

A New Vision for Union Members

BY ARTHUR J. MILLER



On Raiding

BY NICK DRIEDGER



INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

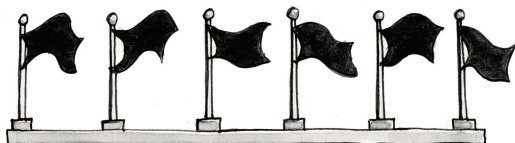
The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) have always been unique among North American unions. To catalogue all of the ways in which this is the case would likely fill far more pages than the slim volume before you. The two pamphlets republished herein are much narrower in scope. Their intended audience is also relatively specific as compared to the nearl infinite variety of wage workers who are eligible to join the IWW.

These two pieces of writing are, we hope, of particular interest to workers who are already formally represented by mainstream unions (also called “service unions” or “business unions”) in their workplaces. The first, *A New Vision*, looks at the “big picture” goals of the IWW

and how IWW members can carry this vision into a workplace that is already represented by a service union. The second, *On Raiding*, looks at the nuts and bolts of IWW workplace organizing and the ways in which it is not mutually exclusive, but parallel, to formal, contract-oriented service unionism.

While both pamphlets were originally published separately and doubtless have merit on their own, it seemed to us that the former without the latter was impractical. And, conversely, the latter without the former might answer “How?” without answering “Why?” It is therefore our hope that readers will benefit from the ways in which they complement one another, and find themselves both more inspired and more prepared to carry the spirit of revolutionary industrial unionism into their workplaces.

Literature Committee of the
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A New Vision for Union Members

By Arthur J. Miller, 2001

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INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

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

Eugene V. Debs

This pamphlet is intended for members of unions other than the Industrial Workers of the World. It explains why we think these workers should also join the IWW. It was originally written in 2001 by Arthur J. Miller, a shipyard worker and IWW member in Tacoma, Washington. Fellow Worker Miller's writing is as relevant now as then. To create a new vision we need a solid foundation. In this pamphlet, Arthur Miller argues for industrial unionism, increased militancy and democracy, and a revolutionary spirit for workers' organizations.

The Need for a New Vision

Virtually all unions in North America believe in collaboration between labor and management, to maintain the status quo, for “the good of the economy” and the country, not for the good of the working class as a whole. These unions operate in the same way as any other business class, and in fact are called “business unions.” The business of these unions is maintaining their own self-interest. They don’t question the profit motive; they don’t have a vision of a different world without capitalism and its inherent exploitation.

They are hierarchical organizations, like the company you probably work for. There is little direct member control. Typically there is virtually no democratic participation by the members in directing union policy. An upper level of professional union leaders has overall control of the policies, structures, and finances of such unions. The goal of business unions is the immediate economic interests of their members - and their officers. In other words, the union’s organizing goals are limited to short-term improvements in the material conditions of their members through restrictive contracts with bosses.

In the US and most other countries, business unions are unable to function as effective workers’ organizations. Strikes are more often lost than won, and when strikes seem to have been won, working people find that there may have been few real gains, and possibly real emotional and material losses - income loss or leveling, eviction, and stress on the family. There are many reasons for this, but the following are some of the most important:

- 1.** Most unions take the power of the organization away from the rank and file workers and place it in the hands of a professional class of union bosses. Thus you have two classes of people within the union: the rank and file and the ruling class. Like all ruling classes, the ruling class of union bosses will act in their own self-interest, which is not always the same as the rank and file.
- 2.** Capitalism has evolved, but the organization and tactics of the major unions have not. Not only have the unions been unable to advance, they have eliminated some of the most effective tactics from the past. Workers today are expected to fight huge multinational corporations with outdated tactics and ineffective organization.
- 3.** Workers are misorganized into unions of narrow self-interest that compete with one another rather than acting in solidarity with each other. When workers with a legitimate grievance strike a job site, union bosses of other organizations often command their rank and file to cross picket lines.

