

University of Alberta

A Critical Ethnography of Education in the Edmonton Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

by

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To the love of my life—
Ashley Dawn Markus

Abstract

This study asks how members of the Edmonton Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) are learning to challenge capitalist hegemony.

A critical ethnographic method is used to explore the question. A history of education in the IWW and related movements provides a foreground to findings and analysis in this contemporary study.

A rich practise of workers' education is found in the Edmonton and wider IWW which—aided by actions of solidarity— influences working-class struggles beyond membership.

A combination of organic and traditional intellectuals engage in a revolutionary praxis of anarcho-syndicalism and related theories reinterpreted through struggles that attempt to challenge capitalist hegemony pre-figuratively in the workplace and on the picket lines of Edmonton.

Key words include: adult education, anarchism, ethnography, hegemony, organic intellectuals, Marxism, revolutionary praxis, social class, social movement learning, syndicalism, union organizing and workers' education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Join the IWW!

It's only 5p.m. and the sun is already down in Edmonton, Alberta as I sit with two fellow workers around a kitchen table, drinking beer on this cold winter evening. The conversation shifts around, then Mark says,

"Hey, Steve, tell Aaron about your problems at work."

Steve seems unsure about bringing it up but Mark encourages him so does.

"Oh, yeah, this job I have, they make us come in 15 minutes early before our shift even starts. Then they have us clean up after the shift, but we aren't getting paid for about 45 minutes."

"That's against Alberta labour law," I exclaim.

"Yeah, but do they really enforce it?" Steve asks.

"That can be a long process," I say, and then change gears. "What do your fellow workers think about it?"

"I haven't really talked to them about it. I think I should just quit."

I realize that Steve is at his wits' end and try to encourage something more productive.

"Why quit when you can organize? If you could get your coworkers onside it would be much easier to deal with it, you could all just refuse to show up without pay."

"They'd just fire us."

"That's what they want you to think... I bet your boss needs all of you more than you need him."

Mark stands up and says he is going to go get something.

I continue, "you need to organize, figure out who would be on board."

Mark seems unsure.

"You mean like a union? They'll just take my dues and sit in their offices."

“Yeah, some of them will do that.” I say. “But what is a union? For many it now stands for overpaid bureaucrats, but is a union not supposed to be a group of workers sticking up for one another? Why do you need a trade union to even do that?”

Mark comes back in the room with a small booklet.

“Here, check this out, it’s called Fire Your Boss, it talks about all sorts of strategies workers can use to get control on the job using direct action. Not by going to representatives who supposedly speak on our behalf, but by getting it ourselves. This can be as simple as folding our arms and refusing to work until we get what is owed to us.”

“Where did you get it?”

“The Industrial Workers of the World—the IWW. Remember I told you about it?”

“Yeah, that’s your union?”

“That’s right, and Aaron is part of it too. Anyone can join as long as they are a worker and not a boss.”

This conversation could have happened almost a hundred years ago during the height of working-class militancy and solidarity. But it was the winter of 2010, and similar conversations with members of the IWW occurred daily across the city. At about 50 active members, the Edmonton Branch of the IWW is the second largest in the world—part of a small but growing revival of a revolutionary union founded in 1905. Membership peaked at about 40,000 in 1923, but the IWW’s ideas have continued to reach millions of workers (Thompson & Bekken, 2006).

The IWW is an industrial union, and by industrial I do not mean only factories. An industrial union aims to organize an entire shop floor (the workplace) and industry, as opposed to separating labour based on trades, as is done by a trade union. An example of this difference could be a school where there are teachers, secretaries and janitors in the same workplace. In a trade union system, all of these workers could belong to different unions. Some may have no union representation at all. The workers may bargain at different times and be

pitted against one another, such as when one group is striking while the other crosses the picket line. Industrial unionists have long criticized this separation across the trades as destroying working-class solidarity. In an industrial union, all workers on a shop floor organize together.

The IWW is also distinct from many unions, both trade and industrial, in that it has revolutionary goals. Indeed, the IWW was formed in 1905 by a variety of radical organizers, communists, anarcho-syndicalists, socialists, and industrial unionists, who shared the explicit goal of creating a union for all workers towards a class-based revolution through a general strike. The idea that “an injury to one is an injury to all” brought them together—that workers always had the power to withdraw their labour and that, through their own solidarity, workers could create a new world, one without bosses.

Finally, the IWW is distinct in that it not only rejects capitalist rule, it rejects the idea that a hierarchy is necessary to class struggle. This includes the hierarchy of large trade unions, where well-paid leaders temper the labour movement, or the hierarchy of state power sought by a revolutionary cadre on behalf of “the people”. The IWW is run voluntarily by its rank-and-file members, called Wobblies—the origin of the term is up for debate—who rotate administrative roles through voting and vote collectively on each important union decision. The most basic unit is the shop committee, where workers of a shop floor vote on how they will organize. It is a pre-figurative way to organize for a more equal and democratic world.

After an initial explosion in members from 1905 to 1919, the IWW was brutally suppressed by the coercive forces buttressing capitalist hegemony. Membership declined to where only history books were written about this radical union that had once struck fear in the hearts of the ruling class. Contemporary academic treatises still focus almost exclusively on the IWW’s history; however, beginning in the 1960’s, the IWW began a slow but steady revival. The reasons for all this will be explored shortly. The important thing is that IWW members are now re-learning the meaning of solidarity in a global capitalist system through direct action.

I joined the IWW two years ago for work-related and ideological reasons while pursuing a Masters of Education degree at the University of Alberta. Prior to joining, I would not have had the conversation beginning this thesis with the same intent of building working-class solidarity. I came to the field of adult education academically from Anthropology, and practically from participation in social and environmental justice movements in Alberta. I became disillusioned with the politics of demand and wanted to be part of something that addressed the root causes of oppression in the present moment; but, without waiting for one totalizing revolution. This pre-figurative sentiment is found in the preamble to the IWW Constitution, which partially reads: “By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old” (see appendix 1). I have long been concerned about the *how* of organizing and wanted to be involved in something that practiced what it preached. As the IWW constitution and organizing principles are consistent with my own beliefs, and as a result of befriending members of a local branch of the IWW, I joined in 2008. One year later, for a Masters thesis, I began a formal ethnographic study looking at how the group uses education to achieve its goals.

Is it surprising that I identify with a revolutionary union founded in 1905? I am a well-educated, lower-middle-class activist, in what are supposedly post-modern times. However, notions of rank-and-file workers having control over the means of production, through direct action, solidarity and democratic organizing, have their appeal. Perhaps it provides reconciliation for a desire to challenge the hegemony of capitalism without falling into either a tyrannical dictatorship of the proletariat in a traditional Leninist sense, or the idealism of some streams of so-called anarchism. From a pedagogical standpoint, I have been impressed with the breadth of knowledge in the IWW which is organically derived from workplace organizing, solidarity actions on picket lines and member-run education courses. Knowledge is passed down by new and older IWW members alike. Books about class struggle are being dusted off and reinterpreted in our own times.

As an educator, I was interested in how Wobblies become intellectuals who challenge capitalist hegemony and produce new alternatives, even pre-

figuratively. I came to understand intellectual formation in the Branch¹ by Gramsci's (1971) concepts of organic and traditional intellectuals. Members who may have never gone to university or even completed high school have nonetheless read about theories of dialectical materialism and, more importantly, participated in forms of class struggle. There are members who were familiar with Marx from university; but, have since learned from the IWW about class struggle in ways not offered through formal academia. I believe they begin to feel a sense of solidarity with the working-class in ways that could not come from a book or the classroom. My research reveals that knowledge gained from participation and collective reflection on class struggle is relevant for an adult education towards a more humane economic and social reality.

Introduction to the Theory and Methodology

In this research, I have explored a contemporary example of the working-class attempting to challenge capitalist hegemony. This challenge is intertwined with a class-based pedagogy. I hold the belief that the fundamental structure of capitalism inevitably leads to a conflict between workers and bosses, in a traditional sense of proletariat versus bourgeoisie, and the often blurry divide of the working-class and managers of the professional middle-class (Ehrenreich, 1989). This struggle continually creates forms of working-class knowledge, inside and outside of unions, as “educational change is the indeterminate result of confrontations and negotiations between historically specific groups of class-based agents” (Livingstone, 1999, p. 200). Unions can, however, facilitate knowledge and skill sharing that may otherwise be out of reach for working people. Indeed, “*informal learning* holds a special place for subordinate social groups such as these, and [it is] much more extensive amongst all unionized workers than any type of formal education” (Livingstone & Sawchuck, 2004, p.

¹ In the IWW groups of industrial unions within a region or city form an IWW branch to coordinate efforts by voting at assemblies. The Edmonton IWW this seems to have been formed in reverse. It started as a branch (the criteria is ten members) which later began organizing workers in different industries; but, more on this later.

4). Yet a union with a pro-business stance will dissuade its workers from an education critical of the oppressive employer-employee relationship (Taylor, 2001). My research is on the learning that takes place in the organic process of workers' struggle formalized in a union that organizes with the explicit aim of destroying the unequal relationship of boss and worker.

Through this study, the question I sought to address was: *How are Edmonton IWW members learning to challenge capitalist hegemony?* I chose an ethnographic method and immersed myself in the Edmonton Branch of the IWW for eight months as a participant observer. I was engaged in a wide range of activities while learning the social and educational processes involved in attempts to challenge capitalist hegemony through direct action and solidarity. I took extensive journal notes about learning in non-formal educational settings, such as workshops, and informally through social interaction. I also noted how this learning was connected to workplace organizing or actions expressing worker solidarity. These observational data were triangulated with five semi-structured interviews with branch members and a group discussion about my initial findings.

To understand how learning and education happens in the branch, I drew on Paula Allman's (1999) concept of a revolutionary praxis, influenced by the work of Marx and Gramsci. Praxis is the knowledge gained from the combination of theory and action. Allman differentiates between a

Limited/reproductive praxis and critical/revolutionary praxis. The first is the norm. The second is necessary to radical, social transformation; however, since it goes against the grain of our present conditions, it must be infused, in all contexts, with an alternative educational approach, an approach that can be applied in informal or what may appear to be noneducational contexts and formal ones as well. (p. 85)

As will become clear in my analysis, I identify education in the IWW as a revolutionary praxis because it is imbedded in workplace organizing and has revolutionary goals. I use Gramsci (1971; Jones, 2006) for an analysis of

hegemonic struggle and the intellectual roles of IWW members. Social hegemony is partially defined by:

The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci, 1971, p.12)

When “spontaneous” consent fails it falls upon the coercive forces of the state to quell any crisis (Gramsci, 1971). This is one important lesson of Gramsci’s theories taken to heart by revolutionaries. Another is that hegemony is never complete, and with each hegemonic order there contains the ingredients for its undoing. Within capitalism, this dialectic is class struggle.

Gramsci’s theories on hegemony can be divided into those that provide a “political tool for construction of a revolutionary people’s coalition” and as “a tool of historical and cultural analysis enabling us to evaluate those strategies by which different groups attempted to form hegemonic blocs in the past” (Jones, 2006, p. 44). Both influence this research, but in the former I distinguish between revolutionary approaches using a vertical social arrangement (hierarchy) and those using more horizontal forms of organizing, as in the IWW, which views these more decentralized forms organizing as both a goal and a process.

Using Gramsci’s theories as a tool of social analysis, I have emphasized the importance of class-based knowledge and control. Gramsci argued that, as a class, workers could produce their own organic intellectuals in the creation of a historic bloc for a revolutionary hegemony. Education, an important site of hegemonic reproduction, can also be used to challenge the dominant hegemony of capitalism (Gramsci). This process is dialectical to material conditions and “intellectual cells” of an emerging class are “born along with their first economic counterparts” (p. 18) which, in capitalism, includes those with unequal power in relationships of workplace production. As an emerging group, organic intellectuals struggle against the old system and attempt to create a new order. It is

not until this group is “completely equipped for all its social functions” (p. 18) that it can compete for hegemonic domination.

Gramsci saw this revolutionary hegemony happening through political parties with organic and traditional intellectuals. Using a Gramscian analysis has required a reinterpretation within a global capitalist system as opposed to a rapidly industrializing Italy, and through a revolutionary process practised on the shop floor as opposed to seeking state hegemony. As a Marxist, Gramsci explored class struggle as a response to the alienation of capitalist relations. This study explores struggle in response to alienation from capital *and* state power. It departs from Gramsci in his later writings on the strategy of seizing the state with a revolutionary party as a necessary or desirable way to achieve a revolutionary society. While drawing on later social analysis of Gramsci to understand hegemony and intellectuals (1971); it is the earlier, more libertarian Gramsci, where similarities in strategy can be found (Gramsci, 1920; Trudell, 2007; Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009).² Gramsci’s own political education represents that the history of socialism:

Since its emergence... has been divided into two main tendencies: libertarian socialism, which rejects the state and hierarchy more generally; and political socialism, which advocates ‘a political battle against capitalism waged through...centrally organised workers’ parties aimed at seizing and utilising State power to usher in socialism’. Anarchism is an example of the first strand; classical Marxism is an example of revolutionary political socialism, while social democracy stands for peaceful and gradual political socialism” (Thorpe in Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 6).

² I regard Gramsci’s writing and organizing during the factory occupations of Turin in 1920 to be much more libertarian and shop floor oriented than Gramsci’s writings as the leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) one year later.

The first two strands of socialism influenced the IWW, but I will show that libertarian socialism, specifically anarcho-syndicalism, had and continues to have the greatest influence.

By participating in a praxis of action and reflection with the Edmonton IWW, I provide an ethnographic study that provides an insider understanding of how a revolutionary, class-based pedagogy can be taught. A similar methodology was used in IWW member David Graeber's (2009) ethnography of anarchists within the anti-globalization movements, but ethnography of the IWW itself, however, is unique in that almost all other academic accounts of the IWW have been historical. The only exceptions I have found of academic research on an extant IWW group is a brief archival analysis of an IWW *Fire Your Boss* pamphlet from the 2002 North American Anarchist Gathering (Atkinson, 2006); and a report by Carleton Parker (1919), then Director of the California Commission on Immigration and Housing who concluded that class conflict and the emergence of the IWW were psychological issues in response to economic problems (in Higbie, 1997).

Overview of Thesis

I will structure my presentation by first defining a few terms and concepts that frame this thesis in Chapter 2. I explain how I conceptualize class, how Marxism, anarcho-syndicalism and the history of industrial unions in North America are relevant. I will provide theories and examples of how a worker-controlled society might be structured. I then begin to weave the development of education and movement intellectuals throughout this history, and position the research within relevant theories of social movement learning. I start with a brief history of the intellectual activity involved in challenging capitalism through revolutionary working-class movements, specifically through the IWW and including historically similar trends within other industrial unions and the anarcho-syndicalists of Europe. I outline the general trends in workers' education, later known as labour education, and distinguish working-class and union-run

education from more reactionary forms of adult education aimed at suppressing class conflict and building consensus to capitalist hegemony.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the methodology of critical ethnography and defend my role as an insider researcher. I show how critical ethnography is a suitable methodology for research with social movements by its willingness to adopt a shared analysis of the oppressive relationship being challenged, in this case capitalist hegemony. I then detail the specific methods used in this ethnography to collect data such as interviews, participant observation and journaling.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present my findings by combining a rough chronological account with themes that arose in the research. Chapter 4 is an overview of the different ways Wobblies are learning in the Edmonton IWW: the process of joining; early experiences with the IWW; non-formal education such as workshops; and informal interactions including mentorship, literature and song. I then provide several accounts of the confidence gained by Wobblies through trial and error and a sense of solidarity. I continue to present my findings in Chapter 5, where I show how Wobblies begin to identify as workers and offer data on hegemonic struggle framed by four questions: what is being critiqued, what is being proposed, what is being acted upon, and can it change society?

In Chapter 6, I provide an analysis of the data and discuss themes arising from my theoretical framework of revolutionary praxis, hegemony and intellectuals to show how Wobblies learn as participants in a social movement but also as workers, making them organic intellectuals. I discuss the role of intellectuals in hegemonic struggle and provide some suggestions for a broader struggle based on a Gramscian analysis. I conclude this ethnography by suggesting implications of my research for the IWW from collective reflection, for social movement learning theorists by presenting contemporary empirical data on revolutionary praxis, and for adult education in efforts towards a class-based revolutionary pedagogy.

Chapter 2: History and Context of Education in the Edmonton IWW

When I first joined the IWW, there were a few concepts which, once grasped, aided greatly in understanding how learning took place. I will provide a few of those concepts before a historical summary of radical and independent workers' education. To begin my historical review, I will explore the role of intellectuals in the Canadian labour movement and the global West more generally, specifically within the IWW.

I have looked to the literature of union education and radical working-class history, including literature on and by the IWW, with a focus on related ideological streams and the local context of western Canada. A visit to the National Archives of Canada has provided a much needed start to this chapter, especially upon finding numerous folders of correspondence letters between the RN-WMP³³ and the Canadian Military during World War I, detailing IWW surveillance and suppression. Finally, the Edmonton IWW has been very helpful in providing resources and an oral history of the branch.

Marxism and Class Struggle

The IWW is not a Marxist organization; however, as it is involved in class struggle, Marxist and neo-Marxist concepts on the subject are important to understanding the IWW. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels (1848) observe that “society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — bourgeoisie and proletariat” (Marx and Engels, 1848, p.1). Similarly, the opening to the preamble of the IWW Constitution reads:

The working-class and the employing class have nothing in common.
There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among
millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing
class, have all the good things of life.

³³ RN-WMP, The Royal North-West Mounted Police, was a precursor to the contemporary RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The view that society is polarized between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is reflected in both. The working-class will soon be:

The largest single class in history, in part due to the industrialisation of large parts of Eastern Europe and Russia, East Asia, Southern Africa, and Latin America. There are at present more industrial workers in South Korea alone than there were in the entire world when Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, and industrial workers are only one part of the working-class. (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 10)

Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1977) criticized contemporary orthodox Marxist views as ignoring the rise of the professional middle-class. While Marx recognized the middle-class, he thought it would “sink gradually into the proletariat” (Marx and Engels, 1948, p. 3). The growth of the middle-class in capitalist countries (Ehrenrich & Ehrenreich, 1977) and the bureaucratic class in Soviet countries (Ehrenreich, 1989) was one of the crises with which the 20th Century Marxists in the West struggled. It is an intrinsically difficult thing to find the edges of class. Marx died just as he was beginning this task (Lukacs, 1972). Since the IWW divides classes starkly between two opposing groups in its constitution, 100 years ago as today, how does it reconcile this binary blurring? The definition of “any person or household that does not own sufficient means of production as to have a relatively high living standard without dependency on paid work” (Asimakopoulos, 2007, p. 3) comes close to the IWW concept of the working-class, and would certainly include most of the lower-middle-class.

Ehrenreich (1989) defines the professional middle-class “as all those people whose economic and social status is based on education, rather than on the ownership of capital or property” (p. 12). Within this group she identifies two major subgroups, the professionals and managers, and draws a continuum across them:

At the lower end there are hard-to-classify occupations like schoolteaching, which is certainly based on education, but which, despite

aspirations, falls short of the kind of income and prestige awarded to professions traditionally dominated by men... At the much more thinly populated upper end there are executives whose wealth, decision-making power, and ownership of stock surely place them in higher class—the corporate elite that serves as an American ruling class. (p. 12)

According to Ehrenreich, the key difference between the middle-class and the working-class is that:

The professional or manager is granted far more autonomy in his or her work and is expected to be fairly self-directing much of the time. In fact, his or her job is often to define the work of others: to conceptualize and command... [the] difference is not only a matter of money but of authority, influence and power. (p. 15)

Professionals—teachers or social workers for example—may have authority over aspects of the working-class; but, it is authority in the workplace as managers that provides the boundaries for the purposes of this thesis. Based upon past votes in the IWW, criteria for being working-class have fallen to those who do not have the authority to hire and fire an employee, because it is such a stark exercise of power. Those on the lower ends of the professional middle-class, such as nurses, teachers or social workers, are considered workers by the IWW

Class Struggle

As a system, capitalism is fraught with contradictions. The one most meaningful for this study is class struggle:

Between capital and labour: capitalist owners of the means of production attempt to take over more and more of the potential means of producing vendible commodities and to claim more unpaid labour time (surplus value) from workers in the form of profits; workers try to keep for their own consumption and security as much as possible of this value via wage bargains and by limiting and controlling their exertions. The specific

coercive or co-operative forms of this extraction process vary over time and space but remain pivotal determinants of social structure.
(Livingstone, 1999, p. 182-183)

This struggle is where the “primary historical agency for changing the economy or mode of production may be found” (p. 182). As a neo-Marxist, Livingstone is careful to clarify that these class relations are not static, and that change comes from the “relations between people themselves as historical actors constructing, reproducing and changing social structures” (p. 181).

Class struggle is a response to the alienation that one experiences as a worker whose labour is exploited and whose agency is diminished. In his book *Marx and Education*, Small (2005) identifies four related forms of alienation conceptualized by Marx. The first is where “the worker puts his life into the object, but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object” (p. 272). The second is a “separation of workers from their own productive activity;” workers don't own the means of production. Small suggests that this alienation is more fundamental than the first, because it involves a forced labour where workers' lives begin when their jobs ends. Third is the workers' alienation from the world, so that they come to experience life through private property relations. Fourth is alienation of the individuals from each other, because they are only related through the commodities they exchange.

Wobblies, anarcho-syndicalists and some neo-Marxists tend to see a fifth form of alienation arising from hierarchical relations arranged for capitalist production through the workplace and the state. This conceptualization of alienation within Marxist literature can be found in more neo-Marxist and cultural Marxist analyses beginning with Gramsci. Within anarcho-syndicalist texts, this notion occurs much sooner (Bakunin, 1869; Schmidt & van der Walt, 2009). Allman (2001) argues that “one of the problems with the socialist critique, both before and after Marx, was that it focused on the results of symptoms of the fundamental relations rather than on the relations themselves” (p. 62). Instead, she says, it is through the social relations in which our lives are arranged that the source of alienation can be found. Workers are economically and politically

alienated from their own self-determination. This is one of the most striking contrasts between orthodox Marxists and more libertarian socialists in that the latter includes an expanded analysis of the problems of hierarchical alienation. Classical Marxists see the State as an intermediate stage necessary between capitalism and a "free communism sometime of the future" (Schmidt and van der Walt p. 53). For libertarian socialists, such as anarchists, the State centralizes power and requires management by elites.

Anarchism, Syndicalism and Industrial Unions

Wobblies have historically been quick to point out that the organization does not espouse one ideology. The ideas of the early IWW "bore some resemblance to the European labour ideology known as syndicalism, but the North American Wobblies were less theoretically inclined and more concerned with the practical question of building revolutionary industrial unionism" (Heron, 1996, p. 38). Schmidt and van der Walt (2009) argue that the early IWW was "characterised by a general ignorance of the anarchist roots of its syndicalist approach" (p. 143). However, "[e]very scholar who has dealt extensively with the IWW has considered it as a form of syndicalism" (Foner in Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 160). While many members in the branch now identify with anarcho-syndicalism, others state that they are more interested in revolutionary industrial unionism, which is related but has a more American, Australian, British and Canadian history. However, more than one Edmonton Wobbly has told me there is a distinct IWW philosophy all its own. Regardless, these historical movements impacted the formation and evolution of the IWW. I take the stance that the IWW is of the syndicalist current of anarchism, just not explicitly so. Therefore, I will attempt to define these movements and their contributions to the type of radical workers' education I am trying to define.

Anarchism did not appear in Seattle, 1999, wearing a balaclava and smashing a window. It has a hundred-year history as a movement of struggle by the "working-class[sic] and peasantry—the 'popular classes'" (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p 6). Anarchists believe that social change must come from below

and that “these two groups constitute the great majority of humanity, [they] are the only ones with a basic interest in changing society as well as the power to do so. This struggle from below must be “organised democratically, and outside of and against the state and mainstream political parties” (2009, p. 7). It stresses individual freedom and direct action. Schmidt and van der Walt argue that syndicalism is a type of anarchism and has always been the:

Most important strand in anarchism...the view that unions—built through daily struggles, a radically democratic practice, and popular education—are crucial levers of revolution, and can even serve as the nucleus of a free socialist order. (p. 7)

From a Russian context, Damier (2009) defines anarcho-syndicalism as:

A fundamental tendency in the global workers’ movement. It is made up of revolutionary unions of workers (“syndicat” in French means “trade union”) acting to bring about a stateless (anarchist) self-managed society (p. 1).

Damier identifies revolutionary industrial unionism as an Anglo-Saxon version of the international workers’ trend of revolutionary syndicalism. Revolutionary industrial unions sought to provide the tools by which workers of an entire industry, through their solidarity, could democratically run production—and by extension broader aspects of the economy and, therefore, society. The IWW has been the most successful and enduring North American example of a revolutionary industrial union. The anarchists in industrial unions believe that revolutionary syndicalism can lead to an anarchist or socialist society and they act upon these ideas.

Industrial unions, including the IWW, can be contrasted with trade unions, which developed around divisions by craft. Within a complex institution such as a school or large factory, there will be many different types of expertise. The result of organizing by craft is that workers can be played against one another. For example, when workers are asked by management to cross picket lines of

coworkers in different crafts and unions. As well, trade union leadership has historically supported the fundamentals of capitalism and state hegemony (Gompers, et al., 1991).

Industrial unions are distinct from trade unions because their membership is drawn from across an industry instead of dividing workers along craft lines. They have historically have the most progressive and revolutionary visions of society in the labour movement. In the United States and Canada, they were the first to include women and people of colour first to conceptualize all workers in solidarity, challenging capitalist hegemony through union organizing.

Models of Democratic Workers' Control

Syndicalists shared with Marxists the belief that capitalism had to be overturned before workers, who created wealth through their labour, would be able to claim it. Until that day came, bosses would exploit workers by stealing the profit made by their own labour. The difference between the two ideologies essentially came down to strategy. Whereas Marxists sought workers' power through attempts at seizing state power, the:

Syndicalists believed that politics was a trap—that the worker's weapon was self-evident. “Without our brain and muscle, not a single wheel can turn” goes a verse from the Wobbly anthem, *Solidarity Forever*. (Caragata, 1979, p. 70)

This song later became the anthem of the trade union movement. The verse refers to a general strike, a syndicalist strategy where workers of all industries refuse to work in order to achieve certain ends. Most general strikes are limited, or political, in that they seek reforms of an existing government through the economic power of workers simultaneously laying down their tools. A general strike is revolutionary when it seizes the economy through workers' solidarity and democratic forms of workers' self-management. The general strikes of 1919 in Canada, most notably in Winnipeg but also in Edmonton and Vancouver, were

done with this intention. They succeeded for several weeks until they were suppressed.

What a revolutionary society, democratically run by workers, would look like is ultimately up to workers themselves. However, there are some theoretical and practical examples. A radically democratic, worker-run society has been theorized by Bakunin (1872), Gramsci (1971), Livingstone (1999), Pannekoek (1948), and Rocker (1938).⁴ Livingstone suggests that more democratic and horizontal forms of workplace organizing would allow for greater control and use by workers of the knowledge they have that is underutilized in a capitalist society (Livingstone, 1999). The Canadian general strikes and anarchists of the Spanish Revolution provide examples in practice. Workers independently controlled production successfully until they were crushed by reactionary forces, the Canadian state closer to home (Bjorge, 2006), or by Franco's fascist forces in Spain, as aided by Hitler and Mussolini (Bales, 2004; Barclay, 1990). These events demonstrate the formation of new forms of independent working-class knowledge (Gramsci in Trudell, 2007; Livingstone, 2004).

Gramsci once remarked that the Canadian "industrial strikes have taken on the overt character of a bid to install a soviet regime". He was not referring to the Soviets centralized by the state, but rather the earlier "Russian uprising of 1905" (Bjorge, 2006, p. 2). Gramsci's view of the soviets was based on the Left-Communist idea of factory councils where workers could democratically control industry. This is similar to the idea of revolutionary industrial unionism, but departing on the strategic question of seizing the state. Gramsci (1971) had experienced the capacity of workers to take over and run an entire city themselves in Turin, Italy from 1919-20. This deeply influenced Gramsci and his vision to "vigorously defend and promote the essence of Marxism—the self-activity of the working-class as the heart of the revolutionary process—against those who claimed to lead the class according to Marxist principles" (Trudell, 2007, p. 7). In the Turin occupations, workers formed factory councils where, like the strike

⁴ Within anarchist movements, the notion of a revolutionary movement creating a new hegemony actually precedes Gramsci by several decades (Shor in Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009).

committees of Canada in 1919, they directly ran production. During the factory occupations in Turin by hundreds of thousands of workers, Gramsci (1920, in Trudell, 2007) wrote passionate articles for his newspaper, *L'Ordine Nuovo*. He created his theory from observations of the radical act of factory takeovers, in which the working-class “rediscovers itself, acquiring consciousness of its organic unity and counterposes itself as a whole to capitalism” (p. 9).⁵

However, as in Canada, the general strikes were eventually suppressed by the state. This led Gramsci to conclude that economic power alone would not suffice in challenging capitalist hegemony, and that political and cultural leadership was needed to form a historic bloc. This led Gramsci to the Italian Communist Party (PCI) as a vehicle to revolution. But, his earlier views are very similar to the outlook of the anarchist strategy of revolutionary syndicalism, that democracy should be practiced directly on the shop floor without the power of the working-class being surrendered to a political party.

The notion of a socialist *and* libertarian worker democracy was a prominent view in the First Internationale until Marx and his allies dominated the agenda. Anarcho-syndicalism is a direct descendant of the libertarian wing of the First Internationale, the most notable figure of the time being Mikhail Bakunin (Damier, 2009; Rocker, 2004). The difference between Gramsci’s vision of the factory council and the strike committees anarcho-syndicalists is that Gramsci came to believe that the political and economic realm had to be captured both by workers through their solidarity, *and* in the Marxist-Leninist sense of a political vanguard that seizes control of the state and establishes a socialist hegemony.

Those with anarcho-syndicalist or revolutionary industrial union ideologies believe workers must organize from the beginning the way they want the workplace and, by extension, society to operate: that is, direct, democratically and horizontally. In contrast, communists see human society eventually achieving a borderless world but that the dictatorship of the proletariat must happen through the seizure of state power.

⁵ Many of the writers for *L'Ordine nuovo* were anarchists and their writings were a good fit for the popular culture at the time (Levy in Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009).

Gramsci had also heard of the IWW (Hoare & Smith, 1971) and, state hegemony aside, his views on factory councils were similar to fellow worker Father Haggerty's⁶ *Wheel of Industrial Unionism*, originally printed in the *Voice of Labour* (1905, see appendix 2). This was a proposed method whereby workers could control their industries at the point of production and, through the solidarity of workers in all industries, create a "new society within the shell of the old" (p. 1). Influenced by anarcho-syndicalism and industrial unionism, the organizing structure of the IWW pre-figuratively modeled the way a revolutionary society could horizontally function. This strategy is known as the "embryo hypothesis" (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 155). One example of this hypothesis working was that, even with 40, 000 members in 1923, the IWW only had two paid staff members (Thomas & Bekken, 2006). The bureaucratic structure often found in unions was replaced by volunteers, thereby democratizing the workload and control of information. The first edition of the *One Big Union Monthly*, one of the many IWW newspapers, proclaimed:

Our aim is not to establish a political dictatorship of the proletariat supported by force of arms, but to remodel the world in such a manner that there shall be nobody to be dictator over. We intend to make everybody a worker of some kind or other, thereby removing conflicting class interests and the necessity for dictatorship. (Ebert, 1919, p. 25)

The interest of this chapter is to provide a theoretical and historical context for education within the IWW. So I will now turn to some of the working-class precursors of intellectual thought in the IWW and trace some historically similar movements.

Workers' Education and Intellectuals

The terms "workers' education", "labour education" and "labour studies" correspond with three distinct movements and periods in American and Canadian

⁶ Father Haggerty was a priest turned IWW and expelled from the Church, see below.

labour history (Dwyer, 1977; Taylor, 2001). Labour education, or union education, has its roots in an older workers' education. It "refers to the education and training offered by labour unions... to their members and representatives" (Spencer & Taylor, 2006, p. 208). Workers' education was the first and most radical of these discourses. It involved traditional and organic intellectuals combining efforts for an education responsive to struggles on the shop floor *and* efforts to change society. In Canada, a radical workers' education was offered through industrial unions, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the more militant trade unions often controlled by the communist parties.

Overall, working-class adult education underwent a shift in Canada and the U.S. starting in the 1920s:

From an older workers' education that stressed education for social change, was open to unorganized and organized workers and was largely a social movement independent of trade unions, to a newer "labour education" that focused on training union officials to participate in collective bargaining. (Taylor, 2001, p. 47)

The 1880s to the 1930s marked the high point for a workers' movements that sought workplace control. Education during this period was front and centre in organizing efforts. When workers made revolutionary gains, or moved towards developing that capacity, there was an increase and radicalizing shift in the development of movement intellectuals, schools and literature. This can be seen in: the 1880s-1920s in the formation of the Industrial Unions (Gramsci, 1920; Leberstein, 1999); during WWI in Canada leading up to the general strikes of 1919 (Bjorge, 2006; Palmer 1992; Taylor, 2001); in the decades before 1936 in Spain (Bales, 2004); in the 1970s and 1980s with popular educators entering the labour movement (Nesbit, 2006; Taylor, 2001); and from the revival of radical workers' movements today (Graeber, 2009; Lynd & Grubacic, 2008).

