



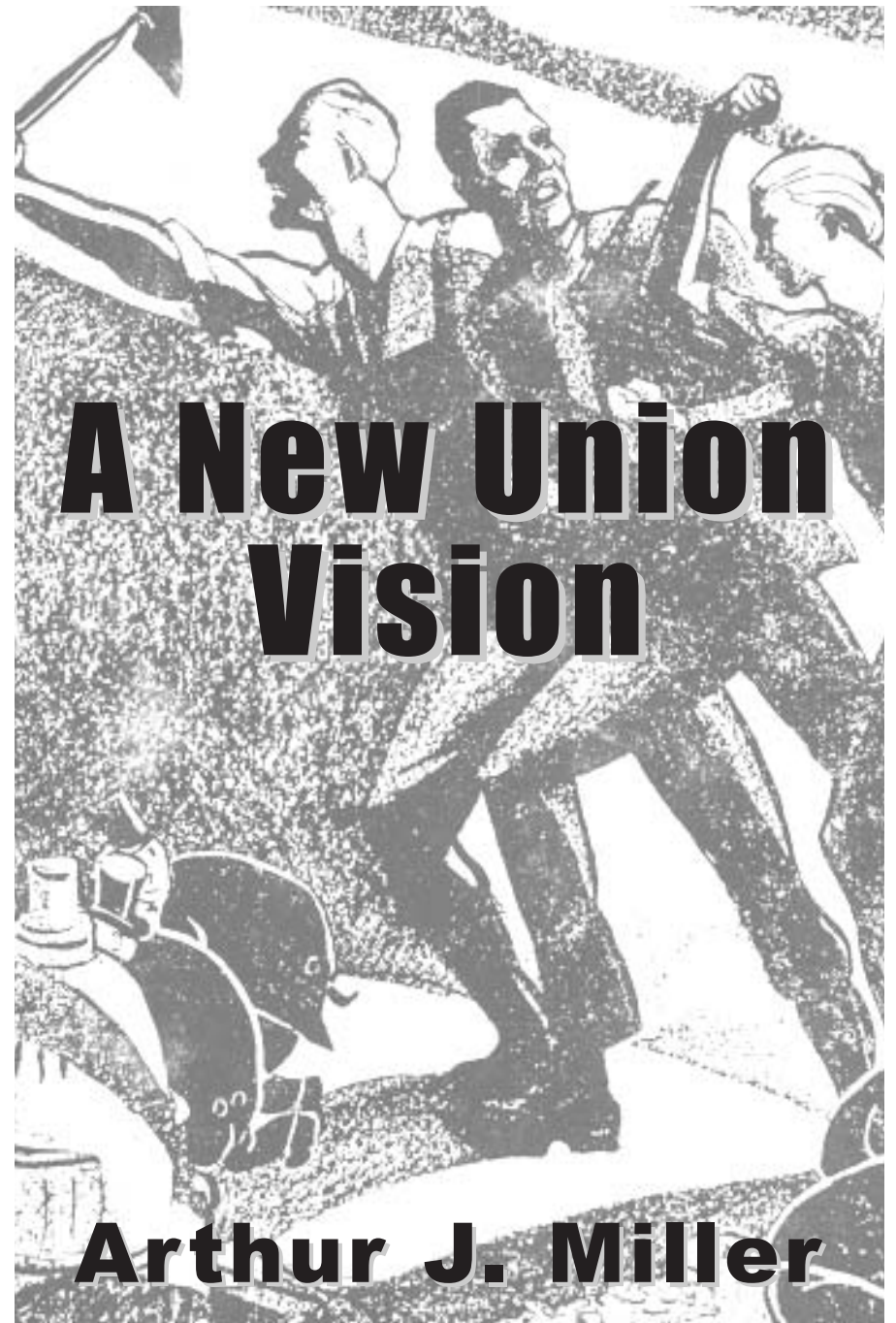
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A New Union Vision

Arthur J. Miller

Conclusion

A new union vision is about people acting in their real self-interest. The self-interest of the employing class is to increase their wealth at the expense of the earth and of working people.

