

IWW102

The Committee in Action

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The Organizer Training Program (OTP) of the North American IWW is administered by a three-member committee charged with overseeing the work of the body, which is called the Organizer Training Committee (OTC). Though the goals of the OTC remain fluid, since the needs of the union will grow and change, the present goals of the OTC are to offer trainings for branches, groups and workplace organizing committees to increase capacity and skills to do workplace and industrial organizing. The OTC communicates the methods and ideas of committees to increase capacity and skills to do workplace and industrial organizing. The OTC prioritizes the recruitment and leadership development of trainers who are leaders in workplace organizing campaigns and who are women, people of color, and immigrants.

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Agenda

Wednesday		Thursday	
9:00	Introduction	10:00	Thinking strategically
9:20	What is “Workplace contractualism”? And Why is the IWW different?	11:30	Lunch
9:40	Organizing Training 101 Recap & AEIOU Revisited	12:00	Accountability
10:20	Break	13:00	Effective meetings
10:40	Handling Grievances	14:00	Working with problem workers
12:00	Lunch	14:20	Break
13:00	Taking action	15:20	Staying solid: pushing & dealing with burnout
14:00	Break	16:20	Finding a role in the IWW
14:20	Retaliation from the boss	17:30	End
15:55	Integrating new hires at the shop		
15:40	End		

What is “Workplace contractualism”? And Why is the IWW different?

What is “Workplace contractualism,” and how is the IWW different?

Reading: The Committee in Action (See Appendix I)

	Workplace contractualism	Solidarity unionism
Who		
What		
How/Why		
Where		

What are the problems associated with workplace contractualism?

What is an organizing committee?

1. Has one on ones with new workers, integrating them into the campaign.
2. Does social mapping, sets up one on ones, identifies workers we want to bring into the committee, and trains and develops committee members as organizers. (AEIOU)
3. Canvasses for grievances, and works with aggrieved workers to make an action plan
4. Coordinates direct action, pushes organizing forward, plans tactics and escalation strategies.
5. Calls committee meetings.
6. Develops ways to deal with problem workers.
7. Pushes workers to be more involved in the committee.
8. Works on linking the workplace to industry-wide organizing and the larger union
9. Signs people up to the IWW

Why is taking credit important?

Organizing Training 101 Recap & AEIOU Revisited

Stages of a campaign:



Another way to look at it

One big organizer exercise

Everyone but the worker in the centre: We work at a call centre. Our shop committee is pretty well established, we have had taken some small actions, and we have won a couple of victories around scheduling. We have some more actions in mind we'd like to plan, but need some more help on the committee.

The worker in the centre is a relatively new employee. We have gotten their contact information but haven't had a one on one with them yet.

Our goal is to get them agitated, educate them on collective action as the solution to their issues at work, inoculate about the boss's role, and to get them to attend a shop committee meeting.

Handling Grievances

What are our goals in dealing with grievances?

Collecting and documenting grievances

Why do we do this?

		How	Why
1	Write		
2	Ask		
3	Resolution?		
4	Collectivize		
5	Other issues		
6	Committee		
7	Copy		

Planning actions around grievances

1	Grievance at committee	
2	Identify level of management	
3	Organize and execute action	
4	Debrief	
5	Assess efficacy	

Why do we assess efficacy of an action?

Taking action

Parts of an action (101 Review)

AEIOU

Grievance

Participants

Witnesses

Target

Demand

Means

Results

Escalation

Follow-up

Ways that management might respond during an action

Followup: 90% of the action

Backup plan	
Immediate debrief	
Plan follow-up	
Memorialize	

Parts of an action fill-in-the-blank

STATION 1: _____

What does this term mean in the context of direct action? Write your own definition or explanation of this term.

Give an example of this from your own workplace.

What could happen if this component wasn't considered in the planning of an action?

STATION 2: _____

What does this term mean in the context of direct action? Write your own definition or explanation of this term.

Give an example of this from your own workplace.

What could happen if this component wasn't considered in the planning of an action?

Retaliation from the boss

Firings

Why does the boss fire people?	Why don't they fire people more often?
--------------------------------	--

How can we deal with firings?

Other kinds of retaliation

Integrating new hires at the shop

Why?

How?

Key talking points for new coworkers

Thinking strategically

Contractualism

From the Constitution of the IWW:

ARTICLE XI Agreements

Sec. 1. Each Industrial Union shall have power to make rules relating to agreements between its job branches and the employers.

Sec. 2. No agreement made by any component part of the IWW shall provide for a checkoff of union dues by the employer, or obligate the members of the union to do work that would aid in breaking any strike.

Sec. 3. Effective January 1, 2013, no agreement by any component part of the IWW shall provide for a prohibition barring members from taking any action against the interests of the employer, nor shall any prior agreements add new prohibitive language. Agreements containing previously negotiated prohibitive language, and the renewal of such agreements, shall be exempt from this amendment.

Does this prevent IWW shops from signing ANY written agreement?

What specific kinds of agreements does this prevent?

Solidarity unionism: our organizing model

Major points of solidarity unionism

Thinking strategically (cont'd)

Strategy and organizational forms

What are the different kinds of workplaces we can organize with our organizing model?

Examples of organization forms

How do we decide on an organizational form?

How can we push our organizing to bigger targets and industrial organizing?

Accountability

Role play instructions

We will be doing a role-play set in an imaginary organic grocery store called Green Planet. Please try and stay in character and imagine that you are really there and members of the shop committee. I will be keeping time and moving you from one step to the next but not participating in the discussion.

You are a shop committee at an organic grocery store.

At a committee meeting **3 months after going public**, boss's anti-union campaign is still around, but has slowed from its initial fever pitch. The committee is planning another action around break policies.

You have all conducted one on ones and these are the grievances that have come up during agitation.

As a committee, **choose one issue and plan an action to address it**, assigning roles and tasks for committee members.

Holding effective meetings

What are the goals of our meetings?

What are the essential elements of a good meeting?

What can go wrong in a meeting?

How do we avoid these problems?

Sample Committee Meeting Agenda

- 6:00 Amend agenda if needed. Report on anything new on the workplace and in the campaign
- 6:10 Report results of previous assignments. Give recognition to those who completed their assignments (Remember the "O" from AEIOU!)
- 6:25 Discussion of the next phase of the campaign.
ie. discussing the purpose of one-on-ones, how to do them)
- 6:35 Role play by committee of next assignment
ie. members trade off being the worker and the organizer, practicing for upcoming one-on-ones
- 6:50 Assignments i.e. distribution of contacts and addresses to committee members.
- 7:00 Adjourn.

Working with problem workers

See Appendix for “Beyond F*ck You” Parts 1 & 2

Bosshead

What is “bosshead”?

What are some examples of bosshead?

How can bosshead hurt our organizing?

How can we deal with bosshead?

