in South Carolina, Signature Press in Arizona, Lakeside Press in Wisconsin and Whetstone Press in Massachusetts.⁵⁵ IU 450 also mounted an unsuccessful drive at a Montana book bindery in 1981 and an organizing campaign at Speedy Print in Detroit in 1985.⁵⁶

The Wobblies also made concerted efforts to organize co-op workers during this time. IWW drives included attempts to organize cooperatives in Boston in 1980 and Minneapolis in 1981, where small shops such as Brite Day Janitorial and Bison Building Collective were organized.⁵⁷ Efforts to organize a Detroit food co-op were made in 1983 and a grocery store cooperative was organized in Madison, Wisconsin in 1985.⁵⁸ Bellingham, Washington was the site of similar organizing efforts. Wobs here successfully organized co-op workers at a flour mill in 1985.⁵⁹ Co-op organizing also took place in Albuquerque in 1981 and Ann Arbor in 1990.⁶⁰

Two organizing drives among agricultural workers in the state of Washington were launched in 1984. In Everson, Wobblies tried to organize a group of 60 workers at the Mount Baker Mushroom Farm. Issues included health and safety violations, low wages and poor working conditions. Despite a promising start, the drive ended without success.⁶¹ Later that year IWW organizers started a drive targeting apple pickers in Washington's Columbia Valley. Their fight

focused on racism, poor housing, bin rates and safety concerns. Wobblies organized over the course of apple harvests in 1984, 1985 and 1986. Although scattered job actions and walkouts resulted in some gains, the drive proved unsuccessful, a victim of high turnover in the orchards, language barriers, and a fearful and apathetic workforce.⁶²

In 1985 the IWW began an attempt to organize prison laborers at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility (SOCF) in Lucasville, Ohio. Prisoners at SOCF worked for Ohio Penal Industries, which subcontracted to private companies, making an immense profit at the prisoners expense. Prison laborers demanded union representation to improve their wages and working conditions. Initially denied the right to have union literature by prison officials, IWW prisoners fought successfully to reverse this decision. Prison workers cheated out of wages also won numerous back pay settlements and organized a hunger strike to protest prison conditions.⁶³ This controversial organizing drive was squelched in 1989 when the fourth district court of appeals ruled that prisoners could not be classified as public employees and were therefore ineligible for union representation.⁶⁴

The IWW attempted organizing drives at a number of other locations during the 1980's. Chicago Wobs tried to organize construction workers at a community development project in 1980.⁶⁵ Other drives that year included an effort to organize art models in Boston and lumber workers in New Mexico.⁶⁶ Wobblies in Illinois tried to organize grocery workers at an IGA store in 1981.⁶⁷ That same year brought Wobbly campaigns at a cookie factory in Iowa, among hospital workers in Montana, a musicians drive in Albuquerque, and an attempt to organize uranium miners in Texas.⁶⁸ In

1982 Wobblies attempted to organize assembly workers at Castle Industries, a mobile home manufacturer in Houston, Arkansas. Following management threats and captive anti-union meetings the drive died out.⁶⁹

IWW unemployed drives were conducted in Tuscon, Arizona and Bellingham, Washington in 1983.⁷⁰ In 1984 efforts to organize loggers were made in Missoula, Montana and Pocatello, Idaho.⁷¹ An IWW job shop of floor covering workers in Dayton, Ohio was organized in 1984 as well.⁷² Later that year New York Wobblies organized and took out on strike drivers at Keller Fish on Long Island. The strike was lost when the employer relocated his operations.⁷³ IWW members in Alaska worked on organizing tour boat operators in Juneau and cannery workers in Anchorage during 1985.⁷⁴ The late 1980's saw IWW organizing drives among food service workers in Spokane, Washington;⁷⁵ street performers in Cambridge, Massachusetts;⁷⁶ Greenpeace phone canvassers in Seattle, Washington;⁷⁷ and woodworkers at Coersis Cabinets in Emeryville, California.⁷⁸

In 1989 the IWW won an NLRB election to represent recycling workers at the Ecology Center in Berkeley, California.⁷⁹ This victory spurred other similar efforts, including recycler drives at the University of California and Ann Arbor.⁸⁰ Several IWW drives were also made in an effort to organize bicycle messengers, beginning with a 1989 campaign in San Francisco.⁸¹ The Chicago branch led a union drive at Barbara's Books in 1990, and the IWW organized Time Tested Books, a bookstore in Sacramento, California, in 1992.⁸² That year also witnessed IWW organizing drives and strikes at Boulevard Bingo in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and the End Up Nightclub in San Francisco.⁸³

In 1990 Wobblies in California began an energetic organizing campaign in Mendocino County targeting timberworkers. Organizers combined environmental actions opposing redwood logging with organizing efforts and worker assistance.⁸⁴ Although largely unsuccessful in their organizing efforts, Wobblies were able to provide timberworkers with legal aid on OSHA and discrimination cases and assisted rank and file loggers in a recall effort against their unions international president.⁸⁵

Side by side with their organizing efforts, the IWW engaged in strike support and solidarity actions. From 1971 to 1992, in literally dozens of labor-management disputes involving other unions, the Wobblies provided assistance. This help consisted of walking the picket lines, printing and distributing strike support literature, organizing benefits, providing food and material goods to strikers and their families, and fundraising appeals in IWW publications. During the 1970's major IWW efforts were made in support of farmworker strikes in California, New York and Texas. Wobblies also backed strikers at Farah Clothing, striking bakers in Albuquerque, and strikes at Cambion Electric and the Dresher Company in Chicago. The 1980's saw Wobblies helping in strikes at Greyhound, Phelps Dodge, Danly Machine, Oscar Meyer, and teacher strikes in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. IWW members also worked in support of striking restaurant workers in Alaska, Wisconsin and Vancouver. They assisted in the Chicago Tribune printers strike, the Hormel strike in Austin, Minnesota, and grocery worker strikes at Jewel Market and Kroger Supermarket. In these strikes and many others, Wobblies provided invaluable contributions of manpower and materials.⁸⁶

The IWW likewise actively supported numerous boycotts. These included the United Farmworkers boycott on lettuce and grapes, the Coors boycott, a boycott on scab wines, and the Treetop juice boycott.⁸⁷ IWW members were also involved in reform movements within business unions. In 1977 Alaskan Wobs helped in a laborers union insurgency in Anchorage and were active in reform efforts in the carpenters and electricians union. In 1985 the Western Massachusetts IWW assisted in reform work in the Community, Educational and Service Workers Union. Wobs were also active in reform efforts in the Bakery and Confectionery Workers Union, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and Teamster locals in New York and Boston.⁸⁸

The IWW was increasingly active internationally from 1971 to 1992. Wobblies in the United States sent financial support or demonstrated on behalf of strikers at the Lip watch factory in France; Unionists in the Philippines; striking British coal miners; striking Coca Cola workers in Guatemala; Solidarnosc in Poland; South African Unionists; and extensive fundraising and support for the syndicalist union CNT in Spain.⁸⁹ Wobblies traveled to Morocco in 1975 to organize a soybean farming project.⁹⁰ British IWW members engaged in strike support, demonstrations, community work, leafleting and political prisoner aid. English Wobs also opened a workers center in Oldham in 1975.⁹¹ In 1991 IWW members in England organized among bicycle messengers.⁹² Swedish Wobblies organized an IWW job branch at the Kockums Shipyard in Malmo in 1971 and did strike support and defense work.⁹³ IWW members in Guam worked to organize employees in the tour bus industry in

1974 and established an active General Defense local.⁹⁴ In Australia Wobs did defense work, published a newsletter, picketed in support of imprisoned anarchists, and in 1992 formed an IWW job shop.⁹⁵ Two US Wobblies lost their lives abroad. Student member Frank Terrugi was murdered in the 1973 Chilean military coup. Journalist and IWW member Frank Gould was killed by Philippine government troops while reporting on rebels there in 1975.⁹⁶

In Canada the IWW maintained an active presence. Wobblies organized a construction crew in Vancouver in 1972, but lost it when the provincial labor board refused to certify the IWW.⁹⁷ Canadian Wobs provided extensive strike support during the Artistic woodworkers strike in 1973 and a beverage dispensers strike in Edmonton that same year.⁹⁸ In 1985 Wobs were active in support of striking workers at Eatons Department store in Winnipeg and a retail workers strike at Purolater in Vancouver.⁹⁹ The Vancouver IWW also organized a benefit for the Canadian Farmworkers Union in 1986, and was active in numerous organizing efforts. In 1988, Vancouver Wobs worked on six organizing drives and had four shops under contract, including Mac Underground Pacific, Eastside Data Graphics and Gleaner Publications. The Vancouver branch was also active in organizing efforts among the unemployed.¹⁰⁰ Wobblies in Toronto formed an IWW job shop at Blackbird Graphics and were involved in organizing bike messengers and contractors.¹⁰¹ IWW members in West Kootenays, British Columbia established a bread bakers co-op in 1990.¹⁰² Canadian Wobs also worked on strike support during the Northern Blowers steelworkers strike in Winnipeg in 1992.¹⁰³

