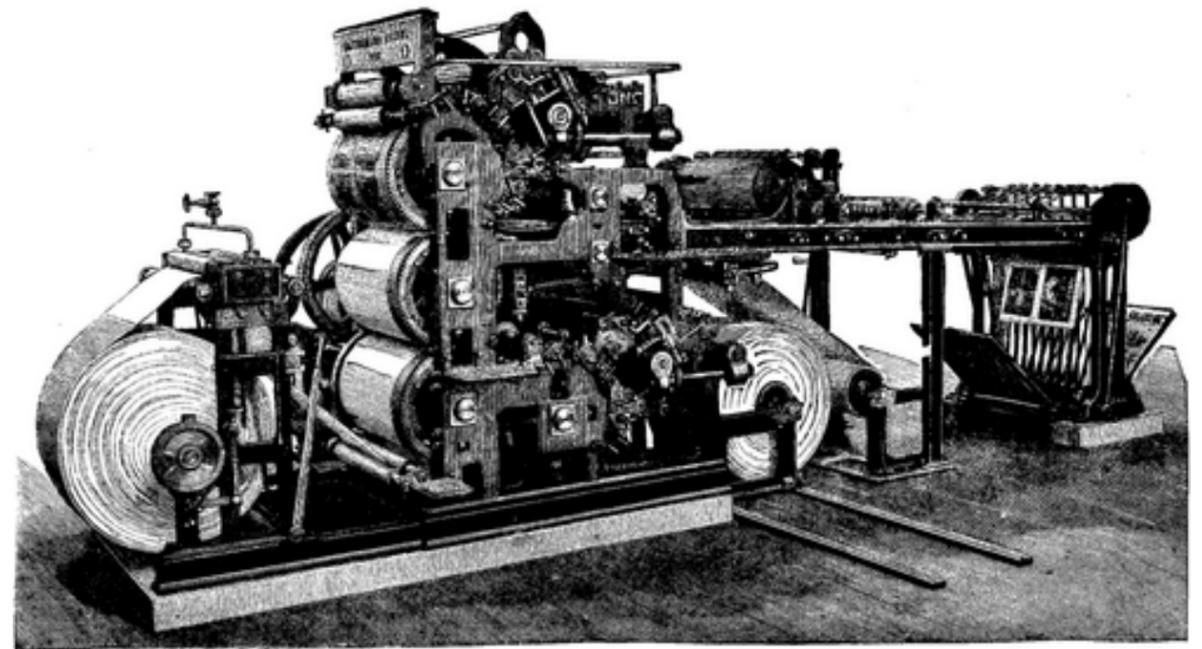


## Tools of the Trade:

Worker self-activity, class consciousness, and building the Industrial Workers of the World



Excerpts from the Workers Power column in the *Industrial Worker*

## Tools of the Trade:

Workers self-activity, class consciousness, and building the Industrial  
Workers of the World

### Contents

- I. Lasting lessons from the class struggle, 3
  - a. M. Jones and MK
- II. Know the union, hear the union, see the union, 4
  - a. Adam W.
- III. Know the union, hear the union, see the union: still good advice, 5
  - a. X361737
- IV. Why direct action, 8
  - a. M. Jones
- V. Wage theft picket, 11
  - a. 12/2008 x356748
- VI. Informal workgroups, 13
  - a. M. Jones
- VII. On leadership, 15
  - a. Phinneas Gage
- VIII. What we're changing, 17
  - a. M. Jones
- IX. For more, 18

## For more

[miami@iww.org](mailto:miami@iww.org)

Facebook: Miami Industrial Workers of the World

<http://www.iww.org>

Archives of the Workers Power column in the Industrial Worker

<http://forworkerspower.blogspot.com/>



## Lasting Lessons from the Class Struggle

by M. Jones and MK

“To build the new society you need new people and people can be transformed only in activity.” - Martin Glaberman, *Work and Working Class Consciousness*.

March 20th, 2004. Over the course of a year a group of UPS loaders had developed a lot of comradery with one another. They had the power, and they openly expressed it by refusing to work at the speed demanded by the bosses. A new worker was brought in and management tried its best to isolate him from the activist group. When this fellow worker defied management and lined up with the rest of the workers, working at their pace, calling management “blue shirts” and spending his breaks with other militant workers, management brought even more pressure on him, pushing him to change and work faster or he would be fired. His coworkers responded after a break one morning by refusing to go back to work until a certain blue shirt, the one mostly responsible for the pressure brought on the new worker, was taken off of the line. It was a stand-off, and the tension was high, none of them having been involved in anything like this before. They won their demand, the supervisor was taken off the line, and they were threatened with firings if they tried anything like that again. Over the course of the next year they all began to leave the job, moving to other work, other shifts at UPS, or to other departments.

