

**Unpopular Wobblies:
The Decline of the IWW in the United States, 1905-1924**

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of History
of the University of Central Oklahoma
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Master of Arts

by

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May 2026

Unpopular Wobblies: The Decline of the IWW in the United States, 1905-1924

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Abstract

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is a radical labor union that had its heyday in the United States in the early 20th century. Within two decades of its founding, however, the IWW was effectively shattered and severely weakened. This thesis will focus on explaining the numerous factors involved in the union's decline, both internal and external.

I will argue that internal problems like the IWW's factionalism and administrative weaknesses combined with external factors like government repression and the rise of the Communist movement to create an unsuitable environment for the IWW's operation. By focusing on these factors and their interplay, I will be expanding upon the ideas laid out by traditional IWW historians like Melvyn Dubofsky or Eric Thomas Chester. At the same time, my focus on the role that the IWW's relationships with external groups like the Socialist Party or the American Federation of Labor played is also intended to fill a gap in the historiography.

This thesis will rely upon a combination of both primary and secondary sources to support my claims. The IWW has been written about by a number of historians and journalists coming from a variety of perspectives that offer important analysis which I will be relying upon. At the same time, IWW members produced countless primary documents in the forms of songs, cartoons, newspaper articles, and pamphlets which I will also be citing routinely. Contemporary scholars and writers also produced many newspaper articles, studies, or polemics which offer a non-IWW or even anti-IWW perspective on the union from the time. All these sources together will allow me to paint a more comprehensive picture of how and why the IWW experienced its fatal decline.

Acknowledgements

I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to my thesis committee chair, Dr. Marc Goulding, and the other members of my committee, Dr. Chelsea Ball and Dr. Erik Huneke, for their time, encouragement, and helpful feedback. I could not have made this journey without their support and enthusiasm, and I thank them for helping me to polish the rough edges of my work.

I must also thank my father, Charles Karst, for encouraging my interest in history and supporting my journey in writing this thesis and pursuing my master's degree. My thanks must also go to my sisters, Ashlyn Phillips and Jordyn Barton, for continually expressing interest in my work and in my education. I also have to sincerely thank some of my dearest friends – Kyle Broadbooks, Devin Erwin-Acker, Zac Gillis, and Ben Cassody – for tolerating my constant rambling about whatever new fun fact I learned about the IWW during my research.

Finally, I must thank my fellow workers in the Industrial Workers of the World today, in particular the members of the Central Oklahoma IWW branch, who have pointed me towards many valuable sources, and D.J. Alperovitz, who maintains the IWW Materials Preservation Project. Despite the somewhat somber and critical tone of my thesis, they have never been anything other than supportive of my efforts to dive into the IWW's history.

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Acronym Guide

AFL – American Federation of Labor

AWIU – Agricultural Workers Industrial Union

BMMWU – Bute Metal Mine Workers’ Union

BMU – Butte Miners’ Union

BMWU – Butte Mine Workers’ Union

BTW – Brotherhood of Timber Workers

CIO – Congress of Industrial Organizations

CGT - Confédération Générale du Travail, or General Confederation of Labor

CLP – Communist Labor Party

GDC – General Defense Committee

GEB – General Executive Board

IUMMSW – International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers

IWW – Industrial Workers of the World

NCLB – National Civil Liberties Bureau

NEC – National Executive Committee

NPL – Nonpartisan League

OIWC – Oregon Industrial Welfare Commission

PCDO – Pacific Coast District Organization

RILU – Red International of Labor Unions

SLNA – Syndicalist League of North America

SLP – Socialist Labor Party

SPA – Socialist Party of America

UTWA – United Textile Workers of America

WCU – Working Class Union

WFM – Western Federation of Miners

Introduction: Big Dreams of a Little Union

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded in 1905 by a coalition of industrial unionists, anarchists, and socialists representing the radical edge of the American labor movement. Although the coalition was diverse and oftentimes uncooperative, they managed to unify against a common enemy – “wage slavery” at the hands of the capitalists. At the same time, the founders of the IWW were united in their dissatisfaction with the state of the traditional labor movement as represented by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which members of the IWW (known simply as “Wobblies”¹) derisively referred to as the “American Separation of Labor,” and instead advocated for the formation of “One Big Union” of all wageworkers.²

The IWW’s membership likely reached its apex in 1917, though the exact number is notoriously difficult to calculate. Regardless, its membership certainly never exceeded 200,000, an exaggerated figure put forward (and then walked back) by the American government during its trial against the union.³ Yet any analysis of its influence must go beyond simple membership numbers. Despite its relatively small number of dues-paying members, the IWW was treated as a grave danger to the United States by politicians, police, employers, and newspapers. In fact, one could be forgiven for assuming that Wobblies numbered in the millions based on the sometimes outlandish and almost always hyperbolic reports that filled the public sphere in the 1910s and 1920s.

Even though the IWW membership was small, its goals were not. The preamble to the

¹ The exact origin of the term is unknown, though the most commonly cited explanation is that a Chinese sympathizer, unable to pronounce the letter “w,” referred to union members as “Eye Wobble Wobblies,” a nickname which then stuck. See x344543, “What is the Origin of the Term Wobbly?” Industrial Workers of the World, accessed 15 May 2025, <https://archive.iww.org/history/icons/wobbly/>.

² Paul F. Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism* (Russell & Russell Inc, 1957), 83.

³ For an overview of the difficulty calculating membership and of the government’s exaggerated figure, see Dean A. Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order: America’s Biggest Mass Trial, the Rise of the Justice Department, and the Fall of the IWW* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 15, 263n7.

organization's constitution, as amended in 1908, boldly declared that it was the "mission of the working class to do away with capitalism."⁴ William D. Haywood, one of the IWW's most (in)famous leaders, laid out an even more lofty goal in front of the Commission on Industrial Relations in 1912. Haywood spoke of a society in which "every man will have free access to land and its resources. In that day there will be no political government, there will be no States, and Congress ... will be composed of experts of the different branches of industry."⁵ In his mind, the IWW, and revolutionary industrial unionism more generally, was the way to achieve this new society. The IWW's goals of a "Commonwealth of Toil" have yet to come to fruition, however. In fact, within 20 years of its founding, the union was reduced to a mere shell of its former self, and the scourge of "IWWism" seemed to be firmly defeated.

Although the IWW's heyday ended in the mid-1920s, the IWW itself did not. It limped along through the rest of the 20th century, experiencing brief (though small) renaissances and near-fatal declines. It survived to see its centenary in 2005, and today, some 120 years after its initial founding, it continues to exist.⁶ Although the landscape of the American labor movement has shifted dramatically in that time – women are now almost universally allowed into unions as

⁴ "The New Preamble," *Industrial Union Bulletin* (Chicago), 10 October 1908, 2, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n25-oct-10-1908-iub.pdf>.

⁵ *Industrial Relations: Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations Created by the Act of August 23, 1912*, vol. XI (Washington Government Printing Office, 1916), <https://archive.org/details/industrialrelati11unitrich/10,574>.

⁶ For information on the IWW between 1924 and 2005, see Fred W. Thompson and Jon Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World: Its First 100 Years* (Industrial Workers of the World, 2006); John Silvano, *Nothing in Common: An Oral History of IWW Strikes 1971-1992* (Cedar Publishing, 1999), <https://archive.org/details/nothingincommon00john>; Franklin Rosemont, "To Be Revolutionary in Everything: The Rebel Worker Story, 1964-68," introduction, in *Dancin' in the Streets!: Anarchists, IWWs, Surrealists, Situationists & Provos in the 1960s as Recorded in the Pages of the Rebel Worker & Heatwave*, ed. Franklin Rosemont and Charles Radcliffe (Charles H. Kerr, 2006), 1–80; and Leland Walter Robinson, "Social Movement Organizations in Decline: A Case Study of the I.W.W.," (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1973), *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global*, <https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/302702668/A93B436A45CF4182PQ/5?accountid=14516&sourcetype=Dissertations%20&%20Theses>.

full members, for instance – the IWW has continued to carve out its own niche in the labor movement, representing the radical edge and prioritizing those workers ignored by the traditional movement. In contrast to the AFL (which has since merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations into the AFL-CIO), the IWW has sought to organize fast food workers, sex workers, freelance journalists, and prisoners, among others.⁷ Although the IWW has been reduced to fewer than 6000 members at time of writing,⁸ it remains an important force in the fight for a united working class and a progressive labor movement.

I first learned of the IWW in high school, reading Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*.⁹ I found myself enamored by the Wobblies, their ideas, and their tactics. On 19 April 2019, I took out a red card and joined the union. Although Zinn’s book is, rather infamously, hardly a neutral source, I hope that my membership in the One Big Union will not reduce me to a mere propagandist or hagiographer. On the contrary, I believe my Wobbly sympathies will help me to be even more scrutinizing and honest in my analysis. As IWW member Fred Thompson noted in his own history of the union, “to glamorize such events and omit what may embarrass is like giving sailors a chart that leaves out the reefs and shoals.”¹⁰ Though this thesis is also not intended to be a polemic against the IWW, I do not intend to shy away from the mistakes, errors, and weaknesses of the union, of which there are no shortage.

⁷ Maxim Baru, “The Only Legally Recognized Fast Food Union in the US Reaches Tentative Agreement with Company,” Industrial Workers of the World, 12 November 2021, <https://wordpress.iww.org/the-only-legally-recognized-fast-food-union-in-the-us-reaches-tentative-agreement-with-company/>; Jelena Vemilion, “Sex Workers’ Charter Challenge Currently Underway,” *Industrial Worker*, 20 May 2021, <https://industrialworker.org/sex-workers-charter-challenge-currently-underway/>; x384480, “A Year of Organizing Freelance Journalists,” Organizing.Work, 21 August 2019; “About,” Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, accessed 15 May 2025, <https://incarceratedworkers.org/about>.

⁸ “2026 Membership Count,” *General Organizing Bulletin*, January 2026, 5.

⁹ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States* (HarperCollins, 2005), 329-38 introduces the union.

¹⁰ Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, vii.

Historiography

In order to explore the reasons for the IWW's near collapse in 1924, it is first necessary to analyze how historians and commentators have covered the IWW. As early as 1906, opponents of the IWW had already issued premature death certificates for the union.¹¹ By the early 1910s, however, even IWW members and supporters began to recognize its failures, and pro-IWW newspapers and magazine began filling with articles asking, "Is the I.W.W. to Grow?"¹²

The first attempt at a historical analysis of the IWW came in 1919, still during the IWW's heyday, with Paul Frederick Brissenden's book, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism*. Brissenden's work is the seminal history of the IWW, providing detailed yet contemporary summaries of the IWW's activities, tactics, and ideology, aided by firsthand accounts of IWW members and officers. It also provides one of the first sober analyses of the IWW's weaknesses and its failures. He concludes that the IWW's largest fault was its unwillingness to adopt "constructive" tactics, thereby weakening itself. Still, he hopefully concluded that the IWW would "become more actively constructive, probably" and overcome its own shortcomings.¹³

In 1932, John S. Gambs, with the benefit of hindsight, painted a less optimistic picture of the union with *The Decline of the I.W.W.* Although Gambs uses the word "decline" to refer more to a period than a process, he attempts some explanation of the reasons for the IWW's decline since 1919, where Brissenden left off. Like Brissenden, Gambs largely attributes the failure of the IWW to grow to its own weaknesses, wryly noting that it was "willing to change the world,

¹¹ For example, see Max S. Hayes, "World of Labor," *International Socialist Review*, November 1906, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v07n05-nov-1906-ISR-gog-Harv.pdf>, 311-2.

¹² Frank Bohn, "Is the I. W. W. to Grow?" *International Socialist Review*, July 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v12n01-jul-1911-ISR-H-GR-ocr.pdf>, 42-4.

¹³ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 350.

but it is not willing to change itself.”¹⁴ At the same time, however, Gambs’s book is also the first major work to include the charge that the IWW was suppressed by the federal and state governments during and immediately after World War I, although he views the suppression as less important than the IWW’s failings.

The next major work in the Wobbly historiography did not come until 1955, when IWW in-house historian Fred Thompson wrote *The I.W.W.: Its First Fifty Years* (later republished, with additional chapters, as *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years* with Patrick Murfin and *The Industrial Workers of the World: Its First 100 Years* with Jon Bekken). Despite his position within the IWW, Thompson makes no attempt to shift the blame for the IWW’s decline to government repression. On the contrary, in both the book and in a later article, he specifically challenges the notion that the IWW was suppressed.¹⁵ Instead, Thompson attributes the near collapse of the union to a devastating internal split in 1924 in which the union fragmented, suggesting that most IWW members simply “dropped out the middle.”¹⁶

In 1965, Marxist historian Philip S. Foner covered the IWW in volume 4 of his labor history of the United States entitled *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917*. Although Foner’s book stops in 1917, years before the IWW’s nadir, he nevertheless offers explanations for the IWW’s eventual decline. In stark contrast to Thompson or even Gambs, Foner attributes the decline largely to government repression, noting that repression came just as the IWW was improving what he sees as its most egregious weaknesses. Despite this, Foner also argues that because of the “serious flaws” which remained in the IWW, it would never have been able to

¹⁴ John S. Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.* (Russell & Russell Inc., 1966), 206.

¹⁵ Fred Thompson, “They Didn’t Suppress the Wobblies,” *Radical America* September-October 1967, <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:89193/>, 1-5.

¹⁶ Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 143.

achieve complete success either.¹⁷ Even so, Foner's book is largely an aberration in the IWW's historiography, lending significant weight to the role of repression.

Writing in 1967, British historian Patrick Renshaw's book *The Wobblies: The Story of the IWW and Syndicalism in the United States* attempted to synthesize Foner's focus on repression with the earlier scholars' arguments about the IWW's own internal fragility. For Renshaw, the repression and the IWW's weaknesses in the post-World War I period are closely linked. He argues that the arrests of countless IWW leaders led to the 1924 schism which he, like Thompson, views as the death knell of the organization. Consequently, Renshaw's claims represent a shift in the historiography to a more thorough analysis of the interconnectedness of both internal factors and external repression as factors in the union's decline.

Labor historian Melvyn Dubofsky echoed Renshaw's new direction with his 1969 overview of the IWW from 1905 to 1924, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW*. Dubofsky, like Renshaw, synthesizes the arguments of those IWW historians before him, merging them into a more holistic explanation for the union's decline. Dubofsky argues that the IWW's weaknesses and its harsh repression exacerbated one another. He frames the repression as the inciting incident for the IWW's decline, stating that with the IWW's ability to organize hampered by government interference, they began turning inward and "raising problems that effectively drained what little strength the IWW had left," which he views as the last straw for the IWW.¹⁸

Little of note was written about the IWW for the rest of the 20th century, until Nigel Anthony Sellars published *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930* in 1998. Despite focusing on a small region of the United States, Sellars draws conclusions about the IWW at-large from his study. In some ways, the book represented a

¹⁷ Philip S. Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (International Publishers, 1973), 558.

¹⁸ Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (Quadrangle, 1969), 456.

return to the earlier arguments of scholars like Brissenden, Gambs, and Thompson. Although Sellars acknowledges the negative impact of repression on Wobblies in Oklahoma, he ultimately concludes that “many of their problems were of their own making.”¹⁹ In addition, Sellars is one of the first scholars to lend particular weight to the idea that the IWW was weakened by its isolation from potential allies.

The limited scope of focus was again a prominent feature of Greg Hall’s 2001 book *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930*. Hall’s book, like Sellars’s, focuses less on the IWW at large and more on a specific department of the IWW, the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (AWIU), though it is not limited to one specific region. As a result, Hall is even more prepared to draw conclusions about the IWW at large and comes to a similar conclusion that the IWW was not defeated simply by government repression. He acknowledges the impact of the 1924 split, but he ultimately lays much of the blame of the AWIU’s collapse, and therefore the collapse of the greater IWW, on a changing social and economic structure which the IWW failed to adapt to, echoing Gambs’s earlier conclusions about the union’s inability to change while adding a stronger focus on external factors.²⁰

In 2014, the historiography shifted again when Eric Thomas Chester re-emphasized the role of governmental repression in *The Wobblies in Their Heyday: The Rise and Destruction of the Industrial Workers of the World During the World War I Era*. Echoing Dubofsky, Chester concludes that the government’s repression and the IWW’s own internal weaknesses exacerbated each other, thereby leading to a general decline. He argues, however, that the government

¹⁹ Nigel Anthony Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 187.

²⁰ Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905-1930* (Oregon State University Press, 2001), 208.

actively sought to play up and worsen existing tensions, effectively operating as the driving force in the union's decline, both directly and indirectly. Although Chester acknowledges the impact of the IWW's own failings and social circumstances, he ultimately wrote the book to find "insights that can be of use in building future social movements," and thereby concludes that government repression is the biggest concern among modern movements.²¹

Chester somewhat foreshadowed a change in the historiography of the IWW as authors have since focused primarily on the repression of the IWW as both the primary cause of the union's decline and as a commentary on the current state of mass social movements. Legal scholar Dean A. Strang continued this trend in 2019 with *Keep the Wretches in Order: America's Biggest Mass Trial, the Rise of the Justice Department, and the Fall of the IWW*. Unlike Chester or Dubofsky, Strang's analysis focuses almost exclusively on the repression of and trials against the IWW with little attention paid to the IWW's own shortcomings or the socioeconomic landscape the union operated within. Still, Strang's decision to focus on the federal government's war on the IWW from a legalistic perspective sets it apart from other works in the historiography, although its focus is limited.

The most recent addition to the IWW historiography, Ahmed White's 2022 book *Under the Iron Heel: The Wobblies and the Capitalist War on Radical Workers*, similarly follows the trend established by Chester. In contrast to Strang, White explores the government's repression of the IWW and its decline more holistically, pointing to the IWW's own failures to respond adequately to government repression as major contributing factors to the union's decline. At the same time, White is also less critical of and more fatalistic towards the IWW than either Chester or Dubofsky, arguing that the union was essentially forced into ineffectiveness by government

²¹ Eric Thomas Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday: The Rise and Destruction of the Industrial Workers of the World during the World War I Era* (Levellers Press, 2014), 86.

repression and that, even had the union responded “appropriately,” it was all but doomed to be a shell of itself regardless.²²

The historiography of the IWW has largely shifted between attributing the decline to internal failures and weaknesses, as earlier historians did, or laying the blame on government repression, as more recent historians have tended towards. While a small number of historians have sought to synthesize the arguments and point out the interplay between those factors, none have focused exclusively on the reasons for the IWW’s decline. As a result, factors which have been brought to light in limited studies – such as Hall’s point about economic changes as a factor in the union’s decline – have been overlooked by subsequent histories. This thesis, in contrast, will attempt to unify the claims of previous historians and argue that the IWW’s decline was brought about by a wide range of interconnected factors from the time of its inception to the mid-1920s, including internal failures, government repression, economic and cultural changes, and isolation from other social movements and organizations while rejecting the idea that one or another factor was the primary or sole cause.

Terminology

To ensure clarity of meaning, it is necessary to offer some definitions of terms which will be used throughout this thesis. Many of these terms have popular conceptions, or misconceptions, associated with them, often ideologically charged. Many also have multiple, sometimes competing meanings. Others have shifted over time from the definitions used during the early 20th century. This section will attempt to elucidate the language used throughout the thesis in the hope of preventing misunderstanding or confusion.

²² Ahmed White, *Under the Iron Heel: The Wobblies and the Capitalist War on Radical Workers* (University of California Press, 2022), 210.

One of the first terms that must be clarified is “socialist.” “Socialism,” as the IWW used it, was generally a narrow term, reserved for the ideologies espoused by socialist political parties as well as explicit Marxist doctrine. Those who opposed capitalism from a left-wing perspective but did not fall under this umbrella, therefore, were seldom identified as “socialists.” Throughout this thesis, I will largely be following the IWW’s word choice here and reserving the socialist label for “political” socialists, those who supported a socialist political party. I will also be distinguishing between capital-S Socialists, used to refer specifically to members of the Socialist Party of America, and lowercase-s socialists, used more generically in the sense above.

Along similar lines, I will be primarily using capital-C Communism in this thesis rather than its lowercase counterpart. While communism refers generally to the ideas laid out especially by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, the IWW sometimes referred to its goal as “industrial communism,” certainly inspired by Marx but not quite traditional Marxism.²³ In practice, however, communism was a seldom used term. Capital-C Communism, on the other hand, is used to refer to the international movement broadly aligned with the then-nascent Soviet Union, favoring the Bolshevik Revolution, and represented through various Communist political parties.

I must also use capital letters to distinguish between capital-S Syndicalism and lowercase-s syndicalism. The latter will be used to refer to the ideology which, as described by former syndicalist William Z. Foster, opposes the state and ignores political (i.e., electoral) action, relies upon trade unionism and strikes as its primary weapons, and calls for a “trade union ‘state’ to conduct industry and all other social activities.”²⁴ Capital-S Syndicalism, on the other hand, is reserved specifically for the international Syndicalist movement based in Europe and

²³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 167.

²⁴ William Z. Foster, “Syndicalism in the United States,” *The Communist*, November 1935, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/communist/v14n11-nov-1935-communist.pdf>, 1044.

those who consciously aligned themselves with the Europeans. While the IWW fits the definition of syndicalist that Foster would later provide, he, other major syndicalist activists, and many IWW members rejected the notion that the IWW was a part of the Syndicalist movement. Instead, I will follow the analyses of scholars like Paul F. Brissenden and Philip S. Foner by recognizing the IWW as a specifically American variant of syndicalism which followed the basic tenets of syndicalism but was not especially influenced by or tied to the established Syndicalist movement and whose variants distinguished it from the wider movement.

I must also offer a brief explanation of the loaded term “anarchist.” I will be reserving the word for those who explicitly identified themselves as anarchists, belonged to and identified with a self-identified anarchist group or organization, or advocated for total decentralization and the abolition of all forms of hierarchy. It is imperative to recognize that anarchism as an ideology is more nuanced than simply opposing electoral participation and seeking to dismantle the state, and many other left-wing anti-capitalists rejected anarchism while also rejecting electoralism and hoping to abolish the state. Consequently, I must also reject any attempts to label the IWW as an anarchist organization.

Each of these ideologies falls under the broad umbrella category of “radical,” a word that itself requires clarification. I will use radicalism to mean the opposition to existing societal systems and structures, such as capitalism and the American government, and advocacy of alternatives which would result in a restructuring of society at large. I must also distinguish here between radicalism and revolutionism. While both call for fundamental changes in society and new alternative systems, revolutionism also rejects cooperation with and working within pre-established systems, instead seeking to organize independently and overthrow the system from without. While all revolutionaries are radical, therefore, not all radicals are necessarily

revolutionaries, and I will attempt to use the most specific applicable term for the sake of clarity.

In contrast to radicals, reformers sought to implement changes to existing systems while keeping the fundamental structures in place. During the early 20th century, the biggest sub-category of reformism was Progressivism. Progressivism has historically been a loosely used term, and Oklahoma historian Kenny Brown has convincingly argued that the term “Progressive” in reference to the early 20th century movement is vague, and even contradictory, almost to the point of meaninglessness.²⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to attempt to build a working definition. I will be using the word Progressivism throughout this thesis to refer to the ideology and the movement during this time period which advocated for democratic reforms, improved working and living conditions, the limiting of corporate and monopolistic power, and a society more concerned with morality and justice, all while working within the pre-existing system and opposing those who sought to work outside, or even resist, the system. Although this definition still leaves open the door for contradictions and ambiguities, it at least limits the definition of Progressivism to the point of workability.

Many of these Progressives viewed themselves as “respectable” members of the middle class. Although the term “politics of respectability” was not coined until the late 20th century, it is a term which accurately describes the attitudes that many middle-class Progressives held and the strategies which some working-class people pursued. Borrowing from Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s seminal work, I will be using “respectability” to describe the concept of the prioritization of “manners and morals” in activism and the reinforcement of middle-class values

²⁵ Kenny L. Brown, “Progressivism in Oklahoma Politics, 1900-1913: A Reinterpretation,” in *“An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before:” Alternative Views of Oklahoma History*, ed. Davis D. Joyce (University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 27-61.

and social norms.²⁶ The middle-class nature of respectability thereby often resulted in antagonism towards the working-class identity; many middle-class women, for example, sought to separate themselves from working women's movements,²⁷ and many working-class women have sought to reject the label of "working class" with its perceived negative connotations.²⁸

Sources

It is an unfortunate reality that my decisions about which sources to use was dictated chiefly by what I was able to access. I lacked, for instance, both the time and the money to access the IWW's primary physical archives at Wayne State University – my greatest regret in writing this thesis. Though I was limited in my access to physical archives, my writing has been greatly aided by digitized sources accessible through the internet. In particular, I relied frequently upon the Internet Archive and HathiTrust to access books, reports, and journals from the period; Newspapers.com for traditional newspapers; the Marxists Internet Archive for newspapers and other periodicals from the IWW and the broader American left; and the IWW Materials Preservation Project, a digitized internal collection of primary and secondary documents, for much else.

I must also acknowledge my bias towards relying on periodicals, both from within the IWW and from without, as my sources. Partly, of course, this is the product of accessibility – historical periodicals are relatively easy to access whereas the IWW's internal documents are not. Indeed, many IWW documents from this time were destroyed or lost in the aftermath of the mass

²⁶ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church* (Harvard University Press, 1993), 187.

²⁷ Lauren C. Santangelo, "'The Merry War Goes On': Elite Suffrage in Gilded Age Manhattan," *New York History* 98, no. 3/4 (2017): 345, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26905067>.

²⁸ Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (SAGE Publications, 2002), 74-6.

raids on the union in 1917. At the same time, however, periodicals were the primary forums for discussions over issues of debate within the union, and IWW newspapers were open to any member to make their voices heard. In fact, some issues even had articles penned by non-members. As a result, discussion-based periodicals like *Solidarity* or the *International Socialist Review* provide a glimpse into the opinions of Wobblies and socialists with relatively little filter. Traditional non-IWW periodicals, meanwhile, served as the main disseminators and preservers of current events, as well as demonstrating the attitudes of anti-IWW Americans.

There is also a notable omission in my sourcing that I must similarly acknowledge, which is the lack of internal government documents. While some IWW historians like Eric Thomas Chester have used government records to great effect, his work sought to analyze the precise methods and motivations of the government's approach towards the IWW. My thesis, meanwhile, focuses largely on the IWW's decline from the union's own perspective, something which is seldom discussed in government documentation.

While I hope that my limitations when it comes to sourcing do not weaken my thesis overall, I also hope that I can, in time, get the opportunity to explore many of the sources which I was unable to in writing this in order to expand, and ultimately strengthen, my work. The pursuit of historical truth, of course, is never finished, and I have no doubt that there is endless information about the IWW which is still waiting to be discovered and explored.

Conclusion

Although many historians have written about the IWW, few have focused specifically on the reasons for its decline in power and influence. Moreover, even those who focus on the reasons for its near collapse often take an overly narrow perspective, attributing it largely to either government repression, infighting, or both. Other potential causes are glossed over, if

discussed at all. This thesis will attempt to rectify that gap, examining the IWW's decline holistically. Instead of arguing that one or two factors simply resulted in the union's diminishing, I will instead argue that the IWW's declension was a natural product of internal failures and structural weaknesses, external repression, and economic and societal circumstances. These factors, as well as the IWW's ambivalent relationships with other organizations and movements, intertwined and exacerbated one another, leading to instability and a loss of membership.

Chapter 1 will discuss the union's internal weaknesses. Because of the hodgepodge nature of the IWW, personal and ideological rivalries frequently bubbled to the surface, leaving the union fractured and fighting amongst itself. Even when Wobblies agreed with each other, the union's prioritization of dramatic propaganda victories like the San Diego free speech fight or the Paterson pageant over day-to-day administration, mixed with a severe lack of money, left the organization struggling. In addition, many rank-and-file Wobblies, thanks to their experiences with other labor leaders, distrusted any kind of centralization or leadership within the IWW and sought to prevent despotic leadership, which often resulted in a completely hamstrung leadership instead. These weaknesses ensured that the IWW struggled, and sometimes even failed, to properly function as a labor union. Instead, its fragility, disjointedness, and lack of coordination scared off members and potential members and contributed to the union's stagnation.

Chapter 2 will focus on the IWW's external relationships. From its inception, the union had tense and vacillating relationships with groups and organizations around the United States. The socialist political parties and traditional labor unions in the United States acted as occasional friends, and more frequently bitter enemies, of the IWW, demonstrating both the effectiveness of cooperation and the dire consequences of isolation. At the same time, farmers, Progressives, and other members of the middle, or even upper, class who sometimes aligned with the union, put the

IWW in a difficult place of either ideologically consistent dedication to its working-class character or pragmatic alliances. Ultimately, the IWW tended to maintain its fierce independence, though not always by its own choosing. Isolated from much of American society, the IWW was similarly isolated from pools of potential members and devoted more of its time to spats with rival organizations than to building up its own capabilities, resulting in a weakened shell of an organization.