The development of organic working-class knowledge challenges notions of anti-intellectualism in the working-class (Livingstone, 1999). The history of working-class knowledge actually demonstrates a "gap between workers'

knowledge and workplace utilization [that] has existed since the inception of modern industry in the early 1800s” (p. 188). Anarcho-syndicalists saw unions as providing an education for workers that would not only aid in challenging capitalist hegemony but provide the knowledge necessary to run society:

The organisation of the trade sections and their representation in the Chambers of Labour creates a great academy in which all the workers can and must study economic science; these sections also bear in themselves the living seeds of the new society which is to replace the old world.
(Bakunin in Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 154)

For Rocker, the union was a “practical school, a university of experience, from which [workers drew] draw instruction and enlightenment in richest measure” (in Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 184). Organizing was not enough for revolution and:

It was absolutely critical that there was ongoing “educational work” “directed toward the development of independent thought and action”. This involved, as Rocker saw it, “the effort to make clear to the workers the intrinsic connections among social problems,” and “by technical instruction and the development of their administrative capacities to prepare them for their role of re-shapers of economic life” (Rocker in Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 184)

Worker intellectuals provided a popular education and were “part of a larger project of forming a revolutionary counterculture as a piece of the project of building counterpower” (p. 185-186).

Organic intellectuals of the working-class began to appear in significant numbers during the 1880s. During this time, what Gramsci would call organic intellectuals were then “brainworkers” (Palmer, 1991; Taylor, 2009), the “self-taught working-class contributors” to newspapers like *Industrial News* and the *Palladium of Labour* (Taylor, p. 11). By the early 20th Century, the “emergence of inexpensive books and a socialist and working-class press... permitted even

unskilled workers to buy books” (Peterson, 1986, p. 157). This expanded the range of ideas for organic intellectuals and working-class organizers. These educators used a diverse range of methods beyond workshops to spread their message, including: songs, cartoons, posters (Merlyn, 2003) theatre (IWW, c.a.1920) and soapbox oration (May, 2009). As intellectuals, they were by and large not university educated. Therefore:

The revolutionary syndicalism of the early 20th Century was not born in the heads of theoreticians. It was born in the practice of the workers' movement which sought as its own doctrine—above all, the practice of direct action. (Damier, 2009, p. 23)

The revolutionary praxis of class struggle theory and practice was a dialectical process, and anarcho-syndicalists “not only took part in the most important social upheavals and conflicts of the 20th Century... in many countries they formed the centre of a special, inimitable, working-class culture with its own values, norms, customs and symbols” (Damier, p. 3).

The institutional origins of revolutionary syndicalism can be traced to Paris in 1886, with the creation of the *bourses de travail*. These were originally organized municipally as:

Labour exchanges for the workforce but they soon began to function as workers' clubs and cultural-educational centres... [and] became a unique kind of centre for the self-organization and mutual aid of workers: they helped the unemployed and people seeking work; they also helped the sick and victims of workplace accidents; they created libraries, social museums, and both specialist and generalist courses; and they carried propaganda for the creation of unions, backing this up in a systematic way by organizing strikes. (p. 13)

These early anarchist educational institutions had two goals: one was to “promote more libertarian methods of education along with a democratic and participatory pedagogy” and the other to “overcome the inequalities in education

arising from an inequitable social and economic order.” (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 186).

Along with an institutional presence, revolutionary syndicalism was strengthened by the creation of strong imagined communities, and education was crucial to this process. At the turn of the 20th Century, radical worker intellectuals would attack capitalist hegemony with a rich culture of critique and offered alternatives, providing a powerful complement to militant organizing and direct action (Burgmann, 2005). French anarcho-syndicalists pre-WWI placed great importance upon producing a revolutionary culture through everyday political acts, songs and artwork contrasting with bourgeois society in what many viewed as the actual schools of a revolutionary working-class-consciousness (Leberstein, 1999).

Schmidt and van der Walt (2009) describe a “Glorious Period” of Anarchism from 1890-1920 when anarchist schools were organized around the world: in Mexico there was the “La Escuela del Rayo y del Socialismo (“The School of the Ray of Socialism”); in Egypt an “anarchist nucleus” founded the “Free Popular University in Alexandria”; in Cuba, the *lectura* was a space created by workers to read aloud during working hours; in early 20th Century Brazil, “anarchists alone ‘offered the transplanted, alienated and oppressed workers a sense of their own decency and dignity’, with ‘free schools, people’s universities, social drama groups,’ and ‘intense educational, sociological... propaganda’”. In China, “anarchists formed several similar bodies, such as the Labour Movement Training Institute and the National Labour University, both established in 1927” (p. 186-187).

Specifically, the Spanish Revolution of 1936, Catalonia, provides one of the few examples of an anarchist revolution replacing modern state hegemony and began:

On July 18, 1936, [when] Spanish generals announced the formation of a military government. When troops moved into position in Barcelona, they were confronted by armed workers' patrols and immense crowds, and were overwhelmed. Within a few months, millions of acres of land and

thousands of industrial enterprises were under the direct control of workers and peasants. (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 5)

Franco received military aid from Hitler and Mussolini, but Western powers followed a policy of appeasement. Thousands of volunteers from around the world, including Canada and the United States, rushed to the aid of the popular classes. Unfortunately, the revolution was crushed by Franco with support from Hitler and Mussolini (Bales, 2004; Barclay, 1990).

This revolution had a historical and educational context. The anarcho-syndicalist urban workers of Spain in the earlier part of the 20th Century departed from their Marxist comrades, with the exception of Gramsci, in their opinions of peasant movements. They made a very pre-Freirian assumption that “the illiterate is not necessarily so crude [*bruto*] and that everywhere there are to be found true intelligences obscured by lack of education” (Peirats, 1964 in Bales, 2004, p. 26). Over several decades, anarcho-syndicalist worker and peasant intellectuals created:

A rich and dense network of anarchist community centres, schools, and libraries- the *ateneus libertarias* (‘libertarian athenaeums’) that existed in every district and village of anarchist strength—and a vast anarchist press. (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009, p. 185)

This adult education created anarcho-syndicalist leaders amongst the peasantry, both as adult educators in their own right, and by seizing and collectivizing the countryside in 1936 (Bales, 2004). The anarcho-syndicalists of Spain in 1936 provide one example of a workers’ movement that draws on distinct methods of horizontally organized education, another being revolutionary industrial unions.

The Knights of Labour was a precursor to industrial unions that began in Philadelphia, 1869. It differed from previous unions because it welcomed all workers regardless of gender, ethnicity or craft (with the exception of Chinese

workers)⁷ and began the practice whereby workers could either join a trade assembly based on craft, as had been the tradition, or join a mixed assembly with all workers on a shop floor. It had a large number of movement intellectuals espousing their distinct philosophies and strategies. In some ways the Knights of Labor was more of a social movement governed by ideology, which required an education about its purpose (Taylor, 2001).

During this time, even in the ranks of the more conservative American Federation of Labor (AFofL), there could be found intellectuals promoting a revolutionary vision of society, and the importance of education and organizing in the process. In 1886, the Metal Workers of America declared in its principles:

The entire abolition of the present system of society can alone emancipate the workers... a new system based on co-operative [sic] organizations of production in a free society. Our organization should be a school to educate its members, for the new conditions of society when the workers will regulate their own affairs. We find the same idea of the union as the kindergarten of the new society expressed [by] Dr. Johann Jacoby [that unions] “are a school for self-culture for their members... they confer upon them skill in independent management of their own affairs... they prepare the workers for a gradual transition from the prevailing wage system to the co-operative methods of productions of the future.” (MWA in Ebert, 1937)

These are but a few examples of radical worker intellectual currents, developed horizontally and organically, that influenced the IWW.

⁷ While the Knights of Labor remove some racial boundaries in the labour movement, by allowing African-American workers to join, it was reactionary in the belief that Chinese workers stole domestic jobs (see Gertais, 2007).

The Early Industrial Workers of the World

Schmidt and van der Walt argue that the IWW is part of the second-wave of anarcho-syndicalism starting in the 1890s. The IWW officially began in June, 1905, in a large Chicago convention hall with a meeting called the “Continental Congress of the Working-class”. Several hundred were in attendance when “Big” Bill Haywood of the Western Federation of Miners, “picked up a large board laying on the platform and used it as a gavel” (Zinn, 1980, p. 321). With a booming voice, he declared:

The aims and objects of this organization should be to put the working-class in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution, without regard to capitalist masters. (Dubofsky in Martin 2006, p. 167)

As a labour convention it was unique, as there were no politicians present with the exception of Eugene Debs of the Socialist Party of America, who was not running for office at the time. Indeed, the attendees’ “political backgrounds varied as widely as their occupations. All together were socialists, anarchists, free thinkers, and assorted radicals and reformers” participating in the formation of the IWW (Werstein, 1969, p. 3).

Those who created the IWW had experience in many of labours’ struggles at the turn of the century. Among the hundreds who attended were “Big” Bill Haywood, Charles Moyer who was also with the Western Federation of Miners, the fearless and elderly organizer Mother Jones and Knights of Labor veteran Daniel DeLeon. There was also Lucy Parsons, widow of Albert Parsons, “one of the Chicago anarchists in the [18]80s who was hanged during the very fierce struggles for the 8-hour day” recalled Elizabeth Flynn decades later (1977, p. 3). Flynn, who was sixteen at the time, had dropped out of school to join the fledgling organization and went on to become an important organizer. It was Flynn whom Joe Hill wrote about in the song *Rebel Girl* (Cohen, 2007; Flynn, 1977). Four Canadians attended the Congress, two from Montreal and two from British Columbia (Heron, 1996).

The Industrial Workers of the World was originally going to be called the Industrial Union of America, but one of the B.C. delegates “argued that the proposed designation... was inadequately internationalist” (Palmer, 1992, p. 187). The proposal passed, and the IWW has been in Canada ever since.

While no active politicians were present, there were some traditional intellectuals in the crowd and on the stage. Former Roman Catholic priest Father Thomas Haggerty spoke (Werstein, 1969). Three years into his priesthood, Haggerty had begun to read Marx and was introduced to the Western Federation of Miners. He was suspended from his duties after “visiting mining camps, campaigning for the Socialist Party with Debs and generally urging the workers to revolt against their capitalist oppressors” (Winters, 1985, p. 16). Haggerty continued to follow his faith and viewed religion and socialism as two different things not in contradiction (1985). Haggerty was one of the authors of the famous Preamble of the IWW constitution (1985, see appendix 1) and designed what became known as “Haggerty’s Wheel” of industrial unionism (see appendix 2): as a model for a revolutionary society through industrial unionism.

Another traditional intellectual present was Daniel DeLeon, a professor of law at Columbia University. He had also been with the Knights of Labor and was considered:

One of the strongest proponents of industrial unionism in the early days in [the U.S.]... but when the IWW swung away from political action and became more and more anti-political, Daniel DeLeon quarrelled with the leadership and severed his connections with the IWW. (Flynn, 1977, p. 34)

For a time, the IWW split into two camps: the Chicago IWW was against any form of electioneering and the smaller Detroit IWW associated with DeLeon and would organize along partisan lines (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009). This split almost destroyed the fledgling union, but:

It was rescued when the remaining leaders, chiefly Bill Haywood, sidestepped the socialist ideologues and set out to take the Wobblies

directly to the “bindle stiffs” and roving unskilled labour of the American and, by extension, the Canadian West. These were the men who wandered from mines to lumber camps to railway construction or wherever there were labouring jobs. (Morton, 1988, p. 95)

Haywood had cut his teeth organizing with the Western Federation of Miners before helping found the IWW. He was determined to build the organization by going “down into the gutters to get at the mass of workers and bring them up to a decent plane of living” (Caragata, 1979, p. 49). With his commitment to organize the supposed “unorganizable”, Haywood was often the target of the bosses, the state and the capitalist press. An article titled “IWW Acts as Kaiser’s Allies” published on July 24, 1917 in the *Toronto Mail and Empire* (later to become the *Globe and Mail*) states that Haywood preferred to organize the unskilled because:

Men who are contented to remain unskilled are usually more ignorant, and therefore more easily directed by such a leader as himself. As long as the men can read and can earn enough to pay their dues they satisfy him. He admits that they are “roughnecks”, and glories in the fact that he is also a roughneck. (p. 1)

As the IWW grew amongst the working-class, it “became more and more revolutionary syndicalis[t] in character... [it] oriented towards direct action... [and] included in its membership unskilled workers, immigrants and women”, of whom the trade unions would not organize (Damier, 2009, p. 20-21). Schmidt and van der Walt (2009) contribute the influence of immigrant intellectuals for this turn towards syndicalism. The IWW grew quickly over the next decade, from 10, 000 in 1910 to upwards of 100,000 in the United States by 1917. The South African IWW started in 1910, IWW in Mexico in 1912, in 1918 the Chilean IWW was formed and reached 250,000 members by the early 1920s. It also spread to Australia, England, New Zealand, Germany and Canada (2009).

The IWW in Western Canada and Edmonton

Flynn (1977) recalls that in its early years, the IWW could be divided into two camps. In western Canada and the U.S. there were the more transient workers. In the east, chiefly in the U.S., the IWW organized the unskilled workers whom the AFofL⁸ did not want. While there was some Wobbly organizing in Eastern Canada during World War I with unemployed workers in Hamilton and in the coal industry of Cape Breton, by and large the early IWW in Canada was in the West (Palmer, 1992). It was here that:

The IWW found its constituency among the itinerant, seasonal workers... unskilled, often foreign-born “bindle-stiffs,” who carried their blankets and other meagre possessions from one location to another, and who were generally ignored by organized labour. Moving among them... the emissaries of the IWW brought their message of radical dissent to mining bunkhouses and forest encampments, usually with company police at their heels. (Gutkin & Gutkin, 1996, p. 98)

The message of the IWW fell on receptive ears. It was “a simple but effective statement of self-worth, directed at workers who toiled incessantly for low wages under intolerable conditions, without the hope of security” (Palmer, 1992, p. 187). By 1907, the IWW had five functioning locals in the Kootneys of southern B.C., were organizing workers harvesting on the Alberta prairies, and were organizing on the coast among dock workers and loggers of Vancouver Island where the IWW membership represented “[18] different nationalities” (Palmer, p. 187). Perhaps 5,000 fishers and 1,200 shore workers were IWW on the great river inlets of B.C (Heron, 1998). At 10, 000 railway “navies” (Heron), 40 per cent of railway construction workers were IWW⁹ (Palmer, 1992).

⁸ AFofL – The American Federation of Labor. A trade union federation that often promoted more conservative approaches in contrast to the IWW.

⁹ IWW membership in the railway yards included Chinese workers who were excluded from trade union membership and even the Knights of Labor.

In Edmonton, the IWW represented a break from the trade unions that dominated the Edmonton Trade and Labour Council (ETLC). It began organizing the supposedly un-organizable in the construction, railway and lumber industries. The Edmonton IWW's first major organizing drive was in 1912 and resulted in 250 municipal ditch diggers striking for a wage increase of five cents an hour plus union recognition. This eventually failed due to the onset of a recession, placing pressure on workers to return to work (Caragata, 1979).

By 1913, the IWW had two locals in Alberta, Local 79 in Calgary and Local 82 in Edmonton, which "was large enough to send a delegate to the 1913 convention in Chicago and was entitled to [14] votes under the IWW's block-voting formula" (Caragata, p. 53). During strikes in Edmonton, Wobblies marched to job sites and would sing to alert the workers of an ongoing strike. At one job site in Norwood, Edmonton, workers were persuaded by song to down their tools. To counter this:

Police were stationed at the work sites... "when the strikers hesitated at one job, two police officers exhibited their revolvers, evidently for the purpose of making an impression," reported the *Capital* on September 28. In another move to take the wind out of the strikers' sails, police arrested the secretary of the IWW Edmonton local, Gus Larsen, and charged him with vagrancy. (Caragata, p. 51)

Singing was just one way the IWW educated workers on the message of industrial unionism and working-class solidarity. Direct action was another. As the recession of 1913 dragged on, the IWW began organizing amongst the unemployed of the city, "encouraging them to demand work" (Turnbull in Caragata, 1979, p. 53). In 1913, the IWW organized a march through the streets of Edmonton with thousands of unemployed workers "demanding food and work", which spoke "to the militancy and desperation of the period" (Bjorge, 2006, p. 43). That same year, the IWW organized a sit-in at McDougall Methodist Church on a Sunday where "several hundred men told the minister they wouldn't leave until they were given places to sleep" (Caragata, 1979, p. 53). To avoid similar

situations the city provided thousands of meals, beds and temporary jobs. However, repression by the Canadian state meant that by the 1919 general strikes across western North America, the original Edmonton IWW was largely disbanded, its members having been arrested and/or deported, with those who remained in Canada joining the One Big Union (OBU) (Bjorge, 2006).¹⁰

Education in the Industrial Workers of the World

The IWW has a rich history of providing a radical workers' education through struggle, words and song. Since its inception, the IWW strategy has been to provide a movement in which workers could, as its emblem states, "organize, educate and emancipate" themselves. A pamphlet published by the IWW (1924) titled *Education and the System: The Basis of Organization*, demonstrates the importance placed on educating and organizing together:

For the workers to organize effectively, they must have a correct understanding of their position in society and of the conditions under which they live and work. If they fail to understand these things, they will either not organize at all or will organize in an ineffective manner.

IWW organizer W.I. "Windy" Fisher noted that "a working-class movement based upon the knowledge of the workers' interest is invincible" (Peterson, 1986, p. 160). Institutional support was given by the Wobblies for a variety of educational pursuits aimed at understanding how to most effectively organize industrially. The answer was found in a variety of direct actions that placed greater control of production in the hands of workers and included: wildcat strikes; quickie strikes or short strikes; slow-downs; work to rule; and many other

¹⁰ The OBU came out of the Western Conference of trade unions in 1919, which passed motions in favour of industrial unions and the destruction of capitalism. The influence of the Socialist Party of Canada was more apparent in the OBU, as opposed to the IWW, in its view of historical materialism, outlined in its constitution (1919) calling on members to "educate themselves in preparation for the social change which economic developments will produce, *whether we seek it or not*" (p. 1); and a hierarchical relationship between its locals and central body (in Bjorge, 2006, p. 62, italics added). They were different organizations, but, the OBU and IWW shared a similar membership.

ingenious methods learned by workers, whether they were IWW or not. The sit-down strike, where workers would down tools but remain on the jobsite, hindered scabs from taking the jobs and would become a favourite of industrial unionists in the automobile industry during the 1930s and 1940s (Caragata, 1979, p. 50). The IWW made an explicit connection between direct actions on the job and the development of Wobbly knowledge. The short strike was designed “not only to pester the employer, it [was like an] army drill, to become the school of practice in preparation for the coming general... strike” (Brooks in Davis, 1975, p. 13).

The IWW shop committee was formed during the Brooklyn Shoe Strike of 1911 and became a mainstay of IWW structure. Decentralized and composed of workers, the shop committee served as a democratic form for working-class gains in the present while it “developed technical knowledge in the working-class and prepared it to take over technical management” by teaching workers how to run an organization themselves (Ebert in Davis, 1975, p. 10). The IWW local union structure was borrowed from the European “Maison Du Peuple”, which functioned as “not only a union hall but an educational and social center” (Fisher in Davis, 1975, p. 10).

Educational programs offered by the IWW included “propaganda leagues, industrial education clubs, Sunday educational meetings, and classes, in addition to its use of travelling speakers, open forums, lectures, street-corner speakers, social events, and not least, the IWW songs” (Peterson, 1986, p. 160). Extensive educational efforts assisted in developing a working-class culture of solidarity amongst rank-and-file worker intellectuals:

At different times the IWW headquarters in Chicago maintained educational and research bureaus; published newspapers in a dozen languages... printed a variety of popularly written agitational pamphlets, in addition to leaflets, cartoons, stickers, and the ubiquitous songbook; and maintained libraries and reading rooms at its local branches and encouraged members to use public libraries to make more serious political, social, and economic literature available to its members. (Peterson, 1986, p. 160)

Formal education was conducted through the Work People's School in Duluth, Minnesota. It was started by immigrant farmers from Finland, a good number of whom were socialists and syndicalists. Those members of the school's board began inviting IWW members and their families to take courses in 1916 (Gambs, 1932). The purpose of the school shifted from party Socialism to industrial unionism, and in 1921 it became the official college of the IWW (Knuuti, 1921). Upon receiving this recognition, one of the officers of the Work People's School wrote in *The Industrial Pioneer*, an IWW newspaper, that:

Knowledge is the keenest weapon in the unavoidable class struggle. Learning is its best capital. The sooner the working-class becomes conscious of its significance in society the nearer is the day of industrial freedom. (Knuuti, 1921, p. 4)

Courses ranged from economics to English to the "industrial sciences", where students learned the skills necessary to be delegates in the more democratic industrial unions such as the IWW: filling out application forms, practicing public speaking and using parliamentary procedure for meetings. There was even a "miniature IWW headquarters with all its various branches" where:

Side by side, the burly miner from the regions of Mesaba, the lumberjack from the west, the harvest stiff, the girl from someone's kitchen or from the factory looms of the east, studied, learning to become fighters in the ranks of labor. (Knuuti, 1921, p. 2)

Students came from all over the continent to attend the school, some enduring great hardships to get there. One student from Saskatoon "unable to afford railway fare, rode most of the trip... on the outside of a boxcar, exposed to icy blasts of wind" (Altenbaugh, 1989, p. 150).

Wobbly education was sharply contrasted with most schools and universities. Clifford Ellis, editor of *The Industrial Worker*, an IWW newspaper still in print, emphasized the importance of education to the IWW:

Worker's [sic] education is, of necessity, an education in class consciousness... its purpose is to teach the facts of industry instead of the slave morality of the bourgeois schools. Its technical training is to develop technique for the coordination of the productive forces in production for use and not for the maintenance of a useless class of capitalist parasites. It is to render education a vital, living, needful thing that makes for human survival instead of suppression... The IWW is engaged in this task because it is one of the necessary functions in working-class progress... It is to enable them to "build the structure of the new society within the shell of the old"... To accomplish this it carries on its work of education by the means that lie to hand—through its papers, pamphlets, lecture bureaus, and through its first established college, the Work People's College of Duluth. But more potent still is the education it carries on at the point of production, on the job. (Ellis, 1930, p. 65)

The most important education was always on the jobsite, learned through struggle, and it was never an easy pursuit. Elizabeth Flynn (1977) recalls the Lawrence, Massachusetts strike of 1912, where textile workers had won a reduction in their hours through law, but subsequently saw a reduction in pay. Over 20,000 workers in mills across the town, mostly women and children, downed their tools and walked out. The workforce was extremely diverse, with workers speaking over 45 languages. The AFofL wanted nothing to do with them, assuming that such an ethnically diverse group could not be organized; but the IWW already had a presence amongst the strikers and lent its support. Flynn recalls:

We did have interpreters in these [45] different languages, but half the time we didn't know whether the interpreters were telling them to stay out on strike or go back to work. So you had to have other interpreters to watch the interpreters and it got pretty complicated. So Bill Haywood decided that we had to speak English so these people could understand it. And I will never forget the lesson he gave to us. I was very young at that

time, I was 22, and he said; now listen here, you speak to these workers, these miners in the same kind of English that their children who are in the primary school would speak to them and they would understand that. Well, that's not easy—to speak to them in primary school English... We had to explain to them that we wanted them to be in the IWW, the One Big Union¹¹ and not in the AF[of]L¹². Well, he would say, the American Federation of Labor, the AF[of]L is like that, each one separated, but the IWW is like that, and they would all say, three cheers for the IWW and he had made his point. (p. 10-11)

The strike was brutally suppressed and, for safety and public support, children were sent to live in supporters' homes in New York and Philadelphia. However, when children were brought to a train station to be sent to Philadelphia, local authorities beat the women and children. This was witnessed by the press and their reporting helped win public support for the workers (Thompson, 1976).

As in the Spanish Revolution, worker militancy in the Lawrence strike did not develop overnight. Wobblies had been agitating, educating, and organizing Lawrence millworkers for years prior to these uprisings. Indeed:

[The] IWW's very slow growth before late 1909 disguises the fact that the Wobblies already had semi-organized groups at Lawrence and Paterson which were helping to build a foundation of militancy. At Paterson there was an eight-year history of Wobbly agitation before the great strike of 1913. The Lawrence IWW local had initiated a series of slowdowns and wildcat walkouts against speed-up in the summer of 1911. (Davis, 1975, p. 3-4)

The Lawrence strike is what convinced Helen Keller, one of the most famous Wobblies, to join. Keller is more often remembered for her disabilities than her politics and sharp wit. She had dropped out of college because, as noted

¹¹ This occurred before the OBU was formed in Canada. The Canadian OBU adopted its name from the IWW slogan "One Big Union for all workers".

¹² I will write out the AFL as the AFofL to avoid confusion with the Alberta Federation of Labour.

in an interview with the New York Tribune, “college isn't the place to go for any ideas... schools seem to love the dead past and live in it” (Bindley & Keller, 1916, p. 2). She joined the Socialist Party but found it to be too slow in the struggle for workers’ emancipation. At the Lawrence strike, she “discovered that the true idea of the IWW is not only to better conditions, to get them for all people, but to get them at once” (p. 2). She went on to say that the IWW sought to:

Unite and organize all workers on an economic basis, and it is the workers themselves who must secure freedom for themselves, who must grow strong... nothing can be gained by political action. That is why I became an IWW. (p. 3)

The strikes at Lawrence and Paterson revealed the strength that the Wobblies drew from an ethnically diverse workforce. Unlike many trade unions of this period, the IWW saw diversity as a strength, and was willing to organize with immigrant workers, many of whom became some of the best organizers. The radical democracy practiced by the IWW was possible in these diverse workforces because “leaflets, speeches, and songs were presented in every language, while in each strike every conceivable parallel was found within the historic struggles of various European nationalities” (Davis, 1975, p. 5). The experiences of immigrant workers were emphasized in this example of radical workers’ education. The IWW ran up to a dozen non-English publications right up until the 1950s (Peterson, 1986). Learning happened both ways with immigrant intellectuals influencing the syndicalist approach of the IWW (Schmidt and van der Walt, 2009).

Creating a culture of working-class struggle amongst workers required a wide variety of pedagogical approaches. Wobblies distributed an immense amount of literature,¹³ spreading the notion of industrial unionism through the

¹³ The archives of the IWW pre-1918 were seized by the U.S. government during the Palmer raids so the exact number is unknown. However, conservative estimates would be in the tens of thousands of items of propaganda.

farming areas of the Great Plains, timber industry in the forests, mining in the mountains of western Canada and longshoremen on the coast. In the U.S, the IWW organized mainly in the agriculture, marine, mining, manufacturing, textile and timber industries.

During the First World War, a major focus was on the agricultural industry where:

The large amount of literature circulated in... harvest drives resulted in an understanding of IWW unionism that both made for a readiness to respond to organizing efforts elsewhere and for some insistence that other unions come closer to IWW ideals. (Thompson & Bekken, 2006, p. 88)

The *Little Red Song Book* was, and still is, the most famous piece of IWW literature. “In box car, jungles and on the job, its songs were sung, until even the farmers and their boys were singing them too” (Thomas & Bekken, 2006, p. 88). This book contains several songs by Joe Hill, the Wobbly organizer and songwriter, whom those in authority “considered a dangerous agitator, a writer of rebel songs that growing thousands sang” (Thomas & Bekken, p. 89). Hill was executed by the State of Utah by firing squad in 1915. Many who followed the trial in the press thought he was framed and executed for politically motivated reasons. Over 30,000 attended his funeral in Chicago and blocked the streets for hours. Hill became a martyr for working-class struggles. His execution came to symbolize how far the State would go to suppress radical notions of workplace democracy (Thomas & Bekken).

The singing of the IWW “possessed a spirit of solidarity and class consciousness that made it unique” amongst the labour movement (Winters, 1985, p. 37). The labour anthem *Solidarity Forever* was written by Ralph Chaplin, editor of the IWW’s official newspaper, *Solidarity*. He also drew hundreds of cartoons, another popular method of education that appealed to a large portion of the working-class. Over the years, IWW newspapers have published thousands of cartoons, “many of which were drawn by unknown ‘fellow workers’ who drew their cartoons on spare scraps of paper and submitted them under comical

pseudonyms or just their red card membership number, their real names now lost to history” (Cohen, 2007, p. 40). These cartoons:

Deliberately and divisively evoked a class-consciousness, both laughing with the militant working-class and at the decadent ruling class, marking that unbreachable and self-defining divide of class and class consciousness by what one finds funny and what one sees as a threat. (Cohen, p. 54)

Ernest Riebe created the character Mr. Bloc, a “scissorbill”, in Wobbly cartoons from 1912 through the 1920s (Cohen). A “scissorbill” meant a worker who did not have a class consciousness, one of hundreds of terms that Wobbly organizers, especially the itinerant ones, used to describe organizing on the job. A class conscious worker was called “enlightened”, a “slave” was a wage earner, and a “knowledge box” meant a school house (Weirstein, 1969). Some terms are still used to this day, such as a “fellow worker” to refer to another Wobbly or members of the working-class, or “stool pigeon”, which is someone who snitches on your activities to the boss.

For many Wobblies, education through struggle was supplemented by IWW literature. The biography of John Edwin Peterson, a lifetime rank-and-file Wobbly and factory worker at Pullman, is provided by his grandson, Larry Peterson. Peterson (1986) became the self-declared librarian of his grandfather’s book collection. He writes:

My grandfather's library... seen in the light of a lifetime of struggle... suggested an ongoing process of self-education and action, of reciprocity between the acquisition of knowledge and militancy. As I slowly learned its contents, it also offered me an escape from the stifling ahistoricity and depoliticization of American suburbia in the 1950s and 1960s through insight into a half-century of workers' struggles. (p. 154)

Peterson discusses his grandfather’s library in a historical context, providing a unique lens into the “interplay of cultural and intellectual with

political and socioeconomic forces which motivated radical American workers between 1900 and 1950” (p. 154). Peterson’s grandfather joined the IWW in 1910 and, as a dual carder with the Car Builders Union, he “practiced the IWW principle that all members were leaders” (p. 159). As an organic intellectual:

He made full use of the opportunities offered by lectures, libraries, and the Radical Book Shop... His social life revolved around IWW meetings, picnics, and other events, in which women participated as actively as men and the many children played together while their parents attended to more serious matters. (p. 160)

The growth of his library corresponded with periods of intense involvement in the IWW and worldwide historical events such as the Bolshevik Revolution. During periods of decline in workers’ struggle, such as from 1925-1931, his book collection hardly grew.

The story of this one Wobbly underlines a general trend that periods of great labour unrest are accompanied by a vibrant intellectual and educational trend in radical workers’ movements. With its radically democratic approach to education, the IWW “encouraged workers to become intellectuals themselves as a necessary step in their emancipation and respected the learning that workers had to acquire on their own and could never take for granted” (Peterson, 1986, p. 160). This biography provides an example of the Gramscian notion held by the Wobblies that “all... are intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9).

Free Speech Fights

Any discussion of education in the early IWW would be incomplete without mentioning the free speech fights. Despite the First Amendment of the U.S Constitution, of which nothing comparable existed in Canada at the time, Wobblies and other radicals were often banned from public speaking in both countries under threat of arrest. This was a ten-year struggle across the United States and into Western Canada where thousands of Wobblies were arrested for speaking in public. The IWW strategy was simple: when a local ordinance was

passed barring public speaking, the call was put out, and within days hundreds and sometimes thousands of Wobblies and allies would arrive to, one by one, step up on the soapbox and start to speak. A favorite was to begin reading the First Amendment before being arrested. The jail cells and court system would become so overwhelmed that the ordinance would be repealed. These free speech fights were often used as an educational tool, because every speech that was given in court after the arrest would be recorded in the public records and often quoted in local newspapers (Baldwin, 1930). This had a tremendous impact on the public because “revolutionary words seemed to take on reality when accompanied by such willing martyrdom” (Baldwin, p. 14).

However, the impact often swung both ways; it could serve to garner support or to whip the public into a mad frenzy. Baldwin (1930), then director of the American Civil Liberties Union, recalled that:

This resistance... combined with revolutionary propaganda and songs couched in words anybody could understand, aroused passionate prejudice. Sober citizens forgot all law and order, they called for blood, and they got it. Though not a single case of violence by a single member of the IWW marked a single conviction in scores of free speech fights, the violence against them was colossal. (Baldwin, p. 15)

Many in the IWW criticized the free speech fights in their “diversion of energy to a struggle against the police instead of against the bosses, and to winning a free speech that did not build unions” (Baldwin, 1930, p. 15). Nonetheless, the free speech fights are a historical example of the lengths to which the IWW would go to educate workers.

