

IWW Explains Its Goals, 1920

James Rowan, *The I.W.W. in the Lumber Industry*, pamphlet no. 500 (Seattle: Lumber Workers Industrial Union, no date [circa 1920]), p. 3, 5-9, 14-20, 26, 39-40, 54-59.

The Lumber Industry of the United States presents a good example of **trustification**. [*Trust* was a slang word for *monopoly* used in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.] Practically all the timberlands are owned or controlled by that great Rockefeller-Weyerhaeuser combination of capital known as the Lumber Trust. Wherever we find timberlands, there we find the Lumber Trust the ruling power, controlling not only the lumber industry, but also the local, and sometimes the State machinery of government, while it's [its] powerful and corrupt influences at the National Capital is well known. . . .

Let us investigate the causes of the miserable condition of the lumber workers. We find that the lumber companies are in business for one purpose—to make profits. They care nothing about the welfare of the workers; that is none of their business. They do not care how rotten conditions are in the camps as long as the men are able to do their work. To them it is immaterial how many men die from disease or accident, so long as they are able to get others to take their places. The longer the hours, the lower the wages, the harder the work and the more inhuman the conditions, the bigger the profits of the companies.

On the other hand, the object of the workers is to make a living. They care nothing about the profits of the employers. They want to make as good a living as possible, and to make it as easily as possible. High wages, short hours, easy work, and good conditions are beneficial to the workers. In this difference of interests and aim, is the very essence of the natural conflict between the Lumber Trust and the lumber workers. In this, as in all conflicts, the side with the most power will win. The secret of power is Organization. The lumber companies are organized into a powerful trust, and so long as the men remain unorganized, they were at the mercy of the Trust. Who then is to blame for the wretched condition of the lumber workers? No one but the lumber workers themselves; for owing to their unorganized state, they added to the power of the lumber trust and made possible the oppression from which they suffered.

To the lumber workers, the miseries of their lives, their toil, hardships and abuses emphasized their need of organization. . . .

The I.W.W. is not only industrial in form, but is revolutionary in character. It is based on the principle that "the working class and the employing class have nothing in common" and "Labor is entitled to all it produces." It is a strictly working class organization, and takes in none but actual wage workers. Its aims are three-fold:

To organize the workers in such a way that they can successfully fight their battles, and advance their interests, in their every day struggle with capitalists.

To overthrow capitalism, and to establish in its place a system of Industrial Democracy.

To carry on production after capitalism shall have been overthrown. . . .

The I.W.W. is non-political, for it recognizes that the power of the workers is not on the political, but on the industrial field; and that economic power precedes and determines political power. . . .

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In [other parts of] Washington the state of affairs was as bad. . . . Troops were brought into the Yakima Valley, and a systematic attempt was made to drive all members of the I.W.W. out of that part of the country. At North Yakima, Wenatchee, Pasco, Leavenworth, Cle Elum, and Ellensburg, hundreds of men were arrested and held in jails and "bull pens" [makeshift jails] for being members or suspected of membership in the I.W.W. No one who looked like a working man was safe from arrest. . . .

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[During the First World War,] Colonel Disque [Brice P. Disque was head of the Spruce Production Division, an army unit created to accelerate the harvesting of spruce needed for military aircraft.] put soldiers to work in the camps, ostensibly to aid in spruce production; but as soldiers were placed in many camps where not a stick of spruce was produced, it is evident that the real object was to break the strike [that the I.W.W. had started a few months earlier]. The companies took advantage of the position of these soldiers to exploit them to the limit, paying them practically no wages, and keeping them in a state of chronic starvation, the food being unfit to eat. If they rebelled it was mutiny. Naturally they used the only available weapon—the slow down system.

There can be no peace as long as the Lumber Trust remains in control of the industry. United action by the lumber workers alone can break the hold of these usurpers. It is up to every man to do his part. The time has come for the lumber workers in all parts of the continent, governing their actions by common sense and intelligent self-interest, to unite together in one great industrial union for immediate improvement in hours, wages and conditions, always keeping in view, and striving towards, the final goal—control of the lumber industry.