Chapter 3 will touch on external circumstances that contributed to the union's decline. As well as repression by the federal government, the IWW also faced repression from state and local governments. At the same time, private groups and individuals – including the media, wealthy business owners, vigilante groups, and private detectives – also sought to dismantle the union. In addition, the changing social and economic landscapes of the United States essentially left the IWW behind as it was unable to adapt to the rapid developments. Stuck in the past, the IWW bled some of the few members it still had and almost completely failed to attract new members as workers and radicals found better, and more suitable, options elsewhere.

I must also draw attention to a notable omission from this thesis: discussions of race and gender. While this thesis will make little, if any, discussion of the IWW's approach towards the topics, this is by no means because there is nothing to say on the subject. On the contrary, the IWW, while suffering from some of the paternalistic chauvinism that is to be expected from a white male-dominated organization in the early 20th century, was remarkably progressive in its inclusion of women, immigrant, and non-white workers, in stark contrast to the AFL, something which other historians have noted and explored with great interest.²⁹ Yet while the IWW's

²⁹ For examples of explorations of the IWW and gender, see Heather Mayer, *Beyond the Rebel Girl: Women and the Industrial Workers of the World in the Pacific Northwest, 1905-1924* (Oregon State University Press, 2018); Ann Schofield, "Rebel Girls and Union Maids: The Woman Question in the

approaching to dealing with workers who were not white men is certainly worthy of further exploration (and indeed, the focus on either men of color or white women leaves a rather notable gap for women of color in the union), this thesis is ultimately focused on explaining the reasons for the IWW's decline rather than merely analyzing its strengths and weaknesses. So, while focusing more on women's issues or fighting for racial equality may have attracted more female or non-white members, as chapter 1 will make clear, the IWW already had a problem with acting more as a civil liberties union than a labor union, much to its detriment. Consequently, while the IWW's failure to focus on race or gender questions may have been something of a moral failure, I do not consider it to be a practical strategic failure, and therefore it remains beyond the scope of this paper.

Finally, I must explain my choice to focus on the years 1905 and 1924 as my bookends. Although it is, perhaps, unfair to label 1905 – the year of the IWW's formation – as the beginning of the IWW's decline, focusing exclusively on the period of declining membership – that is to say, after 1917 – leaves significant blank spots. The problems which ultimately led to the shattering of the union did not just originate in 1924, 1917, 1913, or even 1908. The collapse was the product of years of buildup and various diverse issues, some of which originated from the IWW's very inception in 1905, making it a necessary starting point. 1924, on the other hand, is somewhat more approximate. While some historians have opted to use 1930 as a cutting-off

Journals of the AFL and IWW, 1905-1920," *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 2 (1983): 335-58, doi:10.2307/3177496; and Anne Mattina, " 'Yours for Industrial Freedom': Women of the IWW, 1905-1930," *Women's Studies* 43 (2014): 170-201, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2014.863105>. For examples of analyses of the IWW and race, see Philip S. Foner, "The IWW and the Black Worker," *The Journal of Negro History* 55, no. 1 (1970): 45-64, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2716544>; Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (University of Illinois Press, 2013); and David M. Struthers, "IWW Internationalism and Interracial Organizing in the Southwestern United States," in *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW*, eds. Peter Cole, David Struthers, and Kenyon Zimmer (Pluto Press, 2017), 74-88.

point for the IWW's history instead,³⁰ Greg Hall himself points out that 1924 represented the point of no return for the IWW, after which the IWW was never to recover, something which other historians have echoed.³¹ If not the end of the IWW an organization, then, 1924 was at least the tipping point, after which the IWW could only respond to, rather than attempt to avoid, decline and disaster.

³⁰ For example, see Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*; Mattina, “ ‘Yours for Industrial Freedom’;” and Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*.

³¹ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 208. See also Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 143; and Robinson, “Social Movement Organizations in Decline,” 78-9.

Chapter One: Internal Weaknesses

The IWW was an ambitious experiment, but it was an experiment, nonetheless. The founders of the union hoped to build something radically different from the then-existing labor movement, and as a result, they often treaded new paths. Pioneers that they were, the Wobblies' decisions did not always pave the way for stability and growth. Often prioritizing revolutionary change over pragmatism, the IWW was more interested in not repeating the mistakes of the existing labor movement than it was in avoiding its own mistakes. While the IWW successfully managed to avoid some of the issues which had plagued other unions during its infancy from 1905 to 1908, the period after 1908 was largely devoted to finding new mistakes to make and learning few lessons in the process.

In addition to its structural weaknesses, the IWW also tended to focus on peripheral non-union issues. In the name of revolution and class war, the organization dedicated itself to taking on the capitalist class in all forms on all fronts, which often distracted from the day-to-day unionist issues which were so important to building a labor movement. Consequently, those members and potential members who were more concerned with workplace organizing than syndicalist propaganda or legal defense found themselves at odds with parts of the IWW's membership.

The IWW also suffered from severe factionalism and in-fighting. Due to its close ties with the political left, the IWW experienced some of the same divisions that existed in the American socialist movement. Yet it also faced divisions which were unique to the union, such as those between supporters and opponents of political action, centralizers and decentralizers, and revolutionaries and bread-and-butter unionists. In addition to these factional and ideological splits, the size and openness of the IWW also created a breeding ground for personal animosities to interfere, especially with such big personalities involved.

The IWW's difficulties with structure, focuses, and in-fighting created instability for a union which desperately needed stability. At the same time as the IWW was dealing with threats and opposition from external opponents, it was also limiting its own effectiveness, whether by failing to build up its locals or by tearing itself apart through a schism. The result was a union which failed to live up to its full potential and which was primed for collapse.

Early Divisions: 1905-1908

From the moment of its inception, the IWW was rife with internal divisions. Intended as a class-wide union which embraced all wageworkers, it naturally included a wide variety of interested parties, including members of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), anarchists, “pure and simple” trade unionists who were concerned only with improved working conditions, and reformers. George Speed, who would eventually become a prominent IWW organizer on the West Coast, described the collection of people at the founding convention as “the greatest conglomeration of freaks that ever met.”³²

Although the founding convention was intended to be an exercise in pan-working class unity – William Haywood described it as the “Continental Congress of the working class”³³ – it was not quite the festival of harmony it was intended to be. Algie Simons, a prominent member of the SPA, devoted much of his time at the convention to attacking the much-maligned SLP leader Daniel De Leon. Even when they agreed on the issues at hand, Simons was unable to resist questioning the sincerity of De Leon's views, asking, “Are we to permit those men [De

³² Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography: My First Life, 1906-1926* (International Publishers, 2016), 77.

³³ W. S. McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York Labor News Company, 1905), <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/unions/iww/1905/convention/iww.pdf>, 3.

Leon's supporters] to pour their vomit on us?"³⁴

While the SLP and SPA were perhaps the most obvious opponents at the convention, there were several factions that were hardly united. Vincent Saint John, who would eventually become the IWW's general secretary-treasurer, wrote in his history of the IWW that there were four major factions present at the founding convention: "Parliamentary socialists ... Marxian and reformist; anarchist; industrial unionist; and the labor union faker."³⁵ Others at the convention distinguished between three factions: the "pure and simple" trade unionists, the anarchists, and the socialists.³⁶ Joseph Conlin, a historian of the IWW, later argued that the factions were "not based upon ideological issues ... [but] upon the question of which political party, SLP or SPA, if either, would direct the IWW."³⁷

Regardless of what the factions were or why they differed, it was clear to both observers and participants that the IWW was hardly united. The convention was eventually able to put forward a program that satisfied everyone – or more accurately, dissatisfied everyone equally – and officially establish the Industrial Workers of the World. Luke Grant, an observer for the AFL, noted that although he was surprised by the ability of the disparate members to cooperate and agree on a constitution, he predicted the new organization to be unstable and unlikely to last for a significant time.³⁸

While Grant's predictions of collapse were unfounded, he was correct in expecting the

³⁴ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 86.

³⁵ Vincent Saint John, *The I.W.W.: Its History, Structure, and Methods* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1919), <https://archive.org/details/iwwithistorystr00stjouoft>, 6. "Labor union fakers" or "labor fakirs" were pejoratives frequently used to describe those who were perceived to be opportunistic or inauthentic, using the labor movement merely as a means to personal power.

³⁶ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 280.

³⁷ Joseph Robert Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too* (Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1969), 44.

³⁸ Luke Grant, "Reports of the Founding Convention of the IWW," in *The Samuel Gompers Papers: The American Federation of Labor and the Rise of Progressivism*, eds. Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert, and Grace Palladino (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 463.

members to fight among themselves. Already in January 1906, SPA member and IWW critic Max Hayes, citing “a prominent member of the I. W. W.,” painted a picture of a growing schism in the union. According to his report, there was a growing rift with IWW president Charles O. Sherman and the IWW’s largest affiliate, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), on one side and “DeLeonites and Anarchists” on the other.³⁹

Aside from ideological factionalism, many Wobblies were also growing increasingly frustrated with Sherman. Labor historian Melvyn Dubofsky notes wryly that what little is known of Sherman’s life “reflect slight credit on the man.” He describes Sherman as duplicitous, self-interested, and wholly uncommitted to the IWW’s cause.⁴⁰ In other words, Sherman would have fit right in among the “labor union fakers.” To make matters worse, Sherman was clearly, and almost openly, corrupt. A report from the auditing committee at the 1906 convention showed “gross extravagance and strong evidence of corruption,” pointing to the vast amount of money he spent and the complete lack of results.⁴¹ The IWW would even receive signed affidavits which confirmed that Sherman used his position as president to buy products from Fraternal Supply Company, a business which Sherman part-owned, and charged “unfair and exorbitant [sic] prices.”⁴²

The result was a showdown at the 1906 convention. Sherman was on one side; De Leon, Saint John, and William E. Trautmann were on the other. At the same time, the party split pointed out by Conlin also made its appearance, as many members of the SPA attacked De Leon and the

³⁹ Max S. Hayes, “The World of Labor,” *International Socialist Review*, January 1906, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v06n07-jan-1906-ISR-gog.pdf>, 435.

⁴⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 106-7.

⁴¹ Wilson E. McDermutt, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1906), <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/unions/iww/1906/convention/iww.pdf>, 854.

⁴² “Fraternal Supply Co.,” *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 16 March 1907, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v1n03-mar-16-1907-iub.pdf>, 3.

SLP.⁴³ The convention was open warfare. Anti-Shermanites quickly challenged Sherman and his supporters on issues of convention credentials. Soon the attacks escalated, accusing Sherman of intentionally trying to keep out the “revolutionaries.” Sherman did himself no favors when he told a newspaper, “We believed we could starve them out by obstructive tactics.” Sherman was proved wrong as his opponents managed to acquire funding, oust Sherman from office, and abolish the office of presidency.⁴⁴

Although Sherman’s departure was hardly a loss for the union, the split nevertheless hurt the IWW. Of particular importance was the reaction of the WFM, the largest source of membership for the IWW. In a referendum, the membership of the WFM “overwhelmingly condemned” the actions of the convention and criticized Saint John, a member of the WFM, for participating.⁴⁵ William Haywood, then in jail and unable to attend the convention, wrote a letter to Saint John condemning “Shermanism” while also criticizing the anti-Shermanites’ methods, insisting that they could have dealt with Sherman “without a division or any internecine trouble among the rank and file.”⁴⁶

Calling it a “division” undersold the aftermath. The WFM, despite their harsh criticisms of the convention, called for a peace meeting between the factions. The anti-Sherman faction refused, insisting that the WFM was being insincere and throwing in their lot with “labor fakirs” and other enemies of labor. Instead, they proposed a counter-offer: the WFM should return to the

⁴³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 109.

⁴⁴ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 74-5.

⁴⁵ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 78; *Industrial Worker* (Joliet, IL), January 1907, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-worker-sherman/070100-industrialworker-v02n01.pdf>, 10.

⁴⁶ William Haywood to Vincent Saint John, quoted in *Official Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Western Federation of Miners* (n.p., 1907), 584, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

IWW's fold and line up with the new direction.⁴⁷ The WFM, which had made up the bulk of the early IWW's membership, rejected, and at their convention in 1908, WFM members severed their ties with the IWW, leaving the One Big Union a little smaller.⁴⁸

Yet the split of 1906 was nowhere near the end of the union's early troubles. The war against Sherman made strange bedfellows as De Leon, the doctrinaire ideologist and committed political socialist, allied with Saint John and Trautmann, fierce opponents of politics in the union. Although both agreed that Sherman had to go, they disagreed about the future of the IWW as it related to electoral politics and political parties. The original 1905 preamble of the IWW's constitution included a section which declared that "all toilers [shall] come together on the *political*, as well as on the industrial field."⁴⁹ The "political clause" was a highly contentious issue from its first proposal, though it was ultimately accepted at the founding convention.

After removing Sherman at the 1906 convention, however, Saint John and Trautmann made a move to remove the political clause against De Leon's wishes. Although the issue came to a vote, it did not result in a serious schism as the proposal to remove the clause was voted down.⁵⁰ The anti-politicians did come away with a slight concession, however, as the convention did update the preamble to clarify that the IWW neither "endorses[es] or desires[es] the endorsement of any political party."⁵¹

This was not enough to soothe the emotions of the clause's opponents. They wanted the

⁴⁷ "Any Attempt to Consolidate the Workers on Basis of Departmental Craft Autonomy and Insincere Professions Must Fail," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 25 January 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v1n48-jan-25-1908-iub.pdf>, 1-3.

⁴⁸ *Official Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention, Western Federation of Miners* (W. H. Kistler Stationary Company, 1908), 431, IWW Materials Preservation Project; Vernon H. Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict: Labor Relations in the Nonferrous Metals Industry up to 1930* (Cornell University Press, 1950), 193.

⁴⁹ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 302. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention*, 453, 459.

⁵¹ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention*, 894.

clause gone and, perhaps more importantly, they wanted De Leon gone. Although the factions had allied against Sherman in 1906, De Leon was a contentious and highly unpopular figure among the American left. His opponents nicknamed him “the Pope” due to his unwillingness to compromise on socialist doctrine.⁵² His hardcore devotion to the SLP, often at the expense of left-wing unity or pragmatism, also did little to curry favor.

The latter made him a particularly easy target for the anti-politicians. De Leon continued to focus on building up the SLP and attacking its rivals in the SPA, even when speaking at IWW events and meetings.⁵³ At the same time, despite the resolution on political neutrality passed at the 1906 convention, De Leon wrote to Haywood that he was looking forward to “the day ... when the I. W. W. will have reflected its own political party,” which from De Leon’s pen could only mean the SLP.⁵⁴

Although De Leon may have been guilty of breaching the uneasy peace established at the 1906 convention, his opponents were hardly innocent either. Opponents of De Leon took to the IWW’s main periodical, the *Industrial Union Bulletin*, and filled the pages with criticisms and denouncements of De Leon and the SLP, some vague and indirect and other explicit and direct.⁵⁵ Even Wobblies who had been members of the SLP began issuing warnings in the paper against

⁵² Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of the IWW and Syndicalism in the United States* (Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 27.

⁵³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 135.

⁵⁴ De Leon to Haywood, in *Daniel De Leon, The Man and His Work: A Symposium* (National Executive Committee Socialist Labor Party, 1920), https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Daniel_De_Leon%2C_the_man_and_his_work_-_a_symposium_%28IA_cu31924091731368%29.pdf, 60.

⁵⁵ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 106. Also see K. Rathje, “Why Does the I. W. W. Not Grow Faster?” *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 2 May 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n10-may-02-1908-iub.pdf>, 3; “Has No Political Tests,” *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 9 May 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n11-may-09-1908-iub.pdf>, 1.

the party and De Leon's influence.⁵⁶

At the 1908 convention, the IWW was firmly split into two camps – the pro-De Leon and anti-De Leon camps. The IWW at-large was broadly against De Leon, and despite his best efforts to make a push for control, the convention reflected that ire.⁵⁷ Like the 1906 convention, the debate over De Leon began with a debate over convention credentials as his opponents insisted that he was seated illegitimately. It soon spiraled into explicit attacks both by and against De Leon. Saint John, in a speech to the convention, made almost no mention of the ostensible issue being debated, De Leon's credentials. Instead, he insisted that the attendees "should not follow him and should not allow him to take a seat as a delegate."⁵⁸ Ultimately, De Leon was denied his credentials and not seated at the convention. Seeing which way the wind was blowing, he and his sympathizers left the hall and created their own rival IWW.⁵⁹

Like 1906, the triumph over a common enemy did not result in harmony among the remaining Wobblies. Saint John, Trautmann, and other anti-politicians again pushed to remove the political clause from the preamble with De Leon out. Yet although most at the convention could agree with ousting De Leon, the preamble was a different issue entirely. A committee on constitutional amendments issued two opposing reports – a majority and a minority report – on the political clause. Most of the committee supported keeping the clause, while the minority

⁵⁶ B. H. Williams, "Industrial Unionism and Politics," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 14 March 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n03-mar-14-1908-iub.pdf>, 1, 4; Justus Ebert, "A Letter of Resignation," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 18 April 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n08-apr-18-1908-iub.pdf>, 1, 2; Frank Bohn, "The Failure to Attain Socialist Unity," *International Socialist Review*, June 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v08n12-jun-1908-ISR-gog.pdf>, 755.

⁵⁷ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 136-7.

⁵⁸ Vincent Saint John, "The Worker Against The Intellectual," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 10 October 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n25-oct-10-1908-iub.pdf>, 1, 2.

⁵⁹ For an overview of the De Leonist IWW, see Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 227-31, 234-7.

suggested its removal.⁶⁰

The report resulted in mass debate on the convention floor. Many delegates spoke in favor of keeping the clause as it was, insisting that to remove the clause would open the door to accusations of the IWW being anarchistic or full of “dynamiters.” Others supported a change, insisting that the clause caused confusion and that removing it would keep politics limited to political parties rather than the union. One delegate even argued in favor of removing the clause based on the grounds that, until the clause was removed, there would continue to be fights and debates over it.⁶¹

In a narrow vote – just 35 to 32 – the convention agreed to remove the clause.⁶² After two factional feuds, the anti-politicians came out on top as the leading force of the IWW. This anti-political IWW, despite the criticisms of its opponents, would be the iteration of the IWW which was most successful. Meanwhile, many of the opponents which the anti-political faction had driven out were left behind. Sherman and his supporters, alienated by both the IWW and the AFL, “did nothing and ... never amounted to anything,” as Philip Foner described bluntly.⁶³ De Leon’s supporters, never prioritizing alliances or compromises, continued to claim the name of the IWW, though they similarly amounted to little.

Yet the period of early schisms in the IWW was not a time of triumph. Although some who remained in the union framed the splits as positives – the true revolutionaries shedding the weight of the reactionaries and fakirs – the truth is that the splits provided unneeded instability to

⁶⁰ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 110.

⁶¹ “The Fourth Annual Convention of the I. W. W.,” *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 7 November 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n27-nov-07-1908-iub.pdf>, 3.

⁶² “The Fourth Annual Convention,” 3.

⁶³ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 75.

an already unstable union.⁶⁴ For the first three years of its existence, the IWW turned much of its attention inwards at their own fellow workers rather than outwards to the cause of unionization. IWW periodicals were filled with attacks on (or less frequently, defenses of) De Leon instead of reports on organizing activity, IWW propaganda, and discussions of tactics.

At the same time, the fragmentation of the IWW only exacerbated the already-existing fragmentations of the labor and left-wing movements in the United States. For a time, the IWW had managed to unite members of the SPA and SLP, anarchists and syndicalists, and relatively moderate “pure and simple” trade unionists under one umbrella. Although it was an unstable coalition, and one that perhaps was doomed to fall apart sooner or later, as Haywood pointed out to Saint John, the “Gordian ... knots that [were] cut with a broad axe, were only slipknots that could have easily been untied.”⁶⁵ While Sherman and De Leon may have done more harm to the IWW by remaining than by leaving, had the “revolutionaries” acted with more tact, and better tactics, they may have been able to avoid some of the collateral casualties that resulted from the splits.

Perhaps the most disastrous consequence of the early splits was that the IWW developed its own habit of uncompromisingness. By dealing with the union’s early issues by ousting internal opposition, Wobblies had little experience with compromising and building unity. Instead, they tended to label their critics as reactionaries, fakirs, politicians, or labor aristocrats. To oppose the ways of the IWW was to be anti-revolutionary, and to be anti-revolutionary was a crime against the working class. Paul Brissenden, author of one of the first scholarly analyses of

⁶⁴ For an example of this positive interpretation, see Justus Ebert, *The I.W.W. in Theory and Practice* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1918), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015073497581>, 54-5.

⁶⁵ Haywood to Saint John, quoted in *Official Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Western Federation of Miners*, 584.

the IWW in 1919, predicted that the IWW was “primed” for further schisming.⁶⁶ The experience of 1906 and 1908 ensured that his prediction came true.

Organizational Weaknesses

Although the IWW that came out of the 1908 split was broadly united behind their new anti-, or at least non-, political direction, the union still had to deal with growing pains. As an organization dedicated to a new form of unionism with an ideology that was new to the United States, the IWW was in uncharted territory. As a result, the union was left to experiment with its organizational structure, its tactics, and its focuses. Consequently, the IWW often suffered from weaknesses that its members were unwilling to change.

One of the union’s first experimental structures was the mixed local. In contrast to locals of unions like the AFL, mixed locals were organized based on location rather than industry or craft, therefore including members from a wide range of local industries. Because these locals had such a variety of industrial representations, they were often ineffective at coordinating and organizing local workers, instead having to try to unite differing industries under one umbrella.

Mixed locals were initially intended to be temporary stopgaps until enough workers from specific industries were able to form their own industrial local, essentially acting as steppingstones towards industrial organization. In practice, however, workers in the western United States in particular often failed to transition from the mixed locals into the industrial unions that would eventually develop. At the same time, some workers maintained membership in both the mixed and industrial locals, thereby interfering with accurate membership reports and

⁶⁶ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 220.

leading to disputes over jurisdiction and factional fights.⁶⁷ In his study of agricultural workers in the IWW, historian Greg Hall also points out that due to their transient and migratory nature, many IWW members in the west viewed the mixed local as a superior form of organization that was more convenient for migrant laborers.⁶⁸

Despite the views of the “footloose” western Wobblies, mixed locals were an ineffective method of union organizing, something which many contemporary IWW members recognized. Instead of discussing specific job-related issues and goals for organizing, members of these mixed locals tended to spend more time “philosophizing” and discussing questions of politics and religion, hardly useful for the on-the-job organizing that the IWW sought.⁶⁹ In fact, mixed locals acted more as clubhouses for IWW members than as actual union elements.⁷⁰

Even less effective than the mixed locals were the Propaganda Leagues. True to their names, the Propaganda Leagues focused on promoting and spreading IWW propaganda rather than doing any form of union organizing. When the Leagues were first introduced at the 1908 convention, they were intended to counteract the shortcomings of mixed locals. Since mixed locals only technically allowed IWW members who were not already members of an industrial local, supporters hoped it would allow Wobblies to take part in propaganda activities without sacrificing on-the-job union activity, thereby limiting the damage of mixed locals.⁷¹ In truth, however, the Propaganda Leagues only exacerbated the problems of the mixed locals. Since they were organizations that were dedicated explicitly to not organizing workers, the Leagues were a

⁶⁷ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 162.

⁶⁸ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 55.

⁶⁹ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 468; Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 315-6.

⁷⁰ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 71.

⁷¹ B. H. Williams, “Propaganda Leagues,” *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 12 December 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n28-dec-12-1908-iub.pdf>, 2.

step in the wrong direction, and they had little effect on quelling the damage of mixed locals.⁷²

Both mixed locals and Propaganda Leagues, thanks to their loose structures and lack of ties to on-the-job organizing, were closely involved with the widespread “free speech fights” in the western United States in particular. Since these loose groups dedicated so much time to speaking on street corners and spreading their propaganda in the cities, municipal governments which were hostile to the IWW often passed ordinances forbidding street speaking, sometimes targeting the IWW directly. In response, Wobblies would flood the city, speaking in defiance of the ordinance and filling the jails to pressure the cities.⁷³

Although street speaking and soapboxing were less effective than on-the-job organizing, defending the union’s right to free speech was nevertheless important for its organizing goals. The large presence of migratory workers passing through western cities meant that street corners often served as important recruiting grounds for these footloose workers, many of whom were hired to work off those same streets.⁷⁴ In theory, at least, organizing on the streets was a prelude to organizing the workplace. As one Wobbly explained, “control[ling] the source of supply in the industrial centers ... is a great step in the direction of industrial control.”⁷⁵

Practice did not always match up with theory, however, as the Fresno free speech fights from 1910 to 1911 demonstrated. The free speech fight there followed the pattern elsewhere – IWW members would travel to the cities to defy the ordinance, fill the jails, and place pressure on the city government to relent. Eventually, the pressure got to the city, and a committee of Wobblies negotiated an agreement with the local government to release those members held in

⁷² Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 468.

⁷³ For an overview of how the IWW approached free speech fights, see Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 173-5.

⁷⁴ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 34.

⁷⁵ “Licensed Thieves Rob the Workers,” *Industrial Worker* (Spokane, WA), 5 August 1909, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v1n21-aug-05-1909-IW.pdf>, 3.

jail and allow street speaking.⁷⁶ The ordinance, according to one Wobbly, had died “from overdose of I.W.W.”⁷⁷

Although it was certainly a victory over the specific ordinance, what effect it had on the IWW’s organizing capabilities is uncertain. Philip S. Foner describes the free speech fight as a major coup for the IWW, though more for the publicity it brought to the IWW rather than for its organizing capability. The biggest success of the Fresno fight, he contends, was that Americans who “cherished freedom of speech [were] now fully aware that a labor organization existed which was dedicated to defend that constitutional right.”⁷⁸

Melvyn Dubofsky, on the other hand, explicitly rejects the idea that the IWW engaged in free speech fights for constitutional rights.⁷⁹ Although Dubofsky defends free speech fights as an important element of the IWW’s organizing strategy, even he admits that “[w]hat the IWW won in Fresno was not precisely clear.” The Fresno local soon faded out of existence, and local workers remained unorganized.⁸⁰ The IWW failed to follow up on its success and take the next step in the direction of industrial control.

One participant in the Fresno fight, E. M. Clyde, published a personal account of the strike shortly after its success, ending by declaring, “Now that the Fresno fight is won let us all get busy on the eight hour [sic] day.”⁸¹ Yet Clyde was too ambitious for the IWW at this time. With a success in Fresno – as well as successes in Spokane, Missoula, and other cities – the

⁷⁶ For an overview of the Fresno free speech fight, see Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 185-9; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 184-9.

⁷⁷ Bert L. Weber, “Next!!!” (cartoon), *Industrial Worker*, 16 March 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v2n52-w104-mar-16-1911-IW.pdf>, 1.

⁷⁸ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 189.

⁷⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 173.

⁸⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 188-9; Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 70.

⁸¹ E. M. Clyde, “The March on Fresno,” *Solidarity*, 8 April 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1911/v02n17-w069-apr-08-1911-Solidarity.pdf>, 4.

IWW doubled down on free speech fights in lieu of exclusive workplace organizing. Clyde was not alone in wanting to focus on organizing, however. Some members wrote in to the union's periodicals reminding readers that the IWW should focus on organizing rather than just pursuing speaking rights.⁸² Prominent national figures similarly insisted that the IWW must devote less attention to unnecessary free speech fights and instead focus on industrial organizing.⁸³ One delegate at the 1913 convention simply requested that Wobblies engaged in free speech fights keep their defiant speeches on the topic of industrial unionism.⁸⁴

Although the free speech fights ostensibly contributed to the IWW's overall goals, in practice they detracted from them. The hordes of members that flocked to these cities to fight for free speech meant pulling Wobblies away from work sites, hobo encampments, and even other street corners where they could have organized instead. The end results of the free speech fights, as Fresno demonstrated, did not always result in the furthering of the union's goals anyhow. Instead, free speech often acted as distractions for the IWW in which it abandoned its unionist goals and, unintentionally, acted more as a civil liberties group than a labor union.

When it wasn't devoting its time to protecting civil liberties, the IWW was frequently acting as a legal defense group instead. Like with the free speech fights, the IWW's defense of its members and allies against arrest and imprisonment ostensibly served a greater purpose in the pursuit of industrial organizing. Also like the free speech fights, however, the IWW's focus on legal defense instead served as a distraction from organizing in practice.

Part of the blame, however, must rest of the circumstances in which the IWW found

⁸² For example, see W. I. Fisher, "Organization," *Solidarity* (New Castle, PA), 15 January 1910, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v1n43-jan-15-1910-IW.pdf>, 4.

