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**IWGB**  
**MEMBERS**  
**HANDBOOK**

**FIRST EDITION**

**2023**





## ***Your Member Handbook***

This handbook is a resource for new members to understand how the IWGB works and the kind of union we are building together.

Each section will introduce you to different parts of the IWGB. In the first section, there is a welcome from the General Secretary. The next sections introduce the IWGB as a union, as well as why we need a union at work. After that, the handbook explains what you can do if you're having a problem at work. We discuss what organising at work means and how to use your legal rights to resolve issues too. The last section details the union's structures and how members can make decisions together.

The handbook covers a range of topics and ideas, but it does not cover everything. We want it to be a starting point for members to understand the union and get going organising in your workplace, as well as something you can go back to if you have questions. At the end of the handbook are useful links for more information. If you have more questions, get in touch with your reps and elected union officials.

Getting involved in the union is the best way to learn more. Through being involved in campaigns and your branch together we can build a union that wins a better future.



## Welcome from the IWGB General Secretary

Hello, my name is Henry Chango Lopez. I am the General Secretary of the IWGB union. Before being elected to this position, I was an outsourced cleaner at the University of London. I have been involved in many campaigns in my own workplace and across the union, defending workers' rights and helping migrant and low paid workers to get justice in every workplace.

I would like to welcome you to the IWGB. Together we can ensure that your workplace is protected. More than that, we can ensure that you can improve working conditions for yourself and your co-workers.

It's great to have you as a member of the IWGB. As we all know, we face many issues at work today. This is why it is so important to get organised in our workplaces, because it gives us the collective power that is needed in order to transform our workplaces for the better. It is something that we have done together in many workplaces, winning campaigns and improving working conditions, but also getting the respect and the dignity that workers deserve.

Now that you are a member, there are many ways you can get involved in the IWGB. We are an organising union, not just a service. We are here to support you and give you the tools you need in order to protect your work, but also to improve your conditions. You can take part in the union in many ways. We have monthly meetings in branches where members come together to decide on campaigns and what you want to do. You can become a rep to support fellow members improving conditions in their workplaces. We have annual general meetings for branches and the whole union, where members can stand for election. We can provide training and support for you to take part in the union.

You have taken the first step to changing your work by joining the IWGB. We welcome you to get involved in the union, our campaigns, and activities. Start by reading this guide. Get in touch with people if you have questions. But really what you need to do is get out there and speak to your co-workers and organise your workplace. I hope to be standing beside you soon on a protest or picket line as you and your co-workers fight for change at your workplace.

Solidarity,

**Henry Chango Lopez**

*IWGB General Secretary*







THIS INSCRIPTION IS PLACED HERE TO PERPETUATE THE  
MEMORY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COLLEGE AND OF  
THE MEDICAL SCHOOL WHO DIED IN THE SERVICE  
OF THEIR COUNTRY DURING THE YEARS 1914-1919

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## 1. Introduction to the IWGB Union

The Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) is a grassroots, member-led trade union. We fight for decent livelihoods, fair treatment, dignity and respect for workers.

Latin American migrant cleaners started the IWGB in 2012 to fight for better conditions at work, after a lack of support from the traditional unions they were part of. Over the last ten years, we have grown to include workers in many sectors including: cleaners, security guards and porters in universities, hospitality, hospitals, hotels and offices, couriers, private hire drivers, foster care workers, game workers, charity workers, cycling instructors, and more.

Contrary to what many of us have been told in the past, through the IWGB we have proven that precarious workers can organise and win changes at work, even if we do often face more barriers to organising than other workers.

Our history has taught us that when we come together and fight, we can win. In the IWGB, members organise and campaign to improve their working conditions and we don't stop until we get them – hasta la victoria siempre!



## What is a trade union?

A trade union is a group of workers who come together as a team to push their employer to give them better conditions and pay in their work.

Employers have a lot of power over workers and it can be difficult for individual workers to stand up for themselves on their own. By coming together, supporting each other, forming our own organisation, and taking collective action, workers have much more power than we each could have on our own.

All workers have the right to join a union. In Britain, a union must be independent from employers, bosses, and the government. We have the right to campaign and to organise collective actions such as strikes. Union members have legal protections against unfair treatment from their employer because of their union membership and taking part in the activities this involves.

The IWGB union is run by and for its members. The organisation is paid for by subscriptions from members. Every member gets a say in what the union does.

There are many trade unions in the UK and they can take very different approaches. Some unions operate like they are an insurance scheme: you pay in each month and if you get in trouble you get support from someone. However, this means relying solely on our legal rights, which are often not strong enough to protect us, particularly for precarious workers. If the union only operates like an insurance scheme, it can become too weak to defend members.



We need to defend ourselves if we want dignity and respect at work. We can only win improvements in our pay and conditions if we come together collectively and stand up for ourselves. As a member you need to actively participate if you want to see changes in your workplace.

The IWGB is focused on fighting for change and winning. We want to support each other to build the power needed to do this. Our union is for workers who want to organise. The people best placed to transform their workplaces and industries are those, like you, already working in them. The union cannot do this for you. But fellow members, officials, and staff can provide the support and advice for you to organise at work and change your industry and your life for the better.





## Principles of the IWGB

The IWGB has three main principles: taking action, building workers' power, and that solidarity matters.

### Taking Action

- Workers win through taking collective action. Many of our members do not have union recognition agreements in their workplaces or employers who will willingly listen to them. Instead we must find our own ways to make employers listen and agree to our demands.
- We take a creative approach to campaigning in order to push employers to change things, which often involves petitions, protests, strikes, disruptive action and finding leverage wherever we can. We base our strategies on tried-and-tested models that we have developed over the years in different industries and on the basis of clear-eyed assessments of what will make the bosses and decision-makers listen to us.
- We do not believe that collective action is a last resort. Action is what makes victories happen. Action also builds organisation, power, and creates a sense of community.
- We must not wait around for improvements to fall from the sky or someone else to come and save us – we must make our own plans to improve our conditions and take them forward ourselves.