Roughly a year and a half after the action had taken place, two friends from the UPS job visit for the first time in awhile. Chatting over a beer, one had quit UPS but the other still worked there. He relayed how he would bring the story up whenever he saw their old despised manager, how that blue shirt's face would turn red and he would storm off. Nostalgic for the old crew and their bold action at work, the worker who had since moved on called another former coworker. He too expressed pride in their defiance of the boss and added that he looked forward to the next time he could stick it to management to show 'em who was really in charge. Though the gains were long gone, the memory and experience still lingered, with the workers holding onto a desire to take action next time they have the strength.

May 17th, 2006. Messengers from Arrow Messenger Service in Chicago gather for a special anniversary party at a fellow worker's home. Exactly one year ago, on a busy Thursday afternoon, they all had turned off their two-way radios messengers use to communicate to their dispatcher. Having been through three fruitless negotiating sessions with the company, this was their way of showing Arrow that if the bosses wouldn't meet their terms, the company wouldn't run. After a pitched battle during the ensuing month, the company agreed to the workers' demands.

As they gather at the anniversary party, make little drunken speeches and reminisce over last years drawn-out struggle, only three or four of them – out of twenty – still work at the company. Several were fired during the campaign, others quit in frustration, and others just decided to move on. There is virtually no organization left at the company and no existing struggle against the boss to speak of. In another year the union will be completely gone from Arrow and what will become of the gains made in winter 2005 is anyone's guess.

But one thing is clear; no one there would have changed a thing. For some it was the greatest experience at work they had ever been a part of. There is consensus that the whole thing was nothing less than life-changing. Crappy work is no longer something that must only be endured. It can be collectively resisted.

At first glance one can look at these shopfloor skirmishes and see defeat. Gains were eroded, and no lasting organization was ever built. But through struggle we produce more than better or

worse working conditions, resolved or unresolved grievances, and union or no union. We produce new kinds of people. A major part of our organizing has to be a change in consciousness. This is why our tactics are so important. This type of change in outlook isn't facilitated as clearly through an NLRB election campaign. Direct action, where workers themselves are making the change, gives the feeling of power to us workers. Most members of our class have not felt this power, but once it has been summoned up it is much harder to push down.

When we workers act as a group we are making a statement to each fellow worker involved. This statement is clear; I am willing to stand here with you, if you are here to stand with me. We may win this fight, or we may lose, but that statement always stays with us. It resonates with us as we go through our lives. When we organize and when we take action that effectively challenges our boss, we have the power to demand the changes we want to see. This is the key to understanding why these types of actions change our lives. In the UPS story, workers stood up, put themselves on the line for another worker. In the Arrow story, workers took action to strengthen their position and to make a clear point: we are united and without US you do not have a company. When we put ourselves on the line for one another, no one forgets what is possible afterward.

The concept of producing organizers at one company who scatter out to others companies has become a maxim for some IWW organizers in industry-wide efforts, and the concept is a good one, but there's something more to it. Not everyone is going to become an organizer but everyone is going to have to assess the fight they've just been through and draw conclusions for their own lives. When the dust settles from our action, as it inevitably does, we are left to consider what happened. We have seen the power we have as workers, a power unknown before. It may not occur to us immediately, but with any major change in our lives, there is a resonance - a white noise that does not go away. It could be a month later and we could be at the same job, or a year later and we could be two jobs down the road, but we will remember. And when we have the chance, we line up with, or maybe even lead, an effort to organize and take a stand against the boss. This time we do it with less hesitation than before, maybe with more foresight and with more vigor, because now we know exactly what it means.

The bottom line is this: our organizing needs to have as its byproduct a new increase in workers' willingness to resist - an increase in our propensity to act on our urges to resist the bosses - even if the resistance is individual. This is the revolutionary outcome. This will lay the groundwork for future organizing, in this industry or others. To "organize the worker not the job" as we say in this union, is to gradually create new kinds of people, people who are most likely to never again roll over and take the shit the boss throws at them.

