

**THINK**

**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE**



**OVER**

**INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD**

**BY TIM ACOTT**

Second Edition 2021

**WORKING PEOPLE** HAVE ONLY ONE  
REAL OPTION IN TODAY'S ECONOMY.  
WE HAVE TO **RESIST**, WITH ALL OUR  
MIGHT, THE BIG BUSINESS PROGRAM  
OF FURTHER DEEPENING POVERTY FOR  
WORKING PEOPLE.



## **Think It Over**

Second Edition, 2021  
The Literature Working Group  
Industrial Workers of the World

With appreciation to first edition author, Fellow Worker Tim Acott

# Preamble to the Constitution of the IWW

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.

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

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

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

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

**SOLIDARITY**

**SOLIDARITY**

**W**orking people have only one real option in today's economy. We have to resist, with all our might, the big business program of further and deeper poverty for working people. For the first time in modern history profits are going up while wages and benefits are going down. In the past the two have always been tied, however unequally. Now the game has changed. Worse impoverishment and more of it is the wave of the future if we don't stand against the tide. We have only one hope of fending off this tidal wave of misery. That hope, that tool, is solidarity. Every worker must stand up for every other worker, no matter where you live or where you come from, we must stand together. Every loss to any worker is a loss to us all, and every gain by any part of the working class is a victory for us all.

We must stand together. We must extend our hands across the borders and across the seas. We must support each worker's struggle as if it were our very own because that is exactly what it is. Together we can win. Together we can make this world a better place to live, to raise our children, to spend our old age.

**Direct Action**

**gets the goods.**

**To defend ourselves we  
need to stand together  
and stand up for  
ourselves.**



**D**irect action can be defined as the use of any tool, tactic, or strategy that you can control yourself. It means using tactics that directly address your problem. It's straightforward and simple and you can trust it. It succeeds or fails according to how good your idea is, how forcefully it is applied, and how appropriate it is to the situation.

Voting for candidates who promise to fix your problems for you is not direct action. To strike, to slow down, to sit down on the job are direct actions. To symbolically protest for the purpose of getting press coverage, in hopes that it will build support or sympathy for your cause is not direct action, no matter what the tactics of your protest may be. To walk the picket line with a fellow worker from a different trade, from a different shop, from a different nation is direct action. It takes only the briefest glance at history to see that what is given to us can be taken away. The only gains we can hope to hold are those that we take and defend with our own hands and hearts. Those crumbs that are thrown to us from time to time by the rich and their governments are always taken back.

Governments serve the interest of the ruling class, and will always do so. We can expect the same from them in the future as we have gotten so far, a change in legislative policy once in a while perhaps, to confuse us and weaken our resolve.

Direct action plus solidarity equals success. The only tactics of struggle and defense that we can trust are those that we, the working people, control. Direct action gets the goods. To defend ourselves we need to stand together and stand up for ourselves.

**Every Worker**  
**Needs**  
**a**  
**Union**



In recent years union membership has steadily dropped due to union busting efforts by bosses and their underhanded and often illegal tactics, combined with a collectively poor understanding of what unions are.

Nonetheless, the need still exists for a working class organization to defend and further the interest of the working people at their jobs. That's a union. We need it. Nobody is going to stand up for us. The political parties will court our votes and our donations, but real money talks, and for now the bosses have the real money. They call the tunes in politics. Our only option is a union.

We need to build these unions right. We need to build them so that we can control them, so that we can trust them, so that they will serve our needs only, not the needs of bosses and bureaucrats and political hacks. That means union democracy. It means elected and recallable officials who report directly to the rank and file. It means that all important decisions are made directly by the membership. It means any job or action or strike is controlled by and settled by the workers on the shop floor. It means full disclosure on financial matters and rank-and-file control over union funds.

It means doing things very differently than they are done in the business unions. It means doing things the way we do them in the IWW, the Industrial Workers of the World.