More often than not, this results in the defeat and firing of striking workers. These same bosses will, when their own union is out on strike, ask other unions not to commit the same self-destructive acts

4. Workers find themselves at odds with their own communities and other potential allies. All working people share a need for a decent standard of living, safe and healthy conditions both on the job site and in the neighborhood, and to have a voice in making decisions that affect their lives. In spite of these shared interests, workers find themselves at odds with their own communities and each other. This is the work of those in power, who manipulate situations to pit one part of the working class against another. They are aided and abetted in this by their willing allies, the union bosses and other so-called “friends and protectors” of the working class.

5. Reliance upon government laws and institutions has weakened the power of the working class. Governments are influenced by the interests of the wealthy. They pass laws that seem to benefit working people, but those laws are weakened by lack of enforcement and lack of funding. They can be changed at any time, sometimes without the working people knowing it. The best way to enforce health and safety and other important concerns is through the force of union action. Giving politicians responsibility for these things is like asking the fox to guard the hen house.

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

Why Members of Other Unions Should Join The Industrial Workers of the World

Workers who agree with this critique need to join a union with a different vision of the purpose of a union, in order to spread the idea and help the seed grow. We believe that union is the Industrial Workers of the World, which you can join while maintaining your membership in the business union you already belong to. The IWW's vision does not come out of any book, nor does it arise from any political “ism”. It is the direct result of the on-the-job experiences of working people.

The IWW's ideas are simple:

- All workers on the same job belong to the same job organization.
- All workers in the same industry belong to the same industrial union.

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- All related industrial unions belong to the same industrial department.
- All working people belong to One Big Union.

The IWW also says that “all members in one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.”

When it was founded in 1905, the IWW foresaw the need to make changes not only in how workers were organized, but also in how industry and society were run. The IWW realizes that “By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”

The IWW believes in direct industrial action, rather than delegating its power to union bosses and politicians. Those who sought to enrich themselves on the backs of the working class grew to hate the IWW. It was opposed as much by the Communist Party as by the mainstream political parties.

In its early days the IWW had great success organizing workers in many industries, including many that conventional unions ignored, such as sailors, loggers, and migrant workers. It seemed that the one thing that the ruling classes – be they industrial bosses, political bosses, or labor bosses – could agree on was that they were all against the self-determination of the working people. Therefore they allied against the IWW, and sought to bring our union to its knees by every means imaginable, including lynching, frame-ups, judicial murder, and media slander. Despite those attacks, the IWW continued to grow and evolve.

New Hope for a New Vision

No idea or organization should become stagnant, or it is only a relic of days gone by. The following are ideas for a new vision in working class organization:

#1

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

Corporations are multinational, and today's organizations of working people can no longer think on just the local level, or even the national level. The interests of the working class are international in scope.

From this global labor viewpoint comes:

- International Solidarity -- We stand together regardless of race, religion, gender or nationality, We will not allow ourselves to be divided

and conquered.

- International work agreements and pay scales -- Instead of workers around the world competing to work for the lowest wages, cooperation among workers from different countries could produce enough work at good pay for all.
- International union-enforced standards for environment, health and safety -- We must defend our homes, our lives, and our families. In a system that puts profits before people, we cannot expect industry or their bought servants in government to make sure that our living and working environments are safe, that our air is clean, or that the products we use are truly safe.

#2

These ideas are held by working people around the world.

There are unions in other countries that are close to the IWW's way of thinking, like the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) of Spain, Freie Arbeiterinnen- und Arbeiter-Union (FAU) in Germany, Unione Sindacale Italiana (USI) in Italy, Ελευθεριακή Συνδικαλιστική Ένωση (ESE) in Greece, and Federación Obrera Regional Argentina (FORA) in Argentina. The IWW's idea of the One Big Union represents the evolution from one organization to that of the many organizations, in solidarity for the working class.

#3

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

The ruling class created the myths that black workers are out to take jobs from white workers, that so-called "illegal immigrants" or "foreign" workers are trying to steal jobs, and that women are taking jobs from men. In reality, these workers only want what every worker wants: a decent living. Rather than blame each other, working people need to place the blame for low pay and rotten conditions where it belongs, and that is on the employers who profit from our misery.

All workers are oppressed by classism. Some workers are also oppressed by race, gender, age discrimination, and other issues. To build unity against those responsible we must do two things: first we must weed out those things that the ruling classes use to divide us, and then we must support the peoples' right to organize to end their oppression.

