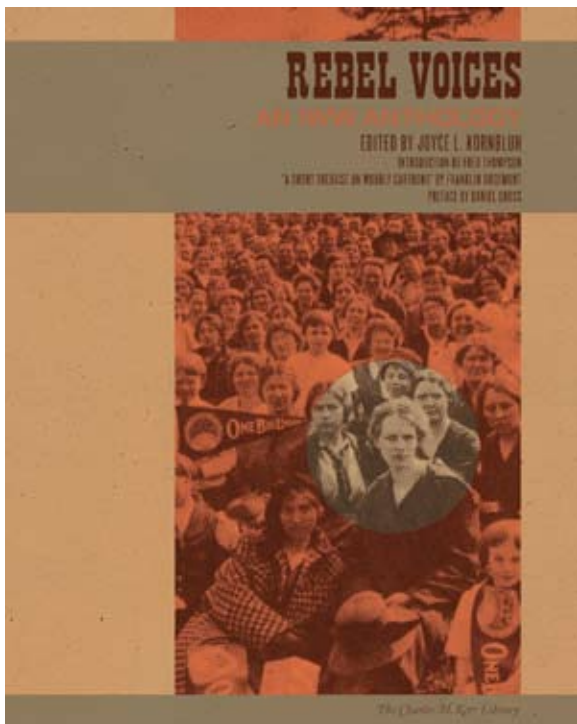

IWW

The Industrial Workers of the World





Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology

“The impact of the IWW has reverberated far beyond the ranks of organized labor. An important influence on the 1960s New Left, the Wobbly theory and practice of direct action, solidarity, and “class-war” humor have inspired several generations of civil rights and anti-war activists, and are a major source of ideas and inspiration for today’s radicals. Indeed, virtually every movement seeking to “make this planet a good place to live” (to quote an old Wobbly slogan) has drawn on the IWW’s incomparable experience. Originally published in 1964 and long out of print, Rebel Voices remains by far the biggest and best source on IWW history, fiction, songs, art, & lore.”

store.iww.org/rebel-voices-pm-press.html

The Preamble to the Constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World

- The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things 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 earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.
- We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same Industry, thereby helping to defeat one another in wage wars.
- Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into 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 wages for a fair day’s work,” we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, “Abolition of the wage system.” It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the every-day struggle with the 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.

An Annotated Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The Preamble of the Constitution of the IWW was adopted in 1905 at the founding convention of that organization, and has been changed but slightly in the ensuing years. It is the most elegant, concise and brilliant document I know of. It is the basic text of the IWW to this day.

I'm a rank and file Wobbly (that is, a member of the IWW) and I approach the annotation of this mighty document with no small trepidation. It's a job that needs to be done, however. The language is a bit old fashioned, though I wouldn't change a word. The passage of 95 years and the interruption of working class traditions and oral history have made it, perhaps, a bit less accessible to a modern reader than I think it needs to be.

I start this project with the deepest respect for the fellow workers who wrote and adopted the Preamble, and the wobblies that have lived by it, fighting the good fight and giving us so very much, from that day to this.

Being a Wobbly is about just going right ahead and getting after it. If a job needs doing, we don't wait around for some expert to tell us how to do it or to do it for us. We working people can do anything we set our minds to, if we do it together. In that spirit I actually have the unmitigated gall to attempt to clarify and explain the finest piece of writing I've ever seen. Wish me luck.

■ The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.

Well, here we go already. I know this puts some people off. Notice please that it says, "the working *class* and the employing *class*..."

What are these? The working class is that large part of society and the economy in which people earn their living by their mental or manual labor; it creates all the public and private wealth there is. The employing class is that small part of society in which people make their living by investing money in other people's work; it creates no wealth, only takes wealth created by others. I know, some people do some of both, but just because some things are orange doesn't mean there's no red and yellow. The IWW draws the line at who has direct power to hire and fire.

