

# THE ORGANIZER

November 2009, Issue #20

## New IWW Office, Meeting Space

Steady Growth Spurs IWW To Open  
Space in NE Minneapolis

by Jeff Pilacinski

For decades, IWW members in the Twin Cities were without a place to call home, but beginning in November, our branch will open shop in the historic Grain Belt Bottling House in Northeast Minneapolis – a neighborhood whose early residents and their vision of industrial organizing were instrumental in establishing the “One Big Union” here and beyond.

In 1905, two Northeast railroad workers – William Bradley and Fred Henion - participated in a select Chicago conference that laid the groundwork for a unique labor organization, which would later be dubbed the Industrial Workers of the World. Unlike the American Federation of Labor, the IWW proposed that all workers in an industry should harness their power together into one union, instead of dividing themselves by the many different crafts or trades on a job. This new union grew quickly and immediately appealed to Northeast workers employed in the Harrison St. rail yard and the massive Mill District, as the IWW welcomed immigrant and non-white workers - workers long deemed “unskilled” by the exclusive, craft-based AF of L locals. • **IWW Leases Space, continued p.2**



The Grain Belt Bottling House, location of the New IWW offices. Photo courtesy Jeff Pilacinski.



## Another Victory for Aizze Against Starbucks

by Anja Witek

This October the Starbucks Workers Union (SWU) filed for unemployment on behalf of former barista, Azmera (Aizze) Mebrahtu, who was fired, and whose story was told in the last issue of the Organizer (#19, Sept 2009). Having fired her, accused her of theft, and withdrawn \$100 from her final paycheck after forcing her to sign a \$1200 promissory note, Starbucks has gone farther and attempted to block Aizze's eligibility for unemployment benefits, a fund into which Aizze has been paying every paycheck. Starbucks contends that Azmera's termination was justified, and that she is therefore not eligible for unemployment benefits. But now a third party institution has ruled that Aizze was fired without cause, and that there is no evidence that she had committed any wrongdoing. • **Aizze, continued p. 3**

### Another local victory against Starbucks

Fired worker Aizze Mebrahtu gains another victory in her struggle against Starbucks.  
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## THE ORGANIZER

A bi-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](mailto: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 - A Step Forward

by John O'Reilly

If there's one thing you can say about the IWW, it's that we're a union that values real effects over the appearance of effect. We have no time for big-mouthed talking heads on TV, lying politicians, or smug bosses. In our search for effective action, we are also smart and frugal with the resources and energy we have. We focus on understanding problems and issues before jumping into them. As a union with low dues and a volunteer membership, we value real results.

Which is why I am so proud and happy to hear that the Twin Cities IWW is finally getting office and meeting space. Frugality aside, I've seen Wobblies having meetings in conditions that don't make it easy to organize. Twin Cities members have held meetings in parking lots in December, conducted committee work in noisy bars, and even confronted the boss on a lunch break. With an office, we can center our work and have a space that is truly our own.

Those of us who work for a living rarely have a place we can really call our own. At work we are obedient to the whims of the boss. When we go out with family and friends, there are few places in the Cities to spend time without spending money. Most of us rent from landlords who could throw us out at a moment's notice, or have mortgages that mean the bank could do the same thing. But the IWW now has an office which can be a home for workers here. Get in touch with our organizers to take a look at the office, and make sure to come to our grand opening party on Saturday, November 7th, at 7 PM.

We do so much with so little, but with a space of our own we can do so much more. Join us as we celebrate a new chapter in our branch's history and we stand up together for dignity, respect, and workers' power. •••

### IWW Leases Space, cont. from p. 1 •

Just as in 1905, the IWW is thriving and continues to organize in industries that are considered low-wage and "unorganizable" by today's large business unions. The determined efforts of local IWWs have yielded considerable success in several workplaces and subsequently seen the Twin Cities branch grow exponentially in just a few short years. With this expansion has come the need for our own gathering space and the Bottling House fit the bill.

Along with the connection to our union's past, this Northeast landmark offers room for significant future growth. Our office will now house the meetings of workers in food service, transportation, retail, and education to name a few. We'll hold basic organizer trainings and courses from our Work Peoples College, with the building's sizable atrium providing an ideal venue for large public discussions, film showings, and gala events. All in all, this space will become a destination where area working people can access myriad resources on labor law and organizing and meet others struggling to make their jobs and communities better places for all.