Joe Hill, IWW Songs

Between its founding convention in 1905 and the United States' entry into World War I in 1917, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) became one of the most active labor unions in the country. The widespread appeal of the union's goal—nothing less than the overthrow of capitalism—and its commitment to forming “one big union” of all workers were key factors in the union's growth, but its organizing tactics also played an important role. The IWW created music that appealed to workers in ways that political pamphlets and other forms of propaganda did not. The union's songbook, *Songs of the Workers* (or *The Little Red Songbook*), which originated among the members of the Spokane, Washington, branch of the IWW, captured that music.

The IWW's gravitation toward music and song developed partially in response to the union's rivalry with organized religion. Wobblies thought that religion only diverted workers' attention away from the ills of the capitalist system by promising “pie in the sky” rewards. Yet they recognized the appeal of religion and the enthusiasm generated by religious organizations such as the Salvation Army. The IWW turned to music to beat the Salvation Army at its own game and began to compete with it, literally on the same streets. When a Salvation Army band met in public to sing and play music, Wobblies often would converge to sing their own lyrics to the band's tunes. The famous militant Christian song, “Onward Christian Soldiers,” for example, became the famous Wobbly parody, “Christians at War,” which opened with the biting stanza (quoted in Winters 1985:42):

Onward Christian soldiers! Duty's way is plain;
Slay your Christian brothers, or by them be slain;
Pulpiteers are spouting effervescent swill,
God above is calling you to rob and rape and kill;
All your acts are sanctified by the Lamb on high;
If you love the Holy Ghost, go murder, pray, and die.

Using humor and brutal honesty, Wobbly songwriters ridiculed the pretensions of organized religion and appealed to workers at the same time.

Yet the IWW crusade against religion was not the only factor motivating the union's embrace of singing. The famous Wobbly songwriter, leader, and martyr, Joe Hill, wrote:

A pamphlet, no matter how good, is never read more than once, but a song is learned by heart and repeated over and over; and I maintain that if a person can put a few cold, common sense facts into a song and dress them . . . up in a cloak of humor to take the dryness off of them, he will succeed in reaching a great number of workers who are too unintelligent or too indifferent to read a pamphlet or an editorial in economic science (quoted in Winters 1985:41).

Most of the workers who formed the IWW's power base, especially the unorganized migrant workers of the Pacific Northwest, had little time or inclination to read union pamphlets or participate in political debates. Memorable, humorous, and politically-charged songs, however, could attract and educate a crowd of workers. Songs sung with enthusiasm could even inspire workers to join the union; as Richard Brazier recalled, “What first attracted me to the I.W.W. was its songs and the gusto with which its members sang them” (Brazier 1968:91).

Joe Hill, IWW Songs

J. T. Walsh and other Wobblies affiliated with the Spokane branch of the union began to push the IWW Executive Committee for a songbook in 1908. The IWW already made use of a songcard containing a few songs and poems, but Walsh wanted a full songbook that would take advantage of the musical talents of Joe Hill and other Wobblies and be recognized and used at meetings and rallies across the country. According to Brazier, Walsh and other advocates called for a book full of songs that would run the gamut of emotional and political messages:

We will have songs of anger and protest, songs which shall call to judgment our oppressors and the Profit System they have devised. Songs of battles won, . . . songs that hold up flaunted wealth and thread-bare morality to scorn, songs that lampoon our masters and the parasitic vermin, such as the employment-sharks and their kind, who bedevil the workers. These songs will deal with every aspect of the workers' lives. They will bring hope to them, and courage to wage the good fight. They will be songs sowing the seeds of discontent and rebellion. We want our songs to stir the workers into action, to awaken them from an apathy and complacency that has made them accept their servitude as though it had been divinely ordained . . . (Brazier 1968:97).

Walsh won his campaign for a songbook, and a committee of rank-and-file members began collecting songs—most of them written by Spokane-area Wobblies. The first edition of *The Little Red Songbook* was published in 1909. Joe Hill wrote two of the songs, both of them among the best-known songs to appear in the songbook: “The Preacher and the Slave” and “There is Power in a Union.” The third song, “Where the Fraser River Flows,” alludes to one of the union’s battles to organize railroad-construction workers in British Columbia.

THE PREACHER AND THE SLAVE.

(Tune: Sweet Bye and Bye.)

(By J. Hill.)