Capitalist Hegemony and Coercion

The revolutionary potential of industrial unionism did not go unnoticed by those who sought to defend the statusquo of wage slavery. As radical union movements grew in their challenge to capitalist hegemony, the American and

Canadian states either assisted reactionaries or directly intervened to stem what many saw as a coming revolution.

North America's labour history includes a remarkable amount of repression with violent attacks by agents of the state and business reactionaries against the militant working-class. Generally, the American and Canadian states took a two-pronged approach to labour during the First World War. On the one hand, there was some leniency towards "pure-and-simple unions" to keep the working-class support for the war effort, but the:

Greatest suppression [was] against the radical Industrial Workers of the World. Although the IWW seldom engaged in violence and represented at most only 100,000 workers, its advocacy of mass direct action, and denunciation of capitalism and the state, placed it beyond the pale. (Taft & Rossin in Lambert, 2005, p. 76)

Federal and state officials "using armed force to break strikes was a contributing factor to the destruction of the... IWW" (Lambert, 2005, p. 13). Through the collaboration of owners, the state and media, World War I was used as an excuse to harass, beat, jail and even murder Wobblies and workers in other radical organizations.

In the U.S., "from the spring of 1917 federal troops began herding off pickets, and in June several hundred sailors were given special leave... and wrecked the IWW hall in Seattle" (Thompson & Bekken, 2006, p. 105). In June 1917, the IWW was organizing in the copper mines of Arizona alongside the AFofL Mine Mill and Smelter Workers—what was once the more radical Western Federation of Miners. The IWW had made several gains through direct actions and, following the workers' demands, proposed a nationalization of the copper mines. In response the Phelps Dodge mining company, making 300 per cent profit on copper sold to the U.S. government for war production, denounced the IWW as traitors in league with the German government (Thompson & Bekken). In Bisbee, Arizona "company officials with a posse of businessmen and a handful of

Mine Mill members” killed three Wobblies and rounded up 1164 suspected IWW (Thomas & Bekken). They were then put:

Into cattle cars and shipped into the desert. They were packed tight, standing up, parched with thirst, and many had been clubbed in the round-up. After 36 hours of this torture they were put into a detention camp at Columbus, N.M. (p. 112)

On September 5, 1917, the hammer of the state came down. The U.S. government directly suppressed two IWW strikes in spruce lumber and copper industries, both essential to war production. Then government agents, known as G-Men, (a precursor to the FBI) raided every IWW office in the country and arrested several thousand Wobblies, including the entire executive board, for violating the *Espionage and Sedition Acts*. The U.S. Justice Department deported hundreds more as undesirable aliens under new immigration laws (Montgomery in Lambert, 2005, p. 77).

The September 5th arrests became known as the Palmer Raids, and the trial dragged on for almost a year until August 31, 1918, when sentences were handed down ranging from five to 25 years. Ralph Chaplin received 20 years in prison for writing his poems and editing *Solidarity* (Cohen, 2007), while “Haywood and fifteen other IWW members receive[d] 25 years in prison for ‘conspiracy to overturn the American war programme’” (“Twenty years for fifteen of IWW Chiefs”, 1918). It was not until five years later, when wartime hysteria had died down, that the IWW officers received a presidential pardon (Flynn, 1977).

The Canadian state took note of how the Americans were dealing with the Wobblies, and further suppressed IWW activities. The Chief Press Censor of Canada (1918) condemned the *Labor Defender*, a publication of the IWW covering the Palmer Raid trials, because:

Featured in this publication [were] advertisements of the *Industrial Worker*, a publication the circulation of which in Canada is forbidden, and of books by such pacifist or socialistic writers as Trotsky, Wells, and Bernard Shaw, and such well known pro-German authors as Nietzsche,

G.K. Chesterton and Edward Carpenter. The whole tone of this publication [was] revolutionary and anti-Governmental. (p. 1)

Later that year, the Deputy Minister of Justice (1918) wrote to the Headquarters of the Canadian Militia and Defence noting that, with the mass arrests and persecution in the U.S., the IWW has been focusing more efforts in Western Canada, and that the police and military should take similar measures.

The military took note and began a domestic campaign against the IWW. It even advised against sending any RN-WMP to fight in Europe, as the danger of the IWW was perceived to be so great (Major General C.G.S, 1917). A letter dated March 27, 1918, from Military District 13 (Calgary) to the secretary of the Militia Council Headquarters in Ottawa states:

I have strong suspicions that they [IWW] are active in Blairmore, Alta [sic], and in the mines east of Edmonton, Alta [sic]. We have had two cases in this District [sic] of men, who although they did not claim to belong to the IWW, one actually recited part of their oath of brotherhood in the dock, both were conscientious objectors, and I may add, got five years penal servitude each. (p.1)

Military surveillance of the IWW in Canada was often done in collaboration with local authorities and citizens' groups. In Wayne, Alberta, a Presbyterian Missionary named G.A. Love (1918) would send letters to the military detailing IWW organizing efforts in the mines of Drumheller. In Ottawa, police received a tip about a meeting of immigrant workers, including some Austrian immigrants. The meeting was broken up by police, who found the men to be "in possession of IWW literature and buttons, which tends to show that this Association is a strong channel for enemy propaganda;" according to an internal memorandum of the Department of Militia and Defense (1918). The immigrant workers and alleged IWW members and/or Austrian spies were sent to an internment camp in Northern Ontario ("Take Austrians to Kapuskasing Camp", 1918).

Correspondence between the military and the RN-WMP included absurd accusations to justify suppression of the IWW. The Major-General of Military District 11 estimated that 90 per cent of labour troubles in B.C. were because of the IWW (1918). The next day, a major in the same military district blamed forest fires in B.C. on the IWW and wrote that “a further influx of IWW into Canada is proposed, with a view to the destruction by fire of Prairie Crops [sic]” (1918, p. 2). Police surveillance could not find evidence for any of this (Chief Commissioner of Police, Canada, 1918), but by then the damage from IWW hysteria had been done.

The Canadian Militia and Defense had stoked enough fear about the Wobblies that on September 28, 1918, Borden’s government banned 13 radical organizations, the IWW making top of the list (“Is Illegal to Belong to These Bolshevik Clubs”, 1918). As a banned organization, the IWW fell under the new powers afforded to the Governor General under the War Measures Act. He passed an order-in-council on censorship earlier in May (PC2384). This act would have a dramatic effect on the IWW’s ability to educate workers. It declared that:

If any person shall without lawful excuse or authority the proof of which shall lie on him, speak, utter, write, print, publish, post, deliver, receive or have in his possession or in premises in his occupation or under his control, any statement report or opinion, or any letter or other writing, or any newspaper, tract, periodical, book, circular or other printed publication, or any photograph, sketch, plan, model, record or other representation, containing or consisting of “objectionable matter,” shall be liable under the Consolidated Orders in Council of May 21, 1918, to five years imprisonment or a fine of [\$5,000] or both. (p. 3)

The result of this law had the same effect on the IWW as similar laws in the U.S. and Australia, where one could be arrested for simply wearing an IWW button. In my hometown of Lethbridge, an actor, Benjamin Legere, was arrested as he stepped off the train for “speaking at an OBU meeting in Calgary and wearing the IWW button... papers found on [sic] his possession show him to be

an active IWW agitator;” he was later deported (“Actor Arrested Here is IWW. Will be Deported”, 1919, p. 1).

For a time, the IWW was able to continue organizing because it had such a strong grassroots network. Senator Borah of the U.S. Senate stressed this point, stating: “the IWW is about as elusive a proposition as you ever ran up against. ... It is intangible. ... You cannot reach it ... it is simply an understanding between men—and it could not be jailed” (Thompson & Bekken, 2006, p. 114). But by 1924, the “heart had gone out of the IWW and the imprisonment of over a hundred Wobbly leaders from 1917 to 1918 was a blow from which the union would never recover and after which ‘the IWW was never the same again’” (Renshaw in Winters, 1984, p. 3-4).

Hegemonic Consensus and Adult Education

Once the coercive forces of the American and Canadian states had succeeded in repressing radical workers’ movements, there was a concerted effort by the state, business and educators who supported the statusquo towards rebuilding a consensus of capitalist hegemony. There was a great deal of growth in the managerial sub-class of the professional middle-class as “one of the purposes of the modern professions was in fact ‘to keep the workers in line’” (Ehrenrieck, 1999, p. 134). Until the 20th Century, workers made many of the decisions about how production should be run. Taylorism¹⁴ in the early 20th Century would demonstrate to the capitalists “how the intellectual command of the production process could be stripped from the workers and concentrated in a more reliable cadre of middle-class managers and engineers” (Ehrenreich, 1989, p. 135). The reaction to working-class radicalism had been repression, but,

The emerging professional middle-class stepped into the fray in the role of peacemakers. Their message to the capitalists was that nonviolent social control would in the long run be more effective than bullets and

¹⁴ Taylorism was one of the first attempts at scientific management of the workplace. See Davis, 1975.

billy clubs. Mines and mills did not have to be hotbeds of working-class sedition; they could be run more smoothly by trained, 'scientific' managers... Almost every profession or would-be profession, from sociology to home economics, had something to offer in the great task of 'taming' the American working-class.” (Ehrenreich, 1999, p. 134)

There is a history of professional adult educators assisting with this consensus-building through multiple organizations. Frontier College was formed in 1911 and had a similar constituency to the Wobblies in Western Canada, including miners, farm workers, lumberjacks and mill workers but its message was largely the social gospel, a gentler capitalism. Industrial unions such as the IWW, OBU and the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) had made material gains for the workers within the timber camps and mines, but Frontier College countered this radicalism with the promise of enlightenment through a liberal education (Taylor, 2001). Similarly, the Mechanics Institutes were run by professional adult educators and were designed for worker education, but also served to keep workers away from more radical pursuits (Taylor).

The St. Francis Xavier Extension programme (SFXE) was one of the most extensive worker education programs in Canada during the early 20th Century. It was set up with the support of Cape Breton mine owners—corroboration deemed necessary out of a fear that the United Mine Workers of America could not keep their workers under control. Cooperatives were formed, which provided a temporary buffer for the workers against the excesses of capitalism. They were formed with an aim to counter communism and temper the “materialist” message of the WEA “among some trade unionists in the region” (Taylor, 2001, p. 54). Workers were taught that cooperatives would raise their standard of living more than struggles through unions. The underlying idea was to have workers identify with the ruling class rather than revolutionaries. The efforts of these adult educators were seen by SFXE as very successful, but it was no easy task:

Many people in this area had been indoctrinated with the revolutionary philosophy of Russia and this fact makes the work of the Extension

Department all the more difficult. The work of the department would be a great antidote to this extreme radicalism... The department has already succeeded in enlisting the cooperation of men who at one time were avowed communists but who have lately returned to a saner way of thinking. (St. Francis Xavier University Archives in Taylor, 2001, p. 28)

The People's School was run by St. Francis Xavier University with an explicit aim to replace communist union leadership with non-communist leadership. To this extent it brought in business-friendly union educators and eventually removed union representatives from the advisory board altogether, bringing business owners along in their place. By 1967, there were no labour topics in The People's School curriculum (Taylor).

During the second half of the 20th Century, the introduction of Human Capital Theory to guide the work of adult education emphasized the need for skills training that allowed for a mobile workforce lacking in technical skills. Under this scheme, workers' education was to be offered by management as opposed to unions (Schied, 1995). The shift to an employer-run adult education meant the purpose was:

Essentially about learning to become a more efficient and compliant "human resource"...it has to be understood within the context of human capital theory and new human resource management strategies that seek to bypass the kind of workplace democracy that independent unionism can provide. (Spencer & Frankel, 2002, p. 170)

The new emphasis on workers' participation would often "mask a retreat into technical training courses... and... a move away from the traditions of workers' education committed to establishing an understanding of political economy among labour activists" (McIroy in Spencer & Taylor, 2006, p. 215).

These are a few of the major trends by the professional middle-class, outside of the unions, of dampening a critical and independent workers' movement and adult education in Canada from the 1930s to the 1970s.

From Independent to Dependent and Back Again: Adult Education in the Union Movement, 1920-1970

Despite government suppression and capitalist consensus building, a radical workers' education was kept alive in some industrial unions, Communist-run trade unions and through the Workers Educational Association (WEA) which in Canada was one location where labour movement radicals had access to institutional support in adult education (Taylor, 2001). In Winnipeg, remnants of the One Big Union, also declared illegal by the Canadian government during WWI, joined the WEA. The more academic courses in the WEA were taught by labour-friendly academics or independent radical intellectuals, and the "atmosphere was more akin to that of a worker's group, where discipline was self imposed and where a democratic and critical exchange took place between student and tutor" (Taylor, 2001, p. 43). Participants ranged from industrial unionists to social democrats to communists, and "many of the new industrial unions that developed in the late 1930s and the 1940s turned to the WEA for assistance in launching education programs" (Spencer & Taylor, 2006, p. 210).

Overall, education in the labour movement underwent a significant change in the U.S. and Canada from the 1920s to 1970s, a period that saw increased bureaucratization, decreased worker control and an emphasis on educating union staff and shop stewards as opposed to workers as a class. This dampening of a militant worker education began in the U.S. when "in 1929 the American Federation of Labour (AFL) exerted its control over the WEB [Workers Education Bureau of America] to ensure that trade union educational endeavors supported collective bargaining rather than attempts to change society" (Taylor, 2001, p. 5). Laws restricting the role of unions to collective bargaining had an impact on education, and since:

The passage of the Wagner Act, and especially since the Taft-Hartley Act, much of what trade unions [did had] been constrained by labor law. This [led] labor education to be focused on training union staff and stewards in

the legal and contractual rules of trade unionism rather than in the broader issues of class relations, solidarity, and organizing. (Michler, 1998, p. 56)

In Canada, the *Industrial Relations Act* (1948) made employers obligated to negotiate with a collective that was the majority of workers, but negotiations were limited to “salaries, benefits and the way management pursued its rights” (in Taylor, 2001, p. 62). Thus, workers could not organize to take over a job site, and strikes were restricted to the negotiation period, otherwise the union and its officers would face substantial fines. Essentially, it made the union a legal partner with the state and employer, and would force the trade union to act as a co-manager of the workers. This had tremendous impacts on the need to have an educated and militant workplace because, more than ever, the bosses and union bosses decided when and how the workplace would be controlled. This was opposite to the workers responding to the immediate conditions and needs of the workplace with their own vision for how the workplace should be run. However, this shift in power was not always smooth. In 1965, there were more strikes than 1946, and one-third of them were wildcat strikes where workers walked out illegally, often against the orders of their union. This showed the strains between workers and the emerging union bureaucracy (Taylor).

In the decade after World War II, anti-communist fever permeated the unions. From 1948-1950, the Canadian Congress of Labour kicked out all unions that elected communist leadership. The WEA took great pains to appear non-partisan, but was denounced as communist. Drummond Wren, who had been the General Secretary for 22 years, was eventually forced out to appease anti-communist fears. He lamented that the Canadian labour movement was moving towards the pro-business stance of U.S. labour, where labour education was about training and indoctrination of the contract system, with broader societal questions left out (Taylor, 2001). Trade unions focused internally on nuts and bolts education for 30 years until economic conditions helped to bring in new voices.

Starting in the 1970's, and continuing to this day, the rollbacks on workers by government and corporations contributed to the need for a more informed and militant workforce. Workers have begun to demand, once again, democratic

control over their unions and job sites (Taylor, 2001). By the 1990s, “it was rare to encounter a course that dealt only with the nuts and bolts of collective agreements” (Taylor, p. 7). Courses began to emerge again on the importance of solidarity, the danger of gender and racial inequalities, and critiques of capitalism.

The adult educators who assisted in this revival were often schooled in Freirian theory: many had been student activists before entering the labour movement. The 1960s and 70s saw a New Left emerge to challenge the legitimacy of “authority including those practiced by the old-time Left parties” (Taylor). The New Left was “challenging the assumptions of electoral politics and parliamentary democracy” but “accepted, however, that trade unions and organized workers were crucial ingredients in resisting capitalism” (Taylor, p. 155). Popular education techniques were starting to be incorporated:

A key feature of this activist education was that workers should teach other workers. The person best suited to facilitate and lead discussions were workers themselves, and emphasis was placed on training and supporting workers in the objectives of adult and popular education. (Taylor, 2001, p. 206)

This period of militancy for the Steelworkers and “revival of member participation” was seen by Martin¹⁵ as “a time when the openings for consciousness, radically democratic education work seemed legion” (1995, p. 160). Martin conducted a “Face the Management” program for Steelworkers locals in the late 1970s and 1980s that helped workers deal with management in a way that critiqued the oppressive relationship. “Participants interrogated the [new management relations] material to expose its anti-union and anti-worker agenda or policies and then devised strategies to resist these overtures and maintain solidarity” (Martin, p. 161). Martin belonged to a trend in labour education where “there has... been some rediscovery of the role of traditional workers' education

¹⁵ D’arcy Martin (1995), an adult educator schooled in Freirian philosophy at OISE, had experience as a solidarity activist before he was hired to run the national education program of the Steelworkers’ Union in the 1970s.

within labour education provision that has led to a renewed focus on political economy and social analysis” (Spencer & Taylor, 2006, p. 216). However, trade union bureaucracy often hampered more radical educators such as Martin (1995).

Reviving the IWW

The New Left rejection of authority was what the IWW was doing all along; this period marked the beginning of its slow revival. The IWW reached its lowest number of members in the 1960s before beginning to climb again. In the U.S., the criminal syndicalism laws used as the pretext for the Palmer Raids were still on the books but rarely used. In 1971, IWW member Ricardo Gonsalves was arrested for agitation in Sacramento and the charges were dropped because the law was finally declared unconstitutional (Thompson, 1976).

Another factor contributing to the IWW’s slow revival was the inclusion of students within the union. In the early years of the IWW, students were often seen as potential scabs (Flynn, 1977). The student movements of mostly middle-class youth in the U.S. and Canada of the 1960s and ‘70s provided new opportunities for the IWW. In 1967, the IWW “voted in referendum for the first time to allow students not currently employed to join the IWW’s Education Workers Industrial Union 620...[with the] view that students should be considered as apprentices for the occupations they expected to fill” (Thompson, 1976, p. 208). This new inclusion proved successful, and at the University of Waterloo in Ontario alone, the IWW soon reached 100 members. Students “impressed by the student-worker alliances in France in May 1968 also did extensive strike support in Ontario” and their activity began the revival of the IWW in Eastern Canada” (Thompson, 1976, p. 208). By 1975, students made up a notable amount of the IWW’s membership and many remained active as members on their jobsites after graduation (Thompson).

In Western Canada, the Edmonton IWW was (re)formed in the summer of 1972. One current member, who became a Wobbly in 1969 with the General Members Branch (GMB) of San Francisco, moved to Edmonton. He recalls walking down 96th street and seeing several Wobblies painting the IWW logo on

an office window. He joined them, then a few more people joined, and a GMB was (re)formed in Edmonton. What started as a library in the office soon became a bookstore collective called Erehorn Books, which ran for more than ten years and was the only gay- and- lesbian friendly bookstore in the city. Black Cat Press also grew out of that office: it became a publisher of hard- to- find anarcho-syndicalist texts, including a translation of *Anarcho-Syndicalism in the 20th Century* referenced at the beginning of this chapter. Black Cat Press still operates and does some work for trade unions, prints IWW literature, and translates and prints anarchist texts.

The new Edmonton IWW ran educational programs targeting unorganized workers and students. In 1973, a *Know Your Labour Rights in Alberta* pamphlet was published, a copy of which is now in the University of Alberta book depository. Many of the unorganized workers approached by the Edmonton Wobblies, then and now, were in the hospitality industry, working in restaurants and hotels. Education of hospitality workers in the 1970s was done through literature drops, “walking into places, acting like customers and avoiding management” as recalled by one member with whom I spoke. He recalled that the Edmonton GMB began printing IWW *Solidarity* signs and occasionally showed up to support mainstream labour movement pickets. The numbers in the branch were always small at this point, never exceeding more than a dozen. According to him, one fellow worker, Mike Crouse, had been a Wobbly during the union’s first generation on the Prairies. For the Edmonton GMB of the 1970s he was a living link to the OBU and early IWW.

The Edmonton GMB folded in the early 1980s as key members moved away. There was not much activity until the branch (re)formed once again in 1999. For a while there was a running joke that the IWW was more of a historical society than a union. However, even at its lowest point there was always support for striking workers in Edmonton. Education courses began in the Edmonton IWW around 2005, about the same time that education courses began to be offered by the IWW across the U.S. In 2006, the Minnesota Branch of the IWW

re-opened the Work People's College, closed since 1941, and began offering free classes for workers.

Since 1999, the IWW has been organizing workers in Edmonton, often in the hospitality industry, where unionization rates are low. In 2009, at the 10th anniversary of the Edmonton GMB, members sang IWW classics such as *Pie in the Sky* and *Soldiarity Forever*. At this point, the branch had about thirty dues-paying members and drew on about 50 workers for picket line solidarity. This is the IWW that I began researching in 2009.

Chapter Summary

The history and the context of education in the Edmonton GMB can be found over a century of radical workers' struggles in Canada, the United States and Western Europe. This historical review has found that the structure of a union has a direct impact on the forms of education being offered. A union that provides a clear and antagonistic division between the employer and the employee will require training in organizing and building solidarity. A union that is legally recognized, with contracts, will often have more non-formal courses related to collective bargaining. This includes shop steward training, bargaining, arbitration, labour law and how to establish an effective union (parliamentary procedure, union administration, effective union committees). Whether a union has a broader social vision will affect education. There are communist-led unions that include a Marxist social analysis in education, to unions professing neutrality in education that focus more on issues of collective bargaining with maybe some liberal social science education.

Context determines everything: "for Gramsci every relation of hegemony is an educative relationship" (Mayo, 1999, p. 36). The suppression of the IWW and similar streams by the Canadian and U.S. state during WWI had an immense impact on the IWW and its education. However, the foundations of capitalism have not fundamentally changed since the IWW's peak. Therefore, there is still a need for workers' education that is democratic, critical and forged through struggle. The education offered through IWW and historically similar streams

provides a more democratic and more radical form of education than the education offered through trade unions from 1930 to 1970. It also goes beyond the current popular education movement within unions, as it is more willing to step outside labour practices that have dampened militancy, independence and revolutionary social visions. It is within this context that I began my research with the Edmonton IWW.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I have an undergraduate degree in cultural anthropology, a discipline long fascinated by the “other”: where ethnographies are the primary source of data. An ethnography is a qualitative method “rooted in the first-hand experience of the research setting...committed to interpreting the point of view of those under study” (Milgate, 2001, p. 43). I had imagined I would end up as an anthropologist on a remote island in search of an “other” to study. Instead, I came to this methodology backwards, seeking to learn more about a group to which I already belonged. I came to my research question—“*How are Edmonton IWW members learning to challenge capitalist hegemony?*”—through my own experiences in the IWW, coupled with a historical review of the literature presented in Chapter 2. This is insider research where I employ a certain rigour and critically reflect upon my findings using a cultural Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist analysis, consistent with a critical ethnographic approach (Carspecken, 1996; Creswell, 1998; Foley, 2002).

In the first part of this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the development of social movement research, critical ethnography and studies of the IWW. I will position myself as both a researcher and insider with valuable and empirical data gained through both positions in attempting to answer my research question. I recognize that my own positions, and the ethnographic method, carry with them certain assumptions that I will identify. I will then outline the methods of this critical ethnography, including: participant observation, interviews, journaling, a group presentation/discussion, and document/archival analysis. I will identify the ethical considerations before finally moving on to how I conducted my analysis.

Positioning the Research

Research on Social Movement Learning

One of the only instances of academic work on an extant IWW group is from 1920 by Parker (in Higbie, 1997), who argued:

The IWW migratory worker, having been subjected to the worst elements of capitalism, was not a “mobile and independent agent, exercising free will and moral discretion...but merely a psychological by-product of the neglected childhood of industrial America. (p. 576)

This quote is reflective of academic views held for many decades that social movements represented abnormal and problematic social phenomena. This view was modified only slightly through the 1940s to 1960s, when social movement scholarship, drawing on collective behavior theory, was particularly concerned with the policing of social movements (Smith, D., 2006). In the 1970s, there was a “seismic” shift in the field that brought about recognition of the reasoning involved in social movement agency. Activists were no longer seen as irrational and in need of policing, but rather as rational actors trying to achieve specific goals (Croteau, Hoynes & Ryan, 2005). This partially arose because of closer involvement between social movement scholars and activists during the upsurge of movement activity in the 1960s, producing new forms of knowledge and a sense of solidarity through this collective praxis.

In the social sciences, research had been conducted for several decades on “deviants” in advanced capitalist countries. Graduate students in anthropology, many of whom were involved in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), (of which the IWW received many student members,) were not content with merely studying “deviants”. They began to work with the oppressed, formed mutual goals and engaged in struggle. These “action” ethnographers drew on the theories produced in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies of Birmingham, England (1964-2002), which drew on Gramsci, Althusser, and E.P. Thompson. CCCS scholars included Paul Willis and Stuart Hall (Foley, 2002).

In education, critical qualitative research “was basically born in the 1970s” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 174). Data in critical research was often analyzed using a range of neo-Marxist and post-Marxist theories. The question of agency in structure was central to many debates in critical qualitative studies. Those with a mechanistic view emphasized structure and were accused by cultural Marxists as not recognizing “human choice and free will—human volition” (Carspecken, p.180). A classic mechanistic study, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, introduced the correspondence theory and demonstrated a hidden curriculum in the U.S. towards different classes of students (Carspecken). Bowles and Gintis (1988) found that “there will tend to emerge a correspondence between the social relations of education and those of the economic system” (in Livingstone, 1999, p. 188).

In *Learning to Labour*, Willis (1977), demonstrated working-class agency by showing that the education his research subjects, the lads, received was not *only* “imposed through a hidden curriculum but also constructed by working-class students, their parents, and their cultural ancestors, in order to cope with alienated and underpaid labour” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 182). Even the children in the classrooms who were eager for education ended up in factories, but were not as prepared to engage in forms of workplace resistance (Carspecken).

Since Willis, critical ethnographers in education seek out structures like hidden curriculums, but also pay attention to working-class agency, especially forms of resistance and struggle (Carspecken). For example, McLaren (1995) and Apple (1996) explore how “individuals can resist and contest social and cultural oppression in [an] educational setting” (in Nesbit, 2005, p. 10).

Unfortunately, adult education and social movement learning was not immune to the neo-liberal shift in academia. Adult education and its “K-12 and higher education counterparts, [is] now firmly established as central to the smooth functioning of economic systems and societies” (Nesbit, 2005, p. 11). Thankfully, there are some in the Canadian adult education field who research social movements and continue to include an analysis of class in their work. They include Chovanec (2006), (Livingstone (1999; 2001), Nesbit, (2005, 2006),

Sawchuck, (2004), Schied (1993), Smith (2006), and Spencer and Taylor (2006). Nonetheless, with this neo-liberal shift, research in adult education, and social movement learning scholarship about working-class struggles, faltered for a time. Social movement practitioners critiqued scholars for making broad abstractions that were not grounded in the movements being studied, while movement activists often did not read or speak outside of their practice (Diani, 2000). During the past decade, social movement learning researchers have once again placed themselves inside the social movements they seek to study. Foley (2002) “advocates blending autobiography and ethnography into a ‘cultural Marxist’ standpoint” (p. 469); LeBlanc (1999) offers insider research on the anarcho-punk scene; and Graeber (2009) provides an ethnographic account of anarchists within anti-globalization movements challenging free trade. It is my hope that this research will be a valued part of the recent upsurge in qualitative studies within social movements.

My Positionality

As I have provided some of the historical context for this study, I will also introduce my own biases and purpose in conducting this research. As a white, well-educated, heterosexual, male Canadian citizen, I retain a certain amount of privilege. This privilege does not excuse me from struggles for equality; rather, it obligates me to work in solidarity with oppressed groups in destroying these social inequalities. I have organized with multiple social movements seeking social and environmental justice throughout my undergraduate and graduate career. The only mark of oppression I have, which I share with the vast majority of humanity, is that of class. I sell my labour for a wage to survive. Although I straddle the working-class and professional middle-class, I recognize that my interest lies with the working-class, not the capitalist class. My research question has been shaped by my participation in social movements and academia.

I make several assumptions in conducting this research: that I am indeed an insider, but as a researcher I am also a stranger; that there is the possibility of inter-subjective analysis between social movement practitioners and scholars, collectively and individually; that humanity exists in interlocking relationships of

oppression—of which capitalist relations of production create an extremely important, if not fundamental, cause of our current unequal state. I also believe that people can collectively bring about positive social change for themselves and, through their solidarity, the world. There would be no point in researching how to challenge capitalism if what is desirable or right could never be known, if individuals or groups could not change social systems, or if every social system theory could be deconstructed into meaningless individual moments. While my research question draws on a humanistic philosophy of learning in assuming that people have an innate capacity to grow and learn, I recognize the fundamental social relations that create the reality within which we engage. The agency and structure involved in this research represents a revolutionary praxis of theory and action.

Insider Research

In *Political Activist as Ethnographer*, George Smith (2006) proceeded from the premise that knowledge is produced through a reflexive social process of mutual determination and learning from other people, and is thus inherently subjective. Starting from their subjective experiences, activists can reflexively engage in research themselves through confrontations with ruling regimes, thereby discovering useful aspects of relations of power (Smith, D., 2006). Holford (1995) argues that reflexivity already happens to some extent in social movements, with cognitive praxis that generates new forms of knowledge for social movements, academia and society itself. However, while movement practitioners are often aware that knowledge is largely a social construction, contradictions in their own truths can often go unnoticed. Graeber (2009) maintains that:

Even when I am critical of the movement, I'm critical as an insider, someone whose ultimate purpose is to further its goals. My eventual decision to write an ethnography came from the same impulse. To some degree, of course, as a trained ethnographer you can't really help yourself. (p. 12)

My B.A. in Anthropology provided much of the spark towards my methodological choice for this thesis. I also hoped that ethnography for social movement scholarship could surface contradictions through an insider position that recognizes the intricacies of the movement while maintaining a critically reflexive stance.

In many ways, my insider position allows for collective reflection, mediated through an individual. As a movement practitioner and scholar, I carry biases with me that will be reflected in my work. This does present a problem in balancing some level of accountability towards academia (Pendlebury & Enslin, 2001), with ensuring applicability of the research for fellow workers and activists (Croteau, Hoynes & Ryan, 2005). Critical research is not necessarily biased in and of itself; this tendency can be reduced by employing standards of methodological rigour found in suitable research for objective knowledge, in this case by systematically using ethnographic methods (Carspecken, 1996).

Following the completion of my data collection, I temporarily withdrew from IWW activities for a period of analysis, as is common in the ethnographic tradition. However, attempting to remove myself completely from the practice of the IWW in order to achieve some level of neutrality was not only questionable in its efficacy, but limited my access to certain types of knowledge, such as the richness of qualitative data that is freely given to trusted insiders of social movements (Drury & Stott, 2001). Thus, I returned to Edmonton in September of 2010 for group feedback from my fellow Wobblies, and I continue to keep in touch with the branch. As a scholar and activist, my hope is that the research results will be reviewed not only by the academy, but by those engaged in class struggle. I argue that qualitative and critically reflexive research, from the position of an insider, can produce valid and useful knowledge for social movement practitioners *and* scholars to approach how social movement learning occurs in working-class struggles.

Ethnographic Methods

The study is ethnographic partially because of the methods I have used: interviews, participant observation, an investigator diary and archival analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Spradley & Baker, 1980). I was interested in class consciousness, and these ethnographic methods enabled me to “empirically research collective conceptions” (Saldanha, 1988). Consistent with ethnographies, my framework includes a “strong cultural lens,” recognizing how learning is embedded within culture (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Creswell, 1998) and observed through symbols, beliefs, practices, artifacts and local knowledge. I then went beyond these surface observations using a critically reflexive analysis based on cultural Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist theories.

Participant Observation

After a year as an IWW member I also became a researcher, and spent my last eight months in Edmonton as a participant observer. In trying to understand how IWW members are learning to challenge capitalist hegemony, I attempted to find out how they understand capitalism and their place in it (i.e. their class consciousness). Participant observation is useful for my purposes, as:

Contemporary social movements offer an ideal situation for the study of the perceived interests and consciousness of mass-level participants. *One can be present at the moments of generation of consciousness and the concerned individuals can be encountered in the field...* individuals engaged in the social relations of production contribute to a collective consciousness... [and] collective conceptions can serve as an *empirically accessible object of studying the subjectivity of a class on matters relating to class reality*, to the extent that they are interjected in individual consciousness. (Saldanha, 1988, p. 14, italics added)

I observed in places that were appropriate to my questions (Creswell, 1998) and I constantly wrote field notes that included “portraits of the informant, the physical setting, particular events and activities, and ... [my] own reactions”

(Bogdan & Biklen in Creswell, 1998, p. 125). Where appropriate, I took notes in situations like workshops or lectures. When the context made writing socially awkward, such as an informal gathering at a pub, I wrote journal notes when I got home. I was not present on the job site where people were organizing, for obvious ethical reasons of confidentiality and informant job security. Instead, I relied on interviews, and Organizing Committee meetings for a glimpse into these actions. Being on picket lines or at a rally did not infringe on my informants' own job security, so I participated in these struggles. I also recorded information gained from informal interviews (e.g., conversations) conducted during the fieldwork.

