



INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

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What is the IWW – FAQ page

Increasing numbers of working people are asking questions of the Industrial Workers of the World.

- **What is the IWW?**
- **What does it stand for?**
- **What can it do for its members?**
- **How does it propose better conditions?**

Here are the honest answers to many of the questions. The final answer, however, can be written for history only by a rank and file of labor that is willing to fight for a world which will be just and secure for all men and women, a world in which there will be no hungry children.

1. What is the IWW?

It is a fighting labor union that believes that the interests of labor can be fully served only when working people are united as a class. It wants to see all on the same job united, all in the same industry in one union, all who work for wages in one big union. The IWW differs sharply from the position of other unions in that, we believe the problems of the working class can not be solved by begging crumbs from employers or praying to politicians for favors. While it fights for better conditions today, the IWW insists that working people are entitled to everything they produce, instead of a meager share.

There will be insecurity and hunger among those who toil for as long as there is an employing class that benefits from low wages and evil working conditions. The IWW holds that there can be no solution to industrial warfare, no end to injustice and want, until the profit system itself is abolished. In striving to unite labor as a class in one big union the IWW also seeks to build the structure of a new and better social order within the shell of the old system which fails to provide for the needs of all.

2. Who May Join?

Any wage earner may carry an IWW card. No worker is barred because of race, religion, nationality, sex, or sexual orientation. It is not, however, an organization for scissor-bills, for cowards, for those who substitute words for action. It does not want people who are content to unquestioningly follow leaders. The IWW is a union devised by and for workers, the best and most intelligent, and growing numbers of such workers are securing IWW cards. They want to help build the union that will rebuild the world. The IWW needs them and they need the IWW.

3. Can Members of Other Unions Join the IWW?

Yes. Many IWW members are also members of other unions. They are women and men who form the fighting heart of such unions; rank and filers who strive to make their unions yield returns for the membership and not completely degenerate into docile pacifiers serving the boss. Such workers have joined the IWW because they want to build a union stronger, more fearless, more honest, than the unions dominant today. Such a union must, in the end, match the unity of the employers with the greater unity of the workers, match the power of the employing class with the greater power of the working class. That union is the one big union of the IWW.



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4. Is the IWW Dual?

No. The IWW is the only union which organizes workers as a class, instead of herding labor into small groups which war against each other for the sole benefit of the employing class. The IWW does not believe that one big union of all workers is dual to small groups that divide workers instead of uniting them. The IWW does not hope to change the labor movement by boring from within to seize control of established unions nor does it seek to elect its members to pie-card jobs. Such maneuvers, even when successful, result in no real gain for labor and only illusory benefits for the victorious group. Today's inadequate labor movement can be changed, not by a shift of rulers or control, but only by a rank and file that is conscious of its strength and aware of its goal--a world fit for human beings to live in.

5. Who Belongs Now?

Some of the best and most capable unionists are already members of the IWW. They are veterans of many a bitter struggle for improved wages and conditions; rebels against an unjust social order who freely offer their hearts and brains to make labor's bright dream of a better world come true. They are people whom one is proud to know; women and men who will fight, whatever the odds, and fight on until the battle is won. Some of the best are not enough. The IWW needs them all. And, equally, all who are struggling for the better world that we can have will find they need the IWW.

6. How Do Its Members Benefit?

While the IWW makes no promises of immediate gain to its members, experience shows that members benefit materially in direct proportion to their efforts in the organization and on the job. IWW members, familiar with the methods of direct action, do much to enforce and improve conditions on the job. The knowledge and facilities gained through the IWW often prove a major factor in winning grievance cases. Members, working in concert with the IWW and its press, have succeeded many times in needling union officials into demanding and gaining higher wages. IWW members have rallied decisive support for unions facing defeat in contests with employers. These things are tangibles that directly benefit the IWW member, as well as all labor. There are equally important intangibles. The IWW gives its members a sense of solidarity and a sense of direction. It makes unionists effective by teaching them how to fight intelligently and as a group. It offers them the companionship of the most honest, fearless group in labor.