This can be clearly seen not only when looking at Corporate Directors' rates of pay and bonuses, but also at the huge payouts many of them get when they are given the boot.

Whenever working people scab on one another or compete for wages, they only increase the owners' wealth while decreasing their own.

Only working people can act in their own self-interest. The employers will not. The government, controlled by the wealthy, will not. Politicians will not, for they seek to control the power of the many for their own personal gain. The union bosses will not, because they, like the politicians, act only in their own self-interest.

If all these can work for selfish gain (with the approval of society), why then are working people, who are the majority, denied the right to do the same?

The self-interest of the working people is a society that is based upon the well being of all, not a society that is designed for the benefit of a few. Think about it; think of your own well-being, and that of your family and your fellow workers. Think about the well being of future generations. If you are tired of working for the benefit of the wealthy few, then think about joining the Industrial Workers of the World, and start to work for those who really matter to you.

A New Union Vision

Arthur J. Miller

Arthur J. Miller has been a member of the IWW since 1970 and has served on the IWW's General Executive Board and been the Secretary of the IWW's General Defence Committee.

The Need for a New Vision

Today in many countries most unions are unable to function as effective workers' organisations. Strikes are more often lost than won, and when strikes seem to have been won, working people find that there is no real gain. There are many reasons for this, but the following are some of the most important:

Most unions take the power of the organisation away from the rank and file workers and place it in the hands of a professional class of union bosses. Thus you have two classes of people within the union, the rank and file and the ruling class. Like all ruling classes, the ruling class of union bosses will act in their own self-interest, which is not always the same as the rank and file.

Capitalism has evolved, but the organisation and tactics of the major unions have not. Not only have the unions not been able to advance, they have eliminated some of the most effective tactics from the past. Workers today are expected to fight huge multinational corporations with out-dated tactics and organisation.

Workers are mis-organised into unions of narrow self-interest that compete with one another rather than acting in solidarity with each other. When workers with a legitimate grievance strike at work, union bosses of other organisations almost always command their rank and file to cross picket lines, resulting, more often than not, in the defeat and firing of striking workers. These same bosses will, when their own union is out on strike, ask other unions not to commit the same self-destructive acts of which they are guilty.

Because of self-interested organisations and deception by union bosses, workers find themselves at odds with their own communities and other potential allies. All working people share a common need for a decent standard of living, safe and healthy conditions both in the workplace and in the neighbourhood, and to have a voice in making decisions that effect their lives. But in spite of these and other shared interests, workers find themselves at odds with their own communities and each other.

This is the work of those in power, who manipulate situations to pit one part of the working class against another, and they are aided and abetted in this by their willing allies, the union bosses, and other so-called "friends and protectors" of the working class.

The reliance upon the government, laws and institutions has weakened the

into thinking that environmentalism is a threat to their well-being.

Nothing could be further from the truth. First, those toxic pollutants that threaten communities and the environment often come from industries where workers are the first to suffer from exposure to them. It must also be pointed out that working people live in the communities that are exposed. The ruling class does not expose their communities to toxic waste - when is the last time that you saw rich people living next to a plant that was polluting the air?

The earth has an ecological balance that we all must work within. That balance has been upset by the exploitation of the earth for maximised profit. The ruling class will pollute, over-log the forest, and over-fish the seas for that maximised profit, and it is the working people who will end up paying the cost with a polluted environment and lost jobs.

Thus, working people need to become the forefront of the environmental movement and, through the force of their unions, demand an environmentally safe and sound industrial system.

7) The traditional unions limit the scope of the organisation to the workplace only.

A new vision of unionism must realise that working people live in communities and that they are consumers. What happens inside a workplace also affects the working class community. In times of conflict a united working class community can make all the difference.

8) When workers are on strike, or the owners move a plant to avoid union activity, the goods that are produced are scab goods.

Unfortunately union workers will handle many of those scab goods, or union production and transportation will supply that scab plant. Thus a plant can continue to operate during a strike with the collaboration of the labour movement.