Difficult conversations

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If all else fails, what can we do about problem workers?

Staying solid: pushing & dealing with burnout

Burning out

- Think of a time when you were burnt out
- What did you do about it?
- How do you feel now?

What can you do for yourself and others when burnout is looming?

Two minute bio tips

Do

- Inspire confidence
- Show the power of workers
- Share your feelings, fears and triumphs
- Generate strong emotional responses
- Share how you learned from experience
- Focus on the overall arc of the story
- Incorporate what you want for yourself, your family, your job and the world
- Think about what the “take away” from your story will be and mold what you share and how you say it around that goal

Don't

- Worry about details like dates, places, times
- Talk about books you have read
- List protests you attended or groups you were/are in
- Use “left” jargon or references
- Talk about debates or disputes within the left

Finding a role in the IWW

Why is it important to integrate workers and campaigns into the broader IWW?

What are some ways we can encourage our coworkers to step up into roles outside their campaigns?

Appendices

The Committee in Action



In this article Phinneas Gage describes how workers at Canada Post have organized themselves, and the ups and downs and risks of organizing.

The Committee in Action

by Phinneas Gage

“So let’s talk about what happened in the last month or so”. I said looking over the room full of the usual suspects. Harjit told the story like this: “the supervisors came out on to the floor to talk to everyone about taking forceback (forced overtime), they didn’t think anything was up when they asked the first person and they refused. They just nodded made a note and moved down the row”. He was grinning like a maniac. “The supervisor then asked if it was a group decision, and everyone said no”. Pete continued the story beaming with pride “then the next one refused, and the next one, and the next one until the entire depot had refused forced overtime”. A sister in the back of the room asked what the supervisors did next “they ran back into their office and called upper management in the plant”. All of the workers simply said that mail was heavy, it had been a long day and they didn’t feel that doing overtime that day was a safe decision. This was when Harjit had sent the text out across the city and everyone heard about what had happened

at Depot 9.

The workers at Depot 9 built their job action around a core group of workers who had staged a march on the boss action before Christmas. The action was a textbook example of what we taught in our “Taking Back the Workfloor Course”. The course was a single day of workplace mapping, basic strategy and a series of role plays designed to teach workers how to plan and execute job actions. The centre piece was a role play march on the boss where the workers take on a facilitator pretending to be a boss. The carriers were upset because the supervisors were being sloppy in assigning jobs to the workers who cover absences known as relief carriers. Usually this is done based on seniority (how long someone has been at the corporation) but often management will cut corners, either out of laziness or favouritism and assign the jobs based on their own whims. The relief carriers demanded that management respect the seniority list. After this action the supervisors were careful to assign relief positions properly. This gave the carriers the confidence to be more ambitious when the time came for them to stand together again. They were also smart about it, they claimed the victory for what it was and told the other workers on the floor about what they got by standing together and taking action.

Initially some of us thought the campaign around forceback might not go anywhere but supported it anyways as a learning experience; we discussed the initial action at Depot 9 and as one action among many other small actions isolated to a single station. We were very, very wrong on that prediction.

Later the next week scattered reports of workers refusing forceback across the city began to come in. Every time a small group of workers would stand together it would be sent out over the text message tree so everyone could hear about it, this also created a buzz and a lot of talk in the break rooms. Finally at one more depot everyone refused all at once, this was turning into a chain reaction.

The Committee in Action

The Organising Committee would meet monthly and would open every time with each member reporting on their station. This part of the meeting almost always took up half of the meeting. The committee members mostly shared war stories and talked about grievances on the floor and what the workers did to resolve the issues. Early in the committee a lot of work was put into helping each other out with problems and planning small campaigns around small concerns usually based in an individual workplace or shift.

One action had workers at a section in the plant ambush the boss in a “staff talk” (presentation by management) with a list of demands. They planned the meeting out like a march on the boss with a list of demands, a group of workers who were instructed to interrupt the boss so that the workers could speak and a third group that would relate stories about how management’s policies were affecting them. The main militants, a pair of sisters, sat at the back of the room and watched their organising play out in front of them. This was important for all of us in a lot of actions because we didn’t want to be the exclusive leaders; we wanted our co-workers to learn how to plan job actions by doing it themselves. The two sisters then sent a text message out so the whole city could hear about the action and build off of it.

There was also a lot of talk about what we could win based on the support we had on the floor behind a given issue. Up to that point we deliberately kept things pretty modest and planned actions that were scaled to our demands. When we got more ambitious with our demands we began to move up the corporate hierarchy. This wasn’t conscious at first but became extremely conscious further down the line. Demands were issued either verbally with the floor shouting the demands out or chanting, during a staff talk, or even sometimes in writing with a demand letter presented to a coffee break meeting for ratification and then handed in to the boss by a delegation of workers.

Issues like respecting seniority and information from management about the work plan for the day usually came down to pressure on a supervisor but staffing levels and work distribution meant we had to target managers or even directors for the entire city. We would target the level of management responsible for the grievance. This also meant our tactics had to change based on where our support was at, strong workplaces where they had a few actions under their belt were more daring and confrontational, others had to start the escalation chain at the beginning.

The workers would then attend an organising committee meeting, or send a report with someone based on a phone conversation. After every action we tried to encourage debriefing through the committee and ask what worked and what did not go as planned. Eventually this became an effortless part of the direct action process.

Ideally a strong committee should have as clear of a process for dealing with grievances as the “grievance process” in a mainstream union. For us the process went something like this:

1. Worker presents a grievance to the committee (this would either be the organising committee at the early stages or a shop committee or informal workgroup based on the job).
2. The Committee identifies the level of management responsible for the grievance and picks a tactic that pressures the appropriate level of the corporate hierarchy. The organising body that targets management should be built around the territory covered by the decisions that level of management governs. So a city-wide policy will ideally be challenged by the city wide organising committee and target the city wide management officials.
3. Committee members on the floor organise the action and raise the demands from the floor. There is no delegated negotiation; all important decisions in

regards to a campaign are made in the shop floor “coffee break” meetings. Demands are issued and we would agitate for concessions. There was little room for management to make counter offers or cut us deals.

4. After the action the committee debriefs on what happened. They identify points on the floor where the campaign was strong and where it was weak. The organising committee identifies leaders and people who would be good for the workforce mobilisation course and assesses the effectiveness of the action.
5. We would then assess whether the action worked. Part of this was identifying if we got what we wanted. If we didn't get what we wanted we would go back to step two and try and turn up the heat either by moving up the chain of command or increasing the intensity at the same level of management. We would also assess whether the floor was stronger because of what we were doing or if there were places we needed to build support.