7. Is It Democratic?

The IWW is a fortress of democracy. While majority vote rules, there is scrupulous regard for the right of a minority to hold differing views. All the important questions, including the election of officials, are decided by referendum vote of the membership. Officials who fail to carry out the desire of the majority are subject to immediate recall. "Pie cards" are not tolerated in the IWW. Wages of officials and employees of the union are set to the average pay received by the members in industry. Terms in office are rigidly limited. Most of the work in the IWW is done without charge because the organization is composed of workers who believe in their movement and gladly give their utmost to promote its growth. A cornerstone of the IWW is the belief that the rank and file must control the union and its officers, instead of being controlled by them. No union can be rank and file that limits the freedom of its members or muzzles minorities by a host of unnecessary regulations. Therefore the IWW makes no more rules than there is genuine need for.



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8. How Is Democracy Safeguarded?

While the structure and constitution of the IWW jealously protect democracy, no law devised can secure or retain democracy once the will for it is lost. The root of freedom is not law, which people can change, but people themselves. Best guarantee of democracy lies in the membership of the IWW; its members, who war against tyranny and injustice, will never allow freedom to be abridged in labor's finest organization.

9. Does the IWW Build Leaders?

In one sense, yes. The IWW rejects "leaders" as such, for if individuals lead they can also mislead. Labor has been continually betrayed by leaders that it trusted and followed. It will cease to be betrayed only when it accepts the leadership of ideas and not the leadership of men. Yet there are people who are quick and capable in presenting ideas and in mapping tactics to fit conditions. The best of them do not wish to lead and they will not blindly follow. These are developed by the IWW--partly because it is a rank and file organization, partly from the shared experience of its members, partly because IWW members have no lack of intelligence and initiative.

10. Why Do Employers Hate the IWW?

So great is the hatred and fear of employers toward the IWW that they have tried to crush it again and again, only each time to see it rise stronger than before. The basis of their fear is the titanic power that is inherent in the IWW idea. When workers are united as a class; when they rely only on themselves; when they use direct action to secure the entire product of the world which their labor has built; when that day comes, no power on earth can stop the forward march of humanity and that day will forever crumble the stolen power of a master class. A root of the employers' hatred is the unyielding honesty of the IWW. It will not compromise. It will not collaborate. It will not sell out. It will not retreat or surrender. Employers do not fear unions that collaborate with them. The "unionism" of such organizations is so false and can be so cheaply purchased that they are constantly used as a strike-breaking force to smash the picket lines of other unions.

- Other unions accept the power of the employing class. The IWW challenges that power.
- Other unions beg for crumbs from the loaf of bread that labor produces. The IWW demands the whole loaf.
- Other unions, servile to employers, attack strikes of other unions and parade through picket lines. The IWW, in words and practice, tries to build a working class unity so powerful that labor will be invincible.

That is why employers have begged for agreements with other unions in order to prevent the IWW from representing workers. Bosses want unions they can control, not the one big union controlled by workers.

11. Is the IWW a Responsible Union?

Entirely--to its members and to the working class. It has not and never will be responsible in the sense used by employers in praising other unions--a tamed, house-broken division of labor which is responsible to the boss for restraining its own members from injuring him. The IWW does not sell out its membership. It does not betray the interests of labor. It is responsible only to the working class. The IWW has been called red but it has never been called yellow.



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12. Is the IWW Radical?

It is as radical as a scientist in her laboratory . . . as radical as a surgeon planning the removal of a diseased growth . . . as radical as a teacher must be to tell the truth. It is well to note that from radicalism has flowed all that makes life better today than yesterday. It is now, as in the past, the only force capable of leading the world out of its night of hunger, hatred and fear. Humanity advances over a path blazed by radicals and stained with their blood. So long as there is injustice there will be radicals. The name itself is the proudest title of free men and women.

13. Does the IWW Advocate Force?

No. While the IWW uses every honorable weapon in conflicts with employers it has never initiated the use of force. Its chief weapon is the solidarity of the working class, which builds, and not individual terrorism, which destroys. Employers have always been the first to resort to force and violence and the IWW teaches only what the law affirms, that workers have the right to defend themselves against attack. Violence is not necessary when, united as a class, all that workers need to do is fold their arms to gain the world.