A new union vision must take another stance on scabbing. No union worker should provide production, transportation or services going into a scab plant, nor should any union worker handle scab goods coming out of that plant. If union workers could just learn to stop scabbing on each other, then labour struggles would be much easier to win.

For example: If ship repair workers were to go on strike, the ships they were working on would be declared scab ships and no union worker would be willing to touch them. No docker would load or unload those ships, no seaman would sail those ships, no services would be provided to those ships, and if they could be moved by scabs to be worked on somewhere else, no shipyard workers in other locations would repair those ships. Everything would be at a standstill until there was a settlement.

our misery.

All workers are oppressed by classism; some workers are also oppressed by race, sex, sexual orientation, or age discrimination and other issues. To build unity against those responsible we must do two things: first we must weed out those things that the ruling classes use to divide us, and then, we must support peoples' right to organise to end their oppression.

Members of ethnic minorities have a need to organise themselves to deal with the years of racist oppression that they have faced, and the rest of us have an obligation to support them in reaching their goals. Likewise women have the need to organise themselves to deal with years of sexism.

4) The ruling class will also try to divert attention away from itself by blaming the effect that their exploiting practices have on the economy on other groups.

For example, they have blamed the decline of the timber industry on environmentalists. Again, the reality of the situation is that the responsibility lies with those who exploited the natural resources in the same ruthless way that they exploited the workers.

5) The dominant society, controlled by the ruling class, is based on a Eurocentric viewpoint.

In other words, European or "Western" civilisation is the centre or standard of the "civilised" world. A good example of this is a world map familiar to most of us where Europe and North America dominate the centre and occupy two thirds of the map, with the remainder of the world squeezed onto the edges and the remaining third.

The map distorts the world and our perception of it to the apparent advantage of the dominant (white) countries. For example, India appears on this map to be smaller than Scandinavia, even though the subcontinent is three times the size of the combined Scandinavian countries.

The Euro-centric ideology often views indigenous peoples as "uncivilised", even though many of these peoples live in social systems far older and more complex than Western society. Accordingly, the dominant society sets out to "civilise" the native people by stealing their land and natural resources, and turning them into wage-slaves or corpses to facilitate the theft.

The working class must cast off this Euro-centric ideology and try to develop a more international view, where all people who work within any sort of social system are regarded as being of equal importance and worth, and where indigenous people, like all working peoples, have a right to their land, their lives, and their self-determination.

If the labour movement fails to do this, it will be nothing more than a pawn used by the ruling classes to defeat foreign fellow workers and, ultimately, to defeat itself.

6) Working people have been misled by the ruling class and the union bosses

power of the working class. The fact is that government is influenced by wealth. It passes laws that seem to benefit working people, but those laws are weakened by lack of enforcement and lack of funding, and can be changed at any time, sometimes without the working people knowing it.

The best way to enforce health and safety and other important concerns is through the force of union action. Giving the responsibility for these things to politicians is like delegating the fox to guard the hen house.

For these reasons, workers are faced with lost strikes, lost jobs, lost incomes, unsafe conditions, and the inability to resist the social and personal wreckage brought about by the multi-national corporations. It is time for working people to look for a new vision of unionism.

Seeds of a New Vision

To create that new vision there needs to be a foundation to build upon. In the beginning of the labour movement, workers organised into single-shop organisations. When they found that this was not effective, they organised many single shops into trade unions, and then these unions later organised into a federation of trade unions.

The main drawback to this system was that many jobsites had more than one union, or had some union workers and some non-union workers. Such an arrangement weakened the possibilities of labour power, and also led to disputes between trades and between skilled and unskilled workers.

The solution to these problems came in the form of industrial unionism. All workers on the same job were organised into the same union, regardless of whether they were "skilled" or "unskilled".

The first attempt to build a union of all workers (including women) was in Britain in the 1830s. The Grand National Consolidated Trade Union was formed to provide assistance and support to all workers in struggle, to rationalise union organisation, and to provide opportunities for those out of work to undertake co-operative production.

