

APPENDIX: CIC Recommends Against Amendment from 2004 General Assembly

Introduction

The Committee on Industrial Classification made a full report and recommendations to the 2004 General Assembly, which the Assembly's ad hoc committee recommended for adoption by the full Assembly. On the floor of the assembly, the following amendment:

FW Plawiuk M/S to amend proposal #5 of the motion to change the Industrial Reserve Organization to the Industrial Reserve Department as follows:

IU 010 - Casual, contingent, and temporary workers. All casual and temporary workers who frequently move between industries.

IU 020 - All unemployed workers who have no near prospect of regular employment, as during financial crisis or local job shortages

IU 030 - Unwaged workers - such as homemakers and live in care workers.

Proposal #5 is the CIC's proposed revision of the List of Industrial Unions. In the original proposal, the Industrial Reserve Organization is described as follows:

THE INDUSTRIAL RESERVE ORGANIZATION: All casual and temporary workers who frequently move between industries. All unemployed workers who have no near prospect of regular employment, as during financial crises or local job shortages caused by closure of a factory or mine.

The Assembly deferred further action on the Committee's recommendations to the 2005 Assembly and instructed the Committee to continue its work. The Assembly specifically provided that the Committee could make any recommendations to the 2005 Assembly that it saw fit, and was not bound by the foregoing amendment.

Your Committee has carefully and respectfully considered the amendment adopted by the 2004 Assembly and has concluded that it ought not to be part of the Committee's recommendations to the 2005 Assembly.

Summary

1. The amendment is inconsistent with the principles of industrial unionism, in that it would create nominal “industrial unions” that would not actually function as industrial unions at all, since they would have no connection with any particular industry, and would not be organized on the basis of class.

The amendment was offered by FW Eugene Plawiuk, who is noted for his eloquent advocacy for the rights of women in capitalist society, and appears to be aimed, not at building the economic power of the working class, but at affirming the importance of unwaged housework, especially by women (the great majority of homemakers), by granting those workers an “equal” status in the Chart of Industrial Unions. It is thus an essentially symbolic, political gesture.

The Committee absolutely agrees that homemakers’ work is vital, both to the well-being of the working class and to the capitalist system; that it is of equal dignity and necessity with wage work; and that its importance and validity should be affirmed in every way. But we feel that it would be inappropriate to use the industrial classification system to make such gestures.

Your Committee finds that unwaged adults who share a household with a wage-worker (a very small portion of the modern working class) should be organized as equal members in the Industrial Union to which the wage-worker belongs, rather than in a separate “industrial union” that has no relationship to any industry and exercises economic power only as a group of consumers.

2. Your Committee further finds that the amendment would prevent the proposed Industrial Reserve Organization from fulfilling the role envisioned for it by the Committee, and would not equip the I. W. W. to organize unemployed and casual workers effectively.

The Industrial Reserve Organization was conceived of as a quasi-independent, auxiliary organization, that would provide various services (such as language classes, hiring halls, skills training, etc.) to unemployed and casual workers in exchange for solidarity, thereby preventing these workers from playing their usual role under capitalism, as strikebreakers and replacement workers. The IRO’s members would not pay monthly dues, and would not have a vote in matters affecting the economic interests of wage-workers, though they would have a vote in the election of general officers, and in their own affairs.

Most unemployed and casual workers who move frequently among industries are unlikely to have the organizational skills needed to operate without considerable support from the General Organization. In the committee’s opinion, placing these workers in “industrial unions” without reference to any specific industry, and requiring them to function in the same way as other Industrial Unions in the organization is a practical mistake.

DISCUSSION

I. Classification of Unwaged Homemakers

A. Importance and Dependence of Homemakers

It is well known that unpaid housework (cooking, cleaning, care of children and disabled adults, etc.) is an essential factor in capitalist society. Your committee recognizes this fact, and further recognizes the desire of all members of the I. W. W. to pay the people who perform such work (who are mostly women) the respect and honor due them for playing such an important role in the economic and social life of the community. We share that desire.

