

What will it take to organize fast food?



A short article by db on the possibilities for organizing in the fast food industry.

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- A union campaign that blasts minimum standards into the popular consciousness and spreads them like wildfire through (social) media and word of mouth.
- A wave of franchise-by-franchise sitdown strikes and occupations that enforce a union and minimum standards on hosts of employers.
- Inspired workers along the food chain and in similar workplaces rise up to demand more.
- Mass pickets, civil disobedience, sit-down strikes and more force nonorganized employers to concede to the union or see their businesses destroyed.
- A series of additional bloody struggles to raise standards and enforce them across the industry are waged and won.

Nothing more, nothing less. Can you feel it? Taste it? Are you loving it?

This is what we might call “sandwiches meets the autoworker” model, inspired by my own experience as an organizer at Jimmy John’s in Minneapolis, through which I saw the need for a more developed strategy of direct action and a need for more concise, winnable demands.

It is also influenced by looking at history, including the book “Reviving the Strike” by Joe Burns, which talks about the importance of strikes in building a powerful labor movement.

While the future is gray, to not shoot for this type of organizing in such an explosive industry is to set ourselves up for failure.

What do I suggest as minimum standards? How about a campaign for \$9 per hour, tip jars and dignity, or the ability to call in sick and not have to face harassment or discrimination. What should we use as a slogan? How about “dignity comes between two slices of bread” (because bread can be slang for money)? The dollar amount could be raised progressively, or upped to fit local conditions or a rising minimum wage.

Such an effort would require some beautiful posters to plaster around stores, including a model “code of conduct” that businesses would be forced to agree to.

It would also be helpful to develop some modern day tar-and-feathering equivalent for creepy or racist managers, as an empowering response to harassment. This could be spread through social networks and done anywhere easily. Something like a glitter bomb, perhaps?

After all, we are the IWW, goddamn it! This is what we do. And fast food workers today are almost as broke as the timber beasts of yesteryear.

That said, being in the IWW gives us an additional advantage. We know that the current economic and political order called capitalism is destroying the Earth and that the same can be said for the capitalist food system. So we know that when the time comes we aren’t going to defend the practice of serving the working class diabetes. Instead, we’ll take things over and transform them for the benefit of all, bringing about a new world within the shell of the old.

A working class revolution is possible! Join the IWW! Think outside the bun!

Originally appeared in the Industrial Worker (September 2012)