## Building Workers' Power

- In our society workers have very little power, while the bosses and the very rich are able to decide most things. Our union exists to enable members to fight to take back power over our working lives. Key to this is building an organisation that empowers our members to organise and to fight, and which sustains that power over time. Democracy enables us to do this.
- Our union is a democratic organisation. Our structures are open and all members are encouraged to get involved. Our structures are also clear and accountable so members can have a meaningful role in decision-making on complex topics.
- Each branch of our union is independent, while also part of, and accountable to, the wider union. Our leaders are people who have built up experience and been trained through struggles and are accountable to members.
- Democracy in unions carries responsibility. Members who vote for something must also be willing to back their vote with action. We are an inclusive union and aim for mass participation.
- Staff are there to support members and elected officials to lead our union. None of our staff (or paid officials) are paid large salaries and every member of staff gets the same rate of pay (the London Living Wage + £3/hr).

## Solidarity Matters

- We share our struggles, support each other and learn from each other. When members in one workplace or one branch fight, members across the union support them. Our community is built through struggle and is focused on joint action.
- Our membership is diverse. We speak different languages, have many nationalities, work in different sectors, and cooperate across the union. We know that migration and language barriers are used by bosses to further exploit and divide workers. By dismantling such barriers and refusing division, we can build a movement that bridges communities and is stronger and more able to win.
- We are proud to be a bilingual English/Spanish union and we are committed to language justice and to supporting members who speak other languages to engage as fully as possible where we can.



## Why we need a union

We face many challenges at work today. Our work is often low-paid, insecure, and comes with bad conditions. We may have bullying managers or little say over how we do our work. We are often overstretched and asked to do more tasks than we have time to do. Many IWGB members work in precarious employment or in the gig economy, where we are denied many of the rights and conditions we deserve. The IWGB membership is also made up of many migrant workers, many of whom are denied the rights of other workers.

All of these problems we face are the result of decisions made by our bosses. The boss makes more money when we are low-paid. They have lower costs when our work is precarious. They save money when they load us up with more tasks for the same rate of pay. It is cheaper and more profitable for them when our conditions are worse. If we do nothing about it our work will never improve. We might be able to make small changes acting as individuals, but we cannot seriously change how our work is organised on our own.

Trade unions are a way for workers to come together collectively to change things. Instead of asking for something as an individual, building a union allows for us to bargain as a group with our bosses. It means we can take effective action when they fail to meet our demands. We are stronger when we do this together.

So the more of us who come together under the banner of the IWGB, the stronger we all are. Each action we take and each fight we win shows bosses everywhere the power we hold and reminds them to respect us all.

We start by fighting for improvements in individual workplaces and



areas. We also want to bring workers together across different workplaces and across the country to make bigger changes that affect all of us. For example, we want to end outsourcing and precarious work in the UK.

We believe that all workers should be respected and have a collective voice over their conditions. While workers do have some legal protections in the UK, these are not good enough. As a union, we fight to defend the protections we have in the law, as well as pushing for improvements and new rights.



## ***2. So you're having a problem at work...***

### **How can the union help you to solve it?**

IWGB members work across a range of industries and face many different problems at work. We can overcome many of these problems through getting organised and fighting back.

Here are some examples of problems members have faced and how they dealt with them.



### **Fredy, a kitchen porter in a restaurant, who wasn't paid his wages correctly:**

"I have worked at this restaurant for 3 years now. The manager often pays me incorrectly. A few months ago he messed up my pay really badly. I was owed £250."

"I have a family in London who I need to look after and rent to pay. My landlord is often giving me trouble about paying my rent late. My manager knows this, but he knows I don't speak English so he thinks he can mess me around."



"I had the phone number for one of the officials of the union from attending a workshop at the church in my area about settled status after Brexit. I contacted him for help. He put me in touch with another member of the union who is helping other members with cases."

"The member helped me to write an email to my manager to try to resolve the issue. When my manager failed to respond, the union member wrote to my manager on my behalf and threatened that the union would take action, including legal action and protests, if the wages were not paid fully right away. The manager paid me my missing wages very quickly after that."



**Abdirahman, a private hire driver in London for companies like Uber and Bolt, who was facing an investigation by TFL into his license:**

“When you are an Uber driver it’s very common to get complaints from passengers. Quite often passengers make complaints in order to get a refund from Uber. Sometimes the passenger is annoyed about the traffic and about being late.”

“One day I got a call from Uber and they asked me to explain what had happened with a complaint from a passenger. They gave very little information about the complaint or the trip, so it was hard for me to answer properly. Then later that day they deactivated my account.”

“I tried for a while to get in touch with Uber, but they wouldn’t listen to me or reopen my account. Six months later I got a letter from Transport for London saying that Uber had reported to them about my deactivation and saying they were going to investigate me and maybe take away my license as a private hire driver. They gave me seven days to respond.”

“The letter from TFL had pages of complaints from Uber passengers on it. They were all really small things like lateness due to traffic. There were a few complaints that were false that were more serious. One passenger accused me of being aggressive to them. That’s not me.”

“I was really worried about this investigation. I was still working for Bolt even though Uber had deactivated me. If TFL took away my license I would not be able to work.”



“I got in touch with one of the union reps I knew, who put me in touch with David in the legal team. David and me spoke on the phone and we went through each complaint one by one. Then David wrote a letter to TFL for me responding to all the complaints.”

“Thankfully David’s letter worked. A few months later TFL wrote back to me and they said that they were satisfied for me to carry on as a licensed driver.”



**Fardusa, who works in administration at a charitable organisation and was experiencing bullying by her manager:**

“My boss had started asking me to do work which is not in my role and shouting at me in front of other members of staff. The way she talked to me was different from others. It was bullying and harassment.”



“I was carrying on hiding everything. Every day I'd get upset, I used to cry a lot, it was a nightmare and it wasn't getting any better and I was feeling, do I need to do this job? Should I just leave it? But I've got responsibilities, I've got children that I need to feed.”

“I decided I need to speak up. A colleague of mine advised me to join the union. I got in touch and said this is what I'm going through. One of my colleagues, who is a union rep, agreed to help me.”

“He helped me out a lot. He attended the meetings I had with managers. He guided me. I was so upset so he gave his time to listen, showed me how to do things.”

“The issue has now been resolved. After I had an interview with my colleague present, the employer wrote to me within 10 days saying they were satisfied with the evidence, and they removed my boss. Now it's so amazing, I love what I do, I am much much better.”





### **Susanna, a cleaner in a hotel, who was experiencing sexual harassment from a supervisor:**

“One day when I was on my way from my job at the hotel to another job, I received some texts from my supervisor at the hotel. He was saying sexual things to me that I felt were very inappropriate.”