# Union Democracy

“No union bureaucrat ever stood up for the workers, and none ever will. We have to stand up for ourselves, together, in democratic union.

If we can't control our union and its leadership, then we can't trust them.

It's just that simple.”



The unions that most working people belong to today, if they belong to any union at all, have lost the democracy that built the union movement in the first place. Most officials are appointed, not elected. Settlements happen behind closed doors and are only presented to the rank and file for approval. Union bosses are entrenched for life, never facing the possibility of returning to the shop floor, if indeed they've ever been there in the first place.

Is it any wonder that union membership is down and workers' confidence in their leaders is very low? Is it a surprise that we are losing the gains we fought for in years past?

In order to defend ourselves and our families we need to join together in unions. We need our combined strength to face the rich and their government. We need the union, but the union we need is a democratic union. How else will it defend our needs and not those of our bosses? How else can we control our own struggles, choose our own goals and our own issues?

We need democratic unions, rank-and-file control, and direct democracy on the shop floor to fight our fights. No union bureaucrat ever stood up for the workers, and none ever will. We have to stand up for ourselves, together, in a democratic union. If we can't control our union and its leadership, then we can't trust them. It's just that simple.

# *Wobble*

is a

# Verb

Wobble/wó'bəl/ v& n.—verb: 1. to incline to one side and the other alternately; 2. to move unsteadily with a side-to-side motion; 3. to stand or go unsteadily; 4. to **slow down or otherwise disrupt a job**. —noun: 1. a wobbling movement; 2. and instance of wobbling.  
Wobbly/wó'lbē/ n. pl. —blies. **A member of the Industrial Workers of the World.**

The essential value of a union lies in what it can do. What it can do for us and for our class as a whole. What you can do with it. How you can use it to do what you need to do. To do is a verb. Action is what we're talking about.

When we come together on the job to address our common problems with the shared strength of our common action, we are doing something. We're not just talking about it, though that's a first step, and we're not seeking publicity and making a big show of it, though those things can be valuable in their place. We are acting on it. Doing. Verb!

In the construction trades the verb "to wobble" is commonly used to describe a group action that seeks to address a problem on the job, a problem with the boss, as on-the-job problems tend to be. To "wobble the job" is to walk out, slow down, or all go to the boss for a "chat" on work time. Straight up, to come together to address the problems by direct means. That's what it's all about.

It's happening all the time, all over the place. It's a necessary part of daily life on the job. You can do it too. You and your fellow workers, on your job, can wobble the situation to make it better. That's job control, and that's the thing we need to establish and protect, for our own safety and health, to ensure good compensation for our precious time, for fun and profit and relief from the boredom and loneliness that pervades our lives in this modern workaday world.

“Together we are  
awesome in our power.

We have only to  
organize this power and  
to wield it,  
for our common good, to  
make this world a better  
place.

Together we can win.”

The key to good wobbling is union. That's small-u "union," meaning cooperation and concerted effort among fellow workers, people with the same needs and circumstances—the people you work next to day after day. Is it any wonder that IWW members are also known as "Wobblies"?

Alone we are weak and ineffectual. Together we are awesome in our power. We have only to organize this power and wield it, for our common good, to make this world a better place. Together we can win. We just have to do it. Let's act now.

**The**  
**Working Class**  
**and the**  
**Employing Class**  
**have**  
**Nothing in**  
**Common**

“The working class and the employing class have nothing in common” says the preamble to the constitution of the IWW. That’s the basis of our approach to labor relations and unionism. Let’s look at this statement for a second.

It doesn’t mean that workers and bosses are a different species, that they don’t breathe the same polluted air and drink the same water, though the air and water in a working class neighborhood might be a lot filthier than they are up on the hill. It means that the two classes are in opposition by their very nature.