The Missoula Floods were enormous landscape-changing events during the last ice age, some of which discharged 2.6 billion gallons of water every second, but they were only possible due to sudden small ruptures of the ice dam on the Clark Ford River. Small ruptures led to larger ruptures, they built off each other weakening the dam. In the IWW, our workplace committees, our campaigns, and our fights with the boss have ruptured production, only to have seen companies rebound and get back to business. But the true ruptures are the changed individuals that come out the other end of these fights. One day our years of struggles will turn these ruptures into a revolutionary flood that will forever change the landscape of the world's economy.

## What We're Changing

By M. Jones

In our organizing we are trying to establish power on the job. This power can be seen and felt in different ways depending on the job. But what we want from our organizing is control over our day to day lives on the job, this control will come from the power we can establish through collective action.

The collective actions we take on the job change the conditions on that job; they change how we daily interact with our bosses and with each other. This results in a bettering of conditions. I believe old time Wobblies called this job conditioning. It comes out of workers collectively and directly confronting the boss on an issue, and sticking up for one another. It is done with or without a contract; often the contract is an impediment to actions that can condition the job.

One of my first experiences with this came on my first job out of high school, throwing boxes at UPS. The workers here, although only informally organized exerted strong control over the job, and had no fear in voicing their opinions to the boss. The workers rallied around one or two strong leaders on the job. These leaders were the first workers to extend a hand to me and the other fellow I got hired on with, these were the workers when there was an issue would between two other workers would get it worked out, and these were the workers who were the first (but not the only ones) to bring up an issue to the boss. These confrontations often happened on the post break discussion session, they were often loud and confrontational. In this I saw the first application of our power as workers, and what it meant to be organized. The result was we worked the pace we wanted, worked with who we wanted, and stuck up for on another. Eventually, this experience would culminate in a threatened strike sticking up for a fellow worker who was in danger of being fired.

When I moved on to another job, this one at a truck manufacturing plant, I found a much different situation. Workers did not condition the job in the same way. They did not stick up for each other. Moreover, the leadership that had existed on the job at UPS did not exist here. The leadership that did exist was found in the "team lead" who often was a good leader and a company man. This of course led to workers following this person, falling in line, and not sticking together. In this situation our job conditions were much different. We were more at the mercy of the company. They had us out organized, and because of this we had no control over our daily lives on the job.

On my current job we are early on in a long process of organizing. One of the first tasks has been to get my fellow workers to take action together and to stick up for one another. Most of them are decent folks, willing to help each other out but with no experience of being organized. Most want to confront problems as individuals, thinking they may get a fair hearing from the boss. In small ways though, I can already see some changes, from a willingness to be critical of how things are handled to having each other's backs and helping each other out. These are some of the small changes that can lead to larger ones.

Job conditioning, I have learned is based on the small confrontations that happen everyday. When the boss comes out ready to tell us a decision he or she has made and is not confronted by workers as a group, they set the conditions for that day. If we workers confront them, stick up for one another, and lay out our demands for what we want, we set the conditions for that day. We are making a point with our action. The boss is learning their role. Workers are learning our power.

subordinates "€partners' unions mask their bureaucracy by conflating the ability to mobilize and inspire with the position in the union hierarchy.

Two years earlier Miguel was president of the local; he served two terms before returning to work in the plant. During a wildcat action in his former workplace Miguel was stuck in a tough position. Stopping the mail often gets people fired, but the workers were incensed. Against his own previous practice (Miguel had already been fired once for leading a job action himself several years earlier) he advised the workers to return to work. He was afraid someone might lose their job as had almost happened to him.

No doubt some people keep their militancy up while in office. There are courageous labour leaders and I've met my fair share. Miguel definitely was one of them. But again it isn't enough that a leader is brave and principled. The important question is why was Miguel willing to incite job actions to the point of getting fired when it was his risk to take but advised others not to take the same risk. The reason is his relationship to the struggle, and to the workers he was leading had changed.

This relationship is destroyed by institutionally removing the leadership from the workplace and placing them in an office, the pronoun changes from "€we' to "€you'. The means of disciplining the leadership then becomes voting them out, in effect saying that when you screw up your punishment is to become just another worker. The focus of activity is no longer at work but rather at the union office. A good militant who would be perfectly willing to stick their own neck out on an action with their co-workers is afraid to have others take that risk. Their instinct is a noble one; they want to protect their people.

