

The I. W. W. and political parties

Vincent Saint John



c/1924

Exported from Wikisource on January 22, 2025

The I. W. W.

and

Political Parties

BY VINCENT ST. JOHN

I am in receipt of many inquiries relative to the position of the I. W. W. and political action. One fellow worker wants to know "How is this revolutionary body going to express itself politically?" and "if it is going to hop through the industrial world on one leg?"

A little investigation will prove to any worker that while the workers are divided on the industrial field, it is not possible to unite them on any other field to advance a working class program.

Further investigation will prove that with the working class divided on the industrial field, unity anywhere else—if it could be brought about—would be without results. The workers would be without power to enforce any demands. The proposition, then, is to lay all stress in our agitation upon the essential point, that is, upon the places of production, where the working class must unite in sufficient numbers before it will have the power to make itself felt anywhere else.

Will it not follow that, united in sufficient numbers at the workshops and guided by the knowledge of their class interests, such unity will be manifested in every field wherein they can assist in advancing the interest of the working class? Why, then, should not all stress be laid upon the organization of the workers on the industrial field?

The illustration used by our fellow worker in which he likens the economic organization to a one legged concern because it does not mention political action, is not a comparison that in any way fits the case. As well might the prohibitionist, the anti-clerical, or any other advocate of the many schools that claim the worker can better his condition by their particular policy, say that because the declaration of principles of the economic organization makes no mention of these subjects, the I. W. W. is short a leg on each count.

The Preamble of the I. W. W. deals with the essential point upon which we know the workers will have to agree before they can accomplish anything for themselves. Regardless of what a wage worker may think on any other question, if he agrees upon the essential thing we want him in the I. W. W. helping to build up the organized army of production.

The two legs of the economic organization are KNOWLEDGE and ORGANIZATION.

The only value that political activity has to the working class is from the standpoint of agitation and education. Its

educational merit consists solely in proving to the workers its utter inefficacy to curb the power of the ruling class and therefore forcing the workers to rely on the organization of their class in the industries.

It is impossible for anyone to be a part of the capitalist state and to use the machinery of the state in the interest of the workers. All they can do is to make the attempt, and to be impeached—as they will be—and furnish object lessons to the workers, of the class character of the state.

Knowing this, the I. W. W. proposes to devote all of its energy to building up the organization of the workers in the industries of the country and the world; to drilling and educating the members so that they will have the necessary power and the knowledge to use that power to overthrow capitalism.

I know that here you will say: What about the injunction judges, the militia and the bull pens? In answer, ask yourself what will stop the use of the same weapons against you on the political field if by the political activity of the workers you were able to menace the profits of the capitalist?

If you think it cannot be done, turn to Colorado where in 1904 two judges of the Supreme court of that state, Campbell and Gabbert, by the injunction process, assumed original jurisdiction over the state election and decided the

majority of the state legislature, the governorship and the election of the United States senator.

Turn to the Coeur d'Alenes where the military forces of the United States put out of office all officials who would not do the bidding of the mining companies of that region.

Turn to Colorado, where a mob did the same thing in the interest of the capitalist class.

The only power that the working class has is the power to produce wealth. The I. W. W. proposes to organize the workers to control the use of their labor so that they will be able to stop the production of wealth except upon terms dictated by the workers themselves.

The capitalists' political power is exactly the measure of their industrial power—control of industry; that control can only be disputed and finally destroyed by an organization of the workers inside the industries—organized for the every day struggle with the capitalists and to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown.

With such an organization, knowing that an injury to one member of the working class is an injury to every member of that class, it will be possible to make the use of injunctions and the militia so costly that the capitalist will not use them. None of his industries would run except for

such length of time as the workers needed to work in order to get in shape to renew the struggle.

A stubborn slave will bring the most overbearing master to time. The capitalists cannot exterminate a real labor organization by fighting it; they are only dangerous when they commence to fraternize with it.

Neither can the capitalists and their tools exterminate the working class or any considerable portion of it; they would have to go to work themselves if they did.

It is true that while the movement is weak they may victimize a few of its members, but if that is not allowed to intimidate the organization the employers will not be able to do that very long.

Persecution of any organization always results in the growth of the principle represented by that organization—if its members are men and women of courage. If they are not, there is no substitute that will insure victory.

The I. W. W. will express itself politically in its general convention and the referendum of its members in the industries throughout the land, in proportion to its power.

The work before us is to build up an organization of our class in the field wherein our power lies. That task must be accomplished by the workers themselves. Whatever obstacles are in the way must be overcome, however great

they seem to be. Remember that the working class is a great class and its power is unbounded when properly organized.

As we organize we control our labor power. As we control our labor power a little we control industry a little; as we organize more we will control more of our labor power, and also control industry more. When we control enough of our labor power we will meet in our representative assembly—the Convention of the I. W. W.—and tell the boss how long we will work and how much of what we produce he can have.

The sooner all the members of the working class who agree with this program lend their efforts to bring it about—by joining the I. W. W.—the sooner will the struggle be ended in spite of all the machinations of the capitalist and his judges and armies.

Therefore it will never be necessary for the I. W. W. to endorse any political party, whether we will gain support or not by so doing. Neither will the I. W. W. carry on a propaganda against political action. To do so would be as useless as to carry on a campaign for it.

We are forced, however, to point out the limitations of political action for the working class in order that the workers be not led into a cul de sac by the politician, and because of that lose all idea of ever being anything but slaves for generations to come.

This we can only do by devoting our entire effort to the work of organization and education on the industrial field.

To those who think the workers will have to be united in a political party, we say, dig in and do so, but do not try to use the economic organization to further the aims of the political party.

For information and explanation literature on Industrial Unionism and the I. W. W., write to GENERAL SECRETARY, I. W. W., 1001 West Madison Street, Chicago, Illinois.

Price of these leaflets, 25 cents per hundred; \$1.50 per thousand.

ADDRESS

INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD,
1001 W. Madison St. Chicago, Illinois



Printed by Printing and Publishing Workers Industrial Union No. 1200

This work is in the [public domain](#) in the **United States** because it was published before January 1, 1930.



The longest-living author of this work died in 1929, so this work is in the **public domain** in countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's **life plus 95 years or less**. This work may be in the **public domain** in countries and areas with longer native copyright terms that apply the [rule of the shorter term](#) to *foreign works*.



About this digital edition

This e-book comes from the online library [Wikisource](#). This multilingual digital library, built by volunteers, is committed to developing a free accessible collection of publications of every kind: novels, poems, magazines, letters...

We distribute our books for free, starting from works not copyrighted or published under a free license. You are free to use our e-books for any purpose (including commercial exploitation), under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Unported](#) license or, at your choice, those of the [GNU FDL](#).

Wikisource is constantly looking for new members. During the transcription and proofreading of this book, it's possible that we made some errors. You can report them at [this page](#).

The following users contributed to this book:

- Kathleen.wright5
- Inductiveload
- Djr13
- CalendulaAsteraceae
- MathXplore
- Fabian Tompsett (MDR)
- Jarekt

- Rocket000
- Dbenbenn
- Zscout370
- Jacobolus
- Indolences
- Technion
- Dha
- Abigor
- Reisio
- Blurpeace
- Dschwen
- Steinsplitter
- Boris23
- KABALINI
- Bromskloss
- Tene~commonswiki
- AzaToth
- Bender235
- PatríciaR