“I was really uncomfortable and scared because I had to go back into work the next day and see him. He sets the rota each week so I was worried he might not give me the hours I need if I didn’t respond to him. I also was worried if he might do something worse if we were alone together at work.”



“Initially I just ignored his messages, but he kept sending more messages and he made some comments to me at work as well. A few months ago I received an email from the union talking about sexual harassment at work. There were some names in the email of people to contact so I decided to get in touch with one of them.”

“The person I spoke with was a rep for the union and it turned out our houses are not far from each other. We met up and talked about what was happening to me and she helped me to work out what I wanted to do about this.”

“She contacted the union legal team and together they helped me to gather evidence of what was happening, and write to the hotel managers to raise a grievance about this issue. My rep also agreed to help me speak to some of the other cleaners who work in the hotel to ask them for their support.”

“The managers were slow to respond, but they eventually arranged a grievance meeting. The meeting was stressful and I really didn’t like it, but I felt really supported by the rep from the union and by my colleagues.”

“A few weeks later, the managers wrote to me and told me they were going to move the supervisor to another location. I was angry about this as it seemed like they didn’t actually care that he was doing this. But at least I didn’t have to work with him any more.”

“Since then me and my colleagues have been meeting with the rep from the union and speaking about starting a campaign to pressure my managers to put in place a new sexual harassment policy to help deal with situations like this better.”



**Lorenzo, a hospitality worker at a university, who was experiencing health and safety issues at work:**

“Since we came back to work after Covid, the subcontractor we work for had been making a load of changes and going to work has been more and more unpleasant. They were sending us our rotas the night before with less than 24 hours notice and they kept on making us deliver heavy crates of food and cutlery to buildings where we had to go up stairs without a lift.”

“I have a bad back from carrying heavy loads at work and I couldn’t handle it any more. I spoke to my co-workers and everyone was pissed off about the rota. Some other colleagues said that in their team there weren’t enough staff either, which meant they were having to work way too hard.”

“I met up with one of the organisers from the union and they recommended we team up and submit a collective grievance about all these issues together.”

“Me and my co-workers had a meeting in a park nearby work one day and we got all of our issues down on paper. We got it typed up and printed and then over the next few days a few of us got everyone to sign it.”

“We decided to go as a big group to hand the letter in to our manager so she would know we were serious. We went during a break time and all crowded into the manager’s office. We asked for a formal meeting with the manager to discuss the issue, with our union reps present too. They agreed.”

“We also decided to publicise the issues on social media too to put pressure on the university to tell the subcontractor to sort things out. One of the staff in another department of the university was the communications officer in our branch and he met with some of us to help write this up and also for us to tell our stories and take some photos for social media. He posted all this stuff on social media the same day we delivered the letter.”

“Before we even had the formal meeting with the manager, she started to resolve the issues. We could tell she wanted this whole thing to go away quickly and was getting pushed by the university too.”





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## Ana Thais, Takeaway Food Delivery Courier in Dalston in London who was facing issues with parking fines:

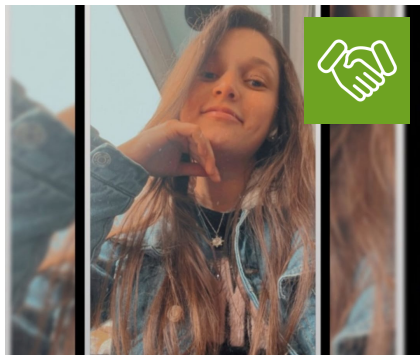
“We had this problem with the local police and parking officers in our area because they were giving parking tickets to us, without checking if we had an order to collect or how long we could park there.”

“This put pressure on us delivery drivers to stop parking near the restaurants or even to leave our bikes while looking for shelter when it was raining or too cold.”

“We didn’t need luxury things, we only wanted a fair parking space where we could work without having to worry about parking tickets.”

“We decided to come together to try to solve this problem. We had a few meetings with the council, but they wouldn’t confirm if they were going to fix the problem.”

“So we did a petition supported by some locals. We then did some motorcades of delivery drivers around the area and held a demo at Hackney Council to make them hear our needs.”



“After so much fighting, and showing our reality to the council and locals, the council has arranged for a local organisation to offer us a fair and safe parking space nearby the restaurants and a waiting area that is currently under construction.”

## Luul, a takeaway food delivery driver in Sheffield, who was experiencing issues with a restaurant:

“During Covid the local KFC used to ask us to wait outside at the window to pick up orders because of the Covid rules. But after Covid it started getting out of hand. They used to ask us to wait outside for an unnecessary amount of time even if our orders were ready inside.”

“After the Covid rules were gone there was no point asking us to wait outside at the window, particularly when the weather was very bad. We asked to come inside but they just ignored us.”



“There was also an issue with delayed orders. Sometimes the order wasn’t even in the system and we had to cancel it after already waiting 10-15 minutes. It was intentionally humiliating. It got very personal and they took advantage of the rules.”

“Most of the delivery drivers were very upset with the staff members and we said let’s join together and try to fight. We started by organising a petition. I collected over 50 signatures for a letter that we gave them.”

“But even after seeing the letter they weren’t willing to change so we boycotted them. We specifically chose to strike on a Friday because it was a very busy day and that meant they would lose the most money. It was very effective. We protested outside in shifts and everybody was happy to cancel orders and boycott. Everyone was willing.”

“We shut down the restaurant totally on that Friday and soon after the manager agreed to make the changes we had asked for. Now it’s fantastic, it’s great. We are allowed to wait inside. It doesn’t take them long to prepare the food as before they were giving priority to the customer in store, not giving everyone the same treatment.”

“People should stand up for themselves. Individuals cannot do all of the work on their own, it was effective only because all the delivery drivers wanted to take part in the boycott.”

**Elena, a cleaner at a university, who was getting paid too little and not getting company sick pay:**

“For many years me and my co-workers at the university were only paid the minimum wage and we didn’t get proper sick pay when we were ill. The directly employed staff at the university were treated totally differently.”

“We decided we had had enough and that we wanted to be paid more and given company sick pay. We had already dealt with some problems at work with the help of the union, so we knew that we could do this if we were united.”

