

FOR DB

INDUSTRIAL NETWORKS

(Distributed at WSA CONVENTION)

Affiliated Industrial Networks

One of the most important factors concerning the Industrial Networks we will be discussing at this convention is whether or not they should be constituted as affiliated bodies of WSA, or as independent networks. The proposed addition from the NY Group to my earlier proposal, and Tom W.'s letter in DB #54 indicates that there is some desire to create the networks as independent bodies. My discussions with Steve and Mitch points to their belief that the networks will be potentially larger and more influential if they are independent of WSA. Tom, from his letter, believes that it is a mistake to try and build networks on the basis of openly stated syndicalist goals. His concern seems to revolve around what he sees as the imposition of ideology in our organizing efforts, and the attempt of WSA to "become the labor movement", or at least a labor movement.

I must disagree with both positions.

The Size of the Networks

The **Direct Action Movement's** industrial networks are the working models which we should study, as well as the effect of their approach on the DAM as an organization.

The DAM has chosen to create their networks as independent formations. Yet this has not meant an absence of syndicalist goals within the networks. The literature I have read from their Independent Education Network is openly Anarcho-Syndicalist. This means, in effect, that the DAM is in the process of building an Anarcho-Syndicalist organization separate from their own, with the hopes that it will, in the future, affiliate in some way, or perhaps absorb the DAM into a larger syndicalist labor federation.

I have no idea what sort of size or influence their education network has achieved, but from the report printed in DB #54 concerning their Dispatch Industry Workers Union project, it would seem that being unaffiliated to the DAM has simply meant that the few members they have attracted have been members of a syndicalist organization separate from the DAM. From what I've read, it doesn't seem that the networks have in any obvious way benefitted from not being affiliated to the DAM, and the DAM itself has not benefitted at all from the energy expended in building the networks.

Based on the limited evidence available, the size of workplace initiatives such as the networks is determined by factors other than their affiliation status. I would suspect that these factors are: the presence of competent organizers within the network, the particular conditions within the targeted industry, and the availability of resources for organizing activities.

The Theoretical Question of Affiliation

This is a question of long-standing among Anarcho-Syndicalists. I read the two positions as being: the propaganda/advocacy group versus the syndicalist labor organization (as in having an organized presence in the workplace). This comes down to a practical matter of whether it is more effective to encourage and advocate the building of syndicalist formations or to actually go out and try to build syndicalist formations.

This question is at the core of the NSF proposal reviewed at the IWA congress, and believe they are correct (if ambiguous) in their conclusion: we must build unions.

Information on the size and condition of our sister organizations in the International is sketchy at best. Based on the information I have seen, it is apparent that those sections which have constituted themselves as propaganda groups have failed to experience significant growth, and some, as in the case of the Danish ASO, have ceased to exist altogether. Those section which are constituted as union organizations (such as the CNT and the COB) likewise seem to have experienced no significant growth based on available information, but still count their members in the thousands, while none of the

propaganda groups have more than 200 members. Likewise other non-IWA syndicalist organizations all seem to have memberships in the thousands (Coordinadora, SAC, CGT, UNICOBAS, etc.). Of course the French CNT and the USI are also union formations, yet each have only 300 members or less. My conclusion from these facts is as follows: formations constituted as propaganda groups inevitably have less than 200 members (often a lot less), while formations constituted as union organizations more often than not have memberships in the thousands.

Working from this conclusion, I believe WSA would be certainly larger and probably more effective as a union formation, as would all other IWA Sections. The question then becomes how do we transform ourselves from a small propaganda organization into a syndicalist labor formation. I believe the DAM has examined these same facts, reached the same conclusion, but are pursuing the solution in a different manner than I would advocate.

I have as yet heard no opposition to the proposal of building industrial networks, only opposition to making those networks integral parts of WSA. If we are resolved to apply organizational energy and resources (even if the available resources is only time) to building these networks, I believe WSA as an organization should benefit directly from any positive results of our efforts. Again, we have as a working model the efforts of the DAM. From the report on the Dispatch Industry Workers Union in DB#54, it would seem that lack of support from within the DAM as an organization has played a negative role in the DIWU effort. I would venture to guess that this is a direct result of the view from within the DAM that the DIWU is a union akin to but not of the DAM, despite the involvement of DAM members. I would again guess that, given the independent status of the DIWU and the lack of resources within the DAM, there was a lack of feeling an organizational responsibility for the success or failure of the DIWU project. If WSA chooses to follow the same course, I suspect that the same lack of organizational responsibility will become quickly evident. If the networks don't grow immediately, if difficulties arise at the shopfloor level, the lack of organizational investment will result in a decline in organizational interest. On the other hand, if the networks were linked to WSA by affiliation, if our organizational interests and reputation were seen as tied up in the success of the networks, I believe such circumstances would tend to rally support and provide a focus for our organizational energy: "The Public Sector Workers are floundering, let's give them a boost!"

The networks might well fail, as any particular project might fail. This is how we develop sound theory, through practice and experimentation. If the networks fail, they will fail in the relative obscurity of the political margins. If, on the other hand, the networks succeed, they might well be the catalyst we need to propel ourselves out of those margins and a little closer to the heart of the class struggle.

The Theoretical Question of Intervention in the Labor Movement

Sometimes the question of how, when or even if we should involve ourselves in workers struggles sounds something like the "prime directive" of non-intervention from the Star Trek tv show. We are cautioned not to "impose our ideology" or use organizational manipulation to achieve our goals. Both imposition and manipulation are terms subject to interpretation. Trying to convince anyone of anything could, by some, be seen as imposition or manipulation. Lobbying for and arguing for a particular viewpoint within a democratic organization could be seen by some as "manipulative". I would say that unless some unethical device is employed (such as lying, threats or outright fraud) using available influence to put forth a position is neither imposing or manipulative. As syndicalists, we should do everything within our power and within ethical limits to build syndicalist organizations, including changing existing formations and creating new ones.

To me, having our industrial networks directly affiliated to WSA is a way of insuring that we will not be accused of operating a "front group", a charge which I believe we would be open to if we build these organizations and try to promote them as "independent" when they are so obviously in line with our goals and full of WSA activists.

The question becomes: should we wait for the working class to come to us and our ideas (a passive approach), or should we take our ideas to the working class and see if they float (an assertive approach). The former offers no risk and requires little effort (and has little chance of success in my opinion), while the latter involves some risk, but also has a potential of moving us closer to our goals.