The desire to not incite others to take big risks, even if one would take those risks themselves is a good quality in a person. The problem is not with the caliber of working class leadership the problem is with the leadership's relation to the rank and file. The key is to build working class leadership that can stay on the job. This means organizing in a manner that does not rob the rank and file of on the job leadership and organizing without full time paid leaders. True leadership is not an office or a title but the ability to move people. This way when we decide to take risks and take on a fight we do it in full knowledge of what we are getting into without asking others to take risks we ourselves are not taking as well.

## Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union

By Adam W.

On a 100 degree summer day I was in Stockton, at the Sikh temple meeting room. A middle aged trucker with a long, flowy beard asked me "How do we show the other drivers who weren't at our meeting today what the union is and why they should join?" I struggled to give him a good, clear answer on this one. I improvised an analogy on the spot. I think it paints a picture of our Solidarity Unionism organizing model in practice: "Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union." Let me break it down.

First you give the whole saying: "Here's how our organizing works. Some workers will know the union, some will hear the union, but others have to see the union." If you have a marker and paper, draw three circles around each other (like a bull's eye target). In the middle one write "know," the next "hear," and the outer most circle "see."

You'll get a raised eye brow or maybe a "huh?" look on the faces of folks, which usually translates to "What the hell is this crazy IWW organizer trying to tell me now?" Don't worry, this is actually good. If you get this reaction it means people will be interested to hear the explanation. Point to everyone in the room. Tell them that they are the workers who know the union. Point out that they are the workers that have attended meetings, are initiating the organizing and maybe have already taken out a red card. From experience or being fed up, they already know collective action is needed to fight for change on the job and that this is the definition of a union. Usually this group is small, but it's the starting point for every campaign.

The people who know the union talk to other folks. Some of the people they talk to will be quickly convinced. They're the ones who hear the union. Maybe they won't come to the first meeting or they might want to know that it's a legit effort and not the malcontents of the month, but once they are asked they will participate. This is usually the first layer of workplace leaders that are brought into an organizing committee.

Most workers are in the third camp, ones who need to see the union. They won't be meaningfully won over to the organizing effort simply by telling them something. These folks are skeptical that collective action by workers can win. They're probably scared of losing their jobs or maybe had a bad experience with another union.

Here's how we move the workers who need to see the union in action. The workers who know the union organize and build relationships and leadership among the folks who hear about the union. Together both groups take action to change small issues. This demonstrates in practice what a union is. Other workers see the union in action and start to understand that change is really possible.

For me this is one of the most useful concepts when beginning to organize. Organizing starts with those who "know" the union, they bring in the folks who "hear" about the union and together they take action to move the workers who need to "see" the union. How this plays out in the long run is that workers move from "seeing" to "knowing" the union through becoming involved in the organizing and action. This process builds the IWW and builds a conscious and militant working class.

## Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union: Still Good Advice

by x361737

Some time ago Workers Power ran a column in which a Fellow Worker promoted the idea of "Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union" as way of explaining how a healthy campaign sustains itself and grows. Having participated in some organizing, I found myself often re-reading that piece as a source of inspiration and advice. I hope to expand the "Know the Union..." organizing approach by offering my thoughts on how to put it into practice.

In any workplace there are going to be some workers who will quickly be attracted to an organizing drive. Perhaps they've been involved in organizing before; perhaps they have some level of ideological agreement; or perhaps they simply have a high level of grievances. In any case, these workers "know the union" and typically come together to form the initial organizing committee.

For other co-workers, they'll have to be persuaded to join the campaign through a series of one-on-one conversations. They need to "Hear the Union" to get agitated about workplace issues and realize they don't have to face them alone.

Most workers, however, fall into the third camp: "See the Union". They'll have to see the power of collective action before they get involved. As our Fellow Worker summed up in the previous column:

"Here's how we move the workers who need to see the union in action. The workers who know the union organize and build relationships and leadership among the folks who hear about the union. Together both groups take action to change small issues. This demonstrates in practice what a union is. Other workers see the union in action and start to understand that change is really possible."

For our friend, "Know the Union..." proved helpful when organizing slowed and workplace militants got frustrated at the pace of growth. "Know the Union..." encouraged workers to get 'back to the basics' of successful organizing: one-on-one conversations and group meetings to plan and undertake winnable direct action grievances. It also demonstrated the role the existing leadership should play in instituting a continual process by which co-workers are led up the "hear, see, know" ladder until a culture of solidarity and collective activity is instituted in a workplace.