It is also well known that unpaid homemakers in working-class households are exploited by capitalism, every bit as much as wage-workers, though the exploitation is indirect. Although working-class homemakers do not sell their labor power to the capitalist class, as wage-workers do, their work helps to create the labor power that wage-workers sell, and without them, wage-workers must shoulder additional and heavy burdens.

Further, the conventional structure of Western society has traditionally placed these burdens on women, along with laws and customs that have tended to force women into economic and emotional dependence on men. This has, all too often, resulted in exploitation of women, not just indirectly, by their menfolks' bosses, but directly, by men who have treated women as possessions, as slaves, forcing them to contribute to the creation of labor power, and using them for sexual services, but compensating them only at the lowest possible level. The dependence of women has often forced them to endure the most outrageous violence and humiliation from those who, according to traditional society's ideals, should be most concerned with their well-being.

One of the most important goals of the I. W. W., in abolishing the wage system, must be to free all women from dependence on men, and thus to allow them, along with men, the full development of their abilities and aspirations. To free wage-workers from the tyranny of the capitalist class, but to leave women subject to the tyranny of men, would be a false victory.

B. Oppression of Women & Homemakers Not Primarily Class Issues

It must be pointed out, however, that the exploitation of unwaged homemakers, and particularly of women, is not primarily a class issue. Oppression of women exists at every level of capitalist society and in every age of recorded history. The creation of modern classes did not change its essential character, but only changed the forms in which it is expressed in daily life.

It is also a fact that capitalism has forced most working-class women into the army of wage-workers. The modern working-class household in which one partner is the only breadwinner, and the other is exclusively a homemaker, is very rare indeed.¹

For these reasons, your Committee concludes that the oppression of homemakers and women is not primarily an issue of class, and is not the type of problem that Industrial Unionism is designed to solve.

C. Unpaid Labor Not Limited to Homemakers

The fact that homemakers are not paid for their labor does not set them apart from wage-workers, except as a matter of degree. The entire capitalist system is founded on the extortion of unpaid labor from wage-workers. That is the exploitation which the I. W. W. intends to abolish, the basis for the term “wage-slavery”. It is true that wage-workers are compensated for a part of their labor, but so in fact are homemakers—not in wages, but in the things that wages buy: food, clothing, shelter, etc.

Your Committee finds, therefore, that there is no reason for the structure of the organization, which is what we are concerned with, to treat homemakers differently from wage-workers.

D. Working-Class Households Should Be Viewed as Economic Units

Although there is a reasonable argument to be made, that wage-workers and the unwaged dependents in their households have divergent economic interests and should be treated as separate economic entities, your Committee has determined that a better view, for our purposes, is to consider the working-class household (whether it be a traditional, nuclear family, a co-operative group of housemates, a same-sex couple with children, or any other arrangement) as a single economic unit.

In general, a household tends to function as an economic unit, rather than as a collection of independent economic actors, even though individual members usually exercise some level of secondary independence.

We find that this view is also more in keeping with the aims of the I. W. W., for it promotes solidarity, co-operation, and mutual aid within the household, rather than opposition and conflict among members of the same class.

¹ For example, fewer than ten percent of U. S. households with a total income below \$50,000 include a full-time homemaker.

E. 2004 Amendment Inconsistent With I. W. W. Principles

In light of the foregoing, your Committee concludes that the 2004 Assembly's amendment, insofar as it deals with unwaged homemakers, is inconsistent with the aims and principles of the I. W. W. We find that this aspect of the 2004 amendment is primarily a political gesture, rather than a practical improvement to the Committee's proposals.

To the extent that it attempts a practical solution to the very real problems discussed above, the amendment uses the wrong tool: an industrial union is designed for waging the class struggle in the workplace, not for social reform in an area that, in its essential features, has little to do with class.

The amendment, moreover, would create an "industrial union" that has no connection to any particular industry, but cuts across all industries on the basis of living arrangements.