The years 1971 through 1992 saw an increase in IWW

defense work. During the 1970's the IWW General Defense Committee (GDC) worked on numerous cases. Wobs contributed money for the defense of imprisoned Italian anarchists in 1972.¹⁰⁴ In 1974 the IWW organized a defense fund for a Wobbly who had been working with farmworker organizing efforts in California and set up in a police frame-up attempt.¹⁰⁵ Organizing in defense of political prisoners was a primary activity of the GDC. This included work on behalf of Ed Stover and Michael Lamm, San Francisco radicals accused of bomb making in 1971, and Martin Sostre, an imprisoned anarchist, in 1973.¹⁰⁶ The IWW also did extensive work in support of jailed Native American activist Leonard Peltier and assisted in efforts to help displaced Native Americans at Big Mountain, Arizona.¹⁰⁷ The 1980's saw a revival of the GDC, and several new GDC locals were organized in the United States and Canada.¹⁰⁸ These locals provided assistance and fundraising for Wobblies imprisoned or facing charges for their activities. In 1990 the GDC launched a major effort in defense of Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney. Bari and Cherney were IWW organizers in the Mendocino, California timberworkers drive. They were both injured when a bomb exploded in their car, and were subsequently charged with possession and transportation of an explosive device. The IWW believed the bombing to be a government setup, and contributed a substantial sum of money to their defense and a counter suit against the FBI.¹⁰⁹

The activities of the IWW from 1971 to 1992 re-established their credentials as a labor union. Following the loss of their Cleveland metal shops in 1950, the IWW, deprived of any collective bargaining activity, existed solely as an educational organization. The 1960's were characterized by IWW work in

the student protest movement and counter culture organizing. By 1971 the IWW had committed itself to organizing workers again, and their activities over the next twenty-one years were a testament to this commitment. While their organizing efforts were largely unsuccessful, these drives nonetheless represented the pledge made by the IWW at its inception: To organize workers ignored by the mainstream business unions. The IWW's emphasis on organizing workers at small shops and businesses fulfilled this pledge. Business unions typically ignored these workers, believing such small bargaining units to be economically unfeasible. It should also be pointed out that the IWW did in fact win a few small victories. Wobblies in Ann Arbor won several organizing drives and negotiated innovative contracts that substantially improved working conditions. In Santa Cruz, Wobs successfully organized a number of small shops and won better working conditions for hundreds of CETA workers. IWW recyclers in Berkeley won an NLRB election and sustained a strong shop. Dozens of prints shops and cooperatives were successfully organized. In some of their organizing drives, even though the IWW was unable to establish union shops, their actions brought improvements in working conditions or financial settlements for mistreated workers. IWW strike support, fundraising activities and reform work extended their influence to the labor movement at large. IWW activities overseas continued their tradition of internationalism and their defense work focused attention on political prisoners and government subterfuge. True to their legacy, Wobblies continued to exercise influence far beyond their small numbers. Their contemporary activities prove not only the continued existence of the IWW, it also secures their small but enduring place in the modern labor movement.

NOTES

- 1 Leland Walter Robinson, "Social Movement Organizations in Decline: A Case Study of the IWW," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Northwestern University, 1973), p. 198.
- 2 Robinson, p. 188.
- 3 Robinson, p. 225.
- 4 Fred Thompson and Patrick Murfin, The IWW: Its First Seventy Years (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1976), pp. 201-202.
- 5 Thompson and Murfin, pp. 206-207.
- 6 Robinson, pp. 229-230.
- 7 Robinson, pp. 240-241.
- 8 Thompson and Murfin, p. 208.
- 9 "Milwaukee Education Workers in Job Action, One Day Strike," Industrial Worker, June 1972, p. 1.
- 10 Robinson, pp. 229-234.
- 11 Jerry William Calvert, "A Changing Radical Political Organization: The Wobblies Today," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Washington State University, 1972), p. 48, p. 63.
- 12 Thompson and Murfin, p. 209.
- 13 Thompson and Murfin, pp. 214-215.
- 14 Thompson and Murfin, pp. 210-213. See also: "Tacoma IWW Wins Free Speech Fight," Industrial Worker, June, 1972, p. 1.
- 15 Robinson, p. 218.
- 16 Robinson, pp. 243-244.
- 17 The Industrial Worker and General Organization Bulletin for the years 1970 through 1979 document a total of 40 organizing drives. 23 of these drives occurred in Portland, Ann Arbor, Chicago and California.
- 18 Thompson and Murfin, p. 215.
- 19 "Portland IWW Organizing Donut Chain," Industrial Worker, December, 1972, p. 1. See also: General Organization Bulletin, May, 1972, p. 7.
- 20 Thompson and Murfin, p. 216.
- 21 "Portland IWW," Industrial Worker, July, 1973, p. 1. See also: "Health Workers Organize," Industrial Worker, July 1974, p. 1.
- 22 "Bums Organize in Oregon Bean Fields," Industrial Worker, September, 1974, p. 2.
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1.

**THREE PENNY CINEMA STRIKE
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
1971
PATRICK MURFIN**

Patrick Murfin was involved with the antiwar movement during the 1960's. He worked extensively as a student organizer, both in high school and college. He was also active as a draft resistor and served time in federal prison for his refusal to be inducted into military service. He first came into contact with the IWW while working out of a Movement center in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic convention and joined the following year. For the next ten years he was active in the union as an organizer, writer, speaker, and a term as general secretary.

The IWW headquarters was at 2440 Lincoln. It was a

large hall, and the Chicago branch shared the location. In those days the IWW was well known in that community, which was the Chicago equivalent of the East Village. It was the hippie, avante garde lefty area in town. We had a good deal of visibility. There were print shops we had organized. The staff of the Seed, an underground newspaper, was IWW, and there were other kinds of cooperative things. We had a weekly community meeting that would be held in the IWW hall. I used to facilitate those meetings. People from all sorts of organizations and individuals would sit in a big circle and discuss community issues. So the union was well known up and down the street, it had cultural contacts all over the community.

Three Penny Cinema was owned by an old radical ex-communist who was publishing an alternative newspaper that was trying to take the tact of making radicalism American. He published a book called "Quotations from Uncle Sam," and he was active in the local left wing scene. A lot of people who worked for him were attracted to that, but eventually they got into a dispute at the theater.

The theater manager, who also had a long history of left involvement, was fired from her job. I believe it was a personality conflict between her and the owner. She was very strong-minded and short-tempered. I think it also may have had to do with the kinds of films that were being shown. The owner wanted to show some more commercially oriented films to make a little money and she wanted to continue showing alternative films. Anyway, they came to us, they just walked down the street to the IWW hall. I was working in the office when they came in and announced they wanted to join the IWW. So I sat down and wrote them all red cards. There

weren't very many of them, maybe eight people. The workers were late teens to mid twenties, mostly women. They were the ticket takers, ushers and concession stand people.

We discussed what their demands were. In the IWW our theory is that we help, but it's peoples responsibility to do things themselves. They had mostly moderate economic demands. They asked for a modest wage increase and the ability to self schedule. They were arguing a workers control argument that they would be able to adequately staff the theater if they worked out their own schedules and made sure that everything was covered. But the main demand was a very personal one, to get the theater manager reinstated.

Another member and I accompanied them back to the theater in a day or two to meet with the owner. We presented evidence that we had a majority of the workers and asked for recognition of the union. I think the owner was somewhat alarmed. I believe that at one point he said he would recognize the union, but would not be willing to reinstate the theater manager, he would not accept that demand. There was some back and forth, but they decided to go on strike within a week or two of organizing.

We provided picket line support. We of course had no strike fund, but people lived extremely cheaply in those days in those conditions. We managed to keep everyone fed, but we mostly helped manage the picket line and handled publicity. We got quite a bit of coverage in the Chicago press. I remember the Sun Times had us on the front page one time, "the long dead IWW rises from its grave." I think they figured it was something of a joke. We were denounced by Roger Ebert, who was upset that one of the few places that showed non-commercial films in the city was shut down by a labor dispute.

The owner tried to reopen the theater early in the dispute, but it hadn't worked. He didn't want a confrontation that would hurt his credibility on the left. He was not going to run a scab shop. So he leased the theater to a couple of out of town guys who reopened it showing dirty movies. The owner claimed that although he owned the building he was no longer involved, and the union would have to deal with the new leasors.

When the leasors took over they opened it with scabs. That resulted in some picket line arrests. I was one of those arrested. There was a yelling match on the picket line one day. One of the managers came out and tried to provoke the members on the picket line. We were pretty well disciplined. I told everyone to keep their hands behind them and not to touch anybody. The police kept a very close eye on the entire episode. They were there already; they had been steadily all along. Anyway, one of the managers charged at me, bumped me off the sidewalk, then turned to the police and started shouting that I had assaulted him. So they arrested me, one other Wobbly, and the manager. We were all hauled away together and charged with disorderly conduct.