“The first thing we were advised to do by the union reps was to speak to all our co-workers who weren’t members of the union yet and get them to join so we would have a majority. It took us a few months to do this and we had to speak to some co-workers several times to convince them.”

“Once we had a majority, we all got together to discuss what we wanted to change and what we would do about it. We agreed to focus on better pay and sick pay. We all agreed we would protest and strike if we had to and a group of us put up our hands to play a big part in organising these things.”

“Over the following weeks we met a lot of times to plan things out and get prepared. Then we sent a letter to the managers saying what we wanted to be changed and asking if they would meet with us to discuss it and with a deadline to respond.”



“By the day of the deadline the managers still hadn’t responded. We arranged a meeting of all members for this day so we could be ready to take action right away if they didn’t listen to us. We agreed to organise a protest in the next week and to start preparing to strike.”

“Over the next few months we organised several protests, we gave out thousands of leaflets to students, we put up posters around the university, we spoke with the newspapers and the media, and we went on strike.”

“The day after our first strike the managers announced they would be improving the pay and conditions for all of the cleaners at the university. They didn’t mention our union or our campaign, but we knew the campaign had worked.”

**Jacqueline, a foster care worker in Glasgow, who was paid too little:**

"I hadn't had a pay raise in over 10 years and the Council wouldn't listen to any of us as individuals. They were never interested. If you ever brought up anything about money they would act as if it was just you complaining and not the other foster care workers."

"I couldn't believe that everyone else working for the Council could be treated as a worker but they treated us foster carers completely differently. Every single thing we brought up it was: 'you're self employed', 'you don't have any workers rights', 'you don't have any protection'. We seemed to fall into a really grey area."





“After being ignored on this for too long, a group of us decided to get together and start a campaign with our union. The plan for the campaign was to pressure the Council until they had to listen to us.”

“We began leafleting houses of voters in areas where the Councillor wasn’t supportive of giving us better pay. We chatted to people about how children being brought up in foster care were being left behind. One Councillor who sat on the board that sets our money actually lost her seat in the next election.”

“We then had a meeting with all the different political parties and made them commit to a summit which all carers would be invited to. Glasgow Council decided not to do this in partnership with us so we turned up, interrupted it, and said what we wanted to be heard. We finally got the leader of the SNP in Glasgow to admit what we are given is woefully inadequate.”

“As a result of this, we won a 10% increase on our fostering fee which is huge compared to what we had been getting. But we’re waiting for the budget to come through and we’d be very disappointed if they haven’t put something else in there. They’ve now admitted that it didn’t make sense to ignore us for so long and that we should get yearly raises and we’ve got a lot of councillors supportive of us.”

“It’s taken us all getting together and pushing for us to be listened to and we’ll need to push more to get everything we want. We’ve all got the same stories, we’ve all got the same complaints but they were just dismissing us one by one. It’s the unity that’s worked for us.”

## When you are trying to tackle a problem it's important to ask yourself these questions:

### ***Does this problem just affect me or does it also affect others in my workplace?***

When a problem affects more than one person, it is usually quicker and more effective to tackle it as a group rather than as one person on your own. If you think your issue might affect other people, ask around and see if it does.

### ***Is this problem something that I can use my legal rights to resolve or in this case are my legal rights not enough?***

Sadly it is relatively common for employers to breach the legal rights that we have. For example, if your employer fails to pay you the correct amount for the work you have done, then this would be what is called an 'unlawful deduction of wages'. When an employer has broken the law, it can be effective to use those legal rights to push for your problem to be resolved.

Unfortunately, there are lots of common problems that we face which should be illegal but aren't. For example, if your employer takes months to get back to your request for a holiday, that isn't actually illegal, even though it is really unfair. Problems like this require collective action to solve them.

If you're not sure about your legal rights, you can contact one of your union reps or the union office for advice.



***What is the best way to tackle this problem? If my problem is covered by my legal rights, is that definitely the best route to take?***

Where the problem you are experiencing is one where you are protected by legal rights, sometimes it is quickest and most effective to go through the formal procedures, such as raising a formal grievance or sending a legal letter.

Sometimes that can end up taking far too long or the formal process might be a wild goose chase. If so, you might be better off speaking to your co-workers and your reps and planning collective action to put pressure on your employer.

Sometimes you might follow both approaches at the same time.

***How much will it cost my employer to give me what I want? And therefore how much pressure do we need to put on to resolve the issue?***

Some problems you experience should be quite easy for your employer to resolve. For example, sorting out an error in the payment of your wages: unless they are going bankrupt, they should be able to do this and it shouldn't require too much pressure to solve it.

Some problems might be more costly for them to resolve. For example, low pay across your workforce. To solve this sort of problem will normally require the employer to believe that they are going to face significant issues if they don't fix it. This means being able to credibly threaten collective action that hits them where it hurts - and being prepared and ready to follow through with your threats if you have to.

**How you resolve your problem through the union will depend on the answers to these questions.**

**Here are the main ways we tackle problems at the IWGB:**



## **Using your legal rights to solve an issue individually or as a group**

### **Examples of issues you might solve this way:**

- Your wages haven't been paid correctly.
- Your contract needs updating as it doesn't reflect your hours.
- You are facing an investigation into your fitness to be licensed as a private hire driver.
- You have been invited to a disciplinary meeting.

### **How we resolve them:**

The examples above are all ones where you have some legal rights that protect you.

It might be just you individually who is affected or it might be a group of you.

Generally you should be able to resolve the issue through asserting your legal rights and making use of formal processes, such as: sending an email, someone writing a representation on your behalf, raising a grievance, attending a formal meeting, going to the employment tribunal, etc.

We generally call these sorts of issues 'cases' or 'casework'.

However, in some situations you may not be able to resolve the issue through the formal process alone. For instance, sometimes the standard of evidence required is unreasonably high and you aren't able to prove your case, at other times employers will fail to respect the law or may just take ages to follow through the process. In these

situations, it may be best to put pressure on through collective action. This is something that needs to be assessed with each case.

## ***First step:***

*Speak to a branch rep and they will either help you directly themselves or link you up with one of our legal staff or with fellow union members to help you take the matter forward.*

*Generally it is a good idea to try to find out if other colleagues are experiencing the same problems, as if so, you may be able to join together, which will make your case stronger.*





## Using collective action to put pressure on the employer to solve an issue

### **Examples of issues you might solve this way:**

- A group of you haven't been paid the wages you are owed last month.
- A restaurant you pick up deliveries from isn't allowing you access to the toilets.
- There is a health and safety issue at your workplace that is affecting you and your colleagues.