#4

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The ruling class tries to divert attention from itself by blaming other groups for the effects of their exploitative practices.

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

#5

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

Nothing could be further from the truth. Workers are the first to suffer from exposure to the toxic pollutants that threaten communities and the environment. Working people live in the communities that are exposed. The ruling class does not expose its own communities to toxic waste - when was the last time you saw rich people living next to a plant that was polluting the air?

The ruling class pollutes the air, over-logs the forest, and over-fishes the seas, all for profit, and working people end up paying the cost. Working people, through the force of their unions, must demand an environmentally sound and safe industrial system.

#6

When workers strike, or the owners move a factory to avoid union activity, the goods that are produced are “scab” goods.

These are goods produced by workers who are unwittingly helping to break union power in the original workplace. Union workers end up handling many of those scab goods, or union production and transportation help supply the scab factory. Thus production or distribution continues during a strike - with the collaboration of the labor movement.

No union worker should provide production, transportation, or services going into a scab workplace, nor should any union worker handle scab goods coming out of that place. If union workers stopped scabbing and stood in solidarity with each other, labor struggles would be much easier to win.

Conclusion

A new union vision is about working people acting for their own best interest. Employers certainly will not. The self-interest of the ruling class is increas-

ing their wealth at the expense of working people. In the United States, 1% of the population controls 32% of all the wealth, and their share is increasing.

Income inequality in Canada is very similar. In Mexico, it is even worse: the richest 1% have 50% of the country's wealth, while the poorest 50% own less than 0%— as an income class, they are all in debt. Whenever working people scab on one another or compete for wages, they only increase the owners' wealth while decreasing their own.

Working people cannot rely on anyone except themselves to act in their own best interest. If the wealthy can work for their own gain, with the approval of society, why then are working people, who are the overwhelming majority, denied the right to do the same?

The best interest of the working people is a society that takes care of everyone, not a society that is designed to benefit the few. Think about it; think of your own well-being and that of your family and your fellow workers. Think about the well-being of future generations.

If you are tired of working for the benefit of the wealthy few, then join the Industrial Workers of the World and start working for those who really matter to you.

DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLD WEALTH IN THE U.S.



Source: Federal Reserve, "Distribution of Household Wealth in the U.S. Since 1989", Q1 OF 2026
<https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/z1/dataviz/dfa/distribute/chart/>



On Raiding

by Nick Driedger

A lot of people feel that if everyone in the labor movement could just get along, we would be stronger. The IWW, too, uses the concept of the “One Big Union” to evoke an image of all workers being in the fight together.

What, then, are we to make of political disagreements in labor? Is it all big egos and stubbornness? Or are there principled differences at stake?

Politics in the labor movement gets nastiest between unions when it comes to raiding. Raiding is when one union starts trying to convince the members of another union to join it instead. A raid looks a lot like an organising campaign, and if the raid is successful, the officers of the one union find themselves cut off from their previous influence.

For mainstream unions, the principal check on raiding is the labor centrals –

the AFL-CIO in the US, and the Canada Labour Congress (CLC) and provincial federations of labor in Canada. Unions within these bodies are prohibited from raiding each other. It still happens, but there are rules governing it, and it is kept to a minimum. More importantly, though, there is no prohibition against raiding outside the federations.

Unions and Political Parties

Unions coexist in the same federations of labor, but different unions have different political affiliations. In Canada, the main tension is between those who support the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP), and those who support the centrist Liberal Party, with a smattering of more conservative unions supporting more right-wing, conservative parties. Some union officials talk about being “apolitical,” but if you scratch the surface, usually there is some kind of political sympathy. In the US, the unions largely fall behind the Democrats, with a few unions sometimes backing Republican candidates.

In all of these cases, the relationship between the union and the party is the same: the union provides money, volunteers, and institutional support during elections, and the party provides policy and candidates who try to insert themselves into the legislative bodies of the state.