What’s good for the bosses—cheap labor, maximally controlled and passive—is bad for the workers. What’s good for the workers—maximum control over the job, the job conditions, objectives and methods, and maximum compensation for our precious time—is death to the bosses, and they will fight it tooth and nail. It’s nothing personal, no more than a lion hates a gazelle, it’s just a natural, impersonal, economic enmity that can’t be gotten around nor safely ignored. It’s the principle that runs our lives, capitalist and worker alike.

If a boss gets too chummy with the workers and tries to be their pal, the business will suffer. If the worker gets too friendly with the boss, they’ll be even more easily exploited and betrayed. Natural enemies on the impersonal plane of economics. You can belong to the same church and even drink at the same bar, but you can’t look out for each other’s interests for long without endangering your own. This is pretty simple and obvious to any working stiff that pays attention to daily life. Smart bosses never forget it. It’s not esoteric at all: it’s pragmatic and good common sense.

# TOWARD A FREE AND EQUAL SOCIETY



WITH A NEW WORLD IN OUR HEARTS

What our slogan implies in terms of unionism is very radical, that is, oriented toward the root cause and cures. It implies class solidarity. All workers have the same interests as well as the same class enemy. It implies union democracy. We're in it together, and only real rank and file control can guide the union steadily and reliably. The only ones we can trust are ourselves, and a union we don't control directly is a very real danger to our interests.

Our slogan implies ongoing class warfare, because it illuminates a struggle that must be won to come to an end. We have to fight tooth and nail to defend our interests and our safety. It's war, fellow workers, and ugly as it is, we're stuck with it and can only go forward by organizing right and fighting the good fight.

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. It's the obvious common sense truth, and we can't afford to ignore it.

# Labor Law

in a

# Nutshell



Labor law is a branch of study that a person could go to college and get a PhD in, and maybe base a lucrative career on. You could buy a car every year, live in a fine house, and send your kids to Vassar and Yale. Of course you wouldn't have a hell of a lot in common with the people you spent your day advocating for. It's a specialized profession, and it pays well.

Don't get me wrong. We appreciate our lawyers. We want them to be sharp and to know every nuance of that tangled web of labor law.

You and I don't necessarily have to attend law school, but we need to understand the basic facts of labor law and how it affects our daily work lives on the job, and to anticipate the legal tricks the bosses will pull.

Here is labor law in a nutshell. The laws are set up by the bosses and their governments and courts to keep workers from effectively fighting for our piece of the pie, for fear that we'll someday be able to take the whole thing. That's about it. The basic idea behind "labor legislation" is that the game is stacked against you. The rules look good on paper but they don't really apply to your bosses. You have to wait, but they can get snappy service in court. You have to limit yourself to certain legal activities, but the bosses can do just about anything and get away with it. Their lawyers are bigger than ours, every time out, because they cost more.

Surprised? Well, our economic decisions aren't made democratically, though they underlie all other decisions that we make. The flow of money, products, services, food, housing,

**“Formal, government sanctioned labor law is not the only game in town, not the only way to proceed, not the only solution to our common problems.”**

medical care and vacation fun, all falls under the other system of decision making. You can call it capitalism, or corporate rule, or business, or whatever you like, but it isn't rule by the people.

Labor Law falls under the influence of big business interests in the government and the court system. Get your union authorization cards signed, call for a government supervised election, and then wait....and wait....and wait. There may be times when this is the smart way to go. But it isn't the *only way to go*. *We shouldn't let the boss define the playing field and call all the shots.*

This is a street fight, a mugging, a cold and calculated assault, and you need to defend yourself as best you can however you can. Watch your back, and use your creativity and especially the help of your fellow workers, and every strategy and tactic and clever idea you can get your hands on. If you let them define the playing field and make the rules, you simply haven't a prayer of winning. It's that simple. And that, fellow workers, is labor law in a nutshell.