⁸³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 196-7; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 61.

⁸⁴ *Stenographic Report of the Eighth Annual Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (I. W. W. Publishing Bureau, 1913), 102, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

itself. As a radical, and even revolutionary, organization dedicated to overthrowing capitalism and implementing a new economic system, the IWW was disruptive to the established forms of government which existed in the United States. Combined with the threat the IWW represented to large business interests, which often had significant pull with the government, it was all but guaranteed that the IWW would find itself under the government's iron heel. Under these circumstances, it was almost forced to choose between focusing on legal defense or allowing many of its most effective organizers to languish in jail.

The IWW was forced to choose its path almost immediately after its founding. William Haywood and Charles Moyer, two WFM officials integral to the founding of the IWW, were charged with ordering the murder of former Idaho governor Frank Steunenberg who had taken a hard line against labor during his term in office. Haywood, Moyer, and George Pettibone, a non-IWW unionist, were illegally extradited to Idaho and kept in jail for over a year.⁸⁵

With Haywood, such a core member of the union, in jail, the IWW quickly came to the accused's defense. It printed out a pamphlet entitled "Shall Our Brothers Be Murdered?" which encouraged members to join the IWW and support the defense.⁸⁶ The IWW, along with the Socialist Party, the AFL, and their sympathizers, helped establish defense committees in major cities throughout the US.⁸⁷ The IWW also took up the role of fundraiser, eventually raising almost \$11,000 and hiring Clarence Darrow to defend the accused.⁸⁸

While the IWW's legal machinery was oriented towards the defense, its revolutionary spirit was also committed to freeing Haywood and Moyer. Fred Heslewood, an IWW organizer,

⁸⁵ For an in-depth overview of the murder, arrests, and eventual trial, see J. Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America* (Simon & Schuster, 1997).

⁸⁶ *Shall Our Brothers Be Murdered?* (c. 1907), IWW Materials Preservation Project.

⁸⁷ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 53.

⁸⁸ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 67.

attempted to form an armed band in Canada to march on Boise, Idaho to free them before being stopped by a more levelheaded Wobbly.⁸⁹ The *International Socialist Review*, not yet closely aligned with the IWW, described the union and other revolutionaries as “somewhat hysterical over this affair,” urging spontaneous general strikes over measured, legalistic responses.⁹⁰ Even the normally tame Eugene Debs, still a member at the time, threatened, “If they attempt to murder Moyer, Haywood and their brothers, a million revolutionists, at least, will meet them with guns.” Debs assured that he would do everything in his power to encourage it.⁹¹

While Haywood was eventually acquitted – and charges against Moyer and Pettibone subsequently dropped – the IWW was also willing to devote its full might and power to the cases of those found guilty, even if they were not major figures in the union, as the Wheatland hop riot and its aftermath demonstrated. In August 1913, workers on the Durst Ranch in Wheatland, California engaged in a spontaneous strike. Richard Ford, a former Wobbly who had been expelled from the union the year prior, worked to coordinate and organize the strike. After the local sheriff and his deputies arrived and opened fire onto the crowd, killing some members of their own group, Ford and Herman Suhr, a Wobbly and friend of Ford, were charged with the murders.⁹²

Ford and Suhr were hardly central figures of the union – Ford, after all, was technically no longer a member at the time of the riot. Nevertheless, the IWW was incensed by the charges against the two men, especially as the police and the courts attempted to foist the blame onto the

⁸⁹ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 67. Renshaw misreports Heslewood’s first name as Frank.

⁹⁰ “The Battle at Boise,” *International Socialist Review*, May 1907, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v07n11-may-1907-ISR-gog-Harv.pdf>, 687-8.

⁹¹ Eugene V. Debs, “Arouse, Ye Slaves!” *Appeal to Reason* (Girard, KS), 10 March 1906, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/appeal-to-reason/060310-appealtoreason-w536-rescueedition.pdf>, 1.

⁹² For a brief overview of the riot and the immediate aftermath, see Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 1-11.

IWW at large. Once again, the IWW's legal defense machinery went into overdrive. It began raising money for the men's legal defense and hired a lawyer to represent them.⁹³ The IWW and sympathizers of Ford and Suhr carried out protests and wrote letters and articles defending the men. When the trial was set to take place in neighboring Marysville, a group of Wobblies came to support the defendants and provide whatever aid to the defense they could.⁹⁴

Yet their support was in vain. On 31 January 1914, Richard Ford and Herman Suhr were found guilty. Rather than stop, or even slow, their legal defense, the IWW doubled down and fought harder for the men's release. Like with Haywood, the IWW took a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, supporters sent a flurry of letters and telegrams supporting the men and asking for pardons.⁹⁵ It specifically sought support from "respectable" citizens to ask for a pardon from California Governor Hiram Johnson.⁹⁶ It also pushed for legalistic maneuvering through the appeals process.⁹⁷

On the other hand, IWW members also figured their best hope lay in direct action and their collective strength. They demanded that Ford and Suhr be freed by 1 August 1914; if not, they would carry out a boycott and a general strike against California hop growers until the two were released. When the date came and went, they carried out their threats.⁹⁸ The strike turned out to be ineffective, so the union escalated its rhetoric, urging workers to commit sabotage – including property destruction – to pressure Johnson. "Don't stick copper nails or tacks in Fruit Trees or Grape Vines ... While FORD and SUHR Are in Jail," one sticker ironically urged.⁹⁹

⁹³ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 52.

⁹⁴ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 267-9.

⁹⁵ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 270-1.

⁹⁶ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 298.

⁹⁷ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 73.

⁹⁸ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 73; Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 13-4.

⁹⁹ Sticker, c. 1915, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

Charles Lambert, secretary of the Sacramento local, even repeatedly praised the idea of burning fields as a means of applying pressure, going so far as to mockingly tell a member of a committee investigating the affair that German spies in the US had been ordered to burn the fields until Ford and Suhr were free.¹⁰⁰

Aside from being ineffective (Johnson decided not to pardon Ford and Suhr precisely because he distrusted the IWW) and dangerous (the IWW's reputation as violent and acting for the German government, which was only reinforced by its behavior in this case, made it an easy target during World War I), it also once again detracted from its ostensible primary goal – organizing workers. The IWW devoted so much of its time and effort to the defense of Ford and Suhr that it sacrificed real opportunities to organize around specific job-related grievances to focus instead on overly ambitious prisoner defense.

The Ford and Suhr case was nowhere near the most egregious example of the IWW prioritizing legal defense. During and after World War I, the American federal government clamped down on the IWW, locking many of its biggest names – including William Haywood, Ralph Chaplin, Vincent Saint John, and more – in prison on sedition charges by arguing they had illegally opposed the war. With their leaders imprisoned, the remaining Wobblies felt obligated to support the imprisoned men, recognizing also that without these men, the IWW was weakened. Consequently, the IWW prioritized legal defense as never before.

Virtually the entire central organization shifted into legal defense mode, with multiple historians concluding that the IWW essentially ceased to function primarily as a labor union in the immediate post-war years.¹⁰¹ Perhaps most indicative of this change was the decision to

¹⁰⁰ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 16-8.

¹⁰¹ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 19; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 444; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 210.

replace *Solidarity* with the *Defense News Bulletin*, which was in part a response to the censorship of *Solidarity* by the postmaster general.¹⁰² Although the inaugural issue of the *Bulletin* assured readers that it would “answer to Injustice by more Industrial Unionism,” industrial unionism increasingly took a backseat to legal defense in the paper’s pages as reports on union organizing were often confined to a single column in later issues.¹⁰³

The IWW’s legalistic approach was somewhat similar to, if more expansive than, that carried out in defense of Haywood and Moyer or Ford and Suhr. It initiated a public lobbying campaign for clemency from the White House with support from Progressives, liberals, socialists, and pacifists, many of whom had also been opposed to the war and/or had experienced repression from the government firsthand.¹⁰⁴ The IWW established a General Defense Committee (GDC) that existed specifically to coordinate the legal defense work both within the IWW and with outside allies.¹⁰⁵ Soon after its founding, the GDC, and the IWW at large, devoted themselves to raising funds for legal appeals and attorney fees, eventually raising an estimated \$1 million (not adjusted for inflation), far more than the union had ever had at its disposal for organizing.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, true to form, the 1919 convention included multiple resolutions demanding a national – or even international – general strike “for the release of all class war

¹⁰² Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 429.

¹⁰³ “We Protest,” *Defense News Bulletin* (Chicago, IL), 3 November 1917, 1, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁰⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 458; Philip S. Foner, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918* (International Publishers, 1987), 305; Philip S. Foner, *Postwar Struggles, 1918-1920* (International Publishers, 1988), 229.

¹⁰⁵ Foner, *Labor and World War I*, 305; “The Greatest Fight in the History of Labor is Now On!” *Solidarity*, 6 October 1917, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1917/v8-w403-oct-06-1917-solidarity.pdf>, 2.

¹⁰⁶ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 210-1. For an example of the IWW’s finances during this period, see *Financial Statement of the Industrial Workers of the World, August and September Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1919), IWW Materials Preservation Project.

prisoners.”¹⁰⁷

The union’s legal appeals were for naught, but the pressure campaign eventually resulted in the release of IWW prisoners by 1923. By that point, however, the damage had already been done. The IWW’s excessive focus on the legal defense of its leadership meant that when they were finally freed, those who returned to the IWW found its union campaigns significantly weaker than when they had left. Although some Wobblies had continued to organize during the defense period, they were not given the support they needed to strengthen their campaigns. Those that succeeded were not given the attention by the national organization they needed to spur on other organizing campaigns.

Yet even focusing on winning strikes and improving conditions for workers did not result in the victories the IWW had hoped for. The IWW and its organizers had an unfortunate tendency to focus on dramatic battles and showy victories rather than the unexciting, though much more important, work of organizing and building up locals. Wobblies noticed the problem even at the IWW’s crest in the early-to-mid 1910s, with one Minnesota Wobbly wryly observing in 1914, “Several ‘organizers’ came to [Minneapolis], pulled off a few sensational stunts, made a lot of noise, then went on their way to more virgin fields, leaving behind an empty treasury as the sole evidence of their ‘successful’ work.”¹⁰⁸

An article by another Wobbly a year prior came to an even grimmer conclusion. The IWW was focused excessively on “sensationalism,” they insisted, and the IWW would never be a serious labor organization until it undertook the difficult task of “quiet organization.” They did not mince words about the effects of this sensationalism, either. “As far as making Industrial

¹⁰⁷ *Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1919), 138-9, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁰⁸ Rich Reese, “New York City and the I.W.W.” *Solidarity*, 21 February 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1914/v05-w215-feb-21-1914-solidarity.pdf>, 2.

Unionism fit the every-day life of the workers we have failed miserably.... Unless we can organize the workers without doing the spectacular, we are doomed.” The focus on publicity and spectacle, they concluded, would have to go if the IWW was to live up to its potential.¹⁰⁹

Nowhere were these criticisms proven more accurate than in the Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912, or the “Bread and Roses Strike.”¹¹⁰ After the workweek had been shortened from 56 to 54 hours for women with a corresponding cut in weekly wages, workers spontaneously took to the streets on their payday, 11 January. When the strike initially began, “some eight hundred joined the strike or were dragged from their machines.”¹¹¹ By 15 January the strike included over 15,000 workers.¹¹² On 13 January, IWW organizer Joseph Ettor helped to form a fifty-six-person strike committee composed of workers of fourteen different nationalities. The committee issued a list of demands: A 15% pay raise, double pay for overtime, an end to the bonus system, and a guarantee not to discriminate against workers involved in the strike.¹¹³

When the strike settled in mid-March, it seemed to be a success – a pay raise, time and a quarter pay for overtime, no discrimination against the strikers, and a reform of the bonus system.¹¹⁴ Months after the strike, organizer Fred Heslewood painted a rosy picture of the effects of the strike, insisting that local unions were “growing by leaps and bounds” as a result of the

¹⁰⁹ L. C. R., “Sensationalism Versus Organizing Ability,” *Solidarity*, 23 August 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1913/v04n33-w189-aug-23-1913-solidarity.pdf>, 2.

¹¹⁰ This summary is drawn from Collin Karst, “A New World from the Ashes of the Old: The Industrial Workers of the World in the Progressive Era” (essay, Rogers State University, 2022), 11. For an in-depth exploration of the strike, see Bruce Watson, *Bread and Roses: Mills, Migrants, and the Struggle for the American Dream* (Penguin Books, 2006).

¹¹¹ Watson, *Bread and Roses*, 12.

¹¹² Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 99-100.

¹¹³ Watson, *Bread and Roses*, 59, 71.

¹¹⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report on Strike of Textile Workers in Lawrence, Mass. In 1912*, 62nd Cong., 2d sess., S. Doc. 62-870, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/SERIALSET-06170_00_00-002-0870-0000/pdf/SERIALSET-06170_00_00-002-0870-0000.pdf, 58.

Lawrence strike.¹¹⁵ Writing his autobiography in the late 1920s, William Haywood, looking back described the strike with similar optimism, calling the results a “magnificent demonstration of solidarity.”¹¹⁶

In reality, the strike had little long-term effect, something that Haywood should have been well aware of. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, in her own autobiography, painted a more accurate picture of the strike’s aftermath. Echoing the criticisms made in the IWW’s newspapers, she noted that the union had “many ... wonderful agitators but poor organizers.”¹¹⁷ The result was a slow but painful drain of the IWW’s strength in Lawrence. Left without the attention or support it had received during the strike, the Lawrence local, Local 20, was unable to defend the gains made as the mills demanded workers to run the mills faster to make up for the wage increase.¹¹⁸ At the same time, most of the leaders of the strike did not stick around to remain leaders of the local, meaning that even if – as Melvyn Dubofsky argues – the IWW was left with capable local leadership in Lawrence, it was not the powerful leadership that had flooded into Lawrence during the strike.¹¹⁹ With the local effectively defanged in the post-strike period, immigrant workers – the main force of the strike – found little to appeal to them in the IWW, starving the local of potential members.¹²⁰ These factors combined spelled disaster for Local 20, which sank from 14,000 members in 1912 to a mere 400 by 1914.¹²¹ Whatever short-term gains the IWW had made in the strike, it failed in every conceivable way to maintain its hold.

The failure to maintain a local presence in Lawrence is indicative of a larger pattern. One

¹¹⁵ Fred W. Heslewood, “After the Big Textile Strike at Lawrence,” *Industrial Worker*, 1 August 1912, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n19-w175-aug-01-1912-IW.pdf>, 1.

¹¹⁶ William D. Haywood, *The Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood* (International Publishers, 2020), 263.

¹¹⁷ Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 150.

¹¹⁸ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 112.

¹¹⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 256.

¹²⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 258.

¹²¹ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 292.

article in *Solidarity* listed Lawrence among a slew of other failed organizing attempts in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania; Paterson, New Jersey; and Akron, Ohio.¹²² Melvyn Dubofsky, discussing the Akron strike, wryly observed that “Such was the splendor of this ... local that within the IWW it was never heard from again.”¹²³ Although he was referring to the Akron rubber workers’ local, it is essentially interchangeable with many other locals that the IWW build in the heat of a strike, left to its own devices in the name of branch autonomy, and effectively left out to dry. In his study of the union, John S. Gambs concluded that, with the strike complete, locals tended to revert to “propaganda activities” rather than organizing.¹²⁴

The IWW’s failure to build its locals and maintain them was exacerbated by its refusal to accept contracts or negotiations with employers. The theory pushed by the IWW was that “industrial unionists [sh]ould abrogate all agreements that would compel them to violate the principles of unionism” since contracts could limit the union’s ability to act.¹²⁵ In practice, however, the lack of enforcing contracts also meant that employers were able to walk back gains won by strikers and hire exclusively non-IWW members to prevent further agitation.¹²⁶ The end result of these factors was that many locals were left weak and defenseless, unequipped to deal with the necessary functions of a union.

The continuous lack of money in the IWW’s treasury did not help locals any either. One of the primary goals of the IWW was to create a union that was open to all workers, including and especially those with low wages. As a result, the preliminary manifesto warned against

¹²² “Reflections of an Organizer,” *Solidarity*, 6 February 1915, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1915/v06-w265-feb-06-1915-solidarity-damaged.pdf>, 2.

¹²³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 287.

¹²⁴ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 185.

¹²⁵ William D. Haywood, “Industrial Unionism,” *Voice of Labor*, June 1905, 3, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹²⁶ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 470.

“[p]rohibitive initiation fees ... that force men to become scabs against their will.”¹²⁷ As a result, the first constitution strictly limited the dues members could be required to pay: No more than \$5 for the initiation fee and no more than \$0.50 per month in dues.¹²⁸

The refusal to charge high dues and initiation fees already meant the IWW would be stuck with a relatively small treasury, but the union’s lack of funds was no mere accident. On the contrary, the IWW actively sought a limited treasury, since full treasuries “inevitably lead the workers to rely upon the money rather than their own efforts.”¹²⁹ Some opponents of a strong centralized headquarters even viewed the lack of a central treasury as vital to protect the power and authority of locals.¹³⁰ Although the IWW also acknowledged that the union’s strikes rely on funds, it pointed out that it depended on fundraising during strikes rather than dipping into any “war chest.” Besides, once the working class carried out a general strike, employers “would yield too soon for the [workers] to need a ‘war chest.’”¹³¹

It helped that, for both ideological and practical reasons, the IWW also did not generally pay its members benefits. Although during the height of the repression it would eventually dole out funds to imprisoned members and their families, the IWW scorned rival unions as “coffin societies,” organizations which were more concerned with paying out sick and death benefits rather than organizing.¹³² From an ideological perspective, Wobblies figured that if the union did

¹²⁷ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 8.

¹²⁸ *Constitution and By-Laws of Industrial Workers of the World* (1905), 13-4, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹²⁹ “Our Purpose,” *Industrial Worker*, 24 October 1912, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n31-w187-oct-24-1912-IW.pdf>, 2.

¹³⁰ Paul Dupres, “The Question of Decentralization,” *Voice of the People* (New Orleans), 9 October 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/lumberjack/131009-voiceofthepeople-v2n40.pdf>, 2.

¹³¹ “Kennedy on the Irwin Strike,” *Solidarity*, 10 September 1910, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1909-1910/v01n39-sep-10-1910-Solidarity-San-Diego.pdf>, 2.

¹³² Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 77n1.

pay out benefits, it might attract more members but it would also be sacrificing its revolutionary and class-conscious nature in the process.¹³³ From a practical perspective, of course, the IWW simply lacked the funds – and the ability to procure the funds – necessary to pay benefits while maintaining its low dues.¹³⁴

Although the IWW may have had its reasons not to fill its treasury, it certainly had no reason, and often no intention, of keeping its treasury as bare as it often was. For its first year, the IWW's funds were drained by the blatant corruption of Charles Sherman and a handful of his cronies, as discussed earlier. When Vincent Saint John took over as general organizer, he found the IWW's funds severely limited, so much so that he was forced to suspend publication of one of the union's major periodicals.¹³⁵ Robert F. Hoxie, a contemporary scholar on labor relations, concluded in a critical article that the IWW possessed “no financial resources even in a slight degree adequate” for its goals, even despite the union's opposition to a large treasury.¹³⁶

By its peak in 1917, the IWW had finally gained enough money to put to good use, almost entirely because of the success of the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (AWIU).¹³⁷ Locals in the Pacific Northwest and in Minnesota, receiving funds from the AWIU's surpluses, were able to renew their struggles for organization, although this did not necessarily equate to success.¹³⁸ On the other hand, when locals were left without money, attempts to organize workers struggled to deal with financial pressure. The strikes in Akron, Ohio (where, despite claiming the strike was not lost due to lack of funds, *Solidarity* concluded that “sharp conflicts ... which

¹³³ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 471.

¹³⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 150.

¹³⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 141.

¹³⁶ R. F. Hoxie, “The Truth About the I.W.W.” *The Journal of Political Economy* 21, no. 9 (1913): 790, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1819758>.

¹³⁷ For an overview of the AWIU and the role it played as the heart of the IWW, see Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*.

¹³⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 321-2, 336; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 511-2.

require little financial aid will prove more effective”)¹³⁹ and Paterson, New Jersey proved how ineffective a lacking treasury could be.¹⁴⁰

Even when the IWW had money, it did not always put it to good use. On occasion, the central headquarters would hold the money, refusing to put it towards ongoing strikes or supporting locals.¹⁴¹ The national leadership was also incredibly slapdash with handling their money, with Paul Brissenden generously describing their recordkeeping as “impressionistic.” There was no universal system for bookkeeping, and countless stories of local secretaries fleeing with the organization’s funds.¹⁴² Even after an attempt at unifying recordkeeping procedures, many locals continued to handle finances informally and off the books, meaning financial records often never made it to central headquarters.¹⁴³ When the government clamped down on the organization during World War I – further exacerbating its difficulties keeping financial records in order – sympathetic attorneys, recognizing the union’s financial woes, offered discounted or even free services.¹⁴⁴ George Vanderveer, the primary attorney for the union during its post-war legal battles, was so taken aback by the poor recordkeeping, “he had demanded to know how in hell the I.W.W. ever expected to run American industry when it couldn’t even handle its own affairs with any slight resemblance to intelligent operation.”¹⁴⁵

The treasury was not the only element of the IWW that was lacking in “intelligent

¹³⁹ “The ‘Big Treasury’ Fallacy,” *Solidarity*, 26 April 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1913/v04n16-w172-apr-26-1913-solidarity.pdf>, 2.

¹⁴⁰ For overviews of the Akron and Paterson strikes, see Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 373-83; and Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 263-85, respectively.

¹⁴¹ For example, see Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 511-2.

¹⁴² Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 330-1.

¹⁴³ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 210.

¹⁴⁴ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 211.

¹⁴⁵ Lowell S. Hawley and Ralph Bushnell Potts, *Counsel for the Damned: A Biography of George Francis Vanderveer* (J. B. Lippincott Company, 1953), <https://archive.org/details/counselfordamned00haw1>, 212-3.

operation.” The union’s national leadership was not always clear and seldom as effective as it could, or should, have been. On the one hand, leadership could sometimes be arbitrary and with little constitutional authority. When the General Defense Committee was established in response to government suppression, for instance, some officials were uncertain where it would fit into the organization or under what authority.¹⁴⁶ This same committee was so tied to its leader, William Haywood, that when his health declined, the GDC all but fell apart.¹⁴⁷

On the other hand, if arbitrary leadership could sometimes be confusing and ineffective, attempts to reduce the power of the leadership tended to hamstring the union in a different way. As early as 1907, organizer Joseph Ettor recognized that rank-and-file Wobblies were all too willing to decry any form of established leadership as reactionary and describe any leader as a “tin god.”¹⁴⁸ Those “tin gods” were held to the highest scrutiny, to the point of absurdity. Fred Heslewood, a fiercely dedicated organizer, was accused of murder and theft based almost solely on the fact that he owned a house.¹⁴⁹ At the 1919 convention, when the IWW needed stability and consistency more than ever, the IWW members who had avoided jail time – mainly those who had little experience in leadership prior – forbade anyone to hold office in the IWW for more than two consecutive terms.¹⁵⁰ One faction, known as decentralizers, even sought to abolish much of the national headquarters. One IWW organizer, a firm opponent of this “freak anarchist” faction, described their goal as “no executive board, no headquarters, no dues, no cards, no

¹⁴⁶ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 56.

¹⁴⁷ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 460.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph J. Ettor, “Pertinent Observations on Political Questions,” *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 19 October 1907, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v1n34-oct-19-1907-iub.pdf>, 1.

¹⁴⁹ “Suspicion,” *Industrial Worker*, 21 August 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v5n20-w228-aug-21-1913-IW.pdf>, 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World*, 89.

secretaries, no convention and no organization.”¹⁵¹

The vision put forward by the decentralizers was closely linked to the fact that many of them were migratory workers with little need for stable, consistent local leadership. These migratory workers often had few ties to industrial locals, instead prioritizing links to mixed locals if they connected with any local. Those who did join industrial locals and work with the IWW on the job often did not do so for long – Vincent Saint John reported that, because of their migratory nature, they tended to drift around the country and out of locals.¹⁵²

The fact that so many Wobblies drifted out of, and then back into, the IWW created a logistical nightmare for an organization which already struggled to maintain its records. Since membership cards had numbers on them, it should have been relatively simple to keep track of how many members the IWW had. However, when delinquent members returned to the union, local secretaries frequently failed to issue duplicate number cards.¹⁵³ Other returning members simply felt embarrassed by the lack of dues stamps in their booklets and found it cheaper to sign up as new members rather than pay back their missed dues.¹⁵⁴ As a result, members who let their membership lapse between working seasons or between locations – of whom there were many – ended up inflating the numbers.¹⁵⁵ Delegates sometimes also received payment for new members they signed up, meaning they had an incentive not just to sign up returning members as new but also to recruit workers with no real interest in the IWW.¹⁵⁶ The natural end result of these

¹⁵¹ John Pancuer, “Report of Organizer in California,” *Industrial Worker*, 14 September 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v3n25-w129-sep-14-1911-IW.pdf>, 3.

¹⁵² Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 269. See also U.S. Congress, Senate, *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 64th Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc 64-415, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hb1tx7>, 4945.

¹⁵³ Vincent Saint John to Paul F. Brissenden, 1 February 1915, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁵⁴ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 136.

¹⁵⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 473

¹⁵⁶ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 99.

practices was uncertainty about the IWW's membership standings and exaggerated reports.

Yet the IWW also dealt with the opposite problem. Although its membership was often overstated, its influence was often understated. Paul Brissenden estimated that the IWW had an average turnover rate of 133% from 1909 to 1919.¹⁵⁷ As a consequence, he estimated that, by 1919, approximately 191,000 people had been members of the IWW at one time or another.¹⁵⁸ Patrick Renshaw, taking a more generous approach, concluded that "perhaps as many as one million workers held IWW cards, and were exposed to IWW propaganda, at one time in their lives."¹⁵⁹ The IWW's strength was never measured fully by its membership numbers, which meant that times where its membership numbers sank did not necessarily spell defeat for the union. At the same time, however, it only exacerbated the IWW's already existing recordkeeping problems and further emphasized its disjointed and disorganized structure.

The fact that the IWW was both revolutionary and experimental meant that it often struggled to find an effective and suitably radical method of functioning. Many union officials, who were more interested in a climactic battle against the bosses than keeping the appropriate records, treated the organization as a vehicle for social revolution rather than as a trade union which happened to be revolutionary. At the same time, many rank-and-file members held similar views, prioritizing political philosophizing and challenging the power of the police rather than the slow, quiet organizing which was so integral to building a labor movement.

The IWW's structures and ideology also meant that neither locals nor the national headquarters were particularly effective. Prioritizing dramatic showdowns over organizing, locals did not always receive the support they needed to maintain their gains. At the same time, a

¹⁵⁷ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 350.

¹⁵⁸ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 335.

¹⁵⁹ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 2.

rampant distrust of centralized power resulted in a defanged national leadership. Those national leaders did not make their own job any easier through their poor recordkeeping and their refusal to build up important, but non-revolutionary, structures like a well-funded treasury. These factors combined to essentially hamstring the IWW, largely by its own decisions in the pursuit of a new revolutionary unionism.

Later Divisions

While the IWW was struggling with becoming an effective union, the groundwork was being laid for a third, and significantly more devastating split in 1924. Throughout the 1910s, many Wobblies began to recognize that the path the union was taking was untenable and that it needed to change. By the latter tail end of the decade, the IWW was also forced by outside circumstances to tackle new and controversial issues. As these issues came to the forefront, Wobblies took sides and split, weakening the union once again.

One of the earliest of these issues, and perhaps the most important in the union's 1924 split, was the issue of centralization. From its inception, the IWW had to grapple with the question of structure and authority. At the founding convention, delegates fiercely debated how the organization would be subdivided and what role locals and departments would play. Although the founders ultimately agreed to a somewhat centralized national structure, the exact shape of the union was up in the air.¹⁶⁰ The issue was not solved at the first convention, however; it was merely postponed.

The centralization question reared its head again in the early 1910s. The 1911 convention saw western locals pushing for limits on the General Executive Board (GEB, the union's central

¹⁶⁰ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 97-8.

council), though in a write-up for the *International Socialist Review*, Ben Williams assured readers that the decentralist element was the result of “[m]isunderstandings” which were quickly put to rest as the western delegates were “enlighten[ed].”¹⁶¹ At the 1912 convention, shortly after the strike in Lawrence, the two separate referenda were put forward to abolish conventions and replace them with referendums, preventing any form of representation and prioritizing direct democracy.¹⁶² Ultimately, however, the convention did not firmly pick a side, as Paul Brissenden alleges that the delegates leaned “centralist on strike [policy] and decentralist on free-speech fights” by allowing the GEB to limit strikes but not allowing it a say in free speech fights.¹⁶³

Here, too, the issue was not solved as it came up again at the 1913 convention. Once again, the decentralists sought to abolish the GEB, the position of General Organizer, annual conventions, and reduce the power of the General Secretary-Treasurer to the role of a mere “recording and transmitting secretary.”¹⁶⁴ For days, the delegates discussed the myriad measures to decentralize the union and weaken, if not outright abolish, its national positions, though it ultimately rejected radical decentralization.¹⁶⁵ In the aftermath, the decentralists mourned their loss at the convention without giving up their fight. “That the idea of the decentralists will triumph, there is no doubt,” one concluded, while conceding that they had not triumphed at the convention.¹⁶⁶ The decentralizers’ anarchist sympathizers were less hopeful. “We consider the Convention... a sad failure,” Alexander Berkman wrote, and the IWW would remain as such

¹⁶¹ B. H. Williams, “Sixth I. W. W. Convention,” *International Socialist Review*, November 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v12n05-nov-1911-ISR-gog-Corn.pdf>, 301.