Long-haired preachers come out every night,
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;
But when asked how 'bout something to eat
They will answer with voices so sweet:

CHORUS:

You will eat, bye and bye,
In that glorious land above the sky;
Work and pray, live on hay,
You'll get pie in the sky when you die.
And the starvation army they play,
And they sing and clap and they pray
Till they get all your coin on the drum,
Then they'll tell you when you're on the bum:

CHORUS:

Holy Rollers and jumpers come out,

And they holler, they jump, and they shout.

“Give your money to Jesus,” they say,

“He will cure all diseases today.”

CHORUS:

If you fight hard for children and wife—
Try to get something good in this life—
You're a sinner and bad man, they tell,
When you die you will sure go to hell.

CHORUS:

Workingmen of all countries, unite,
Side by side we for freedom will fight;
When the world and its wealth we have gained
To the grafters we'll sing this refrain:

CHORUS:

You will eat, bye and bye,
When you've learned how to cook and to fry
Chop some wood, 'twill do you good,
And you'll eat in the sweet bye and bye.

Bloody Sunday: The Everett Massacre

Once proudly called the “City of Smokestacks,” 19th- and early 20th-century Everett was a blue-collar, union, mill town with two dozen saw mills and shingle mills. But most worker faced long hours and extremely dangerous working conditions.

Accidents are so common that frequently a shingle worker is recognized by his missing fingers, lost in accidents with unguarded saws, and 15% of all deaths recorded in the city in 1909 are from mill accidents.

By the early 1900s, in reaction to this environment, much of the city’s male workforce is unionized. With twenty-five different unions, local Labor support is so strong that in January 1909 the region’s *Labor Journal* begins publication from the local union hall on Lombard Street gaining Everett regional prominence.



Recovering from a sharp recession in 1914 that allows mill owners to lower pay rates, Everett mill workers are still not receiving their previous scale pay by 1916. In the spring of that year, 400 shingle workers vote to strike in hopes of regaining their pre-recession wage scale. As part of a growing regional center, with a population around 35,000, local mill workers are proud of their status as trade workers and members of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Yet, they often find themselves at odds with the more radical Industrial Workers of the World (Wobblies) who want to create a union that includes unskilled workers.

On August 19, 1916, Strike-breakers, hired by mill owner Neil Jamison, attack picketing AFL strikers while the local police look on maintaining that the waterfront area being federal property is beyond their jurisdiction. When strikers retaliate later that evening, the police intervene proclaiming the strikers have crossed the line of jurisdiction. On August 22, when twenty-two AFL members speak out about the incident they are quickly arrested.



Throughout September and October of 1916 groups of Wobblies, using their right of free speech on the streets of Everett, specifically a soap-box oratory on the corner of Wetmore and Hewitt, are arrested and beaten by local law enforcement. To challenge the local law, especially Snohomish County

Bloody Sunday: The Everett Massacre

Sheriff Donald McRae, a former shingle worker, the Wobblies encourage an environment of free speech, and local readily join in. One local woman is even pulled off of the soap-box for reciting the Declaration of Independence.

In reaction to the spectacle that the soap-box oratory has become, in mid-October, forty Wobblies are escorted by deputies to an area known as Beverly Park where they are brutally beaten and told to get out-of-town. Despite severe injuries, some are forced to walk the 25-mile Interurban Trail back to Seattle.



After 150 deputies force Wobbly soap-box speakers to run a gauntlet where some are impaled on spiked cattle guards, the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) call for a mass meeting in Everett on November 5.

The Wobblies vow to return, in greater numbers, to show solidarity for their cause.

Affairs between the Unions and law enforcement are swiftly coming to a head. And on Sunday, November 5, 1916, the bloodiest battle in Pacific Northwest labor history occurs.

On that day almost 300 members of the I.W.W. board the steamers *Verona* and *Calista* from Seattle and head north to Everett. The I.W.W. plan a public demonstration for that afternoon on the corner of Hewitt and Wetmore, the same spot used by local Wobblies.

They hope to gain converts to their dream of a single world-wide union.

On November 5, word reaches Everett law enforcement that a group of armed anarchists are coming to burn their town. Under the authority of Sheriff McRae, 200 citizen deputies meet on the docks at the base of Hewitt to repel the intruders.

The *Verona* arrives first, pulling in alongside the dock.



Bloody Sunday: The Everett Massacre

Sheriff McRae asks, "Who is your leader?" Informed "We are all leaders!" he announces to the passengers that they are not to land. A single shot is fired, followed by minutes of chaotic shooting. To this day no one knows if the first shot came from the boat or the dock.

Attempting to avoid bullets, Wobblies aboard the *Verona* rush to the opposite side of the ship, nearly capsizing the vessel. Captain Chance Wiman ducks behind the ship's safe, a fortuitous move when over 175 bullets pierce the pilot house. Warning the *Calista* not to land, Captain Wiman struggles to back the ship out of port and return to Seattle.

On the dock, Deputies Jefferson Beard and Charles Curtis lay dying, and 20 others, including the Sheriff, are wounded. On the *Verona's* deck, Wobblies Hugo Gerlot, Abraham Rabinowitz, Gus Johnson, and John Looney are dead and Felix Baran is dying.

While the official I.W.W. report lists five dead and twenty-seven wounded, it is more likely that as many as twelve Wobblies lost their lives, their bodies disappearing into the bay after the *Verona's* far railing broke.

The Federal Government deploys National Guard troops to Everett and Seattle to keep the peace and citizens remain fearful for days. Seventy-four Wobbly passengers are arrested upon their return to Seattle and eventually taken to the Snohomish County jail. All but one are released.

Teamster Thomas Tracy is charged with murdering Deputies Curtis and Beard, but in a dramatic and much publicized trial that follows, Tracy is acquitted.

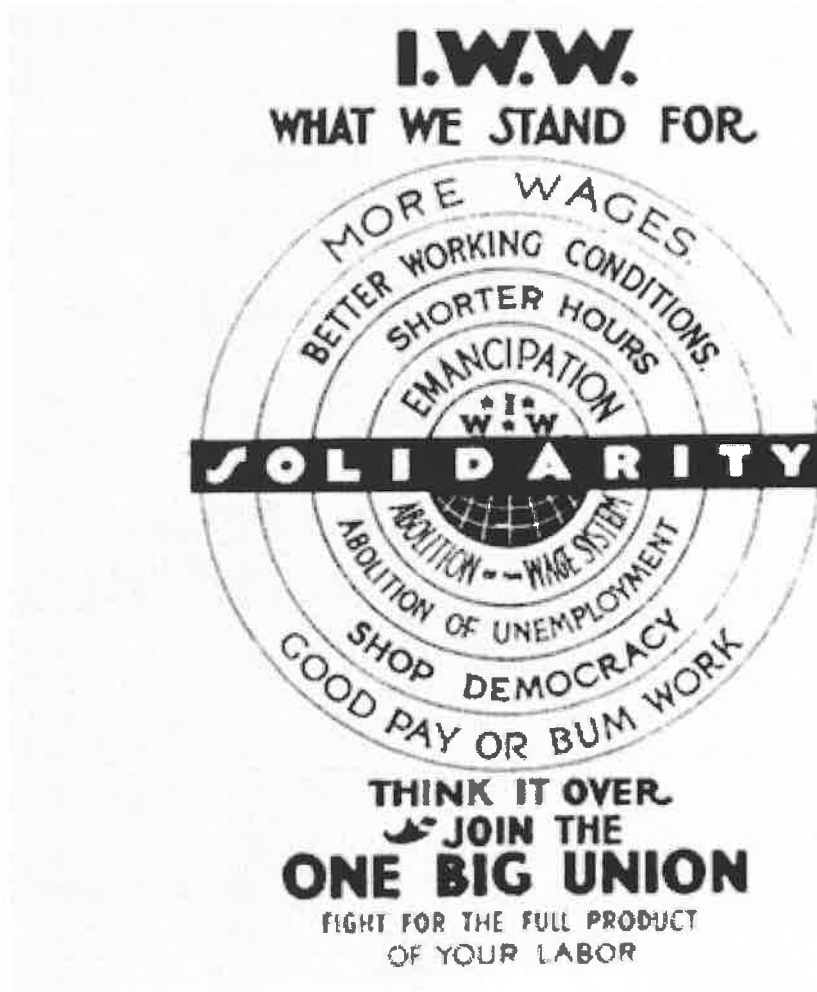
The Everett Massacre appears in newspapers throughout the United States. Today, it is still considered one of the most significant events in 1916 America.



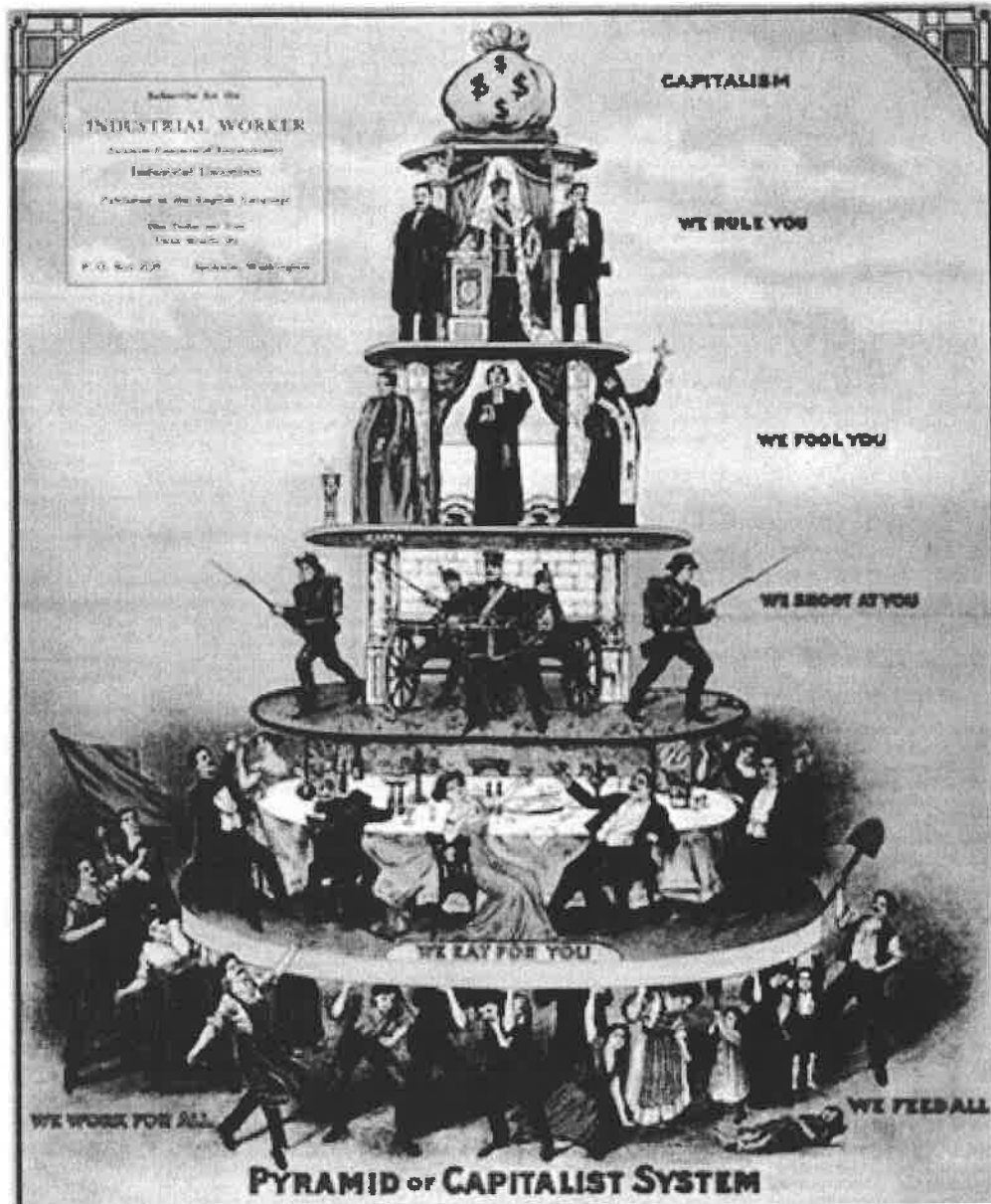
Text Courtesy of Gene R. Fosheim. Additional Research Assistance Provided by Rep. Mike Sells, Images from the Collection of The Snohomish County Museum of History.

IWW Cartoons, 1910s

Unlabeled cartoons in Industries and Occupations Photo Collection and Everett Massacre Collection, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.



IWW Cartoons, 1910s



IWW Cartoons, 1910s

PARLIAMENTARIANISM

[WHICH?]

DIRECT ACTION



ORGANIZE ON THE JOB WHERE YOU ARE ROBBED

IWW Cartoons, 1910s



The Lumber Barons are fat with profits and their hands are smeared with the blood of workers.