### **How we resolve them:**

These are generally issues which may be hard to resolve on your own, but can often be solved quite easily as a group through some quick collective actions to put pressure on the employer or relevant decision-maker.

There may or may not be legal rights you can also make use of. Either way, you and your co-workers have assessed that you need to put pressure on the employer through campaigning and action, as this is key to a swift resolution.

### ***First step:***

*You and your colleagues should speak to your workplace rep or your branch committee or your branch organiser to arrange a meeting and start working out a plan.*





## Using a sustained campaign of collective action to win big changes

### Examples of issues you might solve this way:

- Your wage is lower than you want
- You don't get decent sick pay
- Your employer has a rubbish maternity leave policy
- The Council is trying to change the parking place outside a restaurant you pick up deliveries from.

### How we resolve them:

These are generally issues where it will take a lot of pressure to make your employer or the relevant decision-maker resolve the issue.

You and your colleagues need to get organised and plan a proactive campaign to change things with support from your branch and the wider union.

It is possible the employer will give in immediately right after you threaten them. But you will likely need to take robust action, such as protests, strikes and direct action, and you will need to be prepared to sustain this ongoingly in order to win.

### ***First step:***

*You and your colleagues should speak to your branch committee and/or your branch organiser to arrange a meeting and start working out a plan.*



## What does organising at work involve?

'Organising' is the process of building a union where you work, so you and your co-workers can develop the capacity to take collective action and win improvements.

This process can be different depending on where you work, the size of the employer and how your workplace is structured. But here are some typical first steps to take:

- Talking to and listening to your co-workers
- Finding allies and building a team
- Building up resources, skills & support
- Mapping out your workplace and your co-workers
- Researching your employer
- Having conversations with as many co-workers as possible, recruiting them to join the union and building up the foundations to take action
- Identifying the issues that your co-workers care about and choosing an issue you want to fight to change
- Organising meetings to get on the same page, work out the best way to solve the issue and to agree a plan for action
- Getting every co-worker you need involved and taking action together
- Escalating your actions if needed until you win

The most important thing is to get started and to talk to some colleagues. Once you've made that first step and got a few people together, speak to one of your branch reps or one of the staff organisers for advice and training on how to take things forward.

## What does a campaign involve?

Tackling a big issue at your workplace will normally require thorough preparation. You'll need to plan a campaign involving a series of collective actions that put increasing pressure on the employer as you go on.

Normally we aim to get a majority of workers in a workplace or area involved in the union before starting a campaign, because we're stronger when we're united. That said, we don't let this hold us back. Sometimes a dedicated minority is able to make big changes with the right tactics.

Once you are strong enough to start taking action, you can begin by making a campaign plan. Here are the typical steps of a campaign:

### **Preparation:**

- Start mapping your workplace
- Research who makes the decisions
- Make an organising plan

### **Building the base:**

- Start building a team of co-workers who are keen to help organise
- Carry out one-to-one conversations with co-workers to understand their concerns and to educate and organise
- Identify issues co-workers care about
- Identify co-workers who are influential
- Organise small meetings with co-workers

### **Building an organising committee:**

- Recruit influential co-workers and get them to join an Organising Committee, alongside your team of keen people
- Schedule regular Organising Committee meetings and train members to organise
- Continue one to ones, mapping, recruitment, issue identification, and identifying influential colleagues

### **Getting ready to go public:**

- Organise a big meeting (or several) with all your co-workers to prepare to launch the campaign
  - Agree a plan to win your campaign
  - Elect campaign reps who are empowered to make decisions in the campaign where quick decisions are needed
  - Recruit more volunteers to the Organising Committee and train them
- Carry out some structure tests to assess your organisation and the readiness of co-workers to take action
- Prepare co-workers for potentially hostile responses from your employer

### **Moving to action & escalation:**

- Launch the public campaign
- Take initial actions, e.g. petitions, demonstrations, strikes, direct actions
- Try to engage unengaged co-workers
- Escalate actions and increase the pressure
- If you complete all the actions in your initial plan and you haven't won yet, then take a short break to regroup and work out the next phase of actions
- Keep up the pressure until you have won. If the employer offers to negotiate, the pressure should continue until the deal is sealed

*And then...*



### Victory:

- Win the campaign!
- Communicate the victory
- Engage unengaged co-workers and recruit them so your union continues to get stronger
- Transition your organising committee and other campaign structures into permanent union structures in your workplace, such as a workplace rep committee and regular member meetings.
- Party!

Most successful IWGB campaigns involve taking disruptive action like protests and strikes. The tactics we use in the IWGB depend on what type of employer or decision-maker we are trying to influence. But our experience has shown that we always need to be prepared to take action and put pressure on in order to win.

## Examples of types of collective action

### Mass leafleting

Leaflets are an important way of getting information into people's hands. We can make leaflets at short notice and respond to things that are happening. This can be a useful way to put pressure on an employer by making other workers or the public aware of something bad that is going on. We might give out leaflets in the workplace or just outside it if we are targeting other workers or the public. If the employer is a Council, we might



give out leaflets door to door at the homes of people who are voters for the Council. The aim of this tactic is to publicise something. We want to get lots of members and supporters involved to do so.



IWGB Universities of London  
@IWGBUoL

"I've served the UCL Provost many meals at his house. Now I'm being made redundant."

Read Mbela Papy's story below.

@UCL: STOP the redundancies!



most effective when members are the ones fronting this, whether that's through telling your story in writing or in a video, or including a photo of a group of members together.

### March on the boss

A "march on the boss" is a specific kind of protest. We organise a demonstration that goes to the boss or the managers directly and present our demands to them. This is about us confronting them with an issue and demanding an immediate response.



### ... Social media shaming

In some industries, our bosses might rely on social media as part of their business. Shaming companies on social media can damage their reputation. This can have an impact on the business. Campaigns can involve social media posts about the company, or encourage supporters to shame them. This is normally



## Protest

A protest is a public demonstration by a group of members and supporters. This can involve meeting in a strategic place, for example, outside management's offices. It can also involve a march, for example, around the workplace. We use protests to build pressure and

show support for our campaigns. Sometimes we use them to disrupt events and operations. In either case, this means they should be noisy and lively. We make up chants and bring our own banners and placards with slogans for the protest.