After several actions we learned that a lot of these fights need to be framed in terms of respect, dignity and doing what is right and not just in terms of getting what we want. Of course our motivation for doing a lot of things as radicals is the principle of the matter at hand but we doubted ourselves when we thought that large groups of workers would get on board with this line of thinking. We were wrong. Once we started appealing to people's sense of self worth even if an action went badly many workers saw it as a victory in itself. Our coworkers won't fight for a dollar. They will fight for dignity. Sometimes we fight over a dollar because dignity is what's at stake; we can lose the fight for that dollar but still win back some dignity because we fought.

This process is not something that occupies the space that legal tactics fill in most unions. We would often have grievance forms on hand and encourage members to grieve violations of the

collective agreement in addition to our job actions. There were also human rights complaints, health and safety violations and one demand letter made an appeal to the Criminal Code of Canada. However, there are places where direct action can run into conflict with the more conventional union strategy. In these instances we opted to favour a strategy that used direct action on the floor rather than building our militants into full time grievance specialists. This put worker self activity in the centre of our unionism and meant conventional legal unionism was used as a backup. We treated the law as a shield, but not a sword.

The Campaign Develops

Everyone sat on couches in the union office holding pieces of paper, taking notes and relating what happened over the previous month since the last meeting. “Well is the fact that the absent carrier is going to have twice as much mail going to create bad blood on the floor?” I asked. “It might” Pete said. Christine piped up, “I called in sick for a day last week to take care of my toddler and everyone refused forceback on my route, when I came back there was more mail but it was worth it. There were two others in my depot that had undelivered walks that felt the same as me. I don't think it will create any conflict, at least at our station”.

“Look, this is a crisis, we've been trying to address this for years and have gotten nowhere” Christine said. She continued, “the forced overtime clause is supposed to be a last resort but we have depots that are using it three times a week when it used to be twice a year”. She was right, also injuries were up and this was creating a vicious cycle where workers would work too much overtime to cover absences, get injured and then create more absences while they took time off work to heal. This did create bad blood, once some workers started getting doctors notes saying they could not work overtime. After this happened there was even more pressure on the workers that were left to pick up the slack. The solution to the problem was simple of course: hire more staff.

“This month we have four depots that have held the overtime ban for a few weeks, but we still have six depots with no ban in place”. At a mass meeting called by the workers of Depot 9 the workers demanded to meet with one of the managers for the entire city. By all accounts the manager got roasted as angry carriers demanded answers as to why staffing the letter carriers was not a priority. He was furious with the union who he had felt put the workers up to it, when in actuality the union’s relationship to the struggle was much more complicated.

The Mass Meeting

Christine got the meeting back on track: “We seem to be stuck in the same four depots, the Mail Service Couriers, and certain parts of the plant. We need a way to get everyone on board and push the actions into places where we aren’t strong yet.” “Easier said than done” said Keith, we’ve got the depots where folks either have had some fight in them for a while, like Depot 3, or where most of the carriers are lower seniority and younger”. Christine nodded.

“What we need is a way for everyone, not just the four depots where we are strong, to talk with each other directly”, said Pete. “That way the folks that are worried can hear how it worked for us and maybe our attitude will rub off on them”. Everyone nodded. “A meeting!”, Keith shouted in a eureka moment. “We call a mass meeting, where everyone comes and tells each other about what they have done and how we want to spread it to their station”.

“What about the executive though? Will they be in favour of it?” asked Pete. Pete was thinking about how hard it was to get the direct action course going last time. The last time we tried something like this was the course and there was stalling for months before it got through. (For more on this, see “[Waves of Struggle](#)”). “Do we need permission to call a meeting?” replied Keith.

Two days later an email went out with a nice clean graphic, a date and a time. We also decided that two sisters from the floor would chair the

meeting, and that everyone would get equal time to speak, including any union officials. This definitely upset some people who were used to having the President act as chair at the General Membership Meetings, however it was agreed this was a meeting called by the workers and that it would have no standing under the CUPW constitution. We were clear but firm, union officials were encouraged to attend but they would be in the stack alongside everyone else. When word hit the floor there was overwhelming enthusiasm for the mass meeting. This enthusiasm started to rub off on the entire executive and even those who were worried about it started to think this was a good thing.

Before the meeting Keith stood in front of a crowd of 160 workers, the meeting hall was packed and everyone sat in a huge circle. Christine gave him a slow nod and he read the opening address he prepared. In the speech Keith roasted the union for inactivity and blamed poor leadership for what had happened with forceback. The President of the local was staring daggers at all of us from the organising committee. Some of our coworkers looked pissed too. Many workers were frustrated with the union but the local President was tremendously popular on the floor, she got elected for a reason, and many of us in the committee disagreed with Keith’s argument that this was merely a question of leadership. The problem was with a lack of initiative at the base of the union too, the leadership played a role in this, but we had the same criticisms with the previous two Presidents also. (see [On Leadership](#), [On Contracts](#), and [My Introduction](#)). Plus, the meeting hadn’t been billed as one about problems with the union, it was supposed to be about fighting our bosses.

“This is bad, Phinneas”, Ike leaned in and whispered in my ear. I nodded slowly scanning the room, some members were obviously agreeing with what was being said, but at least as many were angry and felt this was an anti union tirade. As soon as Keith finished his speech there was some very enthusiastic clapping, but some

members also put their hands up and were waiting impatiently, shuffling in their chairs in a way that only someone who intensely irritated can do. A split was developing. And in all splits there are two small fractions who get heated up and shout at each other and a majority who don't want to be in a room with either group of shouters, let alone being in the room with both groups shouting at each other. That is, if a polemical argument broke out over Keith's remarks, it didn't matter who won because the argument itself taking place that way in this meeting would be a loss.

This wasn't the time for executive politics so Ike decided to act quickly. He put his hand up and we all saw Christine sigh with relief, Christine knew Ike well and knew he was going to smooth things over. She wrote down his name on her pad of paper, even though Ike was a full time officer in the union he spoke when it was his turn along with everyone else, we were all equals in this meeting.

Before Ike spoke, Hank, a rank and file worker from Depot 3, and member of a charismatic church got up to speak. "I remember the good old days when Canada Post treated its workers well", he started. "I used to call the supervisor by their first name, if I called in sick they would ask me if I was okay when I was back at work". He paused for effect and to take stock of the crowd.

"We've been very reasonable on this issue, we've waited years", his pace picked up from the calm and thoughtful tone of earlier in his speech. "But Canada Post isn't listening! The union can't do anything for us it's up to us to do this! We can't wait any longer, our friends are getting hurt, the new people are working in the dark and the overtime just keeps coming and coming and coming!" The crowd was getting really worked up at this point, but still a few people were shuffling uncomfortably, there was still a clear split between a lot of folks who were worried this was turning a little too 'anti union' and the passions of the crowd weren't helping.