Interviews

An interview process complements reflection upon participant observation (Stake, 2005) and it is best to wait “until a thick record of observations has been compiled before beginning interviews and group discussion” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 154). During the initial participant observations, I used a “reputational case selection” in deciding which participants would be interviewed (Merriam, 1988, p. 50). Since I am interested in praxis as a process of learning to challenge hegemony, experiential knowledge of long-term and core members was extremely important and was found within “narratives and situational descriptions of... activity, personal relationship, and group interaction” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). I also chose to interview those who were engaged in a wide variety of IWW activities. I attempted to select a diverse group of interviewees.

I formally interviewed five members of the organization who had been involved in the IWW from four to 11 years. Three interviewees were male and two female. Two identified themselves as Caucasian, one as Jewish and two as Chilean Canadian. The ages ranged between early 20s and mid 30s. Reflecting afterwards, I decided this was due to a comfort with members closer to my own age. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted about an hour. In the interviews I sought out interpretations around three broad questions: “How has the IWW influenced your thinking?”; “How did you learn these things?”; and “How do you think this could be taught to other workers?”

During the interviews, I encouraged “asking back” (hooks, 1990, 1992; Oakley in Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006, p. 200) to create a more collaborative relationship and to provide insights that may have been missed about my questions, purpose, method or role as a researcher and participant observer (see appendix 3)

Group Presentation

A group presentation and discussion, eight months after leaving the field, provided an opportunity to get feedback from the group and further triangulate my interpretations and analysis up to that point (Stake, 2005) by placing the analytical findings into a social context (Cicourel in Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 704). I sent out an invitation with a time and place over our email list. This process was more open-ended than the individual interviews, as I did not use an interview guide. For the 10 members who attended (several regrets), I presented my findings then opened it up for questions and discussion. I facilitated by making sure that all 10 members had a chance to speak (Creswell, 1998). To look for ethnographic validity, I sought “respondent validation” (Atkinson in Creswell, 1998, p. 211) feedback on my initial findings and theories. This was quite successful in providing some group consensus about my findings and allowed me to proceed in flushing out some of the themes and meta-themes I was developing.

Document and Archival Review

As an ethnographer, “any document that proves valuable as a source of information can rightfully be considered an archive” (Wolcott, 1999, p. 59). I have learned a great deal about the IWW through its many booklets and pamphlets found in the National Archives and within the Edmonton IWW office library. This data is largely public, or easily accessible to the public such as the schedule for a workshop. I do not include personal correspondence or discussions on the Edmonton IWW listserve in my research. Much of the history in Chapter 2 is based on primary texts from World War I, found in the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa. They included pamphlets and IWW newspapers, as well as

military and RN-WMP correspondence. This has aided in providing a historical context, common in ethnographies. Typically, ethnographers who include historical and archival research “in conjunction with fieldwork tend to regard the historical work as adjunct” (Hill in Wolcott, 1999, p. 60). I attempted to provide a historical context to my research, as I thought it essential in understanding the contemporary IWW. For this historical context I grouped my findings into time periods and themes such as state coercion, education in the IWW, worker intellectuals, trends in worker and labour education, and the development of the IWW.

Ethical Considerations

I am studying “across”, meaning I have no more or less power than those I am researching. I am an equal with members of the branch because I am also a worker, collectively engaging in an organization that eschews hierarchy. At the same time, I am a researcher, which inevitably impacts the social relationship. I should recognize the potential for unequal relationships. The most glaring power discrepancy is around access to knowledge. Therefore, I am attempting to write this ethnography in straightforward terms and use the group interview as a chance to create a more dialogical process.

There are some ethical concerns around insider research in terms of bias and confidentiality. As someone who is a member of the organization I am studying, it will be in my own interest to make sure that the information I collect will be used in the ways I have disclosed to the group, and take important steps to protect confidentiality. I am aware of the role that objective research has historically played in producing knowledge used for the regulation and control of social movements (Smith, D., 2006). This research is intended to empower the IWW, not provide tools for its management.

I sought permission from the branch as a whole through its voting process, receiving a unanimous vote for my research. My proposal was created and revised through discussions with several Wobblies and my research supervisor, Donna Chovanec. I emailed my proposal to the branch mailing list several weeks prior

(see Appendix 4). All interviewees provided written consent to the process, after I explained the research goals and how the interview data would be used (see Appendix 4). Interviewees had the opportunity to withdraw until two weeks after the data collection was completed, although no one did.

I took steps to reduce potential harm to the research interviewees. The only risk I foresaw was if an employer found out the identity of one of my interviewees, the interviewees could be fired for being pro-union or have trouble finding future employment because of their affiliation with a radical union (although both employer practices are illegal, it does happen).

For this reason I have changed the names of informants and altered references that could easily identify people. For example, I made their places of work fairly generic, such as “a worker in a public institution.” Demographic information gathered during the interviews, such as name, year of birth, gender, occupation and ethnicity, were gathered in order to analyze socio-cultural factors with informants’ interpretations about how they are challenging capitalist hegemony. This information did not prove to be as useful as I had thought; but, complemented the expansive descriptions common in ethnographic accounts. I took steps to protect electronic files, including keeping them only on my home computer with password protection. Journal notes and audio from participant observation were kept in a locked safe. While transcribing the interviews, I changed names and places with the master sheet kept in the safe. These documents will be destroyed.

Ethical Benefits

It is my intention to demonstrate that the education provided by the IWW is distinct from mainstream trade union education and represents a form of education in labour unions preceding dominant contemporary forms of labour organizing. It is often more horizontal, member-run and radical, with direct action being a part of a revolutionary praxis. I hope to assist in legitimizing and demonstrating the benefits of this approach to worker education within the labour movement, broader social movements, labour education and adult education.

Ultimately, the IWW's goal is to create a world without bosses, a non-hierarchical world where production is democratically controlled. It is a utopian vision that recognizes immediate expressions of working-class agency. I have intended to contribute to my own knowledge and position on class struggle. In this sense, my research can also be seen as a praxis of "personal growth and social commitment" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 171). As this is a critical ethnography, it sides with those viewed as the oppressed in society and seeks to contribute to a social amelioration. Beyond legitimizing education in the IWW as part of a broader workers' education, this research aims to provide a site for a collective reflection on the role of Wobblies.

Analysis

I coded and organized the field notes and interview transcriptions in easily searchable text files, which was instrumental in searching for patterns (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 172). During the data collection, I paid attention to figures of speech, or "tropes" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), for use in the writing and to identify themes and patterns. The coding I imposed upon the data was based upon my observations, the interviews, and the literature. Using themes found in both interviews and observations is especially important for "high-level codes" as "the final report ought to defend cultural reconstructions with reference to both interview and observation material" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 163). This process of finding "patterned regularities in the data" began in my fieldwork, but was further informed "by drawing [on these] connections between the culture-sharing group and larger, theoretical frameworks" (Wolcott in Creswell, 1998, p.152-153). My research draws on theories of dialectical materialism—Gramscian notions of hegemony, education and culture in looking at how capitalism is reproduced and resisted through everyday practices. I sought out the appropriate cultural Marxist theories of Gramsci (1971) and Allman (2001). I also used a more libertarian socialist analysis, an anarcho-syndicalist and related industrial unionist approach (Damier; 2009; Schmidt & van der Walt, 2009). This process of matching the theories to the data included "checking in" with Wobblies. It was

during this process that I became more distinctly aware of the problems of using Gramsci's theory of hegemony as requiring state hegemony, which allowed for a reinterpretation of his theories within a non-hierarchical organization.

While the bulk of the analysis was done after the data had been collected, the process had in fact been happening throughout the research, and even before it had formerly began. Much of it was a collective analysis, formed through reflection with my fellow workers. However, the assumptions I had going into the research changed a great deal, including: the role of traditional intellectuals and formal adult educators as vanguards; the interaction of organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals; and using a Gramscian analysis within a group sharing more anarchist tendencies.

Summary

In this chapter I provided a background and rationale for the methodology of critical ethnography. To position my research I provided a brief review of the shifts in social movement research from policing to solidarity. Critical qualitative research, including critical ethnography, developed from this shift in academia. As the methodology developed, it allowed for studies of agency in structure, particularly class-based oppression and struggle. I then presented my own position, assumptions and defense of insider research as producing useful knowledge for academia and social movement practitioners.

Methodological rigour is one reason this study has scholarly value. I described the different ethnographic methods I employed, including: participant observation, interviews, group presentation, document and archival review. I reviewed the ethical considerations, including potential risks to research informants, mitigation of those risks and the ethical benefits of the study. Finally, I revealed the method used in my analysis of coding based upon the interviews and data, and a theoretical analysis drawing on dialectical materialist, cultural Marxist/anarcho-syndicalist theories of agency, structure, relations of production and hegemony. This was complemented by an ongoing collective analysis through a critical reflection with my fellow workers. While this is an individual and

academic account, it is my hope that it truly reflects a more collective understanding of learning in the Edmonton IWW.

Chapter 4: Findings on Education in the IWW

In the next two chapters I present my findings from an eight-month ethnographic study with the Edmonton IWW. I have categorized my findings into five broad themes or sections: the interviewees and my own introduction; joining and early experiences with the IWW; education in the IWW; intellectual formation in the IWW; and negotiating hegemony in the IWW. I first detail how my informants and I came to join the IWW, and describe how members are oriented to the IWW after joining. I turn to examples of education in the IWW, including non-formal education through workshops and lectures, informal education through mentorship and socialization, and learning through a revolutionary praxis of “trial and error” coupled with “confidence” from experiencing working-class solidarity and one’s own ability to organize on the job. In Chapter 5, I look at intellectual formation in the IWW: the interconnected roles of organic and traditional intellectuals. I then look at how hegemony is negotiated in the Edmonton IWW, what is critiqued, what is proposed, and, in asking if it can actually change society, how it is revolutionary?

Meet the Edmonton IWW

Joining the IWW

I had been thinking about joining the IWW for some time. While it partially took an ideological commitment to class struggle, it also required some reflection upon my own position at the time, straddling academia in the winter and manual labour in the summer. What was my position within class struggle? I finally worked up the courage to ask several Wobblies about joining the IWW at a Calgary Anarchist Bookfair after-party in March 2008.

Phineus, says,

“We’d love to have you but you should wait until tomorrow to sign up. As a rule, we don’t sign people up when they’ve had a couple of drinks. We’re not some Trotskyist front group or anything.”

I protest and say “I just got here; I’m on my first beer.”

“All the same, we have all the rigging at the bookfair anyways.”

“What’s that?”

“It has membership cards, dues stamps, the constitution, “Fire Your Boss” booklets, stuff like that.”

I find it reassuring to know that these folks want me to have as clear a head as possible when signing up.

The next day I approached the Wobbly table at the Calgary Anarchist Bookfair. At many progressive events in central Alberta with tables set up by social movements, you will find a Wobbly book table. Volunteers from the branch are chatting with attendees and selling books on IWW history, strategies, newspapers and general propaganda¹⁶ published by the branch through a local publishing co-op, Black Cat Press. While waiting for a delegate to sign me up, I bought a comic book published by the branch called *A Not So Comic Comic-Book*. Using different comic mediums, it contains real workplace stories by six Wobblies. Some are about taking the first steps towards organizing, or having the courage to walk on a picket line.

Liz, an elected delegate of the branch, signs me up. There is some joking around, and Thomas says,

“You are now number 374197, welcome.”

Matthew, always the serious one when it comes to issues of industrial democracy, says:

“Remember, this is a democratic union, so question everything. It doesn’t work if we don’t all participate in making decisions.”

The membership card is red and has the IWW General Administration symbol on the front. I am started with a 12-month card where I fill out such details as my occupation, determining to which industrial union I belong. I am a graduate student and research assistant, so I become a member of I.U. 620, Educational Workers, representing everyone who works in any job at a school or

¹⁶ I refer to it as propaganda because the Edmonton IWW has a Propaganda Committee. I understand it as literature meant to persuade.

other educational institution. Students have been allowed to join this part of the union since the 1960s, under the assumption that they are workers in training. On the back of the card is the preamble to the IWW constitution (appendix 1). I am also given the IWW constitution, and “Fire Your Boss”, a handbook of direct action strategies in the workplace.

Members come to join the branch through a variety of ways, but several patterns can be found. Wobblies come to the branch as workers. They have workplace experiences from a variety of industries ranging across the collar colour spectrum. Many try to organize informally in their places of work but do not have much success prior to becoming Wobblies. After being introduced to the IWW, they recognize a group offering a form of organization that meet their immediate needs as workers. It also satisfies the desire to create a better world. Many Wobblies also come to the branch after participating in a variety of social movements. Often they come to critique these social movements as undemocratic, too “cerebral”, “disempowering” or ineffective as avenues to radical change.

Fellow worker Leon identified himself to me as Chilean Canadian but he is an internationalist when “people bug me too much about that.”

He was raised with a political consciousness by his parents, refugees of the Chilean military coup. He has a high school diploma and took a few courses at a local college. On average, his income as an adult worker has been below the poverty line. At the time of the interview, he was employed full-time as a residential painter. He worked in two kitchens prior to that, where he organized.

Leon has been a Wobbly since 2001 but he didn’t really become involved in the organization until 2004, after spending much of his time with “tendencies” of the International Socialists. He would go to picket lines with them and started to talk to the Wobblies, who were also there in solidarity. During the Shaw Conference Centre strike¹⁷, he spent time talking to some of the older Wobblies. It wasn’t the first time he had been on a picket line but “it was probably my first real

¹⁷ The Shaw Conference Centre Strike of 2002 was a bitter 204 day strike that ended with the signing of the workers’ first collective agreement.

conscious introduction to unionism, and basically you have a sense of how people get screwed.”

Leon tells me that what really attracted him to organizing with the Wobblies was their “willingness to do the dirty work.”

“It is a willingness to go out and actually talk to the workers on the picket line, which I always thought was a huge thing, even from the beginning. I didn’t know who were the union bureaucrats when I first got in. Whereas when people first get involved in political organizations, they look towards going to a picket line from a political standpoint, they get an education of who is involved in the union or EDLC [Edmonton District and Labour Council].”

Rachel had also been involved in a political organization prior to joining the IWW, one with a Marxist-Leninist approach. They fostered in her a belief:

“That the working-class would be lead by a cadre and that there was no sort-of, spontaneous self-organization, or that people could autonomously come to a class consciousness. I genuinely believed that there had to be people that led them to that kind of conclusion.”

Rachel worked her way through university to become a teacher. It was a workplace experience that changed her ideas about the working-class. She was a server at a restaurant where the boss would make suggestive remarks towards the female employees, deny wages as punishment, and give less than 24-hours notice for a shift, amongst other issues. The workers did not know these were violations of Alberta Labour Law, but they were angry. Without even knowing the term “organizing”, Rachel began to meet with her fellow workers and”

“Influence direction in the workplace, which was a horrible failure. We all got fired-well some of us got fired and some of us quit because that was our deal-we were all going down together... I had tried to organize my workplace, but I had never even heard the word ‘organizing’ I didn’t even know what organizing was at that time.”

Rachel went through a personal political crisis and “ceased to feel that Leninism was relevant, or that this vanguard party thing was ever going to materialize out of thin air and suddenly lead us all to a glorious future. And at that point I came upon the Wobblies.”

She found a Facebook events page for a Wobbly event and attended. She says,:

“As soon as I walked in, I knew it was the space for me, because people were speaking in a language that I understood. Because I had the background in Marxism—enough to understand what people were talking about in terms of class—but it was a simpler version of what I had been doing, and a more effective one.”

Phineus was born in 1982 and has a bachelor’s degree in Philosophy. He works at a public institution and is also a dual-carder, meaning he has his IWW red card and the card of the trade union of his workplace. He came to the IWW as a “stereotypical anti-globalization activist. I had dreadlocks and pretty progressive politics.”

But he perceived that the movement was “starting to lose steam” and was not “reaching out to the community itself; it was kind of a transient movement that would hop to where the conflict was, but never really set down roots.”

Phinues saw in the IWW something that had a global perspective, but “actually got involved in the day-to-day lives of people who might not be as politically radical as myself.”

Phinues joined the IWW at a time when he had become reliant on jobs for a living. While he had worked since age 14, his wage was for school and vacations; it “wasn’t the same as working to pay your rent.”

Susan works at the same public institution as Phineus and is also a dual-carder. Before joining the Wobblies, she had gone to Argentina for the first of two internships in factories taken over by workers following the economic collapse in 1999. She described to me how, when she first went there, she was a “naïve liberal” who wanted to do something to make the world a better place. In

Argentina, she met some anarchist activists and, while they were very opinionated, she found herself attracted to what they had to say. Upon returning from her first visit, she started to look into joining a social movement in Edmonton. She became involved with an environmental group, but found it an “alienating” and “disempowering” experience because it was only about spectacle without any tangible gains. She was introduced to the IWW while giving a presentation about worker self-management in Argentina. A few Wobblies came to the presentation. Afterwards, one approached her and said, “Hi, my name is Phineus. You might be interested in the IWW.”

Susan was participating in a Marxist reading group at the time, which she found helpful, especially the discussion on dialectical materialism, but she found that “the dynamic of the group itself was a little weird” and even somewhat oppressive towards the women in the group. Ironical, as they were discussing an article by Angela Davis at the time, who is an academic, Marxist and feminist. Susan decided to help some local activists with an art project for May Day, a celebration of workers’ struggle, constructing a “capitalist pig” eating the world on a giant platter to be carried by six Wobblies.

“I helped carry the pig and there was a whole bunch of Wobs except for me and I was kind of like ‘hey you guys are pretty awesome’ and then I went out for beers after the May Day March with people... and then I joined shortly after that ... I said, ‘hey, where do I sign up?’ and they were like ‘oh, that happened quickly! Okay, sign up!’”

Zapata was born in 1978. Like Leon, his family is also part of the large expatriate Chilean community in Edmonton resulting from the U.S.-backed military coup. He grew up in Edmonton and took about five semesters of university, which was “more for interest’s sake”. To make a living, he entered the trades, and at the time of the interview was an electrical apprentice. Zapata was one of the original members when the Edmonton IWW Branch re-started in 1999. He was politically active prior to joining the IWW and had worked in “a lot of service sector jobs.”

His mother had been in the Communist Party for a long time in Chile, so he grew up with “those kind of ideals and that kind of outlook of expecting better.”

As he began working, Zapata was also reading many classical anarchist works, such as William Godwin and Emma Goldman. He was attracted more to class struggle anarchism than “the lifestyle anarchist trend,” and was very interested in the working-class roots of anarchism. He became involved with the New Socialist Group, which was composed of “Trotskyists” and some anarchists, “so it was more workers then.”

The anarchists in the group had read about and were influenced by the Spanish Revolution of 1936, which was where Zapata was headed ideologically in 1998 and 1999. A split in the group occurred when the more anarchist folks wanted to do labour organizing and the Trotskyists wanted to pursue anti-war organizing. The anarchist side of the schism put their efforts into:

“[Re]forming the Industrial Workers of the World here and getting a branch started. That’s where our interests led... it just more or less coincided and we saw value in the IWW... One of the people who we were more or less influenced by was Antonio Negri, [his] comment on the IWW as a new—well, not a new union form, but it is the most appropriate union form for an automatized workforce where everyone is spread out and it is not so centralized anymore—and that is what we agreed with.”

According to Zapata’s recollection, there were about five or six active members at this time in the branch, which had slowly grown to about 50 active dues-paying members, making it the second-largest IWW branch in the world during this research.

There are many similar stories about joining the Edmonton IWW. Each new member brings their own particular experience as a worker, but they all share that class position and find in the IWW a way to conceptualize and organize their workplace. The branch has earned a strong reputation for its solidarity work, but

only in the last few years has it begun to put a concerted effort into organizing members' workplaces.

My Early Experiences as an IWW Member

After joining, I began to attend the monthly general meetings of the branch and take in the meeting structure, run on a truncated version of *Roberts Rules of Order* called Rusty's Rules of Order. I was skeptical of this at first, as I have a background with various forms of consensus decision-making popular in Canada amongst Public Interest Research Groups (PIRG's) and other groups in what is commonly referred to as the "New Left". I had heard that Robert's Rules silences minority voices and will often narrow the realm of discussion.

What I find is that everyone present is participating and has a vote, that alternative viewpoints are presented just as often and that the meetings are run quickly and efficiently. I am quiet at first and don't want to vote on many of the issues that I know nothing about. As such, I find myself asking my fellow workers next to me about the definitions of the acronyms I hear, such as a ROC (Regional Organizing Committee) or GHQ (General Headquarters). With the mentorship of a few Wobblies, I learn quickly and begin speaking to a couple of motions.

At the time, I am working for a lawncare company as a summer job. It is owned by one man, and there are a few hired hands: his son and his son's friends form the rest of the crew. I spend time reflecting upon my experience as a worker with what I am learning through the Wobs. At first I find it much easier to critique the bosses of large corporations, but I am somewhat skeptical about critiquing small business, especially a family-run operation.

The pay is half decent and the boss keeps telling us stories of how at the end of each season everyone gets a bonus and he will take us all out for steak and beer. I think that sounds pretty good. On my last day, I work 12 hours and I make the guy almost a \$1000 in sales. I tell myself "job well done" and sit back waiting for my final paycheque, bonus and steak dinner. It doesn't come. I call him and leave a message. Nothing. I email him. Still nothing. Finally, I bring it up at a pub

after an IWW meeting, a common place to socialize and maybe expand on some branch business. Thomas listens to my story and then yells across the table,

“Hey Phineus, Aaron’s getting screwed out of his back-wages.”

“Really?”

I wasn’t sure I wanted to turn this into a public conversation. I started to defend the lawncare company,

“Yeah, it’s just a family-run business doing lawncare.”

Phineus is intrigued.

“Oh yeah? How much does he owe you?”

“About \$200, and he wasn’t paying overtime, but kept promising a bonus which didn’t come. It was probably about \$400 in overtime.”

“And he runs the business out of his house?”

“Yeah, he is still cutting lawns, but didn’t need me anymore because spring cleanup is done, so I was laid off. I was maybe going to take it to small claims court or the labour board.”

“Yes, you could do that. But it would take weeks or months. Tell you what, tell him to pay you or you’ll take it to a third party. If he doesn’t pay you, we could put up a picket and block his driveway.”

This had not occurred to me.

“You think that would work?”

“Do you think he wants a picket up in front of his house?”

The next day, I add up exactly everything that I am owed. I send my former boss an email saying he owes me \$467 and I am prepared to take it to a third party if I am not paid. About five minutes later I get a phone call.

“Aaron, you have to understand, I don’t pay overtime because I have a higher wage to begin with.”

“But it’s the law.”

I am met with silence.

“Alright, you really have me over a barrel here. I’ll send a cheque, it should be there in a couple of days.”

“Ok, thanks!”

(Click).

The following day, the cheque is dropped off in my mailbox. I am relieved, though part of me wishes we could have set up the picket. This experience has a big impact on my now-former opinion that the interests of the working-class and owners aren't as opposed in small businesses as in large corporations. It also teaches me an important lesson on working-class agency.

At this time I begin to think about writing my thesis on the IWW. I had wanted to study and write about a social movement and the IWW certainly has my attention. My research proposal to study the branch is completed by April 2009, when I present my idea to the monthly general meeting to vote on it.

I step outside, as suggested by my thesis supervisor, while the vote happens. I come back in and Thomas tells me that he is sorry—the branch voted my idea down. There is much snickering.

“It's OK, Aaron. It was unanimous.”

I remember feeling strange with my fellow Wobblies at the pub afterwards, knowing that I was now a researcher among them. But I did settle in, and nothing spurred on a first journal entry like getting laid off on May Day, 2009:

Today is May Day, International Workers' Day. I just left a meeting with my now former boss, a professor. I am a research assistant right now while I am doing my masters' thesis meaning I am a temporary worker; my hours are flexible and my position as well. I wonder what I will do if I ever become a professor. Will I be able to get away with not hiring research assistants and just do a lot of co-publishing and collaborative work where it belongs to everyone? Then I will still feel ethically bound to the working-class.

I start to wonder what professors who are IWW members do, such as Noam Chomsky, David Graeber or Denis Rancourt. As frustrated as I am, I recognize how marvelous it is for my own understanding of boss/worker relations.

Later, I go to a march celebrating May Day. It has been organized primarily by Wobbly organizers in Edmonton, and there are a large number of the red and black anarcho-syndicalist flags, representing the anarchists in the Wobblies. Across the rest of the march I see trade union flags, the New Democratic Party and a smattering of those from the two Communist parties. I spend most of the march talking to a fellow graduate student about how we should organize our academic department beyond the provincially mandated Graduate Students' Association. I eventually decide that organizing with a union in the same department where I am trying to write a thesis about said union would quickly become problematic.

These were but a few of my early experiences with the IWW leading up to my ethnographic study.

Education in the IWW

Through my research, I have identified three broad ways in which education happens in the Edmonton IWW. It occurs non-formally through workshops and lectures, informally through mentorship and socialization, and through a revolutionary praxis of "trial and error" coupled with "confidence" from experiencing working-class solidarity and one's own ability to organize on the job. The next three sections will present findings on these forms of learning.

Non-Formal Education in the IWW

The Edmonton IWW and its members offer a significant number of non-formal educational programmes ranging from organizer training, introduction to the IWW courses, and talks at anarchist bookfairs, to name a few.

During my research, the IWW received an invitation to present on workplace organizing to a high school audience. This was approved during a general meeting of the branch and is one example of Edmonton IWW education in a formal setting, the other example being this thesis.

The education provided by the branch is by-and-large an explicit and democratic undertaking. It provides a chance for newer members to learn by

doing; its structures are voted on by the membership and it is reflective of the members' own experiences as workers. Rachel notes:

“The IWW does comprehensive education. The trainings that they do—I’ve been to the organizing summit, the organizer training committee trainings, the T for T [Training for Trainers]... these are all very important—they allow people to take their experiences from, say, on the picket line and in the workplaces... which is giving them a whole vocabulary... and strategies that they can give [you] to deal with some of those things. So I think that was actually an important part of my experience as a Wobbly, was through actually explicit education as a branch member.”

For about five years prior to this research, the IWW saw an increase in organizing efforts at the local branch level and coordination across the IWW as an international body. Education had been an integral part of organizing efforts. Susan said:

“It seems like there is more going on and there is a greater—at the very least—there is a greater awareness of the need to reflect together and to coordinate. So the organizer summit that we did, there will be another one in 2010, and I think that is a good start for how to discuss strategies and learn from our mistakes.”

At the beginning of my fieldwork, IWW workshops were run by the organizing committee. By the end of my research, through a vote by the general membership, education was provided through the office committee. This reflects that the organizing committee had become more involved with workplace actions, whereas, in the past it had focused more on training people to be organizers.

The workshops I attended during my thesis research were put on officially by the branch and unofficially by members. Workshops such as an *Introduction to the IWW*, *Organizing 101* and *Fire Your Boss* were officially held by the Edmonton IWW. Their content is democratically controlled by its members,

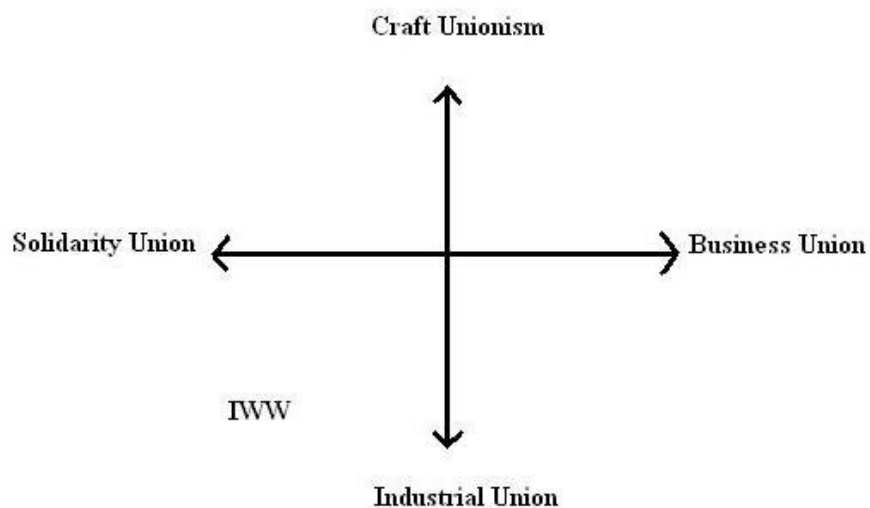
whereas *Anarchism and Class Struggle*, *The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair*, and *Approaching an Anarchist Education* were organized outside of the IWW with the participation of Wobblies as individuals. I included both types in my research because they involved many of the same social networks and cannot be easily separated when looking at education in the Edmonton IWW.

Introduction to the IWW

About once a year, or whenever there is an influx of new members, the Wobblies hold an *Introduction to the IWW* workshop. I attended one such meeting in July 2009.

As I walk into the room, I notice that there are as many senior members as there are new Wobblies, and also a few guests. For the presenters, it is their first time presenting the material, and one nervously admits this. We assure them that everyone will support them and that one of the best ways to learn about the IWW is to teach it.

I am struck by the cooperative structure of the workshop, and I start to understand the role of more senior Wobblies as mentors. The presentation starts out with a diagram showing four different types of unions (Figure 1):



The IWW is placed in the solidarity and industrial union quadrant. A union in the opposite quadrant would be a trade (craft) union, and one that serves the boss as much as it does the workers.

Next, all of the acronyms and structures of the IWW are spelled out along with a detailed presentation on the structure of the local branch, which includes several committees that report back to the general meetings that every member can attend and vote. They include the following:

Solidarity Committee: provides support at picket lines and brings out members to rallies supporting a broad range of progressive causes.

Organizing Committee: coordinates organizing efforts and currently provides educational workshops such as Organizing 101

Propaganda Committee: writes the Dispatch (the branch's publication) and prints information pamphlets.

Literature Committee: sells the literature and sets up tables at events.

Women's Committee: discusses the intersections of gender and class, and ideally addresses any gender inequalities before they become a problem in the branch.

Office Committee: the newest committee, which takes care of the new IWW office in Edmonton.

The workshop ends with a role-play where we practice using Rusty's Rules of Order. After the workshop, most of the group decides to head over to a local coffee shop. On the walk over, several of us discuss how the workshop went. We talk about how the introduction should have less of an "alphabet soup" of acronyms and more of a theory of how the IWW is different from a craft or business union. We surmise that the workshop was well done for those already in the union, but for those encountering it for the first time it would probably be intimidating, overwhelming, or "cultish." We bring this up with a larger group at the coffee shop. We explain how a more basic workshop explaining the theory and action of the IWW would be better and could start from people's own

experiences. The role-playing was mentioned as the liveliest part of the workshop because there was laughter and, afterwards, people said they learned from that exercise.

Anarchism 101

Shortly after joining, I attended a panel discussion on *Anarchism and Class Struggle*, part of a silent auction for the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. As mentioned above, this was not an official IWW event as the IWW does not explicitly promote one ideology. However, some members of the Edmonton IWW do identify explicitly as class struggle anarchists or anarcho-syndicalists, and the panel members were all Wobblies, so I included it in my research.

The panel discussion is held in a small art gallery and attendees are a wide mix of those in the Edmonton progressive scene-including other anarchists and activists. There is a decent spread of food and drink and much socializing. The panel frames the history of anarchism as evolving in working-class struggles. The revolutions in Spain 1936 and the Ukraine 1917 are provided as examples. The event is then opened for public discussion: the audience asks questions and makes points about anarchism. One of the most interesting points is made by a Wobbly in the audience that this is not just a critique of capitalism in the traditional Leftist sense, but a critique of hierarchy as well. He says that many grassroots organizations talk about “bottom-up” organizing. The critique of this is that “there is still an up.” Overall, I find the discussion quite clarifying and encouraging.

Organizing 101

This course was probably the most important introduction to being a Wobbly. The *Organizing 101* course provided a basic strategy for organizing one’s own place of work. For me, this workshop provided a conceptual direction towards the organizing side of a revolutionary praxis. It also influenced my own ontological shift from an activist organizing for causes outside of my immediate material concern to an incorporation of my own place of work and class as a site of struggle. The *Organizing 101* workshop was held over a Saturday and Sunday

in a University of Alberta classroom. There were about 30 participants, mostly Wobblies, and other union activists and some interested friends. The presenters were two Edmonton Wobblies and an IWW organizer from Portland who works in the construction industry. In the introduction, the presenters mentioned that the IWW was the first union to welcome *all* workers, and at its lowest point in the 1970s, it was more of a historic society than a union, but that in the 1990s people started to organize again.