What it doesn't say is that no member of the working class has anything in common with any member of the employing class. That would be pretty stupid. We, as individual human beings have a lot in common. We all eat food and drink water and breathe air. We all live and after a bit, we all die. We have more in common than horses and donkeys do, because we can interbreed and have fertile children. We can even slip, though rarely, from one class to the other. Usually downwards, mind you, as the working class is growing and the employing class is shrinking. Members of the two classes do have things in common, but as individuals.

And what's more, we don't wish them any harm. We don't hate them and we don't want to hurt them. We'll damn sure hurt their class's economic interests any chance we get, but not them. The IWW is a nonviolent

organization and always has been. We've got a very very good record on that count. One we're proud of.

What this first sentence does mean is that the two classes have nothing in common. It's nothing personal. It's economics. What we, the workers, need and want is in absolute and diametric opposition to what the employers want and need.

We want more pay for our time, shorter hours, less boring and repetitive work, less dangerous work, more control of how we spend the hours and days and years of our short lives. We want more control over what goods we produce and what services we provide, and how these things are done. We want more control over the effects that this production has on our health, on the health and safety of our neighborhoods and our homes, on this beautiful planet earth.

The employers, as a class, need us to work longer, harder, faster, cheaper, with less safety rules, less pollution controls and less say in the decision-making process. What they really need is slaves that don't have to be fed and taken care of, super duper robots that know as much as we do and can do all the work that gets done in the world, like us, but with less maintenance and hassle.

What we want and need is to be truly free and in control of the earth, the resources, the machines, the decision making process, in short, the whole ball of wax. We want a safe and healthy place for children to grow up in (all the children, theirs as well as ours), and the possibility of a good, fulfilling life for them to lead. We, in short, want everything the employers need us not to have. Our needs and wishes are simply bad for business.

■ There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

It's nothing personal, but the two classes are natural enemies. We're stuck in the middle of a war, a class war. That's not a figure of speech. It's a very real and ugly war with a body count that makes WWII look like a minor fender bender on a sunny Saturday afternoon.

It's war, and we fight it every day, but our weapons aren't guns and bombs. Our weapons are education, organization, and the various ways of withholding our labor. We fight with our arms folded.

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

It's not a war of our choosing. We were born into it, but we've damn sure got to fight it and get it over with. There's just no real choice. Year after year

they take away more of our lives, create more misery, kill and maim more of our fellow workers, destroy more of this beautiful planet. They'll never stop unless they are made to stop. They're mad.

Once again, I'm speaking of classes. The employing class is mad. They take more and more and more. They destroy more and more and more. They do not consider the cost in life, in misery, in degradation, in pollution. They do not consider the future. They only consider profit. They do not consider the children. They only consider how to amass more capital. They, as a class, are mad dogs. I don't say we must shoot them, but they must be stopped, and the only hammer big enough to do the job is the organized working class, our organized and tactical withholding of our labor and our many forms of direct action. We'll get to that soon.

- We find that the centering of management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever growing power of the employing class.

Remember that this was written in 1905. Pretty sharp, huh? The founding wobblies could already see the trend toward fewer and fewer people controlling more and more of the wealth of the world and becoming more and more powerful and more separated from the rest of us. They could also see that this control ran across national boundaries and wasn't about race or nationality, but about money and power. That's why they founded an international union, meant to embrace all workers everywhere in the world.

What they saw in 1905 is pretty obvious today. Now just a handful of the richest of the rich control most of the wealth of the world, along with the attending political and military power, and the trend is continuing. And they are organized. Very organized. We have to get organized in a very big way and quickly. But we need to organize right. Which brings us back to the Preamble:

- The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping to defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class has interests in common with their employers.

When they say "the trade unions" here they're mostly talking about the American Federation of Labor, the AFL. That was the big noise in labor in the USA in those days, and is now the AFL-CIO with the addition of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Let's be real clear her where we stand re: the AFL-CIO. These union federations include a whole lot of fine union sisters and brothers, past and present that have fought the good fight

for us all many and many a time. We salute those fighting workers, those heroes of the class struggle. No Wobbly has got a beef with any unionist that stands up.