Then Ike's turn came. He was a lot younger than

Hank; he had expensive glasses designer jeans and a faux hawk. He stumbled a bit at first stuttering the first words of his speech but he quickly found his feet. "Jean Claude Parrot was one of the greatest leaders this union ever had", the older members who remembered the years where 'J.C.' went to jail for defying back to work legislation nodded sagely. "But we make a big deal out of our great leaders, a big deal that even Jean Claude Parrot wouldn't agree with. He always said that they couldn't have any of what they had accomplished without the members taking action themselves, without the wildcat strikes and direct actions those glorious years would be nothing!" I'm a cynical guy but I could feel my own heart singing at this point. "Don't look to the union for permission they cannot legally give! You are the union, the union isn't the full time officers or the people in Ottawa, they are just a small part of CUPW; the union is every single one of us! This is what makes us a movement!" The crowd exploded, many started chanting "so-so-so-solidarity!"

The next speaker was Pete. He smiled broadly while re-telling the story about what happened at Whitemud South. "We were really worried when we were only the third depot to refuse forceback, first it was Depot Nine, then Depot Three", the crowd cheered, "then it was us, and we thought the discipline was definitely going to come". He shuffled his notes, and beamed at the room. "But we stayed strong and we did it, and that's why I came to the meeting today, to say you all can do it too, together we can end forceback!"

Keith then stood up and read a motion to form a 'Workfloor Mobilisation Committee' to coordinate job actions all over the city. The motion outlined a committee that had broad representation from all the different depots, and sections and shifts in the plant. The committee would be independent of the local executive and would coordinate job actions outside the bylaws. Some of the tension in the room came back, but several executive members who were working on the direct action campaigns earlier spoke in favour

of the committee. I was an executive member too, I voted in favour.

The Campaign Continues

The next morning the texts began to roll in: “Depot 6 is refusing all overtime, management extremely upset”.

“Sherwood Park depot is refusing overtime and standing strong”.

“Depot 3 affirms that they will not do any overtime”.

“Depot 1 refused overtime for today”.

Each one was forwarded out to about seventy of our fellow workers, feeding more enthusiasm across the city.

A series of coffee break meetings began to roll out across the city where depot after depot affirmed that they had all but stopped mandatory overtime. In most depots a vote by a show of hands in a coffee break meeting generally decided it, this helped build the sense of strength and unity on the floor as workers saw how much support there was for the proposal. This pattern followed in about ten different stations and even spread to the plant as the inside workers used the momentum to raise their own concerns over days off and respect from management. Soon the spirit of militancy spread to the plant.

Then there were more text messages.

“Fork lift drivers just turned in their company vehicle operators permits. They are refusing to move mail until issues of health and safety are resolved”.

“In the offsite”, a part of the mail plant operations that were moved to another building, “workers marched on the boss over staffing concerns.” Actions in one place would spur on actions in other places. They would often leap frog and places that had a lower level of agitation would often start at a much higher level than the first depots to start. Escalation would work on a different scale on a city wide level than it did on

the level of an individual station.

At one point a coffee break meeting was as an extremely daring and radical act. Later on many of the stations would be organising a march on the boss as their first job action. The movement coalesced around the issue of staffing and health and safety, inside the mail plant and outside with the delivery personnel. Over a thousand workers at over a dozen different workplaces were involved in one kind of job action or another, either marching on the boss, refusing forced overtime, or participating in mass meetings on the floor. There were also petitions, chants from the floor, noisemakers and even some letter carriers would rock their cases and make noise to celebrate the arrival of Friday morning.

The Workfloor Mobilisation Committee

“Alright folks let’s call this meeting to order.” Keith sat at the front of the room in the coffee shop and looked across the room. The usual suspects were all present, except for the executive members that served on the local organising committee. There were also some new faces from some of the depots that were brought in to the struggle. The group took turns telling everyone about the job actions at their stations, petitions, noise actions, march on the boss actions, and forced overtime refusals. Keith opened the discussion on the direction of the committee like this:

“The members look to the leadership of the union for direction, these actions can’t continue without real leadership in the local.” Pete looked uncomfortable and Christine shot her hand up. Keith smiled knowing he touched a nerve with some folks in the group but he wanted to press his point and a heated debate was just the way to do it.

Christine spoke her piece, obviously trying not to sound too annoyed. “Come on Keith it isn’t that simple, a lot of members just don’t have the confidence to take on a risky action yet. Having an executive member leading the charge isn’t going to change that. Folks need to learn and that only

happens by taking risks yourself“.

Keith nodded, “people look up to their union leadership though and that is just a fact we have to deal with. It’s only natural that the union officers are seen as the people who need to make the decision to take action”.

“Isn’t that part of the problem though? I mean we have seen people question the union in a way they haven’t before and that’s healthy. We don’t want people to simply follow the union we want people to fight for something because they believe in the cause”.

Keith shot back. “You have to admit it is confusing to people when half of the stewards are saying one thing and the union leadership in the office is saying something else with regards to these actions. We need to be able to take these actions on through the proper channels. In order to do this we need to have a clear majority on the executive.”

“What if that executive buckles under the pressure too? What if they get scared when someone gets fired or the Labour Board steps in and threatens fines? Having strong leaders is great but why do we isolate them in an office and put them in meetings with management all day?”

Christine took a long sip of water and looked out the window. Pete, after reminding everyone that there was a rules of order, told folks that they should probably get back on track and take care of some business too. “You have the floor Christine.

“It looks like the ban is holding across the city, what we need to be ready for now is discipline in retaliation for our actions.”

Pete nodded, “definitely, the first hint of any discipline we need to see coffee break meetings across the city to discuss what to do”. Pete looked around the room, “seeing no more discussion on this item let’s move on to our discussion on putting on the next round of direct action courses”.

Trade Union Discipline

Typically the question that dominates workplace strategy is how the radicals on the floor should orient themselves towards the union leadership. When things really start to move in a shop another question arises: how is the union leadership is going to orient itself towards the actions on the floor? Our approach was a challenge to the traditional idea of what “discipline” means in a trade union. All unions rely on a strong degree of unity among their members. One way to get this unity is making a big deal out of leadership at the top. In almost all unions they say that the highest authority of the union is the membership. That is to say that most unions are democratic.

The basis of trade union democracy is the local meeting. Naturally the General Membership Meeting (in CUPW this is a monthly GMM) cannot meet all the time so there is a special committee, called the Executive Committee that reports to the General Membership meeting and acts on behalf of the membership at large between meetings. In CUPW there is also a corresponding regional executive committee and a national executive. These two groups have general meetings (conventions) every few years to decide policy and direction but otherwise the executive has the power to act in the name of the membership.