They outline the stages of a campaign that have been created from the history and experience of IWW organizing. The general strategy is similar to many other unions—A.E.I.O.U: agitate, educate, inoculate, organize, unionize. One difference in the IWW is that it is often the workers themselves doing this organizing and not a paid organizer. The IWW either assists workers' self-organizing or it is an IWW member organizing in his/her own place of work.

The presenters explain that the first stage, social mapping, is the only time there are secrets amongst workers. This is because you don't want the boss or those friendly to the boss getting wind that you are organizing a union. In this stage, the first step is conducting a physical and social mapping of the location, getting fellow workers' contacts, finding out who works where and what their relationships are to each other. Presenters and attendees provide more examples. The presenters leave ample room for discussion and feedback, which speaks to the emphasis of a decentralized education.

The presenters move on to agitation and education. Agitation means finding out what people's concerns are. Agitation is best done with short-sit down meetings with fellow workers, one-on-one, to learn about their grievances and educate them about what people have done in the past to address workplace concerns through solidarity, workplace democracy and direct action. Mass meetings at the start will alert everyone, including management, that there is a union drive happening and, during the meeting, individual worker grievances are often not raised like they are at one-on-one meetings. A safe, neutral place for the one-on-ones off the shop floor is suggested, such as a coffee shop. Bars are not recommended. The whole point of this meeting is not to tell your fellow workers

about something radical, but to listen to people's own concerns about the workplace. Presenters advise us not to start off with talking about unions and to keep the meeting short; people have things to do. Workers know that something is wrong; they just need people to reaffirm those concerns. Even before I begin my formal data analysis, I recognize how much of this process is reflected in classical adult education approaches via Freire and others, where the work starts from people's own experiences. As outlined in Chapter 2, this approach within union organizing, especially in more democratic and radical streams, has been happening for over a century.

The workshop uses role playing to practice listening to a fellow worker about his/her concerns on the job in the one-on-ones. There is an odd number, so I am in a role-play group of three with a newer Wobbly and a guest. We take turns being the organizer and the worker invited to the one-on-one. We try to be skeptical and not make it too easy. The facilitator from Portland chimes in and reminds us that unions are about relationships and are built from one-on-one conversations—they are not just about grievances and contracts, as in many trade union shops.

The presenters continue to the next step in a campaign: creating a shop committee with interested workers. A shop committee is the basic collective unit in IWW organizing. Decisions about a campaign are ultimately made by those on the shop floor. Phineus notes that it is easy to make committees but hard to make them democratic. However, they identify strategies to maintain active committees, such as building up the confidence of a worker new to the committee by providing small, achievable tasks so that they gain the confidence to take on larger tasks like getting union cards signed. It is easier to build a committee initially from tasks than actions. It gives workers on the committee a sense of empowerment, and membership gives people a sense of ownership. Workers are encouraged to bring their concerns to the committee instead of the boss, thereby forming a collective power of workers, stronger than their own individual power. When workers collectively approach the boss, the organizing drive really takes off. If the boss didn't already know something is up, they do now.

The presenter from Portland notes that education is happening throughout all these stages. Education in preparation for what a boss will do about the organizing drive is called “inoculation”. When a boss does find out, the pressure will be on and will test how well fellow workers were inoculated to whatever anti-union campaign follows. An anti-union campaign will use leaflets to paint the IWW as an illegitimate, unregistered union, or a bunch of anarchists and communists. Other intimidation tactics include telling workers they will be fired for joining a union, that the IWW is a terrorist organization and that the police will be called, or more subtly, that the union is a third party that is not needed in such a team environment.

The presenters again use roleplay to highlight the importance of inoculating a workforce against union busting. This roleplay is a “captive audience meeting”, a mandatory meeting where the boss, or a hired consultant, meets with all the workers to dissuade their organizing efforts. Susan plays the boss, and the fellow worker from Portland plays an outside consultant. A properly inoculated workforce can be quite creative in resisting a “captive audience meeting”. Some of us play agitators, others play more neutral workers and others play the stool pigeons¹⁸ (those who will tell the boss everything that is happening). Our group of agitators gives the consultant a hard time. Then, half of us walk out of the meeting singing “Solidarity Forever”. Much fun is had and, while perhaps slightly exaggerated, serves as a practice for the real thing.

The presenters explain that to begin winning gains for workers, a committee has to force the boss to take the workers seriously and negotiate. This can be done through obtaining official recognition as a registered union through card signing, then holding an election under a labour board. The traditional IWW way would be through a form of direct action demanding the resolution of workers’ concerns or recognition of the union.

¹⁸ The term comes from early labour organizing and refers to workers who would check under stalls to make sure those on bathroom breaks in a factory are not just taking a break and then inform the boss of infractions

Part of the process of gaining recognition as a union is “going public.” Different ways to go public include doing a first action or getting other organizations to phone the boss telling him he now has a union in the shop. The Starbucks Union, an IWW campaign, goes public in a big way and will use a job action coupled with media exposure to announce that the location is now unionized. Some IWW organizing campaigns never really “go public”, especially to the media, but form a collective body of workers making demands all the same.

The workshop ends with a presentation by Phineus and a labour lawyer/professor who had been brought to Edmonton to speak at a public event the previous evening. The lawyer clarifies that under existing provincial labour relations law, the IWW has legal grounds to organize in Alberta without officially registering as a union under the labour board. The labour lawyer emphasizes that workers have the right to organize, regardless of whether or not the government recognizes the union or not. The Canadian Merchant Seamen is one example of a union that is not registered.

Later, I surmise that this knowledge spurred a collective confidence for the branch to move forward with organizing without registering officially as a union under the labour relations board, which it had been reluctant to do.

Phineus explains why the Edmonton IWW has not registered as a union, including that the names and addresses of all officials must be handed in to the government. Most importantly, however, a registered union must give notice before it intends to strike, and can only strike during the bargaining period for a new contract. Otherwise, the union and its officers can face fines in the tens of thousands of dollars. It makes the union officers, whose names and addresses are given to the government, legally bound to ensure its members only strike when they are allowed or risk heavy fines individually. It becomes the officials’ interest to prevent workers from taking direct actions such as quicky strikes, slow-downs, sit-downs, or work to rule, many of which are hallmarks of IWW organizing. As well, the process of being a registered union, with all the legal red tape, requires people with certain specialized skills such as lawyers and bureaucrats. Under the Alberta Labour Relations Act, the government can impose binding arbitration to

force a settlement. This is designed to keep production going. It removes power from the workers and places it in the hands of government, union leadership and industry. Finally, being a registered union requires use of the Rand Formula, where dues are collected by the employer on behalf of the union. This is different from the IWW way of having dues paid voluntarily by the workers to an IWW delegate, which provides the worker with more control over the union.

The 2009 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair

Many of the Edmonton Wobblies participate in organizing the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, the largest in the western Canada. I attended as part of my research. There were dozens of tables from anarchist publishers and bookstores, including Edmonton's Black Cat Press, AK Press from San Francisco, Turning the Tide Books from Saskatoon, and many tables full of 'zines made by younger anarchist affinity groups. There was a daycare, free food from a volunteer kitchen and two socials. The event was held in the Ukrainian Hall, an old community hall with a ballroom and kitchen on both floors. The Ukrainians have a long history of working-class organizing in the city, and the location had become a favourite for events organized by Edmonton's radical Left. Men from the IWW volunteered for the kitchen after prompting from several of us, because the task in previous years had often fallen to a few dedicated women.

One of the women from previous years, a local anarchist who is not a Wobbly, remains this year to help guide us through. I help out in the kitchen and the bar, so I only have time to go to the workshops put on by fellow Wobblies, which includes one affiliated with the branch, Fire Your Boss, a truncated version of Organizing 101 put together by Phineus, Susan and Thomas. There are two others put on by Wobblies, including Approaching an Anarchist Education, a discussion facilitated by Susan and Rachel. The pamphlet reads:

The system of public education serves to legitimize and reproduce unequal and often oppressive structures of power and authority that anarchists fight to undermine. As anarchists who oppose state authority,

what options do we have for education in our communities? Join us in an interactive workshop that will explore these questions and more.

The workshop happens in the downstairs hall. We do a round of introductions. There are several teachers, younger anarchist punks, fellow Wobblies and, interestingly enough, another researcher I have not seen before, also looking at the broad topic of anarchist education. Susan and Rachel identify themselves as class struggle anarchists belonging to the IWW. They facilitate a conversation about what is essentially agency and structure in public education. The teachers talk about the structural impediments to education in the system, and the teenage anarchist punks itemize why they hate school. We create a list of the positive and negative aspects of state education, and start to imagine alternatives when the time runs out.

The Fire Your Boss workshop is done in three parts. The pamphlet reads:

Join the Edmonton IWW for discussions about organizing on the job. We'll start with an interactive role play where participants get to see and talk about what we're up against as workers. The next part will cover knowing your rights and laws you can use for your own protection, and finally an overview of how to organize to make your workplace work for you

Part I: Workplace Roleplay (12:00-1:00)

Part II: Know your Rights (1:00-2:00)

Part III: Workplace Organizing (3:00-4:00)

Participants in all three sections include IWW members and non-members who are attending the bookfair. The roleplay is led by Thomas, and it is the second year he has done it. Everyone dramatizes the role of workers on a factory floor. Thomas takes on the character of the boss.

The roleplay starts with an informal discussion on the shop floor between the workers about some problems they are having with the boss, who suddenly walks by. He calls one of us into his office.

The person returns and says, “the boss wants to know if there are any concerns, that I am always welcome in his office.”

The ones playing the organizer roles stress that we should make decisions together and take them to the boss collectively. I am called in and practice being uncooperative with the boss’s attempts to separate me from my fellow workers through special treatment. I can see how this roleplay could boost the confidence of organizers. The boss keeps trying to pull people into the office for his own one-on-one chat and the organizers scramble to inoculate people to the tricks the boss will use to divide them. The roleplay at the beginning feels a little forced at first, but we eventually get into it and are planning a job action by the time the workshop is over. It helps that several of us in the roleplay had been in the Organizing 101 workshop and/or had organized in a workplace before.

The next section is Know Your Rights and is put on by Susan and Phineus. It is about labour law within an Albertan class struggle context. They clarify right away that filing a grievance is not direct action. With a grievance, the process is around the individual, whereas direct action builds unity and keeps the boss/worker line apparent. They stress that direct action changes the way people think about their workplace. An organizer from another union asks if it is a real union without the certification process. There is a debate at this point about whether to certify as a union or not. The other unionist mentions the protection from certification. But then a Wobbly explains that you don’t have to register to have some legal protection. The presenters clarify that there is employment law, which covers all workers, and labour law, which covers workers in registered unions. The debate seems to come out of the definition of a union. This is a controversial aspect about the IWW, because it is more about direct action as opposed to the collective agreement with the labour board. It is based upon solidarity unionism. Phineus sums up by providing his definition that a “union is a group of workers that stick together and have each others’ backs,” not necessarily an organization recognized through labour law.

The third section is a really brief version of Organizing 101. It goes through steps to organize on the shop floor. During the social mapping part,

described above, someone in attendance who is not a Wobbly objects to the undemocratic nature of this part of organizing. The attendee feels that the boss should be included in such discussions because they are people too. Susan explains that:

“Workplace democracy means those who work beside each other, and is not necessarily for the boss. Besides, the structure of a workplace in a capitalist system is inherently undemocratic, and a boss will try and squash any organizing drive right off the bat, so it must be kept secret at first.”

The attendee is still unimpressed, and after some back and forth she leaves. The exchange represents the complexity of contemporary anarchist movements, where not everyone who would attend an anarchist bookfair has the same understanding of class struggle.

Continuing to Approach an Anarchist Education

Rachel and Susan are encouraged by their presentation on anarchism and education at the bookfair and put on a three-part discussion series during October and November 2009 in the Faculty of Education building at the University of Alberta. It is called *Emancipating Education*. I attended all three.

I wasn't really expecting it to be a part of my fieldwork; I was going more for interest's sake. However, during introductions I noted that about half of the 20 people there were branch members, and the other half were teachers and students. Both of the presenters acknowledged that they are IWW members and view societal change along class struggle anarchist principles.

The presentation touches on issues regarding the interplay of structure and agency in education. The group takes turns listing some of the structures in place, such as the grades, curriculum, examinations, life of students outside school and funding. Susan stresses that in this workshop we should not only critique the current system, but also imagine alternatives. There is some interaction through group exercises. We are asked a series of questions, including “how much control

teachers have over the classroom,” which I find interesting because everyone is split across, “hardly any”, “some control” and “a great deal”, with Wobblies and teachers in all categories. I am in the middle.

At the time, I am a sessional instructor in Education. The workshop influenced my own teaching. In my next class I go through the collective bargaining process of the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA), and all of the legal pathways required before a strike could be called. Then, I decide to contrast this with teacher wildcat strikes as a historical alternative.

Summary of Non-formal IWW Education

The workshops conducted by the Edmonton IWW provide a space for Wobblies to reflect upon their experiences as workers. But several Wobblies stressed, and I noticed it myself, that the best way to learn these things is “through trial and error” in struggle—a social process. Role play is used in many of the workshops and allows for practicing “trial and error” as later, although it does not replace the knowledge one gains in real-world struggles. The workshops are member run and allow for dialogue between participants. Non-formal education is the most structured way that members learn to challenge capitalist hegemony.

Informal Education

Education through social interaction, music, literature and mentorship provided other spaces where Wobblies reflected upon their struggles as workers’ and learned new approaches to organizing and theories to understand working-class struggle. I noticed that social gatherings are an important part of the Edmonton IWW. One such gathering attended by Wobblies is the Anarchist Road Trip.

Once a year, Anarchists from Edmonton and Calgary hold the Anarchist Road Trip, which is a chance for those who live in different cities and organizations or affinity groups to connect and have fun. During my research, the 3rd annual Anarchist Road Trip was held, and my partner and I attend.

The spot, which changes each year, is deep in the Alberta foothills. We sleep in tents through a cold and wet weekend. Spirits are high though as a warm fire is built. It is one of the rare opportunities for anarchists in Alberta to gather socially, the other being the two anarchist bookfairs. The Edmonton crew is almost all Wobblies, except for a couple of folks, but the Calgary group have only two-card carrying members. These two are interested in setting up a branch in Calgary. This road trip provides an opportunity for an informal fireside discussion on how that could take place. They mention it has been difficult to get people to go to meetings.

The class anarchist influence of the Edmonton IWW is apparent in how many activists join the branch or have an affinity with them. I notice that, in general, many of the Calgary anarchists eschew more organized forms of anarchism and seem to praise more insurrectionist or individualistic currents of anarchism as opposed to collective struggles. A month later, the Edmonton Wobs went to our usual spot for an after-meeting beer. Several anarchists from Calgary were in the city and came out as well.

There is a heated discussion about organizing around gender and sexual identity versus organizing around class. The group from Calgary seems to identify mainly as queer and feminist anarchists. They express concerns about organizing only under one cause or banner, while the Edmonton class struggle anarchists argue that post-modern struggles neglect a recognition that we are all in this together regarding class struggle. The Calgary anarchists bring up issues of diversity and inclusion. The class struggle anarchists agree, and say that this is great, necessary for solidarity, but not revolutionary. Several Wobblies stress that issues of gender and sexuality are important, but will not in themselves change the fundamental relations of society. Another Wobbly stresses that we have to address these issues simultaneously and that unequal social relations break down working-class solidarity. He goes on to explain that Wobblies address social inequalities through class struggle, and that we must address gender and queer oppression within our own movements.

Debates such as these are an important educational tool amongst the Edmonton IWW. However, they can sometimes run in intellectual circles and can be infuriating for those who do not understand all of the history and theory behind the debate. This is where mentorship can play an important role. Even during heated discussions: Wobblies can turn to the person next to them and ask what something means, or steer someone trying to verbally figure out a theory onto a coherent path.

Mentorship

Mentorship is not a formal process in the branch, yet members regularly stated it as a way Wobblies learn in the IWW. Rachel noted:

“Oftentimes, when a new member enters the branch, somehow everybody comes over and sits down with that new person and does have those conversations with them, usually in a very casual way. And that helps to sort of give them some words and give them a way to sort of talk about their experiences.”

While mentorship happened briefly during non-formal workshops it was during social gatherings at informal locations such as a pub where a deeper level of mentorship would occur through long discussions. One Wobbly who influenced me is Bill, solidarity chair at the time, and he asked if I would accept a nomination for the position because he was stepping down. I tell him that I would. He goes on to say that the Solidarity Committee is the public face of the IWW and has established good relationships with workers in other unions and civil society. In the December general meeting, I am elected to be the new solidarity chair and I meet with Bill to talk about the position. Bill had been the solidarity chair for as long as I had been a member and I was interested to hear what he had to say.

He has previously stated that the Solidarity Committee is the “face of the IWW” and is “the volunteer fire brigade” when workers are engaged in open struggle. Bill has learned a lot from another, older Wobbly, Albert, who was the solidarity chair for about two years. “Albert would have it all in his head... He

was very well connected throughout the labour movement.” The solidarity chair keeps all of the picket signs, white placards on sticks that have the IWW logo and a simple message: “In Solidarity”. These signs have seen dozens of marches and picket lines. Bill goes on to say:

“We can usually get 15-20 people out to a protest that is 200-strong (an average sized Edmonton protest). There are about 50 people who will come out to a protest as a Wob in Edmonton. So we can get almost half of our members out to a protest. What other union can get half their executive out to a protest, let alone half their members?”

With the Wobblies, I attended many solidarity actions, not only on the picket line but also public healthcare rallies, the Gay Pride Parade, the Stolen Sisters March (about the over 500 missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada), and protests against mass arrests of migrant workers to name a few.

Bill notes that going on a public demonstration as a Wobbly takes courage: some cannot participate publically because it would jeopardize their job. When going to a picket line, Bill says we take our direction from the workers on that picket line, not necessarily from their unions. Bill finishes by advising me to always be grooming a new replacement.

Mentorship also happened between Wobblies and coworkers on the shop floor, an agitation and education process that is central to Wobbly organizing. Leon had “Wobbled” (agitated) on several jobsites, and described the mentoring process he does on the shop floor:

“First you take the structure, AEIOU, and let’s take your first person. The first person that you get from agitation or whatever, you go through the training one-on-one with them, and you set up a time and you—this is what I believe, I don’t know if this is completely what other branch members would prescribe. I believe that you have to take the time to go through all of those steps with the person, spend a lot of time with that person, coach that person and get them starting to agitate others. Delegate tasks, do the social mapping, everything that you know how to do, that

person should know how to do. And then you get someone else, let's say that the next time—let's say that you're agitating somebody and you've got a potential person. This time around you bring that second person with you. You're both with that person together and you try to build them up together.”

I remark that this mentorship allows for organizing efforts to spread beyond one person and Leon agrees.

“Exactly! I think that's the key, you know, that everybody is becoming a teacher. You know, you build your organizers and then all of a sudden, it is the three of you that are organizers, and then you just keep on going from there. And while that is happening, maybe you have other things you need to teach people. Like, I'm not the best at Robert's Rules, so something like that, right? And teach people how to democratically run an organization. So people start doing that for themselves and then all of a sudden, as opposed to you saying, ‘well, here is what I think is best for us to do’, or ‘this is what we gotta do’, you start discussing things and start voting on things, and that's the best way to go about it. If you want to build worker empowerment, workers' power, you have to give people an opportunity to be responsible for what happens in their job. I think that's the best way to go about it.”

Mentorship goes a long way in not only giving newer members the words to talk about their experiences, but the confidence to take on tasks because they are being supported by more seasoned members.

Education Through Literature and Song

Books and pamphlets provide words and analysis helpful for Wobblies in understanding their experiences as workers. As mentioned, the IWW publishes a number of smaller booklets and members are often recommending and borrowing out to each other. The Edmonton Branch office, opened in 2009, has a wall of books donated by members on a variety of topics ranging from management sciences to anarchism. Some members work in a local publishing co-op called Black Cat Press that, as mentioned in Chapter 2, was started by IWW members in Edmonton during the 1970s.

While Phineus stresses the importance of learning through struggle, he adds that he would be:

“Lying to myself and everybody else If I didn’t say that the books, particularly the books by older Wobblies and... [books that]more experienced Wobblies from other parts of the country lent me, had a big influence... And there are kind of ones that are now considered classics of IWW organizers in the current IWW. Pretty much anything by Martin Glaberman, Stan Weir, Staughton Lynd... I would say those really influenced me. I’ve also read a lot of Left communist literature, so from Germany’s ultra-Left in the 1920s, people like Gorter, Otto Rühle, Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick, but, again I think it is really important that I point out that this stuff... sometimes I understood it on paper, and then I would see it going on around me and it wouldn’t connect at the time, and it wasn’t until thinking back about what happened and going over my own gut feelings of what happened that the stuff really started to make sense, if that makes any sense.”

“Sure”, I replied. “So you would read it, see it happen in real life and then you would reflect on what you had read based on what you had seen?”

“Exactly!” Phineus exclaimed. “And sometimes when I was seeing it go down I wouldn’t even realize until well afterwards that I was reading about this. That, you know, that this is what I was doing. You know, I

would think I was going up against the boss, I'm really mad, I've got everybody behind me on these grievances, they're all really mad too. I've filled out the paper work—and Glaberman's got a really good critique of the grievance procedure—but you wouldn't really realize it until you go back, that what you were doing actually is getting everybody fired up over a piece of paper. [You were] taking everybody on this long detour around the actual issues on the job, and we're actually demobilizing people... undermining the struggle by reinforcing a bureaucratic tendency in the movement.”

Music is another historical artefact that Wobblies can draw on in learning informally about the theory and practice of the IWW. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Wobblies historically went from jobsite to jobsite singing to workers, letting them know there was a strike on. Today, many Edmonton Wobblies know these tunes and they can be heard singing them during the annual May Day Parade. An IWW marching band was recently formed that performs Wobbly classics like *Solidarity Forever*. During the 10-year anniversary of the new Edmonton IWW, members all sang along to *Preacher and the Slave*, which warned of “long-haired preachers” promising “pie in the sky when you die, that's a lie!” Wobblies have a rich history of learning through workshops, mentorship, literature and song, but it must be reinterpreted through the conditions of one's jobsite or in solidarity on a picket line. This is why learning through struggle is so important.

Confidence From Trial and Error and Solidarity

My perspectives about education in the branch changed dramatically as a result of organizing with the IWW. I had been schooled for two years prior on the role of an adult educator as professional and scholar. My initial assumptions were along the lines that education alone was enough to foster radical worker organizers, and I was unaware that many workers are already quite conscious about their class position and about class struggle. In my historical review, I found that even when popular education techniques are used, there is still the social disconnect between the local workers and outside educator, or structural

impediments such as the dampening effect trade union bureaucracy has on worker militancy. Within the IWW, everyone is a worker, regardless of their educative role in a particular workshop, as a mentor or on a picket line.

The literature of the IWW, the non-formal education through workshops and informal education such as mentorship, would be meaningless without the material reality of a worker engaged in class struggle. This point was stressed by every Wobbly I spoke with about IWW education. The response to my queries about how Wobblies learn was consistently “trial and error” and Rachel pointed out that working-class consciousness is fostered by:

“Building the experience of our members and through taking them out through these places... to marches and picket lines and into workplaces, to meetings with people who are frustrated and angry... When you start to have that experience of the type of situations you’re dealing with, then you’re ready to start putting words to it. But usually the way they educate you is, ‘hey, we got a picket line on the weekend, do you want to come?’”

Rachel had tried organizing on the job before she had even heard of the term “organizer.” When she began to hear it talked about in the branch, she realized that she had come:

“To kind of an organic understanding of [organizing], because it wasn’t—nobody gave me a definition; I just heard and saw lots of examples. I would go to a picket line and see what people were doing and people would say, ‘ahhh, they’re organizing,’ and then I would go to a meeting with a worker who was trying to come to the IWW for some assistance, and they would say, ‘I am trying to get my co-workers together’ and later we would talk about it and say, ‘yeah, he has been an organizer in the workplace for a while.’ And so I started to hear this word over and over and over, and I started to look for places where people were doing this act of organizing, which was basically setting up a system that worked for them. It was a grassroots way of dealing with the system that confronted them.”

Rachel had tried organizing at a young age before developing a real knowledge of class struggle and the language associated with it. Interestingly, many workers will use organizing terms, even IWW terms, without knowing their origins. As an electrician, Zapata had heard people use the term “Wobble”, which is an old IWW term where people would agitate a job site. Although these workers may not have known where the word came from, they still had an understanding of what it means. He noted, “somehow the collective memory of the Industrial Workers of the World has disappeared, but what the consequences of the organization meant for everyday people still exists.”

Although Zapata stressed that workers will self-organize regardless of the IWW or its education, he recognized the importance of organizer training for the rank-and-file as opposed to just union officials. He contrasted this with his electrical union, where “the leadership is just in it for retirement”, and identified a place for the Wobblies to provide some of this education.

By placing education firmly within the context of working-class struggles, Wobblies are reflecting upon their own experiences in an organic learning process. Phineus followed a Web-based IWW conversation on IWW education. Some Wobblies argued for “courses on economics so that workers could understand the economic situation that they are in.”

Phineus replied on the forum, “the economics aren’t going to make any sense unless they reflect people’s experiences.”

He told me:

“People who have gotten the most out of the IWW are the people who have done solidarity work with the IWW, and by that I don’t just mean picket lines. Also stuff like going to the Stolen Sisters March, and other broader progressive causes—everything from the Pride Parade to like, you know, the May Day march, and these types of things are the bedrock of what you have to be able to base any education. If there is no struggle, you can’t educate people on struggle. And you have to be able to appeal to the struggles and contradictions and fights in their own lives in order to build a theory that is based on struggle and based on class antagonism.”

Wobblies are educated through action in a broad range of social struggles, but usually from a class perspective. Individually, Wobblies reflect on their struggles as individuals in a workplace and collectively through attempts at organizing.

As mentioned above, I had begun to recognize that rank-and-file workers in general were more class conscious than I had realized. Perhaps this became the most clear to me from the anger I saw in striking Safeway workers, as scabs were being brought across the picket line, taking their jobs. I had been on picket lines before with Wobblies, but this was the one strike that occurred in the city while I was formally conducting research on the IWW. My journal entries from the strike sum up my own learning from that picket line.

September 10, 2009

Warehouse distribution and dairy workers are on strike at two different sites in Edmonton. Safeway has begun to hire replacement workers, i.e., scabs, to cross the picket line, and they are being bussed in. Yesterday, several Wobblies joined the workers in blocking a vanload of scabs from entering the plant. However, Safeway has quickly filed an injunction against this, and now the UFCW union can receive massive fines for blocking the gates. I go down to the Safeway picket line and produce a 20 minute radio segment with interviews of striking workers for my radio show. This is the first time I have ever seen scabs being brought across a picket line. We are able to hold up each van for five minutes before the union can be fined. We stand in front of each van and the workers scream at the scabs. I'll always remember how angry the workers are that scabs were being brought in to replace their labour. They don't need to be told it is wrong.

I notice the union is playing a bit of policing by making sure the workers only block the scab vans for five minutes and the company has a goon squad with surveillance cameras. The workers describe to me how tough the job is. In the course of a nine-hour day they can load up to 30, 000 kg of food onto pallets. They show me a sheet detailing how much weight is loaded by each worker and

how much time it takes. The workers are reprimanded if they do not meet a weight quota. It's Taylorism at its finest.

September 13th, 2009

The Solidarity Committee of the Edmonton Branch has organized cars and drivers to bring Wobblies to the Safeway Distribution picket line to support the strike. But this morning, after six days, workers voted to accept the company's offer. At the mustering point we talk about it, and some of the younger Wobblies feel they gave in too early, especially because the main grievances had not been met. Bill, an older Wobbly and chair of the Solidarity Committee, points out:

"that is easy to say now, with 24 °c weather; but when winter comes, they may have wished they had accepted it while they could, especially with the State providing muscle for the scabs. Trade union strikes can last months, but it is better for workers to do quick direct actions: hit them hard, hit them fast, hit them often."

Phineus told me that, "the best education that the Wobblies have ever done for me is walking on picket lines." He recalled dozens of picket lines he has walked on as a Wobbly, and it changed his perceptions of the working-class in that,

"Most of those picket lines were not stereotypical white male, blue collar jobs, you know? Like the vast majority of those workforces were predominantly woman, and especially the [Shaw] Conference Centre and Casino¹⁹-predominantly immigrant women. And it is funny, because you come out of a progressive scene, but I think it is probably why a lot of people in progressive scenes tend to write off the working-class as an agent of change in society... because they identify it with the stereotype about the guy in the blue coveralls."

¹⁹ See footnote number 15 for the Shaw Conference Centre strike. The Palace Casino strike was organized with UFCW and was one of the first picket lines I went to in Edmonton, before I had joined the Wobblies. The IWW Solidarity Committee sent many members there in support. The strike resulted in a first contract for the workers.

Learning through struggle happens if it is a Wobblies own place of work or if they are showing solidarity on a picket line. It also happens through reflecting upon their own organizing experiences. Leon said he learned through trial and error, often the hard way, and gave an example of a time when, during a captive audience meeting,²⁰ he questioned management on a number of issues in front of everyone. Later, he realized:

“If I had applied IWW tactics there on how to work a captive audience meeting, and had I kept my mind a bit cooler and dealt with it a different way and then started organizing again after that meeting, that probably would have been a smart tactic. And that is something you get out of the IWW, too; if you don’t have the numbers, you stay quiet in the meeting and then later ask ‘are we going to organize?’ As opposed to, ‘I’m pissed off, now I’m going to make a point.’”

After attending the *Organizer 101* training and communicating with the Organizing Committee, Leon becomes much more focused in his efforts.

“As [a restaurant worker] organizing the job, I want to build solidarity. We did social mapping, educated people, took people on one-on-ones, taught people how to social map, started going through the AEIOU’s with people, and actually formed a governance committee and [learned] from that too; another evolution there. The fact that we need to have a strong committee base, that it is number one and that it is so important—[A] strong, structured committee where people are educated on how to run a union, and on top of that teaching the idea of solidarity unionism.”

The monthly Organizing Committee meeting provided one location where Wobblies could collectively reflect upon their own organizing experiences. During my fieldwork, I attended a number of these meetings. There was a

²⁰ See Organizing 101, above.

campaign involving several restaurants in the city, and at the time Leon was employed with one and sent a report to the meeting.

“The organizers note some of the problems between front (servers) and back (kitchen) workers, because front workers make more tips.”

We talk about how these variables impact union organizing and are important to note in a physical and social mapping of the workplace. There is a physical separation between servers and the kitchen, and servers have a backroom and front room presentation of self²¹, whereas the kitchen is only backroom. This separation means it is hard to organize the front of house for the two kitchen workers who are Wobblies. Someone remarks that this is a typical restaurant division seen in many organizing drives in this industry. A motion is passed to throw up a picket if Chris, one of the organizers receiving flack from management, gets fired. Then the committee agrees that, if they are blocking customers from entering, tips will be given to the front of house servers by the Wobblies to try and build solidarity. Many of these strategies are drawn from other campaigns and through reading about older IWW struggles.

There is also a cold campaign in a related sector of the hospitality industry. A cold campaign means that no workers from that jobsite are starting the process, and it is initiated by the union itself, often with paid organizers. In this case everyone is still a volunteer. To start, a datasheet is made for cold calls of workers. We are all assigned the task of doing the social mapping by making use of the service and finding out workers’ names and phone numbers. The goal is to find some working in the industry who would be interested in organizing. A whole six-month plan is drawn up, most of it right out of what we learned in the Organizer 101 training.

On the way to one organizing meeting, I mean to glean some information from a server for the cold calls, but I lose my nerve. The server looks really busy and I think she will be annoyed with what would have looked like a come-on: asking for her number. Later, I learn about methods such as using fake petitions

²¹ See Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: NY; Anchor Books

for the social mapping, or even sneaking into the management's office to grab a list of employees!

Many of the themes I identified in my research came from the interviewees and later, I would spot them in my journal notes from my own participation. Confidence is one of those themes. It became a trope central to my analysis, and one that I had not expected. Trial and error can be a great way to learn, it can also be a road to destruction in the personal development of a working-class organizer. I found in the interviews, and from my own observations, that whenever Wobblies advocated direct action, there was solidarity behind those words. This has been one reason the branch did not grow too big too fast. Learning through trial and error builds confidence when one is supported by one's fellow workers in solidarity. A few success stories help as well. I felt my own confidence grow when the Wobblies had my back as I tried to get unpaid wages from my lawncare company employer. While Susan argued that IWW education is best learned through "trial and error", she underlined the importance of:

"Trying to encourage the kinds of situations where people feel valued and confident enough to assert their own collective power. And individual power sometimes, because [collectives] rely on the actions of individuals, you know? So that, for me, [is] a big social game of how to organize has been—I think that the model of the IWW with the organizer trainings and the training for trainers has been really good in terms of... models and strategies and tactics for organizing... I think that we could be better about sharing experiences of organizing and learning from each others' mistakes, although we are getting better at that... It is a whole different skill set of organizing that we are just not taught in school, and I think that is a huge part of it, just getting our hands dirty and making mistakes. And I think that one of the good things about the Edmonton Branch has been that sense of responsibility and long-term goals in terms of not just running around and making mistakes, that it sounds like what other

branches have done and other organizing drives have done, and just sort of like, ‘okay, let’s not go too crazy here.’”