## Strike

A strike is a collective action in which we stop working. Strikes can take many forms. It could be one or many, striking until the bosses meet our demands, or walking off the job because of unsafe conditions. We have protections from getting fired for striking when we organise it through a ballot with the union. When we strike we normally need to organise other activities to make it effective, such as 'pickets' to encourage co-workers not to go into work.



## Creative direct action

Depending on the kind of work that we do, there may also be other options for creative action. There may be a weak spot for our employers or something we can disrupt. For example, the launch of an advertising campaign, an open day or a fundraising dinner. This means thinking about the organisation of our work and what is important to our bosses. We can think together about what opportunities there might be for creative actions and campaigning.

When you and your co-workers have organised your workplace and are ready to prepare a campaign, speak to a branch rep or staff organiser for support and training.





### ***3. Solving problems using your legal rights***

As we've mentioned, some issues can be tackled quickly and effectively through using your legal rights.

With the right information, you will often be able to solve issues for yourself. The IWGB has various guides for members that can help with this and many of our branches also run legal rights training sessions from time to time. As a member, it's important you are proactive in learning about your rights, as this can help you to avoid many problems and to solve others for yourself.

Where you aren't able to solve an issue for yourself, the IWGB is there to support you. The first step to accessing support is to contact one of your workplace or branch reps. They will be able to advise you on the best way forward. There is guidance for how to contact your reps at the back of this handbook.

Most issues that require support will be solved by reps directly. Where needed, reps can bring in support from the IWGB legal staff. This will normally only happen in more complicated situations, for example where the issue needs to be taken to court. At times, where reps are struggling, the IWGB legal staff can also help out with more straightforward problems.

#### **Casework**

When one of your reps or one of the legal staff supports you with a problem, we call this 'casework'. Casework is the process of providing representation or legal support for a member with a problem at work.



Casework is based on demanding solutions in accordance with the legal rights of workers and the responsibilities and obligations of employers, contractors, licensing authorities and so on. This can involve writing emails and letters to employers, accompanying members to certain meetings, and escalating the case legally if necessary. At times it can also involve coordinating with reps and co-workers to organise collective actions like protests to put pressure on the boss.

### **How is casework managed in the IWGB?**

Members in different branches face a range of different issues. Each branch of the IWGB has its own approach to handling casework. But the basic protocols explained above are the same in terms of who to speak to and how to get support.

Most IWGB branches have a branch casework team made up of reps and other volunteers who handle cases. These volunteers are trained by the union to effectively support fellow members and are supported by legal staff. Some branches also have reps in specific workplaces who can help with casework issues too. As you organise your workplace, it is important that some of you take on this responsibility yourselves and help your co-workers with issues.

The IWGB's legal staff are divided between two teams of caseworkers who support members from different branches. As well as taking on cases for members, the legal department also provides legal advice for union campaigns and takes up strategic litigation in the courts to improve protections for workers.

## **Accessing casework support and legal advice in the union:**

- Contact your local workplace rep or a branch official. The elected members from your branch are your first point of contact for any issues, questions or concerns. They will likely be able to help you directly or handle the case within the branch. If not, they will pass on your case to the relevant team of the IWGB legal department. Some branches have a form that members can fill in with details of their case to get things moving more quickly.
- Alternatively, you can phone the IWGB office on our English or Spanish lines, found in the 'Contact' section of this booklet.

## **What happens after I've got in touch?**

After contacting the union with a casework issue, a rep or a legal department caseworker will contact you to assess the problem, open a case, give advice and provide you with the relevant policies and conditions on representation.

It is important to get in contact as soon as possible when facing a problem at work that you need legal support with, or if you think that an issue could arise, as there are often external time limits and deadlines which could affect your case. For example, many cases have to be begun within 90 days of the incident occurring.

If your case is one that requires support from IWGB legal staff, then you should be aware that the IWGB legal department's current timeframe to get back in touch with members and open a new case is 10 working days after the case is initially submitted (although this may be done more quickly depending on the urgency of the case). Reps and branch officials are often able to contact members more quickly than this.

The IWGB cannot take forward legal representations for members within their first 2 months of membership and cannot take cases that pre-date your membership of the union. This rule is in place because the union has limited resources and cannot afford to take on a large volume of cases from recently joined members. However, you should still contact your branch for help from reps or fellow members as they may be able to give advice or take other forms of action.

We know that we are stronger together. That's why if you have a problem, it's important to see if other co-workers have similar issues and to make reps aware of that too.

The chances are that individual problems at work have wider structural roots and, more often than not, are shared across the workplace. Identifying shared issues is a great starting point for a campaign that can improve conditions for everyone.

## How do I know what rights I have as a worker?

Your branch officials and the legal department can provide you with information and resources regarding your legal rights and protections.

Two important starting points for knowing your rights at work are knowing your 'employment status' under UK law – that is, what kind of worker you are classified as – and having access to the contract, agreement, or similar document that covers your terms and conditions of work or service. You should try to get this information. Contact your reps for advice if you are struggling with this.

## Other important steps to take when you have a problem at work

Apart from contacting your branch officials, there are some useful practices you can follow on your end to ensure you are gathering the right information with which to challenge your employer.

- Take notes of mistreatment or other issues: if you believe you are suffering from discrimination, bullying, or harassment at work, make note of incidents with as much detail as possible, including time and dates.
- Store all documents and communications from your employer, like payslips, paper letters, emails, and most importantly – your contract of employment
- Do not feel obligated to sign any documents on the spot: if you are unexpectedly asked to sign something, you are within your rights to ask for time to read and consider the document, especially if you struggle with a language barrier. Take a photo or copy of the document home with you. You can contact the union for advice. Be careful if taking photos of documents containing the names and details of others, as this may be a breach of data protection.
- Know your rights to be accompanied in meetings: your contract, handbook of employment, or terms and conditions might provide information as to bringing someone along to a meeting with your boss, HR, or management. Employees have the right to the presence of a union representative at disciplinary and grievance hearings. If you contact the union in time, we can postpone a hearing in order to ensure you are accompanied. You have the right to postpone a grievance and disciplinary hearing and propose an

alternative date within 5 working days of the original hearing.

