

## Taking creative action



An account by a Pizza Hut worker in the UK about remembering to be creative in workplace organizing.

There is no denying that organizing, and class struggle more generally, is hard work—it can be boring and really tiring. However, we need to remember not to get stuck in a pattern that keeps it that way. There is no reason to stick to the old models of action. Let's be creative, let's try new things and most important of all let's encourage new fellow workers to come up with ideas and take the lead on them.

While at Pizza Hut we got creative about taking action, over health and safety and over management belligerence.

My first example is how we dealt with poor safety standards, particularly oven gloves. In the 10 years that I have worked at Pizza Hut, safety has always been issue— the burns on my arms can attest. Oven gloves with holes were a constant issue. Despite it being raised by multiple workers, multiple times, nothing was ever done. So we essentially created a game: binning gloves! As we got in on each shift I checked gloves, and if they were “sub-par,” they would end up in the bin.

The trick to making it fun in this case though was through involving other Pizza Hut workers, active fellow workers or not. That meant taking a risk that they could have dobbed us in, but the reality was we knew it was an issue that annoyed everyone. We also made a game of getting away with it. At the core however, this action was real and meaningful. It represents two classic tactics: dual power and workplace sabotage. Although both were on a small scale, it meant a lot to workers in a historically unorganized workplace.

The second example I would put forward was a matter of accidentally discovering a weak spot. For some months, we had been trying to push through a grievance. A grievance forms a part of a labor

dispute in British employment law and in practice; it is a pretty decent way of putting your bosses on notice.

Despite our best efforts to talk, we had been completely ignored. So we began to plan our next move. Our dispute was over Bank Holiday pay, which is usually time-and-a-half, but at Pizza Hut this is standard pay, as well as delivery drivers' commission, which they receive on a per delivery basis.

The plan was to organize a walk-out on the next Bank Holiday, which would have been on the day of the illustrious royal wedding (a nice note of celebration if you ask me). However, the plan fell apart when an unpopular loud mouth thought it would be funny to catch us out. In front of a manager and several other staff we didn't yet trust, he shouted out, "What's this about, this strike next week then?"

We had been caught, we hadn't planned for this. What would happen? I would be fired for sure. Would others be too, had we just lost the lot? No, it was quite the opposite. Management was desperate to talk to us. Suddenly we found ourselves very popular and looked after. Before we knew it our area manager came down to meet with us and tried to settle the dispute, in his "I am just one of you guys" manner. Obviously we didn't get what we wanted but we managed to sort some other issues around the moped drivers' safety gear.

Tactics may sometimes come from where you least expect them. Keeping an open mind about ways to deal with issues and not letting yourself be held back by preconceptions of what falls under proper methods allows for some interesting results. Central to this is remaining open at all times to the input of your fellow workers, using the skills around you and encouraging involvement.

Neither of these examples came about spontaneously; they grew naturally out of the culture of cooperation that we managed to build in our shop, or "Wobblying the job." This is something that we can do as organizers before we even "out" ourselves as such. The boss might want a car driver to take a long delivery to keep the times down and win themselves a cash bonus; the car driver doesn't want to be out of pocket on fuel. A moped rider can turn directly to the car driver, ignoring the boss, and offer to swap for their shorter delivery. Depending on the workers and bosses involved this may not work but it will always create a bond outside of the boss-worker hierarchy, it is this bond which will see us through any action, large or small.

*Originally appeared in the Industrial Worker (April 2013)*