Now because the National Executive Board represents the will of the national membership represented by the National Convention their decisions are binding on all bodies below them, this means regions and locals. All decisions made by the regional office are binding on the locals in that region. This means that discipline flows from the top to the bottom of the organisation. The check on this discipline is the fact that the leaders are elected and criticised in meetings. (This practice is very similar to Democratic Centralism as practiced by various left wing political parties, particularly those that come out of the traditions of European Social Democracy such as the Bolsheviks or German SPD.) So there is open

debate and contested leadership and a vibrant democratic culture but ultimately many decisions in regards to strategy and tactics are made at the top levels of the organisation and are binding on every one further down the chain of command. That is to say that traditionally many unions are what is called centralist. These practices rarely exist inside the bylaws of most unions due to a century and a half of social democratic union practice they are simply assumed.

Our organising on the floor through rank and file committees was a challenge to this system because in our organising the workers at the shop level decide on strategy and call out for solidarity from other workplaces. We encouraged members to act without permission and to take the initiative independent of the leadership. One informal motto some of us took up was “it’s better to ask for forgiveness afterward than to ask for permission first.” This led to the committees being accused of being undemocratic because the workers themselves were usurping the power of the democratically elected local, regional and national executive bodies.

Ultimately this was a question of the kind of democracy our union or even society at large should practice. On one hand you have a democracy based on freedom of initiative, the democracy of our committees that is constituted by the participation of those involved towards a common goal. The Organising Committee meetings act as a check on everyone’s activity but everyone also assumes that folks have the freedom to act on their own behalf and not wait for some saviour to come down from the clouds with the answer for them. On the other hand you have a representative system that is democratically managed by the members but in essence acts as a workplace government in miniature. Many of these practices are implied but not outright stated, and in the long history of wildcats and independent action at the post office there has also always been a strong tendency towards independent action.

Some critics have said that direct action is a set of

tactics and not a strategy. This is true when we’re talking about individual actions in isolation. When we organize ourselves around direct action, though, and the capacity to take direct action then it’s different. In that case, there is something special about direct action in that it cannot be managed from above and it chafes at every encounter with an idea of discipline that is based on strong leadership at the top of an organisation. For this reason it is not a strategy in itself, but it does effect the kind of strategy you are going to use.

In order for workers to have real control over their own activity leadership needs to be built through action on the job, this leadership needs to be accountable to workers on the job, and for the leadership to remain accountable the source of that leadership has to stay on the job. We aim to build leadership on the shop floor and have the shopfloor be the place where our union makes decisions about how to fight bosses. This is also why many of the larger job actions began with a “coffee break meeting” where the workers would hold an assembly on the job and vote by show of hands on the course of action to be taken. From this starting point you build towards a sense of unity and discipline that does not feel external to the workers but comes from their shared struggles and interests. Discipline then becomes a horizontal force, not something from above. It becomes something that everyone exercises on each other instead of something imposed by leadership with a mandate from convention. The question is not simply one of organisational form or a crisis of leadership, and it’s certainly not about getting the right people elected to officer roles. It’s a matter of developing the spirit of solidarity and horizontal discipline in the struggle itself. Effective direct action requires this, and produces this.

The Local Executive

Sam stood in the hallway shaking with rage, “There’s a process Ike!”, he shouted. Ike was grinning ear to ear as the labour relations rep

continued his tirade. “What is the board going to say about this? You’re going to get fined! This is Delton all over again!” The Delton wildcat (see [“My Introduction”](#)) was part of a previous wave of job actions a few years earlier.

Ike smiled calmly and said “the office had nothing to do with this Sam, though we were obviously happy to see everyone take so much initiative and show so much solidarity but this happened outside the union meetings. The workers did this themselves. Over a thousand of them took action themselves without our direction.” Sam shook his head and walked away briskly shouting, “fines, Ike! You better be ready to pay those fines!”

Later that day Ike was sitting between myself and Harjit listening to Craig, another executive member express his concerns about the job actions.

“I have no idea what is going on, I hear about a job action in one station after it happens, sometimes I hear about the job actions a week after they have happened. No one is asking us if it is alright- its total anarchy!”

Ike looked at Harjit and stifled a giggle, but the local President was not impressed either. I raised my hand and she gave me the floor.

“None of us know when an action is going to happen, to a certain degree we just have to trust the member’s judgement”. I paused. “None of this is political there are folks from all over the place in the local planning these job actions”.

“What if the members are wrong?” asked Craig out of turn.

“Is that any worse than if we are wrong?” heckled Ike.

Craig continued, ignoring Ike. “Look, we need discipline we can’t just have everyone running around doing as they please. We need to enforce the contract, if the language isn’t strong enough we have a democratic way to negotiate new language”.

I continued. “I think we would do well to follow

the lead of the floor on this stuff, give them the power to act and we do our best to back them up and give them support. We do not need to be the stars of the show, if Delton taught us anything sometimes things need to be done that the executive cannot take the lead on and that is alright.”

“Look, the members elected us to make decisions for them, there is a process and we have bylaws”, Craig was clearly not convinced.

Ike’s turn. “No one has broken any bylaws, it may be how things were done in the past, but no one is breaking the rules with independent committees. Show me the language in the constitution that says this if they are breaking rules”.

Sharon, continuing her slow pace and turns to lecture Ike, “so do these people, who are acting outside the constitution and outside the contract expect to be protected from discipline if the corporation tries to fire them?”

“Yes”, I said, “and they are justified in feeling this way, we don’t just give Solidarity to those we agree with when we fight the boss”.

Good Clean Wins

When radicals move from unfocused activism to real organising they usually go through a phase where they talk about winning a lot. It’s a way to show that they’re Serious Radicals Who Understand These Things. “What would it take to win?” “We need a victory.” Good clean wins don’t really exist, at least in our experience with direct action campaigns on the job. Everyone wants to think of labour struggles as like a backyard wrestling match where the opponents square off against each other. Eventually we pin the boss and they cry ‘uncle’ and we get our concession.

What actually happens is you agitate like hell and the boss mocks you the whole way and does everything he can to make you feel powerless. Then the boss will come down really hard and try and punish the bad ones among you and buy off the folks who he can identify as wavering in their

commitment. Then he will quietly address some of the concerns, usually without publically stating what is going on and if he has to acknowledge the change he will get professional help in crafting a plausible story as to why these changes were coming anyway.

With the forceback campaign we only found out the boss was hiring in response to everyone refusing overtime because one particularly dedicated militant was checking the job boards every day on the CPC website and noticed that Edmonton was hiring in a time of year when Canada Post does not usually hire. Eventually we found out our campaign was so successful Canada Post was hiring hundreds of workers. They have never publicly acknowledged this victory to this day. They don't want us to get bolder; they hope workers won't learn or won't remember the power we have collectively. Some members of senior management quietly conceded it was unrest on the floor that led to this course of action in private discussions with union officials. It was obvious anyway, but it feels good that management had to admit it, at least to themselves.

Claiming Our Victories

Harjit looked at the new kid next to him as he clumsily pushed the mail into the old wooden sorting case; he was slowly memorising the streets in case he had the same run tomorrow. He was moving much quicker, but slowed down for a second and turned to him, "you know why you got hired here don't you?" The kid looked at him confused. "Let me tell you about what happened last winter".