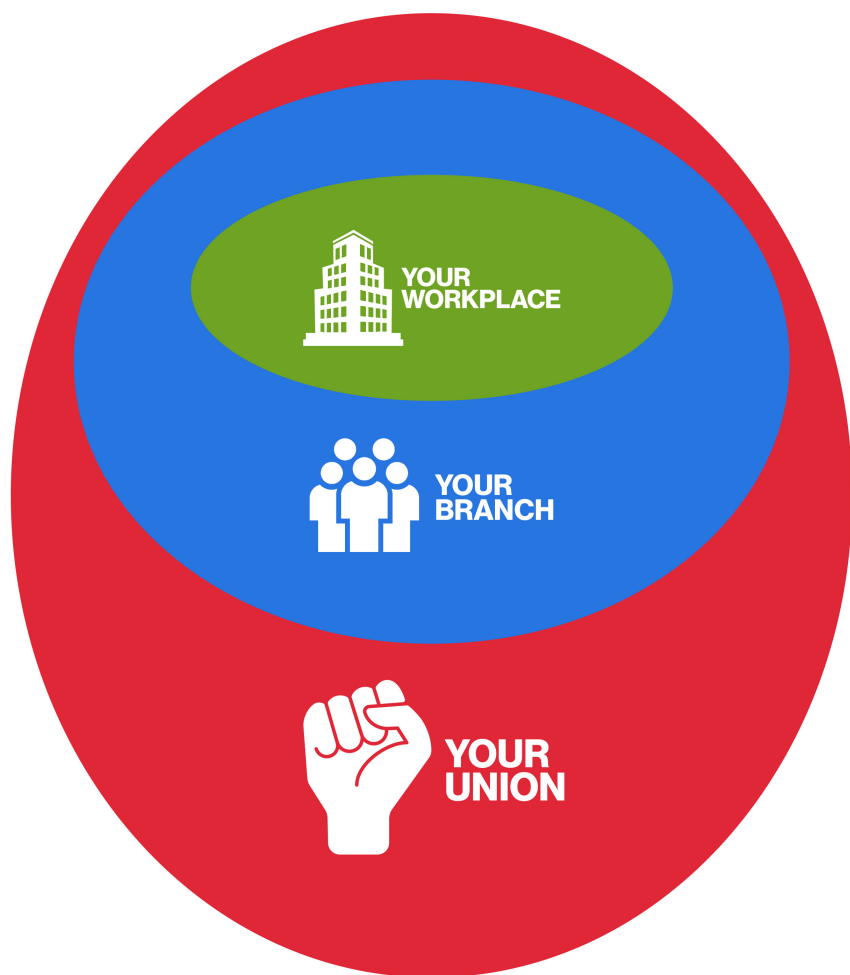
- Keep a record of your shifts and hours worked: taking personal note of your working pattern, especially if your hours vary or you are often working overtime, is useful as evidence in cases relating to pay, overtime, and holiday.
- An email, text exchange, or meeting minutes are much better evidence of important conversations than a phone call. If your boss or supervisor wants to discuss something important with you verbally, make a written or recorded note of what they said to you, what day and time, and who else was there. You can also send them a follow-up email or message as soon as possible after the conversation confirming the details of what was discussed. It may be important to have this information later.





## 4. The structures of the IWGB union

The IWGB is a democratic union run by members. As a member of the IWGB, you can build the union in your workplace or area and take part in union activities with the other members of your branch, and you also have a say in the running of the union as a whole.



## Your workplace

The purpose of the union is to help you win improvements in your workplace or area of work by building collective power among you and your co-workers, as well as increasing members' power in society. You and other members in your workplace can collectively decide what you want to change in your workplace and how to go about it.

When you are organising in your workplace, you will be supported by your branch reps and by staff organisers and caseworkers. Once you have a group of members in your workplace in the union, you should set up an organising committee made up of anyone who is keen to get involved in building the union and elect some workplace representatives (or reps). You can then build towards taking action to win changes at your work.

Lots of IWGB members do not have a typical workplace, for example, drivers and couriers work out on the streets and foster carers work in their own home. The union will help you connect with other members in the same situation as you and to organise in groups suitable for the challenges you face. For example, our foster care worker members typically organise in groups by local government authority as these authorities are responsible for setting pay and conditions for foster care workers.

## Your branch

Every member of the union is a member of a branch. Your branch operates across your sector and connects you with members in different workplaces. The union currently has twelve different branches.

Getting involved in your branch is one of the best ways to get active in the union. Branch meetings are a great space for meeting other members, sharing updates, discussing plans, learning more and getting involved.

Your branch can be a source of support for you when you are building the union in your workplace. We are more powerful when we support each other's struggles. Branches also run campaigns on issues that impact workers across the sector. For example, the cycling instructors branch has organised big campaigns against government funding cuts.

Branches are also key to the union's democracy. Branches take formal decisions by voting on motions at meetings. Any member can bring a motion to their branch meeting. A motion is a formal way of writing up an idea or proposal for fellow members to discuss and vote on. You can find a template motion at the end of this booklet.

Branch meetings happen monthly in most branches, although in some they take place fortnightly and in others every three months. Branch meetings are open to all members and every member has equal rights in the meeting.

Each branch also has its own constitution and has an Annual General Meeting (AGM) that all branch members can attend. Branch officials and committees are elected at the AGM. Branch committees are made up of a Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Women and Non-Binary Officer and BAME Officer. Most branches also have other positions, like a Communications Officer, reps for particular workplaces, or regional officials. The committee is responsible for the organisation and administration of the branch between branch meetings and they are there to support members to organise, take action and get involved. Different branch officials have different

responsibilities, for example the treasurer is responsible for oversight of the branch finances.

## Your union

The different branches are all part of one big union. Each of the branches has a say in the running of the union as a whole. The branches share many resources and support each other's campaigns.

The union as a whole also comes together to take action on major issues that run across our branches, such as campaigning for better rights for migrant workers, or better rights in the gig economy.

The highest decision-making body of the union is the union-wide Annual General Meeting (AGM). The union-wide AGM is attended by delegates from each branch who have been elected at branch AGMs, as well as everyone who sits on the Executive Committee of the union.

The Executive Committee (EC) is responsible for the organisation and administration of the union between AGMs and it meets at least once per month. Every branch is represented on the EC by their Chair, as well as other officials for larger branches, such as their Secretary and even another committee member.