The IWW has had, however, a couple major beefs with the AFL-CIO, all along. These are differences of approach, of belief, on the most basic level. The AFL was founded to represent the interests of a very small portion of the working class, the top of the heap, the white, male, native born, English speaking, skilled craftsmen. It never meant to address the needs of the working class in general, just a few workers, the aristocracy of labor.

It was, and still partially is, organized along craft lines. In other words, according to the type of work one does. Thus, the railroad, or the post office, was and is, divided into many different craft unions who did not, and do not to this day, generally, cooperate with each other in their common struggles with their common enemy, their common bosses.

The result of this bizarre organizing concept was and is union scabbing. Janitors go to work across the drivers' picket line, and a month later the drivers cross the janitors' line, all with the blessing of the union. Weird, huh? How's that going to force the boss to pony up with some better wages or safety conditions? The AFL went out of its way to scab on the IWW many many times.

The basic root concept of the AFL-CIO is that capitalism can work and that the working stiff, at least some of us, can get a fair deal, with some adjustment here and there. The basic root concept of the IWW is that capitalism can't be reformed, can't be made to serve our interests. It's got to be replaced with a system of economic democracy, controlled by the workers, before the workers will ever really get a fair shake.

Different ideas, different practice. In the long run, while we are in solidarity with working people everywhere, and with the rank and file members of any union, we're bound to bump heads occasionally with the officials of any union that thinks the boss is its pal.

The IWW was founded by hard bitten, experienced unionists who were fed up with the existing labor unions and felt, based on their experience, that they needed to create a different sort of vehicle to serve the interests of the working class.

■ 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.

So that's just what they did. They built a better form of union. It's democratic. It's built to be controlled by the rank and file and to guard against

corruption and union bureaucracy. It's independent of any political party. It's an industrial union, meaning that every worker in one enterprise, from the cook to the bookkeeper to the janitor to the driver to whomever, is all in the same union. Therefore, the fact that their interests are identical is reflected and reinforced structurally in the way the union is set up.

The IWW is built to fight for the workers and for no one else. It's not made to support the government, nor the politicians, nor the career bureaucrats, nor the gangsters, nor any church, nor any national grouping or race or gender, nor, least of all, the bosses and employers and owners themselves. It's our fighting machine, to be controlled by the workers themselves alone. It's built for solidarity and it's built for struggle.

■ 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.'

No use beating around the bush, fellow workers. While we're here to fight for better wages and hours here and now, we're also here to change the very system that controls the economy. Political democracy without economic democracy is a lie, a sham, and a cruel joke. We're here to fight for better conditions now and for a better life in the future. No contradiction, because it's the same fight.

■ It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism.

This sounds like some ancient prophecy, but really it's just common sense. There's nobody else to do the job. We've got to do it. Politics will always obey economics, never the other way around. Military power is just a reflection of economic power.

The real power lies already in the hands of the workers. That's the big secret. Tell your friends. We make everything that gets made. We provide every service. We do it all. We can stop it all just by folding our arms. We're not about armed struggle. That's not a big enough hammer to do the job.

We hold the only power on earth great enough to defeat capitalism, and all we have to do is to get ourselves organized, and organized right. Then we can stop the madness of the employing class, once and for all.

■ The army of production must be organized, not only for the every-day struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown.

We have to organize ourselves to fight the good fight here and now, and as soon as possible, to fight the last battle against capitalism, and to hold the whole thing together after that last battle is won. We're going to replace the

structure and organization of capitalism with the superior structure and order of economic democracy, workers' democracy. With that structure in place we will carry on, as the new democracy grows and transforms our lives. It's doable.

■ By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

And there it is. The short term is in harmony with the long term.

We don't know exactly what shape it will eventually take, how could we? We do know that it needs to be truly democratic, to be controlled by the huge majority of the human race, those who do the work. We know that it can be the end to war and famine and slavery and ecological destruction, because these things are against our interests. When we, the workers, run the economy, we will be running the whole sheebeen, in our own interests, for ourselves, the vast majority, in peace and harmony. Now that's something worth working for, worth living for, and it's, to my mind, quite possible.