There's another important lesson to take away from this: many self-identified radicals have little real-world organizing experience. This is okay. Like anything else, organizing takes practice. What we do have, however, is a wealth of grand arguments supporting class struggle and a vision for a post-capitalist future. Because of this there's a temptation to 'intellectualize' the organizing process. Speaking from personal experience, I know what it's like to feel unsure about doing something new, especially when it comes to organizing. It's tempting to fall back on something we're more comfortable with—like making the argument for why we need a revolutionary union.

Reality, however, is much more complicated than a well-phrased argument. Instead of trying to 'win the organizing argument' we're much better off building relationships of trust with our co-workers. Through this relationship, we engage our co-workers in small scale winnable actions. These actions, in turn, lay the groundwork for larger struggles and deeper conversations.

## On Leadership

By Phinneas Gage

Miguel was charismatic. Middle aged yet still handsome, a principled family man, an open communist and refugee from Chile. He was part of the left, of the left, of the left, those who desperately argued that the working class had to defend themselves even as Allende their socialist President was dragged away and shot in a basement. As an entire generation was exterminated or disappeared, buried beneath soccer stadiums and dropped into Volcanoes Miguel managed to make it to Canada, like an entire generation of Chileans he vowed not to give up the fight. He was a survivor, a militant and a leader.

So a leader is what my union decided to make him. When Miguel was on the floor he held more power than any of the bosses. I remember being a nervous inexperienced shop steward dealing with a possible firing; the stakes were high- the sister in question had gotten into an accident, her third in the last month. Three accidents for drivers in a year is enough to get someone fired, and on top of all this she was still a temp and nowhere near the end of her probation, and as one supervisor recently found out she was pregnant. I asked for Miguel to help me represent the sister as the stakes were just too high for me to responsibly handle on my own.

To say we came out on top in that interview would be an understatement. Miguel simply walked into the room, beaming, and sat down leaning far back in his chair. The two young supervisors were obviously caught off guard, they were visibly nervous. There's a stereotype of what the labour militant should look like, yelling at the boss, defiant, a person who lives and breathes direct action. No doubt there were times when Miguel was exactly this. However, the quiet power he held was stronger. In this case he merely told the supervisors that if they fired this sister it would be an injustice that cannot be overlooked by the workers. He never once mentioned the union all he said was the workers would not tolerate this injustice.

That quiet power, the leadership in that man and his skills as an organizer did not come from him alone. Those supervisors did not fear Miguel; they feared the respect he had from his peers. The bosses feared the workers ability under Miguel's leadership to make their lives miserable. Miguel believed in his coworkers and his coworkers believed in him.

A union officer does not need to have the backing of the workers on the floor. He - and it's usually he - only needs to have backing of the workers who bother to turn out to vote. A working class leader can only exist with the tacit support of the workers. The problem is the relation that the officer has to the workers they represent and used to work next to. This is why a union officer is not necessarily a working class leader.

When leadership comes from the floor there is very little distance between a working class leader and her supporters. Quiet chiding and maybe a bit of teasing about status going to their head can bring the leader in line if they are acting out of step with the workers. This discipline by the workers on their leadership is part of the normal work environment.

When one is a union leader one "visits the workflow." You are no longer at home on the job; you are a guest in the workers own space. This creates a distance, a relationship that makes officers likely to view their role as a professional one, as an expert who comes in from the outside. Even the most progressive unions while in one instance saying "you are the union" to the membership say in another that we must "service our members". These two conceptions of workplace activism are fundamentally at odds with each other. In fact the idea that "€the membership is the union" acts a smokescreen for the union turning itself into a third party above and beyond the workers own self activity on the job. Much like employers try to call workgroups teams or

organization, direct action, our class is defined. We cease to be individuals, left to the whims of the bosses and become a force that can push our own issues and agenda.

To put it another way, workers—conscious of it or not—undertake individual anti-capitalist acts all the time. Workmates, however, often need to see collective activity in action before they're willing to join a union. From there, it's involvement in collective struggle that opens a space for us, as radicals, to begin having discussion about class, capitalism, and the labor movement.

As organizers, "Know the Union" not only helps us not only to remember that organizing is a process, but forces us to recognize that many times "action precedes consciousness". The most important thing organizers do is not winning arguments or making rousing speeches, but actually building the relationships that form the basis of any successful campaign.