Source:

<http://recompositionblog.wordpress.com/2012/01/31/the-committee-in-action/>

Beyond “F*ck You”: An organizer’s approach to confronting hateful language at work.

By Coeur de Bord

“Oh man, I hate that faggot.” Stop. Breathe. Collect. Intervene.

“Fuck that word, don’t ever say it!” Admittedly not my most measured response to a supervisor using bigoted language. But it did spark a conversation. One that left me feeling that I had created for myself the dignity and self-worth that would help prevent future degradation by my bosses. Because I shouldn’t have to feel like shit, I shouldn’t have to accept the casual use of violent slurs, and I shouldn’t let anger and frustration ruin my day or prevent me from existing as my honest self.

After a cold silence that forced my supervisor to get out of my hair for a few minutes (which I used to practice some stress-relief exercises on nearby inanimate objects), he sought me out to apologize. I had mellowed out a bit, so when he started elaborating on his “intended meaning” I tried a more polite and informative approach. I told him there isn’t a “not bad” way to use that word. “See, I was trying to connect with you about a person we both hate (a corporate boss), so when you said what you did it sounds to me like you feel that sort of hatred towards me, my friends, my family, because we are who we are. You know how much that fucking sucks??” I began to see some understanding in his eyes.

I was off to a good start, and he followed up with a question: “Obviously I’m pretty ignorant about this stuff, I just hear people say shit like that all the time. Is saying ‘gay’ in that way bad too?” I said that yea, it’s also fucked up, but to a different level. I told him briefly of the overt threats and violence associated with calling someone that “F” word, the

fear that drives many of us to tread softly and carry an extendable baton as we go about our lives. I spoke of how those words, even when not associated with acts of direct violence, are spat at us as reminders that we are supposed to be less than, to be ashamed, to remain silent and hidden until we are called on to serve as an example for something or other. He got it. He’s seen it in action at work, too.

His derogatory comment wasn’t a random example of poor word choice: it fit perfectly into the social atmosphere that rules at my job. I work in a large distribution warehouse where the macho culture and hyper-sexist work divisions create a pretty hostile atmosphere for the very few openly queer people. Our bosses love this—they encourage workers to compete against each other to work faster, lift and carry heavier boxes without help, and bully slower or “weaker” workers with sexist and homophobic taunts to get them to work harder. The faster and harder we work, the company’s profits grow as our pitiful paychecks grow even smaller. This competition between workers is reflected among the ranks of management, separated into multiple levels, where part-time supervisors have to disregard the sanity and safety of us workers if they want to impress their superiors with high production numbers in the hopes of a promotion. The toxic social culture makes it especially difficult for supervisors who are women or people of color (of which there are precious few). My supervisor was born in an East African country, a region that comprises a large portion of our immigrant and refugee population, which undoubtedly makes him even more vulnerable to the malice of his bosses.

“So its kind of like when people say ‘N——.’” “Its not the same, because the history is so much different. But there is a certain similarity in the basic attempt to dehumanize other people with a single word.” We talked about the oppressions our different communities have faced throughout history, and how this oppression affects our lives today. He agreed with me that derogatory slurs

are some of the most painful, daily reminders of these histories of extreme violence. We talked about reclaiming these hateful words in our communities, and the side effects of making it seem more acceptable when the wrong people hear us say it.

Whether or not you are comfortable with reclaiming words of violence within your communities, it is never acceptable to use them with the intent to harm. Nobody wants to be degraded or shamed for who they are. Most people understand that the rest of us feel that way, even if they haven't previously been challenged to think about it. And maybe (ok, definitely) not everyone will be as understanding and willing to engage in a conversation. But I'm offering this story in hopes that some of my responses will inspire y'all to digest and transform the feelings brought on by facing bigoted language. I acknowledge the anger, sadness, and frustrated confusion it brings on, but with this conversation I found a way to prevent them from sticking barbs in me and dictating my moods and energy for days to come. Those barbs represent both the heterosexist oppression we face as queer people, as well as the employing class's daily efforts to keep workers divided, weak, and compliant.

Though this incident occurred with a supervisor of mine, I am more excited about the prospects of these conversations with our fellow workers. In our struggle against capitalism, we will inevitably encounter co-workers who demonstrate bigoted views, whether out of ignorance or conscious malice. No different from you, my first reaction is to remove the problem or move myself from the problem. But this isolationist tendency prevents the bonds of solidarity from growing before the seeds can even be planted. Remember that above all, the employing/ruling class wants us isolated and divided, weak and powerless to challenge their abuses. Don't give them what they want.

So often, experiencing homophobia leaves me with a shitty feeling in the corner of my head that lasts for days. I'd be willing to bet that many of

you know this lingering feeling. It distracts us from having fun, prevents us from being able to truly relax, and keeps our focus on getting through the daily grind, rather than being able to organize against our exploitation as wage workers. Having this conversation taught me that by working around these emotions can help break down the barriers that the employing class uses to weaken working class solidarity. If taking a stand like mine doesn't feel possible to you, think of other ways to overcome the effects of such violence. Maybe having a plan or scripted response will be more comfortable than the spontaneous and improvised approach I took. Maybe a friend or co-worker can assist in navigating through these encounters. Certainly, I urge Fellow Workers to discuss and develop strategies that would offer the support and protection of the Union to support FWs experiencing such hateful attitudes at work. We cannot afford to ignore and work around such problems in building a union for all working people.

Coeur de Bord is a queer IWW living in Minneapolis. When not organizing against hostile work culture, they are most likely reading books about dragons.

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<http://tcorganizer.com/2014/04/17/beyond-fck-you-an-organizers-approach-to-confronting-hateful-language-at-work>

Beyond F*ck You 2: workplace organizing against oppressive language and behavior

By Colt Thundercat

A sequel to a previous article we've published, a Twin Cities IWW member writes about how he's dealt with homophobic remarks and sentiments at work. This originally appeared in YOU BETTER WORK: queer, trans, feminist workers stories #1, which has a Facebook presence and can be purchased there.

I knew it would be hard going into it. Friends who already worked in the distribution center I was about to start work at had warned me about the specific difficulties I would have as a queer person in an environment where the work culture was dominated by a hypermasculine, sexist and homophobic atmosphere. I listened intently, and did my best to prepare myself. "It's ok," I thought, "this will certainly not be the first time I've dealt with this. I have a thick skin. I know how to stand up for myself. I'm can deal with this. I'm prepared."

Quite frankly, I was wrong. To say that it was a hostile environment for me would be a massive understatement. The workplace, like many, is almost completely gender-segregated, with my work area and all those like it being entirely staffed by men. Homophobic comments, slurs, and "jokes" were traded between my coworkers on the regular. I struggled daily to try and deal with the anger, frustration, and depression that I felt clocking out after having heard "faggot," "fag," "pansy," "no homo," and other shit like it thrown around more often than I had experienced since middle school. Like then, I found myself acting quiet and withdrawn in those first few weeks as I struggled not to let my anger get the best of me.