The strike was successful in the sense that the theater was shut down. No one was crossing the picket line, they were getting nowhere, and they went belly up within a month. The leasors stole the projection lenses and skipped town. When we were called to court the other Wobbly and I were acquitted because the complaining party was not there. The manager was convicted because he skipped town. I think he was also convicted of theft later on a complaint from the owner for stealing the projection lenses. So the theater stayed empty and closed for a while and the strike petered

out. Eventually, the owner reopened the theater without the fired manager and without a union shop. That was basically it. Nothing much was accomplished, but a good deal of excitement was created on Lincoln Avenue.

2.

**PARK INTERNATIONAL/
INTERNATIONAL WOOD
PRODUCTS STRIKE
LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA
1972
ARTHUR MILLER**

Arthur Miller joined the IWW in 1970 while working for an underground newspaper in California. He subsequently found himself in the center of the bloody San Diego free speech fight. He has worked as a marine pipefitter, farm worker, miner, trucker and as a roughneck on an oil rig. He has been a member of the United Steelworkers, Teamsters, Brotherhood of Railway Carmen, and the Machinists Union. As a Wobbly, he has served as a delegate, branch secretary, organizer, general executive board member and as chairman of the IWW general defense committee. He has also been a

frequent contributor to the Industrial Worker and the IWW General Organization Bulletin.

In the spring of 1972 I had moved from Chicago to Long Beach, California. One of the local IWW people had been working with farm workers. He was involved with some people who had a dispute with a boss in a local company. They asked me if I would come in and speak to them on the possibilities of organizing.

The name of the place was Park International and International Wood Products. It was actually two parts of a company that made and produced two different materials. At Park International they made huge fiberglass tanks that were used for different filtering processes. At International Wood they made a variety of different wood products. The workers were primarily male. I would say that up to a quarter or more were Chicano and the rest of them were white, all younger workers. Working conditions were lousy. The pay was low and Chicano workers were critical of the racism of the boss.

I went in there under the agreement that I was not going to push any particular option, but to try and explain the different options to them. I explained that they could go to the AFL/CIO. Many of the workers that had experiences with them said they felt that was a waste of time. I explained that they could start a union completely on their own, but I didn't see that they had the resources to do that. Their other option was to join the IWW. They formed a committee to look into these three options. We held a meeting to vote on the choices. That was the first time that I spoke directly as an IWW member representing the IWW versus representing options. I

gave them an outline of what the IWW believed in. We had a person that translated into Spanish for the workers that didn't speak English. Nobody else was willing to present an option for the AFL/CIO or for forming their own union. After that we had a vote. 100% of the people at the meeting chose to join the IWW. Altogether there were 36 people that worked in both places and 32 joined the IWW. The meeting was held on May 1st. A few hours after that, J. Edgar Hoover died.

First we worked out our demands. There were a number of them, things like pay scale and anti-discrimination, union recognition and benefits. I believe we had ten of them. Most of them were economic conditions and dealing with racism. In the process of working out our demands, one of the major pushers of the union inside the place was fired for union activity. We had a meeting with a lawyer and we decided that we needed to take action upon the firing of the worker. We first went in and talked to the boss, presented our demands and explained that if this worker was not rehired we would call a protest strike. So the strike was not actually over our demands, but a protest strike over the firing of a union organizer. We never said that the strike was open ended or that it was going to be one day, two weeks, a month or a year. We did this for the reason that if things continued for too long we could go back without it being a loss for us. At noon that day everyone turned off all of their equipment, walked out, and started a picket line that was joined by close to 100 outside supporters.

We immediately had trouble with the AFL/CIO. They tried to send scabs in from the Laborers union. Their truck drivers physically went across our line, so we opened up the hoods of their trucks and pulled their wires out. A striker

poured a handful of dirt into the gas tank of another truck. These were all "union" truck drivers. Our fundraising was quite successful. As a matter of fact, this was one of the few organizing drives in the last 30 years that didn't put the IWW into debt; we had money left over that we returned to the organization. Our strike fund built up quickly, mainly through the support of old time Wobs and the Hungarian Book Committee, which back then was controlled by old time Hungarians. We had local fundraising too. We even went and spoke at rock concerts and passed the hat. The United Farm Workers supported us, they contributed quite a bit of food for the striking families. The Teamsters recognized our picket line and the Teamsters lunch wagon would only come out and serve food to the strikers and not the scabs inside. The Longshoremen support us considerably. We went to the Longshoremen's union because some of the companies fiberglass tanks were shipped overseas and we wanted to find out if there was some way that they would refuse to handle scab goods, which they agreed to. Not only that, they told us they would put our strikers to work on longshoremen gangs. Ironically, they made more money on strike than they would have if they settled the strike. The United Electrical Workers contributed 100 copies of their book "Labors Untold Story" to raise money.

We had situations of violence on the picket line. Thugs tried to come in and break us up. We had a 24-hour picket line and at night they would come by and intimidate people and show weapons. During the strike only one truck got out with tanks on it. Down the road some strikers released the ropes tying the tanks down and they spilled all over the place and were damaged. We didn't have arrests, but we had other

things. For example, one guy was on probation and his probation officer said that his probation would be lifted and he would have to do prison time if he didn't cross the picket line. The unemployment department tried to force people that were on unemployment to go down there and take jobs as scabs. The VA sent people down to be scabs. We picketed the boss's church once and we sent people over to his favorite bar and told people what was going on. He got drummed out of his favorite watering hole. We tried to expand it. We made good contacts into one of the places that took these tanks and added equipment to them. We almost started an organizing drive there, but that didn't pan out because we were so overwhelmed.

Unfortunately, I hate to say it, but the new breed of IWW members in the past 20 years are not that good at aspects of solidarity. As a matter of fact, I think that's the reason we eventually lost there. Chicago sent three inexperienced people out there that didn't know what they were doing. They brought these intellectual college anarchists to our educational meeting. We were having educational meetings every week. They ended up debating these far-fetched theories and within 15 minutes all the workers were gone. The problem with the modern IWW is that some of it is not grounded in real working class struggle. It doesn't really comprehend it. So in time the workers lost confidence in the IWW.

We also had trouble with the NLRB. In the process of the strike we filed for a union election and filed unfair labor practice charges at the NLRB. The problem was that when we decided to go back in the boss brought in each worker and said he would only take them back if they agreed not to testify in front of the NLRB. Those that agreed were the

only ones that were allowed to go back to work. In time the NLRB ruled that this was a fair labor practice. We couldn't get our main people back in because they wouldn't agree to it. I told our people to agree to anything, it didn't matter, we still had our suit. I was still somewhat naïve about our government. I didn't see how they could rule that this was a fair labor practice, but that's what they did. Now I won't have anything to do with the NLRB or filing for elections. I don't believe in having the government doing our organizing for us. The government's interests and our interests are two different things, and our strike definitely proved that to me.

By the time the election was held we had only two union members left there. The boss fired people, brought in scabs, and replaced everybody. Once we lost our solid people, our hardcore union supporters, it was basically lost. The election was held because we filed for it, and that was also a mistake, it happened eight months after the strike. Our main people wouldn't go back in and they harassed and intimidated those who did. Many of them quit and went on to something else. The other things was that people lost confidence in our organization because of our lack of basic union experience, knowing what was important to workers and what was downright silly.

In my opinion, the IWW needs to return to the working class. We have to do our groundwork and research. We have to develop good clear tactics and we can't be naïve in believing the government or the courts are going to be on our side. The other thing that we were trying to develop in Long Beach, but we didn't have the resources to do, was getting away from single shop organizing. There is no power in a single shop. We have to do industrial organizing. We have to

push the idea that no union worker provides goods or services to a scab plant and no union worker should ever touch scab goods. We have to get back to what we were originally talking about as an organization and quit trying to be the AFL/CIO. We are an organization with limited resources trying to imitate an organization that has great resources.

We organizers need to learn to do our groundwork first, things like research of the company and the industry. We need to have good down to earth literature that explains what we believe in. Though the IWW needs to improve in some areas, I still believe that the idea of international industrial unionism is more relevant today than it has ever been in the past. That is because today's power of the employing class is greater and it is now multi-national. Through the years I have spent in industries such as shipyards, hard rock mining and the fishing industry, I have seen first hand the weaknesses of the AFL/CIO. I believe that the IWW should stop trying to be a poor mans AFL/CIO and return to what it once was.

3.

**KENTUCKY FRIED
CHICKEN STRIKE
STATE COLLEGE, PENNSYLVANIA
1973
FRANK CALLAHAN**

Frank Callahan worked in the anti-war movement while in high school and served as a volunteer in the presidential campaigns of Eugene McCarthy and George McGovern. He joined the IWW as a student at Pennsylvania State and was one of the organizers in the State College fast food workers drive. He also worked as an IWW organizer at a Pennsylvania chemical plant and was active in a rank and file insurgency among unionized taxi drivers in Boston.