Formal, government sanctioned labor law is not the only game in town, not the only way to proceed, not the only solution to our common problems. Check out the IWW. Think it over, join the union of your class, and fight for the full product of your labor, using solidarity unionism—the Wobbly way. This is our game. We do the work. We make the stuff and haul it around. We, actually, could control the economy. If we organize ourselves democratically to advance our own interests, we can share the wealth that we already produce.



**We**

**Never**

**Forget**

“We Never Forget.” So it says on many of the older IWW stickers and posters, especially those from the 1920’s when the prisons of America still housed hundreds of our members arrested on charges of criminal syndicalism, sabotage, and sedition. Obviously, one meaning of the slogan was that we would never abandon these valued fellow workers until they all walked free in the sunlight again. And to our credit, we never did. We kept on doing everything in our power to free our Fellow Workers, locked down in the class war that burned so hot in the past. But the slogan has another meaning, one that runs deeper and applies even more poignantly today. It’s about what late Fellow Worker and Wobbly troubadour Bruce “Utah” Phillips called “The Long Memory,” which he describes as our most dangerous weapon and greatest tool.

We remember the old stories, their successes and failures. These stories contain abiding truths, examples of how the working class coped with a higher level of struggle, a hotter brand of trouble, a more naked fist of attack. We can’t copy these old actions or treat them as blueprints to be followed with exacting accuracy. That would be foolish. But the core information about how the Wobblies of a century ago looked at the problems they faced, and how they applied the principles and knowledge of their many struggles and many battles, and importantly the mistakes they made—that’s the gold we must mine and refine.

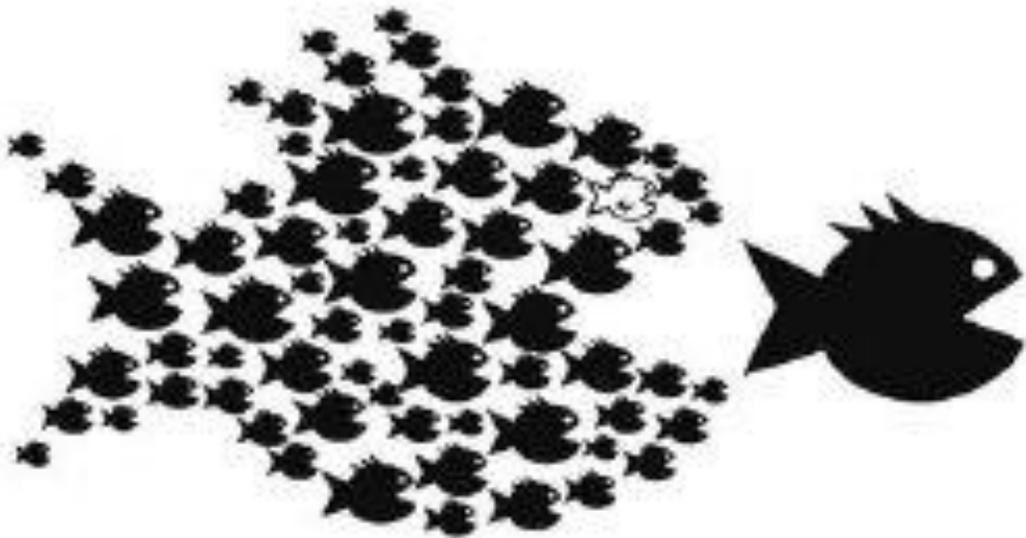
The **long memory**, the wisdom and experience accumulated over more than a century of constant struggle in the class war, is the sum of hundreds of thousands of victories, defeats, and challenges.

Times have changed, but the essentials remain the same. The class war still rages. The same madness still drives our class enemies to the wanton destruction of all that surrounds them. The same danger and evil still stalk our lives. The players may change, but it's ultimately the same game.

The long memory, the wisdom and experience accumulated over more than a century of constant struggle in the class war, is the sum of hundreds of thousands of victories, defeats, and challenges. It is this memory that makes us wobble.