If it had been less all-encompassing, less of the status quo of the job, I probably would've known how to handle it. Instead, I felt lost, trying to figure

out how to address something that seemed so deeply rooted it was unmovable.

I quickly found that this environment was fairly deliberately set up and encouraged by our bosses. Unlike FW de Bord, who details their experience with a homophobic supervisor (we work at the same distribution center), my experience was that the supervisors and managers in my section were careful to never say anything overtly homophobic or sexist—likely something that they are trained in to avoid lawsuits—but worked hard to cultivate an atmosphere of hypermasculine competition in order to leech more profit out of their workers. If you were going too slow, you were told to "man up." If you called in sick or worried about getting injured, you were accused of being a "pussy" or a "whiny bitch." Meanwhile, the same supervisors encouraged the kind of sexist and homophobic atmosphere that prevailed, laughing at jokes, backing up the worst offenders if anyone "took it wrong," and of course, never doing anything to curtail or stop it.

Unlearning Bad Habits

Like most of us who experience oppression in our day-to-day lives, I do what I can to surround myself with good people. People who I can trust to support me, who understand this shit, who I know will be respectful towards me. But, of course, our bosses, not workers themselves, select who they work with, our only option is to either accept this or try our luck somewhere else. Many would say that the best course of action for any self-respecting person in such a situation would be to leave and try and get another job where the atmosphere was less oppressive. As an organizer, though, I found it unacceptable to believe that certain jobs can, or should, only be organized by straight cisgendered men. On the contrary, I've found that being forced to struggle in order to create an accepting atmosphere has made me a better organizer and helped form the kind of bonds between myself and my coworkers that make it possible for us to take action against

speedups, harassment, and any number of other management abuses.

In order to do this, though, I had to unlearn an entire system of dealing with oppressive behavior that I, like many of us on the left, had learned from academic writers and texts. This framework that I had learned told me to be uncompromising in shutting down oppressive language in as swift and direct a way as possible. It said that I should have zero tolerance for people who acted in oppressive ways. If people didn't understand, or didn't get it, it wasn't my problem; it was not my job to educate them on the ways they oppressed me and others. I don't mean to imply that this framework is totally useless, just that its usefulness does not extend to my, or many, workplaces, as it is set up in a way that encourages the same isolationist attitude described above. Of course, there are people and situations who are not able to engage with their coworkers because of their gender identity and other factors in the same way that I am able to, a fact that I would be careless to ignore. With that said, comparing an attitude that builds trust and solidarity to the more confrontational and adversarial attitude I had learned, I've found the former to be far more effective than I could ever imagine the latter being.

I don't want to imply that this is the only acceptable way to engage with your coworkers, or that it is something that organizers are, or need to be, universally capable of doing. Many of us, myself included, have incredibly visceral reactions to the kind of oppressive behavior we experience that are incredibly difficult to suppress in order to approach our coworkers in a more calm and comradely manner. While suppressing this kind of reaction is never easy, and certainly hasn't been for me, there are plenty of folks who have a much harder time with this, whose lived experiences place them closer than I am to the kinds of violence that accompany such oppression. I am in no way diminishing the validity of those for whom oppressive behavior sparks a perfectly understandable and reasonable anger and

defensiveness—a defense of ourselves and our ability to survive. What I am advocating is for people to figure out ways that we can connect with our coworkers and others who are uncritical in the way they think and act about oppressed groups and build a culture of solidarity rather than simply accepting that they will always be adversaries and not allies to us in our struggles. For anyone who has experienced oppression and violence, this is by definition a struggle with our own emotions; my feeling, however, is that it is a struggle that is worthwhile to undertake and that helps us become better organizers and revolutionaries, wherever the starting point for this internal struggle is, and wherever it leads us.

Building a Culture of Solidarity

After a few miserable weeks, I felt it was time to put a simpler approach into action. After a period of waiting for the right moment—excruciating in itself—I found myself clocking out when I overheard S., the worst offender, laughingly yell over at another worker: “Mike, you’re such a fucking faggot!” Truth be told, I actually got along pretty well with S.; he was a nice guy, good sense of humor other than the fucked up stuff like that, we joked frequently about how unrealistic the expectations were of us and how obnoxious some of our bosses were. I walked up to him, and asked, “Hey S., can you do me a favor?” “Yeah, man, what’s up?” “Can you cut it out with the gay jokes? I really don’t like hearing that shit.”

There was a pause. “What, like about you? Because I don’t think I said anything about you—” “Nah, not about me, just in general. I just don’t like hearing that, so I’d really appreciate it if you could knock it off. I gotta run to catch my bus, but if you wanna talk about it more some time, I’d be happy to.” S.’s look of concern and confusion turned to a nod, “OK, man, not a problem. Sorry if I pissed you off or anything.” And that was that.

The results were quick and effective. With S. removed from the picture, the homophobic banter went from something that happened

multiple times per day to a few isolated incidents. When those comments did crop up, I took the exact same attitude, with the same results. One day at break, S. was talking about shopping at a health-food store where his girlfriend works: "I mean, it's good food, but whenever I'm checking out, I'm like, oh man, I feel like such a... a..." He stopped and looked at me with a sort of deer-in-headlights look on his face. I piped in, "like a fuckin' hippy?" He cracked up, "Yeah man, like a fucking hippy. Shit, I'm turning into a hippy." The rest of the day was a series of jokes about what kind of incense we should get him for his birthday.

As time went on, I gained more confidence at the same time that I became more of a presence on the shop floor. My attitude was based in a simple premise: that if you show that you've got people's back, they'll do the same for you, including being willing to reexamine their attitudes and the way they talk if you ask them in the same spirit. Whenever I talked to my coworkers and they said something offensive, I calmly told them that I didn't appreciate it, and offered to have a more in-depth discussion whenever they felt like it. I did my best not to make it feel like I was shaming them or "calling them out," which has the tendency to shut down discussions. With coworkers who didn't use such language, I found off-hand ways to out myself as queer and offer the same opportunity for further discussion.

The results were overwhelmingly positive, and often surprising. Usually it opened the door for us to talk more in-depth about the issue and other things that allowed us to know each other better: one coworker stopped in his tracks, in the middle of loading a truck, to say, "Fuck, you're right. My brother's gay, he always tells me the same thing. I really gotta work on that." Another chastised me after I outed myself by joking that I would lose my gay card if I didn't like Beyonce, for confining myself, saying, "listen, like what you like, but we both know that there are plenty of gay folks who don't like Beyonce. I mean, I grew up in a really religious christian family, and I feel people make a

lot of assumptions about what that means I'm like, or I'm into, which aren't true. It's like that, I think." Several others have responded by simply saying things like, "so I really don't know a lot about that stuff. I wanna know more, though." Each time it gave us the opportunity to build the kind of bonds of solidarity that are invaluable in any organizing effort.