## Why Direct Action

By M. Jones

The goal of the IWW is to create the "future society in the shell of the old." It is important we keep this goal in mind as we go about our organizing. This goal helps define how we organize for the daily struggles and it shapes our perspective on future organizing. As IWW's we accept that this goal means we put certain principles forward in our organizing. One of these, Direct Action is the basis of this article.

Direct Action is a principled tactic that will help us build revolutionary industrial unions, because it builds revolutionary industrial unionists. Backed by solid organization it can enforce our demands whatever they may be: better wages, more time for ourselves, subsidized childcare, etc. At the same time it prepares us for larger battles and struggles as it develops us into a collective force. It has the ability to change our conceptions of ourselves and the world around us. Old prejudices, the shit of capitalism, that has kept us divided as workers can get shed. Ways of feeling, isolated, alone, depressed with the weight on your shoulders fall away. This happens because we are involved in action, doing things in a way that is not passive. We are a force with our own agenda and goals.

As the IWW, we emphasize direct action in our organizing. Simply put, direct action is any tactic that addresses an issue directly, that a group of workers themselves control, and that does not depend on a third party. Direct action does not rely on the state through the National Labor Relations Board, legislation, politicians, or bureaucrats. Instead it is based on us acting collectively and directly on an issue. Sometimes it is aimed at the boss or bosses. This is the first thing that comes to most of our minds. This is the classic image of the workers marching out of the factory or sitting in. But it is also simpler actions, refusing to participate in employer meetings unless they are on the terms of the workers. This happened with a group of massage therapists out in Portland recently. Or bringing in the proper safety equipment paid for by the group when the bosses refuse to provide it (as happened recently at a Chicago Starbucks). Sometimes it is aimed at other pieces of the capitalist system. In Portland a social service workplace for victims of sexual or domestic violence was in danger of getting its funding cut by the county. The workers organized, and with a large group of supporters showed up at the county commissioners' meetings demanding the budget not be cut. They had their funding restored because of the action they took together. Another example of direct action is a group of women workers that confronted a sexist co-worker (or co-workers). The target can vary but the method stays the same.

It must be said openly that Direct Action is not about violence or destruction despite what the bosses or the media may say. Anyone who advocates individual violent acts, as "direct action" is sorely misunderstood on its place and purpose and does a disservice to the working class, for whom there is no need for such posturing.

We recognize direct action takes discipline, planning, and follow through. The foundation however is the solidarity that exists among workers in the shop. Here is the basis of the action. We begin at this point and organize the action from there, bringing others in as necessary. Solidarity is how we support each other around an issue; it is a measure of how strongly we as workers feel towards one another and how much we will support each other. Solidarity is developed out of our shared experiences on the job and our common grievances. It is both the foundation of and broadened by Direct Action.

Our organizing around an issue succeeds or fails based on how good of a plan it was and how well it is carried out. To ensure that it is carried out well we assess our situation before hand,

## Informal Workgroups

By M. Jones

December 2007

In every workplace throughout all of history, workers have come together and worked together for their common interests. This takes many forms. Sometimes it's at the level of two workers next to each other in cubicles who support each other and make work less miserable by being able to laugh with one another; other times it forms into a group that encompasses enough people that they can informally control the speed of production and the work conditions that surround them; and sometimes it grows into a union a group of workers within a shop, ideally across and industry who can directly exercise power in relation to the boss. In whichever form it takes it is significant. In each form it challenges the isolation that exists in other aspects of our lives as workers. In these relationships we begin to see the possibilities of what it means to take collective action and what it means to control the means of production. We are empowered by these relationships, and where we can build on them we can have success and begin to make changes.

These bonds we form with our fellow workers are the basis of our organization, the basis of Industrial Unionism and the basis of a working class movement. Where these bonds originate and where they are most intense is in our workplaces, where they come out of our day-to-day interactions and struggles.

The first two forms mentioned are incomplete. Little can be done if our work group remains isolated in a group of two or three; and if we begin to informally control production we still may be isolated within a larger company or industry. These have to be expanded through organization. But look at these small groups as the seeds, and the tiny cells within a larger muscle of organization (a muscle that must be constantly exercised).

