

IWW and Chinese Workers

Ba Jin

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1. Even though we currently spread our rhetoric about the “labor movement,” what relevance does it ultimately have for Chinese workers? We proclaim that “labor is sacred,” but workers have never been happy about it. For some years now, the words “May Day Festival” have become familiar to Chinese people, but despite the fact that certain newspapers are advocating for it, how many workers truly understand what it’s all about? If this continues, what consequences can we expect if we, who promote the “sacred nature of labor,” have failed to capture their attention? Convinced that the American IWW is useful to Chinese workers, I would like to present the following:
2. IWW is the abbreviation for Industrial Workers of the World. Which in Chinese means “Alliance of Industrial Workers of the World.” Currently, they are the most powerful labor group in the United States. Almost every general strike that has taken place in recent years in the United States has some connection with them. Their influence extends across almost the entire country. The government and capitalists consider them a thorn in their side and would like to make them disappear, but the majority of the people place their trust in them so that the government cannot stop them. In short, I dare say that they will inevitably be the ones to begin the next social revolution in the United States.

Born in 1905. In the fall of that same year, six staunch leaders of the labor movement met to discuss the situation of workers in the United States, and decided to call a larger assembly the following year. A year later, therefore, some thirty leaders of the labor movement met at a secret conference, and in June of that year a congress was held in Chicago. Eighty-six people were present at this congress, representing thirty-four labor groups (or several tens of thousands of members). After two weeks of debate, they gradually established an organization that is none other than the famous IWW.
3. The IWW’s doctrine is very close to French syndicalism, which is why it is often considered “American syndicalism.” First, the IWW advocates the destruction of capitalism; they believe that otherwise workers cannot be truly happy. And since “the State,” “the government,” and “the law” all protect capitalism, they also propose to put an end to these monsters. They believe that there is no possible agreement between capitalism and the working class. We must necessarily wait until the workers have taken possession of the land and

the means of production, and we must continue until the abolition of the “wage system” (The Objectives of the IWW, § 2). They believe that to abolish capitalism, it is necessary to organize the army of producers not only to fight the capitalists but also to take over production once capitalism has been overthrown (*ibid.*, last §). They also propose “connecting the entire workforce in all branches of industry in such a way that in the event of a general strike or lockout in a given industry, all industries will unanimously support them and consider the interests of a portion of them as the interests of all” (*ibid.*, § 4).

The method they use against the capitalists is the “general solidarity strike,” their most effective weapon. If this strike fails, it is replaced by a “go-go strike.”

These are the principles of this organization, and at the same time its characteristics. It is clear why it is the best workers’ organization. Despite this, in my opinion, it has a defect: since it is organized under a centralized model, the Council of the executive body is very powerful and can, at its discretion, order this or that organization to participate in a general strike. Perhaps this defect is due to the fact that all members are unskilled workers. In short, they use radical means to create their ideal world of workers, where freedom and equality would truly reign, and where authority would have disappeared.

4. What Chinese workers need most today is purely workers’ organizations. A single example is enough to understand the reason. Imagine that all the workers in a factory go on strike because their wages are too low; however, when they return home they will have no rice, and if they continue without work, how will they be able to eat? Their boss will want to hire other workers, and they will be forced to beg him to keep them. Their strike will therefore have been a complete failure. This fact shows that to save Chinese workers, we must inevitably ensure that they organize themselves into a gigantic group of revolutionary workers, who will join together to overthrow systems such as “the state,” “the government,” and “the law,” to overthrow the capitalists who are the worst enemies of the workers, and to return to the workers possession of the organs of production and their products.

This is the best method, and such are the aims of the IWW. It is clear that these aims concern the Chinese workers first and foremost. The capitalist world is coming to an end; the world of workers is approaching. Chinese workers who are sleeping, wake up quickly! Federate with one another and solve your problems yourselves. If you want to survive in tomorrow’s world, you cannot lag behind this era.

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