¹⁶² Report of the Seventh Annual Convention: Industrial Workers of the World (n.p., 1912), 7, 12, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁶³ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 297.

¹⁶⁴ *Stenographic Report of the Eighth Annual Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (I. W. W. Publishing Bureau, 1913), 43, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁶⁵ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 308.

¹⁶⁶ G. Gabriel Soltes, “Convention Notes,” *Voice of the People*, 23 October 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/lumberjack/131023-voiceofthepeople-v2n42.pdf>, 2.

unless “the real militants and revolutionists” in the organization would oppose the reaction of the centralists.¹⁶⁷ Even *Solidarity*’s editor, aligned with the centralizer faction, expressed weariness. “I can scarcely say that this convention has been a big success.”¹⁶⁸

The decentralizers, damaged but undestroyed after the 1913 convention, continued their fight against centralization after the 1913 convention. Throughout the country, newspapers which promoted the decentralist view, labeled the “Rebel press” (by both themselves and their opponents), continued to advocate for limits to and even abolition of the union’s central authority.¹⁶⁹ The AWIU, itself dealing with internal debates about centralization, was also forced to deal with an attempt in California to form an agricultural workers’ union separate from the AWIU, though this independent union lasted only a few months.¹⁷⁰

Some decentralists from the West Coast also attempted to create something of a “compromise between the idea of absolutely self-governing locals on the one side and servile locals completely controlled by a bureaucratic machine on the other” in the form of the Pacific Coast District Organization (PCDO). The ostensible goal of the PCDO was to create an organization which was closer to the western locals which felt alienated from the central Chicago headquarters.¹⁷¹ Delegates at the IWW’s 1911 convention concluded that if the PCDO truly lived

¹⁶⁷ Alexander Berkman, “The I. W. W. Convention,” *Mother Earth*, October 1913, <https://archive.org/details/mother-earth/Mother%20Earth%20v08n08%20%281913-10%29%20%28c2c%20Harvard%20DSR%29,234>.

¹⁶⁸ “8th I. W. W. Convention,” *Solidarity*, 4 October 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1913/v04n39-w195-oct-04-1913-solidarity.pdf>, 1.

¹⁶⁹ Covington Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South & Other Writings* (Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1999), 200-1.

¹⁷⁰ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 97.

¹⁷¹ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 312.

up to its goals, it “was fully justified and would be supported.”¹⁷² Not all agreed that it was living up to its goals, however. At the 1913 convention, one delegate decried the PCDO as a “scheme to kill the [*Industrial Worker*].”¹⁷³ The editor of *Solidarity*, Ben Williams, concluded even more boldly that the goal of the PCDO was to “disrupt the I. W. W. and form an independent organization in the West.”¹⁷⁴

Yet the centralizers were not content to merely react to the actions of their opponents. They, too, dedicated great effort to ensuring their vision for the IWW’s future was the one which would prevail. The GEB, the target of so much of the decentralists’ ire, issued a report condemning those “whose sole purpose seems to be to disrupt the organization,” calling out the decentralizer faction by name.¹⁷⁵ General secretary-treasurer Vincent Saint John, however, was not content with mere denunciations. Fearing the Portland local’s decentralizing tendencies, he suggested an associate “colonize the local” and ensure it stays under centralist control.¹⁷⁶ When he discovered that two Arizona locals were operating effectively entirely independently, he handed another Wobbly a gun and urged him to “deal with” the locals, though there was ultimately no need for bloodshed.¹⁷⁷

The centralizers, heretofore acting more as anti-decentralizers rather than as centralizers, made a dramatic – and successful – push for centralization at the 1916 convention. The delegates established a general recruiting union which would act as a centralized organization to direct new

¹⁷² “Criticism of the Convention,” *Solidarity*, 21 October 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1911/v02n44-w096-oct-21-1911-Solidarity.pdf>, 2.

¹⁷³ *Stenographic Report of the Eighth Annual Convention*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ “Criticism of the Convention.”

¹⁷⁵ *Stenographic Report of the Eighth Annual Convention*, 103.

¹⁷⁶ Vincent Saint John to Jack Law, 29 August 1914, reproduced in Eric Thomas Chester (ed.), *Yours for Industrial Freedom: The Industrial Workers of the World from the Inside* (Levellers Press, 2017), 13.

¹⁷⁷ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 131-2.

members to their proper industrial unions, consolidated the union's operations in Chicago, and abolished the position of general organizer and transferred the powers to those of the general secretary-treasurer.¹⁷⁸ Walter Nef, the AWIU general secretary, speaking in favor of abolishing the general organizer position, succinctly declared, "Put one man in charge."¹⁷⁹ That "one man" was William Haywood, whom Melvyn Dubofsky declared had "found himself commander-in-chief of an expanding empire," unchallenged by any other major figure.¹⁸⁰ Ben Williams declared that the centralization efforts "promote a better system and more efficiency in the work of organization."¹⁸¹ Although the results of the convention seemed an unambiguous success for the centralizers, and an unmitigated disaster for the decentralizers, it was not the end of the issue. As Paul Brissenden explained regarding the 1913 convention, decentralism "was not annihilated...; it was merely smothered."¹⁸²

At around this same time, though largely independently of the centralization question, the IWW was also weighing its options when it came to dealing with World War I which had broken out in Europe in 1914. Although the United States was not yet involved in the war, Wobblies quickly engaged in debates about how to approach the war. The conclusion they came to rather quickly was that it was all but inevitable that the United States would be dragged into the war. When *Solidarity* put out a special issue devoted to the war question, organizer Harrison George wrote an article entitled "Can America Keep Out of the War?" The conclusion he came to, in the

¹⁷⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 344.

¹⁷⁹ *Proceedings of the Tenth Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1917), 75, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁸⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 345.

¹⁸¹ "Some Questions about the Tenth Convention," *Solidarity*, 20 January 1917, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1917/v8-w367-jan-20-1917-solidarity.pdf>, 2.

¹⁸² Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 306.

first sentence, was a firm no.¹⁸³ While George's opinion about the inevitability of American involvement in the war was reflective of the broader IWW, his view on what to do about the war was not. The union largely concluded that the war should be condemned and opposed, but that the IWW should not actively undertake anti-war agitation. Although the IWW sometimes used language which suggested organized action – a resolution at the 1914 convention, for instance, promised that IWW members would “refuse to fight for any purpose except for the realization of industrial freedom”¹⁸⁴ – it largely came to the conclusion that the IWW should not actively work to oppose the war, if for no other reason than because the IWW was unprepared to stop the war, and any attempts to do so with its small and relatively uncoordinated membership would be a mere “utopian” effort.¹⁸⁵ Other members pointed out that focusing on anti-war organizing would detract from union work and organizing workers.¹⁸⁶

Yet although the IWW as an organization had largely confined itself to passive criticism of the war by the time the United States entered, it was not enough to stop severe repression by the federal government. Recognizing the government's hostility towards the IWW, some Wobblies recognized that the war provided a justification for the federal government to clamp down.¹⁸⁷ Despite this recognition, the union stayed on its course of criticizing the war while not actively organizing against it, and the federal government clamped down. Articles and statements from the IWW criticizing elements of the war, even from years before the United States had

¹⁸³ Harrison George, “Can America Keep Out of the War?” *Solidarity*, 31 October 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1914/v05-w251-oct-31-1914-solidarity.pdf>, 1.

¹⁸⁴ “The Ninth I. W. W. Convention,” *Solidarity*, 3 October 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1914/v05-w247-oct-03-1914-solidarity.pdf>, 4.

¹⁸⁵ B. H. Williams, “Recent Strikes and the War,” *Solidarity*, 16 October 1915, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1915/v06-w301-oct-16-1915-solidarity.pdf>, 3.

¹⁸⁶ For example, see “Renewed I. W. W. Activity,” *Solidarity*, 7 April 1917, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1917/v8-w378-apr-07-1917-solidarity.pdf>.

¹⁸⁷ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 358.

entered, were used against the union.¹⁸⁸ Articles in the IWW's press which had criticized the idea of a draft were used to justify charges of impeding the draft and defying the newly passed Espionage Act.¹⁸⁹ Although the Act had not even come into play until 15 June 1917, the trial involved evidence written as far back as 1914. Yet to Frank Nebeker, the prosecuting attorney, this mattered little. Although the union's stance may not have explicitly broken any laws at the time, he argued it "was just like making a large caliber cannon and pointing it directly at the Government as soon as we got into war."¹⁹⁰ Despite the shaky legal standing of the cases, the federal government successfully prosecuted major IWW leaders in a series of trials at the end of the war.

The prosecutions, while damaging, were only precursors to the debate over commutations and clemency that combined with the debate over centralization to split the IWW in 1924. After the mass arrests of Wobblies, the IWW once again prioritized its legal defense machinery, hiring lawyers to represent the accused in court and, when they were found guilty, to issue appeals and challenge the legitimacy of the trials. But as the GDC and its hired attorneys worked through the court system, an alternative avenue of freedom for the prisoners was presented: pardons and commutations.

As the war, and the patriotic hysteria that came with it, drew to a close, anti-war sympathizers and civil libertarians urged Woodrow Wilson to rethink the repression of anti-war activists. Wilson refused, but his successor Warren G. Harding opened the door for relaxation, allowing prisoners to submit individual appeals for clemency. Although ostensibly an offer of mercy, by allowing only individual appeals, Harding's offer divided the IWW. The IWW's

¹⁸⁸ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 200.

¹⁸⁹ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 79.

¹⁹⁰ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 119.

official position was that prisoners must remain united, and that either all would be free or none would be free. After all, if the imprisoned Wobblies were tried collectively, then they must be freed collectively.¹⁹¹ Even more importantly, the first offers of clemency required a renunciation of the IWW and a promise to obey the law, tacitly admitting that they had broken the law by being IWW members in the first place.¹⁹²

Since many of those arrested were leaders and diehard adherents to the IWW, they were skeptical of the offer and unwilling to denounce the one big union. Those Wobblies imprisoned in Leavenworth voted “[b]y a large majority” to pursue collective rather than individual clemency appeals.¹⁹³ Anything other than collective action would have been a betrayal of the IWW’s ideals and, more importantly, “traitorship to our class.”¹⁹⁴ Not content with merely taking a stance, the hardcore prisoners and their allies in the IWW at large decided to enforce their collective solidarity. Any prisoners who made individual appeals for clemency would have their families cut off from stipends and financial support.¹⁹⁵ At the IWW’s 1922 convention, delegates further decided to expel all Wobblies who appealed for clemency individually and publish the names of “those breaking solidarity.”¹⁹⁶

Yet the fact that the convention felt the need to punish those who pursued clemency on their own reflects the fact that some prisoners held no such reservations. Fairweather Wobblies soon renounced the union in order to gain their freedom. Some immigrants among the group

¹⁹¹ “An Open Letter to the President from 52 Members of the I. W. W. Now in Leavenworth Penitentiary,” 1922, 5, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁹² Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 461; Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 229.

¹⁹³ *Minutes of the 14th General Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1922), 25, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

¹⁹⁴ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 196.

¹⁹⁵ Chester, *The Wobblies in their Heyday*, 217-8; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 203-4.

¹⁹⁶ *Minutes of the 14th General Convention*, 51.

accepted deportation as a means of getting out of prison.¹⁹⁷ Eventually, prison started to wear even on those who had been committed to the cause. E. F. Doree, who had earlier described the idea of individual clemency as “traitorship” and spent years steeling the resolve of his fellow prisoners, finally accepted a commutation after his son became gravely ill, decrying the IWW in a private letter to his wife.¹⁹⁸ By June 1923, with the hysteria of the war and the Red Scare fading, the continued incarceration of political prisoners no longer felt necessary to many Americans. That month, President Warren G. Harding offered commutations, unasked, to some of the remaining Wobblies in prison, over half of whom accepted, including men who had signed the open letter declaring they would only accept commutations collectively. Still others held to their principles and declined.¹⁹⁹ Yet even those who refused any form of individual clemency did not have much longer to wait as Calvin Coolidge, Harding’s vice president who succeeded him after his death, issued unconditional clemencies to all remaining Wobblies in December.²⁰⁰

The end of imprisonment did not result in the end of tensions, however. Although the IWW members released in the June 1923 commutation had not been expelled from the union, those who had refused, or not been offered, that same deal distrusted them. James Rowan, an avid decentralizer and the chief player in the 1924 split, had particular ire for Ralph Chaplin, who had accepted the June commutation. When Chaplin joined the GDC after being freed from prison, Rowan insisted that, if he were allowed to remain on the committee, the IWW would become a “crooked, yellow, opportunistic fakeration ... selling out the workers.” Chaplin opted to resign.²⁰¹ Others who had rejected clemency made similar accusations against those who had

¹⁹⁷ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 229.

¹⁹⁸ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 235.

¹⁹⁹ Harry Daugherty to W. I. Biddle, 21 June 1923, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

²⁰⁰ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 222.

²⁰¹ Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.*, 64.

accepted, hurling insults at these “traitors.”²⁰²

The uncompromising attacks against the “clemency hounds” were only part of the damage caused by the mass imprisonments. Many capable Wobblies grew disillusioned with the union while in prison or felt out of place returning, instead opting to abandon the cause.²⁰³ Even those who did return to the IWW sometimes did “apparently from habit, and not conviction.”²⁰⁴ Perhaps nothing was so clearly devastating as the decision of William Haywood and eight others to jump bail and flee to the Soviet Union. Haywood had, for better and for worse, been the public face of the union and the de facto leader. His abandonment of his fellow workers not only left them without the man so many revered, but it also left the union in serious financial difficulties as it was forced to repay the \$80,000 in forfeited bail.²⁰⁵

Making Haywood’s departure worse was the underlying debate about how to deal with the issue of Communism and the Soviet Union among the IWW. The Communist Party, acting on orders from the Communist International, offered to assist Haywood and others in escaping to the Soviet Union, allegedly promising to pay back any forfeited bond money.²⁰⁶ Soon after, however, the Party denied it had made any such promise.²⁰⁷

The role of the Communist Party in helping Haywood flee and their supposed promises to repay forfeited bail added fuel to an already burning fire. When the Bolshevik Revolution had broken out in November 1917, Wobblies were all but ubiquitous in their celebration. When they first heard the news, many were being held in jail awaiting trial. In their cells, they sang, “All

²⁰² Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 223.

²⁰³ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 258-9; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 209.

²⁰⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 462.

²⁰⁵ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 212-3; Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (University of Chicago Press, 1948), 302-3.

²⁰⁶ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 302.

²⁰⁷ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 230-1.

hail to the Bolsheviks!”²⁰⁸ They were so loud in their jubilation that passersby could hear the prisoners sing.²⁰⁹

The most enthusiastic of the pro-Bolshevik Wobblies attempted to align the union with the Russian revolutionaries. Harrison George put out a pamphlet about the revolution, urging readers to “[i]magine the Industrial Workers of the World ... controlling as well as operating all industries, and you have the same thing” as the Bolshevik Revolution.²¹⁰ Haywood, too, embraced the revolution, telling Chaplin, “Here is what we have been dreaming about; here is the I.W.W. all feathered out!”²¹¹ The 1919 convention – the first held since the revolution – also included a declaration praising the creation of “workers’ republics” in Russia and elsewhere.²¹² Enthusiasm was so prevalent, in fact, one curmudgeonly Wobbly complained of being “saturated with the Party! Party! Party! and State! State! State! stuff.”²¹³

He was not the only one skeptical of the pro-Communist bent of the IWW. While the pages of *Solidarity* were filled with discussion of the merits of affiliating with the Communist International, the western *Industrial Worker* rejected any such ties.²¹⁴ *The One Big Union Monthly*, a monthly periodical launched in 1919, similarly rejected any such affiliation, urging readers in no uncertain terms to ignore the claims of “soviet maniacs” who were nothing more than “half-wits, brazen adventurers, crafty politicians and agent provocateurs.”²¹⁵ The anti-Soviet

²⁰⁸ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 204.

²⁰⁹ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 235.

²¹⁰ Harrison George, *The Red Dawn: The Bolsheviks and the I. W. W.* (I. W. W. Publishing Bureau, n.d.), <https://archive.org/details/TheRedDawnTheBolsheviksAndTheI.w.w>, 18.

²¹¹ Haywood, *The Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood*, 370.

²¹² *Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention*, 148.

²¹³ Jack Murphy, “Communist Party Activity in I. W. W.” *Solidarity*, 18 September 1920, 2, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

²¹⁴ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 80.

²¹⁵ “The Referendum on the Third International,” *One Big Union Monthly*, November 1920, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/one-big-union-monthly/v02n11-nov-1920_One%20Big%20Union.pdf, 50.

agitation by the *Monthly* came at a good time as the IWW at large began to pivot away from the Communist International, with a new General Executive Board more dubious about the Soviet experiment came in. With the shift came the ouster of *Solidarity*'s pro-Communist editor, with the GEB declaring him to be “not fully in accord with the policy” of the IWW.²¹⁶ Even so, the views of the *One Big Union Monthly* were deemed so “reactionary” that the editor was removed and the name changed to the *Industrial Pioneer* to separate itself from the previous editor's views.²¹⁷

As the union's leadership grew more skeptical of – if not outright hostile to – the Communist International, the rank-and-file membership seemed to lean that way too. Even those, like Haywood, who had fled to the Soviet Union became increasingly disillusioned with the re-establishment of the wage system; an American Communist complained that they were “obsessed with the idea that they don't need bosses.”²¹⁸ Near the end of 1920, the GEB put a referendum to the membership on the question of affiliation with the Third International. The first question, of unqualified endorsement of the International, lost handily. The other two questions, endorsing the International but with reservations, were much closer. Ultimately, however, the GEB threw out the entire referendum results.²¹⁹

Although the exact results and legitimacy of the referendum are uncertain, the GEB at least seemed to feel empowered by the seeming skepticism of the membership towards the Communist movement. Even the Communist Party itself, before the results were published,

²¹⁶ *Minutes of the 13th Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1921), 11, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

²¹⁷ *Minutes of the 13th Convention*, 18.

²¹⁸ Alfred Pearson, Jr. to Edwin Ludlow, 16 October 1922, 1997.078, box 1, folder 3, Edwin Ludlow Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

²¹⁹ “Vote on the Referendum,” *Solidarity*, 18 December 1920, 4, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

recognized that the anti-Communist “yellow leaders” had come out on top.²²⁰ When the IWW was offered membership in the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), a Communist-oriented international labor union federation, the GEB opposed affiliation “in any manner” with the RILU.²²¹ While the Communist Party had warned against the “vacillating” views of the IWW leaders in 1920, by 1922, they vacillated no more.²²² The GEB had made it clear that the IWW was not to be a part of the burgeoning Communist movement.

Yet the declarations of the GEB were not final. Even after rejecting affiliation with the RILU, Communists and sympathizers both within and without the IWW continued to push for ties between the groups, making further conflict inevitable. At about this same time, the clemency debate was at its height as the IWW struggled to come to terms with how to handle those who had accepted, and those who had rejected, clemency offers. The bubbling up of the issue of decentralization only added fuel to the fire. The mixture of controversies made battle inevitable, and the 1924 convention would be the battlefield.

The actual schism began, as in 1908, with a debate over technicalities. The rules for calling a meeting of the GEB had recently been changed, and the new ones were unclear. As a result, in July 1924, GEB members attempted to call a meeting without the support of General Secretary-Treasurer Tom Doyle and General Organizer Joe Fisher, leaving the validity of the meeting uncertain. Rather than attempt to compromise and solve the crisis, James Rowan – ardent decentralizer and fierce opponent of “clemency hounds” – encouraged the GEB members to meet on their own without Doyle and Fisher. Moreover, the Rowan group voted to expel

²²⁰ “The Yellow Leaders of the I. W. W.” *The Communist*, 15 December 1920, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/thecommunist/thecommunist3/v2n15-dec-15-1920.pdf>, 2.

²²¹ *The First Congress of the Red Trade Union International at Moscow, 1921* (Industrial Workers of the World, n.d.), 55, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

²²² “The Yellow Leaders of the I. W. W.”

Doyle and Fisher. Doyle and Fisher, meanwhile, responded in turn, holding their own meeting with supporters and voting to expel Rowan and the dissident GEB members, even physically driving them from the headquarters building.²²³

Although Rowan's actions escalated the situation, Doyle and Fisher were unpopular among the IWW membership due to their financial mishandling (the treasury, at this point, was nearly empty), their tendency to act without proper authority, and their heavy-handed way of dealing with Rowan's rebellion.²²⁴ Regardless of constitutional legitimacy, the Rowanites were in a strong position to win over the IWW membership to their cause. They soon squandered their good will, however. Centralizers raised firm objections to following a man who, aside from being an "ego-maniac bent on rule or ruin," advocated decentralization, secessionism, and a weakened central headquarters.²²⁵ Their greatest sin, however, was to seek a court injunction to prevent Doyle and Fisher from holding control of the union's finances, which historian Patrick Renshaw wryly notes is "yet another example of extreme revolutionaries calling in 'the legal lackeys of capitalism' to help their cause."²²⁶ Contemporary Wobblies saw it the same way. The cover page of the union's *General Office Bulletin*, the IWW's in-house discussion forum and administrative report, rhetorically asked, "Shall the Membership Decide? OR Shall the Capitalist Court Decide?"²²⁷

The membership's disillusionment with the leadership feud only grew at the 1924 convention – or more accurately, conventions. Both the Rowan faction – now calling themselves EPs after their newly promoted Emergency Program – and the Doyle-Fisher faction had called

²²³ Robinson, "Social Movement Organizations in Decline," 62.

²²⁴ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 211.

²²⁵ "What's It All About?" *General Office Bulletin*, July 1924, 4, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

²²⁶ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 211.

²²⁷ *General Office Bulletin*, 19 August 1924, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

their own convention into session, leading delegates uncertain which to attend.²²⁸ Many delegates eventually opted to meet independently, and Doyle and Fisher recognized this meeting as legitimate.²²⁹ When the convention eventually came into session, the primary topic of discussion was the split and the ongoing injunction. In an attempt to solve the dispute, the delegates decided to oust all leaders of both factions and elect a temporary administration that would not include “any one [sic] involved in the general headquarters controversy.”²³⁰ With the issue seemingly solved, IWW periodical *Industrial Solidarity* urged members to “accept the findings laboriously arrived at” in the convention and to move on from the debate and focus on the real issue – “fighting the boss.”²³¹

Yet the IWW was unwilling, or perhaps unable, to move on so easily. Even in the same issue, the new GEB put out a warning against the “fraudulent outfit” claiming the name of the IWW – the EPs.²³² The GEB’s warnings of the threats of the EPs were exaggerated; it likely never had more than a few hundred members.²³³ Even if the EPs were not a threat, the split itself had crippled the union. Fred Thompson, in his in-house history of the IWW notes that most members, so appalled by the behaviors of both factions, simply “dropped out the middle.” Most Wobblies, he argues, “consider this 1924 split definitely the worst thing that ever happened to it.”²³⁴ One member even found the split to be so devastating that she assumed it had been

²²⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 466.

²²⁹ *Minutes of the Sixteenth Constitutional General Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1924), 27, IWW Materials Preservation Project; Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 118.

²³⁰ *Minutes of the Sixteenth Constitutional General Convention*, 13.

²³¹ “The Convention is Over,” *Industrial Solidarity* (Chicago), 19 November 1924, 2, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

²³² “Warning,” *Industrial Solidarity*, 19 November 1924, 1.

²³³ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 122-3.

²³⁴ Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 143.

successfully “engineered” by some conspiracy with the intention of breaking the union up.²³⁵

Although she was wrong that the split was the result of outside malicious forces, it is not hard to understand how it may have appeared that way. Had the IWW’s enemies (and there was no shortage of them) sought to destroy the IWW from the inside out, they could not have done a much better job. The fact that the schism was based on such controversial questions about the methods of organization, the proper behavior of revolutionaries, and the IWW’s future among the global left meant that tempers naturally ran hot. On such contentious and seemingly vital questions, differing views were not mere disagreements to those involved; instead, they were indicators of reaction, counter-revolution, labor fakirism, and every other accusation which Wobbly speakers loved to label their opponents. The 1924 split, indeed, was the culmination of nearly every unsolved issue and debate amongst the IWW from the past 20 years all come to a dramatic and irreparable boil.

Conclusion

The IWW was created on rocky foundations, and this instability became an almost permanent feature of the union. The fact that it was founded by such a diverse coalition – political socialists of both major socialist parties, anarchists and syndicalists who wanted nothing to do with politics, “pure and simple” trade unionists concerned only with moderate labor unionism, and the ever-present threat of grifters and “labor fakirs” – all but guaranteed that the IWW would be forced to decide which way to go, shedding off members and allies all along the way. Yet although this decision making may have been a necessity, it was a catastrophic necessity for the union. Each split and decision lost the IWW allies, support, and power,

²³⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 467.

eventually leaving it with significantly weakened capacity.

The revolutionary fervor and ideological purity also led to several unnecessary schisms as well. Personal animosity and distrust resulted in factionalism and accusations which alienated both parties and neutral observers. Blinded by this internal warfare, many Wobblies dedicated more time to fighting against their fellow workers than to fighting against the bosses. Every debated issue was, in the eyes of many Wobblies, a benchmark test for revolutionism. Questions of organizational tactics, clemency, mixed locals, and legal defense were indicators of either reaction or revolution. As a result, no issue was too small to split the union over.

As if the infighting was not devastating enough, the fact that the IWW was so new and experimental means that the union often engaged in strategies which were not conducive to effective organizing or growth. Since so many members were so ideologically committed, however, it was also sometimes unwilling to change even when its tactics were ineffective. The IWW focused on fighting the class war, fomenting revolution, or building consciousness often at the expense of organizing workers. Its unionism, in fact, was sometimes more of an aspect of its revolutionism than a goal in and of itself.

All these factors combined ensured that the IWW was often somewhat weak, fragile, and uncoordinated. Although not intentional, Wobblies effectively hamstrung the union and tore it apart from the inside out. The result was a union that seemed to grow increasingly weak and less stable. Yet although the IWW's own internal flaws and weaknesses played a significant role in the union's decline, it also played a role in the IWW's tenuous relationships with other groups and organizations which, in turn, further exacerbated the already-present weaknesses.

Chapter Two: External Relationships

The IWW formed at an opportune time; the early 20th century was the height of the radical left in the United States. By the early 1910s, the Socialist Party of America claimed over 100,000 members.²³⁶ Left-wing populist and agrarian socialist groups like the Farmer-Labor Party, the Nonpartisan League, and the Working Class Union sprang up across the United States, especially in the Midwest. These groups, and others like them, insisted that the abolition of capitalism would offer a better, brighter future, a vision that aligned with that of the IWW.

At the same time as leftists pushed for an end to capitalism, more moderate reformers in the Progressive movement pushed for a more humane variant. Their arguments for improved working conditions, shorter hours, and better pay for workers in the economic field, combined with their advocacy of more democratic and egalitarian governance, made Progressives seemingly natural allies of the labor movement. Like many labor unions, including the IWW, these reformers hoped to see workers get their fair share and avoid seeing anyone living in the slums or the streets.

Other labor unions in the US also fought for the dignity of the American worker. Like the Progressives, they sought to improve wages, hours, and conditions and prevent any workers from starving. They fought against the frequently harsh treatment by their employers and hoped to see the day when workers might be in control of their own lives. This, too, made unions like the AFL important friends for the IWW to make.

Yet despite these seemingly obvious alliances, the IWW made few friends in its heyday. Although many of these groups sometimes shared common cause with the IWW, they differed in both methods and ultimate goals. While the IWW was willing to cooperate with rival groups on

²³⁶ James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (Monthly Review Press, 1967), <https://archive.org/details/declineofsociali00weinrich>, 27.

occasion, and these groups were sometimes willing to set aside their disdain for the IWW to work together, the IWW never made any permanent, long-lasting alliances. Socialists, labor unions, reformers, and farmers all moved between being enemies, allies, and passive observers of the IWW.