The state supports this arrangement by giving sole bargaining unit rights to individual unions, so that there is only one union per workplace – unlike, for example, in Europe, where you can have multiple unions, each with their own political affiliation, at the same job. The argument for the winner-take-all system is that this prevents unions and workers from being pitted against each other on the job. But the actual outcome is that it removes a field on which substantial disagreements about labor strategy could play out. Instead the only “disagreement” becomes about who can administer the grievance procedure and bargaining process in the most technically competent manner.

When Political Differences Mattered

At one time, unions were actually much more politically diverse. There were unions tied to socialist parties running third-party tickets in the US, some of them with big names like Eugene Debs. There were also unions tied to the Communist Party, like the United Electrical Workers or, in Canada, the Canadian Seaman's Union. The Communist Party in Canada had a strong presence in municipal politics, and part of their electoral strength rested with their trade union base.

The unions that prevailed are the unions with the politics we see today. If they seem to disagree, it's despite the fact that the range of opinions has narrowed, and they are fighting less over the substance of their ideas and more over shallower things like the personalities and character of the various leaders. So while the labor movement started out as a sort of laboratory for working class politics, over time it developed into a monoculture where the officers, staff, and contracts are largely interchangeable.

The labor centrals led to a steady process of political homogenization: unions that were inside the political mainstream were safe from raiding; unions outside of the political monoculture were either raided out of existence, induced to merge, or forced to change their politics. Unions like the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, the Canadian Seaman's Union, the One Big Union (an IWW breakaway group run by the Socialist Party of Canada), and the IWW all dried up over the 20th Century. The only radical unions that remained were the International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU) and the United Electrical workers, but without a coordinated political centre of their own, they too have drifted away from generating something different from the social-democratic compromise of the mid-twentieth century.

How Do You Fend Off a Raid?

The Industrial Workers of the World have been on the business end of raiding since their inception. In the 1920's in Drumheller, Alberta, Canada, the IWW and then the OBU were beaten out by the United Mineworkers of America (UMWA) after a few bitter strikes that were broken by the bosses signing contracts with the UMWA to break the more radical unions. Eighty years later, in the early 2000's, a drive at Powell's Books by the IWW was ended by the ILWU coming in and signing up most of the shop.

In general, when faced with a union that is considerably larger and has significantly bigger resources, a smaller union doesn't stand a chance against a raid. They don't have the same legal resources, communications resources, or organizing capacity.

But a story that came out of an organising drive at a call centre in the Midwest is worth considering. That campaign had an IWW committee of about 30 people in a workforce of several hundred, which was pushing for concessions from management. They had some modest successes under their belt, and the campaign was definitely getting results. The workers on the floor were paying attention.

Members of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO, a socialist outfit that had some points of agreement with the IWW and a lot of points of disagreement with us) also worked at that job. Seeing the militancy at work,

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and presumably the increasing organising prospects, they began to put forward to the IWW committee that the shop would be well-served by a “real” union. The IWW members of course objected, pointed to their solidarity, and pointed to the concessions that they were winning, and said the union was already quite real.

From this political difference came a conflict, based on a genuinely held difference of perspective and strategy, and a genuinely held difference of interests. The members of the ISO called in organisers from the Communications Workers of America (CWA), a mainstream union with a presence in call centres in the US.

The CWA organiser did his research and started looking into the company and quickly discerned that the IWW group was a group that he needed to meet with, so he arranged a meeting with representatives from the committee. He laid out what other call centres had got in similar situations, gave them a general outline of his plan, and proposed that the IWW people line up behind the CWA drive.

In any other circumstances, with a union already organizing on the job, this would be considered a raid. But the IWW is not in any of the labor centrals, was not pushing for a contract, and nor were they aiming to be the certified bargaining agent. Their model was: sign members up, train them to take action on the job, push for concessions, and build the power of the workers directly.

From the perspective of the CWA and the ISO, this wasn’t a real union drive. “Real” drives end in a contract, and they end with a membership base that can bring money into the Democrats or some other sympathetic party or candidate.

The reply from the IWW organizers on the job was brilliant. They stated they wouldn’t contest any attempt to build the CWA at their job. If it came to a vote, some of them may abstain but most of them would probably even vote in favor. They simply said that they would continue to build the committee on their job and would refuse to honor any no-strike clause the CWA signed. If a situation called for a wildcat or any other kind of direct action, they would favor that over any grievance procedure that was implemented. They would not commit to any labor peace, and they would be as clear about that to the employer as they were to the CWA.