Worst, it would create a union that pits one member of a household against another, rather than uniting them for struggle against the exploiting class.

F. The I. W. W. Should Classify All Household Members Together

The I. W. W. Constitution provides,

no working-class student, apprentice, homemaker, prisoner or unwaged volunteer on a project initiated by the IWW or any subordinate body thereof shall be excluded from membership on the grounds that s/he is not currently receiving wages. Such workers may take membership in the Industrial Union for the industry in which they last worked, or for which they are now training, or at which they work part-time, or in the case of students and homemakers in Educational Workers I.U. 620 or Household Service Workers I.U. 680 respectively as may seem most practical.

Gen. Const., Art. II, Sec. 2.b. This provision suffers from many of the same defects as the Committee finds in the 2004 amendment, but we had not seen it as part of our mandate to comment on it until the amendment forced us to take up the issue.

Specifically, the provision assigns homemakers to an Industrial Union that was created as a political gesture, has no relationship to any capitalist

industry², and pits one member of a household against another, instead of uniting them for struggle against the capitalist class.

It is the opinion of your Committee that the I. W. W. should instead unite homemakers and wage-workers, in the class struggle as in the home, by classifying them together in the industry by which the wage-worker is exploited.

There is historical precedent for this view. In 1912, FW Covington Hall represented the General Executive Board of the I. W. W. at the convention of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers in Alexandria, Louisiana, which had voted by a big majority to affiliate with the I. W. W. In his memoir, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South*, Hall gives the following account:

There were no women at the convention, and the men wanted their wives to have the right of membership. A motion to this effect was offered on the floor and seconded. It was thoroughly discussed, and finally agreed, that a housewife, whether wife, mother, sister or daughter, would be allowed membership, her dues to be \$1 a year. As the call for the vote was made, Secretary Smith interrupted to ask, "Does this mean that house women will have a full and equal vote with men on all matters pertaining to the union?"

"Yes," was the unanimous answer.

"Even to the calling on and calling off of strikes?" asked Smith.

"Yes," they said. "A man's wife has as much right as he has to vote on strikes, for when a strike is on, the man can go hunting or fishing, and not have to hear hungry children whimpering for something to eat, while the woman has to stay home and take it all. Besides, but for the housework of their wives many men could not hold jobs. Yes, our intention is that she

² The Household Service Workers' I. U. No. 680, added in 1976, is defined under the present system as "All workers engaged in performing services in the home;" but it appears to have been devised, not for wage-workers in the domestic service industry, but for homemakers in I. W. W. households.

shall have full voting rights with us, even to the calling on and off of strikes.”

Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South and Other Writings*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1999), p. 129.

In response to this trend, the 1921 Convention took the reactionary step of excluding male workers’ wives and mothers from the breadwinners’ Industrial Unions, and lumping them all together in the Educational Workers’ I. U. No. 630 (currently No. 620), claiming that education of children was their “natural environment”.

It is the opinion of your Committee that this classification of women on the basis of their sex, rather than their relationship to the means of production, was misguided and contrary to the principles of the I. W. W. The 2004 Amendment, in our opinion, tacitly repeats this error, though in a different direction. Although it is outside our mandate to propose a constitutional amendment to this effect, we believe that the Southern woodsmen chose the proper method for ensuring the equality of homemakers in an industrial organization, and that the I. W. W. should adopt their solution.

II. Classification of Casual Workers & the Unemployed

A. Unemployment & Underemployment the Products of Capitalism

Capitalism creates both wage-slavery and unemployment. The introduction and improvement of machines is constantly throwing workers out of employment, where they serve as an “industrial reserve army” on which capital can draw when it needs to satisfy increased demand for products, to lower wages, or to replace striking workers. Despite numerous attempts by labor unions, these unemployed and under-employed workers have never been satisfactorily organized to take part in the class struggle, or to prevent their use by capital against employed workers. Your Committee sees a need to avoid the mistakes of the past in organizing this special category of workers.