While neither the IWW nor the external groups were especially determined to overcome their disagreements, it was the IWW which suffered the most as a result. Because the union frequently found itself without allies and with plenty of enemies, it was often engaged in battles on multiple fronts, preventing it from acting effectively. Moreover, when the IWW's enemies, such as the government or employers, sought to crush the IWW during and after World War I, it lacked allies to come to its defense. These tense relationships exacerbated already existing issues for the IWW and further weakened it, resulting in weaknesses and decline as the IWW was largely left to stand alone by the mid-1910s.

Socialists and the Political Left

At the time of the IWW's founding, the American left was divided amongst itself. Two major socialist political parties existed in the United States: the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and the Socialist Party of America (SPA). The parties were frequent critics of each other, based just as much on ideological differences as personality and history. Despite the SPA only being founded in 1901, it quickly became the dominant socialist party in the United States, which further drew the ire of the older SLP.

While socialists split along party lines, they also split within the party. Daniel De Leon, leader of the SLP in the early 20th century, maintained an iron grip over the party, meaning that those SLP members who remained in the party firmly followed his line. The SPA, on the other hand, was a much more eclectic combination. Members of the SPA included moderate social

democrats, radical industrial unionists, agrarian socialists, and even “utopian” socialists who took inspiration more from Edward Bellamy than Karl Marx. Despite the menagerie of political ideologies within the party, members generally fell into one of two groups: the left wing, or the “Reds,” who supported more radical and revolutionary variants of socialism and sought to move beyond electoral politics; and the right wing, or the “Yellows,” who advocated more moderate, reformist electoral socialism.

As the founders of the IWW attempted to build a new organization, they sought to make connections to both political parties, but especially the SPA. When they set up a secret meeting in January 1905 to begin to lay the groundwork for the new organization, they reached out to such figures in the Socialist Party as Eugene Debs and Algie Simons, both associated with the party’s left wing, and Max Hayes and Victor Berger, associated with the right. Daniel De Leon, however, was not invited to the secret conference.²³⁷

The January conference signaled the first rift between the Socialist Party and the not-yet-formed IWW. Neither Hayes nor Berger attended the conferences, criticizing the attempts to form a new union. Berger argued in the Milwaukee *Social-Democratic Herald* that by splitting from the AFL, industrial unionists would make it harder for the AFL to ever transition towards industrial unionism as opposed to its traditional craft unionism.²³⁸ Hayes, meanwhile, wrote a letter rejecting the invitation. He similarly argued that a new union would weaken attempts to take over the AFL and also added that a new union specifically intended to promote socialism would result in “another running fight between Socialists on the one side and all the other partisans on the other,” which would only result in a weakening of the broader labor

²³⁷ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 111.

²³⁸ *Social-Democratic Herald* (Milwaukee), 14 December 1904, quoted in Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 16.

movement.²³⁹

Despite the reservations of the Yellow Socialists, a formal founding conference went ahead all the same, with Daniel De Leon in attendance. Although Simons was unable to resist sniping at De Leon, a spirit of cooperation nevertheless permeated the convention. De Leon, known for his stubborn dogmatism and unwillingness to compromise, even assured delegates that he and “Brother Debs” had “[shaken] hands over the bloody chasm,” putting aside their differences to unify the American labor movement.²⁴⁰

At the end of the convention, members of both the SPA and SLP had helped form a new organization – the Industrial Workers of the World. Yet although members of both parties worked to create the new union, neither party officially affiliated with it. On the contrary, in fact, the preamble of the IWW’s constitution explicitly rejected “affiliation with any political party.”²⁴¹ It is worth noting that while the preamble opposed political affiliation, it did not oppose political action. This “political clause,” with its commitment to non-partisan political action, led to a great deal of criticism and confusion from delegates at the convention, who accused the writers of the preamble of “toadying” to SLP members, SPA members, and anti-political anarchists.²⁴²

Their criticisms were not unfounded. Melvyn Dubofsky, in his history of the IWW, asserts that the ambiguity of the political clause was intended precisely to appease the disparate factions.²⁴³ Although the clause’s critics were ungenerous in their descriptions, unifying the rival socialist parties, in addition to those who adamantly opposed any form of electoral politics, was a

²³⁹ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 121.

²⁴⁰ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 181.

²⁴¹ “The Original I.W.W. Preamble,” <https://archive.iww.org/about/official/StJohn/2/>.

²⁴² For the controversy over the political clause, see McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 273-298.

²⁴³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 83-4. Also see Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (State University of New York Press, 1989), 37.

nearly Herculean task. The fact that the founders were able to unify such diverse opinions through an ambiguous clause is much more to their credit than to their detriment.

Nevertheless, despite the founders' clever politicking, the diverse coalition did not make for a stable long-term alliance, and at the 1906 convention, the IWW's first and only president Charles O. Sherman and his supporters were ousted and the presidency abolished. Although left Socialists who supported the founding of the IWW were not necessarily supporters of Sherman, the 1906 split did leave many SPA members feeling apprehensive about the IWW. Some on the party's left who had initially supported the IWW developed reservations about the union, and even Eugene Debs let his membership slowly fade.²⁴⁴ Meanwhile, those on the party's right felt their worst fears confirmed. Max Hayes wrote a surprisingly sympathetic, if far too premature, eulogy for the IWW in the aftermath.²⁴⁵ Despite his harsh criticisms of those involved, he nevertheless portrayed the IWW's split as a negative for the labor movement.

Despite personal opinions about the 1906 IWW split, the SPA, with few exceptions, was united in apportioning blame: the schism had been the fault of De Leon and the SLP. Hayes was one of the most ardent critics of "that prince of disruptors, Dan DeLeon."²⁴⁶ Another member of the party's right wing, Ernest Untermann, declared in early 1908 that "[o]nly comrade A. M. Simons and myself" had recognized the danger of involving De Leon in the movement from the beginning.²⁴⁷ The SPA went even further, however, accusing De Leon of making "plans to capture the administration" of the IWW in the party's official report to the 1907 International

²⁴⁴ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 79-80.

²⁴⁵ Hayes, "World of Labor," November 1906, 311-2.

²⁴⁶ Hayes, "World of Labor," November 1906, 311.

²⁴⁷ Ernest Untermann, "Pause and Consider," *International Socialist Review*, March 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v08n09-mar-1908-ISR-gog.pdf>, 542.

Socialist Congress.²⁴⁸

While the remaining Wobblies did not necessarily agree with the SPA's condemnation of the actions of the 1906 convention, many did agree with the harsh castigations of De Leon. Even when he was on his best behavior, many socialists and unionists were intensely distrustful of De Leon. By 1906, however, he was no longer on his best behavior. De Leon exerted much of his energy attacking SPA members and anti-political IWW members, leaving little time to devote to the Wobbly gospel.²⁴⁹ In response, the General Executive Board (GEB) put out a vague, but pointed, reminder to organizers not to "enter into a discussion of the relative merits or demerits of any political parties."²⁵⁰

IWW members became increasingly irritated about De Leon. As the pages of the IWW's papers filled up with pro-, and especially anti-, De Leon articles, rank-and-file members expressed their frustration at the "damn dope about DeLeon" filling up the papers.²⁵¹ Then-SLP members like Frank Bohn, Ben Williams, and Justus Ebert even turned against their party leader, warning IWW members not to allow De Leon to take over the union.²⁵²

With opinion essentially unified against De Leon, the 1908 IWW convention, led by De Leon's former allies William Trautmann and Vincent Saint John, sought to remove De Leon and the SLP. After a long debate over De Leon's credentials that quickly turned into more general

²⁴⁸ Morris Hillquit, *Recent Progress of the Socialist and Labor Movements in the United States: Report of Morris Hillquit* (Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1907), https://archive.org/details/RecentProgressOfTheSocialistAndLaborMovementsInTheUnitedStates_151, 23.

²⁴⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 135; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 106.

²⁵⁰ "Instructions to Organizers," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 29 June 1907, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v1n18-jun-29-1907-iub.pdf>, 4.

²⁵¹ F. W. Heslewood, *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 23 May 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n13-may-23-1908-iub.pdf>, 3.

²⁵² Bohn, "The Failure to Attain Socialist Unity;" Ebert, "A Letter of Resignation;" Williams, "Industrial Unionism and Politics."

attacks, De Leon's credentials were denied. He and his supporters left the convention and set up their own rival IWW which amounted to little. With De Leon gone, the remaining Wobblies went about removing the political clause.²⁵³

After De Leon was ousted, relations between the IWW and the SLP firmly severed. There was little to no cooperation between the groups again. In fact, De Leon, who had a reputation for making any attack, "however unfair," against his opponents, became one of the IWW's fiercest critics.²⁵⁴ After the convention removed the political clause, De Leon lamented the loss of the IWW he had known. With the clause out, "veiled dynamiters" were free to reign over the union.²⁵⁵ De Leon continued to mourn the loss of what he believed to be the real IWW in the years after, describing the then-existing IWW as being led by the "monkeyshines of the handful of freak-frauds" who had taken the name, but not the spirit, of the IWW.²⁵⁶

Relations with the SPA, on the other hand, remained. The 1906 split had frayed relations between the groups but had not severed them. IWW members like Frank Little, Covington Hall, and William Haywood organized for the IWW and campaigned for the SPA simultaneously. As a result, IWW members, even after the removal of the political clause, provided votes for the party in places like Butte, Montana, where it "elected almost the entire city administration."²⁵⁷ The IWW's newspaper and the party's left-wing journal also cross-promoted each other to encourage

²⁵³ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, chapter IX presents an account of the 1908 schism sympathetic to De Leon. For an account more defensive of the anti-De Leonists, see Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 133-41.

²⁵⁴ Quote from Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South*, 69.

²⁵⁵ Daniel De Leon, "The 'I. W. W. Convention'," *Weekly People* (New York), 10 October 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/the-people-slp/081010-weeklypeople-v18n28.pdf>, 1.

²⁵⁶ Daniel De Leon, "Industrial Unionism," *Weekly People*, 21 August 1909, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/the-people-slp/090821-weeklypeople-v19n21.pdf>, 4.

²⁵⁷ Conlin, *Bread and Roses*, 121. See also Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 121-2 for the role of the IWW in the 1912 presidential election.

greater overlap.²⁵⁸ Perhaps most indicative of the cooperative nature of the organizations was the election of Haywood to the SPA's National Executive Committee (NEC) in 1911.

Not everything was positive between the organizations, however. Those in the SPA who had aligned themselves with neither the pro- nor anti-IWW factions felt betrayed by the removal of the political clause, viewing it as a declaration of war.²⁵⁹ If the removal of the political clause was not enough for fence-sitters in the party, Wobblies' outspoken distrust of SPA officials and electoralism certainly was. In an editorial for *Solidarity*, an official IWW publication, Ben Williams boldly declared that the IWW would "eventually replace" the socialist politicians' leadership in the struggle for socialism.²⁶⁰ One cartoonist in the *Industrial Worker* took a more Aesopian approach, showed one pig – representative of the working class – fenced in by "parliamentarism" and misled by political action while another pig – labeled "I.W.W." – "decided to use a Small Bunch of Direct Action" to bust through.²⁶¹

The insults and the criticisms were too much for the party's right wing to bear, and by 1912 they had returned the declaration of war. Morris Hillquit, a leading member of the right wing, declared the philosophy advocated by Haywood and the IWW as "good anarchistic doctrine, but ... diametrically opposed to the accepted policies of Socialism."²⁶² Anti-IWW sentiment developed at the grassroots level, too. Socialist Party locals put forward proposals to

²⁵⁸ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 394.

²⁵⁹ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 281.

²⁶⁰ "The 'Policy' of Solidarity," *Solidarity*, 23 July 1910, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1909-1910/v01n32-jul-23-1910-Solidarity.pdf>, 2.

²⁶¹ "A Modern Fable" (cartoon), *Industrial Worker*, 27 August 1910, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v2n23-w75-aug-27-1910-IW.pdf>, 1.

²⁶² Morris Hillquit, "Socialism and Law," *New York Call*, 20 November 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/the-new-york-call/1911/111120-newyorkcall-v04n324.pdf>, 6.

expel Haywood and declare the party as being firmly opposed to sabotage.²⁶³ Even Debs called for the party to firmly state its rejection of “sabotage and every other form of violence and destructiveness.”²⁶⁴

In an echo of the IWW’s earlier schisms, the tensions culminated in a dramatic showdown at the 1912 Socialist Party conference. Delegates proposed an amendment to the party’s constitution which would expel any party member “who opposes political action or advocates crime against the person or other methods of violence.”²⁶⁵ The motion passed, and the IWW was the obvious target. Armed with the new clause, Yellow Socialists sought to remove the influence of the IWW and other “Anarchists and Syndicalists,” as Victor Berger derisively labeled them.²⁶⁶ Their primary target was Haywood, the representative of everything they loathed about the IWW. SPA locals in New York and New Jersey put forward a motion to recall Haywood from the NEC, and the issue soon escalated into a national referendum.²⁶⁷ Socialists elected to recall Haywood in a vote of 22,495 to 10,944.²⁶⁸ Haywood resigned from the party in the wake of the referendum, and many of his sympathizers followed him out, either voluntarily or involuntarily.²⁶⁹ In his history of the Oklahoma IWW, historian Nigel Anthony Sellars argues

²⁶³ See, for example, “National Party Referendums,” *Socialist Party Monthly Bulletin*, March 1912, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/spa-bulletins/120300-socialistpartymonthlybulletin-v08n06.pdf>, 4.

²⁶⁴ Eugene V. Debs, “Sound Socialist Tactics,” *International Socialist Review*, February 1912, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v12n08-feb-1912-ISR.riaz-ocr.pdf>, 483.

²⁶⁵ “The National Socialist Convention of 1912,” *International Socialist Review*, June 1912, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v12n12-jun-1912-ISR-gog-Corn.pdf>, 825.

²⁶⁶ Victor Berger, “The Purpose is All Too Plain in the Barnes Case,” *Social-Democratic Herald*, 10 August 1912.

²⁶⁷ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 409-10.

²⁶⁸ “Result of Referendum D, 1912,” *Socialist Party Monthly Bulletin*, March 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/spa-bulletins/130400-socialistpartymonthlybulletin-v09n06.pdf>, 2.

²⁶⁹ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 411, 413; Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 122; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 42; “Come to Think of It,” *Solidarity*, 16 August 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1913/v04n32-w188-aug-16-1913-solidarity.pdf>,

that the split weakened both organizations, leaving uninspiring reformists in control of the party and reckless radicals in control of the union.²⁷⁰

Yet even the SPA's new anti-IWW direction was not enough to fully sever relations. Wobbly historian Fred Thompson claimed that at the local level, the "IWW and socialists remained as friendly as ever, often sharing halls."²⁷¹ Certainly the decline of the Reds' power was not the same everywhere. The editorial staff of the *International Socialist Review*, one of the party's biggest periodicals, remained firmly committed to the left-wing of the party and a vague alliance with the IWW.²⁷² Other state and local branches, like the Texas SPA, similarly aligned themselves with the left.²⁷³

Even those SPA members who were not ideologically committed to the IWW's vision continued to cooperate with the IWW on common causes. When Joe Hill, the prominent IWW songwriter, was sentenced to death in Utah, the Socialist Party sought to defend Hill through moderate publications like the *Appeal to Reason*.²⁷⁴ The SPA also continued to provide support for IWW strikes.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, the IWW and the SPA still shared speakers and organizers, never fully able to separate their memberships despite their drift apart.

The threat of American involvement in the then-raging Great War in Europe only brought the two organizations closer as their locals and members worked together in opposing the war

2; Matilda Rabinowitz, "A New Antagonist," *Solidarity*, 18 October 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1913/v04n41-w197-oct-18-1913-solidarity.pdf>, 3.

²⁷⁰ Nigel Anthony Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*, 28.

²⁷¹ Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 78.

²⁷² Allen Ruff, "*We Called Each Other Comrade*": *Charles H. Kerr & Company, Radical Publishers* (PM Press, 2011), 157-9.

²⁷³ James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 276.

²⁷⁴ Franklin Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW & The Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture* (PM Press, 2015), 127.

²⁷⁵ For example, see Mayer, *Beyond the Rebel Girl*, 72.

and the American draft.²⁷⁶ Although official IWW policy after American entry did not explicitly call for resistance to the war, the clear opposition of many Wobblies nevertheless opened the door for harsh repression by the government; the SPA, on the other hand, explicitly opposed the war at its 1917 convention, similarly giving the government reason for repression.²⁷⁷ As a result, and combined with the fear over the Bolshevik Revolution that same year, the government and vigilantes dealt with both organizations harshly. While their common suffering only united them further, the repression also weakened both groups, making their relative cooperation during the war a matter of little importance. Southern IWW organizer Covington Hall lamented that, “[h]ad it not been for World War I leading the ‘hosts of labor’ astray, no one know what the ‘revolt of the rebels’ might ... have led to.”²⁷⁸

Hall’s lamentations were not entirely justified, however. While the Socialist Party came out of the war weakened, the broader socialist movement was reinvigorated by the Bolshevik Revolution. After the left wing “triumphed overwhelmingly” in the 1919 NEC election, the right-wing administration in place declared the election to have irregularities and nullified it.²⁷⁹ When the party held an emergency conference later that same year, the left attempted to gain control of the party. In another dramatic showdown, however, the right-wing administration drove the left wing out of the convention. Forced out of the party, the Reds formed their own new parties: the Communist Labor Party (CLP), composed primarily of English speakers, and the Communist Party, composed primarily of foreign language immigrants.²⁸⁰

These new parties made their sympathies to the IWW clear. The CLP held its founding

²⁷⁶ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 127-8.

²⁷⁷ “Resolutions on War and Militarism,” *International Socialist Review*, May 1917, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v17n11-may-1917-ISR-riaz-ocr.pdf>, 670-2.

²⁷⁸ Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South*, 201.

²⁷⁹ Foner, *Postwar Struggles*, 243.

²⁸⁰ Foner, *Postwar Struggles*, 246-9.

conference in the IWW hall, and each party endorsed the IWW's organizational methods.²⁸¹ Despite these close ties, the communist parties were met with ambivalence by IWW members. Some, like William Haywood, joined a party immediately.²⁸² Others, like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, were hesitant at first but soon became affiliated.²⁸³ Still others, such as Ralph Chaplin, never overcame suspicions towards the party.²⁸⁴

Much like relations with the SPA, the IWW's relationships with the communist parties wavered frequently. Members of the Communist Party and the IWW worked together in the International Labor Defense which was dedicated to freeing "class war prisoners."²⁸⁵ Yet as the IWW hesitated to work alongside the party, Communist Party newspapers criticized the "Yellow Leaders of the I. W. W."²⁸⁶ The CLP was more willing to support the IWW, even speaking out against the Soviet line at the Second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 which called for the dissolution of the IWW.²⁸⁷

Despite the CLP's defense of the IWW, the communist parties merged in 1921 into a new, united communist party which followed the Soviet line less critically. The new party continued to try and make connections with the IWW, but when the union demonstrated its unwillingness, the party turned to sabotage and poaching members instead. Whatever warmth had once existed between the organizations was firmly replaced by harsh competition between two groups which each saw themselves as the vanguard of the working class.²⁸⁸ By the mid-1920s, the IWW had been fully left behind by the constant shifts in the nature of the political left.

²⁸¹ Foner, *Postwar Struggles*, 248-50.

²⁸² Haywood, *The Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood*, 371.

²⁸³ Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 280-1.

²⁸⁴ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 287-8.

²⁸⁵ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 333.

²⁸⁶ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 81.

²⁸⁷ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 205.

²⁸⁸ Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.*, 86-9.

Rival Unions and Moderate Labor

While the IWW existed as a sort of extension of left-wing politics into the field of labor, it was, in many ways, a fierce rejection of the pre-existing labor movement. At its founding convention, the delegates made no bones about their opinion towards the rival AFL, the dominant labor union in the United States. Delegates made frequent comparisons between the “fakirs” of the AFL on one hand and the “true labor organization” that would be the IWW on the other.²⁸⁹ In the eyes of the IWW’s founders, the AFL was a betrayal of working-class solidarity and labor organization.

The IWW’s fierce opposition to the AFL was not based merely on an abstract sense that the AFL was not up to the task of leading the working class. Instead, Wobblies saw the AFL’s structure and method of organization as antithetical to a united labor movement. The AFL was a craft union, in which workers were organized by their specific job rather than by the industry in which they worked. The IWW’s founders, on the other hand, sought to organize industrially. Since their goal was the creation of one big union for the entire working class, they viewed the division of workers by their craft to “hinder the growth of class consciousness” which “renders ... solidarity impossible.”²⁹⁰ Even worse, craft unionism actively created a new class of workers who felt they were above the others and, in the process, actively reinforced and assisted in the exploitation of “lower” workers. The IWW declared these workers to be “labor aristocrats,” and proclaimed that the AFL upheld this aristocracy of labor.²⁹¹

Wobblies were far from the only critics of the AFL, its craft unionist structure, and its

²⁸⁹ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 242-3.

²⁹⁰ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 8.

²⁹¹ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 87.

relatively conservative goals. More moderate Socialists such as Max Hayes and Victor Berger, who rejected affiliation with the IWW, held similar critiques. Yet despite these critiques of the AFL, many Socialists viewed the formation of the IWW as disruptive to the labor movement and ensuring that the AFL would remain conservative. Instead, they sought to “bore from within” the AFL and “dump conservatism overboard.”²⁹² Socialists were confident, even before the IWW’s formation, that it was simply a matter of time until the AFL would be forced to adopt a more “progressive” and socialistic direction.²⁹³ In fact, they warned that the IWW’s formation would set back their progress as conservative AFL leaders would rejoice that their opponents had fled the AFL to form a rival organization.²⁹⁴

The Socialists were not the only ones interested in taking over the AFL. On the more radical end, Syndicalists who took inspiration from the Syndicalist movement in Europe also found the idea enticing. The French General Confederation of Labor (Confédération Générale du Travail, or CGT), in particular, was a hotbed of European Syndicalist activity, and American Syndicalists looked to the CGT and its experiences to formulate their own strategies. The CGT, which had initially been a broad federation of unions much like the AFL, was eventually dominated by a “militant minority” of revolutionary Syndicalists who committed the union to syndicalist ideals.²⁹⁵

A short time after the Syndicalist takeover of the CGT, British Syndicalists under Tom

²⁹² McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 121. For a brief overview of the socialists’ “boring from within” strategy, see Philip Taft, “Attempts to ‘Radicalize’ the Labor Movement,” *ILR Review* 1, no. 4 (1948): 583-5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2518468>.

²⁹³ Victor L. Berger, “The A. F. of L. Meeting,” *Social-Democratic Herald*, 24 December 1904, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/social-democratic-herald-us/041224-socdemherald-v07n34w334.pdf>, 1.

²⁹⁴ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 122.

²⁹⁵ Zoe Baker, *Means and Ends: The Revolutionary Practice of Anarchism in Europe and the United States* (AK Press, 2023), 258-60; Taft, “Attempts to ‘Radicalize’ the Labor Movement,” 585.

Mann similarly devoted themselves to taking over conservative craft unions and influencing them along syndicalist lines. Like their French counterparts, the British Syndicalists were largely successful in transforming the established labor unions into something more radical and more revolutionary.²⁹⁶ Both Mann and the CGT took the lessons of their successful entryism into the labor movement and sought to export it to the United States, with the CGT's secretary Leon Jouhoux urging the IWW to "get into the labor movement."²⁹⁷ Some American Syndicalists, particularly William Z. Foster, took their advice to heart, urging the IWW to focus on boring into the AFL. When their attempts to refigure the IWW failed, Foster and his Syndicalists formed their own organization, the Syndicalist League of North America, which would unsuccessfully attempt to do what the European Syndicalists had done.²⁹⁸

Yet although criticisms of the AFL and its craft unionist structure were all but universal among the broader American – and even international – left, the IWW rejected the strategies of both the Socialists and the Syndicalists. Unlike the entryists, Wobblies insisted that the AFL was entirely without merit. To Jouhoux's advice, the IWW responded that the IWW "is not only IN the labor movement of the United States; but that the I. W. W. IS ... THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT."²⁹⁹ The advice of the entryists was worth little because the lessons of the French and British Syndicalists in particular ignored the specific conditions of the United States and the specific weaknesses of the AFL.³⁰⁰ European Syndicalists, they argued, had joined the labor movement just as it was developing, ensuring there would be no entrenched opposition. In the

²⁹⁶ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 417-8.

²⁹⁷ "Get Into the Labor Movement," *Solidarity*, 30 September 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1911/v02n41-w093-sep-30-1911-Solidarity.pdf>, 2.

²⁹⁸ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 427-9; Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 276.

²⁹⁹ "Get Into the Labor Movement."

³⁰⁰ "Revolutionary Minority in the Syndicalist Movement," *Solidarity*, 30 September 1911, 4.

United States, on the other hand, the AFL was already a stable, anti-radical force, preventing easy infiltration.³⁰¹

The implications of the IWW's rejection of boring from within and reforming the AFL seemed to many like a clear declaration of war on the AFL. After the preliminary manifesto was published, even before the founding convention, some leftists recognized what they deemed to be the death knell of the AFL and rejoiced. The AFL "must give way to some organization more fit to meet and solve present industrial problems," one opined.³⁰² Another, although more skeptical of the manifesto's claims, recognized that the AFL would eventually be "destroyed, root and branch, by an outraged rank and file."³⁰³

No one was more certain that the new union would seek to destroy the AFL than the AFL's leadership. An article in the Federation's official periodical, the *American Federationist*, warned that the labor movement's "enemies" were making another attempt to "smash the American trade union movement."³⁰⁴ The Iowa State Federation of Labor similarly insisted that the call for a new union was put forward with the explicit intention to destroy the established labor movement.³⁰⁵ From the perspective of the AFL's officials, any attempt at a new union with a new form of organization – founded, in part, by former AFL affiliates – represented not just an encroachment into their territory but an existential threat.

The AFL was certain that the IWW sought to destroy it, but the IWW's founders were less sure about what they wanted of the AFL, though they never sought to dismantle the entire

³⁰¹ Salerno, *Red November, Black November*, 96.

³⁰² "The Chicago Conference for Industrial Unions," *International Socialist Review*, February 1905, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v05n08-feb-1905-ISR-gog.pdf>, 496.

³⁰³ Frank Bohn, "Concerning the Chicago Manifesto," *International Socialist Review*, April 1905, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v05n10-apr-1905-ISR-gog.pdf>, 587.

³⁰⁴ Samuel Gompers, "The Trade Unions to be Smashed Again," *American Federationist*, March 1905, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015012981331>, 139.

³⁰⁵ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 307-8.

labor movement. In response to the accusations, Charles Moyer of the WFM expressed “no regret” over the “disruption of the so-called labor movement of today.”³⁰⁶ Yet what most Wobblies sought was less “disruption” and more poaching. IWW periodicals urged workers to bail from the AFL to join the IWW.³⁰⁷ Algie Simons of the SPA insisted that the idea was to lure AFL-affiliated unions into the IWW, recruiting rather than rivaling them.³⁰⁸ As Paul Brissenden explained, the hope was for a “general secession” of AFL-affiliated locals and workers into the IWW.³⁰⁹

Yet Simons’s assurance that the IWW would not form rival unions was proved to be a lie almost immediately. Nowhere was this more clearly demonstrated than in the mining town of Goldfield, Nevada from 1906 to 1907. Even before the IWW proper showed up on the scenes, the miners in the town were highly receptive to the IWW’s message, and the WFM already had a strong presence among them.³¹⁰ Soon, the IWW sought to expand into Goldfield, going beyond simple industrial unionism into “mass unionism,” attempting to unite all the workers in the entire town into IWW Local 77.³¹¹ Two groups of workers in Goldfield were already affiliated with the AFL, however – the carpenters and the typographers.

The IWW quickly went to work attempting to poach the AFL unions and bring the entire town under Wobbly control. They succeeded in organizing “engineers, clerks, stenographers, teamsters, dishwashers, waiters,” and more into Local 77, in addition to the WFM’s own Local

³⁰⁶ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 26.

³⁰⁷ For example, see “Some Points of Difference,” *Industrial Worker* (Joliet, IL), January 1906, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-worker-sherman/060100-industrialworker-v01n01.pdf>, 8.

³⁰⁸ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 64.

³⁰⁹ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 108.

³¹⁰ Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 219-20.

³¹¹ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 191-2.