14. Is the IWW American?

One might ask if freedom is American or if justice and humanity are American. Wherever workers toil, wherever masters rule, there, is the IWW or IWW thinking. Since economic injustice is worldwide so, also, is the IWW. In a narrower sense the IWW, organized in Chicago in 1905, is far more "American" than the corporations, financed by native and foreign masters, which seek to dictate subsistence conditions for American workers. The master class of all nations would force workers into slavery. The IWW would make workers free.

15. Is the IWW Anti Religious?

No. It has no religious bias and it does not interfere with the religious belief of any member. Such beliefs are part of the freedom of humanity and the IWW strives to extend freedom, never to lessen it.

16. Why Do Labor Skates Oppose the IWW?

"Labor leaders" of other unions have so entrenched themselves in office that they long ago ceased to represent the interests of labor or heed the will of the union membership. First formed in frank recognition of the opposing interests of worker and employer, other unions have become so decadent that today their chief concern, at best, is to beg for crumbs from the loaf they produce. This debasement is reflected even more clearly in the type of "leaders" (Beck of the Teamsters, Hutchinson of the Carpenters, MacGowan of the Boilermakers, etc.) who act as trustees for labor.

The basic concern of the labor skate is to perpetuate himself in office and to make that office personally profitable. This is done by crushing democracy, muzzling the rank and file, and punishing revolt or even criticism by summary expulsion. The interests of such "labor leaders" with employers are identical. Both are concerned with riding, as parasites, on the backs of labor. Both profit from the suppression of rank and file demands or protests. Both benefit from maintenance of a servile job trust, chiefly concerned with the profits of its "leaders" and the employers. Labor skates oppose the IWW, not because they don't understand it but because they understand it well. A victorious IWW means the end of domination and privilege; it will signal the beginning of complete control by the rank and file of labor.



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17. Is the IWW Secret?

Although there have been times (as with other unions) when members, to guard themselves from beating or lynching, have had to carry their IWW cards inside their shoes, the IWW has never been a secret organization. Members of the IWW are proud of their red cards, which mark them as women and men and not driven sheep. Halls are open to all; union meetings are held regularly and openly; public meetings are advertised and are open to all workers.

18. How About Politics?

The IWW, as an organization, is non-political and it does not interfere with political beliefs or activities of its members. It requires only that political views do not create division within the union. This rule enables workers of all political beliefs to join together without friction to advance their economic interests. The IWW concentrates on direct economic action because history shows that whoever holds economic power also holds political power. The IWW believes that whatever is "given" to workers by politicians can as quickly, with interest piled on the "debt," be taken away. (Need the Wagner Act, followed by Taft-Hartley, be cited?) Only that which labor wins by its own economic strength can be retained. The hard lesson, fully absorbed by the IWW, is that labor cannot depend on pie-cards, politicians or prayers. Labor can only rely on labor; if it wins it must win by its own economic unity and strength.

19. What is Direct Action?

It is the action labor takes when it fights in the direct, natural way and that which brings greatest results. When workers rebel on the job and slow down or cease work until their grievances are redressed--that is direct action. When workers, united as a class, conduct a general strike to defend their interests--that is direct action. Workers are continually betrayed when they rely on other means than direct action--electing politicians to office, submitting demands to arbitration, or permitting the courts or government agencies to settle issues. These are methods designed to benefit the employing class. To expect justice from these sources is as naive as to believe slot machines are made for the enrichment of those who put money into them. The only purpose of the infrequent payoffs is to maintain the faith of the gullible in the "justice" of a rigged machine.

Employers are vitally concerned only when labor uses direct action to win its demands, for it is a method that is not easy or cheap to combat. Workers have invariably gained more by acting directly than could have been won by playing ring around the rose with employer-controlled agencies. Direct action tore the chains of open slavery from humanity. Over the centuries it has established individual rights and modified the life and death power of the master class. Used fully, used wisely and well, direct action can forever end hunger, injustice and the mastery of humans by other humans.