State College is an isolated place; it's very unlike a big

city. We had an IWW branch there, on campus at Penn State. The root of the branch was in student politics and the anti-war movement. We were also active in tenant organizing. At the time there were big demonstrations on campus. Sometimes the school would shut down and half the students, 10,000 or more, would be out in the streets marching. In the early 1970's it wasn't that outlandish to attack the capitalist system openly, so our branch became very active in student politics. We tried to convert the student government into a student union, which was happening all over the country. Student government was a training ground for student politicians, it didn't really represent students. Some IWW members got elected to the student government, and that was the reason the IWW was able to do a student government sponsored survey on the working conditions of students.

We went around and handed out survey forms all over State College. The questions had to do with working conditions and how satisfied student workers were. It only had three or four questions on a half sheet of paper. We distributed them everywhere and got a lot back. Our goal was to organize working students. We wanted to do a town wide campaign, not just organize one or two places. We originally planned to organize bookstores, but the survey showed high levels of dissatisfaction at fast food places, so we focused on them. We tried to organize a network and through that network pinpoint the hot spots. We actually had a map with pins on it showing businesses with high levels of dissatisfaction that we picked up from the survey. We made lots of contacts from the survey. We had members and sympathizers in restaurants all over town.

I can't recall exactly how the Kentucky Fried Chicken

contact was first made, but part of it was I lived in a house where people who worked there happened to live. A Wobbly named Bill Desmond came in from Ohio and got a job there and my brother worked there too. The people who worked there hated it and we signed up just about everyone. At first we tried to get voluntary recognition. We presented union cards to the manager, but he refused to recognize us. We immediately went out on strike.

We had a very tight picket, we would just go around in a circle on the sidewalk. What made it really effective was that we started our strike in the fall, during college football season. The economy of the town depended on the huge football crowds. The fans would come and have something to eat after the game and that was where the restaurants made their big money. Every time there was a big football game we would be out picketing in full force. When people saw our pickets they would just go past, there were plenty of other places to eat. Every football game we were able to stop all of their business. People in State College were aware of our dispute and supported it, so our strike was very effective.

When the restaurant owners in State College found out about our organizing drive they got together and raised a fund to defeat us. We simultaneously threatened all of them, and they were very worried. The owner of Kentucky Fried Chicken could have settled with us, but he owned a lot of restaurants. He had the money to just shut the place down and that's what he did. We had effectively destroyed his business anyway, so they boarded it up after the first month of the strike and that was the end of it. Next, we tried to organize a Roy Rogers restaurant in town. A majority of workers had filled out union cards, but then management

turned on their standard union busting attack. They had constant meetings with the workers and put a lot of heat on people. They really generated an atmosphere of fear. The NLRB election resulted in a fairly close vote, but the IWW lost. We had a lot of members in other restaurants, but since we lost so visibly at Kentucky Fried Chicken and Roy Rogers the fast food drive never ended up going anywhere.

One thing I learned at State College was that it's better to have a strategic view of the industry you are trying to work in rather than doing a random drive. I think you have to plan a campaign and not sit around waiting. If you look at the fast food industry, the thing is to try and form some sort of network of fast food workers who are interested in organizing, and through that network focus on the hot spots. That's what we did at State College. We did a lot of research and preparation. If you don't see the necessity of a build-up stage, it's not going to happen. Right now, I don't think the IWW has the resources to organize. I think we need to do more work in general recruiting. Our objective should be to conduct an organizing drive that has some possibility of working, rather than all of these futile drives.

4.

MID-AMERICAN METAL AND MACHINERY STRIKE VIRDEN, ILLINOIS 1977 MIKE HARGIS

Mike Hargis joined the IWW in 1972. He was involved with Students for Democratic Society and the antiwar movement. While attending the University of Maine, he worked to organize a student union and was also active in organizing the unemployed. After moving to Chicago he worked with the IWW as an organizer, a writer and a national officer. The organizing drive at Mid-America Metal and Machinery carried on a long IWW tradition of organizing among metal workers. This was perhaps best exemplified by the union's Cleveland metal workers local, a long time mainstay of the IWW.

In 1975, the Chicago branch sent out a call to members who were interested in coming to Chicago to join their organizing drive in the metal and machinery industry. I decided to take them up on it and moved to Chicago. The branch there had about 60 members, it was fairly large for the times. It had three industrial organizing committees. There was the metal and machinery workers, which I was involved with. There was also a health care workers organizing committee and a construction workers organizing committee. The idea was that they would organize in the small metal and machinery shops in Chicago. They had a list of places where people might get jobs. We were going to try and get a few people jobs at a particular place then organize from the inside once we had established ourselves. As it turned out it was in the middle of a recession and we could never get jobs in the same place. Since we couldn't get a foothold in the metal industry, we decided to broaden our jurisdiction, and started calling ourselves the general production workers organizing committee. That way we were able to get a couple of other people who were members of the Chicago branch to take part in the committee. We produced a pamphlet called "The Metal Workers guide to Safety and Health." We printed three thousand copies and started distributing them. Unfortunately, it didn't really result in any kind of recruitment. We produced a leaflet called "Slow down and live" and a direct action pamphlet. We were doing a lot of good solidarity work too.

In July of 1977 the IWW General Secretary got a call from a fellow down in Virden, Illinois. He worked with the United Auto Workers. He said he knew of some folks at the Mid-American Metal and Machinery Company in Virden.

The UAW wasn't going to organize them because there were too few people and it wouldn't be worth their while because it wouldn't be cost effective. So he asked if the IWW was interested in organizing them. We said sure, and the organizing committee sent three organizers down to Virden and met with the workers in the shop.

Mid-American Machinery was a business that bought things like road graders and bulldozers. They would refurbish and repaint them and then sell them at auctions. The workers were mechanics, painters and laborers. They were all men in their twenties and thirties. Southern Illinoisians with one foot in the south. I wouldn't say they were progressives, socially speaking. They were basically ordinary rednecks, not to use it as pejorative, but just as a description. Safety was their big concern. There was a laborer who tried to lift some heavy equipment without a hoist, because the boss didn't have hoists in the place, and he got hurt. The workers had a safety meeting. The boss got word of this and fired the laborer in retaliation for causing all this trouble. That's what sparked the organizing drive. Wages were also a concern and they were interested in medical benefits, but people were getting hurt regularly, so safety was the big thing.

There were eight people who worked in the shop and we met with six of them. Five of them joined the union right off the bat and we signed up another later. When the workers went back to work on the Monday following the meeting, they discovered that the boss had found out about the organizing and locked them out. They were locked out for a week. The organizing committee had a meeting with the employer and presented him with evidence that a majority of the people who worked for him had joined the union. They

also presented him with a letter for voluntary recognition, which he refused to sign. At this point the workers decided to file charges with the National Labor Relations Board for unfair labor practices because of the lockout. Fairly soon after that, the boss decided to lift the lockout and brought everyone back.

While they were working, the committee mobilized people in Chicago to go down to Virden and do informational picketing at the plant. While our members were still at work we were picketing outside and leafleting truck drivers who were dropping off and picking up equipment. We did succeed at turning away a couple of trucks and that ticked the boss off. We heard that the company was going to be at an auction near O'Haire airport. We called on some favors we had done for some other workers on strike, and we mobilized a picket line to go to the auction. We managed to disrupt the auction sufficiently so that Mid-American Machinery had to haul its equipment back to Virden. At this point, the boss slapped a lawsuit against the union and against one of our organizers for fifty thousand dollars, but that didn't stop us from continuing the effort. Over the next year, while the NLRB stuff was going on, we tried to keep the pressure on by picketing at auctions. We picketed at auctions at Little Rock, St. Louis, Louisville, and a couple of other places. We did manage in this manner to hurt him financially, but not enough so he would cry uncle. He kept making appeals of every NLRB decision. Finally the NLRB came down with a direct bargaining order, which basically meant that since the employer created such a situation through intimidation and other such practices, a fair election couldn't be held. So the NLRB recognized that the IWW did

have a majority of workers in the union and therefore the employer would have to bargain with the union. Of course he didn't accept that. He continued his appeals and harassing suits and we continued to picket auctions. It was in a stalemate.

Meanwhile, our majority atrophied in the workplace. One guy left to be a deputy in the Sheriffs department, another guy left to work in the mines, another guy was fired for allegedly sabotaging some machinery. By the spring of 1978 we were down to one guy left in the shop who was a member of the union. In May, the boss announced he was building a new worksite and he started to work on the new site. It was at this same time that the last union member left decided that this was the time to strike because of the move and the extra costs of construction. So the guy went on strike and we mobilized as best we could.