There are also eight central union officials on the EC. They are elected every year by the whole membership. The central union positions are General Secretary, President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Branch Support Officer, Women and Non-Binary Officer, and two BAME Officers, with one of the two positions reserved for a woman or non-binary member.



The IWGB also has a dedicated staff team who support members and officials with organising, casework, communications and operations. The union operates a flat pay structure where all staff are paid the same hourly rate.

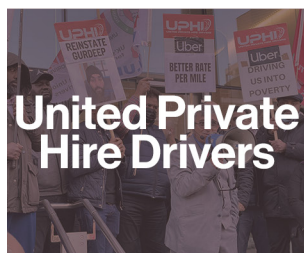
Some staff are hired by branches, some by the union as a whole. The general secretary is responsible for the management of all staff employed by the union. The general secretary is accountable to the union's membership through yearly elections, the AGM and the EC.

You can find the complete Rule Book and your branch constitution on the IWGB website.



## Who is in the IWGB?

The IWGB is made up of members like you in branches. We currently have 12 branches across different sectors:



## ***5. Building a strong union***

All IWGB members need to play an active role in the union. Your participation is essential to resolve issues and win improvements in your workplace.

Supporting each other to resolve issues, organising together and campaigning to win changes at work are the foundations of the IWGB union. This is how most members get involved.

But to defend what we've won and keep winning improvements we need to build a strong union for ourselves. That starts in your workplace and also includes coordinating with workers in other workplaces through your branch and the wider union.

Every member should understand what a strong union looks like and what role you play in building it.

## **What a strong workplace union looks like**

### **The union is visible to members and to management every day**

- Face-to-face visits. Reps and active members walk through the workplace regularly. They have relationships with all members.
- Complete coverage. There is a rep or active member on every shift in every department. The list is written down, regularly updated and widely available.
- Lively meetings. Membership meetings in the workplace are regular and well-attended.
- Recruitment is the norm. We aim to involve the vast majority of workers in the union and every member takes responsibility for

recruiting others.

- New staff join. Union reps and members are constantly on the lookout for new staff and proactively get them to join.
- Good communication. The workplace reps produce and distribute regular newsletters and flyers.

## **We defend our rights and we set standards and enforce them**

- We know our rights. Members are informed and seek out information, training and advice.
- We set standards. We collectively discuss issues we face, we agree standards and policies that we believe are right, and we fight to make them a reality.
- Collective action is the norm. Members mobilise and use collective action to solve everyday problems. We don't rely on others to do things for us, or legal rights as our only line of defence.
- Reps do it. Reps are trained and empowered to resolve issues at the lowest level, including filing grievances and representing members.
- The boss knows it. Managers know they need to toe the line or they will get pushback.

## **Members own the union**

- **Confidence.** Members feel that their union is strong and can resolve problems.
- **Easy access.** Through reps, members have immediate access to resources to resolve their problems, without having to track down union staff.
- **Participation.** Members participate in the union at the workplace level and also in union-wide activities and campaigns.
- **Pride.** Members are glad they belong to the union.
- **Democracy.** Members understand how decisions are made and how they can get things done.



## What a strong IWGB branch looks like

- We encourage workers from other workplaces in the sector to join us.
- We encourage and support members to start organising in their workplaces, to support co-workers with issues, to campaign, and to build strong workplace unions.
- We hold regular branch meetings which are lively and well attended.
- We share information about what is happening across our workplaces and campaigns. And we retain and record experience from previous campaigns to pass the lessons on to members preparing new campaigns.
- We turn out to support each other across workplaces in the branch and in other branches and we build up the capacity of members to coordinate across workplaces as a foundation for future joint campaigns.
- We fundraise and pool resources to support campaigns and other activities, such as building up strike funds.
- Branch officer positions are filled and branch administrative work is done consistently. Members play an active role in teams supporting this work.



## Your role as an IWGB member

Your participation is essential. As a baseline as a member you are expected to:

- Keep up to date and informed
- Attend union meetings regularly, speak up and take part
- Recruit co-workers to join the union
- Support your co-workers and stand shoulder to shoulder with them
- Play an active role in any campaigns in your own workplace
- Take part in union activities
- Support members in other workplaces

You might also join a team working on some tasks with fellow members, such as: an organising committee in your workplace, a casework team in your branch, or helping to plan a party to raise funds for your branch. Or you might step up and become a workplace rep or branch official.



## ***6. Becoming a workplace or area rep***

Some information has already been provided in this handbook about the role of branch officials. This section is focused on workplace and area reps.

IWGB workplace or area reps are members who make a commitment to take on specific responsibilities on a regular basis. Here are some examples of typical responsibilities:

- Organising regular meetings for members in your workplace or area
- Keeping in touch regularly with members to be a point of contact for any issues and to keep them informed
- Representing co-workers in meetings with management over collective issues
- Representing co-workers in grievance or disciplinary meetings
- Advising co-workers on their rights and on how to tackle problems they are facing
- Mobilising co-workers to take part in activities and campaigns
- Recruiting co-workers to the union and inducting new members to the union

Members in your workplace or area should set out clearly what responsibilities they want reps to take on when they elect them.

All IWGB reps are elected by their co-workers and fellow members. Normally reps are elected for a maximum period of a year. IWGB workplace or area reps can be elected at an all-member meeting for members in their workplace or area. Alternatively they might be elected at a smaller meeting by the co-workers in their building or shift.



Reps play a vital role in the running of the union. Our goal as a union is to have at least one rep for every ten members of the union - that way we can ensure we are a strong organisation and all our members are engaged. It also means that the workload for reps is shared and not too much for anyone.

If you are up for becoming a rep, then speak with your co-workers and ask if they would support you to be their rep, then get in touch with your branch to arrange the practicalities.



## 7. Resources

- **The IWGB Website**

<https://iwgb.org.uk/>

- **The IWGB Rule Book and Branch Constitutions**

<https://iwgb.link/rule-book>

- **Contact a branch rep**

<https://iwgb.link/rep>

- **Your Rights at Work**

<https://iwgb.link/rights-at-work>

- **Legal department handbook**

<https://iwgb.link/legal-handbook>

- **ACAS - The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service**

<https://iwgb.link/acas>

- **History of Trade Unions in the UK**

<https://iwgb.link/tu-history>



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“Hasta la victoria,  
siempre”

