

Branch Organizing Manual



***The Hotel and Restaurant Workers'
Industrial Union 640***

Industrial Workers of the World

June 2001

Congratulations on joining the IWW!

But there's just one problem, what now? Perhaps you're the only person in your community in the IWW or there is no organized IWW. It's time to organize the hospitality industry in your area! While this pamphlet will assist you in forming a new IWW Branch, nothing substitutes for contacts with experienced wobblies. Make contact with other IWW branches as much as possible!

While there are some similar skills in organizing a Branch and organizing in the workplace, this manual is specifically for Branches. Check the IWW's Organizing Manual and the IU640 Organizing Manual for information specific to workplace organizing.

What is an IWW Branch?

A Branch is the basic unit of the IWW. It consists of 10 or more dues paying members who live within an hour's travel of each other. The essential difference between a branch and an IWW group is that a branch is an official "Chartered" unit of the IWW and is entitled to certain rights and responsibilities as defined in the IWW Constitution. Perhaps the most important benefit is a Branch is entitled to retain half of the dues it collects. Branches are required to make monthly reports and accountings of dues monies collected.

There are 3 types of Branches in the IWW:

Industrial Union (IUB): The IUB consists of 10 or more members who work in one industry as defined by our Industrial Unions.

General Membership (GMB): Consists of 10 or members in any industry not organized into a local Industrial Union Branch.

Job Branch: When wobblies organize in a particular workplace they form a Job Branch. The Job Branch is not an independent branch and is responsible to the local GMB or IUB.

Branch Charter

When you have over 10 members you may petition the General Executive Board (GEB) or Regional Organizing Committee (ROC) for a Branch Charter. All members signing the petition will need to have paid dues in the last 2 months. Send your petition to either General Headquarters (GHQ) or to your ROC Headquarters.

This manual will be specific to organizing Industrial Union Branches (IUBs) in the Hotel and Restaurant industry.

Basics of building the IU640-IWW locally:

We are trying to build a new international union for Hotel and Restaurant Workers which is democratic and run by its members. In making this decision we have chosen several issues to organize around and a strategy for making this occur.

At this juncture our strategy is to organize IU640 Branches based on members willing to make a commitment to build our union. We are looking for 10 to 20 members in a city who are up to learning about IWW-style unionism, are capable in setting up branches that can function with 100s of members and who can organize at the workplace. This is a tall order, but we believe we can do it.

When starting an IU640 branch, please consult with the General Organizing Committee (GOC) for advise.

Building and training a core group:

The best way of forming a solid IWW branch is to start off with 3 to 5 people who are dedicated to building the IWW and learning the art of organizing. When building this core group, look for friends, co-workers and acquaintances who may have some of the following qualities:

- * Labour organizing experience, especially legal aspects
- * Group skills such as running meetings, fund raising, bookkeeping, etc.
- * Communication skills, graphics, writing, web design, etc.
- * Contacts with diverse communities within the working class, language skills, etc
- * Find out if there are other IWWs in the area, talk to nearby Branches, perhaps they have contacts with former or potential members.

When you have formed a core group, spend some time, perhaps a month or two, meeting informally. Spend this time learning what the IWW is about and to get to know each other. Set some goals for the local IWW over the next year and make strategies to meet these goals.

Recruiting Membership:

Beyond the core group, the best way of recruiting new members is by doing practical activity. People want to make a better world and want to see that the IWW can deliver.

- * Usually the best members are labor activists who are fed up with sell out business unions. They bring in many talents and contacts. However, be careful with unionists who want to build the IWW as a union support group rather than a union.
- * Seek potential members with skills and a dedication to building the IWW rather than someone with a particular social ideology that's looking for a home.
- * While this may go against logic, community activists are generally not a good target for the initial membership of a branch. Activists generally have a lot on their plate and will jump into activity and back out, usually quickly.

Training your members:

Throughout the life of a branch you will need to continually train and educate your members, so start early. When members have particular skills they can share them with the other members by giving trainings. An excellent method of passing along skills is teaming an experienced member with a new member when doing a particular task.

Other skills may be hard to come by; here are some ways of learning them:

- * Ask for an experienced IWW member to come to town to give a training. If this is impossible, phone, e-mail or write wobbly organisers for advice.
- * Seek out sympathetic union activists (there will be many of them) and ask their advice.
- * Some business unions give trainings on organizing, while it is not always the IWW way you can learn a lot.
- * Some colleges hold classes/workshops in labour organising.
- * Non-profit fund raising groups often have trainings for non-profit group skills.
- * If you don't know, search the web, go to the library, ask an elder.

Being serious

Workers seeking help want the appearance of professionalism in a union because they are often scared and want security. This doesn't mean you need to change your appearance, dress up, etc when you are doing wobbly business. But please be serious about the IWW and our organizing. Because if poorly done, organizing can have dreadful affects on workers' employment, ability to find future work, etc.

While many of these issues aren't important when a group/branch is small, its best to instill the proper attitude because the branch will need them as it gets larger.

- * Be polite and courteous
- * Show up when you say you are going to or call and reschedule.
- * Make sure the Branch is doing its tasks such as bookkeeping, sending dues in to your headquarters, etc. on a monthly basis.
- * Be organized and don't waste people's time.
- * If you don't know something, its OK. Say you don't know but will find out the answer, do it and get back to the person with the answer.
- * Do what you say you are going to do or pass along the task. Again its OK not to do something you said you would, but it's not fair to the branch to just drop a task.
- * Make branch literature look clean and not sloppy, cheesy or 'far out'
- * Make efforts to include all sorts of workers- anticipate childcare issues, health limitations, different languages, etc.
- * Don't gossip. Often you will need to keep actions, organizational plans, etc confidential.