We had to picket two, sometimes three locations. The boss still had the original place. He also had a temporary place, which was across from the old place, and then there was the new site being constructed. For the first week it looked pretty good. The construction crew and the electricians agreed not to cross the picket line until things were clarified. Unfortunately, after the first week they got word from their union officers that they had to cross the picket line because of their contract. There were some pretty heavy incidents on the picket line, particularly with truck drivers who were trying to cross the line. A couple of women pickets confronted a driver and he got out of his truck and pushed one in the face. He said he couldn't live with himself if he honored a commie picket line, so as a good Teamster and an American he was going to cross the line. So he did, and we

were continually faced with this. Another truck driver got out of his cab with a tire iron. There was one time I was picketing at the temporary shop with another guy and some guy from the city waste disposal brought his garbage truck to pick up the garbage. We asked him not to cross the picket line so he got out of his cab and started screaming and yelling that he was a good American. So he grabbed my baseball cap and pulled it down over my face. He was going to punch me over the garbage. There were times when it was really surreal.

We continued to picket throughout the summer until it became clear that the strike wasn't doing what we hoped it would do, which was to force the boss to start negotiations. So by the fall, the committee talked with this last union member and convinced him that he should offer to go back to work unconditionally with the understanding that the boss would refuse to take him back, which would be another unfair labor practice. That meant we could file another NLRB charge, plus he could get unemployment. After that, the strike was over, although we never called it off. The situation was that we had a direct bargaining order from the NLRB, but nobody employed at the shop was a member of the union. So we concentrated on trying to keep our sole union member from going completely bankrupt and we continued to pursue the NLRB charges and counter the civil suits made against the union.

In 1980 we got a letter from the boss. All of his appeals had gone naught, so he finally agreed he would start negotiating with the union. By that time the general production workers organizing committee had ceased to exist, so it was addressed by the industrial organizing committee, which

was a national IWW organizing committee. The chairman of the committee sent a letter to the people who were currently employed at Mid-American Machinery informing them that according to the NLRB they had a union. He asked them to get in touch with us and let us know what kind of issues they would like to bargain over, but we never heard from anybody. So it kind of faded off into nowhere.

Virden created a lot of internal problems in the Chicago branch. People blamed each other for screwing up and there was a lot of internal fighting over the next few years. There were a lot of personal feelings that came out of it, and it got to the point that certain people couldn't stand to be in the same room together. It made it difficult to accomplish anything, and a lot of people just dropped out. Unfortunately, that's the way it goes sometimes.

One thing I learned from this strike is that the IWW's idea of unionism is something that working people can grasp, it's not something that's foreign to them. It's something they can accept. The people down in Virden accepted it on the level of their jobs if not the total ideology of it. The other thing is that in terms of tactics, trying to organize a place that's 300 miles away is not a good idea. On one hand, we want to help people who need help, who want to get organized. On the other hand, if you don't have a base in the area, something to work from, it's very difficult. You can't really import it from someplace else. Maybe if we could have afforded to have a core of people down there full time, something different would have happened. On the other hand, it was a good experience for people. The best things we did was the auction pickets. We cost him an awful lot of money at those things. He couldn't sell his equipment and he had to buy

back a lot of stuff. What he did sell he sold at reduced prices. It got to the point where the people who were running the auctions didn't want him around because they knew that wherever his equipment was there would be pickets. So we were able to disrupt his operations quite a bit.

Another thing I learned from this is that there are some bosses who would rather go out of business than deal with a union. There's some kind of ideology about it where it's their business and they're going to do whatever they damn well please and they are not going to listen to anybody. In the long run it probably would have been cheaper for him, in the first week, to bargain with his workers and give them a few concessions rather than lose money from the disruption of his business. The other lesson I drew from it was that going through the NLRB, especially in a situation where you have so few workers, is probably not the best tactic because it takes too damn long.

5.

**UNIVERSITY CELLAR/CHARRING
CROSS BOOKSTORE STRIKES
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN
1978
FRED CHASE**

Like many IWW organizers of his time, Fred Chase came from the New Left. A member of Students for a Democratic Society, he was also active in the antiwar movement and as a student organizer. He worked briefly in an IWW print shop and at various times was a member of the United Auto Workers and The United Food and Commercial Workers. He was a long time activist in the IWW Shop at University Cellar and was a contributing writer to the Industrial Worker. Fred Chase also served as General Secretary Treasurer of the IWW. The local at University Cellar was

one of the few long term IWW Shops of recent times, representing over 70 workers.

University Cellar was a college bookstore. It had a long radical tradition. It was started by a sit in of students protesting the capitalist operations in town. They wanted a non-profit bookstore that wouldn't gouge them. The store was incorporated and it was owned and operated by the Michigan student assembly. They appointed a board of directors with the approval of the board of regents and it included faculty, staff and students.

I went to work at U Cellar in 1972. There had been five unsuccessful organizing drives over the years. They were by the workers, they weren't connected to any particular union. There was one occasion where a Wobbly did come into the shop for a while. He did some agitating, but he was only a temporary worker, and once he left that fell apart. Finally in 1978 we called a meeting and had a discussion about the possible unions and whether we should be independent. I had some union experience, so I described these experiences and then I talked about the IWW. The workers agreed with me that it was the most appropriate for our shop, because it would leave us alone to make our own decisions about what was going to be in our contract. They wouldn't be just one more boss over our heads.

The workers at U Cellar were mostly in their twenties. A lot of them had finished college. They were having trouble finding jobs in their careers so they turned their part time jobs in college into full time jobs. They were a very intelligent work force, very committed and hard working. They wanted raises, but the primary issue of contention was workers self-management. We had a liberal manager that every-

one liked. He was moving on, and the new manager tried to make the organizational structure a lot more hierarchal. That made worker decision making a key issue.

In the earlier union drives, we would get to the radicals in the shop, which was about 25% of the workforce. We would call a meeting and only the militants would show up. That was where the drives usually petered out. On the successful drive we decide that we weren't going to quit until we had talked to every person in the shop. Ultimately we succeeded in getting the less militant people to join us as well. We went through the NLRB because we were forced to by management. We signed people up into the union rather than getting authorization cards. After we signed up two thirds of the workers we walked up to management, told them what we had, and that we wanted to start negotiating. They refused to recognize us, so we went to the NLRB and won by the same two-thirds membership that we had in the shop.

The first contract negotiations were tough. One of our members basically built the contract. He spent a lot of time in the library looking at other contracts and picking out the best from each one. They weren't required to negotiate about worker involvement in decision making. It came to the point where we were getting close to an agreement, but worker involvement was the key issue that wasn't getting anywhere. Finally, we told them that we were going to strike for wages, and if they wanted us to come down on our wage demands, they were going to have to talk to us about self-management. They were absolutely set against that, so we went out on strike. Initially we had a strike authorization vote. The workers understood that we would not strike with that authorization without coming back to them. When we

did go back to them the strike vote was pretty close, but we got a majority. As it turned out, we got pretty good support even from the people who opposed this strike because it was a very democratic decision making process. Nobody felt forced into anything and the workers who lost the vote felt a strong commitment to their co-workers.

We picketed in front of the store for three days. We had a great turnout. I don't know what it would have been like if we had gone for two weeks, but for those three days everyone was up for it. We also had people who weren't on the picket line, who were off preparing food for the strikers. We didn't ask for much money from the International because we had been collecting dues for nine months from over 60 members, so we usually had more than we needed. Our policy was that we would pay anyone's rent if they were about to be evicted, or anything like that. We wanted to make sure that the workers didn't suffer any dramatic hardships. Money also came from IWW branches around the country without our asking for it. We got over a thousand dollars in donations, which was a nice gesture of solidarity.

There were some minor incidents on the picket line. The assistant manager rode a bicycle to work and somebody slashed his tires. Some of the union members were pretty upset about that, so we issued a general statement that we didn't feel this was an appropriate action for the strike. We encouraged our members not to do that if they were indeed the guilty ones. There was a rented truck that management had filled with textbooks and someone put sugar in the gas tank and let the air out of the tires. Then there was one day I was on the line with my daughter. There were very few members who crossed the line, but there was one scab who

was crossing that day. My daughter stuck out her arms and said, "you can't cross this picket line." The woman got really angry and pushed her out of the way. Other than that, it was pretty level headed on both sides.

Business went down dramatically during the strike. It was getting good publicity in the student newspaper, so everyone knew what was going down. We struck right at the beginning of the textbook rush in the fall. That was when the bookstore did most of its business, so it really hurt them. Management had hired a lawyer to do their negotiating. We were worried about that at first, but he turned out to be a pretty level-headed guy. When they were getting their backs up he pointed out to them that if they wanted the store to survive it would make sense for them to let us have some of the managerial decision making that we wanted. We went back to negotiating and made some concessions. We were looking for workers self management. What we wound up with was something where we had a lot of input into decision making. There was a store council established and it had representatives from each department. The council made the day to day business operation decisions for the store but there was veto power from the board and that was basically where it wound up.