Through organization these small work groups branch out, around an issue or as part of a campaign. They encompass other workers, get further defined through this organization, and identify workplace or industrial issues to struggle against. Again this often happens informally and we should not overlook it or believe that workers are not capable of acting outside of formal organization. Small informal actions are happening all over the place, and even in this context workers begin to see their power, but in small ways. It has to grow and it has to become formal in order to grow to a position of strength and push forward demands.

As the struggle grows it becomes more formal, the definition it gets is one of class. It moves from a group of friends or acquaintances that want to make things better on the job, to a group of workers making a demand on the boss and having an action to follow this demand up. In this action we must come together and confront things directly ourselves. This means not relying on a third party, on the government, a lawyer, or the press to enforce our demands, but doing it ourselves, with other workers inside our workplace and outside of it. This is direct action and is present in informal struggle and in formal struggle.

In this struggle we as a group are defined by our relationship to the boss and to production, in a way that is not possible when we act as individuals. This is when we become the working class; a group acting in its own interests.

We all identify ourselves as part of this group, the issue we have been organizing around now becomes one of the working class verse the employing class. And though these actions we begin to see what is possible, not just for ourselves and our families but also for our fellow workers, for our organization and for our union. Out of these small seeds, informal work groups,

no experience with the boss he said something that made the guy upset and he left. I personally didn't feel at all like I was going to be physically threatened in this situation and as the picket wore on and we had subsequent conversations with the owner, I became more firm about not needing anyone other than the three of us who were involved around. It was too difficult to deal with strategy-wise, and bringing machismo into things seems like a bad move in general.

As time went on and his nightclub stayed empty he began to come out looking increasingly concerned. He wanted to talk again. This time just the three of us went upstairs with him. We were obviously hurting him, as the club was almost empty.

We won half the wages owed in cash and a written statement promising to pay the remainder next Saturday. If he didn't pay there would be another picket. We were promised by the head of the District Labour Council that they would support us on this matter (unprecedented in my knowledge). We are using the possibility of an even bigger picket, with media this time, as a guarantee.

This may not directly lead to any organized shops, but actions like this are helpful to folks, including ourselves. We gain valuable skills we can use when there are bigger fish to fry. Taking actions like this builds real solidarity. We can point to these actions when someone asks, "What does the IWW do?"

keeping in mind our desired outcome and possible responses. As workers we come together and democratically decide what we want and what we are going to do. Outside organizers can help develop a plan and tie it in with larger strategy. But the decision to act and how to act must be carried out by those directly involved. It is important that as many of those impacted are involved in the planning and decision-making. It is in this way we maintain a democratic organization. We also increase our strength as a group by sharing skills, planning together, and testing our abilities. And most importantly we further the solidarity we feel towards each other.

Direct action requires that we overcome the divisions amongst us by deciding on a plan and moving on it. We stop taking complaints to the boss one at a time, hoping for some sympathy or a fair hearing. Instead we list out the problems, our demands to fix them, and through an action confront the boss directly. This challenges us to do things many of us are not used to, things we are discouraged from doing by capitalism. First we think critically about the situation around us. We have to organize beyond ourselves and bring people in. We strategize as a group to ensure our plan is as fool proof as can be. And lastly up for each other and for ourselves.

It is obvious how this differs from the other days at work. Instead of driving in think how miserable to day will be, hoping things will move by quickly, that the speed of work or your numbers of cases to solve won't be too difficult. That the pay will seem worth it, there won't be as much inventory to stock. The boss won't come by and demand that we work overtime. Instead we show up focused, with a plan, a sense of community with those around us. We have a say in our lives on the job and we have power. Organizing puts this into play; direct action takes it to the next step.

This tactic can only be effectively accomplished by those directly involved. It is a key to keeping our organization democratic, making sure those most impacted and with the most to gain or lose are the primary actors in an action. They are not necessarily the only ones with a stake in the action, but they are the most effected. Work should be done to make sure anyone potentially impacted is consulted on the action, especially with large actions (except of course the boss). Everyone involved is accountable to each other during and after the action. This means that if the designated Fellow Worker who is to speak to the boss during the action is unable, someone else steps up, or we have a second speaker appointed. Or if during a slow down action, where we have all decided to work at our own speed the whole day, a fellow worker begins to work faster, we work things out with them. We figure out what is up and work with this person and ensure next time this mistake won't be made. Any mistakes made can be worked out and any problems resolved as a group, sometimes with the aid of external organizers there to walk us through. Here it is clear how this is different than a handful of "organizers" calling the shots.