She went on to say that confidence is not something that “comes from a book”, and I asked her when she felt her confidence increase. She told me a story of being part of a more militant trade union. She had been placed:

“Onto midnights, and I was really pissed off at the way that the management was treating me... and I was on the bottom of the totem pole for a while, and I remember having a conversation with a shop steward and we were just having a chat, right in front of the supervisor’s office about how this place could be so much better if we didn’t have those goddamn bosses and we could do it all ourselves much better. It was just like, I can’t believe it, I can have this discussion and I don’t have to be afraid, you know? I’ve got my union backing me up, that was a really big moment for me in my own confidence in terms of how to not be afraid to talk about that stuff on the shop floor. Obviously, you need to be careful about [whom] you are talking to about it, and how you’re framing it in terms of where they are at in relation to the union and politics in general, but it’s possible to get to that point.”

Zapata agreed that worker confidence only grows if there is solidarity. He noted that many workers understand they are on the short end of the stick, so:

“They need people to back them up. Like, people have a fear when they face problems and they don’t really have confidence in people whether they would defend them or just do nothing or just sell them out—even worse. I think that you can teach the tactics, but you have to be able to deal with the fallout afterwards, you have to accept the consequences and you have to be prepared for that. If you want people to take militant action, ok. If they get fired, what to you do?”

This concern for one’s fellow workers struck me as something learned through struggle, and not simply a collection of radical and romantic ideas from

books. However, knowledge from workshops, informal discussions and books provided direction and an analysis about workplace struggles. In struggles for working-class control, there is a dialectical process of theory and action, and this is why I have come to see it as a revolutionary praxis. Leon summarized his view on how IWW learning happens by saying:

“You’ve got people who are learning how to organize and they are doing things themselves. That is where they build their confidence, because that is where they are building their knowledge and their skills. I think I really believe that education is emancipation, but within that education—I don’t mean education in the sense of a textbook education. I think it is important to know your history, don’t get me wrong, I think everybody should have the ability to get a higher education—but... [built by] doing things yourself, and that is where you build the confidence and self-emancipation and self-accountability.”

All workers have some class consciousness vis-à-vis the alienating experience of seeing the fruits of one’s labour being expropriated for somebody else’s profit. Education through non-formal and informal channels can provide a certain analysis and reflection upon these experiences. However, it is not until one learns through trial and error with a group offering solidarity that this consciousness forms into an understanding of class struggle. This learning in the context of being a worker in struggle and having a sense of solidarity builds within members of the IWW a sense of being part of something larger than themselves—a sense of being working-class.

Summary

In this chapter I showed how the members I interviewed joined the branch with previous workplace experiences. Some members joined with experience in other social movements. They found the IWW provides an empowering experience for working towards social change. In the IWW, they found an organization that is relevant to their own workplace struggles, provides a sense of

solidarity and a social vision. After joining, members learned about the IWW through non-formal channels such as workshops, and informal channels like social interaction and mentorship, as well as literature and songs. These sites of learning provided space for a deeper reflection about workplace organizing or other IWW actions. The non-formal courses were often quite detailed, reflected workers' experiences, and were democratically run through voting and a rotation of facilitators. Roleplay was an important tool used in many IWW workshops. It provided members a chance to "try-out" IWW strategies and concepts without the risks associated with real-world organizing. Members offered workshops not officially endorsed by the IWW; these were often more explicitly ideological, usually along anarchist lines. Mentorship was not formalized into IWW activities, but recognized by members to be an important way to learn about the IWW, from how to organize to providing a sense of the history and development of the organization. Music did not seem to play as important a role in learning about the IWW as it did in the organization's early years, but was still present and can still be counted amongst the ways in which learning happened. The knowledge gained through the IWW provided a set of skills that organizers could use in the workplace. Members stressed that the learning that happened in the branch would be meaningless without "trial and error". The confidence needed to take on one's boss does not come from a book. At the same time, Wobblies stressed the need for solidarity so that learning through "trial and error" is not a disempowering experience in the development of a working-class organizer.

Chapter 5: Findings on Working-class Consciousness and Hegemonic Struggle

Identifying as a Worker

After an organizing meeting, I am walking home and I spot fellow worker, Erik, in a coffee shop, so I go in to say hello. Erik has recently completed his Master's of History, but is currently an entry-level manual labourer at a public institution. I have been reading Gramsci (1971), specifically "The Intellectuals" and "On Education" from the Prison Notebooks, and some of his earlier writing during the occupied factories of Turin (1920). I mention that I am drawing on Gramsci's theories of hegemony and intellectuals in my thesis. Erik points out that using Gramsci is problematic, because in challenging capitalist hegemony, Gramsci was seeking the hierarchy of state hegemony. I agree, and try to stress that I am interested in Gramsci's thoughts on intellectuals as related to hegemonic struggle. I part with him on the question of seizing state hegemony (see my discussion on worker control in Chapter 2).

Erik is quick to spot one of the trickiest parts of using Gramsci in my thesis. I think about Erik's educational background; he has Masters of History but he is currently a "low- level" employee in a public service job. I realize that he is in the role of both the traditional intellectual from his academic work, and an organic intellectual from his position as a worker and his participation in the branch and other social struggles.

There are intellectuals who are organic to related social movements and became organic to working-class struggles as well with the IWW. I myself would fall into this category. Traditional intellectuals in the IWW are also organic intellectuals, but not all organic intellectuals are traditional intellectuals. In the Edmonton IWW, I noted there were two members with doctorates, in Art and Psychology, and several had Masters of Arts. Many had taken university courses but then entered the workforce without a degree.

The knowledge gained from being a traditional intellectual helps develop the discipline to read long books on class struggle, but I wondered if it provided a

hindrance, because traditional intellectuals are often schooled to support the ruling class. Personally, I did not encounter much difficulty in pursuing the studies that interested me, but there are also the deeper changes that resulted from almost nine years of post-secondary education. Before joining the Wobblies, I viewed the labour conducted in universities or non-profits housed within universities as perhaps even more important than working-class struggles for social progress. Maybe I was justifying a desire to secure a comfortable middle-class position. My participation in the branch, from an organic experience, resulted in a shift in myself where I began to view professors, students, custodians—all workers at a university as belonging to the same industry. This shift was not a neoliberal one in a commodification of knowledge sense, but rather recognition of the structures that are in place in academia that mirror capitalist relations of production, including hierarchical relations.

The learning that takes place in the branch results in a shift towards a working-class consciousness. Rachel described this shift:

“When you start replacing the words that people commonly use with these other words, it lays out a very clear picture of class war.... This person is organizing, this person is working-class, this person is not working-class... And I guess the question is always which side are you on? And it comes down to which side you feel most affiliated with... for me it was quite obvious being, like, a broke student trying to be a teacher, working in coffee shops and having to smile and wink and flirt for my tips, that I was... on the side that was getting really exploited out of the deal. And so I suddenly felt my working-class identification more strongly than ever before.”

If this clarification of being working-class comes across as class reductionist or too utopian, then ask yourself, as the reader, about your own position in society. This may seem like a dangerous viewpoint if you benefit from a hierarchical workplace. If, like most workers in the world, you fall further down on the social stratum, this viewpoint may have more merit. Our position within

the traditional working-class or lower professional middle-classes influences our outlook on our place in class struggle (Ehrenreich, 1989).

Phineus found that one of the biggest shifts while in the IWW was his understanding of the working-class. As an anti-globalization activist, he equated the working-class with unions. In the IWW, he saw that a lot of working-class struggle happens whether a shop is unionized or not. His view of what the working-class is became centered on the “relationship you have to the way you make your living”. This would include:

“People who have to make a living without the... virtue of already having money to spend. So, basically the upper class [is] those who have enough wealth that they can make wealth out of their own wealth, and the working-class [is] those who have to make a living out of their own ingenuity and their own muscle, often.”

This definition would include the traditional working-class and most of the lower professional middle-class. Rachel found that her views of people in a workplace before joining the IWW were organized around who was “nice”, who was “rude” or “lazy”, with “employers on both sides.” After joining, she “started to really see the economic relationship between the two sides very clearly, because I started to see which way the money flowed and who was in control, who had the authority.” It was no longer about who was a:

“Jerk or lazy or nice or really smart or not; [but] who has the ability to make decisions and inflict those decisions on other people without their say, and who doesn’t... And then you start to understand that the people on the other side of that equation, your coworkers, are the people that you have power if you stand with. [You] start to understand those relationships as beneficial to build even if you don’t personally like that person... and so you start to really feel that sense of class solidarity.

A sense of solidarity can further clarify class relations at the job site and develop working-class consciousness. Zapata noted that, once workers have some

success through their actions, “the game changes in some ways.” He recognizes that this fosters an antagonistic relationship between the workers and employers, but that part of that is “just the natural antagonism of people trying to lord over and supervise other people.” He questioned how anyone can ever accept authority when it seems arbitrary:

“I have no problem accepting directions from people [who] know, who are more experienced than I am, such as a journeyman or foreman or things like that. At a certain time though, you know how to do things and I think that is true for most people... that they gain a level of experience where they don’t necessarily need direction anymore and that’s very—it’s kind of a liberating thought. [The ruling classes] don’t like people getting comfortable in their own power and [realize] that they do have power, because when they don’t need authority anymore, then what’s left? There’s just the façade of some type of social agreement, which is lost in some ways; and especially when they go through an industrial action and all that is left is the realization that [the workers] have the power and other people just try to parasite off of that.”

Zapata noticed a great deal of class consciousness among the workers on his jobsite, but recognized that their power was underutilized by the existing trade union.

Within the IWW, members felt solidarity from other members of the branch and from fellow workers on the job. When a member was laid off or had a financial problem, the branch passed a hat around at the meeting to help the worker out. When one feels that level of solidarity, one also notices when it is absent in a job, whether or not there is a trade union. Rachel noted that, in jobs where it wasn’t present, she would “look for ways to build it, because I missed it and wanted it.”

She noticed this shift in herself and adds that, had I asked her six years ago if she thought she was “on the side of the working-class” and that “working-class

people deserve to stand together and act in solidarity”, she would have said “yes, absolutely,” but that she did not “act like that in my own life.”

She reflected that, “the IWW gave me a chance... through my organizing... to start to see how that looked in a workplace and how to get there.”

She noted that she had to have a shift in consciousness before she could begin to build working-class solidarity. She laments that, had there been a Wobbly organizer at the coffeeshop where she was employed when all the workers were fired or quit in solidarity, things might have turned out differently—because of the level of solidarity already present on the job.

Now she can see her own role as an organizer and an educator in her work as a teacher. With her fellow workers [teachers and support staff], she tries to “educate them about alternative points of action. And you educate them also, and probably most importantly, about the risks they take engaging in this type of action.”

She learned this the hard way when they were fired for trying to “organize into some sort of cohesive team that could make demands.”

She came to see this educational role as the most important thing an organizer can do. However, she and several other members stressed that this process is an organic one of self-organization, accomplished by identifying workers who can become organizers and educators in their own right.

A Different Approach to the Working-class

While the Wobblies develop a working-class consciousness through struggle, it is not to become leaders of the working-class, but rather, as Phineus put it, to “learn how to give the workers hope, and... faith in their ability to solve things themselves.”

Phineus agreed that the roles of an educator and that of an organizer in a workplace are the same; because:

“Any organizer that is worth their salt has some ideas and some experiences and some knowledge and they want to impart it on anybody [who] will listen. I think that an important part of being an organizer is

being an educator as well. Especially if your goal is to build an independent—free thinking working-class movement.

This can create different tactics than the traditional trade union structure where an organizer is often trying to be “someone who was an up and coming in the union” would take a problem of the workers and get them to sign a grievance form. As a Wobbly organizer, the question is about how workplace issues can be used to build collective power, as opposed to the power of a union leader.

“So you don’t fire off the paperwork, you look at... what is the issue here and where do we have a little bit of power over the boss, and how do we collectively leverage that power? So that when it is all said and done, whether we win or lose, we can walk away from that situation saying we did it, instead of ‘Phineus did this for us.’”

Being supporters of self-organization and worker independence has had an impact on the way Wobblies organize. While the IWW was divided somewhat on the issue of union certification, there was never a demand made of workers seeking advice on whether they should certify or not. Knowledge about organizing was freely given, but if the workers turned around and did the exact opposite, solidarity from the Wobblies remained. Phineus stressed that this is one of the most important parts of the organizing and education done by the Wobblies. When workers ignored the advice of the IWW and “even if the workplace lost its campaign, it’s still the job and the role of the IWW to support those workers when things go down exactly as maybe even they said it would, but the solidarity is something that does not go out the window... our job is still to stand with those workers.”

Common experiences of union busting, with people being fired, provided IWW members with a “healthy respect for what is at stake” because “if you go up against the boss and he decides to fire somebody, he might fire somebody that has a kid.”

This allowed those who had developed their ideas of the working-class through reading Marx or anarcho-syndicalist writings to ground these theories in a

material context where there are real consequences resulting from their actions. The development of class consciousness in the Wobblies is a dialectical process of theory, and action and care is taken to balance the two.

Hegemonic Struggle

Broadly, I have presented my findings thus far in terms of how Wobblies are learning to challenge capitalist hegemony and how this impacts upon their own consciousness. I now turn to describing how challenges to capitalist hegemony are understood and what alternative forms are being presented.

A Critique of Hierarchy

I have explored some of the workplace relationships that Wobblies are critical of: unequal control of capital and hierarchical relations in the workplace. This critique of hierarchy extends to other forms of social organizing as well, including the state and trade unions, but also structural inequalities of gender, race and sexuality.

Wobblies provide plenty of critiques of trade unions that can come off as reactionary at first. However, it is not the idea of workers unionizing but the bureaucratic structure of trade unions that Wobblies believe hampers working-class agency. The IWW is an example of an alternative union model that predates contemporary labour relations. With the exception of wildcat strikes, the picket lines supported by the Wobblies are with trade union workers on legally sanctioned strikes. However, the Wobblies are not there to support either the union bureaucracy or the legality of labour relations, but the workers themselves. As well, these actions are not intended as “raids” to win over members from a “rival” union, but to show working-class solidarity. On a picket line, Wobblies take their direction from the workers on that particular shop floor and provided suggestions if asked.

The Chair of the Solidarity Committee would come to know trade union officers during a strike and cooperate with them, and more militant trade unions tended to be on friendlier terms with the Wobblies, but the loyalty remained with

the rank-and-file workers. This tension between more conservative trade union bureaucrats and the more militant IWW came to a head during the May Day celebrations of 2009, when an annual labour gala was organized by a committee with many Wobblies on it. Several anarchist and queer- friendly groups were invited to set up tables, which bothered a few trade union bureaucrats, as they claimed the presence of these groups would offend their members. The unions represented by these bureaucrats were bankrolling most of the night, with much of the labour provided by Wobblies and other labour activists. They threatened to pull funding if the groups were not un-invited. In response, members of Edmonton's anarcho-queer community threatened to picket the event. The Wobblies knew where they stood, as they would never cross a picket line. Eventually, the trade unions conceded to the anarchist and queer groups setting up tables and the event went ahead.

Zapata, who helped form the new Edmonton Wobblies in 1999, always had a healthy distrust of authority, even within Leftist organizations. He credited his parents with instilling a "political pessimism... because my mother would tell me how people in the Communist Party [Chile], when the coup happened... all the rank-and-file people were throwing spike belts on the road to stop the army trucks and having gun fights with military and... the leadership at that time, they were organizing planes out of there for themselves."

In his work with the IWW, he saw the same structural relationships between trade union bureaucrats and rank-and-file workers, the kind of relationship that develops when one group has more power than another whether in a union or the workplace. During our interview, he said:

"I firmly believe that people get into cushy positions and they enjoy being there. It is better than their jobs, and why would they want to threaten it? And they may not come out and say it, but I think that's the way it is, actually."

Zapata admits he wavers in his opinion of trade unions, "whether they are going to be policemen for the Left or for working-class radicals, or are they

actually going to be useful for us as allies?” I mention to him that Gramsci thought that the big trade unions and the social democratic parties actually held back the working-class from being able to achieve what it could. Zapata agrees:

“I used to be in the ND[P]YA [New Democratic Party Youth of Alberta], I used to be in the Youth Caucus, and I saw our efforts squashed, just utterly squashed, totally destroyed at the convention floor. And we were just going up against an entrenched bureaucracy, and that’s really the enemy for us right now, just entrenched bureaucracy... I will never agree with any of that and I’ll never—... ahh, I was about to say I’ll never cooperate with them, but I think we can’t be too distant from them. I think we are going to have to have some type of relationship, but only tactical and short-term. Just in and out, that’s it. I think that, once we get too involved with them, that we become too beholden to certain people, certain bureaucrats, certain entrenched sectors of the worker bureaucracy layer that lords over everybody else.”

Wobblies critiqued hierarchy within a range of social organizations from the workplace to a trade union to a political party. I noticed that their response to capitalist hegemony was more about process than the potential result of class struggle, and represented a faith in the ability of the working-class to manage its own affairs.

Locating the IWW in Struggles Against Capitalist Hegemony

In one sense, Wobbly ideology is related to anarchism as a working-class movement, although not explicitly so. Officially, the IWW does not explicitly promote one ideology but is rather a philosophy of worker control through direct action and solidarity. However, the boundaries between industrial unionism and anarcho-syndicalism are blurry, because of a shared history and the ideological leanings of many members. A sharper distinction is often made by Wobblies between a class-based anarchism and a lifestyle anarchism. Lifestyle anarchism includes dumpster-diving, DIY (do it yourself), and, at the risk of speaking too

generally, often blends over into identity politics in anarchism such as feminist and queer anarchists, or more resistance or insurrectionist anarchism such as black bloc anarchism or primitivism. These movements are interesting in the ethno-genesis of new cultural form,s such as a society of dumpster divers who share their treasures. It is often based on the consumption of these new cultural forms, hence the term “lifestyle.”

While not as old as class struggle anarchism, insurrectionist anarchism has been a minority within these movements for over a century (Schmidt & van der Walt, 2009). However, these different movements are not so easily contrasted when they blend into each other with mutual participation in the Anarchist Bookfair or solidarity during the May Week tabling crisis. There are Wobblies who are part of these subcultures and others who are not. I remember IWW members working with political party activists in the NDP or with one of the two Communist parties. We all knew each other on the Edmonton Left. Wobblies had critiques of strategies in other movement, and in turn many would critique the IWW for being too class-based in these post-modern times, but there was still a certain amount of solidarity and mutual aid across these movements.

The influence of anarchism in the Edmonton Branch was important to recognize, but when I tried to pigeon hole Zapata as an anarchist, he became uneasy, and responded:

“There is a lot of baggage there, and there [are] a lot of people in the American movements that have caused a lot of problems for anarchism, such as the Bob Blacks and the Hakim Beys and other... idiots that try to rehabilitate Ted Kaczynski²² as a member of the anarchist movement [laughs] and I do think there are problems there, but as an anarchist-syndicalist I would be [closer] to the Spanish Anarchists, like Spain of ’36 kind of tradition, I suppose. But that [has] its limitations too. So there are always going to be limitations and you can’t just place yourself in one

²² See www.primitivism.com/kaczynski.html for an example of anarcho-primitivism’s flirtation with the man better known as the Unabomber.

column and, that's it, right? The world is very complex and even the history that we draw on from that time is limited at best, so you can't just depend on that solely."

When asked to explicitly describe the collective ideology of the Wobblies, no one said it was explicitly anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist. What they described was an ideology coming from direct action and solidarity for working-class control. This ideology was developed historically through the IWW's history, influences from broader anarchist and other working-class struggles, and was reinterpreted by members through their own struggles. With the exception of organizing principles such as solidarity and direct action, ideas forged in struggle, IWW philosophy in this context attempted to reflect working-class struggles in their current situation.

When the all-trades wildcat strike occurred in 2007,²³ Wobblies supported the workers at the picket lines and rallies, but at the same time they questioned the nationalistic tone in the striking workers' critiques about international trade unions, and gently agitated with ideas of solidarity across borders and trades. Susan noted that working-class revolt will happen regardless of institutional support or whether workers articulate an ideology, but it may not move beyond an issue. She added that there are "good organizers who insist on democratic decision-making, collective responsibility, challenging the boss every time," essentially expressing anarcho-syndicalist values but without explicitly acknowledging them as such. What the Wobblies have been doing for over a century is providing organization around these radical currents of working-class organizing. ,

The Wobblies traditionally had an approach to "organize the worker, not the workplace" which benefited efforts in temporary work camps in the American and Canadian West during the early part of the 20th century. Wobbly organizing

²³ This was a wildcat strike against the labour laws of Alberta and the wishes of the building trade unions. For an article written about the strike by a Wobbly, see <http://www.libcom.org/library/wobble-job-building-trades-wildcat-alberta>

may prove to be a good fit for the casual, temporary workforce so common in the early 21st century.

In recent years, some of the biggest gains of the IWW in the U.S. and Canada have been in the service industry, specifically with the Starbucks Workers Union and organizing efforts at Jimmy Johns restaurants.²⁴ This approach attempts to create, within the rank-and-file, leaders who can promote the ideas of industrial democracy in their own places of work, or within trade unions as dual-carders. However, Phineus cautions that it is important to “not be too doctrinaire about things”, and that context can play a huge role. In his interview he noted that people who don’t appear to be radicals can be doing some fairly radical things via their positions as workers.

“There [are] things that often happen that look really contradictory to people, and until you actually sit down and look at why they don’t do things—and I think you can explain a lot about society, everything from voter apathy to racism in the working-class—by actually trying to look at what is going on, and I think if we as radicals looked a little bit more at what was going on and listened to people we might actually be able to move things forward a little more.”

I ask him, “so you need to look at not only the ideas, but what people are doing and, I’m not sure what your thoughts are on dialectical materialism—or do you think that is dialectical?”

He responds,

“It totally is... I think a lot of what you’re looking at is what I would call dialectical materialism, I tend to—and I mean it’s something that has really influenced what I think. Basically, I am so used to not using words like that, and I find it really hard because of my job now as a [public sector worker], and I agitate around, kind of just a different set of people;

²⁴ See the Starbucks Union, an IWW campaign. As well, in late 2010, the Edmonton IWW threw up a picket line to support a worker fired at Martini’s Grill in Edmonton.

I try and get the ideas in there without necessarily using the words... but yeah, it's totally dialectical materialism."

The relationship that Wobblies have with the organization in terms of their own learning is dialectical. While there are objective conditions to workplace organizing and workers' militancy as a class, the IWW has always proceeded from the assumption that workers could have all the power in the world if they only acted in solidarity. This understanding of capitalist hegemony recognizes structural conditions of our relationships, but offers a tremendous amount of agency. This agency is exercised in the workplace and within the organizing structure of the IWW itself. Zapata observed that the same problems of any organization can develop when "cliques" form, but by organizing in a more horizontal fashion, there are ways to keep people in check. He values the IWW because it offers "a lot of room to organize your own initiative, if you want." The influences of anarchism and Marxism are both apparent in the IWW, but these theories are reinterpreted within specific contexts of class struggle.

How the IWW Proceeds to Challenge Capitalist Hegemony

For years, there was a tension between what the IWW was actually doing and what it professed to be doing. Within the Edmonton Branch, the ideology was there, and members were supportive of workers on strikes, but it usually did not translate back into those members' own jobs. When it did, as Leon highlighted, it was often not successful because the organizer lacked the training from workshops introduced later in the branch, or because the institutional support offered by the branch was not as developed. The recent rise in organizing, in the branch and with Wobblies across North America, was accompanied by the introduction of courses on organizing and the re-emergence of more permanent institutional forms such as the Work People's College (see above), and IWW offices being re-opened in the U.S. and Canada.

This slow return is not necessarily a negative thing, as it has allowed the Edmonton IWW to build up a level of support necessary to defend organizing approaches using direct action. The consequences of direct action rupturing ruling

hegemonic consensus have historically been severe, and range from mass arrests to beatings, and even the murder of Wobbly organizers. The length to which the ruling class, and those who serve them, will go in protecting the status-quo has been experienced by several Edmonton Wobblies. During the A-Channel strike of 2004²⁵, Phineus was beaten up by a bouncer for heckling a scab. He recalls:

“The weather people and the news anchors were in the bargaining unit, but they got paid a lot more and they basically got bought off by the company. [Since] that is the face of the company, it was kind of a big blow to the union and it really hurt a lot of people on the inside who were buds with these people.... [A] big part of the strategy became trying to get these people off the air. Individually, a lot of them had showbiz jobs on the side that they were doing, and in particular one of them, the weather [anchor], was a blues singer. And so we basically cooked up this action, [me] and a few fellow workers, and we basically went into the blues show and dressed up like ritzy middle-class blues people and heckled her in waves. And they’d hired... these [ste]roided out juice monkeys to act as security for these guys, and they beat the snot out of us. They wrapped my tie around my neck, smashed my face into the table a few times and dragged me out and threatened to curb stomp me, but then the waiters pulled them off of me and we ran like hell [laughs].”

The Wobblies returned the next night in even larger numbers. Wobblies are often willing to take risks on the picket line and in labour solidarity; however, this extends to other social movements as well. Leon recalled jeering at an anti-gay marriage protest and the scuffles that broke out there. He says these solidarity actions are just something the Wobblies do. At any rally “there is always a presence and there are people you can count on.”

²⁵ The A-Channel strike of 2004 was between then-Craig Media-owned A-Channel and Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union local 1900. Workers won a first contract for every employee.

While the IWW offers solidarity across a range of struggles, it does so from an analysis of class warfare and decentralized organizing. The IWW has a philosophy of direct action, but it can be tempered by the wishes of the workers involved in the struggle, not by a trade union decision or draconian labour laws. In challenges to capitalist hegemony, the IWW proceeds from an organic context-specific position informed through its philosophies, but drawing its leadership on the specific course of action from the rank-and-file.

Can it Change Society?

In challenging capitalist hegemony, Wobblies have their critiques of the current system and those who support it; but, they offer alternatives and they act on them. Can these efforts actually change the way society runs?

Answers to this question vary from a very enthusiastic “yes, absolutely” to a more pragmatic “in combination with other organizations”. When I asked Zapata about it, he realistically notes:

“We can’t expect everybody to come to our organization, right? So I think that [with] an overall patchwork across the world, [we] can organize industrial action on certain campaigns and pick our battles. I think [it’s] really important... It is kind of a trap when you start to... see yourself as a missionary to everybody else.”

Phineus is very upfront that the IWW will not in itself change how society is run. He admits that the IWW can be as guilty as many groups on the Left in thinking there is a formulaic way of building a mass radical union that will take over workplaces and create the kind of socialism [the IWW] wants. What has become important for Phineus is developing the ideas the IWW represents, not necessarily the organization itself. When I ask if the IWW is the way to change society, he responds:

“It is a lot more important in, at least to me, that I build people up to be Wobblies, regardless of whether or not they hold that red card their whole lives. And so that they take a certain idea and knowledge of the way work

works and the way the working-class is through the rest of their lives rather than just building an organization.”

Changing my line of questioning, I ask if “the working-class using certain ideals or organizing models can change society,” to which he agrees, and adds that it is important to feel that one is:

“Part of a historical process. This isn’t something that came out of the class or rose above the class, [it] is...a part of the working-class developing its own identity and its own consciousness of itself... the IWW is an instance of being representative of that process.”

He names OCAP, the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, as being another process of using direct action to achieve working-class gains, although not grounded in the workplace.

A more enthusiastic response on the question of the IWW changing society drew on the changes that happened within the individual worker from organizing in a pre-figurative approach to revolution. Leon felt that:

“The whole idea of solidarity unionism teaches people that they can become organizers themselves. It’s the biggest building block for emancipation in the sense that [I], as an individual, [I] as a worker, I have the skills, I have the knowledge, I have the willingness to change the thing. And I realize that, if anything, I have to rely on the other working folk around me as equals to actually make a difference in my society and in my workplace. It is a self-accountability; you become accountable to yourself, which I think takes away from an individual’s disenfranchisement.”

These changes happened to the individual, but within social contexts where the organizer “in training” experienced workplace struggles and discussed radical ideas with fellow workers. Rachel claimed she would “be so bold as to say this is the key to changing society.”

As she has learned to organize and stand in solidarity with workers across industries, she recognized the IWW model as a:

“Catalyst for the kind of change we want; because... our economic relationship is where our power lies. As producers, that is where our strength is. Seeing that is one thing, but acting that and being strong in your solidarity with your fellow coworkers is a completely different thing. And it is when you have that force to move forward that you suddenly think that maybe this could actually work. Because you do see small gains repeatedly.”

While the Edmonton IWW did not have an entire workplace organized during my research, these gains happened to individuals or groups of Wobblies on the job and, for workers outside of the IWW because of the actions of Wobblies. Thomas was a Wobbly I spoke with who had been organizing with Leon in the restaurant industry, and heard about another restaurant being closed down. He spoke to the workers being laid off and found out they would not be receiving any sort of severance. Thomas helped them organize collectively to win two-weeks’ worth of their regular pay from the owners.

Many of these efforts revolved around “bread and butter” issues, meaning they sought to address issues that get workers paid so they can put food on the table. Yet this was done with an eye to building working-class solidarity so that workers could eventually run things themselves. As outlined, this approach represents a break from a trade union in the notion of *what* the working-class is capable of achieving. For Rachel, this was the biggest transformation she recognized in her own experience with the Wobblies.

“I had to make a choice about the working-class. And the choice was whether or not I was willing to fight for working-class control of society. Even if that didn’t result in the world that I wanted, even if that didn’t work like a communist world when they were done organizing it. I had to really ask myself whether or not I actually wanted working-class

autonomous, grassroots control, or whether I just wanted to be a dictator and have my way and fight politically for what I thought.”

She recognized that within this alternative hegemonic order she would still have a voice and a vote, the same as everyone else. She stressed that the alternatives to society are endless, but that the first step is democratic working-class control over the means of production.²⁶ She felt that we are “fighting a losing battle” until we are able to change the base of the system. I asked her if this shift represented a faith in the working-class. She agreed, but noted that it is based on something in the material world, because:

“You’re not relying on some vague idea of how human beings will interact in an idealistic society; it’s really what is going on now, these people will stand with you, if their interests are your interests. And I think that once you realize that, experientially, then you do not just believe in some great big bunny in the sky, you actually have something that you are working with there. And so I think that when you are a Wob, your faith is justified, it is not just about a philosophical idea of who human beings are or what role they have, it’s actually an understanding of how you have interacted and how other people interact with other people. And so you really have something to stand on there, and a reason to believe that people can organize autonomously and not have to be told top-down what to do.”

So, while the IWW was not organizing in revolutionary times during my research, its approach allowed for members to learn about working-class solidarity and control through pre-figurative work. This resulted in significant changes to individual and group class consciousness.

²⁶ As noted early in Chapter 2 models of direct working-class control somewhat vary but typically involve committees or councils of workers on a job having a vote about the running of production in their workplace, who are then linked together through spokescouncils of larger industrial unions and even across industries in the running of society (Gramsci, 1920; Pannekoek, 1948)

Summary

In Chapter 5, I have shown that in the IWW, learning and experiencing class struggle corresponded strongly with an emerging working-class consciousness. Wobblies are organic intellectuals in that their knowledge comes *vis-a-vis* their class position. However, Edmonton Wobblies inhabit traditional intellectual positions simultaneously as teachers or graduate students.

I found that the knowledge I gained organically had a greater influence on my role as a traditional intellectual than the other way around. This included my view of class relations in academia and, like other Wobblies, my view of who constitutes the working-class. I was able to get past the popular misconception that the working-class is only a white guy in coveralls working in a factory. I began to see class relations in my everyday surroundings and started feeling a sense of solidarity with the many kinds of workers I encountered, even within the professional middle-class, and observed from the lower end of that spectrum as a graduate student (Ehrenreich, 1989).

I found that Wobblies critique hegemonic relations on several fronts: the hierarchy of the workplace, the bureaucracy of the trade union, the role of the state in maintaining capitalist relations, and a critique of revolution through state hegemony. Wobblies are cautious about espousing a specific ideology. Their view of socialism is one where workers control the means of production directly on the shop floor. It is a philosophy of worker control through direct action and solidarity.

The approach of the Wobblies to “organize the worker, not the workplace” worked well in the migrant frontier workcamps in the early 20th century, as it does in the service industry today with its casual employment, where workers migrate between minimum wage jobs. The approach of the Wobblies, with control of organizing ultimately remaining with the worker, allows organizing to respond to the conditions of the workplace. It also depends on an educated and militant workforce.