Well now, there it is - the annotated Preamble of the Industrial Workers of the World. The Preamble is official union literature, obviously, but the annotations are just my humble opinion. I will say that I'm pretty happy with them. Something's not official IWW literature until the General Executive Board, duly elected by the rank and file of the IWW, says it's official, which is as it should be.

I hope it's of some use. I'm more than happy to hear criticism regarding the annotations, try to answer questions, take suggestions, bright ideas. Maybe I missed something, or didn't quite get some part just right. Wouldn't surprise me too much. Let me know, c/o the Portland OR General Membership Branch of the IWW, PO Box 15005, Portland OR 97293 USA.

If you're not a Wobbly yet, think about joining us. If you are a member of the working class (meaning that you do not have the power to hire and fire) and if you agree with the principles laid out in the Preamble, contact a delegate or a branch of the IWW, or contact the General Headquarters, and join the union. Make it a part of your life. Together we can build a better life. Together we can make this world a better place, better than you ever imagined.

For a better world, *Tim Acott X344468*

PS: Upon rereading this it occurs to me that I'm not the first to try to explain and paraphrase the Preamble. Fellow Worker Ralph Chaplin wrote the song "Solidarity Forever" in 1915 as a musical version or paraphrasing of the Preamble. Great song. Probably the best known and most sung labor song in the American labor movement. So, I've tacked Ralph's mighty melody (sung to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," aka: "John Brown's Body") onto my own humble effort and here it is on the following pages. - TA (1999)

"Solidarity Forever"

Written by Ralph Chaplin in 1915, is perhaps the most famous union anthem. It is sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body" and is inspired by "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

When the union's inspiration through the workers' blood shall run,
There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun;
Yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one,
But the union makes us strong.

CHORUS:

Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
Solidarity forever,
For the union makes us strong.

Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite,
Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might?
Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight?
For the union makes us strong.

Chorus

It is we who plowed the prairies; built the cities where they trade;
Dug the mines and built the workshops, endless miles of railroad laid;
Now we stand outcast and starving midst the wonders we have made;
But the union makes us strong.

Chorus

All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone.
We have laid the wide foundations; built it skyward stone by stone.
It is ours, not to slave in, but to master and to own.
While the union makes us strong.

Chorus

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn,
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.
We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn
That the union makes us strong.

Chorus

In our hands is placed a power greater than their hoarded gold,
Greater than the might of armies, magnified a thousand-fold.
We can bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old
For the union makes us strong.



General Strike Wall-Poster (Variety Pack)

by Eric Drooker

“The ever-popular poster as seen everywhere on the internet. The IWW retained Eric Drooker’s service, and he created this hardly-silent Agitator for the OBU! This high quality poster is printed on a very fancy stock of paper and is worthy of being framed and put on a wall. If you’re looking for something to post up in the streets, please see our “wheat-paste quality” prints.”

store.iww.org/general-strike-wall-poster-by-eric-drooker-variety.html



“You don’t remember the Wobblies. You were too young. Or else you weren’t born yet. What they really were was a religion. They were welded together with a vision we don’t possess. It was their vision that made them great. And it was their belief that made them powerful. And sing! You never heard anyone sing the ways those guys sang unless it was for a religion. Bunches of them, ten or twenty at a time, out in the harvest fields or in one of their free speech fights, sitting in the barred windows of the second floor of the jail singing the songs that Joe Hill had written for them or Ralph Chaplin’s “Solidarity Forever”, a singing that swelled through the town until nobody could escape it.”

— James Jones, *From Here To Eternity*

The **Tulsa General Membership Branch** (TGMB) is a solidarity-powered fighting labor organization that is committed to the defense and advancement of the working class. The TGMB seeks to improve the working conditions and labor standards for all our fellow workers hard at work for the employing class. We stand ready to fight for increased wages and respect on the job. We are committed to building up our strength and our numbers until that glorious day when we throw off our chains and begin, finally, to work for ourselves.

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