After the strike was settled, there was constant tension between the union and management. We had an effective grievance procedure, so we managed to work out most problems without going too far. One time we had a one day sick out. They weren't going to pay us for it. We told them there was a good chance there would be another sick out so they decided to pay us for the day. Another time we had a procession through the store and sang songs in the Wobbly tradition. I

think we sang Solidarity Forever, but it was with lyrics that applied to the University Cellar. A couple of times, the negotiations went all night the day before we had scheduled a strike. It was really down to the wire a couple of times, but we always managed to work something out at the last minute and get a contract. I think that if we hadn't had the strike to begin with we would have had to have one down the road to convince them we were serious. They were pretty cautious about not alienating or antagonizing us and forcing us back out.

The structure of our local was pretty traditional. We had shop stewards, delegates that collected the dues, and a branch secretary-treasurer. We had weekly meetings at the store. They weren't terribly well attended, we would usually get nine or ten people, but they were always there. A lot of times we would make a decision with these nine or ten people and everyone would raise hell. So we would have another meeting a week later and there would be thirty people there to reverse the decision. Some of the members were also active in the Ann Arbor general membership branch, which coordinated the local organizing efforts. We were able to organize several shops at the time, including the Peoples Warehouse, the Ann Arbor Tenants Union and Leopolds, a local restaurant. We had all of those shops under contract at one time or another.

We also organized and took out on strike a bookstore called Charring Cross Books. It was a small bookstore that sold antiquarian books. They employed three workers. Two of them were former employees of U Cellar, so they contacted us. They were upset over working conditions, namely wages and hours, and they wanted job protections. We

drew up a list of demands and presented them to the bookstore management. They turned us down, so the workers went on strike. We were on the picket line for about ten days. We pulled some Wobblies out of U Cellar to picket for the striking workers. Frank Cedervall, an old time Wobbly, came up and spent a week with us. It was a quiet picket line, but it was interesting just talking to the passers by. At one point we went to another bookstore operated by the same owner and we set up an informational picket. There was some hostility there because people were claiming we were doing a secondary boycott. That was our intention, but it was presented as an informational picket. Eventually Frank Cedervall negotiated a contract with the employer. It was basically a face saving agreement. The owner was in the process of selling it to a couple who decided they could run the place themselves. They agreed that if they had to hire anyone they would hire back those three workers and give them a raise. They never did hire them back. The workers went on to other jobs so it was a moot point, but we did strike and win a contract.

The University Cellar went out of business in December of 1986. It had always been a fairly marginal operation. Being non-profit they didn't maintain any reserves. Any profits that were made were put back into the business or went into wages and benefits. In the fall of 1986 the bank we were dealing with was about to merge with another bank. I think they concluded that we were a marginal operation and that we didn't look good on their books, so they refused to give us a loan. Twice a year we needed loans to keep the store going, we couldn't function without them. Once we were turned down we started scampering around looking for

other banks, but no one would give us a loan. I felt there was a blacklist, that once one bank said we were at risk the rest of them weren't going to deal with us. I think it was purely a business decision with no heart and we got screwed by it.

6.

**KELLER INDUSTRIES STRIKE
LONG ISLAND, NEW YORK
1985
PAUL POULOS**

Paul Poulos is a veteran labor activist and union organizer. He has worked for years in the Teamsters reform movement. He served as a national organizer with the Professional Drivers Council for Safety and Health and as a rank and file activist in Teamsters local 814. He was also a founder of the brotherhood team, a reform group within local 814, which for many years was controlled by organized crime. He served a term as IWW general secretary and has spearheaded many IWW organizing drives, including attempts to organize assembly workers in Arkansas, prisoner laborers in Ohio, and child care workers in Massachusetts.

Keller Industries was a distributor that would bring in fish from New England for sales distribution in New York City. It was in East Northport, Long Island. The guys we tried to organize were drivers who distributed locally to Long Island and New York restaurants. It wasn't a large group of employees, my estimation is probably six or eight. They were younger guys, a nice bunch of guys actually. They were solid, real solid. It wasn't an operation that was run with any warehouses or coolers, it was the kind of stuff that was pedal on the run. They were treated very badly. I think it was more or less a question of respect, the way the employer talked to people, and it was pay of course, my recollection is that it was far from adequate. These guys had to transport the products at three or four in the morning in freezing weather without proper gear, outside without garage facilities. It wasn't a particularly good work situation. It was an employer who was shooting from the hip, trying to find easy ways to do things at people's expense.

My brother, who is 16 years younger than me, was working there. He wasn't as dedicated a unionist as I was, but he knew I was involved with the union. He called me up and told me what was going on. He felt that those people out there wanted to organize, so that was the triggering mechanism, the connection that started it.

I went out there one morning, prearranged with the workers, and we engaged the company. We confronted the employer with recognizing the union or a strike, and it turned out that we had a strike because he wouldn't recognize us. We picketed for a couple of months. The union supported them. Contributions were made, donations came in from all over the country. It came from individual branches

and people. The IWW published the literature we sent them and were very supportive in that way, but the IWW is not the AFL/CIO, it doesn't have millions in funds available. It's an organization that has always been run by the seat of its pants. It puts more stock in the ingenuity and strength of its people as opposed to dollars and cents.

In any event, the upshot was that one of the workers there was actually an employer patsy who broke the strike line and tried to run us down. I got into a confrontation with him. He was waving a pipe from the inside of the cab as he was coming through. I broke the mirror on the side of the truck as I was jumping on and got arrested. Eventually the employer left town. His trucks were out of there, he moved out of state. He totally abandoned the business, and once that happened the issue became moot, the strike was over. We put him out of business, I mean it came down to that. If you aren't going to treat people correctly and pay the freight then get the fuck out of here.

We filed Labor Board charges against him, but it went nowhere. It's really a joke, the NLRB, and it's sad too because it gives the illusion of protection to people when there is none. For example, take region three, the New York area. The Board is anywhere from six months to a year in issuing complaints. It's probably a year and a half behind in holding Administrative Law Hearings. The entire process from beginning to end could take someone six to ten years. When they're through the individual doesn't remember what job it was he was trying to get reinstated at. It's pathetic. Those motherfuckers break the law they call it unfair but when we break the law they call it unlawful. There is a certain psychology in the language, unfair as opposed to unlawful.

The Keller strike was a tremendous learning experience for the guys who were involved in it, as is every organizing drive. People take away with them the skills and knowledge they acquired and teach others, life goes on. It wasn't any great shakes, it was just another organizing drive. It's what Wobblies do when a situation arises. I have always said that if the IWW was credited for the secondary support activity that they engage in you would see a much broader influence of the IWW in the world. The Wobbly has a certain mentality. It's a socially progressive mentality and it demands that a Wobbly act in situations that are socially unacceptable. Within that context there are Wobblies out there in all walks of life in all kinds of situations stirring up shit that people have no idea of. We belong to a union that doesn't provide health insurance to us as members, we are not covered by collective bargaining agreements, but year after year members pay dues to this organization to support an idea. Not too many unions can boast of that. There's something to be said for it.

7.

**END UP STRIKE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA
1992
DEKE NIHLSON**

Deke Nihlson was a shop floor organizer in the End Up organizing drive. Originally involved in the punk rock scene, he went on to become an activist in the anarchist movement and militant gay organizing. The organizing drive at the End Up was profoundly influential. It introduced the concept of class struggle within the gay community at large. The organizers also utilized unique tactics in their fight, innovations encouraged by the worker control philosophy of the IWW.

The End Up is a particularly old gay bar. It goes way back. It's a long-standing institution and it's pretty well

known. The way it works is that different clubs do different nights at the bar. Doing the club and doing the bar are two different things. The way the bar makes money is by selling alcohol. The clubs do promotional work and publicity and get people into the bar. They decorate the interior, set a theme and hire a deejay. They do all the cultural work around making it more than just a space with a bar in it, but actually creating an environment within it. They would set up and charge a price at the door. The clubs kept the cover charge and the bar made its money off of selling drinks.

We were the maintenance workers and the janitors. We also did construction and repair. Essentially, what that entailed was going up after the party was over and cleaning the club, rendering it habitable again. It was part time, but it paid particularly well. We never had a grievance with the pay. Half of our shifts were in the middle of the day, half of them were in the middle of the night. There were six workers. Four of us had worked there over a year, which was incredibly long by the standards of the job description. A couple workers were more recent than that, maybe six months.

There was an incredibly absentee owner and a generally absent general manager. There was also an office manager or two. The office managers were the people who were around all the time. The owner showed up long enough to take his money every Monday afternoon and the general manager wasn't around. We had set it up so that in working with one of our office managers we were effectively largely self-managing our department. We weren't setting our own wages, but we were setting our own hours and making our own schedule. The only requirement was that the work got done in time for the club to open. There were also times

when the mess was particularly bad and we needed people on a temporary basis. So the people employed there would come up with the extra workers. We could get people individual hours of work that were so brief they didn't even legally need to go on the books. We had very wide latitude over our working conditions. For example, one of the people working there was a person with AIDS and had a hard time with chemical sensitivities and with exposure to bacteria as well. He could never clean the bathrooms, he would sweep the floors. We could handle that.