Infrastructure:

It takes infrastructure and organization to make an organization. Here are some of the basic needs that almost all groups have.

- * **Get a PO Box.** For most groups, a Post Office Box is the permanent base of operations. You may someday open an office, but offices can move. A P.O. Box provides stability. Go to a convenient government Post Office and ask to rent a box for your union. Never use a private mail company because they often go out of business.
- * **Have a contact Phone Number.** Branches often use the personal phone number of a stable member. This is often for economic reasons. But as soon as you can get a branch phone (so the branch is listed in the telephone directory). Again, stability is the key. As Mobile/Cellular phone costs go down, investigate this as an alternative.
- * **E-mail address.** Get an e-mail account for your branch through a local internet provider, a free web-based provider (like hotmail, yahoo, etc) or from iww.org. If you don't understand how to go about this, ask other wobblies how to go about this.
- * **E-mail list.** If many of the members of your branch have access to e-mail you can set up a list through the iww.org which allows you to e-mail everyone at the same time. This facilitates discussions between meetings.
- * **Create a branch web site.** When you do, include branch activities, practical information on how the IWW organizes and contact info. This can lead to many contacts.
- * **Get listed in your IWW newspaper** and on iww.org as the IWW contact for your area.
- * **Create a Database.** Keep a list of members, including their names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mail, dues payments, and any other information relevant to keeping in contact. It's up to your group how to organize such a database. It can be used to make mailing lists, mailing labels, phone trees, even e-mail lists. Such data can be kept on paper, or on three by five cards, but the most convenient method is using a computer database application. Microsoft Access and AppleWorks/ClarisWorks are two database applications that are on many computers.
- * **Paper Work:** You need to keep a well organized record of your bills and expenses, correspondence, organizing efforts, contacts, phone lists, members, reports, and the like. However, much paperwork can be avoided if you keep things simple and keep things organized. A good filing system can be key to keeping things in order, but it need not be complicated.
- * **Establish an Branch bank account.** Make sure you have protections against theft such as co-signers for checks, etc. In the US you need an EIN number, call GHQ for help setting that up.

Keeping members = Building Solidarity

One of the hardest skills to learn is how to keep membership. Don't be disheartened by turnover, most

voluntary organizations experience around 40-60 percent turnover in a year. Here are some ways to keep turnover low:

- * **People hate their time being wasted.** When you are going to do something be organized or don't do it.
- * **Keep it simple-** don't discuss/meet/vote/fret over the things that don't need to be.
- * **Run tight meetings**
- * **Make it fun,** have regular informal parties/get togethers or "chin wags" so members get to know each other.
- * **Distribute responsibilities,** make every member feel valuable
- * **Avoid cliques-** invite and make room for a wide variety of people, the more variety, the greater strength and skill pool.
- * When taking on tasks, **pair experienced members with inexperienced** to build confidence and comraderie.
- * **Agitation isn't the same as Organization.** Hell raising is fun and may get results, but it is limited. Make a strategy which builds a permanent union.
- * **Make sure Branch officers are doing their duties,** make sure dues are being sent to the GOC. Make sure that the members are getting what they deserve- Organizing Bulletin, newspaper, ballots at election time.

Focus on building the IWW

We are members of the IWW because we believe the IWW is the best way of organizing the working class. The IWW shouldn't be a front group for any ideology, political group or coalition of unionists.

- * **Don't be the go-for** for other unions/groups. Expect to be treated as an equal. Do not do work for other groups if it does not benefit the IWW. In the '70s, one GMB spent 6 months conducting a boycott for another union. While they did learn some skills, in the long term they burned out most of their membership and the other union got all the credit! This doesn't mean we shouldn't do support work, but do it as the IWW so we get credit for it!
- * **Keep politics out of the union.** The IWW's strength is that it has no 'ism', we stand for Economic (or Industrial) Democracy. Our principles unite the best aspects of many political movements, make sure that all workers feel comfortable in your branch.

KNOW THE ENEMY!

Of course you know individual bosses and their actions. But what are the specific conditions of the hospitality industry in your area? Check out business publications, the Restaurant and Hotel Associations, Journal of Commerce, etc.

- * **Identify particular issues** for the IU640 to agitate or organize around. Are there issues specific to the hospitality industry in your region?
- * **Do you have contact** with workers having common problems? Are their issues isolated or can they be raised by a larger segment of the industry?
- * **Know your enemy!** Investigate business conditions, weaknesses and strengths, Use IU640 surveys to identify industry issues, workplaces with disgruntled workers, etc.

ACTIVITY!

- * **Agitate!** Post IU640 stickers, circulate leaflets.
- * **Have public discussions** of industry issues with a local or guest IWW speaker.
- * **Form and train outreach teams** to go into workplaces and make contact with workers.
- * **Put on trainings** for new members and contacts. Teach basic labor law, how to do outreach, etc.
- * **Put on educationals/movie nights** about the IWW's ideals and goals.
- * **Start a hotline** for workers to call. Publicize the number on stickers and leaflets.
- * **Participate in local Labour actions-** walk picket lines; attend labor sponsored rallies and demonstrations. Carry well made signs that say "IWW in solidarity with..." or "An injury to one is an injury to all" have the IWW globe on signs. When you are out supporting average workers in struggle, they will come out to support you!