Direct Action is useful to our organizing because direct action is the only way to continue to build upon our success and to ensure that our gains are not whittled away. Organizing in the IWW is not merely about winning demands. Yes, winning demands, improves our lives as workers on and off the job. We do not lose sight of this, but we recognize it is not an end in itself. If our only goal were to win demands, we would have no reason to be different than the business unions. If this were our goal it would be fine to hire picketers to stand outside to shop, while the workers toil inside. It would be fine to use only "public" pressure to force the boss to sign a contract as some business unions do. But this is not what we want. We want workers and ourselves as workers, to be conscious of themselves and to be organized. This means being active, not passive. This means building up our skills and our confidence. Out of this comes our real strength.

This is why we need not be the largest numerically to have the biggest impact. We, as workers, decide how to take care of an issue: not unaccountable leaders disconnected from the

situation, not the state through appointed judges, not the union president and her cronies miles away. We are not passive in this. We are making the moves and the decisions.

We aim to build a new society. Building a new society requires us to change as workers. Collective Action challenges the alienation that breaks us apart and makes us feel like isolated individuals. People do not change when they are spectators who watch someone else get things for them, or are given things to keep quiet. We change when we are acting on something, when we are experiencing things ourselves. Through direct action this is possible. Here we are seeing what is possible, what limits exist, how we can be stronger next time. This happens again and again as we build the One Big Union, until our strength can match that of the bosses and larger things are possible.

## Wage Theft Picket

By x356748

April 2008

One day I told a friend of mine about an action the General Membership Branch did where we got someone a few shifts' worth of wages after he got fired quickly from a new job. We called for a picket. It didn't actually happen. The boss caved as soon as the first two guys showed up with a stack of signs. Then another former employee who had left town, and had been trying to wrestle her last two weeks pay from the boss caught word of it. She talked to the boss and said something to the effect of, "Heard there was a picket, shame if there was another one." She had tried for months to get her money, after the picket she got it right away.

My buddy said, "Hey I know someone in a similar situation." He passed on our IWW contact details. His friend had worked at a club for a few weeks. She was fired because the boss couldn't afford all of the staff he had. She had already contacted the employer to ask for her back wages. No matter happen, no matter how many phone calls she made, she was stonewalled by her ex-boss.

She joined the union and asked for help. Her ex-boss is emotionally manipulative and unstable. She wanted us to go for her initially. I volunteered with another Wobbly to meet with her ex-boss. I was initially reluctant to be a representative because I'd never done it before. But the thing needed doing so I put on a suit. We went to the business. We hung around waiting for the boss to come and open up. He was unwilling to talk to us. The other fellow worker gave the boss his cell phone number. We told him we are going to have a picket but he can phone us if he'd like to reconsider. We left and a little while later the boss phoned us. He wanted to meet. He said he would call but later with a meeting time. He didn't.

We learned from this action not to do everything for the worker. In planning the next steps we made sure she was involved... we aren't a service union after all. We tried to help out with the stuff that she couldn't do. This way we did a better job of helping the worker be the organizer. Still, it's hard to teach what you're just learning. Neither of us who were being representatives have much experience in this stuff.

A picket was called for 9:30 p.m. one night. The worker invited a bunch of her friends. I sent out a facebook invite. A bunch of People's Global Action folks were having a meeting around the corner. They came by after that was done. When I got there, there were about 10 folks. I'd say there was a total of maybe 35 people coming and going, with about 20 at any one time. It was a solid picket.

The guy I was working with made up a little leaflet briefly stating that the business doesn't pay its staff and people shouldn't patronize the club/restaurant. The headline was "FREE DRINKS." The text explained that if workers aren't getting paid the owner shouldn't be charging. Most folks got the joke but one woman apparently went in, ordered a drink and presented the flyer, thinking it was a coupon. She came out angry about that, screaming and swearing. I felt bad that someone had to get upset but outside of that the leaflet worked well. The boss called the cops saying we were starting fights with customers. They left quickly when they saw what was going on.

At first the employer wouldn't meet with us to talk unless we told the picket to leave first. We said no. Eventually he came out to talk. In addition to us three who were involved in negotiating, one of the bigger, burlier members of the branch was also present. There was a feeling amongst the wobs that we needed some sort of physically imposing presence "in case of trouble". As he had