B. A Possible Solution

A central goal of the I. W. W. is to eliminate unemployment altogether, first by forcing employers to reduce the hours of work so that all workers can find employment, and, ultimately by seizing control of production and abolishing the wage system that creates unemployment. But this cannot be done unless the organized workers can neutralize the “reserve army” or turn it to our own use.

The Committee on Industrial Classification proposes that the I. W. W. try what we believe is a new method for organizing unemployed workers, by creating an Industrial Reserve Organization that would unite the unemployed and irregularly-employed with other workers in a common struggle against the employing class.

As far as we are aware, previous attempts to organize the unemployed have primarily tried to use masses of unemployed workers to force the adoption of relief measures by government, or to compel employers to hire more workers, through intimidation, social pressure, etc. These have universally failed to secure lasting solutions to the problems of unemployment and under-employment. We are unaware of any successful program that has organized the unemployed to remove the *economic* advantages which capital derives from its industrial reserve army. Your Committee believes that such a program should be attempted, and to that end has proposed the formation of an Industrial Reserve Organization as an auxiliary body to the I. W. W.

C. Special Problems in Organizing the Unemployed

The membership of the IRO is likely to be highly transient, and, because of the destructive influences of the capitalist system, many members are likely to suffer with substance abuse and psychiatric disabilities, and to lack the basic life-skills (such as showing up regularly, meeting schedules, following through reliably on tasks, etc.) which are necessary to the effective running of any organization. A large portion of the IRO's membership will most likely not have the necessary skills and training for maintaining the level of organization and system required for a functioning Industrial Union. (The IRO, as proposed, does not include the unwaged homemakers included in the 2004 Amendment.)

As a result, the IRO will probably have to be subsidized by the rest of the Organization, which would probably supply paid organizers and administrators to help maintain continuity in an organization whose membership is likely to have a very high turnover rate. (Remember that one of the I. W. W.'s objectives is to abolish unemployment and casual labor. If we do our job right, the IRO's members will constantly be moving into Industrial Unions as they secure regular employment.)

D. Temporary Workers Needed For Stability

Your committee therefore views the separation of unemployed workers from temporary workers, as provided in the 2004 Amendment, as a practical error. An "industrial union" consisting entirely of unemployed workers is not likely to function well, because of lack of training and the debilitating effects of unemployment and poverty. Temporary and casual workers are likely to have

more stable lives and better life-skills than the majority of long-term unemployed workers.³ They will thus probably provide whatever organizational stability the IRO can supply from its own membership, and will probably be relied on as the principal rank-and-file leaders in the organization. They will most likely be the majority of the organization most of the time. They will staff the hiring halls and IRO offices, and provide relative continuity to the organization. Your Committee therefore finds that the IRO should not be divided into two groups as provided in the 2004 Amendment.

E. Further Study and Planning Required for Implementation

Like the rest of the Committee's proposals (and, indeed, like the current system, even if it were not brought up to date), the proposed Industrial Reserve Organization will have to be implemented at some later date. Your Committee recommends that, if its proposals are accepted by the membership, a special committee be appointed by the GEB to study the needs of unemployed and casual workers, and to propose a plan for establishing the IRO, including a design for appropriate structures, by-laws, and sources of funding, as well as a campaign plan and timetable.

CONCLUSION

While we are sure that the 2004 Amendment was offered out of the highest motives, it represents, in the opinion of your Committee, an inappropriate use of the I. W. W.'s classification system for symbolic purposes, and would defeat the purpose of the proposed Industrial Reserve Organization. The Committee therefore respectfully recommends that the 2005 General Assembly adopt its recommendations as reported, without adopting the 2004 Amendment.

Selected References:

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<http://faculty.washington.edu/gregoryj/cpproject/black.htm>

³ Note that the proposed plan calls for organizing temporary workers who usually work within a single industry in the same I. U. as regular workers in that industry. The IRO would include only temporary workers who change industries more than three or four times a year.

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