On Saturday, November 7th, all are invited to the Bottling House for an opening celebration featuring a scavenger hunt, live music, and much more. If you can't make it to the opening, please make arrangements to drop by the space at 79 13th Ave. NE (near the intersection of Marshall and 13th a few blocks off the #11 bus line) and talk to IWW members about what we're up and how you can get involved. •••



IWW members Jeff and Bob paint the new office space. Photo, Jeff Pilacinski

**Aizze, cont. from p. 1** • As reported in the previous article on Aizze's situation, she was taken into the back room after her shift on July 8, 2009, and interrogated for 2 hours, during which time she was accused of theft and fired. Strangely, management admitted at the time that they accused her of theft, that they had no evidence at all to justify their claim against Aizze. In addition, Starbucks' District Manager Claire Gallagher took advantage of Aizze's limited English abilities and bullied and manipulated her into signing a promissory note, saying she would pay Starbucks the arbitrarily-determined amount of \$1200. After her wrongful termination, friends, customers and fellow workers have stepped up to fight on Aizze's behalf. In July, a picket of a couple dozen workers and community supporters drew attention to Aizze's story.

The Unemployment Insurance Agency has decided for Aizze and against the company, writing that Starbucks had not provided sufficient evidence proving Aizze had done anything wrong at all. This is the first time a third-party organization has determined that Azmera's firing was unjust. Azmera's attitude to the verdict was one of gratitude and persistence. "I thank my God and my friends that I can get this money now for my family," Azmera said, "I know that if they stay in support of me, we will win."

The decision came as Aizze was waiting to achieve a source of income, and as her bills piled up. After repeated attempts to get a response from the Starbucks, Aizze decided to seek justice through the legal route. While charges are pending with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights for ethnic discrimination, and with Small Claims Court for the \$100 Starbucks stole from Aizze's paycheck, Aizze is searching for employment. The company has apparently ended their telephonic harassment of Aizze and her family, asking for conversations with them, or telling her she must pay them the \$1200 stated in the promissory note. A customer set up a PayPal account to raise funds to donate to Aizze that is linked directly to Aizze's bank account. The link to the account is on the SWU web-site, [www.starbucksunion.org](http://www.starbucksunion.org). The small claim filing will be heard in court on November 2. •••

**CORRECTION:** The Editors regret that we misspelled FW Azmera Mebrahtu's name in September's edition of the Organizer. We apologize to FW Mebrahtu and are pleased to hear that her case against Starbucks is going well. •••

## Anti-Racism Actions in Austin Minnesota

By Michele Rockne

The National Socialist (NAZI) Movement (NSM), an explicitly fascist movement which adopts the US flag with a swastika across it as its symbol, held a publicized protest of an anti-racism workshop at the Midtown Minneapolis YWCA, on October 3rd. This was the first time in over a decade that Nazi's have held a public event in the Twin Cities, and required a response from anti-fascists. Antifascist citizens from all walks of life gathered to pre-emptively demonstrate the lack of welcome fascists can expect in our lives. Our decisive showing of approximately 200 citizens versus four misguided bigots was a victory for racial justice in our fair cities.

Our pre-emptive demonstration was so successful that even though Minneapolis Police officers originally showed up to protect the NSM members, they eventually caved and escorted the NSM members out of the neighborhood. But this is not the end of the story. While we have driven the fascists out of the Twin Cities again, their presence is much more dramatic in Austin, Minnesota, where their main Minnesota office and recruitment apparatus is located. On October 17, the NSM has planned an "anti-immigrant, anti-communist" rally in Austin.



Anti-fascist organizers, including members of the Twin Cities IWW will travel the ninety miles from the metro area and stand in solidarity against the NSM with our neighbors in Austin. I went there as part of an advance team on October 11th to meet with community members.

The Austin community is very much aware of the antics of the NSM organizer in town. Rather than an element of white pride, the NSM is seen as comical to some, but mostly embarrassing. We leafleted shopping areas, and the consensus of Austin townfolk is massively against the Nazi agenda.

Religious and lay members of Queen of Angels Catholic Church graciously hosted us. One church member took two hours out of his Sunday to show us around town and introduce our party to Latino business owners and town leaders, educating us on the significant contribution Latinos make, both to the tax base of the town and to the cultural life in Austin. Church leaders have also offered their building as a meeting and rallying point for our action coming up on October 17th.