220 of miners.³¹² With the heretofore unorganized townsfolk now in the IWW, they issued an ultimatum to the AFL's members: Join the IWW, leave town, or be forced out of a job.³¹³ At the same time, the IWW declared a boycott against the *Goldfield Sun*, a local newspaper which it accused of being hostile to the IWW in its articles. In addition, the *Sun*'s printers, unionized in the AFL, had refused to join the IWW.³¹⁴

With the IWW's attacks on the AFL clear, the AFL locals responded in kind. The Carpenters' Union, in particular, sought to challenge the IWW local, which had by then merged into Local 220. It put out a demand that no carpenter should assist in the construction of the Miners' Union Hospital, and any carpenter caught assisting Local 220 would be fined.³¹⁵ Since the newsboys who normally sold the *Goldfield Sun*, now affiliated with 220, were out on strike, the Carpenters' Union also stepped in to sell the papers and scab against the IWW.³¹⁶ More and more frequently, both AFL and IWW supporters carried arms, though no widespread violence ever occurred.³¹⁷

Although the IWW seemed like a powerful force in Goldfield by early 1907, it soon began to collapse, and by 1908, there was little left. In something of a microcosm of the national IWW, the Goldfield IWW was torn apart by government repression, internal uncertainty, weak strategy, and infighting. Yet perhaps nothing was more devastating to the IWW in Goldfield than the AFL. The AFL's locals in Goldfield represented obvious weak spots in the IWW's mass town

³¹² "Our Position Confirmed," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 30 March 1907,

<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v1n05-mar-30-1907-iub.pdf>, 2.

³¹³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 122; "Events of the Week," *The Goldfield News*, 16 March 1907, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/852023182>, 1.

³¹⁴ Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 222.

³¹⁵ *Official Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the Western Federation of Miners*, 33-4.

³¹⁶ Vincent Saint John, "From Vincent St. John," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 30 March 1907, 1; "The Situation Growing Serious," *Tonopah Bonanza*, 8 September 1906, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/465286923>, 8.

³¹⁷ Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 222-3; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 122.

union since they had no obligation to solidarity. At the same time, the IWW's attempts to lure AFL members into Local 220 backfired, only leading to fiercer resistance from the AFL. As a result, the AFL locals, which were never wholly opposed to working alongside rather than against employers, actively collaborated with the Businessmen's and Mine Owners' Association to shut the IWW down.³¹⁸ The mine owners, recognizing the soundness of dividing the labor movement in Goldfield, further promised to recognize any miners' union which was not linked to the IWW, and some employers insisted their workers join the AFL.³¹⁹ Goldfield, then, was a conflict "not between employer and employee" but essentially a labor civil war, as the president of the Goldfield Chamber of Commerce opined.³²⁰

Here, too, the incident at Goldfield was largely representative of the IWW at large. Relations between the IWW and AFL were, as demonstrated by the IWW's founding convention, often chilly. Neither was willing to concede much to the other, and at times, this resulted in a fissure in the labor movement, one that employers were all too happy to see. As long as workers were divided between Wobblies and Federationists, employers would never have to deal with a fully united working class, something which IWW members were eager to point out and blame on the AFL.³²¹ IWW cartoonist Ernest Riebe, convinced that this was intentional, concluded that "the A.F.L is used by the exploiters to keep the workers out of the I.W.W. and keep them in slavery."³²²

³¹⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 122.

³¹⁹ "Producers Closed While Labor Unions Quarrel," *Goldfield News*, 16 March 1907, 1; William Jurgens, "Roosevelt Takes a Hand," *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 20 April 1907, 1.

³²⁰ "Statement of Milton M. Detch," *Goldfield News*, 16 March 1907, 1.

³²¹ For example, see "Fakers Defending Their Nefarious Work," *Industrial Worker*, 24 July 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v5n18-w226-jul-24-1913-IW.pdf>, 1, 4.

³²² Ernest Riebe, "Mr. Block: He Learns That the Lumberjacks Know the A. F. of L." (cartoon), *Industrial Worker*, 13 March 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n51-w207-mar-13-1913-IW.pdf>, 4.

Although the IWW's accusations rather notably missed its own role in dividing the labor movement, they were not entirely untrue. The AFL, in fact, often gained significantly from the presence of the IWW on the industrial field. As was in the case of Goldfield, when the IWW, representing the threat of radicalism and unlimited class warfare, came onto the scene, the AFL looked significantly more amenable in comparison. As a result, even employers which had been hostile to any form of unionizing recognized that if unions were here to stay, it was better to deal with the AFL than the IWW.³²³ Local and state governments similarly encouraged workers to align themselves with the AFL. Oklahoma's Department of Labor, for instance, encouraged "every loyal American citizen to join... the American Federation of Labor" rather than join the "ignorant foreigners" in the IWW.³²⁴

The benefits the AFL gained were not always merely incidental. Under president Samuel Gompers, the AFL made a concerted effort to present itself as a moderate, respectable, and proudly American alternative to the radical anarchism which the IWW seemed to preach. During World War I, as the government increasingly feared how the IWW might impact the war machine of the United States, Gompers actively collaborated with Woodrow Wilson and Secretary of Labor William Wilson, assuring the president that "there is nothing in common between the I.W.W. and the American Federation of Labor."³²⁵ Even more damningly, Gompers assured the White House that "[i]f lumbermen and mine operators negotiated with the AFL, ... the IWW

³²³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 275.

³²⁴ Charles L. Daugherty, *Third Annual Report of the Department of Labor for the State of Oklahoma, 1909-1910* (Warden Printing Company, 1910), 18, Oklahoma Digital Prairie, <https://digitalprairie.ok.gov/digital/collection/okresources/id/89183>.

³²⁵ Samuel Gompers to Woodrow Wilson, 10 August 1917, in *The Samuel Gompers Papers: The American Federation of Labor and the Great War, 1917-18* (University of Illinois Press, 2007), <https://archive.org/details/samuelgomperspap0010unse>, 173.

would disappear.”³²⁶

Gompers’s promise was not mere lip service, though it was perhaps overly ambitious. The AFL made a concerted effort to not only come out on top in the labor civil war but to ensure that the IWW floundered, even if the AFL did not directly gain from it. This was demonstrated in 1912, in the Lawrence Textile Strike, in which John Golden, the president of the AFL-affiliated United Textile Workers of America (UTWA), came to Lawrence to observe the strike shortly after it broke out and report his finding to the governor of Massachusetts. Golden denounced the IWW as “an outgrowth of anarchism” which the legitimate labor movement rejected, adding that those on strike were nothing more than “ignorant workers... [who] are not as farseeing” as the skilled, English-speaking AFL members.³²⁷ When the skilled AFL workers did eventually come out alongside the IWW in Lawrence despite the protestations of Golden, Golden continued to ensure that there was no significant sense of solidarity between the groups. The UTWA managed to take away a minor concession from the textile mills and soon went back to work, improving their own lot and actively undermining the IWW’s strength in the process.³²⁸ This was far from the first, or last, incidence of the AFL scabbing against the IWW. At the IWW’s second convention, long before Lawrence and even before the debacle at Goldfield, the delegates were already provided with a long list of AFL strikebreaking occurrences, one that would only grow as time went on.³²⁹

Not content with challenging the IWW’s power to organize, the AFL also sought to use its influence with the government to clamp down on the IWW or at least cooperate with the

³²⁶ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 411.

³²⁷ “John Golden on Lawrence Strike,” *Fall River Evening News*, 19 January 1912, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/590541624>, 7; “Operatives Ill-Advised,” *Fall River Daily Globe*, 19 January 1912, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/603676330>, 6.

³²⁸ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 338-9.

³²⁹ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the Second Convention*, 101.

government's own efforts. This became especially clear once the United States entered WWI in 1917. As the federal government sought to suppress the Wobblies, it found an eager partner in the AFL. Aside from public comments insisting that the IWW was entirely separate from the "legitimate" labor movement represented by the AFL, Federation leadership also fed information to the government which would be helpful in their war against the IWW. Charles Moyer, who had helped found the IWW but soon joined the WFM in leaving the one big union for the AFL, was particularly helpful. He assured federal agents that he would look into allegations of ties between the IWW and the German government, and he also promised that, with an injection of federal funds into the AFL's mining union, he could bribe Wobblies into working against the IWW leadership.³³⁰ Once the trials against the IWW began in earnest, Gompers once again made assurances to the federal government that the AFL was a patriotic organization and a more than willing foe of the IWW.³³¹

The Wilson administration, in turn, responded favorably to such overtures. From the government's perspective, the AFL represented an imminently reasonable and acceptable form of labor organization compared to the IWW. As a result, William Wilson, with some support from the president, worked to essentially make Gompers the de facto spokesman for honest labor in the United States and its primary, if not sole, representative.³³² Simultaneously, the White House sought to throw its weight around to support the AFL in ongoing labor conflict and even to empower the AFL where it had little organizational gains of its own. Taking Gompers's advice to heart, the administration attempted to hold negotiations between the AFL, as the representative of labor, and the business owners in the Western United States, as the representatives of capital,

³³⁰ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 148.

³³¹ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 113-4.

³³² See, for example, William B. Wilson to Samuel Gompers, 29 January 1918, in *The Samuel Gompers Papers: The American Federation of Labor and the Great War*, 333-4.

to create an agreement which would satisfy both parties and bring an end to the labor troubles in that part of the country, which of course meant IWW activity.³³³

Although the IWW had fired the first shot in the verbal war, and although it never held back on criticizing the perceived conservatism and class collaborationism of the AFL, in practice, it did little to actively undermine the AFL's organizing capacity beyond local and member poaching. On the contrary, the IWW, true to its promises of working-class solidarity, provided support to the AFL to varying degrees. Although its press seldom, if ever, offered unambiguous praise of the AFL, IWW newspapers sometimes voiced qualified support of ongoing AFL strikes.³³⁴ Its statements of support, in fact, were just as much criticisms of the AFL's methods and structures as they were shows of solidarity, noting that although such a strike may be "creditable," it would fail unless conducted by the IWW's one big union.³³⁵

Yet in comparison to the AFL's strikebreaking, the IWW's critical comments mean little when combined with its willingness to support its conservative rival. Even beyond half-hearted expressions of solidarity, IWW locals, despite the union's rhetoric, continually worked alongside AFL locals when circumstances were advantageous. Cooperation was particularly fruitful when the issue was not workplace organizing, thereby avoiding jurisdictional or methodological disputes. As a result, locals were able to cooperate in organizing the unemployed as well as fighting for free speech on the West Coast.³³⁶ The IWW and AFL could even, on occasion, work together on workplace issues, like when they cooperated to oppose anti-union hiring practices in

³³³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 411.

³³⁴ For example, see Albert Ehlert, "Strike in California Oil Fields," *Solidarity*, 18 April 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1914/v05-w223-apr-18-1914-solidarity.pdf>, 1.

³³⁵ "The End of the Steel Strike," *The New Solidarity* (Chicago), 31 January 1920, 2, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

³³⁶ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 102; Mary Anderson Hill, "The Free Speech Fight at San Diego," *The Survey*, 4 May 1912, <https://archive.org/details/thesurvey28survuoft>, 193.

Portland in 1922.³³⁷

Rank-and-file AFL members and AFL locals were willing to return the support in turn, though often in defiance of Federation leadership. In addition to joint ventures in defending the free speech of organizers, AFL locals also expressed solidarity with IWW-led free speech fights, even (unsuccessfully) urging AFL leaders to provide support.³³⁸ At the same time, rank-and-file Federationists sent money to support the IWW's effort to organize shoe workers in Brooklyn, miners in Duluth, and textile workers in Lawrence.³³⁹ AFL state affiliates also joined in a growing chorus of progressives protesting against harsh treatment of the IWW by local and state governments, for example, urging California's government to commute the sentences of Richard Ford and Herman Suhr.³⁴⁰ At times, even Samuel Gompers and other AFL leaders raised their voices to protest harsh treatment, including coming to the defense of Joe Hill.³⁴¹

Although the IWW had a fluctuating relationship with the AFL at large and its lower-level affiliates, the case of the Western Federation of Miners deserves special attention. The WFM had been one of the driving forces, if not the driving force, behind the formation of the IWW in 1905. The split in 1906 weakened ties between the broader IWW and the WFM, however, and the WFM dropped out of the organization, not aligning itself with either faction. It existed independently once again until 1911, when it reaffiliated with the AFL.³⁴² In 1916, still

³³⁷ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 176.

³³⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 183; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 183-5.

³³⁹ Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 306-7, 504-6; Leslie H. Marcy and Frederick Sumner Boyd, "One Big Union Wins," *International Socialist Review*, April 1912, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v12n10-apr-1912-ISR-gog-Corn.pdf>, 619, 624.

³⁴⁰ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 15.

³⁴¹ *Report of Proceedings of the Thirty-Fifth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (Law Reporter Printing Company, 1915),

https://archive.org/details/ProceedingsOfTheAnnualConventionOfTheAmericanFederationOfLabor_190, 286-7.

³⁴² Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 243-4.

affiliated with the AFL, the WFM renamed itself the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW), thereby severing any link to its past.³⁴³

When the WFM withdrew from the IWW, Wobblies viewed it as the ultimate sin – treason against the working class, represented by the IWW. As newly branded counterrevolutionaries, the WFM was therefore a prime target for IWW ire. Shortly after the WFM's disaffiliation, Vincent Saint John staged a plan to take over the WFM – ironically, by the very method rejected in the case of the AFL, boring from within – and bring it back into the IWW fold. The plan ultimately came to little, but it served as a clear demonstration that the WFM had moved firmly from friend to foe.³⁴⁴ This transition took place concurrently with the Goldfield strike as well, resulting in fragmenting among the IWW-WFM alliance in the town and the replaying of the same fights and arguments as the 1906 convention. As the two groups became increasingly untrusting of each other, WFM Local 220 and IWW Local 77 severed, going their separate ways and shattering their semi-united front.³⁴⁵

Nowhere was the hostility between the WFM and IWW more clearly demonstrated than in Butte, Montana. Here, the WFM had a local – the Butte Miners' Union (BMU) No. 1 – that was closely aligned with the more radical and pro-IWW elements in the WFM, in stark contrast to the national leadership. Aware of the sympathy, and unwilling to leave the BMU radicals to their own devices, the IWW had its own presence in Butte in the form of a Propaganda League with the goal of whipping up Wobbly sympathies and distrust of the WFM in the local.³⁴⁶

Whether as a result of the IWW's propaganda or as a natural byproduct of the tense relationship

³⁴³ Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 377.

³⁴⁴ Vincent Saint John to Albert Ryan, 4 August 1908, quoted in *Official Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Convention of the Western Federation of Miners* (Great Western Publishing Co., 1912), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435029726494>, 283-4.

³⁴⁵ Jensen, *Heritage of Conflict*, 227.

³⁴⁶ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 302.

between the national WFM leadership and the Butte local, by 1912, the BMU radicals began exploring the option of forming a new local union independent of the WFM.³⁴⁷ In mid-1914, they officially founded the Butte Mine Workers' Union (BMWU) as an alternative to the conservative WFM, fit with Wobblies on the new union's executive committee.³⁴⁸

The new BMWU ultimately proved to be short-lived as a concerted effort by the state, the mine owners, and even the AFL and WFM destroyed the newly independent union by the end of the year. Although the union itself lasted only a short while, it dramatically altered the situation in Butte. The miners grew increasingly distrustful of the WFM and AFL, and they found the IWW to be useful allies against the conservative unions.³⁴⁹ The IWW, though sympathetic to the new union and hoping for success, still took the crushing of the BMWU in good stride, pointing out that the harsh repression was "making rebels" out of workers in Butte once thought to be "hopeless."³⁵⁰

Although there was indeed a well of untapped radicalism beneath the surface in Butte, for the next couple years, Butte had little effective organization since both the BMU and BMWU had been broken in 1914. In June 1917, however, after a dramatic fire killed 167 miners, Butte workers once again protested. Distrusting of the newly-renamed IUMMSW, miners formed another independent union – the Butte Metal Mine Workers' Union (BMMWU). Like the earlier BMWU, the BMMWU contained a sizeable IWW presence from its foundation.³⁵¹ The IWW, in

³⁴⁷ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 72.

³⁴⁸ "5,000 Miners Secede," *New York Times*, 22 June 1914, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1914/06/22/issue.html>, 18.

³⁴⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 306.

³⁵⁰ "Butte Under Military Rule," *Solidarity*, 26 September 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1914/v05-w246-sep-26-1914-solidarity-joe-hill.pdf>, 1.

³⁵¹ "Attempt Being Made to Cause Strike of Miners," *Anaconda Standard*, 13 June 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/350733273>, 1.

turn, was eager to support the strike that the BMMWU called in response to the dangerous conditions in the mines.³⁵²

Yet the IWW's overtures to the Butte strikers were not entirely altruistic. Although Wobbly leadership may have been sincere in their support for a better world for the workers and for a united working class, they also undoubtedly viewed the IWW as the only viable path forward to achieve that goal. The Wobbly principle of uniting all workers into one big union was based on the notion that the IWW would be that one big union. Sympathetic though the IWW may have been towards the Butte miners, it expected them to join the Wobbly revolution.

IWW organizers and writers felt no need to hide the fact that they were seeking to unite workers into the IWW. Before the ink had even dried for the BMMWU's founding, the IWW had already sent organizers into the field, and they promised to send more.³⁵³ Prominent figures in the IWW such as William Haywood encouraged the BMMWU to affiliate with the AFL, and his brother-in-law Charles MacKinnon was sent to unify the organizations. MacKinnon and other IWW organizers, however, found that the BMMWU, although sympathetic to and friendly towards the IWW, was fiercely protective of its independence. For now, the BMMWU executive committee chair insisted, the IWW would have to line up behind the BMMWU, not the other way around.³⁵⁴

The IWW was, for a time, willing to play ball and support the BMMWU. The BMMWU, meanwhile, was beginning to consider shifting away from the IWW and back towards the union it had so opposed, the IUMMSW. The question of IUMMSW affiliation came to a referendum, but since the IUMMSW's leaders were unwilling to recognize the BMMWU or their ongoing

³⁵² "Big Strike in Butte, Montana," *Solidarity*, 16 June 1917, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1917/v8-w388-jun-16-1917-solidarity.pdf>, 1, 4.

³⁵³ "Big Strike in Butte, Montana," 4.

³⁵⁴ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 87.

strike, it was handily defeated. No longer trusting of the IUMMSW and still uncertain about affiliation with the IWW, the BMMWU nevertheless recognized that existence as a lone independent union was not enough. Instead, BMMWU leaders put forward a plan for a new union of miners that would be independent from, though cooperate closely with, the IWW. Wobbly leadership, for its part, expressed eagerness to cooperate, though insisted that the only sensible solution in the long term was affiliation with the IWW.³⁵⁵

The BMMWU's ambitious plans ultimately came to naught as intense repression effectively crippled the union at the same time as miners' strikes led by the IWW in Arizona similarly collapsed. Yet the IWW's approach to dealing with the BMMWU is, in many ways, indicative of the IWW's usual approach to independent unions. The IWW approached the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW), a union of lumber workers in the Southern United States, in a very similar way. The Wobbly press spoke highly of their fellow workers, encouraging lumber workers in the south to reach out to the BTW to organize. At the same time, they clearly saw the BTW as a potential affiliate, insisting that workers should "[g]et into the Union, the Big Union that makes the injury to one an injury to all," a clear appeal to join the IWW.³⁵⁶ Once again, Wobbly organizers did not hide their intentions, sending Haywood and Covington Hall to a BTW meeting to urge affiliation – and unlike with the BMMWU, their efforts succeeded and the BTW joined the One Big Union as the Southern District of the Forest and Lumber Workers Industrial Union.³⁵⁷ Like the BMMWU, however, the BTW soon collapsed in the face of harsh repression.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 91.

³⁵⁶ "Special Appeal to All Who Work in the Woods," *Industrial Worker*, 11 May 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v3n07-w111-may-11-1911-IW.pdf>, 3.

³⁵⁷ Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South*, 123, 127-9; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 216.

³⁵⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 218-9.

The BMMWU and BTW were far from the only unions the IWW attempted to take over. Aside from its usual poaching of AFL locals, the IWW routinely sought to bring independent unions into the fold, insisting that the only way forward was with the IWW. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, IWW Local 20 established an Alliance of Textile Workers Unions with other local unions with the intention of “boring from within” and taking control of the entire industry.³⁵⁹ In the early 1920s, the IWW also succeeded in pilfering members from and even smashing locals among marine and transport workers.³⁶⁰

It is also worth pointing out how the IWW responded to unions which rejected to affiliate or cooperate with the IWW. In San Jose, California, an independent union by the name of the Toilers of the World formed in the local canning industry. The Toilers were aligned with the IWW in their strategies and philosophy, seeking to organize all workers industrially regardless of race and prioritizing mass picket lines. However, they ultimately opted to affiliate with the AFL instead, leading the once sympathetic and supportive IWW to reject the Toilers.³⁶¹ Other unions which were seemingly aligned with the IWW’s industrial unionist vision but opted to maintain their independence met with similar disdain. Independent unions which borrowed the demand for the unification of the workers into “One Big Union” who did not organize properly (that is to say, the IWW’s way) were nothing more than false prophets of industrial unionism.³⁶²

Whether rivals like the AFL or WFM or potential allies like the BMMWU or the BTW, the IWW viewed all non-IWW unions as being either against the IWW or for the IWW. As the self-appointed harbingers of the workers’ revolution, Wobblies had little time for unionists who would not get in line. Everyone had a part to play in the IWW, but no one had a part to play

³⁵⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 233-4.

³⁶⁰ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 141-2.

³⁶¹ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 124-5.

³⁶² Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 189.

outside of it.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the IWW's self-perception as the leaders of the workers' movement, the IWW was willing to make alliances with other unions, even if only briefly. Unions which were closely aligned to Wobbly theory and ideology could expect significant support on the assumption that they would soon fall into the IWW's orbit. Unions which were not aligned, however, still received support from the IWW to varying degrees, especially when they furthered IWW goals. Richard J. Evans's description of the Communist Party of Germany is easily reapplied to the IWW, finding it "always desirable to make common cause, but only on the [Wobblies'] own terms."³⁶³ Even when other union did not directly support the Wobbly cause, the IWW was sincerely committed to working-class solidarity and was generally unwilling to cross a picket line or defy a union's strike, even if the IWW was more than willing to criticize the perceived weaknesses of said strike.

The natural result of the IWW's behavior was a frosty, though not completely hostile, relationship with the rest of the established labor movement. Independent and rival unions often distrusted the IWW to acknowledge their independence. Combined with many unions' already existing distrust of the IWW's radicalism, it was a logical next step for many to engage in open warfare against the IWW as an illegitimate threat to the labor movement. At the same time, the power and prestige the IWW gained, partly through its opposition to the AFL, meant that it could be a powerful ally to have, and similarly radical industrial unions in particular looked to the IWW as a viable alternative to the conservative craft unionism of the AFL. Consequently, the American labor movement got caught in a war – sometimes cold, sometimes hot – between the two great labor powers, and neutrality was not an option.

³⁶³ Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (Penguin Books, 2003), 239.

“Respectable” Citizens and Middle-Class Progressives

The IWW was at its apex during the Progressive Era, and although it existed outside of the Progressive movement – aligning more with revolution than with reform – it nonetheless was an integral part of the era and had a significant effect on the Progressive movement. The issues that Wobblies brought attention to, such as limitations on civil liberties and especially dire working conditions, stirred the hearts of Progressives and reformers who sought to create a more humanitarian system. As a result, Progressive reformers could sometimes line up behind the IWW, lending their support to the Wobbly crusade if it seemed to align with Progressive goals and values.

At the same time, as reformers, many Progressives rejected the radical revolutionism of the IWW. Although their criticisms may have been valid, their solutions were not. Consequently, many Progressives sought to undermine the union’s revolutionism by advocating reforms which would solve their critiques through the proper channels. Not content with merely undermining the IWW, Progressives, despite their championing of civil liberties and greater democracy, also sometimes lent their support to harsh crackdowns on the IWW. Concerned not just with good government and democratization but also social morality, Progressives saw the IWW as a threat to American social fabric through its seeming rejection of the primacy of family, legitimization of free love, and propensity for secularism that bordered on atheism.

Regardless of whether reformers were aligned with the IWW or not, the fact that so many of them belonged to the middle, or even upper, class caused many Wobblies to be inherently suspicious. Even middle-class radicals who were wholly aligned with the IWW vision were not wholly trusted and were not allowed to join the one big union. Since the IWW was such a strongly class-conscious organization, allies outside of the working class were largely kept at

arm's length, ensuring that the IWW remained separate from the Progressive and reform movements.

These middle-class reformers were at their most supportive of, or at least sympathetic to, the IWW during the height of its repression. Even those who were no friends of the IWW sometimes found the treatment of the IWW so harsh and unfair that, despite their criticisms of the union, they could not stay silent. This qualified support is perhaps best demonstrated in the Spokane free speech fight of 1909. As with other free speech fights, the IWW sought to defy city ordinances against public speaking by continuing their street speaking regardless, for which they were promptly arrested. Among those arrested were Wobbly women, most notably Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Flynn found the conditions to be reprehensible and reeking of immorality, writing that the experience was “horrible, immoral and absolutely different from her ordinary, decent mode of life.”³⁶⁴

Flynn's account, and her focus on the immorality so prevalent in the jail, was perhaps crafted specifically to appeal to “respectable” Progressives and middle-class women. Whether it was her specific intention or not, her complaints certainly resonated with the women of Spokane. The City Club of Spokane, a group of middle-class women, insisted that a matron be appointed to the jail to ensure the moral and physical safety of imprisoned women and put together a committee to investigate Flynn's complaints and the jail's conditions as well as offering some support to the Wobblies in their fight.³⁶⁵ The Club was by no means sympathetic to the IWW's, goals, however, and they made that clear. One Club member wrote as much in a letter to the acting chief of police in Spokane, assuring him that “to most [members of the Club] no worse

³⁶⁴ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Story of My Arrest and Imprisonment,” *Industrial Worker*, 15 December 1909, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v1n39-dec-15-1909-IW.pdf>, 1.

³⁶⁵ Mayer, *Beyond the Rebel Girl*, 45, 48.

epithet could be hurled than I. W. W. sympathizer.”³⁶⁶ Flynn herself, writing retrospectively, noted that the middle-class women “los[t] all interest ... when they realized that the I. W. W. intended to organize” workers.³⁶⁷ Even still, the women of Spokane’s middle class were willing to overlook the IWW’s radicalism and agitation and defend Wobbly women against the worst of the worst excesses of the local jails.

Middle-class sympathizers also came to the defense of Wobblies accused of myriad crimes, in their minds, wrongly. In the case against Richard Ford and Herman Suhr, for instance, outraged citizens urged California officials to release the two men. One socialistic correspondent for the *Sacramento Star*, openly sympathetic to the men and therefore hardly a neutral reporter, insisted that “prominent men and women” were preparing a petition demanding the men’s release, insisting they could obtain 30,000 signatures.³⁶⁸ Yet even unsympathetic journalists recognized that Ford and Suhr had a strong support base, with one remarking that the district attorney had received “[h]undreds of letters” from around the United States, decrying the IWW for falsely portraying the men as “martyrs to the labor cause.”³⁶⁹ Other newspapers, equally unsympathetic to the IWW, similarly raised alarm at respectable groups, like the First Congressional Church of Oakland, “Be[ing] So Easily Misled By Hearsay,” as the sub headline for one article put it.³⁷⁰ Even some who had helped prosecute Ford and Suhr came to their

³⁶⁶ “Mrs. Stalford Replies to Mayor and Chief,” *Spokane Press*, 5 March 1910, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/932370107>, 3.

³⁶⁷ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “The I. W. W. Call to Women,” *Solidarity*, 31 July 1915, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1915/v06-w290-jul-31-1915-solidarity-10th-anniv-IWW.pdf>, 9.

³⁶⁸ Jack Jungmeyer, “Travesty on Justice, Says Public Jury,” *Sacramento Star*, 6 February 1914, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/607421289>, 1.

³⁶⁹ “Pose as Martyrs in Labor Cause,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 December 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/27566688>, 3.

³⁷⁰ “Congregational Church Believes Weird Tales,” *Marysville Evening Democrat*, 9 December 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/608783931>, 1; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 268.

defense.³⁷¹ In his contemporary study of the IWW, reformer John Graham Brooks noted with frustration the cult status afforded by liberals to Wobblies like Ford and Suhr who had been prosecuted, explaining, “It matters little what [prosecuted Wobblies] say; the sympathy that has been created in their favor supplies all deficiencies.”³⁷²

Although Progressives were sympathetic to low-level prosecution like with Ford and Suhr, these “respectable” citizens were most compelled to defend the union in the face of the federal repression that came during and after World War I. During the war and the initial stages of the prosecution, some prominent reformers approached the Wilson administration to encourage them to stop, or at least minimize, their repression of the IWW. Burton K. Wheeler, for instance, then an attorney in the state of Montana who gained notoriety for refusing to prosecute opponents of the war, urged the United States Attorney General Thomas Gregory to focus on prosecuting mine owners over labor unions.³⁷³ Frank Walsh, soon to become co-chair of the National War Labor Board alongside former president William Howard Taft, also expressed sympathy with the IWW, though he was unwilling to fully speak out against the prosecution. Other government officials, like Assistant Secretary of Labor Louis F. Post, held no such reservations, working both privately and publicly to oppose the prosecution.³⁷⁴ One former soldier from the Military Intelligence Division even wrote an open letter to Woodrow Wilson, assuring that “whatever prejudices I have ... are all uncompromisingly against the I. W. W.” but

³⁷¹ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 92.