What started things was what happened to a worker named Jasmine. She had been a homeless youth on the streets because she was queer and her family threw her out. She felt that she had been welcomed into a family at the End Up. It's sort of a gay slogan that we're all family. Indeed that sentiment has been used to keep unions out of the queer ghetto. She had been subject to the occasional arbitrary firing that the manager would visit upon the workforce to make an example and keep people scared. She never recovered from it. It was more than just losing a job to her, it was losing her place in the community. She had been dealing with personal problems and when she lost her job she slid into despair. She would show up at the bar screaming and crying. One time she showed up drunk and told the people at the bar that she was going to kill herself. The manager who was there told her that if she was going to do that she should go outside, so she did. She went outside to the crosswalk in front of the club, pulled out a gun, and blew her brains out. I came to work just in time to see the San Francisco Fire Department hosing what was left of her head down the sewer. It was devastating to everyone. She had

been disposed of by something she thought of as her family. There was no redress for her, no path to justice, and that was what led to her death. To me, it was a profound reinforcement of why we needed a union.

What happened next was the office manager quit and there was one person in the department who wanted to be manager. It was funny, because management had spent months fishing around to see if any one of us would be interested in managing our department. We weren't because we were doing it collectively, so we continued to individually refuse. But not this one guy. He got in there and he immediately sabotaged the collective scheduling system. The next thing he did was fire the person with AIDS, who ironically had gotten him his job to begin with. Then a coworker and I were summarily fired. Those were the outrages that set the series of events in motion.

The strike started directly upon us presenting a contract to management for recognition in the presence of a union representative. We walked the picket line for about five months. The employer went to the National Labor Relations Board but we didn't. We kept the heat on them directly and made it both a labor issue and a community issue. We did a couple of different kinds of picketing. We had been maintaining picket lines during the morning and early day to try and prevent the delivery of liquor by largely Teamster labor. We were told by the drivers that what we needed was formal recognition from the joint council. So we got a form, filled it out and sent it to the council. They graciously granted it to us, they thought it was great. They stopped liquor deliveries for about a week. The Teamster driver would show up with the truck, park it, see the picket line and refuse to unload. So

he would call the boss and then the boss would come out in his little car and move the alcohol himself. Much joy was had watching some of those guys sweat for their money for the first time in their lives. Of course, the distributor wasn't going to keep that up, so they had the End Up pick up the alcohol at the warehouse itself.

So the End Up hired scabs and rented a U Haul to go get the alcohol themselves from the distribution site. What we could have done, though not legally because of Taft Hartley, is gone and picketed the distributors, but our beef wasn't with the Teamsters union. So instead we attempted to physically intervene between the scabs, the truck and the door of the club. At that point they called the cops and had us arrested. We weren't taken off, we were cited and the charges were eventually dropped. They were simply using the cops to break the picket line. We could have kept struggling there, but we figured that we had taken that as far as it could go in terms of establishing that this was a line that other unions wouldn't cross and we did have the power to stop liquor deliveries.

We then shifted to more of a public outreach strategy. What we were doing was taking one strategy as far as we could, given our limited resources. After we made our point we would shift tactics. So our next tactic was to do informational picketing at the clubs, which lasted two or three months. At first we did it nightly, then we did one different club a week and finally a couple of pickets spaced two to four weeks. A lot of the club patrons had never heard of this before and so it was all very new to them. These were the people we were trying to reach the most. We had the occasional patron who simply refused to cross the line even

when we said it was okay to go on in. There was a minority of people who actively sneered at anything having to do with the union. But the great bulk of people had never been confronted by that kind of a situation before, let alone right in the heart of the queer ghetto. We also had a media circus. We held a press conference in front of the End Up which was covered by a few of the queer community papers. We explained what was going on. I burned a rainbow flag to illustrate my assertion that we are not all family. A few of us are bosses and the rest of us are workers. We got extensive coverage, most it quite sympathetic.

This was the situation, on the line if you will, that proved to me that what the IWW says about workers determining the parameters of their own struggle is really true. It was ideas in action, because of course many Wobblies who weren't in the shop were of the opinion that we ought to boycott the bar and all the clubs in it. We pointed out that the bar and the clubs were two different institutions. We wanted to draw a very clear line that our struggle was not with the clubs, it wasn't with the community, it was with the owners of the bar. It was a labor-management dispute. That turned the situation not into a barricade where the class war was fought. It was the springboard for the introduction of a class analysis into the queer community, which previous to that had been remarkably lacking. This resulted in all sorts of shady employment practices on the part of gay bosses. The gay ghetto in general is a union free environment. We set out to change that. What that meant was that we got to leaflet thousands of queer and queer friendly patrons in a way that wasn't directly threatening to them.

When we reached pretty much everyone we could that

way and our human resources were stretched beyond the ability to maintain a regular picket line, we shifted tactics again. We took our case to the NLRB. It took two or three years, but their investigators sustained our charges, which meant that the government took an advocacy role on our behalf against the End Up. Of course, the End Up presumed the NLRB would not sustain the charges. That was a safe assumption for them because the NLRB only sustains something like one percent of charges of illegal firing based on union activity, but surprise, surprise, the government sustained our charges. The End Up tried to get them dismissed but that wasn't successful, so they spent some time delaying and we didn't go away. They told us that even if we won they would appeal it all the way to the Supreme Court. We said that would be fine, because it wasn't costing us as much as it was costing them. They said they were going to declare bankruptcy and we said fine, we'll take credit. They tried everything that generally discourages a business union, but we didn't care. So ultimately when they could no longer get the trial postponed they actually started talking out of court settlement, which of course the government encourages. We were willing to settle for a lot of their money. The way these kinds of negotiations work is you end up negotiating for some fraction of back wages. What you sue for at the NLRB is the amount of wages you would have earned had you still been working there. By the time the trial was breaking they owed us collectively something like fifty grand in back wages. They made an offer that was way too low, we countered with an offer that was a little too high and we ended up with an amount we could live with. When they paid it we signed papers dropping the charges. Dispute resolved.

I had been in labor disputes before in the queer community and had, along with my fellow workers, sided against going union. What we did instead was make it a community issue. We took our case to the queer community and expected solidarity based on those parameters. It was a disaster. We didn't get press coverage, we didn't get public support, and we didn't get institutional change. I went in to the End Up situation with that experience already under my belt. I knew that if we were going to do anything about working conditions it would have to be done differently than that.

Something that I knew in theory but was really borne out for me was the efficacy of unionizing to deal with problems at work. I think the Wobblies, other activist groups and people in the community also saw that borne out in the course of the struggle. Not just right then and there, but in the intervening years. Interestingly enough, one of the things I found was that a lot of people who thought it was a personal dispute, just a disgruntled worker or two, later saw it in a broader context, in a more historical context. Just breaking down the wall was the single biggest task at hand. In terms of that the organizing drive at the End Up was a resounding success.

The other thing I learned is that it can be done. The best way to organize is with the kind of organization that stays under the control and in the hands of the workers that are affected by the decisions being made. That's something that is to this day remarkably unique with the IWW. Most other unions will send somebody in to make your decisions for you rather than the worker run delegate model that the IWW uses. I think that was a very powerful thing.

Something else that I personally learned was that the End Up was not a barricade, it was not a which side are you on

situation. It was the introduction of a new idea to a particular community of people, one that could never win or lose based on who did or didn't go over the line. Even though everyone knows what a union is, the whole idea of it being real and relevant and part of our everyday lives as queer workers in queer workplaces was almost unprecedented. We made that real and made it tangible in a way that allowed people the space to think about it and come to their own conclusions. That's why I called it much more of a springboard for a reintroduction of the ideas of class division into a community of people who are busy chanting that they are family. In fact there are few bosses and many workers and we don't have common social interests.

I think in part, queers are finding the voice and the will to come out in their unions and form caucuses and be visibly queer. We have to remember that while McCarthy was busy trying to get the unions to purge their communists, the reds were busy trying to purge queers from their ranks as a security risk. There is some history there that is not well known but is very clear in terms of its parallels. I think that the development of queer consciousness as queer workers has already been happening because of the social revolution allowing queers to come out of the closet in broader society. That has also been resonating with the fact that unions are under attack like they have not been in decades. The unions have been in a struggle for their very existence, much as queers have always been, so there's sort of a coming home in that.