This is not a process that happens overnight. It took the Edmonton IWW 10 years to reach a state of steady organizing, where they were able to provide the

support necessary to engage in direct action. Historically, the repression from business owners and the state towards organized worker militancy has meant that a network of solidarity is crucial. In this regard, the Wobblies made sure that they could back up their words with action. This revolutionary pragmatism was reflected in a dampened view of how the IWW engaged a hegemonic struggle. Informants cautioned that the IWW was not a panacea for a revolution, but merely part of workers' struggle for self-determination. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for the notion that worker democracy through direct action and solidarity is the "key to changing society", but that it would not happen through the IWW alone. Wobblies placed what could be described as a faith in the working-class, but they saw this faith justified as they organized with their fellow workers.

Chapter 6: Analysis

A 100 year old debate exists in the IWW about which is the more important strategy for working-class emancipation: the organizing or education part of the IWW motto to “organize, educate, emancipate”. This dichotomy of how workers learn to effectively organize has reappeared throughout the history of IWW literature: was it through direct action in the workplace or through the instruction of working-class intellectuals (Foner, 1965)? My research reveals that organizing and educating are dialectical in learning to challenge capitalist hegemony. Organizers and intellectuals, both traditional and organic, are dialectically related in what could be called a revolutionary praxis (Allman, 1999). By this I mean that the Wobblies are organizing in a way that attempts to challenge capitalist hegemony theoretically through workshops, and social interaction and from their material position as workers in class struggle. Wobblies are organic intellectuals of the working-class (Gramsci, 1971).

Wobblies object to the ownership of capital in the hands of the few, but they also challenge the way capitalism structures our social relations in the workplace, unions and social movements. Hegemony is challenged pre-figuratively through the way the Wobblies organize and not necessarily through one totalizing revolution. Although we may “not live in revolutionary times”, as Phineus notes, the IWW are revitalizing a form of organizing that once presented a real threat to capitalist hegemony in North America.

In searching for an answer to the question of how the IWW learns to challenge capitalist hegemony, several broad themes arose in my fieldwork that can be connected to relevant literature. Education in the IWW is viewed as a revolutionary praxis with learning in the IWW examined as a social movement *and* from the context of being working-class (first alienation and then confidence). Ontological and epistemological shifts were found with members developing a working-class consciousness and becoming an organic intellectual. The relationship of traditional and organic intellectuals in the IWW—including related aspects of a professional middle-class position and a more traditional working-class were found to be important dynamics in IWW education. Finally,

the pre-figurative way in which Wobblies as organic intellectuals organize, and the creation of broader alliances across a range of interrelated struggles through solidarity, are central to challenging capitalist hegemony.

Education as a Revolutionary Praxis in the IWW

The IWW workshops were created by the branch and were drawn from a wider IWW and radical working-class networks. Lessons were based upon the IWW's own struggles, and workshops had seen a revival since about 2005. Often, the non-formal courses gave a vocabulary to what workers were already doing to gain some control over their own working conditions. Newer members reported that they were responding to conditions on the job prior to joining, but felt that they lacked the concepts and strategies to effectively organize for worker control by making gains through direct actions and building solidarity.

Even before I began my formal data analysis, I recognized how much of this is reflected in popular adult education approaches (Freire, 1970), where the work starts from people's own experiences and where one does "not have to be already conscious in order to struggle. By struggling [one] become[s] conscious/aware" (Freire, 1988, p. 114, in McLaren, 2002, p. 172). However, beyond Freire's critique of banking education, Livingstone (1999) notes that this "approach has paid little attention to documentation of oppositional (or counter-hegemonic) cultural forms among working people, the wider recognition of which could sustain transformative cultural action beyond the small group level" (p. 197). Martin (1996) and Newman both note that "transformative education and learning initiatives may have more likelihood of survival when they are supported directly by labour unions" (in Livingstone, p. 197). Indeed, as outlined in Chapter 2, this approach within union organizing, especially within more radical streams, has been happening for over a century.

While interviewees emphasized the importance of the courses, they were unanimous that courses were not enough to develop a working-class challenge to capitalist hegemony on the job. This is because, to paraphrase Leon, it is too "cerebral" to only focus on the theory by reading books, having discussions and

putting out position papers about changing the world. Reading, mentorship, and workshops offered by the IWW provide the theory for a Wobbly education, but the context comes from one's position as a worker, one's organizing and other forms of social action such as attending a rally or walking on a picket line. Together, theory and action allow for collective reflection upon working-class struggle and being working-class. The more systematic forms of adult education, such as workshops, mentorship and facilitated discussions are dialectical to organizing efforts intended to fundamentally change social relations in the workplace and society. This makes learning a revolutionary praxis imbedded in one's life as a Wobbly.

Allman (2001) draws a theory attributed to Karl Marx where a shift in consciousness is dialectical to a shift in one's material conditions and relations. I argue that, while the IWW and the working-class currently lack the capacity to overthrow capitalism, this shift can be a pre-figurative one that occurs collectively on a jobsite or within a social movement, and individually within one's own consciousness through experiencing working-class power through direct action and solidarity. In this sense, IWW education strongly resonates with Allman's (2001) notion of a revolutionary praxis. Allman builds on Marx's notion of praxis, "the unity of theory and action" (p. 40), and distinguishes between a limited and a revolutionary praxis. As quoted in the introduction, a revolutionary praxis is:

Necessary to radical, social transformation; however, since it goes against the grain of our present conditions, it must be infused, in all contexts, with an alternative educational approach, an approach that can be applied in informal or what may appear to be noneducational contexts and formal ones as well. (p. 85)

In the more horizontally organized IWW, where all members can become intellectuals and organizers, there is an "alternative" educational approach that is "infused, in all contexts" of the workplace, where most of us spend the majority of our waking lives. As well, I note that a Wobblies social life included gathering together at a pub and engaging in debates about organizing, or sharing tales of

workplace struggles. The learning I observe taking place is in a milieu that cannot be located in a single place; it may originate from workplace struggle or through a theoretical discussion over a post-meeting pint of beer, but only between the realm of ideas and the material realm could a revolutionary praxis actually emerge (Allman).

Gramsci used the term “philosophy of praxis” when talking about socialism to get beyond the prison censors, but his choice of words also “reflected his own particular brand of Marxism” (Armstrong, 1988, p. 249). Allman argues that Gramsci’s view of praxis was a dialectical approach and advocated for less of an orthodox Marxist viewpoint, where a vanguard would lead an uneducated workforce towards paradise. It is dialectical in the recognition of the cultural aspect of class and in that “knowledge arises from material reality, but the understanding of this reality is, in its turn, shaped by ideas” (p. 251). This theoretical approach allows for an emphasis on working-class agency, while still recognizing the material context in which it is shaped. Rudolph Rocker (1938) described the dialectic between the material realm and that of ideas in that:

Movements arise only from the immediate and practical necessities of social life, and are never the result of purely abstract ideas. But they acquire their irresistible force and their inner certainty of victory only when they are vitalized by a great idea, which gives them life and intellectual content. (p. 19)

For the Wobblies in my study there was a great emphasis on workers’ agency, the importance of working-class struggle and education. The development of IWW education is one example of how the IWW, as a movement, was shaped through praxis. The lessons offered through the *Organizing 101* workshop had been developed historically through IWW struggles, and were offered by workshop participants based upon their own experiences. In this sense, the workshops provided a place for reflection upon a breadth of IWW organizing; as well, a reflective praxis was happening at an individual level through IWW education and organizing. For me, a clear example of this would be the lesson I

learned when the IWW supported me as I collected back wages. This required a realization that my role as a worker in a small business was the same hierarchical relationship I had expected to find in a large corporation. At a collective and individual level, Wobbly education is a revolutionary praxis with interplay between the branch as a social movement and one's position as a worker. I will now discuss learning from these two positions to gain a deeper understanding of education in the IWW.

Learning in the IWW as a Social Movement

The IWW can be properly understood as a social movement—part of a century-old, radical working-class struggle. As a social movement, it is a “form of collective action” that can be identified by three qualities (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 20). The first is that social movements involve “conflictual collective relations with clearly identified opponents”; for the IWW, this means class war against the employer. Secondly, they are “linked by dense informal networks”, which become most apparent whenever the Wobblies show up in solidarity during a strike in the city—more subtle forms are found in social interactions. Finally, social movement participants “share a distinct collective identity”, which, for a Wobbly, means being a militant or revolutionary member of the working-class who is willing to engage in direct action to achieve workplace democracy.

Prior to joining the IWW, many Wobblies have previous experience in other progressive social movements. As a worker, one joins the IWW with some level of class consciousness. As a social movement, however, the IWW provides a deeper and collective understanding of what this entails. Sherkat and Blocker (1996) saw that social movements can “mold participants’ beliefs, direct behaviors, and channel commitments” (p. 1049). Evidence of these effects can be found throughout the research. To conceptualize why people engage in collective action, Oliver and Johnston (2000) argue for using the theory of ideology. They found that activists often enter groups with compatible pre-formed ideologies. However, rather than experiencing an individual journey of self-discovery, those new to a particular ideology are educated within their social network through

“reflecting on and interpreting their own experiences” (p. 14) alongside collective construction of meanings. This understanding of social movement learning takes into account the deep collective and educational aspects of ideological formation that are dialectical to individual and collective actions in responding to material conditions. For the Wobblies, this involves a transformation in one’s understanding of the workplace, social change, the importance of solidarity and worker agency in class struggle.

Learning in social movements is usually “tacit, embedded in action and often not recognized as learning” (Foley, 1999, p. 3); but, contemporarily and historically, the IWW has explicitly recognized the importance of education for a lasting working-class struggle. Learning in the Edmonton IWW is an introduction to a rich history of revolutionary organizing. This history is from the IWW’s own history and from related working-class struggles, such as the General Strikes of Winnipeg and Edmonton in 1919, the fight for the eight-hour work-day in Chicago of the late 1800s, and anarcho-syndicalist movements in Europe, especially Spain in the mid-1930s.²⁷

As a social movement, knowledge is formed in the IWW through “interaction with old movements, old traditions, concepts, and values... in the recombination and reinterpretation of intellectual roles and practices” (Badat, 1999, in Walters, 2005, p. 60). Saldana (1988) argues that this process of developing a class consciousness can actually be measured “through a post-hoc inference from individual conceptions and from their relatively stable historical crystallisations in culture, ideology and organizations in class movements” (Saldana, 1988, p. 16). In my interviews with individuals, collective conceptions of class shine through and are further substantiated by my own observations. Individual and collective consciousnesses have to be “analysed within a dynamic social historical context. The development of class consciousness takes place in

²⁷ When I first became involved with the IWW, I thought, “enough with Spain already!” But it helped me to learn the history of Catalonia in 1936, which provided an example of the working and peasant classes running production.

the immediate context of and in intimate relation with a social movement and within the wider context of social historical transformations” (Saldana, p. 17). The structure of the Wobblies has allowed for this consciousness to translate into sustained working-class agency.

As members of a social movement, Wobblies share a “distinct collective identity” (della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 20) developed through material contexts, such as workplace struggles, and historical struggles. This was reflected through the interviews. As well, I note that socialization in the Wobblies is an important part of the learning process. Mentorship is one aspect of this, but it also occurs between intellectual equals through debates. Kilgore (1999) argues that social movements often find recruits through networks of friends, and that because of this “we may participate in collective social action... without first or ever fully grasping or agreeing with its vision” (p. 195). While friendships are formed before and after joining the IWW, it is not correct to assume that socialization in the IWW leads to uncritical actions just because members are friends. Wobblies are extremely conscious about the interplay of theory and action. One would also be mistaken in assuming that Wobblies conform to the exact same thoughts on what class struggle is all about or on strategies for emancipation. Debating various motions at a meeting or theoretical questions afterwards at a pub are important parts of the social life of a Wobbly. A debate can often include disagreements on a number of important points, on some basic assumptions about working-class organizing, even sometimes what exactly the working-class is.

I noticed that Edmonton Wobblies are divided on the question of political parties. While some eschewed all partisan politics, others formed temporary alliances with Alberta’s social democratic party, the NDP, or even took out memberships in the party. Some Wobblies felt that a professor, who works on research and does not own a university, is part of the working-class, while others would say he/she are a petit bourgeoisie: hiring and firing students, intellectuals often serve the ruling class, etc. Another Wobbly would point out how some professors are quite secure in their status, while others work temporary part-time as sessionals.

An example of the array of philosophies on class struggle would be how some Wobblies took what could be categorized as a class reductionist view of social change compared to others, who adopted a more radical pluralist position where social change happens through a multiplicity of interrelated struggles. However, members with these seemingly contradictory viewpoints all found their place within the Wobblies as working-class divisions along partisan lines are eschewed, and there are common understandings which hold the group together. Collectively-held values included the importance of solidarity, siding with the working-class, and the use of direct action over legislative reform.

This is not to say that conformity does not take place, nor that it is a negative thing when it does. In our individualized society, conformity is taken to be a sign of weakness. But, as Gramsci (1971) points out, “we are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass [*sic*] or collective man [*sic*]. The question is this: of what historical type is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs?” (p. 321) Or, to put it bluntly, “Which side are you on,” as go the lyrics to Florence Reece’s 1931 union song. Sherkat and Blocker (2001) argue that ideology does not have to be indoctrination, but rather a new tool of analysis, (such as Marxist dialectics). As a social movement, the IWW lends itself to particular forms of learning dialectical to material relations. Shared ideology is not a stagnant doctrine. It is created through reflection upon shared experiences as workers, and is a social process. As a social movement with a presence in the Edmonton community, the IWW has an influence upon the learning of workers far outside of its membership.

Learning as a Worker

As discussed in the beginning of Chapter 2, the material reality faced by the Edmonton IWW is working-class and the lower end of the middle-class. Eligibility to join the branch (based on past votes) generally falls at the line where someone has the power to hire and fire, because of the hierarchical social relation that this creates with one’s coworkers. At the same time, the Wobblies expand what it means to be working-class. The definition expands beyond the traditional

factory worker to anyone who survives by making a wage, who sells their labour through “brains or brawn” in industries from energy to healthcare, hospitality to education. This is why I say the Edmonton IWW is working-class: although it includes a diverse group of workers, even from what could be seen as two different classes, working and middle (Ehrenreich, 1989). As a class-based social movement:

The collective context of being working-class impacts on an individual’s education as they organize “around class-related issues such as working conditions....[they] come to realize that collective action and solidarity, as captured in the [IWW] slogan “an injury to one is an injury to all, ” is the most effective approach to overcome social and economic hardships. (Walters, 2005, p. 55)

As members of the working-class, Wobblies share a common experience of alienation. This is a historical phenomenon of the working-class based on its relations to production and positions within the hierarchy of the workplace as described in Chapter 2. These relations contribute to how IWW members are learning to challenge capitalist hegemony and to how attempts to change capitalist relations will impact our consciousness. Indeed, “the most powerful forms of learning happen while people are resisting oppression” (Foley, 1999, p. 2). The attempt to struggle against this alienation impacts the development of a working-class consciousness.

It must be stressed that attempts to challenge capitalist hegemony go beyond collective responses to alienation and even the right analysis: they take guts. All of the interviewees mentioned that they have developed confidence in their own abilities to change the status-quo since joining the IWW, and wish to pass this confidence on to other workers. This confidence comes from one’s own experience—“trial and error”, but with a sense of solidarity. Again, Freire was very influential upon the turn towards a more independent labour education in the

1970s and 1980s in Canada (Taylor, 2001). Whether in a trade union or the IWW²⁸:

A deep understanding of the complex processes of oppression and domination is not enough to guarantee personal or collective praxis...The globalization of capital can be challenged and defeated not only by understanding its formation but also by developing the will and the courage—the commitment—to struggle against it. (Freire in McLaren, 2002, p. 172)

However, for the IWW the strategy to organize the worker and not the workplace allows for this continued education outside of the rigid structure of the trade unions. You can not hide behind a desk in the IWW. It becomes a much more fluid social movement, which has beneficial implications for social movement learning. Wobbly education, dialectical to workers' struggles, provides a set of organizing skills that corresponds with one's workplace, and can lead to an increased sense of agency and an emerging working-class consciousness. Further, I argue, the process of gaining this consciousness and confidence, wherever one is employed, marks the process of Wobblies becoming organic intellectuals of the working-class.

Worker Consciousness and Becoming an Organic Intellectual

Social relations provide the context through which our consciousness forms. Marxists have long maintained that a shift in our material relations will result in a shift in our consciousness. This was seen to happen at the level of whole societies through a socialist state (Small, 2005). The psychologist Lev Vygostky (1930) theorized this process of new material relations shaping consciousness in the early U.S.S.R. I argue that this transformation can occur even in pre-figurative transformations of our social relations, for example in organizing and achieving power on the shop floor or experiencing organizing

²⁸ I am not denying that there are working-class heroes within trade unions, but they can be found amongst officers *and* the rank-and-file.

horizontally. Kaufman's (2003) neo-Marxist notion of pre-figurative politics is similar to the IWW model of organizing the way one wants the world to be in the first place. I see no reason why Vygotsky's theories could not be applied to pre-figurative changes in our social lives before a totalizing revolution; because: "If the relationships between people undergo a change, then along with them the ideas, standards of behaviour, requirements and tastes are also bound to change" (Vygotsky, 1930, p. 7). Even without a change in state hegemony, we can pre-figuratively see a change in material relations impacting workers' consciousness by organizing on the shop floor and transforming relations of production through worker solidarity.

From those I interviewed, and from my own experiences in the IWW, I noted that by learning in the IWW, a shift in conceptions of one's position as a worker and what this entails occurs in terms of class struggle. For some, this included an expansion of who constitutes the working-class and where their own loyalties lie. Their relations with people at work became less about personality and more about their own relations to production. Wobblies gained a deeper understanding of being working-class. For many, this resulted in a re-examination of previous productive identities of being strictly "middle-class": a hegemonic concept binding a "class of workers and consumers to a moral, political and economic project...where the individual [became] blurred with the company" (Du Gay, 1991, in Jones, 2006, p. 59). In many ways, this emerging class was a benefit for the professional middle-class, as it could follow a calling, however, this became a barrier with the number of years one must be educated to do so (Ehrenreich, 1989).

In some ways, as an identifiable group, the middle-class "is analogous to that of civil society"²⁹—providing a trench system that sustains capitalism through its complexity and interlocking levels" (Jones, 2006, p. 87). The task is to disentangle the middle-class from capitalist hegemony; it is a daunting one at best

²⁹While I have not addressed theories of civil society as hampering or contributing to revolutionary change, I will note that the IWW perspective on the matter would revolve around gaining control for workers in industries of civil society such as public education, academia, the arts, etc.

(Jones, 2006). Ehrenreich (1989) notes that the middle-class is elite compared to the working-class in terms of monetary status and a hierarchical relationship. However, she reminds the reader that the middle-class is not the ruling class, and that it ultimately has more reason to side with the working-class and struggle for a classless society (1989). The definition of working-class in this thesis does not include the managers of the middle-class. This is recognition of the current owner-manager structure making it hard for a class consciousness to develop because the managers and salaried personnel, while not the actual owners, must enforce workplace hierarchy. Confusing class consciousness even further is the practice of management responsibilities being shifted onto the individual worker through practices of self-discipline (Baldacchino, 1990).

In the IWW, the expansion of what it means to be working-class, combined with the lessons learned through a revolutionary praxis and the confidence gained from solidarity, provide a starting point to overcoming managerial control gained in the latter half of the 20th century, partially through the science and education of human resource management.

For me, as an emerging member of the professional middle-class, I have had an ontological shift as an activist organizing for causes outside of my immediate material concern toward an incorporation of my own places of work as a site of struggle. I have begun to view my position in the world differently, and have learned about many of these concepts through struggle as opposed to just from books. This shift is not only from a middle-class view to a working-class view, but from the role of a traditional intellectual on matters of class struggle, knowledge of Marxist and anarchist theory reserved for books and pamphlets, to that of an organic intellectual, consciously and actively involved in working-class struggles.

Organic intellectuals are not intellectuals by profession, but nonetheless produce ideas and inspiration for their class (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci's notions of intellectuals were developed during the factory occupations of Turin in 1920, where he saw workers leading their own affairs through the factory councils (Armstrong, 1988). These organic intellectuals did not use their "eloquence,

which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, ‘permanent persuader’ and not just simple orator” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10).

In contrast, traditional intellectuals are not engaged in practical “messy complexities of social life”, they are “men of letters, philosophers or artists” and generally serve to uphold the statusquo. Most traditional intellectuals are those who “on account of their superior intellects...have established themselves in this world, yield to the need for a thoroughly bourgeois position and bend their every invention to the exclusive use of the privileged class to which they themselves belong” (Bakunin, 1869, p. 1). Of course, not all traditional intellectuals fall so easily into this category of upholding the statusquo. Those who actively engage in struggle with sub-altern groups in their scholarship would certainly not fit this definition. As well, I mentioned in the previous chapter how some Wobblies, including myself, appear to straddle positions of traditional and organic positions. In the branch, this combination can be seen both on an individual and collective level.

Gramsci felt that the working-class could develop organic intellectuals from its own ranks through a revolutionary party “channelling the activity of these organic intellectuals and providing a link between the class and certain sections of the traditional intelligentsia” (Hoare & Smith, 1971, p. 4). Winning over traditional intellectuals would be “a crucial aspect of the ‘war of position’ itself” (Mayo, 1999, p. 42)³⁰ but “it is more common... for a traditional intellectual to resist being incorporated into an emergent hegemony” and instead defend the statusquo (Jones, 2006, p. 18). However, “the more the working-class is able to articulate its vision through organic intellectuals the more individuals of the traditional intelligentsia will cross over to their side”(Coben, 1998, p. 21), which speaks to the importance of a more “cerebral” discourse for the traditional intellectuals.

³⁰ Gramsci viewed hegemonic struggle in cultural terms where social actors competed for meaning alongside material struggles.

The crucial debate as to the role of traditional intellectuals within a revolutionary organization can be traced back to the split of the First Internationale, when the dominant perspective of Marx and his allies won over the more libertarian socialists in propagating the belief that a vanguard party with “superior wisdom” would transmit knowledge downward to the labouring classes. For Gramsci, the process of education was better conceived as a dialogue between intellectuals and “the people.” He writes “The popular element ‘feels’ but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element ‘knows’ but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel” (Gramsci in Jones, 2006, p. 90).

For Wobblies, like many whose work reflects the more libertarian socialist stream, an intellectual can explicitly understand *theories* of class struggle and the *feeling* of it through a praxis of his/her own position as a worker, collective action and reflection. The Edmonton IWW provides a space for organic intellectuals to work together with traditional intellectuals, and for traditional intellectuals to become organic through their activity and recognize themselves as part of a broader working-class struggle. This is not done to win over the traditional intellectuals to be leaders of a vanguard sense, but to become organic intellectuals that gain knowledge through struggle, not merely through books. Intellectuals of the IWW who are of an educated background draw their inspiration from and do their educational work within the movement. There is an ontological shift in recognizing one’s position as working-class, and there is an epistemological shift with knowledge coming from class struggle as opposed to just class theory in books.

The Edmonton IWW contains several members with graduate degrees. These “educated classes”, the “professional middle-class” (Ehrenreich, 1989), are historically the intellectuals who support capitalist hegemony, or within revolutionary parties become leaders *of* the working-class. By joining the IWW, these traditional intellectuals begin to identify more with the working-class itself, and as such become organic intellectuals *within* working-class struggles. Drawing on Marx, Freire calls this form of transition “class suicide” (Mayo, 1999), yet

within IWW discourse this is not class suicide so much as it is a recognition that, although they may be educated for work within the knowledge economy, (the universities, schools, hospitals), the professional middle-class is still of the working-class because the basic fundamental relationship between worker and boss remains intact. The fluid organizing styles of the IWW allow for a combination of traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals, plumbers and psychiatrists. This challenges the trend, perceived or real, where more recent social movements are mainly composed of the middle-class with older movements such as labour unions representing the working-classes (Spencer, 1995). Instead of taking over, leadership ambitions of traditional intellectuals are tempered by the more horizontally organized IWW. This is not to say that the relationship only goes one way—because traditional intellectuals can sometimes provide a more concise analysis of class struggle or provide a historical parallel to a particular struggle³¹.

Of course, while a Wobbly may learn a term like “dialectical materialism” from a book, and may see an example of it in organizing, he/she may hold back on using it if it could create a barrier between the organizer and fellow workers with a more organically derived sense of working-class struggle. In my discussion with a few Wobblies after the *Introduction 101* workshop, I may have been thinking of Freire (1970) in stressing that the course should build on workers’ experiences in expressing IWW theory, but I did not cite him in the conversation. This is an example of the negotiation process involved in straddling traditional and organic intellectual positions.

Whether intellectuals are for the statusquo or against it, traditional or organic, they bring “a dimension of agency to the hegemonic process that may appear to be absent in more impersonal phenomena such as texts and institutions” (Jones, 2006, p. 81). Indeed, for organic intellectuals of the working-class, there is

³¹ Within the history of the IWW, the role of traditional intellectuals has been important for archiving and writing about the organization. In the 1960s and 1970s when a wave of revised IWW histories appeared, many traditional intellectuals in academia drew on new academic theories viewing social movements as having rational goals (Foner, 1965).

“an important role of agency in the context of revolutionary activity for social transformation” (Mayo, 1999, p. 84). This agency is dialectical to structure, and Gramsci points this out in *The Intellectuals* by stating “famously that ‘all men are intellectuals’, but he qualifies this by arguing that only a minority of people can function as intellectuals within any given society” (Jones, 2006 p. 81-82).

This is not to say that they cannot when the opportunity presents itself. As a young writer, Gramsci had known of the ability of “ordinary workers, with only elementary education” to “rapidly absorb great ideas of the past” during reading groups, which “must have led [him] to see such clubs as a possible model for generating revolutionary social change” (Germino in Coben, 1998, p. 32). But these reading groups did not necessarily lead to social action and, for Gramsci, a revolutionary party became the primary means for “channelling the activity of these organic intellectuals” (Hoare & Smith, 1971, p. 4).

Within the IWW, this development of organic intellectuals happens without a revolutionary party attempting to seize state hegemony through organizing and support of workers’ own control of production. As mentioned, there are distinct structural differences between these avenues to worker consciousness. Within hegemonic struggles for the state, intellectuals:

Have tended to see the state as the avenue to power, prestige and influence. Leninism is a typical expression of this tendency. Its appeal to the intelligentsia is that it offers a justification for their rise to positions of power and manipulation in the course of popular struggles which they can exploit and subvert (Chomsky, 1987, p.19–20).

The Italian Communist Party (PCI), in Gramsci’s (1971) analysis, was the most appropriate form for organic intellectuals to achieve hegemony. The IWW represents an alternative revolutionary form of intellectual development through worker solidarity, horizontally organized, where power is exercised by the rank-and-file. This process begins with one’s own experience as a worker. It matures in a process of struggle and socialization within the organization, and is expressed through solidarity with broader struggles. Coben (1998) contends that “Gramsci’s

primary meaning of ‘organic’ is functional rather than positional; he emphasizes the organic intellectual’s role in organizing and mediating the revolution, not his or her rootedness” (p. 186). Within the IWW, an organic intellectual position comes from knowledge gained in working-class struggle. Wobblies become organic intellectuals through class struggle, but also by their position along a broad working-class spectrum.

Challenging Hegemony

Hegemony is a condition in which all aspects of social reality are defined by a single class (Livingstone in Mayo, 1994). There are two popular misconceptions about hegemony. One is that it is a static relationship when it is in fact always contested. Hegemony is:

Built into in the political regime of production, is relational, practical, and dynamic. Any real production regime is continually being constructed and reconstructed in and through concrete struggles between workers and employers. (Stepan-Norris, 1995, p. 836)

The other misconception is that hegemony is always a negative relationship, a thought that could be attributed to the New Left in its rejection of state hegemony, be it capitalist or communist. Many of us on the Left can agree that the current system of hegemonic relations is something to be transformed. But would any new order not be a new hegemony? Gramsci believed in hegemonic struggle through the state, but he had split with many Marxists at the time in his vision of a socialist hegemony “created and continuously recreated by conscious human agency rather than a socialism created and administered by elites” (Allman, 1988, p. 93).

The IWW too, seeks a new hegemonic reality of worker-controlled production *but without the state*. Worker democracy, sought by the IWW through class struggle, would be a new hegemonic order, but its emphasis on worker control means that its exact form is dependent upon decisions made by workers themselves. The transformation of social relations in the realm of production to

horizontal forms of working-class organizing is the hegemonic struggle this critical ethnography focuses on.

The IWW challenges not only the hegemony of capitalism and the bondage of wage slavery, but also the interrelated hegemony of hierarchy where a small group exercises power over everyone else. This philosophical tradition represents a break with revolutionary or hegemonic struggles that seek state control. While Gramsci (1971) came to see the seizure of the state by a revolutionary party as necessary in providing a new hegemony, this study draws on his earlier ideas of worker control through “factory councils”. Gramsci had first-hand experiences with workers occupying factories in Turin, where a transparent economy was directly and democratically controlled by workers at the point of production (Gramsci, 1920). This notion was influenced by the philosophical currents that the IWW also drew on in its early models of Industrial Union Spokes-Councils, or the Workers’ Councils theorized by Pannekoek (1948). Gramsci was influenced by the Factory Councils of Turin in 1920, but he later came to critique those who only sought what he saw as economic change without political change (Hoare & Smith, 1971).

As well, the IWW’s independence as a union impacts hegemonic struggles. Beyond democratizing knowledge in its worker education, the structure of the IWW has a direct impact on its ability to challenge capitalist hegemony. Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin (1995) examined CIO³² locals prior to its merge with the AFL in 1955, using several markers of union democracy. They “conceptualize union democracy as a combination of a formal democratic constitution and a vital inner political life” and conclude “that both union democracy and radical union leadership foster the imposition of limits on capital’s power in the sphere of production” (p. 830). It is:

Only where workers are protected by a formally democratic union constitution and, in practice, can also freely criticize union officials and

³² The Congress of Industrial Organizations, a body of industrial unions that broke away from the AFofL in 1935 but later reformed with it in 1955 to form the AFL-CIO.

organize their own political associations to contend for power (caucuses, blocs, etc.) can they “discover for themselves what is possible”. (Lipset et al. in Stepan-Norris & Zeitlin, 1995, p. 835)

The IWW officers are elected from the rank-and-file once a year, and a full financial report and printed forum for criticism is mailed out monthly.

Labour laws require a boss to recognize a registered union, but collective agreements under this law state that a union cedes the right to manage the workplace. This trade off began with the Industrial Relations Act (1948). Post-World War II saw labour militancy bought off in exchange for concessions to the working and middle-class. As the Edmonton IWW is not registered as a union in Alberta, it remains free to challenge management for control over the workplace without signing collective agreements that remove the rights of workers to manage a workplace. Another clause vehemently avoided by the IWW is a no-strike provision, which prohibits strikes entirely or limits when strikes are permissible, such as during the negotiation of a contract. This removes power from workers on a daily basis by channelling concerns into grievances dealt with on an individual basis or only during contract negotiations. The inability to strike was found to be a crippling factor, and “the longer the workers are prohibited from using the strike, either conditionally or totally, as a weapon of struggle... the more disabling is a strike prohibition” (Stepan-Norris, p. 840).

Pre-Figurative Challenges to Capitalist Hegemony

Wobblies learn to challenge capitalist hegemony through pre-figurative organizing. This means that they organize in the same way that they would like to see society run. Since it is pre-figurative, it allows these shifts in consciousness and ontology to happen now, at least partially, instead of waiting until after a revolution. Being a Wobbly means training fellow workers to be organizers as they go along. It is a slow process of challenging hegemony but it has staying power because it democratizes radical working-class knowledge.

For Gramsci, “every relation of hegemony is an educational relationship” (Mayo, 1998, p. 36). In this cultural struggle, the learning that takes place in the

IWW to challenge capitalist hegemony has far-reaching implications beyond the membership itself. As a social movement, the IWW is “intrinsically educative both for the participants and for the broader society” (Martin in Walters, 2005, p. 55). Social-movement learning includes learning by people who participate in social movements and learning by people outside of social movements through the impact they make (Hall & Clover, 2005), especially for fellow workers. Staughton Lynd remarks on the back cover to *The IWW: Its First Hundred Years: 1905-2005*, that the IWW has always had an influence outside of its membership. This is why Wobbly organic intellectuals as “permanent persuader[s]” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 10) are so important in challenging capitalist hegemony. This process is about developing certain ideas amongst the working-class, as opposed to just building ‘One Big Union’.