Amazingly, over the course of the past year, the culture has changed in a way that the same raunchy humor that was once a staple of the homophobic atmosphere has transformed into self-effacing jokes that my coworkers use to mock their own masculinity. More importantly, it is often used in a self-policing manner, as a sort of rebuffing of homophobic or otherwise fucked up comments. Perhaps the best example of this came at the end of a difficult night some months ago—5 of us were stuck loading the last truck in the building, when Al, a new employee who had already made a few homophobic comments, made a joke that G., a (straight) coworker who I'm fairly close with, looked like the kind of guy who liked to get fucked, to which G. immediately responded with, "you say it like that's a bad thing." Al, not knowing how to respond, simply muttered, "hey man, I don't wanna hear about that kinda shit." G. loudly announced, "Well, that's too bad, because Imma tell you ALL ABOUT IT!" What followed was a fifteen minute long description, in minute detail, of just how great getting fucked is, the nuances of penis shape and size, positions, and so on, in terms graphic enough to make John Waters blush. Meanwhile, the rest of us were cracking up at both how uncomfortable this made Al as well as G.'s preferred method of addressing the issue. Afterwards, G. came up to me and said, "yeah, I don't let that shit fly. I got your back."

Building Beyond Oppressive Language

Some time ago, during the short break we get during our shift, I was outside with a number of coworkers, mostly from work areas other than my own, when T., a young Latino worker, started

telling us a story from his other job as a caterer at a convention center in town. I didn't know T. well, although we had previously talked briefly about our (vastly different forms of) alienation from the lily-white dominant culture of the midwest, him as Latino and myself as a Jew. T. was complaining about how, when serving at an event sponsored by Disney for GLBT executives, he had been yelled at several times for misgendering trans* patrons. I quickly piped in about the issue, noting that this is something that trans* folk have to deal with far too often, and that it's perfectly understandable that someone would be frustrated in such a situation. He and the other workers outside agreed, and agreed when I noted that if it weren't in a situation where T. was a servant, but was simply a friend, the interaction would have likely been a lot different. Our break ended, but I was still unsatisfied with the way things had gone down.

The next day, I wound up getting to work about fifteen minutes before our shift started and saw T. again. I asked him if he had to serve the same event that day, to which he said yes, and that he had wound up misgendering someone and gotten yelled at about it by his boss. Not sure what to say, I finally blurted out, "you know, the whole thing is fucked up. I'll be real, I'm gay, and all these events are so frustrating to me. I mean, all these companies hold up this type of shit just to advertise to the GLBT community and say, hey look, we're so accepting, but in reality, they're the opposite. I mean, our company had a float and a booth at the Pride parade, maybe they have some gay executive they parade around, it's all about just getting money from rich motherfuckers in the community, but the last thing I'd ever say about this place is that it's gay-friendly."

T. thought about it for a second, then said, "yeah, man, I can't imagine. I mean, this place is shitty about that stuff. And it's super rough for the women who work here too. I mean, you gotta have really thick skin to work here if you're either. Hell, I can't imagine how tough it would be for

like, what is the word, transgender? Yeah, it'd be crazy hard to deal with that shit."

I was, in all honesty, shocked at how quickly T. connected the dots. We kept talking about how absurd it was for our company to be at the Pride parade, about how the Disney event he had catered had nothing to do with what it might actually be like to work there, and our various experiences of offensive behavior and language at work. As the buzzer announcing our shift was about to start went off, I said, "Yeah, that's the fucking thing—this company cares about as little about it's gay workers as it does its straight ones, which is to say, they don't give two shits about us. I'm sure Disney is the exact same fucking way."

T. nodded as I got up to head over to my section. "Yeah, I'm sure Disney is just as happy to fuck over anyone who works for them, I guess," he said. Then, with a wry smile, he added, "just so long as they aren't Jewish."

Conclusion

One of the main ideas motivating me to write all of this, and to address these issues the way I have is a firm belief in something that those of us who are revolutionaries and who believe in liberation often forget: that our ideas are incredibly popular, and not just among those who already agree with us on most things. That the concept that we should have a respect for the dignity of everyone, the idea that we would all have each others' backs against not only harassment from our bosses, but also from other workers clinging to fucked-up attitudes is something most workers can easily get behind. These ideas, liberation and solidarity, are not difficult things for people to understand, although they are often expressed in academic jargon that can be incredibly difficult to relate to for those who haven't experienced it before.

Of course, being in agreement about these ideas doesn't mean that someone won't act in ways that are oppressive; people's consciousnesses in regards to these issues are complicated. One day, I can hear a group of coworkers making sexist

comments while the next, hear the same group discussing the harassment and sexism the mother of one of them has experienced working for our company for twenty years and how fucked up it is that women working in our building have to put up with it. Both ideas can coexist: I think that our job as revolutionaries should be to encourage the latter, to push our coworkers to look critically at the ways they get in the way of the universal respect and dignity that they do actually believe in, and further push them towards ways that they can help make those ideas more of a reality.

Finally, the purpose of this piece, and my intention in putting down all these stories, is not to give the impression that by addressing these issues in the way I have that my workplace is perfect by any stretch of the imagination. The work is still difficult, the pay low, the harassment from management constant. I do still hear homophobic and sexist language from coworkers from time to time, although almost never from anyone who works in my area. What has changed, however, is that I no longer go to work guarded, worried about what bullshit I'll have to deal with from my coworkers. The bosses still try and get us to outdo each other by questioning the masculinity of anyone who doesn't meet their unrealistic standards. The difference is that most of my coworkers don't really buy it anymore—the buddy-buddy relationship between them and the bosses broke down somewhere along the line when they stopped viewing the homophobic and sexist atmosphere as acceptable. The toxic environment of hypermasculine competition has been largely replaced with one where, at a basic level, people care about each other and make it clear that we have each others' backs. Since that happened, we've been able to fight back against all the various bullshit from management that we deal with on the regular in ways that I don't think would have been possible otherwise.

Colt Thundercat is an IWW organizer, writer, and homo-about-town living in Minneapolis. His interests include bikes, banjos, bad jokes, and making fun of

people. He can generally be found making sarcastic comments to his bosses at the large distribution center where he works, where he actually spends most of his time contemplating which of his managers would last longest in a pit fight with a bunch of angry grizzly bears while muttering "soon" under his breath.

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Feedback form

Date: September 30 & October 1 2015 **Location:** Toronto **Trainers:** Kelly, Travis & Max

What did you learn?

What was most valuable to you? What parts did you get the most out of?

What could have been better?

Was there anything you think should have been given more or less time?

What feedback would you give for the trainers?

Additional comments: