

THE ORGANIZER

September 2009 • Issue #19

Starbucks Barista Unjustly Fired, Demands Justice

John O'Reilly when she made it clear that she did not understand what management was accusing her of, Gallagher and an HR representative on the phone simply repeated

ting to an offense she maintains she did not commit.

When IWW barista Anja Witek heard about the situation, she tried to get in touch with

Starbucks management began yet another losing battle last month when they fired Azmera Mehrbatu. What they did not know was that Mehrbatu, known to her customers and fellow workers as Aizze, would not simply accept losing her job for an unjust reason. Mehrbatu and the IWW Starbucks Workers Union have been working to get her job back and stand up to Starbucks management's bad decisions.

Mehrbatu was accused of theft from her store on the corner of Snelling and Selby in St. Paul, but upper management have yet to provide a shred of evidence that the barista, well known by her co-workers for never being off when counting down her till, stole a penny. Instead, Starbucks district manager Clair Gallagher took Mehrbatu into the back room after a shift in early July, kept her confined there for an hour and a half until Mehrbatu signed a statement admitted guilt and a promissory note that forces her to pay \$1200 to the company. An immigrant from Ethiopia, Mehrbatu's English skills are limited and

themselves over and over. Most shockingly, the management implied that if Mehrbatu did not sign the notes, the police could be called. Fearing for her three children, Mehrbatu signed the note that she did not understand admit-

up with a plan to get get Mehrbatu her job back.

The Starbucks Workers Union held a picket for Aizze on Saturday, August 15th outside

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Azmera Mehrbatu speaks to supporters at an IWW-organized action. Photo by Erik W. Davis

No Shortcuts in the Class Struggle

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THE ORGANIZER

A monthly publication of the Twin Cities General Membership Branch of the Industrial Workers of the World.

The IWW is a union for all workers, dedicated to organizing on the job for better conditions today, and a world without bosses tomorrow.

You are invited to contact the Branch Secretary-Treasurer or any Delegate listed below for no-pressure conversations about your issues on the job.

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Stories, letters to the editors, and belly-aching can be addressed to tc-organizer@riseup.net

Unless otherwise stated, the opinions expressed are not necessarily the official position of the local branch or the union as a whole.

Many of our members are engaged in active organizing campaigns, and some use an alias, occasionally their union card number, or 'x' number. We prefer transparency over secrecy whenever possible, but will always honor requests for anonymity.



Education.
Organization.
Emancipation.

Editorial: No Shortcuts in the Class Struggle

John O'Reilly

Organizing is hard work. There are no shortcuts, there are no "move ahead to Go, collect \$200" cards, there is no power waiting to swoop in and do the work for you. Every day that you organize, you put in twice as much as work as you might otherwise: you work at your job and you work for the union. Sometimes it's hard to accept these facts. But if we accept them, then we can focus on the real work much better.

One thing that makes the IWW so unique is our reliance on volunteer organizers. When I talk with staffers from other unions, they sometimes don't understand how we are around at all. "But your organizers are all just members, how can they be any good at organizing?" I tell them that you don't need a fancy title to be an organizer, you just need to understand that conditions at your job need to change and that you and your fellow workers are the only ones who can do it. Being a volunteer organizer is kind of like teaching a kid to play baseball: you may not be able to remember what the infield fly rule is, but can teach them how to hit a ball and run the bases. Every single IWW organizer may not be able to recite the National Labor Relations Act, but there's always someone in the union who knows how.

Paying staffers to do the work that union members should be doing voluntarily is a shortcut that the IWW does not take. We use all of our dues money on organizing, and with no staff budget at the local level, we do not waste a penny of it. Our international office workers and General Secretary-Treasurer are paid just a small sum to do tremendously important administrative work, less than a staff organizer would be paid in another union. The IWW sees paying officers and staffers as a waste of the membership's dues. Our dues should be supporting our organizing and thus supporting ourselves.

Volunteer organizing is the only way for every single member of the organization to know what we are about and to do the work that we need to do to empower to working class. When you stand up to the boss together, you learn something that cannot be taught by a union bureaucrat doing it for you. You learn the power of solidarity, the need to stand together, and the ability that we all have to do so. If we accept that organizing is hard work, we must also understand that trying to find an easy way out is a waste of time. There's a great deal of work that we need to do to save this world of ours, so rather than scratching around for shortcuts like employing paid staff, we should focus on how organizing can improve our own skills and make us more confident. When the day comes that we win this drawn-out conflict between the workers and the bosses, it won't be because somebody fought it for us, but because we stood up for ourselves. •••

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the store where she worked. Hopes were high as several dozen union members and supporters waved signs supporting Mehrbatu and calling out Starbucks for its discriminatory behavior. According to workers inside, the hour and a half-long picket slowed business to a crawl inside the store and gave Starbucks the message that the union was not going to let Aizze fight this battle alone. After a fruitless call with Starbucks HR later that day, the SWU remains committed to getting Aizze her job back and getting Starbucks to throw out the promissory note they pressured her to sign. Said Witek, "District management now won't have their meetings in our store because they know they are wrong and they are afraid of that." She added that the union continues to fight. "We're not going to back down," she promises. •••



Photo by Erik W. Davis.

Second Anniversary of the AFSCME Workers Strike at the University of Minnesota

Annie Nonomus

Two years after the 2007 strike of all three AFSCME locals, the race to the bottom is thriving at the University of Minnesota. Top-heavy, management-ridden employee rolls at the University Of Minnesota reflect the worst face of union-busting and the University Inc. phenomenon. Over 16 years ago, when the first union of front-line workers was formed at the University of Minnesota, there were over 3,000 clerical workers and a couple hundred Professional and Administrative staff. Today, clerical numbers have dwindled to P&A staff members have numbers to over 4,000 has also skyrocketed to President lurking behind structure threatens to sity under the triple boot ception management, inequality. Two years the bosses is alive and which is supposed to just the greedy few. We synthesis of wage-slave tween keep-your head meritocracy of medioc-

The Good Ship Bru-

has presided over the

stated goal to become

search institutions"

done like a small box of

step of some other, more successful university. As Bobby's ambitious pipe dream for the future of the University has circled the drain, Bruininks has done everything in his power to draw attention to the shiny new stadium rising above University Avenue and Oak Street. As in Roman times, bread and circuses keep the people preoccupied while the scandalous waste of taxpayer dollars continues unabated and the promise of a "career path" for the lower classes at the University is pushed away, underground, gone down a sewer.

In these economic times, precarity is a boon to any boss, whether in a sweatshop or at the University, because workers fear to make waves and put up with more and more (and more!) crap for less pay. The U of MN Retirement Incentive Option, taken by a few by choice, gives way to the Hiring Pause. Some positions go unfilled, and some become vacant.

As a bonus for the bosses, increased work load and the thumbscrews of workplace stress help to lighten the "burden" of high labor costs by forcing some fellow workers into early and ultimate retirements that take the form of cancer or coronaries. Sons and daughters of privilege queue up, as bit by bit, the "public" university - once a ticket to "liberation" from menial wage servitude - moves farther and farther out of the reach of the public which granted the charter to the University in the first place, and continues to fund this machine of class war and strife. •••

Members Corner The General Executive Board and You

Nate Holdren

This month in *Member's Corner* we highlight the General Executive Board (or GEB). The GEB comes up a lot in the alphabet soup that is the IWW. Some of the details can seem dull, but it's an important part of our union. Knowing about the GEB is part of being an informed and active member. The more informed and active members we have, the more democratic our union will be.

Seven people serve on the GEB. We have an election every year for the next year's GEB. The election happens as part of as our annual referendum. If you are up to date on your dues you should get an election announcement in the mail sometime in September, and a ballot in October. Nominations for the GEB take place at the annual convention, which this year takes place over Labor Day weekend in Chicago. Anyone can run for the GEB, as long as you have been an IWW for 18 months and have stayed up to date on your dues for a year before you were nominated.



less than 1700 at last count, while seen a ten-fold surge in their today. The number of managers unprecedented levels with a Vice-every file cabinet. This top-heavy crush the mission of the Univer-heel of white male privilege, per-and staggering income after the strike, the bonanza for well at this land grant institution, serve the public as a whole, not seem to have reverted to a toxic hell; a sort of unholy cross be-down serfdom and the worst rity.

ininks' bloated mangement staff abject failure of the bosses' once-"one of the top three public re-which has, mercifully, been aban-wimpering puppies on the door-

The GEB has the power to set policy for the IWW, as long as those policies don't conflict with the constitution. In general, the GEB is supposed to keep the various parts of the IWW accountable, transparent, and democratic by



making sure they report and making sure they do what they were elected to do. The GEB is also responsible for making sure that IWW publications and websites are in keeping with our vision and values. That doesn't mean the GEB runs everything, but that if something really out of line happens – like say the editor of the newspaper decided to start running stories about how the IWW supports a certain political party – then the GEB is supposed to step in fix things.

The IWW Constitution spells out the GEB's powers and the basic expectations it has to live up to, in Article III, section 5. You can get a copy of the constitution from a delegate or at a General Membership Branch meeting.