³⁷² John Graham Brooks, *American Syndicalism: The I. W. W.* (Macmillan Company, 1913), 9.

³⁷³ Vernon L. Pedersen, “The Most Dangerous Man in Montana: Corruption, Communism, and Bill Dunne,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 67, no. 2 (2017), 51 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26322816>; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 396.

³⁷⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 429.

nevertheless insisting that the case was illegitimate.³⁷⁵ The former United States Senator from South Dakota, Richard Pettigrew, even testified in the IWW's defense during the Chicago trial.³⁷⁶ At the same time, sitting Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin urged Wilson to drop the case against female Wobbly Theodora Pollok in Sacramento.³⁷⁷

Much of the defense work done by liberal sympathizers, however, was done outside of the halls of power through protests, petitions, and donations to the defense fund. There was perhaps no greater "respectable" supporter of the IWW than the nascent National Civil Liberties Bureau (NCLB), headed by Roger Baldwin. The NCLB put out a pamphlet analyzing the IWW and the legitimacy of the charges against it, noting that "[e]ven the I. W. W. are entitled to" a fair trial.³⁷⁸ The pamphlet argued that the legalistic framework for the trial was unsound, and pointed out that the prosecutors' frequent aspersions against the IWW's patriotism were "irrelevant to the indictment ... [and] can have no purpose there except to incite the passion and prejudice" of the American people, a clear affront to the rule of law.³⁷⁹ Even the IWW's primary lawyer in the sedition trials was a supporter of the war who defended them out of a commitment to civil liberties rather than radical causes.³⁸⁰

Although the Wobblies did have some defenders during their prosecution, they were few and far between. After their trials, however, and after the fervor of World War I had died down, many reformers and Progressives argued for clemency and mercy for the imprisoned Wobblies. Chief among the clemency advocates was the NCLB, newly renamed to the American Civil

³⁷⁵ Alexander Sidney Lanier, "To the President," *The New Republic*, 19 April 1919, 383, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hxqfnh>.

³⁷⁶ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 120.

³⁷⁷ Mayer, *Beyond the Rebel Girl*, 119.

³⁷⁸ *The Truth about the I. W. W.* (National Civil Liberties Bureau, 1918), 3, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015079028349>.

³⁷⁹ *The Truth about the I. W. W.*, 51.

³⁸⁰ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 170.

Liberties Union, which was so fiercely dedicated to defending the Wobblies' rights that one private detective complained, "Wherever we seek to suppress these radicals, a civil liberties union promptly gets busy."³⁸¹ The Wilson administration similarly expressed frustration at the "church people" who were "good citizens" that similarly applied pressure to grant amnesty to the IWW prisoners.³⁸²

Some of the more liberal newspapers throughout the country took up their role as the "fourth branch of government" to similarly apply pressure to the federal government. Many of these papers were not radical by any means. The *Kansas Leader*, for instance, pointed out that by 1922, only two countries that had fought in World War I still had political prisoners – the United States and the Soviet Union. They argued that Wobblies should be freed from prison not out of sympathy for the Wobbly cause but in defense of "American decency."³⁸³ Other newspapers similarly pointed out that the United States was the last, or one of the last, warring countries to still have political prisoners.³⁸⁴ Even as Harding and Coolidge began letting out some prisoners, newspapers continued to hound them, insisting that all political prisoners be free. "Would Thomas Jefferson ... think there was much progress in this presidential order to let a few political prisoners out of jail and to keep a great many more political prisoners in jail?" one asked rhetorically.³⁸⁵ Yet no newspaper anywhere, with the exception of the IWW's own papers, was more enthusiastically committed to the cause of freedom for political prisoners than the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. When the last prisoners were finally released, the *Post-Dispatch* celebrated,

³⁸¹ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 67.

³⁸² Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 219.

³⁸³ "Loose Them and Let Them Go," *Kansas Leader* (Salina), 20 July 1922, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/486761868>, 4.

³⁸⁴ For example, see "Press Comment," *Shawnee Morning News*, 11 December 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/898632019>, 4.

³⁸⁵ "Much Room for Progress Yet," *Oakland Post Enquirer*, 25 June 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/999346479>, 14.

filling almost an entire page with articles about the release. Included on the page was “The Story of the Post-Dispatch’s Campaign for Justice for Political Prisoners Told in Headlines,” a collage of *Post-Dispatch* headlines from previous issues calling for their release. Also included was a self-congratulatory article, “Post-Dispatch Did Much for Prisoners.”³⁸⁶

The IWW’s clemency supporters also included several prominent politicians, mostly Progressive or liberal but sometimes even conservative. William Borah, who had been a prosecutor during the Haywood, Moyer, and Pettibone trial, proved one of the most avid allies, assuring Ralph Chaplin that he would “stage a one-man sitdown strike on the White House steps” if the last of the prisoners were not released by Christmas of 1923.³⁸⁷ Other politicians, both state and national, were willing to speak out for clemency as well. During a hearing by the Committee on the Judiciary on the subject of amnesty, Congressman C. Frank Reavis argued that, with the war being over, any suspension of civil liberties must be undone and a “humane government” like the United States should grant amnesty to those imprisoned during the war.³⁸⁸ An amnesty committee composed of Progressive Wisconsin Senator Robert M. La Follette as well as former South Carolina governor and soon to be United States senator Cole Blease also met with President Harding to urge clemency.³⁸⁹ Once the last of the Wobblies were finally released, a number of senators also spoke out in support of the amnesty, including George Norris, Charles Curtis, David Walsh, Wildman Brookhart, and Edwin Ladd.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 16 December 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/140258483>, 3.

³⁸⁷ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 332.

³⁸⁸ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Amnesty for Political Prisoners*, 67th Cong., 2nd sess., 16 March 1922, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951d02092180j>, 15.

³⁸⁹ “Harding to Receive Amnesty Committee,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1921, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1921/04/01/issue.html>, 15.

³⁹⁰ “Freeing of Prisoners Draws Expressions of Commendation,” *Mansfield News*, 16 December 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/291882755>, 1.

Repression was not the only time Progressives came to the IWW's aid, however. Dedicated to economic as well as political reform, many more progressive reformers found some of the IWW's critiques of job conditions and wealth concentration to be well-founded. In the 1916 Mesabi Iron Range strike, for instance, an appeal from local mayors – themselves on the side of the union – and the strike committee to Secretary of Labor William Wilson resulted in the appointment of two men as federal mediators. In stark contrast to the later suppression that the Woodrow Wilson administration would dole out to the IWW during World War I, the mediators came to the conclusion that the IWW's complaints, and their demands, were legitimate and that the IWW had acted in good faith.³⁹¹ Thorstein Veblen, tasked by the Food Administration in 1918 with studying the role of the IWW in farm labor and determining how to unify agricultural workers behind the war effort, similarly concluded that if the AWIU's rather reasonable demands were met, Wobblies would “give the best work of which they are capable.”³⁹² Carleton Parker, who had led California's investigation of the Wheatland hop riot in 1913, came to much the same conclusion, that the “IWW problem” was the result of the failure of employers to recognize “any IWW demands though many have a real basis and justification.”³⁹³

Other respectable figures were willing to lend support to the IWW not over a specific campaign but because of their actions more generally. Wallace Short, who was elected mayor of Sioux City in 1918, had expressed appreciation for the IWW's work among the unemployed prior to his mayorship. When the AWIU intended to host their convention in Sioux City, Short allowed them to gather, insisted that their constitutional rights be protected, and even gave a

³⁹¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 329; George P. West, “The Mesaba Strike,” *International Socialist Review*, September 1916, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v17n03-sep-1916-ISR-riaz-ocr.pdf>, 158-9.

³⁹² Thorstein Veblen, “Using the I.W.W. to Harvest Grain,” *Journal of Political Economy* 40, no. 6 (1932), 798, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1822901>.

³⁹³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 364.

speech to Wobblies at the convention, despite the threats of more conservative townsmen.³⁹⁴ The city of Kenmare, North Dakota outdid Sioux City in every way when the AWIU held their convention there in 1924. Like in 1919, the mayor gave a speech to the assembled delegates. Going further, however, he noted that the citizens of Kenmare were “well aware” of how essential these harvest Wobblies were for agriculture, donating \$50 “[o]n behalf of the business men of the town.” The convention responded in kind, giving an official recognition of gratitude to the townsfolks.³⁹⁵ Harvest Wobblies were not the only IWW members to receive praise. In New York City, John Graham Brooks praised the IWW for its dedication to the cause of the unemployed, though he was unable to resist criticizing the “childishness” of their proposed solution.³⁹⁶

Many liberals and Progressives like Brooks, despite sympathies with the IWW’s plights, sought a less radical, more moderate course to deal with labor strife. Many echoed Brooks, offering qualified praise with a paternalistic, condescending tinge to it. Louis Brandeis, for instance, noted that although the IWW’s long-term goals were “entirely worthless from a practical point of view,” praised them for the influence they exerted on craft unions like the AFL.³⁹⁷ This was largely where his even tentative support of the IWW stopped, however. Although he opposed the harsh treatment they faced, he still viewed the union as too radical and as a problem to be solved rather than a method of solving problems. Emblematic of many

³⁹⁴ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 160; “Convention Causes Official Unrest in Sioux City,” *New Solidarity*, 19 April 1919, 2, IWW Materials Preservation Project; Mat K. Fox, “Convention Held in Sioux City is Great Success,” *New Solidarity*, 3 May 1919, 1, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

³⁹⁵ “Many Industrial Unions Hold Important Annual Conventions,” *Industrial Solidarity*, 8 October 1924, 1, 4, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

³⁹⁶ John Graham Brooks, “The Challenge of Unemployment,” *The Independent*, 15 March 1915, <https://archive.org/details/independen81v82newy>, 385.

³⁹⁷ Louis Brandeis, “How Far Have We Come on the Road to Industrial Democracy? – An Interview,” reprinted in Osmond K. Fraenkel (ed.), *The Curse of Bigness: Miscellaneous Papers of Louis D. Brandeis* (Viking Press, 1934), <https://archive.org/details/curseofbignessmi0000osmo>, 47.

Progressives in the era, Brandeis argued that social reform at the hands of the state, combined with more benevolent treatment of workers by employers, would reduce the support for a radical organization like the IWW.³⁹⁸

Brandeis was far from alone in this view. Many Progressives were concerned with what they deemed to be a “labor problem” in the United States, represented by the IWW. In California, shortly before the Wheatland hop riot brought the IWW into the spotlight, Progressive Governor Hiram Johnson created the Commission of Immigration and Housing with the intention of alleviating workers’ woes to prevent further radicalization.³⁹⁹ Other reformers put forward their own proposals to ameliorate the conditions of workers which were equally dedicated to both preventing revolutionism and solving the “labor problem.” They advocated reforms such as hotels for transient workers and the homeless on one hand and explicit favoritism towards more moderate unions like the AFL on the other.⁴⁰⁰

Other Progressives embraced paternalism to the extent of appointing themselves as the protectors of workers’ rights, despite the protestations of the IWW and unionists more generally. This is most clearly demonstrated in the 1913 Oregon Packing Company strike. When women workers went on strike in demand of better pay and safer conditions, the Progressive Oregon Industrial Welfare Commission (OIWC) attempted to appoint itself the representative of the strikers. The OIWC leadership urged the strikers to return to work, promising to solve the dispute on its own. Despite the strikers’ refusal, the OIWC negotiated with the employers anyway, reaching a deal that neglected the demands for improved conditions and did not satisfy the wage demands, and declared the strike over. The strikers, unsurprisingly, continued to reject the self-

³⁹⁸ David M. Rabban, “The Emergence of Modern First Amendment Doctrine,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 50, no. 4 (1983): 1325-6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1599474>.

³⁹⁹ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 11.

⁴⁰⁰ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 23-5.

appointed Progressives.⁴⁰¹

In addition to viewing the IWW as too radical for respectable, patriotic American workers, many Progressives also viewed it as too lenient, irresponsible, and immoral. Here, again, the Oregon Packing Company strike is a perfect demonstration. This strike, with women in such a prominent role, was a prime target for Progressive morality policing. At a time when prostitution, rather tellingly referred to as “white slavery” by contemporary reformers, was one of the Progressive movement’s main concerns, the loose gender restrictions of the IWW caused a great deal of fuss. The *Oregonian*, a local newspaper, found the exaggerated threat of “white slavers” much more concerning for the strikers than the very real financial difficulties they faced as a result of low pay at the factory, warning that these “Human Parasites” were presenting themselves as Wobblies and, in what must have been a great shock to their sensibilities, “mingl[ing] freely” with the girls on the picket line.⁴⁰² As if the cavorting of young women and male Wobblies was not scandalous enough, Progressives struck up a great fuss about the vulgar language that Wobblies, and even the women strikers, frequently used out on the picket line. One woman, in fact, was arrested merely for using the word “scab.”⁴⁰³

Morality policing was not limited to strikes, nor to newspaper commentary. During the 1909 Spokane free speech fight, local judge John D. Hinkle informed one woman that “the I. W. W. Hall is no fit place for a woman and no good woman frequents it.”⁴⁰⁴ Other public officials offered their own opinions on how Wobblies spent their free time. North Dakota Governor

⁴⁰¹ Mayer, *Beyond the Rebel Girl*, 73-4.

⁴⁰² “Scouts for White Slavers are Busy,” *Morning Oregonian* (Portland), 18 July 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1082085953>, 5.

⁴⁰³ Mayer, *Beyond the Rebel Girl*, 83; “Patience of Mayor with Agitators Now at Breaking Point,” *Oregon Daily Journal* (Portland), 10 July 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1090694445>, 1, 13.

⁴⁰⁴ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “The Shame of Spokane,” *International Socialist Review*, January 1910, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v10n07-jan-1910-ISR-gog-LB-cov.pdf>, 615.

Ragnvald Nestos expressed “no sympathy” with the men who “persist in hanging around street corners, railroad yards and jungles” instead of working for the “splendid wages” being offered.⁴⁰⁵ Wobblies faced particular trouble from vagrancy laws, laws which criminalized various “unproductive” uses of time. These laws, as Ahmed White points out, were often championed by “forward-thinking, philanthropic, and progressive-minded people” in order to maintain order and prevent mischief on the streets.⁴⁰⁶ Of course, to many Progressives, the IWW was almost inherently disorderly and mischievous. Although Wobblies may have taken umbrage with the harsh moral judgement they received, they were not inclined to proclaim themselves moral and respectable. On the contrary, they sometimes rejoiced in their rejection of “bourgeois morality,” feeling as though it hindered class consciousness.⁴⁰⁷

Between the moral policing and the undermining of Wobbly radicalism that Progressives carried out, the IWW was skeptical of relying on help from outside its own constituency of the working class. One of the first issues the union debated, in fact, was the question of whether to allow a sympathetic attorney into the founding convention. Delegate J. W. Saunders insisted that “friends of labor” like him were invited to aid the IWW, “but from the outside.”⁴⁰⁸ Other middle-class and wealthy sympathizers were similarly relegated to allies, rather than members, of the IWW. Marie Equi, for instance, a physician based out of Portland, Oregon, was an avid supporter of the Wobblies, giving speeches to IWW halls and providing aid to strikes. Despite this, she was excluded from membership since she was self-employed.⁴⁰⁹

The IWW also placed little faith in reformers to make any kind of meaningful change.

⁴⁰⁵ “Nestos Urges War on Loafers,” *Grand Forks Herald*, 17 August 1922, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/351914187>, 2.

⁴⁰⁶ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 52.

⁴⁰⁷ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 293.

⁴⁰⁸ McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 82.

⁴⁰⁹ Mayer, *Beyond the Rebel Girl*, 141-3.

Since the 1908 split where the IWW had rid itself of the “political clause,” Wobblies routinely expressed skepticism towards legislation that would improve working conditions. Although, as Joseph Conlin pointed out, the IWW at least theoretically supported such reforms,⁴¹⁰ Wobblies could not imagine such reforms being enough. Instead, as Melvyn Dubofsky notes, they tended to ask, “How are [reform laws] *enforced*?”⁴¹¹ The answer that the IWW came to, time and time again, was that the “organized power of the working class” was the only viable means to enforce such laws.⁴¹² Jack London, although never a card-carrying Wobbly himself, reflected the pessimistic view of the union about the futility of reform as a means of fundamental change, remarking to a reporter, “no master class is ever willing to let go without a quarrel.”⁴¹³

Wobblies were, in some respects, right to distrust Progressives who sought to entangle themselves in the labor movement. Although many pronounced themselves friends and defenders of labor, the Progressive ideal of the labor movement did not include the IWW, which instead represented a radical perversion of the legitimate labor movement, echoing the AFL’s own understanding of the labor situation. Many of the most repressive Progressives, in fact, had ties to more moderate unions. The sheriff of Everett, Washington, for example, Donald McRae had been a former member, and even president, of a local of the International Union of Shingle Weavers, Sawmill Workers and Woodsmen.⁴¹⁴ Despite his former links to the movement, McRae was eager in his war against “I. W. W. agitators,” promising they would have no place in

⁴¹⁰ Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too*, 28-35.

⁴¹¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 158.

⁴¹² “R. R. Fight Only Begun,” *Solidarity*, 16 September 1916, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1916/v7-w349-sep-16-1916-solidarity.pdf>, 2.

⁴¹³ Emanuel Julius, “The Pessimism of Jack London,” *The Western Comrade*, June 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/westerncomrade/1306-westerncomrade-v1-n03.pdf>, 92.

⁴¹⁴ “M’Rae Says Tracy Was One of the Men Who Shot at Him,” *Everett Daily Herald*, 28 March 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/103156347>, 7.

Everett.⁴¹⁵ For those Wobblies who did make it into town, McRae had a fire hose “made ready to administer a water cure” if needed.⁴¹⁶

McRae was not exceptional for suppressing the IWW as a respectable friend of labor, although most labor-friendly enemies of the IWW carried out their repression through legislation and prosecution rather than brute force. One of their favorite methods was the criminal syndicalism law, a law which criminalized actions such as promoting sabotage or violence in labor relations, a thinly veiled attack on the IWW. The first state to implement such a law was Idaho. Although labor-friendly legislators had previously rejected harsher anti-labor legislation, they had no such reservations over a law restricting the IWW specifically.⁴¹⁷ Two years later, in Washington, the state legislature passed its own criminal syndicalism law alongside a major labor reform bill, thereby throwing a bone to the “legitimate” labor movement at the same time as it worked to crush the IWW.⁴¹⁸

Other states had taken similar multipronged approaches to dealing with the Wobbly menace. In the wake of the Wheatland hop riot, for instance, Hiram Johnson and his Progressive allies sought a way to restrict the IWW’s influence. While Johnson refused to grant clemency to Ford and Suhr, he also created a commission to investigate the IWW’s claims of poor working conditions. The commission’s report upheld the IWW’s complaints, but it also called for state intervention and regulation to fix the issues without giving the IWW any fuel. On the other hand, he coordinated with other Western governors in suppressing the IWW and appealing to the

⁴¹⁵ “Agitators Are Driven from the City by Police,” *Everett Daily Herald*, 23 August 1916, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1028722386>, 1.

⁴¹⁶ “Agitators Are Driven from the City by Police,” 2.

⁴¹⁷ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 74.

⁴¹⁸ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 131.

federal government for a national crackdown.⁴¹⁹

The idea of a nationally coordinated suppression of the IWW met with favorable responses by many other Progressives, especially as the United States grew increasingly closer to involvement in World War I. Figures like George Creel who had dedicated themselves to advancing social reforms, economic reforms, and labor laws now found themselves advocating for a war on the IWW through laws limiting labor radicalism and anti-war sentiment.⁴²⁰ Kennesaw Mountain Landis, the judge who prosecuted the IWW's main leaders in Chicago, offered an explanation for the sudden pivot, saying, "once war is declared, this right [free speech] ceases."⁴²¹

Although these Progressives were harsh in their suppression of the IWW, they still largely represented the moderate approach compared to some of the more extreme measures proposed. Creel, for instance, although committed to the repression of the IWW's leadership, objected to the prosecution of low-level rank-and-file Wobblies.⁴²² Simon Lubin, another early advocate of prosecutions against the IWW, similarly objected to the sheer scale; in response, he found himself labeled as a secret IWW member.⁴²³

It is little wonder, then, that the IWW was so skeptical of making alliances with or overtures to reformers, liberals, and Progressives. Even had they wanted to work alongside these respectable reformers, few wanted anything to do with the IWW. On the contrary, they often sought to undermine the IWW and redirect workers into the "respectable" labor movement, the nascent welfare state, or religious communities. They had little tolerance for the radicalism and

⁴¹⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 299-300.

⁴²⁰ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 81.

⁴²¹ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 167.

⁴²² Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 176.

⁴²³ For example, see "Daughter of Lublin Denies I. W. W. Tale," *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, 27 October 1938, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/704014110>, A-12.

the “immorality” of the IWW.

Even those who were seemingly sympathetic to the IWW to some degree were generally unreliable. Many Progressives instead viewed the IWW with a condescending sense of paternalism, seeing the union much as a parent might see an unruly and immature child. They believed that they, and the state, knew what workers needed more than the workers themselves did. For a union that proudly advocated workers’ self-empowerment, this was unacceptable.

Instead, the IWW and the liberal middle class maintained a constantly shifting alliance of convenience. Each side used the other when it was advantageous, and each side attacked the other when it was necessary. The IWW could attack the idle rich one day and ask for donations the next. And indeed, those respectable citizens could decry the IWW as a Bolshevik plot just as soon as they would praise them for their defense of free speech. But the IWW, as dedicated and outspoken revolutionists, could never fully line up with the reformists.

Farmers

The IWW’s relationship with farmers is worth particular examination, if for no other reason than to gain an understanding of how Wobbly doctrine defined class. The IWW, as mentioned above, had a rather strict limit to who could join the union, limiting its membership exclusively to the working class. The IWW’s definition of class was not always clear, and not always consistent, but it largely relied on a combination of the traditionally Marxist concept of the individual’s relationship to the means of production and the power they held over other workers.⁴²⁴ Farmers, then, were in an ambiguous position. Tenant farmers were alienated from

⁴²⁴ Ebert, *The I.W.W. in Theory and Practice*, 9; Jaime Caro-Morente, “The Political Culture of the Industrial Workers of the World: A Radicalization of the Republican-Democratic Political Culture Within

the means of production, working land that they did not own, yet they aspired to own it. Moreover, both tenant and non-tenant farmers often relied on hired labor to harvest, even if it was temporary. At the same time, the IWW's rhetoric often focused narrowly on the plight of the wage earner, and since farmers did not earn wages, their claim to membership in the working class was even shakier in the IWW's eyes.

Whatever class farmers belonged to, during the early 20th century, especially before American entrance into World War I, many farmers were sympathetic to socialism and other forms of left-wing economic populism. In Oklahoma, a highly agricultural state, the Socialist Party received 20% of the vote at its height, with many agricultural communities voting for the party in even greater numbers.⁴²⁵ Meanwhile, farmers' organizations like the Farmers' Union, the American Society of Equity, and the Nonpartisan League (NPL) put a specifically agrarian spin on the left-wing economics, often developing alongside Progressivism.⁴²⁶

At the same time, as the IWW gained prominence in the United States, some farmers developed a deep sympathy with the burgeoning union. As Ahmed White explains, many of these farmers worked alongside and talked with the men who worked their fields. They trusted the Wobblies and felt a shared identity as workers and, therefore, members of the working class.⁴²⁷ Sympathetic farmers like these often went out of their way to hire IWW members to work on their fields, not only because they felt a kinship with them but also because they thought

the American and International Labor Movements," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 15, no. 2 (2021): 114-5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48642383>.

⁴²⁵ Garin Burbank, "Agrarian Radicals and Their Opponents: Political Conflict in Southern Oklahoma, 1910-1924," *Journal of American History* 58, no. 1 (1971): 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1890078>.

⁴²⁶ Theodore Saloutos, "The Rise of the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota, 1915-1917," *Agricultural History* 20, no. 1 (1946): 43-4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3739348>.

⁴²⁷ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 58.

Wobblies, if paid and treated adequately, were reliable.⁴²⁸ One farmer, in fact, allegedly declared, “The IWWs I know are swell fellows, but them [sic] alleged IWWs I read about in the papers are holy terrors.”⁴²⁹

No farmers’ group was more of a friend – though not quite an ally – to the IWW than the North Dakota-based Nonpartisan League. The NPL itself was sympathetic to the Socialist Party and the broader socialist movement that was so prominent among American farmers at the time, and as a result, it was also at least somewhat sympathetic to the IWW’s goals. The NPL was so sympathetic to the IWW, in fact, that during the AWIU’s 1917 convention, NPL president Arthur C. Townley reached out to the convention asking the AWIU to send delegates to meet with the NPL to come to an agreement on wages, hours, and conditions during the harvest season.⁴³⁰ At the same time, a deal between the groups had practical benefits as well. As the NPL’s newspaper, the *Nonpartisan Leader*, pointed out, if the deal went ahead, aside from preventing any disputes on the job, North Dakota farmers could “draw on an organization having 20,000 to 30,000 members” to ensure they have enough workers for their fields.⁴³¹ Although the agreement fell through on the NPL’s side as members split on the issue, farmers in western North Dakota in particular were enthusiastic about the prospect. “I would have taken it with open arms,” one farmer said about the proposed deal.⁴³² And indeed, even after the official deal fell apart, some farmers continued to follow the established provisions all the same, resulting in better wages and

⁴²⁸ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 90.

⁴²⁹ Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 79-80.

⁴³⁰ “Agricultural Workers’ Convention a Hummer,” *Solidarity*, 9 June 1917, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1917/v8-w387-jun-09-1917-solidarity.pdf>, 1.

⁴³¹ “League Plans Supply of Farm Labor,” *Nonpartisan Leader* (Fargo), 7 June 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/85991473>, 6.

⁴³² “Farm Labor Plan Abandoned,” *Nonpartisan Leader*, 19 July 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/859915552>, 10.

hours for harvest Wobblies in North Dakota.⁴³³ At the same time, in contrast to the rise of criminal syndicalism laws around the country, North Dakota, under NPL-affiliated governor Lynn Frazier, explicitly rejected any such repression and, on the contrary, pointedly defended the rights of migrant laborers and unionists from harassment.⁴³⁴

Other farmers, not content to be mere allies or supporters of the IWW, fully embraced Wobbly ideology and sought to join the one big union. Some farmers wrote in to IWW papers, expressing their sympathy and solidarity.⁴³⁵ One Oklahoma farmer, after listening to Frank Little speak to a Socialist Party local, enthusiastically informed Little that the IWW vision for a new world finally helped farmers like him understand how to “organize and administer a Co-operative Commonwealth.” He and his fellow radical farmers eagerly applied to join the IWW, but they were unable to join since they were not wageworkers.⁴³⁶ Despite their rejected memberships, these farmers bought into the IWW entirely, expressing skepticism about political socialism and embracing direct action, something that the IWW excelled at.⁴³⁷ Another, writing in to the *Industrial Worker*, asked the union to accept farmers so that they might become “union men and not scabs.”⁴³⁸

Unwilling to abandon their Wobblyism but unable to join the IWW itself, many radical farmers sought to form their own IWW-esque organizations or join similar groups with more lax membership policies. In Texas and Louisiana, for instance, tenant farmers were able to join the

⁴³³ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 135.

⁴³⁴ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 137.

⁴³⁵ For example, see “Let the Producers Get Together,” *Voice of the People*, 18 June 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/lumberjack/140618-voiceofthepeople-v3n25w076.pdf>, 4.

⁴³⁶ Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South*, 187.

⁴³⁷ Nigel Sellars, “Wobblies in the Oil Fields: The Suppression of the Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma,” in Joyce (ed.), *An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before*, 132.

