

The Wobblies Are Back!

Fifth Estate Collective

2005

Last year, Starbucks' "baristas" in New York continued to organize for the first union shop in an outpost of the notorious coffee chain. In January, criminal charges were dismissed against an IWW Starbucks organizer stemming from a march at the 2004 Republican National Convention against the Bush administration's collaboration with union-busting at the coffee shop giant. IWW Starbucks Workers Union co-founder Daniel Gross was arrested for resisting arrest and disorderly conduct during the protest. He previously rejected a plea bargain to serve a week in jail.

The dismissal of the Starbucks-instigated charges came just over two weeks after the National Labor Relations Board issued a complaint against the coffee company, alleging that management made threats, gave bribes, and created an impression of surveillance in a failed effort to defeat the first-ever union of Starbucks cafe workers in the United States. Gross was snatched by the NYPD at a peaceful union march that began and ended at the Starbucks store where he works.

Co-worker and union activist Anthony Polanco was arrested as well; Polanco's charges have also been resolved. Out of the 200-plus march participants, Gross and Polanco were the only ones arrested. Legal observers witnessed Starbucks managers coordinating with the NYPD before the protest began. The company has made false allegations to law enforcement about IWW protests in the past. Starbucks has refused to recognize the union.

"2005 marks the 100th anniversary of the Industrial Workers of the World, a union that has undergone government repression for each of those 100 years," remarked Gross. "So, while we celebrate the victory today against the criminalization of dissent, we remember our sisters and brothers who have not fared as well."

Independent truckers in the Stockton, California inter-modal rail yards won the majority of their demands in a two-day strike September, 2004 against the Patriot Trucking Company. There are roughly 250 intermodal, or short-haul, truckers in Stockton, many of who are Sikh immigrants from India and most have joined the IWW.

The Stockton drivers sparked a wave of independent-trucker strikes along the West Coast and then across the country in 2004. Truckers from as far away as Los Angeles, Miami and Savannah, Ga., tied up ports and railheads with spontaneous work stoppages.

The drivers, whether in Stockton or Seattle, are an important part of the backbone of the "containerized economy," ferrying goods from ports and rail yards to local stores and warehouses. The IWW organizers and drivers in Stockton are working on plans for further actions and greater gains. Although they are currently considered independent contractors and are not protected by many labor laws, this didn't stop them from standing up to win better pay and conditions.

The IWW invites all truckers to join, regardless of nationality, legal status, or contractor status to join the IWW. Contact them at PO Box 11412, Berkeley, CA 94712, (415) 863-9627, Email—troquero — at — iww — dot — org. Organizers are asking for donations toward organizing expenses and to create a hardship fund. Make checks or money orders out to "IWW" and mail it to the address listed above.

The IWW has seen a rapid increase in its membership in recent years and organizing efforts have been on the rise. The natural food chain Wild Oats has also been the target of IWW organizing in Ohio. A nationally known

law firm is warning its clients, “Employers should beware: the Wobblies are back.” There are much more detailed reports of the IWW resurgence at www.iww.org.

Want to read more about the Wobblies? The theme for our next edition (#370) will be “Wobblies and Work.”

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Fifth Estate #368-369, Spring-Summer, 2005

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