Although the IWW is not explicitly an anarchist or anarcho-syndicalist union, its strategy of revolutionary industrial unionism is part of the same working-class strategy of pre-figurative approaches to revolutionary change. The IWW has always been critical of hegemony, or a hierarchy that seeks to control working people as opposed to organizing workers to achieve their own destiny. I go from the premise that, if workers controlled the means of production, directly and democratically, it would be a new hegemonic reality, even if it was horizontally controlled. Day (2005) identifies the Wobblies as composing the newest post-hegemonic anarchist social movements in his “hegemony of hegemony” critique of the totalizing mission of many traditional Leftist groups in seeking a new hegemony to replace capitalism. However, the IWW’s goals are distinct from Day’s post-structuralism in that there is a new hegemony, even if only pre-figuratively, one of democratic control within the workplace as opposed to the majority listening to the minority of bosses. What is proposed by the Wobblies as a revolutionary vision would be hegemonic if that society was controlled by a single class—the working-class—at the point of production. While we may not live in revolutionary times and “no social movement appears even remotely likely to overthrow the ... fundamental institutional supports of global capitalism” (Sklair in Mayo, 1996, p. 152) it does not mean that workers cannot

be creating a new hegemony in pre-figurative challenges learned through a revolutionary praxis. As quoted in the introduction, while Gramsci's work is seen by many on the Left as a “political tool for construction of a revolutionary popular coalition, [it] is also a tool of historical and cultural analysis enabling us to evaluate those strategies by which different groups attempted to form hegemonic blocs in the past” (Jones, 2006, p. 44). Wobblies are realistic in their belief that the IWW alone will not make a revolution. Instead of turning to reformist change in despair, however, the Edmonton Wobblies look to and put efforts behind rebuilding organizations that have historically provided a challenge to capitalism.

When workers are in revolutionary times, the tool of industrial unions and anarcho-syndicalists is the general strike. The general strike is an activity of the working-class where enough labour is simultaneously withdrawn from the economic system that it can no longer operate. Workers seize production through a refusal to work and then vote through strike committees on what will be produced and how. Bjorge (2006) contends that “for the IWW, the general strike has historically been seen as a way to bloodlessly seize the means of production” (p. 90). He provides examples from Canadian history that include the Winnipeg General Strike and the subsequent one in Edmonton in 1919. This avenue to revolution is the starkest embodiment of the IWW’s strategy of workers direct action to gain control of the means of production and create a revolutionary society.

Forming Alliances for a Broader Struggle

Hegemony relies upon consensus. Beyond production, a capitalist state relies on a complex web of civil society and an “individual who can govern himself without his self-government entering into conflict with political society” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 268). When hegemonic consent fails, coercive state forces reinforce relations of power. Police, courts, RCMP, and the FBI are all “the responsibility of what Gramsci calls political society”, which are “the set of apparatuses which legally enforce discipline on those groups who do not give their consent during a normative period and which dominate the whole society in

periods when consent has broken down” (Jones, 2006, p. 50). For the agents of a capitalist state, a breach of hegemonic consensus in the workplace represents a “conflict with political society”, as the state ultimately backs up the interest of capital with brute force. The IWW and similar trends of revolutionary industrial unionism in Canada and the United States, when they have managed to break hegemonic consensus amongst groups of workers, have encountered jail time, beatings and even murder by, or with support of, the political society.

For this reason, the Wobblies and similar radical working-class currents would do well to make broad alliances with all workers in civil society, members or not. Ehrenreich’s (1999) *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the American Middle-class* is about “the retreat from liberalism and the rise, in the professional middle-class, of a meaner, more selfish outlook, hostile to the aspirations of those less fortunate” (Ehrenreich, 1999, p. 3). This middle-class is a group that turned to the political and economic Right as it became conscious of itself. However, Ehrenreich argues that mutual solidarity is in the interest of both classes. The two groups have common ground, and this becomes more apparent the further down the middle-class one goes, regarding the unequal relations of a capitalist system. However, this is not an easy alliance. As autoworker John Lippert wrote (in discussing the hostility of his coworkers to college-educated Leftists): “In the experience of most people in the plants, colleges train people (e.g., teachers, social workers, engineers) to do one thing: to keep the workers in line” (in Ehrenreich, 1989, p. 133).

However, Ehrenreich reminds us that “the American middle-class is not, of course, a ruling class” (p. 255). She calls on the middle-class to view the working-class “not as alien ‘others’ or even as objects of liberal sympathy, but as allies in a struggle to curb the inordinate and growing power of wealth... for the point of discussing class is ultimately to abolish it” (p. 256). Only an expansive alliance of workers across civil society can create the historic bloc necessary to challenge capitalism. A “historic bloc” is “an alliance of different subordinate groups [in]...solidarity on the basis of their common goal, the revolution” (Coben, 1998, p. 167). Within Western capitalism, it is widely held that a frontal assault

on the state will not work. Therefore, institutions that traditionally support hegemony, such as schools, can also be sites of a new, pre-figurative hegemony through the democratic organization of their workforce.

In approaching the middle-class, there are tensions within the IWW between those who want a more radical civil society approach and those who feel the branch's time is better spent organizing the middle-class as workers. The Edmonton IWW Solidarity Committee provides the best examples of social action that addresses issues beyond the economic sphere to the social spheres through addressing a variety of progressive causes. In the last piece of writing before his death, Gramsci wrote that the working-class can only "become the leading and the dominant [i.e., hegemonic] class to the extent that it succeeds in creating a system of class alliances which allows it to mobilize the majority of working population against capitalism and the bourgeois state" (in Jones, 2006, p. 45). Within the current post-modern discourse, the importance of alliances gains new relevance as social movements engage in struggles across a broad social and economic spectrum. Gramsci's emphasis on the working-class as the 'universal class' has been criticized as essentialist by Laclau and Mouffe (in Mayo, 1999). They stress the open, unstructured nature of the social and reject the working-class as destined to be the leadership class. However, Laclau's and Mouffe's notion of the decentred nature of the social can "support any kind of politics" and ignores that "'the abolition of capitalist relations of production' is the most important target for the purposes of bringing about emancipatory social transformation" (Geras in Mayo, 1999, p. 96). My concern with Gramsci's concept of the historic bloc is his idea that the "industrial working-class *lead* their allies through ideological means and provide the centre of any progressive movement" (Jones, 2006, p. 42, italics added).

The IWW doesn't fall so easily into this vanguard assumption. When the Solidarity Committee attends a rally, it takes the lead from those impacted by the cause. This includes actions on the picket line but extends to, for example, the Stolen Sisters March. For the IWW, this includes showing solidarity in what is not only a working-class struggle. This solidarity can create a set of alliances

necessary to building any sort of historic bloc that could effectively challenge the hegemonic order (Gramsci, 1971). Several Wobblies spoke of the amount they learned from attending rallies not immediately thought of as working-class struggles. This process is important in developing a hegemonic class that “really must make large parts of its [sic] subalterns’ worldview its own” (Jones, 2006, p. 45).

This alliance building is not without its difficulties. Shukra (in Holst, 2002) argues that the working-class needs to develop “a politics of anti-oppression as well as anti-exploitation as a prerequisite to developing a working-class consciousness which would be a key to destroying all forms of oppression through revolutionary social change” (p. 44). Within the Edmonton IWW, there are efforts to include a gendered critique of the organization through the Women’s Committee. These efforts have resulted in child care at major events and some male Wobblies being questioned on oppressive behaviour. However, gender issues are dealt with as they relate to class struggle. Gender inequality is seen as a barrier to working-class solidarity. It is an approach that links common struggles (Gouin, 2009). Instead of a feminism based only on identity and against a preconceived and stereotypical notion of the working-class, this requires a feminism that struggles alongside the working-class for the emancipation of all (Gouin, 2009; Segal in Holst, 2002). In the conversation with the Calgary feminist anarchists, the point made by a few Edmonton Wobblies was that gender politics would not necessarily result in revolutionary change, but must still be addressed. Wobblies provide such solidarity, not only to build alliances, but because “an injury to one is an injury to all”. Indeed, the IWW and other revolutionary industrial unions were the first to welcome all members regardless of race or gender.

Perhaps these binaries between class-based organizing and a radical pluralism are too stark. Separations between working-class movements and those called new social movements (NSM) are not as distinct as they are often made out to be. Brass (1991) argues that many issues addressed in new social movements are the same as those addressed by workers, and Wainwright (1995) reminds us

that old and new social movements are interconnected simply by the sheer numbers that are involved in both movements (in Holst, 2002). Tucker (in Holst, 2002) critiques the NSM analyses of Cohen and Habermas through a study of 19th Century French syndicalism, and concludes that:

Syndicalism shares many of the same concerns with modern movements, ranging from the value of autonomy to an emphasis on rational (rather than traditional) modes of justification and consensus formation; further, the movement attempted to implement these values in its very organizational structure. (p. 86)

The IWW—with its non-hierarchical structure, emphasis on the individual and collective—challenges the notion of new and old social movements being two separate phenomena. To successfully be part of a hegemonic challenge to capitalism, the IWW must continue a solidarity unionism grounded in economic struggles but engaged in a larger historic bloc of interrelated struggles, old and new.

Chapter Summary

The learning that occurs in the IWW can be seen as a revolutionary praxis that combines theory about class struggle with direct action. Wobblies enter the IWW as workers, and this class position is enriched through a revolutionary praxis. As a social movement, the IWW impacts learning to challenge capitalist hegemony through a process of socialization and education. As part of the working-class, Wobblies are responding to particular forms of alienation, but in a way that builds solidarity and confidence. As workers in a radical social movement, Wobblies develop a class consciousness that can be seen as an ontological shift, especially for those who have filled traditional intellectual roles, or were involved in social movements outside of the economic sphere. There is also an epistemological shift in that knowledge from class struggle shapes consciousness more than knowledge learned through books. As such, Wobblies are organic intellectuals who learn to challenge capitalist hegemony in pre-

figurative ways. From this position, Wobblies engage in solidarity across a range of social struggles while maintaining a focus on the workplace.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

What I found in the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was a contemporary example of organic intellectuals challenging capitalist hegemony through a revolutionary industrial union. This is important, as many studies on the IWW have been historical, despite the slow revival of this radical union. Founded in 1905, the IWW seeks to organize workers in all industries under one union, as opposed to dividing labour by trade. Instead of collective bargaining, as in mainstream unions, the IWW seeks to address grievances through direct action on the job, with the approach that worker power depends on the right to withdraw labour and halt production. While many of the approaches of popular education within trade unions are shared, this organizing model allows for greater worker control and is an example of how a revolutionary, class-based pedagogy can be taught by organic intellectuals as agitators, organizers and educators in their own workplace.

When I started this research I had different objectives for its use and a different understanding of adult education. I began with the assumption that an adult educator was someone from outside of a group, who possessed privileged knowledge that was presented to a sub-altern for his/her liberation. Throughout this process I have become committed to a radical workers' education run by the rank-and-file. I have reinterpreted Gramsci's (1971) assertion that everyone can be an intellectual (but not all of us have the means to become one) within an organization that seeks to radically democratize power in the workplace and within its own organizing structure. This pre-figurative approach provides a means for every Wobbly to become an organic intellectual and hence, an adult educator. While the aims of my research have changed, I am satisfied with the outcome. It provides a justification for the revival of an independent, working-class education with the aims of revolution. This is important if we on the Left are to reinterpret revolutionary tactics that have historically been shown to be successful in challenging capitalist hegemony.

I began this thesis by explaining some of the reasons why I found the IWW so appealing. It provides an extension of my own work, for decentralized

organizing was the type of adult education I was interested in. In Chapter 2, I outlined the history of a radical workers' education and the role of organic intellectuals within these movements. This exploration included an examination of anarcho-syndicalist movements, specifically revolutionary industrial unionism. I also examined the historical differences between union structures and the impact on learning and hegemonic struggle. In Chapter 3, I introduced critical ethnography, its historical development and how this methodology related to this project specifically. I also defended the use of insider research as producing valid, empirical data on social movement learning. In chapters 4 and 5, I wove together data from interviews, observations and IWW texts in showing how one learns how to challenge capitalist hegemony. Chapter 4 demonstrated the different forms of learning that take place, and how they are a revolutionary praxis of theory and action. In Chapter 5, I followed the intellectual formation that takes place in a Wobblies education, how the IWW began to challenge capitalism pre-figuratively, and how this struggle is broadened. Finally, in Chapter 6 I formally analyzed my findings and demonstrated how learning in the IWW is best conceptualized as a revolutionary praxis. I positioned IWW intellectual formation within a Gramscian theory of hegemonic struggle (1971) and then discussed the ramifications of this in challenging a capitalist hegemony through pre-figurative struggles. I suggested a broader struggle and that the IWW provides a location for working-class and professional middle-class workers to find common ground and solidarity.

Reflections on the Research Process

It was my intention to determine how IWW members are learning to challenge capitalist hegemony. I chose an ethnographic method. An ethnographer's role is to learn about the world from the subject's eyes. As an insider, I was learning from the IWW and changing my view of the working-class and my place in it. A critical examination of one's purpose in life, an ontological shift, is entirely consistent with an ethnographic study. It was the combination of theory and action with revolutionary intent that I saw as the most important part of learning in the IWW. As one became an intellectual organic to the working-

class he/she began to be a “permanent persuader” within his/her place of work and larger social movements. This process is consistent with Gramsci’s idea of an organic intellectual learning to challenge hegemony but, within the IWW, this is done within a non-party revolutionary formation.

The study formally lasted eight months, when I was a participant observer and conducted my interviews. Ideally, the study could have lasted longer, as there was no major job action by IWW during my study. If the research period was longer, I would have had the chance to participate in a Wobbly-organized picket line outside of a restaurant in late 2010. When this picket line began I had already moved away from the city. However, as a graduate thesis there had to be a clearly defined beginning and end to the research. This is the ethnographer’s dilemma in general: when to stop fieldwork with a pervasive fear that something really interesting will happen right after one leaves the field. Nonetheless, the interviews allowed for a deeper look into this side of the Wobbly dialectic, or praxis, along with brief encounters on picket lines during the formal research period. The interviews, five in total, provided confirmation of my own observations and informal discussions with Wobblies. The interview responses provided a focus when collecting data and helped to ensure I was on the right track. It was not until I began to group the interviews into codes that I realized how consistent the responses were.

If I conducted the research again, I would seek out a wider age range in this process. Of course, I could continue researching the Wobblies. One idea for further research would be to look into newer Wobbly conceptions of working-class struggle before and after a major job action. I would also recommend research in other branches of the IWW to see how education is done, and how the process of intellectual formation is similar, or different, and possible reasons why.

Implications of the Research

The objectives of this research fall across academic and social movement lines. For academia, this study produces empirical data analyzed using a cultural Marxist and anarcho-syndicalist approach. This research has implications for sociologists, anthropologists and radical adult educators studying social movement learning. The research also has implications for social movement participants and members of the Industrial Workers of the World. For the IWW as a social movement, this research allows for reflection upon the importance of education dialectical to its organizing efforts and upon the Wobblies role as an organic intellectual

Theoretical Significance

The relationship between critical theory and practice is a stream of research underrepresented within adult education (Brookfield, 2005). Specifically, there has been little work linking empirical research with theory on how revolutionary praxis in contemporary, Western contexts can happen. If we are to understand how radical adult education works within social movements, especially revolutionary social movements, we need a clearer understanding of how intellectual roles are organically formed, ideally within broad-based and horizontal movements. This research provides a contemporary and empirical example of organic intellectual formation in a struggle against capitalist hegemony. I believe that it shows the importance of organic intellectuals educating themselves collectively, and the role of revolutionary organizations in facilitating and channelling the work of organic intellectuals and traditional intellectuals with working-class interests (Gramsci, 1971). In that sense, this research also provides a bridge from academia to theories and practices developed through class-based pedagogies by exploring the relationship of traditional and organic intellectuals in the IWW. Along with a split between the working-class and much of the middle-class, the relevance of conceptualizing “old” and “new” social movements, often along the same class lines in contemporary processes of

radical change, is challenged by showing the interplay of IWW members in a broad range of social movements while maintaining a class struggle focus. Empirical evidence with this tension in mind provides new understandings, especially in cross-movement or intra-subclass education in creating a revolutionary hegemony. Gramsci has been dead for over 70 years, and his theories continue to influence radical adult educators and theorists. Unfortunately, there have been few empirical studies done on how his theories can be applied in a contemporary capitalist context to create an effective challenge to global capitalism, especially with his early theories of factory councils and worker control. It is my hope that this research can be a step in this direction.

Educational Significance

Education is shaped by cultural and economic influences (Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 1971) and education in turn shapes how we view social cultural and economic forces and how we act upon them (Nesbitt, 2006). Therefore, there is a dialectical relationship between education and social structure. Since education is one of the most important sites of hegemonic reproduction, it is a very important site in the creation of counter-hegemonies (Nesbitt, 2006, p. 173). Union education can only focus on “bread and butter” issues or it can facilitate change towards a more democratic system.

Popular education began to influence labour education in Canada starting in the late 1970s and aided the development of a critical workforce, but the structural model of a particular union will influence how this knowledge is used. The IWW is willing to step outside labour practices that have dampened militancy, independence and revolutionary social visions. This provides an increased amount of agency to workers in their own “conscientization” (Freire, 1970). Popular education approaches are limited when it is only an educated instructor encountering an ‘other’ and facilitating a problem posing education to awaken a critical consciousness. Members of the IWW are trained to become educators and organizers within their own places of work and —with solidarity from a working-class position—broader social movements. The implications here

are a legitimization of organic intellectuals of the rank-and-file, a democratization of the knowledge from working-class struggles and the ongoing re-introduction of a revolutionary working-class politics with the New Left.

This research is a call for a critical, independent workers' education within class struggles. Frank Youngman (1986) "argued that pedagogy should always be situated within an economic and political context" and that the "aims of a class-based pedagogy should be to 'challenge the ideology and culture of capitalism and create a counter-hegemony and to develop the general knowledge... necessary to reorganize production and society in a fully democratic way'" (in Nesbit, 2006, p. 197). The IWW provides such a site for education, as it occurs within working-class experiences on the shop floor, and includes traditional and organic intellectuals. Formally, trade unions have a representative democracy, which means that "union education is determined ultimately by policies established by the duly constituted policy-making bodies of the organization" (Taylor, 2001, p. 7). Within the IWW, most decisions are made by the entire branch through committee meetings and then monthly branch meetings. A more democratic form allows for more control of education by organic intellectuals. This is the case within the Edmonton Branch, with 50 members. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated how this happens even when the IWW numbered in the tens of thousands and in even larger numbers with related anarcho-syndicalist approaches. The IWW democratizes pedagogy in workers' education, and this research provides data about the impact this agency over education has on the class consciousness of a Wobbly.

The explicit non-hierarchical approach of the IWW, both in its vision of society and pre-figuratively through its own organizational structure, influences how knowledge is produced, since every member has an equal say over agendas and the running of meetings. *Organizing 101* embodies a form of education similar to independent and radical workers' education prior to the 1940s, as shown in the historical review. It is militant with a strong social vision and it seeks to "organize the worker, not the workplace". This strategy depends on an educated workforce that can collectively reflect on its own material positions and

then organize. The impulse of workers to organize for better conditions is often not enough on its own to provide a long-term challenge to capitalist hegemony. The education one receives in the branch provides a vocabulary, an analysis and a space for reflection about workplace experiences. The educational implications include insights into what a critical and independent worker education looks like when paired with revolutionary social movements. It results in an ontological shift of organic and traditional intellectuals in conceiving class relations and on which side they fall. This radical workers' education by no means has to be limited to the IWW. To remain relevant, trade unions would do well to empower their members by continuing popular education while democratizing their own processes. However, this process will not come from those in comfortable chairs, above the fray of class struggle, it will come from the rank-and-file. Union educators should encourage an informed, critical and militant workforce or get out of the way. With a global recession, casualization of labour and the exploitative relationship of employer-employee intact, the IWW and similar organizations may prove yet again to be a real alternative to workers weary of capitalism, the centralized authority of state socialism or an entrenched labour bureaucracy.

Implications for the IWW

The next 10 years will be interesting for the IWW. Will it continue its slow revival at a time when union membership rates are falling? If it begins to challenge capitalist hegemony, how will it respond to state oppression? I believe that this study shows the importance of building alliances, not only for protection with grassroots and civil society against state coercion but for the educative value of learning in struggle, expanding one's realm of solidarity. Wobblies learn about being working-class not only in their own places of work but across a range of progressive causes. In turn, they provide a radical working-class education to people outside of its membership and the labour movement itself.

The IWW is already conscious about its educational efforts, not typical of a social movement (Foley, 1999). This research shows the importance of reflecting upon struggle within these educational contexts. The Organizing

Committee does this to some extent at its meetings, as Wobblies report on efforts across various job sites. Within a non-formal educational workshop this is expanded beyond a “report back” to a conscious reflection, but the *Organizing 101* workshop, for example, only happens every year or two. I would suggest the IWW encourage this process of reflection at various gatherings throughout the year. Mentorship and role-play were mentioned by informants as an important way to learn in the IWW, and efforts could be made to institutionalize these practices.

Final Words

The tenacious growth of neo-liberal policies over the past several decades has been a remarkable re-organization of capitalism. The fundamentals, however, remain the same. We appear to be returning to a more naked form of capitalism unhindered by the welfare state. In this context, the IWW once again becomes relevant in not only protecting the interest of workers but providing one way to overcome the master-slave relationship of wage labour. Gramsci (1971) writes that the revolutionary party must develop its own social, economic and political forms before it can take power. This is what Wobblies do, but from a grassroots approach, worker by worker rather than by directly taking on/over the state in a traditional “counters” hegemonic form.

I challenge the reader to look at his/her own place of work, his/her own communities, and begin to look at how pre-figurative organizing for a radically democratic world could work. Simply voting on Election Day and empowering a politician to fight your battles for you will not create a more just world. What must be done is to empower people within their daily lives, as workers, whether that is in a factory, coffee shop, hospital, road crew or domicile.

Workers will resist forms of oppression and control over their own agency. This is a fundamental response to alienation. However, the form that this resistance takes is by no means pre-determined. It is the role of organic intellectuals to ensure that workers learn to organize *themselves* and develop this pre-figurative power, instead of just lining up behind leaders. I have tried to

emphasize the importance of working-class knowledge and control for a more equal world. I can only hope that this work inspires the reader to form bonds of solidarity with his/her fellow workers for a more just and equal world.

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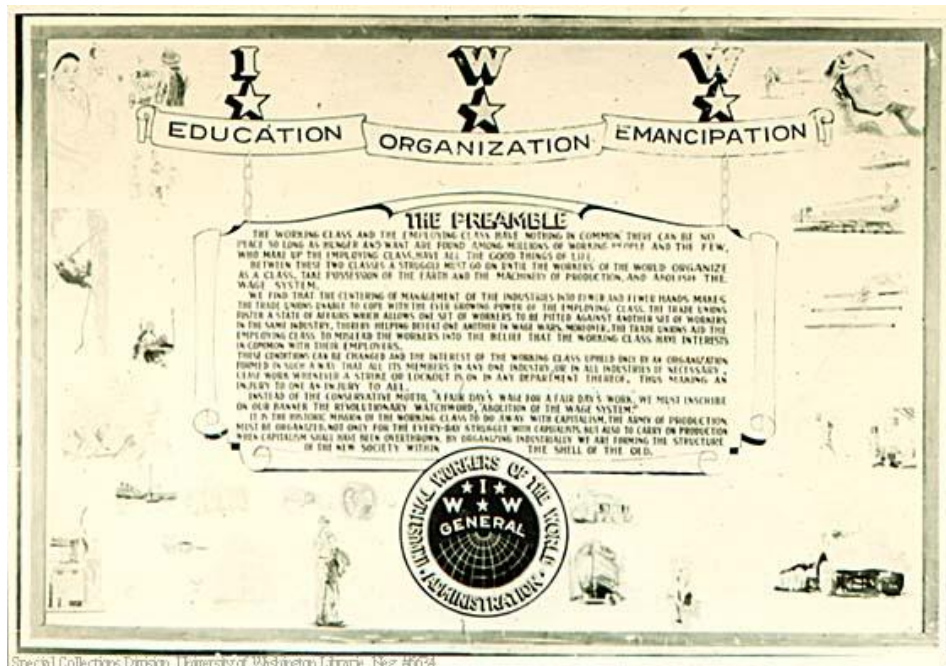
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Appendix 1: Preamble to the IWW Constitution

Figure 3



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The working-class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working-class have interests in common with their employers.

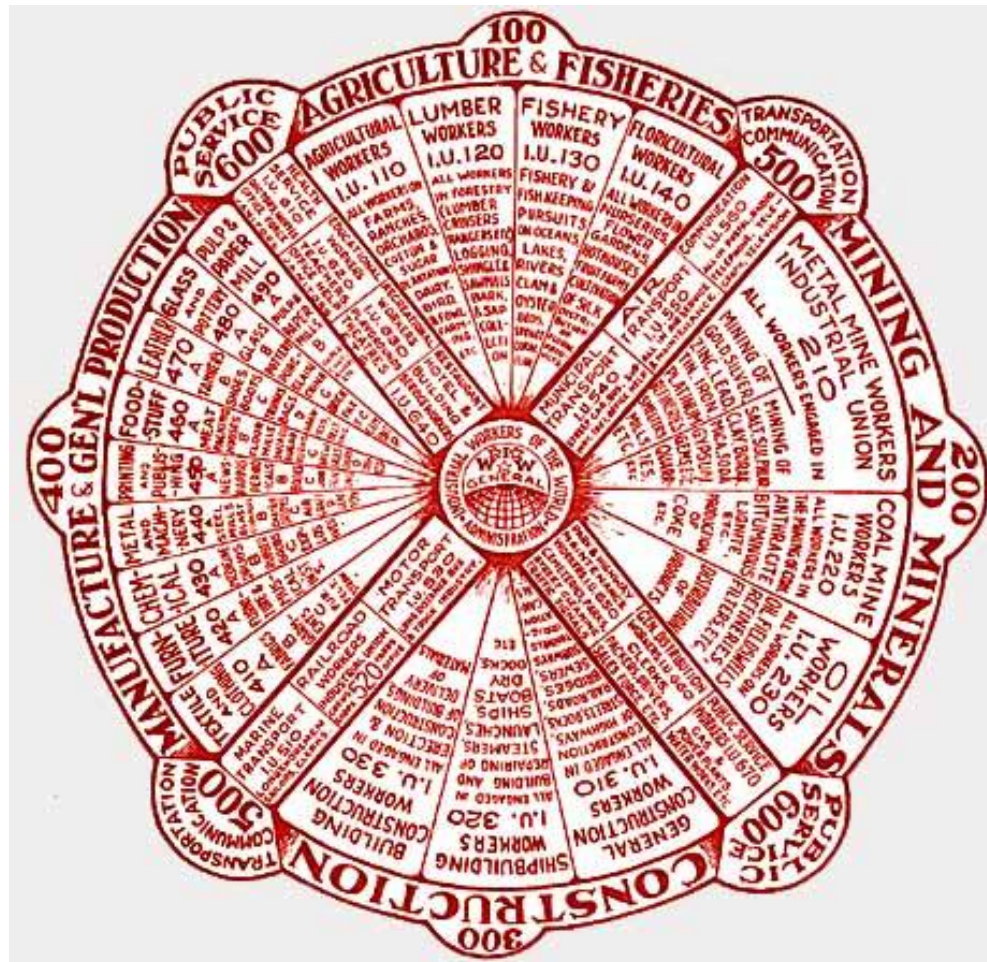
These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working-class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working-class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Appendix 2: Father Haggerty's Wheel of Industrial Unionism

Figure 3



Appendix 3: Interview Questions

I.W.W. Education and Hegemony: Guide for Interviews with fellow workers (1 hour)

Date and location

Pseudonym/Code

Interviewer(s)

Introduction

Introduce self.

Carefully review Information Letter (see attached).

Answer all questions.

Obtain consent.

Consents

Consent to participate? YES ☐ NO ☐

Consent to audio record? YES ☐ NO ☐

Demographic information

(to be collected sensitively and only as appropriate)

Age and year of birth	
Gender	
Racial and/or ethnic identity	
First language	
Marital status	
Parental status	
Educational background	
Income level	
Employment status	

Questions

“How has the IWW influenced your thinking?”

“How did you learn these things?”

“How do you think your experience and understanding of the world could be taught to other workers?”

Appendix 4: Letter of Introduction and Consent

Dear Fellow Workers of the IWW Edmonton GMB,

I am currently doing a Masters of Adult Education at the University of Alberta. About a year ago I joined the IWW to try to understand my own workplace as a research assistant and because I agree with, and will assist in working towards, the goals of the IWW: organizing industrially for a world without bosses, or as the preamble to the constitution states “forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old”. I have been involved in a variety of social movements prior to joining the IWW and yet I have still learned a great deal in the past year about capitalism, hierarchy and resistance to it.

I have my own experiences that have led me to these views, but I am really interested in how fellow workers in the branch have come to critique capitalism and hierarchy while imagining and creating alternatives. Specifically, I want to understand the role of education both in branch activities and the shop floor in understanding this process. So with this question in mind I am approaching the Edmonton GMB with a proposal to conduct research to find out: how education is used in theory and action, how we negotiate this education and how it can be expanded within our struggle.

There is a rich history of education in the IWW. It has long been a part of the IWW strategy of “Education, Organization, and Emancipation”. Starting in 1916, the IWW ran a Work Peoples College with organizers coming from far and wide to learn social theory and organizing tactics. The IWW has always been on the cutting edge of educational trends. Decades before a discipline called “Adult Education” existed IWW educators and theorists promoted key ideas about lifelong learning, the importance of literacy and thinking critically, and organizing from the experiences of workers instead of imposing a top-down idea of social change. Some have even gone so far as to say that the IWW Work Peoples College was the first labor school in history.ⁱ

I would be conducting this research myself, and while I hope that there will be some collaboration from people in the Edmonton GMB I also do not wish

to detract from the important organizing and education already happening. Therefore I have chosen a research method that would lend itself to existing activities while providing a chance to respond to my research question. The method is called “critical ethnography”. It is critical because I share a vision of the world with the branch that is critical of capitalism and other forms of hierarchy. It is ethnographic in that I will be observing educational opportunities in the branch by participating in them and providing my labour where possible. I would also like to do six to eight short one hour interviews with volunteers. Once they are completed, I will present my findings to the branch during a group interview and, therefore, create another opportunity to learn how we can expand our educational efforts in the branch and organizing efforts.

I will be bringing forward a motion at the next branch meeting for a vote on whether this research can happen. I have a 10 page proposal written in more technical terms that is available to anyone who would like to look at it. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751. I am open to questions, comments or criticisms about this project, and I hope that through our democratic process the branch will agree to this project. While I will be present during the motion and discussion of I will remove myself during the actual vote so that my presence does not have any determining factor on the outcome.

If you have any questions you can contact me or my graduate research supervisor, Donna Chovanec.ⁱⁱ

Sincerely,

Aaron Chubb

ⁱ “This Really Was the Initial Labor School.” *Railway Clerk* (September 1963): 16

ⁱⁱ Principal Researcher-Aaron Chubb (780) XXX-XXXX email: XXXXXXXX

Supervisor-Donna Chovanec (780) XXX-XXXX email: XXXXX

Dear Fellow Worker,

This is an invitation to participate in a research project about education in the IWW I am interested in how fellow workers in the branch have come to critique capitalism and hierarchy while imagining and creating alternatives. Specifically, I want to understand the role of education both in branch activities and the shop floor in understanding the process of how education is used in theory and action, how we negotiate this education, and how it can be expanded within our struggle. I have been a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (Edmonton GMB, I.U. 620) for over one year now. I will be doing this research for my Masters of Adult Education.

Ethnographic Method

I will be using an ethnographic method for the research which will include observing and participating in Branch activities and conducting interviews analyses.

- 6-8 interviews lasting about one hour each with fellow workers in the branch based on recommendations of those who have a history of organizing, agitating and educating.

- Participant observation of Edmonton GMB meetings, events and actions to examine how education is happening. This will happen for a six-month period.

- I hope to present my findings in late Fall 2009 to the branch and get feedback through a group interview.

- Interviews will be audio recorded, with the files being stored securely at my house.

- Any personal information I take down will be protected for confidentiality.

Names and locations such as workplaces will be changed. Any personal records or materials that are provided to me will be returned in person, or if that is not possible, to the branch office.

-I will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants <http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html>

Rights of Participants

Everyone in the branch has the right:

To not participate.

To withdraw at any time up to two weeks past the end of the study period, December 31, 2009, without prejudice, and to continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate.

To opt out without penalty and any collected data withdrawn from the database and not included in the study up to the end of the study period, December 31st, 2009.

To privacy, and confidentiality [anonymity can't be assured in this kind of research. Hard as you try, members might be recognized by other members through their quotes/stories].

To safeguards for security of data (data are to be kept for a minimum of five years following completion of research).

To a copy of the report (either by email or paper).

Other uses

Depending on the resources I have available to me, I would also be interested in using the ethnography to write a book that would be accessible to Wobblies and other folks in the labour movement about IWW education in the Edmonton GMB. Another possibility could include a script for a theatrical production, conference presentations and scholarly articles.

Principal Researcher-Aaron Chubb (780) xxx-xxxx email: xxxxxxx

Supervisor-Donna Chovanec (780) xxx-xxxx email: xxxxxxxxx

I consent to my participation in the above-mentioned research and understand how my contributions will be used. I understand that I can remove myself from the study at any point up to two weeks after the completion of data collection.

Signed:

Dated:

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEASJ REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEASJ REB at (780) 492-3751.