In short, the CWA could have the bargaining unit, but the IWW would continue to hold the shop floor.

The reaction from the CWA was to pull their staff from the campaign. The organiser complained that he had never before, in years of organising, encountered a situation like this. The CWA, in deciding not to conduct

the raid, said it wasn't a good business move on their part, meaning the campaign carried risks and liabilities that outweighed the revenue that would come from dues. The threat the IWW posed was deemed credible from the job actions they had already pulled off.

The IWW, for its part, is still active at the company years later, though at a different location. They have a strong committee there and are continuing to push back against company policy and continuing to win concessions, including an across-the-board wage increase for hundreds of workers.

The IWW succeeded in fending off the raid where the other smaller main-stream unions would not have stood a chance, because they took their strategy from a different playbook. Where the IWW played the same game, like at Powell's books in Portland Oregon, they lost. Where they played by different rules, they won.

Differences That Matter

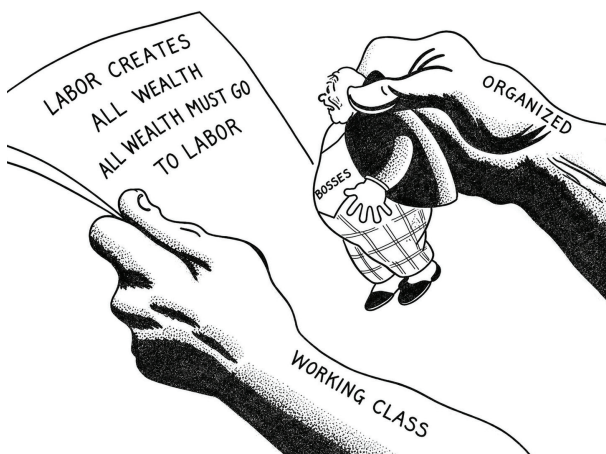
The real political diversity of unions has narrowed at pace with unions becoming more legalistic. Despite differences in individual unions' party affiliations, the federations of labor have a loose political consensus. They see labor relations as a technical field, and the point of labor law is to promote resolution of disputes in a way that is good for the overall economy.

Recently, in Canada, Unifor (a very large private sector union) quit the Canada Labour Congress over accusations of trying to raid hotels organized by UNITE HERE. This threatened to create a power vacuum in provincial and municipal labor bodies (membership in the CLC is required to be in provincial and district labor councils), as many officers from Unifor held executive positions in the "House of Labor." How was that power vacuum filled? The Unifor officials simply maintained their roles by signing up with other unions, even though they had never worked under the contracts of those unions, nor had they ever been elected to represent those workers. These career labor politicians just got new credentials as a flag of convenience to continue politics as usual.

Prohibitions on raiding are flimsy and based on a sort of legal thinking. So is raiding a good thing? Mostly not. Employers will obviously pit unions against each other at any possible moment. However, if workers can't change unions, then they can't realistically use leaving their union as a tool to keep their officials honest either. Insofar as unions are a monopoly on the right to strike, this creates a corrosive dynamic, as the union itself, in order to maintain its standing in front of the labor boards, will often do what it can to prevent direct action, except in the most dire of situations.

ON RAIDING

The IWW needs to watch out for raiding because we have different politics than the rest of the labor movement, so they consider us fair game. The best way for us to handle raiding is to stick to what makes us different. Unions don't know how to deal with a mobilized and active workplace, so dealing with more conservative unions is mostly the same as dealing with the boss: build the committee on the job and build the power of the workers.



**Other Relevant Reading from
the Industrial Workers of the World:**

How to Fire Your Boss:
A Workers Guide to Direct Action.
2022

One Big Union: Principles and Goals
of the Industrial Workers of the World
9th Edition. 2021

Annotated Preamble to the Constitution
of the Industrial Workers of the World
2020

Contact the IWW: iww.org

Join the Union You Wish You Had on the Job



**INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD
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