

Linens and new uniforms

Cooks and dishwashers had to bring kitchen linens (rags and uniforms) home and wash them on their own time and at their own expense. They also didn't have properly-fitting uniforms, and the kitchen rags were very old and dirty. Cooks wrote a petition and delivered it with a march, backed by servers. They demanded new rags and properly-fitting uniforms, and a linens service to pick up from the diner and wash them so they didn't have to, and gave a deadline of Friday. A few days later that week, managers were seen folding new uniforms in the diner. Sure enough, the entire demand was met by the deadline.

Worker safety: Gas leaks

CO leaks; boss denied it, then called it CO2, then finally fixed it after 2 strikes.

Worker Safety: The banquette

At Ellen's Stardust Diner in New York, the waitstaff perform a singing cabaret show while waiting on tables. While performing, they often stand up on a stage that runs the length of a long banquette, or double-sided bench, in the middle of the restaurant. The banquette had become unstable, and it was dangerous to stand on. One server had even fallen off and rolled his ankle, but management had refused his workers' compensation claim. Many of the staff had raised concerns about the banquette. Management kept promising to fix it, but months went by with no action. Finally, the servers decided amongst themselves not to stand on it anymore. This took some guts, but they stuck together. Not standing on the stage made them harder to see when they were singing, and diminished the quality of the show. A short time later, management installed a brand new banquette. It probably cost them tens of thousands of dollars. But they did it, because servers had found the way to "motivate" them.

Protecting tips: The bucket

The restaurant doesn't pay them to sing; they just make minimum wage, plus their tips as servers. The only way they get paid for performing is by passing a red metal bucket around the tables of customers, about once an hour. It collects several hundred dollars a night, so it really makes a difference in servers' take-home pay. One day, management just took it away. They said they thought it looked "unprofessional" or something. Well, this was unacceptable to servers. They planned a march on the boss to demand it back. For their signal, and to pump each other up, they sang "My Shot" from the musical Hamilton, and got all the customers to raise their ketchups in the air. Then five servers marched up to a manager, and demanded to have their tip bucket back within 24 hours. While this was happening, there was of course no singing in the restaurant, and the silence was really noticeable. The manager kind of stammered and hesitated, and then told them to put their request in writing, and not to put a deadline on it. The servers stood firm: "You heard us," and walked away. Five hours later, they got their tip bucket back.

Refusing Unpaid Work: New Year's Eve

Management wanted servers to learn a new repertoire for New Year's Eve. Learning a song as a performer is not the same as you or I learning to sing along to a song on the radio. It involves getting to know the music on a technical level, interpreting a part, rehearsing for many hours, etc. Workers were frequently being asked to learn new repertoires of songs (as opposed to the songs they already know and like to perform), but quietly ignoring the requests. Management

explicitly asked them to learn two new songs for NYE, offering a meager one paid hour of rehearsal time for them to practice as a group. The workers scheduled for NYE discussed among themselves how to respond. They voted as a group not to learn the songs, as it would take too much of their own, unpaid time. They drafted a letter stating this, and on December 30th, they emailed it to the manager. Two hours later he conceded that they wouldn't have to perform the songs (well, obviously), and that no one would be disciplined. After that, management didn't ask servers to learn new repertoires.

Refusing filming without consent

Singing servers are used to tourists pulling out their phones and filming them, and they generally don't mind. But one day, a whole film crew showed up, from Brazil. Management seemed to have been expecting them, but none of the servers had received any warning they were coming. As performers, they care about commercial use of their image. Some even have contracts (for example, with a reality show), that prevent them from appearing in other productions. So, they were unhappy about this film crew. Plus, it was obvious that management was getting some kind of payment out of the deal, but that wasn't being shared with the servers. So the staff wrote up an impromptu petition, and anyone who didn't want to be filmed signed it. They handed it to management, and none of those people got filmed by the crew.

Quashing an Arbitrary Discipline Policy

At a hip burger restaurant in New York, management asked staff to sign a new discipline policy. This wasn't for new hires: it was presented to people who were already working there, and had been working there for weeks or months or years. There was no discipline or behavior problem in the restaurant or anything, but all of a sudden, they had to sign this multi-page new policy. One of the workers, a veteran of the IWW Stardust campaign, said this was ridiculous and unnecessary, not to mention suspicious. He told the rest of the staff that he wasn't going to sign it, and he told them they shouldn't feel compelled to sign it either. After all, if they refused, what could management do? The other workers liked this idea, and together they all told management they wouldn't be signing the new policy. Management had no choice but to give up.

Stopping Credit Card Tip Theft

At an upscale restaurant on New York's Upper East Side, servers noticed that they weren't being given the full amount of their credit card tips. When a customer paid a check with a credit card, and wrote in a tip, the restaurant was keeping a small portion of it -- they said, to offset their fees from the credit card company. One of the servers was a veteran of the IWW Stardust campaign. She told the other servers this was ridiculous, and they should fight management on it. They all agreed to complain to management about it. When they did, the policy was ended immediately.