We have kept in our hearts these stories and moments, these long past lives of simple fighters and brilliant thinkers, fiery talkers and dogged organizers. When we pull out our songbooks on the picket line or pay our monthly dues, we carry on the same struggle, lift again the same red banner and carry it along a little further toward "that commonwealth of toil that is to be." We join the unbroken chain of class warriors that stretches through the generations. We seek to carry on their knowledge and their thoughts, to see how they came to their decisions, in hopes that these insights will guide us forward into the light of a new day, in a new world of peace and prosperity, joy and sharing.

**Help**  
**the Work**  
**Along**



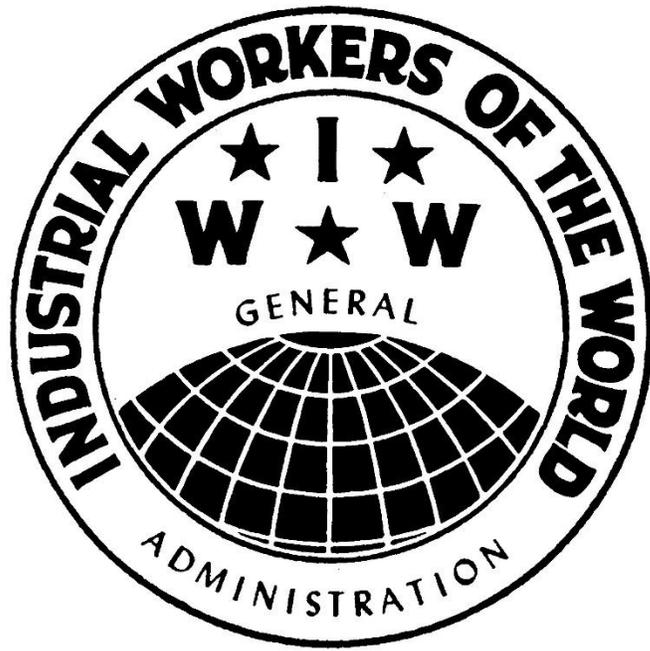
**ORGANIZE!**

William D. Haywood, a.k.a. Big Bill, used to sign his letters and correspondences “Help the work along, William D. Haywood.” He was a founding organizer and the General Secretary Treasurer of the IWW for many years, through some of our most turbulent times. That closing formula tells you a lot about his method of leadership, and the union of the time.

Help the work along. We joined together, then and now, to do a job, to accomplish a task, for ourselves and each other, for our class, and for generations to come. That task, simply stated in our Preamble, is abolition of the wage system. Building a new society within the shell of the old. Ending, once and for all, the tyranny of money, of boss over worker.

It’s a big job. Too big by far for any one hero or small band of heroes. Help the work along. It’s a big job that takes however long it takes, however many battles and however many hours of volunteer labor and thought. However many tasks completed, small or large. However many meetings and discussions, hours of travel, or ballots printed, mailed, and counted, the work will still remain.

It’s not all that glamorous, for the most part. Help the work along. Often, it’s business-like and plodding. Hard work lightened by many hands, shared hours, and little steps. Sometimes just holding the line against setbacks. Sometimes not even that. Some leaps and bounds.



“We are all leaders.” “Every member is an organizer.”  
“If each Wobbly would make a new Wobbly once a week  
we’d have the Cooperative Commonwealth of Labor in a  
few short years.” Help the work along.

The work: Education, Organization, Emancipation.  
Those are the names of the three stars on the IWW emblem  
on every dues card and Union button. Education, both of  
self and fellow workers. Organization, both of self and  
fellow workers. Emancipation, both of self and fellow  
workers—in struggle, at work, and for the earth that feeds  
and holds us all.

Won’t you join us in our work? Help the work along?  
What else is there to do?

# **CONTACT THE IWW**

**General Headquarters, North American  
Regional Administration, Industrial  
Workers of the World:**

**[www.iww.org](http://www.iww.org)**

**Or your local branch or delegate at:**