The NSM attempts to cloak their totalitarian fascist agenda under a flurry of flag-waving and red-baiting. I'm willing to bet any veteran still alive from World War II who was present during the liberation of the Nazi death camps would be happy to tell us what they think of the NSM's waving of the American flag. The fact that they are planning their October 17th

demonstration at the Veterans' Memorial in downtown Austin very near the VFW would be appalling if it were not such a ridiculous attempt to paint themselves as patriots. •••

**Editor's Note:** We plan a review article on the Austin action in next month's issue.

## Maquiladora Workers Speak In St. Paul

by John O'Reilly

On October 8th, the Twin Cities IWW sponsored two speakers from the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. They spoke to a crowd of students and union members in Macalester College's Olin-Rice Hall. The message of their words and their struggle was that workers on both sides of the border must work together to fight the neoliberal system.

Speaker Ernesto Lizcano was tired of working in what he and his fellow workers called a "living hell," a Maquiladora factory in the state of Tamulipas in northern Mexico. They stood up against the company, an automotive corporation called TRW, where the workers built seat belts, as well as the yellow union that told them to accept the horrendous conditions. Working with the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, an international organization that stands up for workers rights, Lizcano and his fellow workers started a campaign for better wages and conditions. Lizcano was fired and blacklisted several months ago, so he and CJM organizer Israel Monroy embarked on a speaking tour of the United States to spread the word about their struggle.

The event, cosponsored by several academic departments at Macalester College including History, Hispanic Studies, Latin American Studies and Religious Studies, was a tremendous success. "The struggle of these workers is inspiring," said Jonathan Katz, a senior at Macalester, "They are standing up to a system that destroys communities and forces workers to endure awful conditions." Maquiladoras are factories that have sprung up on the northern edges of Mexico after the passage of NAFTA, which allows U.S. companies to reduce their costs by closing factories in the U.S. and using the corruption and violence of the Mexican political system to pay their workers barely enough to live. They are symbols of the need for international organization of workers to stand up against exploitation.

The CJM tour through the United States also made stops in Baltimore and Philadelphia that were sponsored by the IWW. The International Solidarity Commission of the IWW has worked with the CJM in the past and an IWW member sits on the board of the CJM. Lizcano and Monroy continued on to make stops in states in the southern and western U.S. before returning to home to Tamulipas to take on the bosses head-on. The Organizer will report any updates that it receives from the workers' struggle against TRW. •••

## We Need Organization At the University of Minnesota

Sue D'Onomis

The need for organization at the University of Minnesota is high. The U is not a good employer for anyone except high level executives. Pay is low, and with the various economic and budgetary crises, many university workers feel insecure, and many others have lost their jobs. The U particularly needs organization across job classes. The workforce is strongly divided by what people do and where they work. As with most workplaces, people mostly have relationships with the people they see on a regular basis in the course of their work. The way work gets done at the U means that people interact mainly with people in the same job class: grad students with grad students, librarians with librarians, techies with techies, and so on.

Opportunities for interaction across job classes mostly happen with people in the same department: a grad student in English will interact with clerical workers in the English department office who will interact with a tech person who is assigned to the department.

The size of the U - thousands of employees in numerous job classes spread across many square miles of workplace - makes it an intimidating place to organize. Then again, organizing any workplace is intimidating and hard, and there are certainly important prospects and precedents for organizing at the U. Several jobs classes are already unionized, and in recent memory graduate students have carried out four (failed) attempts to unionize via the state's public employee union election process.

IWW members and other workers at the U have organized ourselves in various ways repeatedly in the past 4 years or so, sometimes in response to a big intense moment like the AFSCME strike, and sometimes in a more forward-looking proactive manner. These efforts have been hampered by the divisions between workers, such as the divisions of labor at the U mentioned earlier.

At the same time these efforts have built more informal relationships across different parts of the U. This informal network of relationships will no doubt be the basis for future moments of resistance as the crisis at the U worsens, and those moments will hopefully build the network further. With enough effort and some careful planning these relationships could be the basis for a permanent and powerful organization of workers. •••

## In November, We Remember

Ralph Chaplin

Red November, black November, bleak November, black & red;  
Hallowed month of labor's martyrs, labor's heroes, labor's dead.  
Labor's hope and wrath and sorrow, red the promise, black the threat.  
Who are we to not remember? Who are we to dare forget?

Red & black the colors blended, black & red the promise made,  
Red until the fight is ended, black until the debt is paid.  
August Spies and Albert Parsons, with Joe Hill and all the rest.  
Who are we to not remember? Who are we to dare forget?