Securing a lactation room

For years, owners at Ellen's Stardust Diner in NYC discriminated against mothers by refusing to provide a nursing/pumping station, as required by New York law. Even after being sued for this repeatedly by workers who had kids, they continued to just refuse to provide one, making the restaurant inhospitable to new moms. However, after workers formed a strong solidarity union with the IWW, which often took action to get what it wanted, management grew scared of what workers would do if their demands weren't met. When a server returned from maternity leave,

she didn't even have to say anything: she was greeted with a private room she could use to pump breastmilk in peace. This was a major accomplishment in an industry that generally forces women to just quit when they have kids.

Getting a Worker Rehired

Raul was a pastry chef who had worked at the Stardust diner in New York for years. He took time off to treat stage four colon cancer. When he tried to return to work, he was told by the owner that he no longer had a job... via text message! There happened to be an active IWW solidarity union among servers in the restaurant. They had Raul take a selfie with his huge surgery scar, and they circulated it on social media with the story of how he was fired. Around that time, the servers also held a shift strike. It was technically about a different matter. But suddenly, after that strike and after that social media campaign, Raul was contacted by management and told there had been a misunderstanding, and that he was welcome back to work.

Ending Tip Theft: Group bookings

During tourist off-season (the colder months), management often filled the restaurant with group bookings or "buyouts." It charged these groups an 18% automatic gratuity, but the booking manager took a 3% sales commission out of that. Moreover, when group parties were unhappy, management would lower the bill, but take that out of the gratuity, i.e. the servers' cut, instead of the restaurant's cut. This affected not only servers, but all of the support staff they tip out, like runners and bussers. Servers met, and discussed what they wanted, then drafted a letter with their demands to management: the full 18% gratuity on every party, and access to all receipts for group bookings. They then planned a "march on the boss" to deliver the letter. The march participants included not only servers, but hosts, bussers and runners. They descended on a manager during a busy Friday lunch rush. She seemed confused and distracted, but they made sure she took the letter.

Workers had given management a deadline of noon on Monday, with two escalating actions planned for the week, if their demand wasn't met.

Just before noon on Monday, the General Manager sent a notice to all staff, meeting their demand. The servers have been getting their full 18%, and access to party receipts, ever since, and tipping out support staff accordingly.

Cough Drops

Servers sing all through their shifts, and they also talk to customers, taking orders and such -- in a very loud restaurant. During cough and cold season, this can be especially hard on servers' vocal health. In December, the union put baskets of cough drops, plastered with union stickers, at server stations. Once the cough drops ran out, management started refilling them.

Adequate Staffing

Management started scheduling 6 servers per shift instead of 7. This meant larger sections for each server, and a more exhausting and difficult shift. Staff bombarded managers with messages, via the company's internal communication tool, that these staffing levels were inadequate. After a few days, management went back to putting 7 servers on the floor.

Securing a Raise for Hosts

Hosts had their own set of issues, and they became interested in the union too. They came to meetings and started wearing pins. Alarmed to see hosts now wearing union swag, management called a captive audience meeting. Hosts were prepared: they talked amongst themselves about their grievances, and they also arranged to have several servers crash the captive audience meeting, to let management know they (the hosts) had support. When management tried to pretend to be concerned about the happiness of the staff, the hosts let loose with a barrage of complaints, and demanded a raise to \$15 an hour. The manager said he would see what he could do. A few days later, they got word that all hosts would immediately get a raise to at least \$14.50, with hosts who had been there for six months or longer (about half of them) getting \$15 / hour.

Paid Leave and Job Security

Before the campaign started at Ellen's Stardust Diner, a new management team was brought in. They started "cleaning house," firing servers who had been there for years, even really talented and well-liked performers. Management would make up some reason, like the fact that a table had walked out without paying the bill (which servers sometimes suspected was a set-up by management in the first place). Waitstaff formed a solidarity union with the IWW. They started taking direct action on the job, to get their needs and demands met. They never filed for an election; they just used action in the shop. Recently [2017], a worker needed to take a month off to let her voice recover. She called a meeting with the general manager, and had another union member sit in with her (management wouldn't even consider turning down such a request these days). She said she needed to take a month off, pointing out that her job strains her voice, and she asked what could be done to compensate her for losing out on a month's worth of earnings. The general manager noted that she was entitled to sick pay according to New York law, and told her she had accumulated 50 hours' worth. He also committed the restaurant to helping her file a claim for Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which pays partial earnings. This is such a big difference from two years ago, before there was a union. Back then, she would have been shown the door, and never hired back. Now, the boss was working to get her the maximum of pay during her time off, with assurances there will be a job for her to come back to.

Raise for cooks

To 16.50 / 17.50, immediately after the minimum wage went up to \$15, via two sit-down strikes.

Safety fix for stairs

Letter delivered to boss after a couple workers injured themselves or had close calls on the stairs. Gave a deadline, and before it arrived, boss put down grippy tape and reinforced the handrails.