The 'Grand National' lasted a few years but broke up due to its inability to provide adequate support for sections of its membership who were on strike.

The IWW itself arose out of the practical needs of workers in the USA. Ultimately it led to a desire to organise not only all workers in the United States, but throughout the whole world. The story is as follows:

One hundred years ago in the USA, miners in the west found that they needed not only to organise miners, but also all other workers in the mining operation in their areas.

After finding out that the national federation of trade unions did not meet their

needs due to its "one trade per union" organisation and its refusal to include "unskilled" workers, they set up the Western Federation of Miners.

Realising that even this did not create a strong enough force against labour's enemies, they turned their regional organisation into a national one. But even the national organisation did not have the power that was needed, so they set out to create a trans-national organisation in league with other like-minded unionists that would organise all workers to their greatest strength. That new organisation became known as the Industrial Workers of the World.

The ideas of the IWW did not come out of any book, nor did they arise from any political "ism". Rather, they were the direct result of the on-the-job experiences of working people.

The ideas were rather simple:

- * All workers on the same job belonged to the same job organisation.
- * All workers in the same industry belonged to the same industrial union.
- * All related industrial unions belonged to the same industrial department.
- * All working people belonged to the One Big Union.

The IWW foresees the need to make changes not only in how workers are organised, but also in how industry and society are run. If the causes of industrial conflict and the misery of work are not tackled, then workers will face endless strife with employers.

Thus the IWW has long stated that "by organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old."

In its early days the IWW had great success organising workers in many industries and countries. Many workers that conventional unions thought were impossible to unionise, such as sailors, loggers, and migrant workers joined the IWW, and through industrial organisation they won better wages, hours and conditions. Many thought the IWW's new society was a reality in the immediate future.

Because the IWW believed in direct industrial action, rather than on delegating its power to union bosses and politicians, those who sought to enrich themselves on the backs of the working people grew to hate the IWW.

It seemed that the one thing that the ruling classes - be they industrial bosses, political bosses, or union bosses - could agree on was that they were all against the self-determination of the working people.

Therefore they allied themselves against the IWW, and sought to bring it to its knees by every means imaginable, including lynching, frame-ups, judicial murder and media slander.

But in spite of suffering hundreds of murdered and thousands of jailed members, the IWW has survived and continues to evolve.

Today the IWW is the strongest it has been for many years, and organising is being carried out in many countries. As a result, links are being forged between workers around the world, thus helping us to lay the foundations for a truly global

labour movement.

New Hope for a New Vision

No idea or organisation should become stagnant, for it then becomes nothing more than a relic of days gone by. The following are ideas for a new vision in working class organisation:

1) The IWW has always been an international organisation, but in today's world this has become more important than ever.

Corporations are now multinational, and today's organisations of working people must no longer think on just the local level, or even the national level. They must realise that the interests of the working class are also international in scope.

From this global labour viewpoint comes:

- * International work agreements and pay scales — In other words, rather than workers around the world competing to work for the lowest wages, co-operation among workers from different countries could produce enough work at good pay for all.
- * International Solidarity - We stand together. Black, white or yellow; Jew, Christian, Muslim, Hindu or atheist; male or female, gay or straight; we will not allow ourselves to be divided and conquered.
- * International union enforced standards for the environment and health & safety — We must defend our homes and our families. In a system that puts profits before people, we cannot expect industry, or their bought servants in government, to make sure that our living and working environments are safe, that our air is clean, or that the products we use are truly safe.

2) The world is a very diverse place, and different peoples have different ways of doing things. The IWW stands in solidarity with workers all over the world who are struggling against their bosses.

3) The working class has been manipulated and divided by the ruling class for far too long.

The ruling class has diverted the minds of working people away from the true cause of their problems. They create the myth that black people are out to take jobs from white workers, that so-called "illegal aliens" or "foreign" workers are trying to steal jobs away, or that women are taking jobs from men.

In reality, these workers only want what every worker wants, a decent living. Rather than blame each other, working people need to place the blame for low pay and rotten conditions where it belongs, and that is on the employers who profit from