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You can also download a copy of the constitution here: <http://www.iww.org/PDF/Constitutions/2009IWWConstitution.pdf>

The GEB also has a set of rules for itself called the Manual of Policies and Procedures. All IWW members have a right to get a copy of this document. You can get a copy by asking our branch Secretary-Treasurers, by contacting the GEB directly, or by contacting IWW General Headquarters. Headquarters' email address is ghqiww@gmail.com, their phone number is (513) 591-1905 and their address is PO Box 23085, Cincinnati, OH 45223-3085.

The GEB does most of its work via email. They have an email list which serves as an ongoing meeting of the board. All members can join the list to keep an eye on what the GEB is doing, and to give input. You can join the GEB email list here: <http://lists.iww.org/listinfo/geb>. The GEB also reports on its activity in the General Organization Bulletin mailed to all members who are up to date on their dues.

Finally, the GEB serves to support and mentor IWW groups and branches. The GEB should help groups of IWW members that are working on forming a branch in that process, and should help new branches get their feet under them. The GEB should also check in regularly with existing branches, to see how things are going, to help them succeed locally and within the larger IWW, and to help identify roles that branch members could play within the IWW's international General Administration. •••

Alienation and the Labor Theory of Value: targets of our attack.

Erik W. Davis

Here's how it works, most of the time. Two types of classes: those who work, and those who mysteriously make money by paying others to work for them; bosses and workers. Bosses make money by paying others to work for them. Strangely, they make much more money this way than do the workers themselves. This is one of the main reasons for our opposition to the bosses, and why workers and bosses have "nothing in common."

Ask the boss why he makes more money by not working than those who do work; you get a lot of answers. He worked hard when young, pulled himself up by his own bootstraps. Picture someone pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and see if you don't start laughing. Occasionally a good-hearted boss will admit that he just got lucky. But none of this is exactly true. The truth is that the boss owns the shop; it is his private property. Therefore, the ability to make money at the shop also belongs to him.

Economists as far back as Adam Smith and Karl Marx described the distortions that take place under capitalism, and described the process by which a boss makes more money by having other people do his work, as based on the 'Labor Theory of Value.'

The Labor Theory of Value (LTV) is important and uncomplicated. It is to the boss' advantage to spend as little on wages and other inputs (coffee beans in a coffee company, e.g.) as possible. The boss will use all of his many legal and illegal advantages to push these costs lower, so that his profits will be higher. Wages are the area over where the boss has the greatest control.

Let's be very clear: the boss' profits are taken directly from the labor of the workers. It is our work which transforms, for instance, raw materials into a final commodity. At Starbucks, it is the work of the

barista that transforms roasted coffee beans into a nearly-\$5 cup of coffee with a bit of milk in it. But the barista does not receive the full value of her work in her wages.



Profit does not magically appear, a fact which contemporary economists are learning yet again as yet another speculative paper bubble crashes, sending the economy into another crisis which will only make our global class more miserable. Instead, profit for non-workers (bosses) is taken directly from the value that workers create in the work they do. If workers were paid wages for their work equal to the value of the services or commodities they produce, there would be nothing left over for the non-working boss.

This, the Labor Theory of Value, is the reason why all labor unions throughout the history of organized labor have most commonly focused on the issue of wages and compensation, attempting to benefit ourselves and our class by reclaiming from the bosses some portion of the profits they steal from our work, if not reclaim it entirely.

But there is another reason to oppose the bosses at work. Bosses are not only parasites, whose bloated rest is a direct result of our work. They have also assumed the right to command those who create their wealth. We have no illusions that someday work might be unnecessary, or that the world will somehow become a perfect utopia. We object to the unearned power of the bosses, who order workers more knowledgeable than the bosses on how to perform a task, and then steal the value we create. This fact - the fact of sweating, grinning, grinding our teeth, and clamping our emotions down for the majority of our waking lives - is the subjective experience of alienation - being alienated from our own power, our own work, and our own will.

So while unions will always attack the bosses on the issue of wages - for increased wages means increased power for the working class - the IWW also attacks on the front of workshop control and shop democracy, in order to fight not only against the theft of the bosses, but against their attempts to alienate us from ourselves. •••



Chea Vichea, founder and former president of the Free Trade Union of the Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia, shot to death in January 2004. Photo courtesy of the FTUWKC.

Cambodian government threatens to sue union leader for publicly linking anti-union murder to the government

Erik W. Davis

Over five years after his elder brother was murdered for his own union efforts, current president of the Free Trade Union Workers of the Kingdom of Cambodia (FTUWKC) faces new government threats: government spokespeople confirm that they intend to charge Mony with libel, with the possible result of prison time. Coming during a period of challenge for the Cambodian unions (see past stories in IW), this prosecution could be devastating to the Cambodian union movement.