I wouldn't say that we started it all, but we were the first this side of the seventies to make the connection between labor and queer issues. Especially at a very visible institu-

tion in a very visible queer ghetto in San Francisco. We made a loud sound as a militant queer union. I think that made the idea, the next time it came up, not so strange to people. When we were doing it there were many people who had never heard of that before. All that informational picketing and leafleting we did paid off. For example, the San Francisco AIDS foundation, one of the larger and older community based AIDS service organizations in the United States, has gone union. They organized with the Service Employees International Union into their own local. I think we had something to do with that. I talk to business union activists and I find that very often when I tell them that I am with the Wobblies they know about the End Up organizing drive. Word has gotten around much further than even the specific case we made at the End Up. That was very much the kind of effect we hoped to have in organizing with the Wobblies. I think we were immensely successful in that, whereas if we had taken a strict class war approach we wouldn't have made it nearly as far. I fully credit the IWW with giving us the solidarity to see that through and the autonomy to construct that struggle in our particular context, in a way that worked for us.

8.

BOULEVARD BINGO STRIKE ALLENTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA 1992 LENNY FLANK

Lenny Flank became an activist at an early age. As a boy growing up in Rapid City, South Dakota, he witnessed first hand the federal government's suppression of the American Indian Movement. Prior to joining the IWW he was involved with the Nuclear Freeze Movement and organized support for the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. Along with Jeff Kelly and Fara Farbod, he founded the Lehigh Valley IWW branch in Eastern Pennsylvania, which quickly became one of the most outspoken and active branches in the union. The organizing drive at Boulevard Bingo was a simple case of a Wobbly being in the right place at the right time. It brought

to the surface tensions between the local and the IWW general administration. These tensions have been a recurrent theme in several contemporary IWW organizing drives.

The whole thing started in June of 1992. Jeff Kelly just happened to be driving down the road one day and he saw a group of people standing in front of this bingo hall with picket signs. As Lehigh Valley Wobs, we have a standing policy that whenever we see picket lines, we always stop and ask what's going on. So he pulled over and asked what was happening.

It turned out that a group of bingo workers were upset about the working rules they had in the bingo hall. The issue they were most concerned about was that literally every day they came into work there would be different work rules. People would be punished for rules that didn't exist until they were punished for them. The bingo hall was operated at the time by a guy who brought his wife in as the new supervisor. She changed all the work rules because she was trying to force people out and hire her relatives instead. So one of the workers happened to have been fired and that was the spark that set it off. The rest of the workers, there were ten of them all together, walked off the job, picked up signs, and started picketing. Their hope was that they would force the boss into rehiring this person. Instead, the boss fired all ten of them right there on the picket line. So when Jeff heard the story, they asked him if there was anything he could do to help. They had talked to the Teamsters about three months before and were shot down. Most AFL/CIO unions have a policy, either unwritten or not, that they don't attempt to organize any company with less than 50 employees. So Jeff

told them that we might be able to help. He went home and called me and Fara Farbod. We met in a bar and sat down and decided this was a fight that we probably had the resources to go ahead with.

The next day we showed up on the picket line. We told them that we could file charges on their behalf with the National Labor Relations Board. We had no idea how long that was going to take, but we thought they had a pretty good chance of winning it. So it snowballed from there. After about a week all ten of them had signed union cards. In July we sent a letter to the bingo hall owners saying look, you can't fire these people, it's illegal. We want you to take them back on the job. They are represented by a union and we want to talk about a contract. Of course, we never got an answer so we went ahead and filed charges.

By October we got the decision from the NLRB that they had issued a merit finding and they ordered the bingo hall to rehire all ten of the employees. The bingo hall rehired them and fired them again within 24 hours. At that point we filed more charges and then from there things got crazy. We picketed every day for about three months.

We discussed civil disobedience, but ultimately decided against it because it would have been a tremendous financial strain, we just didn't have the money to post bail or pay for a lawyer. The police showed up when we first started picketing, they were there every fifteen minutes for the first four days. Remarkably enough, the police were fairly supportive of us because they knew we had the legal right to be there. There wasn't a whole hell of a lot they could do to stop us. After a while they were getting so annoyed with the bingo owners that they flat out told them not to call them anymore,

there was nothing they could do. There were also replacement workers who were relatives of the manager. To their credit, there was actually one or two of them who refused to go in. There were also a lot of customers who refused to go in. Not enough as it turned out, but a lot.

The thrust of our strategy at that point was to try and force a voluntary recognition. What we wanted to do was to hurt the bingo hall so badly that they would give in without having to go to the NLRB. We knew the fed process would be long and drawn out and we didn't know if these people were willing to hang tough for that long or not. We wanted to try and extract a voluntary recognition, but that ultimately went nowhere because the boss was the biggest asshole I had ever met in my life.

When the NLRB ordered him to rehire everyone and he promptly fired them all again, even the feds were outraged. They are used to dealing with big companies who at least know the rules. When they break the rules they don't do it quite so blatantly. They were really pissed off about it, which as it turned out was a good thing for us because it turned the feds into our allies. That doesn't happen very often in an IWW strike. The other good thing was that by firing the employees, it turned into a lockout, which meant they could collect unemployment.

One of the biggest problems we had at the beginning of this thing was that if the fight went longer than a week, we didn't have any money to keep this thing going. There was a lot of conflict between us and the IWW general administration over this. The distinct impression I got was that the GA resented giving us money to help these workers out. I kept trying to make these people understand that these workers

didn't have a job. They had rent to pay, bills to pay and food to buy. If we couldn't keep them out they were going to go back. We didn't have any choice in the matter. At the time we were putting out a newsletter and every month we had an appeal for funds. We actually raised about a thousand dollars, but it was not enough. We just couldn't raise enough on our own, so we had no choice but to go to the GA and they did not like it. In the end, the good thing about the Lehigh Valley branch is that we have connections all over the country, good working relations with a lot of other branches. Our fellow workers in Philadelphia, Santa Cruz and San Francisco went to bat for us. Without those folks we probably would not have got a nickel. So the most fortunate thing for us was that the federal government was providing the strike fund. All these people collected unemployment for 26 weeks. That was the key factor that allowed this to get off the ground.

Ultimately what happened was the NLRB scheduled a trial. Fifteen minutes before it was about to start, the bingo hall came in and said they wanted to talk about a settlement. We hashed it out and reached an agreement. The boss agreed to reinstate all ten of the workers, give them part of their back pay, and he agreed to sign a contract with the IWW. We got everything signed, we got the contract, everyone went back to work and then we ran into a problem.

The bingo hall was actually owned by two separate organizations. The supervisor was managing on behalf of both of them. Right after everyone was reinstated under the contract the county government stepped in. They had been investigating this supervisor because he had alleged connections to all kinds of organized crime people in Philadelphia. They basically concluded that he was siphoning off money so they

pulled his bingo license. He was actually President of one of the organizations, the Pennsylvania Association of Songwriters, Composers and Lyricists. The other organization was called Allied Air Force. They ran a little museum where they had old airplanes and helicopters. Presumably, they used the bingo hall money to fix up the airplanes. Allied was allowed to keep its license but it had restrictions placed upon it by the District Attorney's office, the primary of which was that they had to fire the manager, which they did.

The President of Allied Air Force decided that he was going to run the bingo hall himself. This guy had no experience whatsoever, he was an airplane mechanic. He also seemed to have the idea that he was the boss and if there were parts of the contract that he didn't like, he didn't have to follow them. So he started violating the contract from the day it was signed. At first we tried to be reasonable with the guy. We sat down and talked to him, but he basically told us to fuck off. At that point we had no other option but to file more charges. We went ahead and did that and right after that our supporters started getting written up for disciplinary measures, then fired one at a time. As each one was fired, we would file more charges. That dragged on for about a year until it was finally scheduled for a trial.

One of the tactics management used to put pressure on the union was to file a lawsuit against me personally, their reasoning being that it would bankrupt us because we didn't have money for a lawyer. They thought it would scare me into dropping all of this and that we would just fold up and go away. As it turned out none of that happened. Instead, it presented a great opportunity for us because our lawyer was working for next to nothing and their lawyer wasn't. Our

strategy was to file challenges to everything we could possibly think of. We filed all kinds of motions for discovery, the point being to have their lawyers run up such legal bills that this would be a tremendous cost to Allied Air Force. We hoped that eventually it would get to the point where they just could not afford to drag this thing out anymore, and it turned out that was exactly what happened.

When the NLRB charges were scheduled to go to trial again, about ten minutes before the trial was about to start the lawyer for Allied Air Force came over to me and said he wanted to talk about a settlement. We said the only deal we were interested in was that we weren't going to ask for anyone to be reinstated because there were no union employees left. What we did want was that people get at least half of the back pay they had coming to them and that they drop the lawsuit against me. We dickered around for a couple of hours, but they basically gave in and signed the agreement.

Our basic problem was that we had no one in the workforce when this whole thing started. The only option we had was to get our people back in the workforce. Once it became clear that we were not going to get voluntary recognition and he was not going to reinstate these people, the only other option was to go to the feds. If it had been our choice, we would not have taken that option because we knew what the probable outcome would be, which was exactly what happened. It took so long and dragged out so far that by the time we got the rulings in our favor nobody cared. Everyone had found jobs someplace else, there was no one left to go back. That's why we don't have a job shop there now, because it took two years to get everyone back.