Black the flag and black the mask, red the hearts that beat as one.  
Spur us to this better task like rays of light from autumn's sun.  
Red November, black November. Red the promise, black the threat.  
Who are we to not remember? Who are we to dare forget?

Ralph Chaplin, 1887-1961.

## Member's Corner

By John O'Reilly

### The Organizing Department

One of the biggest changes in the IWW within the past few years has been the introduction of the Organizing Department (OD). The process of creating the OD began at the union's General Assembly in 2005 and was finalized at the GA in 2006. Since then, the Organizing Department has served as the union, primary organ for directly supporting the work of organizers. As outgoing Organizing Department Board member J. Pierce from Phoenix, AZ says, 'The OD is a huge step forward for the IWW and represents a new phase of building industrial bodies and taking our campaigns beyond the local level.'

The Organizing Department is made up of several elements. Two committees, the Organizer Training Committee (OTC) and the Survey and Research Committee (SRC), make up the primary parts. The chair of each committee sits with three members elected directly by the membership for two year periods on the Organizing Department Board (ODB). The OTC is in charge of creating and maintaining trainings that the union carries out in order to better prepare members for organizing. Pierce adds, 'The OT 101 training teaches the process of Agitation, Education, Inoculation, and Organization as the organizer goes to work on the shop-floor or targets a particular industry.' The OTC also trains members to become trainers themselves, thus spreading the knowledge to local branches and allowing them to build knowledge of organizing. The SRC is in charge of assisting branches and organizing campaigns with questions that they may not be well-equipped to answer, like research on supply chains, ownership, translations and similar issues.

The ODB oversees these projects and directs a few of their own, including the Organizing Department Liaisons and the Industrial Contact system. The ODLs are elected from each participating branch and provide a conduit from the branch to the OD. Each month, ODLs report on organizing in the branch so the OD knows what is happening and can provide resources to help out their campaign. Every branch needs a competent Organizing Dept Liaison in order to glean lessons from other campaigns, transmit pertinent info to the rest of the union, and help unite campaigns being waged in the same industry,' Pierce adds.

The Industrial Contacts are members of a given Industrial Union classification and serve as ways to communicate across regions and nations to link up the efforts of organizers in given industries. The IC system is seen by many as a way of the IWW organizing industrially by connecting various members and struggles. The ICs attempt to initiate dialogue and reports from all members in their industrial classification (which appears on your red card as 'Industrial Union No. followed by a number like 450 or 640.)

Pierce is proud of the Department, seeing the work it does as an important way of building confidence and experience in our membership. 'The ODB, ODLs, and ICs further the education of IWW organizers by sharing examples of the harsh realities and

the creative victories we've seen and building up the organizer with support and helpful criticism. The OD aggregates the best knowledge in the union and attempts to spread that knowledge and those methods out to other campaigns,' he says. The Organizing Department is one of the IWW's newest parts but is also quickly becoming one of its most important.

#### Bottom line:

-The OD educates members and coordinates their work

-Learning from our collective experiences is the best way to build the union

JOIN THE  
INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD (IWW)  
TWIN CITIES GENERAL MEMBERSHIP BRANCH  
FOR OUR 3RD ANNUAL  
RED NOVEMBER / BLACK NOVEMBER  
FALL FEAST

WE REMEMBER AND CELEBRATE  
THE ACHIEVEMENTS  
AND SACRIFICES OF THE LAST  
YEAR OF ORGANIZING  
TOGETHER - GATHERING  
STRENGTH FOR THE  
STRUGGLES AHEAD.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER  
21ST, 2009  
DINNER AT 6 PM,  
PROGRAM AT 7 PM  
WALKER COMMUNITY CHURCH  
AT 3104 16TH AVE S, MPLS,  
MN 55407

\$10 ADULTS AND \$5 KIDS.

IWW



## Upcoming Events.

**November GMB  
Tuesday, Nov 3, 7-9pm**  
IWW Office Space

**Space Grand Opening  
Party! Nov 7, 7 PM**  
Show at 9:30  
IWW Office Space

**Eyes on the Fries,  
Tuesday, Nov 10 7pm**  
MCTC Room L-3000 1501  
Hennepin Ave, Mpls

**Red November/Black  
November, November  
21st, 6pm Dinner,  
Program at 7,**  
Walker Church, Mpls 3104 16th  
Ave S

**December GMB, 12-1,  
7-9pm**  
IWW Office Space

**IWW Office Space  
Grain Belt Bottling  
Building  
79 13th Avenue NE  
Minneapolis, MN 55407**

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