The Royal Government of Cambodia announced that it would use the notoriously corrupt Cambodian judiciary to seek sanctions against FTUWKC president Chea Mony, for accusing the government of organizing his elder brother's murder in 2004.

After a decade of organizing workers in the nascent garment industry of newly post-socialist Cambo-

dia, Mony's brother Chea Vichea had become the most famous and effective organizer in Cambodia. He was known for telling to "Dare to express yourselves. Have no fear. Strength lies in unity." More than high-minded rhetoric, Vichea presided over the creation of the first mass rank-and-file union

movement in Cambodia's history, organizing nearly 80,000 of Cambodia's then-roughly 1 million garment workers into the union, all gains won through direct action and militant struggle. He never retreated to an administrative role, but remained at the front lines of the organizing struggle. He had just been fired from a factory job for organizing workers into a union a few days before, when two men entered the newsstand outside a Buddhist temple where Vichea read the newspapers every morning, and put one bullet in his head, and another in his chest. Vichea died instantly at the age of 36, leaving behind a pregnant wife and young child, who now live as political refugees in Finland.

Only days later, the capital city of Phnom Penh was brought to a standstill while a peaceful, unpermitted march of mourners, wearing mourning clothes, occupied the streets carrying signs identifying Vichea as the "Hero of the Workers (*Virachun*)."

Vichea's younger brother Chea Mony took up the mantle of leadership and has continued to build and defend

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Chea Mony leads a 2004 protest of his elder brother's assassination; over 40,000 workers braved government threats to publicly mourn Chea Vichea's January 2004 murder. Photo courtesy of the FTUWKC.

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the union, despite the constant threats and economic difficulties of the moment. Mony is slight, shorter than his brother, and speaks with a soft, high-pitched voice. Also like his brother, Mony appears fearless. He receives death threats every week, and has not abandoned his leadership of the union.

Chea Mony has not feared to point fingers. Like nearly all other Phnom Penhois, Chea Mony believes that members of the government, specifically from within the Ministry of the Interior and the Police forces, arranged his brother's murder and hired the killers. Holding the real assassins accountable is crucial: since Vichea's murder, two more leaders within the FTUWKC has likewise been assassinated, and one managed to survive a kidnapping and murder attempt.

Responding to international outcry after Vichea's murder, the government arrested two clearly innocent men, Sok Sam Oeun and Born Samnang. These men had alibis for the time of the murder outside of the city and confirmed by entire villages.

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After a speedy show-trial they were convicted of the murder. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other organizations all condemned the convictions as sham efforts by the government to protect the real murderers.

While the government has done nothing to catch the real murderers of Vichea, the "plastic killers" (falsely accused killers) Oeun and Samnang have been largely acquitted and apparently released by the courts on August 17. Applauding the decision at the time, Mony repeated his accusation against the government to the press.

As reported in the Phnom Penh Post, Mony declared at the time "I maintain my stance from the beginning and acknowledge that [Born Samnang and Sok Sam Oeun] were fake killers, and I urge the court to find the real killers...I am ready to take responsibility and dare to be imprisoned for my conclusion about my brother's case, which is that the government prepared a plan to kill my brother."

Khieu Sopheak, spokesman for the Ministry of the Interior, has since made clear that the government will use all available measures to prosecute Mony for libel and slander. These charges, rendered by the corrupt Cambodian judiciary, are used frequently to silence critics of the regime. Opposition politician Mu Sochua was found guilty of similar criticisms only the previous week and may be sentenced to prison time.

update: as this issue went to press, the Cambodian government reversed course, declining to file legal charges. The author's opinion is that this is part of an ongoing 'war of position' vis-a-vis the unions, rather than an act of intelligence or sincerity. ...

Our "Organizing Tip" column is taking a vacation this month. Please check back next month for more ideas about how to organize your space.

Having trouble at work?
Worried about job security?
Having trouble paying the rent?

Join the IWW!



Fight for better conditions and better wages.

Build workplace power and put pressure on the boss to get what you want.

Learn more or join today! Contact us at twincities@iww.org or call 651-315-4222.

Upcoming Events

General Membership Branch Meeting

October 6 at 7 PM Monthly business meeting for the IWW Twin Cities General Membership Branch. Come vote on where your dues are spent! All members have a vote, and all workers are welcome. Mayday Books, 301 Cedar Ave.

The Twin Cities Branch of the IWW holds Organizer Trainings once per month on average. Here, workers learn invaluable skills with which to reach out to, organize with, and empower their coworkers. If you are interested in attending a training, please contact Jake at jake.b.bell@gmail.com to find out when the next one is.

Organizing is a daunting task; we can help you prepare.

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.
- From the Preamble to the Constitution of the IWW