⁴³⁸ George R. White, “As A Farmer Sees It,” *Industrial Worker*, 6 March 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n50-w206-mar-06-1913-IW.pdf>, 3.

then-IWW-affiliated Brotherhood of Timber Workers, which also worked closely alongside the Socialist Renters' Union, despite protestations from IWW headquarters.⁴³⁹ At about the same time, Thomas A. Hickey helped found a Renters' Union in Texas which drew from Hickey's exposure to the IWW's ideology and methods, including a firm rejection of political partisanship, a clear distinction between workers and non-workers, and a willingness to organize non-white farmers.⁴⁴⁰

Yet no farmers' organization was more dedicated to formulating an agrarian syndicalism than the Oklahoma-based Working Class Union (WCU). The WCU was by no means identical to the IWW; on the contrary, rather than openly proclaim its gospel, it swore members to secrecy upon pain of death.⁴⁴¹ Most importantly, of course, the WCU accepted, and indeed prioritized, tenant farmers, as well as members of the middle class.⁴⁴² Nevertheless, mainstream newspapers picked up on the obvious similarities, pointing to the WCU as an "analogous organization" which used "methods very similar to those used by the I. W. W."⁴⁴³

Their observations were largely correct. As Nigel Anthony Sellars notes, the WCU formed in direct response to the IWW's rejection of tenant farmers into their union.⁴⁴⁴ Even so, the WCU continued to try and tie itself to the IWW, even asking Frank Little once again if they could affiliate. Little, once again, said no.⁴⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the WCU proceeded. WCU members, rather than mere farmers, often had ties to and experience in the increasingly industrial economy,

⁴³⁹ Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 212-3.

⁴⁴⁰ Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 223; T. A. Hickey, "The Land Renters Union in Texas," *International Socialist Review*, September 1912, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v13n03-sep-1912-ISR-gog-ocr.pdf>, 243-4.

⁴⁴¹ Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 325.

⁴⁴² "Agricultural Workers' Convention a Hummer."

⁴⁴³ "New Phases in Economic Warfare," *Harlow's Weekly*, 11 December 1915, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/657301069>, 429-30.

⁴⁴⁴ Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*, 78.

⁴⁴⁵ Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 326-7.

with many having earned wages as farmhands or oil workers. Consequently, the industrialism and proletarian-centrism of the IWW only brought them closer to the WCU, hence why they were so adamant about connecting to the Wobblies, even to the point of publicly, and falsely, proclaiming that the IWW was ready to join with the WCU and bring down “Kaiser Wilson” in Washington. Their gambit to force the IWW to ally with them failed. The AWIU rejected any form of affiliation, and the WCU was left on its own to pursue its increasingly incoherent and ill-conceived plans.⁴⁴⁶

Although the WCU received little public support from the IWW by the time of the Green Corn Rebellion, its short-lived attempt to overthrow Woodrow Wilson, many Wobblies were sympathetic to the broader plight of small farmers and hoped to see them join the one big union.⁴⁴⁷ The most avid supporter of their enlistment was likely Covington Hall, who, as an organizer in the South working closely with the BTW, came to sympathize with tenant farmers and recognize their revolutionary potential. He used his position as editor of the paper *Voice of the People* (formerly known as *The Lumberjack*) to support their recruitment, including articles which argued that “[t]he I. W. W. reflects the economic interests of the small farmer” and urging farmers to “unite on terms of equality with the Workers of the World.”⁴⁴⁸

Hall’s crusade on behalf of small farmers reached the IWW at large through the pages of

⁴⁴⁶ This explanation of the WCU’s ideology and ties to the IWW is drawn from Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*, 78-92. See also “Agricultural Workers’ Convention a Hummer” for the AWIU’s refusal to affiliate.

⁴⁴⁷ For an overview of the Green Corn Rebellion, see Nigel Anthony Sellars, “With Folded Arms? Or With Squirrel Guns? The IWW and the Green Corn Rebellion,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 77, no. 1 (1999): 150-69, https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc2031868/m2/1/high_res_d/1999-v77-n02_a02.pdf.

⁴⁴⁸ “Working Farmer, Organize!” *Voice of the People*, 28 May 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/lumberjack/140528-voiceofthepeople-v3n22w073.pdf>, 4; Fred Freeman, “Working Farmer and the Land,” *Voice of the People*, 30 June 1914, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/lumberjack/140630-voiceofthepeople-v3n26w077.pdf>, 4.

the *Industrial Worker*, which reprinted an article from *The Lumberjack* on the topic.⁴⁴⁹ In response, many Wobblies wrote in to offer their own opinions on the matter. Although many sided against Hall, some wrote in support of tenant farmers in particular. One Wobbly assured readers that radical small farmers were “on the same side of the class struggle.”⁴⁵⁰ One Wobbly, conceding that tenant farmers were not the primary focus of a wage-workers’ union like the IWW, nevertheless argued that there were many tenant farmers in the South who also worked for wages; classifying them as “capitalists” despite their hardship was “very absurd.” Besides, he pointed out, the IWW was not merely a union – it was also “the germ of the coming revolution,” and potential revolutionaries could not be abandoned.⁴⁵¹

This Wobbly’s uncertain waffling about where or how to include tenant farmers was reflective of many other IWW members who sympathized with farmers’ plights. Another Southern Wobbly, E. F. Doree, similarly expressed dismay at the idea that small farmers could be written off as capitalists. On the contrary, he argued that many of the Southern tenant and small farmers were essentially just “wage worker[s] with a home,” including the IWW’s “best fighting material” who had been blacklisted from lumber mills for organizing. If the IWW was unwilling to organize small farmers, “we may as well move the I. W. W. north of the Dixie line.”⁴⁵² One Wobbly, skeptical about tenants farmers’ class position but willing to offer support to truly revolutionary farmers, supported creating a Farmers’ Auxiliary to the IWW which would exist outside of the IWW proper but still received the support of the IWW in the revolutionary

⁴⁴⁹ Covington Hall, “The Rebel Farmers of the South,” *Industrial Worker*, 23 January 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n44-w200-jan-23-1913-IW.pdf>, 3.

⁴⁵⁰ “The Working Farmer and the I.W.W.” *Solidarity*, 6 March 1915, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1915/v06-w269-mar-06-1915-solidarity.pdf>, 2.

⁴⁵¹ B. E. Nilsson, “Can Tenant Farmers Be Admitted to Membership?” *Industrial Worker*, 6 February 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n46-w202-feb-06-1913-IW.pdf>.

⁴⁵² E. F. Doree, “The Southern Tenant Farmer,” *Industrial Worker*, 6 March 1913, 3.

struggle.⁴⁵³

Most Wobblies, however, were distrustful of farmers being allowed into the IWW. Although some sympathized with their economic plights, acknowledging that they were increasingly running the risk of losing their homes and livelihoods from increasing centralization, corporatization, and industrialization of agriculture, this only reinforced their hesitancy to allow in farmers. After all, if small farmers were being driven out of farming and into the ranks of the wage-earning proletariat, then there would soon be “no question as to their fitness for membership.” Only once they proletarianized would the farmer truly become “one of us.”⁴⁵⁴ In fact, Wobblies who made these arguments seemed to embrace the destruction of tenant farms, viewing as the natural next step in economic development. Since IWW doctrine often took inspiration from Marxism, they could view the squeezing out of small farmers as an unstoppable natural law of economics rather than as an intentional development that could, or should, be stopped.⁴⁵⁵

Others based their rejection of farmers on the basic principles of class warfare. Farmers, even small and tenant farmers, relied on hired labor during the harvest season to pick crops. Even if the farmers were die-hard revolutionaries the other 11 months of the year, during the harvest season, “class antagonisms would arise during the term of employment.”⁴⁵⁶ The IWW had a clear and, for the most part, unmalleable definition of class, more simplified than that laid out by Karl Marx. According to Wobbly doctrine, there were only two classes – the working class and the

⁴⁵³ T. F. G. Dougherty, “Advocates a Farmers’ Auxiliary,” *Industrial Worker*, 20 February 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n48-w204-feb-20-1913-IW.pdf>, 4.

⁴⁵⁴ C. E. Payne, “Small Farmers Retard Industrial Development,” *Industrial Worker*, 13 February 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n47-w203-feb-13-1913-IW.pdf>, 4.

⁴⁵⁵ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 85.

⁴⁵⁶ “Farmers and Wage Workers,” *Industrial Worker*, 30 January 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v4n45-w201-jan-30-1913-IW.pdf>, 2.

employing class. Tenant farmers, struggling as they may be, were employers, and therefore, “exploiters.” Wage workers, the only class allowed into the IWW, were, on the other hand, “exploited.” According to the IWW, never the twain shall meet.⁴⁵⁷ To allow both classes into the union would “invite certain disaster.”⁴⁵⁸ One cartoon in the pages of the *Industrial Worker* sarcastically portrayed the “Brother Farmer” as demanding long hours from his farmhands. Even the farmer’s son is an exploiter, urging his father, “you better cut their wages.”⁴⁵⁹

Although Hall and other IWW supporters of farmers considered rejecting them as members as “one of the biggest mistakes in [the IWW’s] history,”⁴⁶⁰ and although many small farmers were clearly enraptured by the revolutionary attitude and ideology of the IWW, those who argued against farmers joining the union (and ultimately won the debate) certainly had valid arguments. The discussions over the role of tenant farmers in the IWW focused on those farmers who were “revolutionary” and sympathetic to the IWW, but there would have been no real way to screen out “counterrevolutionary” farmers had the IWW opened its membership. Any attempt to allow those certain, sympathetic farmers into the union while excluding those who opposed the IWW through some form of revolutionary purity test would have been fruitless and, more than likely, would have destabilized the IWW rather than strengthened it.

Moreover, the IWW saw the world fundamentally through a lens of class warfare. And while individual farmers may have had reasons to be sympathetic to socialism, or even IWWism more specifically, farmers as a class did not. On the contrary, harvest Wobblies had had enough experience with farmers to know that they could be just as harsh as, if not harsher than,

⁴⁵⁷ Ernest Griffeth, “Can We Unite Both Master and Slave?” *Industrial Worker*, 6 February 1913, 3.

⁴⁵⁸ “As the Editor Sees It,” *Industrial Worker*, 6 March 1913, 3.

⁴⁵⁹ “An Identity of Interest” (cartoon), *Industrial Worker*, 16 July 1910,

<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v2n17-w69-jul-16-1910-IW.pdf>, 1.

⁴⁶⁰ Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South*, 187.

employers in any other industry. Farmers, like any other employer, sought to make a profit. So when IWW members demanded farmers to cut their profit margins by upping wages, shortening hours, and improving conditions, many refused to hire them.⁴⁶¹ Some even resorted to violence, as with one mob of farmers in Kansas which drove Wobblies out of their camp.⁴⁶² Others appealed to their state governments, urging coordinated action against the IWW.⁴⁶³ Many Wobblies remembered, too, that it had been farmers who created the dire conditions that led to the Wheatland hop riot, and it was farmers who had rejected any calls for reform or improved conditions in the aftermath.⁴⁶⁴ If excluding sympathetic tenant farmers was the price to pay for excluding some of the worst exploiters in the country, it was a price worth paying indeed.

Conclusion

The early twentieth century was a time of constant change as multiple groups sought to bring about either reform or revolution. The IWW, which was primarily (though not exclusively) revolutionary, seemed to fit in rather neatly among the myriad social movements which were so prominent. In reality, however, it struggled to fit in with the milieu of the Progressive Era. Its revolutionism meant that it neither fully trusted nor was fully trusted by the reformists which were dominant during the period. Disagreements arose between the IWW and reformists over questions of how far reforms should go, whom they should apply to, and who gets to decide how the working class behaves.

At the same time, the IWW also engaged in jurisdictional fights with both reformists and

⁴⁶¹ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 101.

⁴⁶² Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 123.

⁴⁶³ Eldridge F. Dowell, *A History of Criminal Syndicalism Legislation in the United States* (De Capo Press, 1969), <https://archive.org/details/historyofcrimina0000dowe>, 61-2.

⁴⁶⁴ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 2-3, 11.

its fellow revolutionaries. The IWW vision of a future society was one build around organizing all workers into one big union, which of course meant the IWW. It existed as the self-appointed sole representative of the working class, and anyone else who tried to sever that status by speaking on behalf of the workers – whether liberal reformers, moderate trade unionists, or Communist Party officials – was decried as a labor fakir or a counterrevolutionary. At the same time, none of these other social movements were willing to give up their own self-proclaimed statuses as leaders of the workers, creating an unbridgeable chasm between the opposing “leaders.”

The result of these countless disagreements about how change should be brought about resulted in the IWW working temporarily alongside many groups but having no real long-term allies. On the contrary, many of the groups which the IWW could, in theory, have worked alongside were more inclined to be rivals or even enemies of the IWW. Consequently, the IWW was left largely on its own to carry out its often overly ambitious plans and to face the combined powers of capital and the state. When the IWW needed external assistance to some degree – as it frequently did – it had to scramble to find people and organizations that would be willing and able to help since it had few friends on permanent standby.

Yet although the IWW’s diehard, uncompromising revolutionism may have prevented it from fully allying with other groups, it is also what made it so appealing to so many of the people who would eventually join. Had the IWW moderated its stances to, for instance, cooperate more closely with the AFL, there would have been little to appeal to either those who opposed the AFL or those who supported the AFL. Had the IWW opened its membership to accept middle-class sympathizers or farmers, there would have been little preventing the IWW from shifting away from union organizing to unrelated side issues, a problem with which it

already struggled. And, as Melvyn Dobofsky points out, had the IWW fallen in line with its fellow revolutionaries associated with the Comintern, it almost certainly would have been reduced to little more than a marching agent for the Soviet Union.⁴⁶⁵

The IWW, truthfully, was in an untenable position, forced to choose between protecting its identity and goals or seeking safety in alliances. Although, to paraphrase William Haywood, the IWW could have done with less cutting of the Gordian knot in its relationships with other groups, it was unlikely to ever find a comfortable middle ground. The IWW, as a revolutionary organization with a specific vision for the future, was unlikely to become a major player in the United States. As John Gambs observed, revolutionary organizations in the United States are simply unlikely to attract significant membership.⁴⁶⁶ Its relatively miniscule membership was only exacerbated by changing economic and social conditions in the country which undermined its efforts.

⁴⁶⁵ Dobofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 465.

⁴⁶⁶ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 200.

Chapter Three: External Circumstances

Although this thesis has, thus far, focused largely on factors contributing to the IWW's decline to which the IWW was at least party, the union was also a victim of circumstance. The United States in the early 20th century was undergoing dramatic changes, as was the world around it. Although the IWW was a part of this change, it also suffered because of it, unable to adapt to the new world in which it increasingly found itself.

Perhaps no factor has been more explored than the repression which the IWW faced at the hands of government. Local governments sought to drive Wobblies out of towns, and state governments created criminal syndicalism laws that were thinly veiled – if veiled at all – attacks on the IWW. But after the outbreak of World War I, the federal government, firing up its war machine, declared the IWW its internal enemy, a partner to the external enemy of Germany and the other Central Powers. Consequently, the government cracked down on the alleged anti-war threat the IWW represented. Soon after, with the outbreak of the Bolshevik Revolution, the United States embraced anti-Communist hysteria, and the IWW found itself a target of this first Red Scare.

Yet if the rise of anti-Communism was detrimental to the IWW, so was the rise of Communism. The variety of syndicalism which the IWW promoted had once been a major force in the American left. The success of the Bolsheviks, however, led to a shift away from the union-led radicalism of the Wobblies to the party-led radicalism of the Communists, resulting in a loss of members to the Communist movement. At the same time, the short-lived Technocracy movement had its own draining effect on the IWW. Moreover, many Wobblies, beat down by repression and feeling permanently on the losing side of the class war, simply lost the fire of IWWism which had driven them previously.

Part of the reason for this shift away from Wobbly syndicalism was the shift that occurred

in the economy at the same time. The IWW was unquestionably a product of its time, a response to the unregulated working conditions and the reliance on unskilled labor that dominated the United States at the turn of the 20th century. By the 1920s, however, working conditions began to improve – partly because of Wobbly organizing – which resulted in fewer workers willing to line up for a workers’ revolution. At the same time, improvements in technology, especially in agriculture and transportation, reduced the need for so many unskilled workers, reducing the IWW’s pool of potential members and limiting their effective power.

This mix of external circumstances resulted in an overall weakening of the IWW’s power and membership. Although the IWW was relatively new to the labor scene, by forming at such a volatile and changing time, it was quickly left behind.

Repression and the Red Scare

The IWW’s repression at the hands of the federal government is one of the most studied aspects of its decline, with entire books having been written about that subject alone.⁴⁶⁷ While this is, undoubtedly, an important factor, it is worth exploring in the wider context of government repression which the union faced – not just from the federal government, but also from local and state governments, vigilante groups, and businesses.

No matter who ordered the suppression, local police were frequently involved in carrying the orders out, often with great eagerness. Many police had more or less direct ties to the businesses involved in IWW strikes. The sheriff’s group that opened fire on the workers at the Durst Ranch, for instance, included a lawyer for the Dursts and used a car supplied by the Dursts

⁴⁶⁷ For examples, see Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*; White, *Under the Iron Heel*.

as well.⁴⁶⁸ Although many were willing and eager to assist in the war on the Wobblies, some police complained about the increasing influence of the businesspeople on law enforcement. One police captain in Los Angeles lamented, “we policemen have been made the tools of the big business interests who want to run things.”⁴⁶⁹

His discomfort with the state of policing was far from common, however. Many police departments and sheriffs were enthusiastic to crack down on the Wobblies, even without direct corporate backing. Some, like Everett, Washington sheriff Donald McRae, who was a member of the local Commercial Club and the Open Shop League, were devoted believers in the free market. Keeping the IWW out of town, even if it meant opening fire on a ship full of Wobbly civilians, was necessary for the protection of capitalism.⁴⁷⁰ Others, like Bisbee, Arizona sheriff Harry Wheeler, viewed the IWW as a threat to whiteness, and white women in particular. Wheeler, with assistance from the Phelps Dodge corporation and deputies from out of town, forcibly deported Wobblies and even some AFL members to protect the women.⁴⁷¹ Still others, like the police in Boise, were so inundated with American patriotism that they threatened any Wobbly who should “speak of the national emblem [the American flag] with disrespect.”⁴⁷² IWW newspapers routinely compared the behavior of the police to the repression doled out by autocrats like Nicholas II, then-tsar of Russia.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁸ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 6.

⁴⁶⁹ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 45.

⁴⁷⁰ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 49-51.

⁴⁷¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 385. See also Mitchell Abidor, *I’ll Forget It When I Die!: The Bisbee Deportation of 1917* (AK Press, 2021), 96, 128; Katherin Benton-Cohen, “Docile Children and Dangerous Revolutionaries: The Racial Hierarchy of Manliness and the Bisbee Deportation of 1917,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Woman Studies* 24, no. 2/3, 43-4, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3347346>.

⁴⁷² “Lurid Emblem Barred in Boise,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 May 1912, <https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/380252263>, 3.

⁴⁷³ For example, see “Spokane’s Sweat Box” (cartoon), *Industrial Worker*, 15 December 1909, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v1n39-dec-15-1909-IW.pdf>, 1.

Police departments and sheriffs' offices were far from the only groups dedicated to breaking the IWW. Vigilante groups – many made up of local law enforcement as well – often set out to teach the union a lesson. In San Diego, just a month before the Boise incident, a group of vigilantes sought to teach the IWW its own brand of patriotism. They forcibly removed some Wobblies from a freight train, forced them to kiss the flag and sing the Star Bangled Banner, and run a gauntlet of men attacking them with makeshift weapons.⁴⁷⁴ “Thus did San Diego ... teach patriotism and reverence for the law” to the men, one writer remarked.⁴⁷⁵

The San Diego “lesson” was closer to the usual than to an outlier. By 1919, in fact, the IWW was able to put together a short list of incidents of violence against the union, including murders, beatings, deportations, tarrings and featherings, and kidnappings.⁴⁷⁶ In 1910, the *Los Angeles Times* reported – under the headline “DRIVE OUT LOAFERS” – that a mob in Fresno had raided an IWW camp and burned down the tent in which the Wobblies were living, though none were killed.⁴⁷⁷ In 1913, the same paper reported with delight the irony that one Wobbly had been saved from an angry mob by the very same police officer he had been antagonizing.⁴⁷⁸ In 1917, a vigilante group known as the Knights of Liberty tarred and feathered a group of IWW members in Oklahoma in an incident soon dubbed the “Tulsa Outrage.”⁴⁷⁹ In fact, the situation got so out of hand with the American entrance into World War I that, in an act of desperation, the IWW asked for protection from the federal government – certainly no friends of the IWW at the

⁴⁷⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 191-3.

⁴⁷⁵ Walter V. Woehlke, “I. W. W.,” *The Outlook*, 1912, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=iau.31858033603394>, 531.

⁴⁷⁶ “With Drops of Blood the History of the Industrial Workers of the World Has Been Written” (Chicago, c. 1919), IWW Materials Preservation Project.

⁴⁷⁷ “Drive Out Loafers,” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 December 1910, <https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/380268125>, 5.

⁴⁷⁸ “Saved From Mob,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 September 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/380297307>, 1.

⁴⁷⁹ Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*, 108-9.

time. Unsurprisingly, their pleas went unheard.⁴⁸⁰

One of the most notable instances of vigilantism against the IWW occurred that same year with the lynching of Frank Little in Butte, Montana. Little had been one of the most outspoken opponents of the war among the union and one of its most ardent organizers. On the night of 1 August, he was kidnapped from his room, beaten, dragged behind a car, and hanged from a nearby bridge. Although the incident provoked great outrage among both the IWW – who placed Little next to Joe Hill as the two greatest martyrs in the class war – and the public, drawing thousands of supporters to his funeral, no one was ever prosecuted for the lynching.⁴⁸¹

Between the relative legitimacy of police violence and the illegitimacy of vigilante violence stood private detective agencies. While these agencies had once been used as something of a private army against organized labor,⁴⁸² their role had somewhat shifted by the time the IWW became a prime target. Sometimes, they acted as backup to the local police, assisting in either investigations of or police brutality against the IWW.⁴⁸³ More frequently, however, private detectives acted as spies in the organization, infiltrating the union to gain access to information. Many even managed to become ranking union officers.⁴⁸⁴ In addition to the obvious effects of gaining information from the IWW, infiltration by the private detective agencies also had the

⁴⁸⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 383.

⁴⁸¹ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 100-4; Foner, *Labor and World War I*, 288-9.

⁴⁸² For example, see Philip Dray, *There Is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* (Anchor Books, 2010), 169-75 on the 1892 Homestead Strike and the involvement of the Pinkerton Detective Agency.

⁴⁸³ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 52; Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 20-1; “Special Guard’s Bravery Prevents I. W. W. Outrage,” *Long Beach Daily Telegraph*, 29 January 1918, <https://www.newspapers.com/image-view/608296489>, 12.

⁴⁸⁴ Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*, 97; Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 56; Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 152-3; John Drabble, “From Pinkerton to G-Man: The Transition from Private to State Political Repression, 1874-1956,” *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 20 (2004): 63-4, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/jast/article/699938>; “I. W. W. Exposes Spies,” *Industrial Solidarity*, 22 March 1924, 1, 3, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

added benefit of causing the union to become increasingly paranoid about spies in their midst.⁴⁸⁵

Although most private detectives were in the employ of the businesses which the Wobblies were organizing against, many businesses also had their own in-house labor spies which, like the private detectives, were able to successfully take power in local unions.⁴⁸⁶ Their tactics diverged from those of private detective agencies in their unhesitating willingness to use violence against the Wobblies, however. In 1912, the Galloway Lumber Company in Grabow, Louisiana ambushed a BTW meeting, opening fire on the assembled crowd.⁴⁸⁷ In 1920, as an IWW strike leader confronted the local sheriff near Butte, company guards from the local mines opened fire, shooting fifteen strikers in the back.⁴⁸⁸

Employers also took less directly violent approaches to dealing with the IWW. In addition to using the AFL and other moderate unions as tools against the IWW, employers were also willing to crack down on any semblance of organized labor, even from moderate and respectable unions. During the Paterson strike, for instance, although employers assured workers that they believed in “decent, honest, God-fearing American trade unions,”⁴⁸⁹ a local observer believed that “*no form of labor organization ... would be tolerated*” by the employers.⁴⁹⁰ So opposed to any kind of IWW presence were the employers, in fact, that some even professed that they would rather shut down their businesses than deal with the union.⁴⁹¹ Not willing to let the

⁴⁸⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 335.

⁴⁸⁶ For example, see Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 32 about the Akron, Ohio local, in which “every elected official ... was a secret agent of the owners.”

⁴⁸⁷ Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 219-20; Hall, *Labor Struggles in the Deep South*, 138-9.

⁴⁸⁸ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 162-3; Ralph Chaplin, “The Picket Line of Blood,” *One Big Union Monthly*, June 1920, 11-2, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/one-big-union-monthly/v02n06-jun-1920_One%20Big%20Union.pdf.

⁴⁸⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 275.

⁴⁹⁰ Leo Mannheimer, “Darkest New Jersey,” *The Independent*, 29 May 1913, 1192, <https://archive.org/details/independent74newy>. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹¹ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 86.

law get in the way of crushing the union, business owners during the Lawrence strike even went so far as to plant dynamite and frame it on the Wobblies.⁴⁹²

In addition to the myriad local forms of anti-IWW repression, the IWW also had to deal with the full might of the American military and state national guards. As early as the Goldfield strike in 1907, the federal government was willing to send troops to aid the employers in crushing the new union at the request of Nevada Governor John Sparks.⁴⁹³ While a commission – highly unsympathetic to the IWW – concluded that the request for troops was unnecessary and was ordered by mine owners to crush the WFM,⁴⁹⁴ troops nevertheless stayed in Goldfield for another month.⁴⁹⁵ As the IWW gained fame and infamy, they became a favorite target for the National Guard when labor disputes escalated. Routinely, state governors – especially in the Western United States – sent the Guard in, as they did during the strikes at Wheatland in 1913 and Butte in 1914, often with little to no legitimate reason.⁴⁹⁶ Even the IWW's passive free speech fights soon drew the attention of National Guardsmen.⁴⁹⁷ On occasion, the deployed soldiers went above and beyond their duty, attacking Wobblies or raiding their halls without orders.⁴⁹⁸

Yet if state and federal governments saw Wobblies as troublemakers needing to be

⁴⁹² Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 288-9; "On Trial for 'Plant' in Lawrence Strike," *New York Times*, 20 May 1913, 8, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1913/05/20/100621453.html?pageNumber=8>.

⁴⁹³ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 195-6; Theodore Roosevelt to John Sparks, telegram, 5 December 1907, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

⁴⁹⁴ U. S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Papers Relative to Labor Troubles at Goldfield, Nev.*, 60th Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc 60-607, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/SERIALSET-05374_00_00-010-0607-0000/pdf/SERIALSET-05374_00_00-010-0607-0000.pdf, 21, 23.

⁴⁹⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 124.

⁴⁹⁶ See Chester, *Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 9, 81 for brief summaries of the National Guard's role in the respective strikes.

⁴⁹⁷ For example, see "Union Holds Riot Carnival," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 1909, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/380144234>, 3 on the National Guard during the Spokane free speech fight.

⁴⁹⁸ For example, see "'Reds' Started Fray; Sergt. Boehmke Testifies," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 July 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/380164721>, 2.

brought to task in peacetime, during World War I, the IWW was seen as nothing short of an enemy of the United States. The National Guard continued to come to the defense of employers in IWW strikes, now in the name of “maintaining ... production for the war.”⁴⁹⁹ In order to protect necessary infrastructure for the war, the federal government further places both federal and state troops in IWW strongholds, “well away from the Mexico border and away from any pockets of German sympathy.”⁵⁰⁰ With state National Guard units now federalized as a part of American mobilization, a door opened for the federal government to implement a unified anti-IWW strategy. Collaborating with firmly anti-Wobbly governors, the Woodrow Wilson administration sent a combination of National Guardsmen and regular soldiers to prevent labor disputes – though targeted almost exclusively against the IWW alone.⁵⁰¹ Soon, troops were even used for ordinary policing against the union, raiding halls and making arrests.⁵⁰²

Although the war against the IWW was carried out by multiple groups acting as the foot soldiers against the union, government officials – with the support and encouragement of corporate allies – were the ones who coordinated the anti-IWW drive. Even at the local level, mayors and city council members worked closely with business interests to keep the IWW at bay through targeted anti-IWW legislation, including their own criminal syndicalism laws.⁵⁰³ City officials also ensured the IWW was constantly being harassed, raided, or spied upon by police or

⁴⁹⁹ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 86. See also “Bayonets vs. I.W.W.,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 August 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/380412848>, 1.

⁵⁰⁰ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 48. See also Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 401.

⁵⁰¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 382, 401; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 94.

⁵⁰² Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 128; “State Troops Act; I.W.W. the Object,” *Indianapolis News*, 21 October 1919, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/39581186>, 1.

⁵⁰³ Dowell, *A History of Criminal Syndicalism Legislation*, 51; “Syndicalism Law Adopted,” *Oregon Daily Journal*, 7 June 1923, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/1086924499>, 12; “Council Passes I. W. W. Ordinance,” *Spokane Press*, 23 April 1918, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/932354868>, 6.

private detectives.⁵⁰⁴ Mayors and other local officials took it upon themselves to use their positions to threaten the IWW with a harsh crackdown, up to and including threats of martial law.⁵⁰⁵ Other city officials put out appeals to higher levels of government, insisting that state and federal officials “either hang or incarcerate for life all the anarchists,” as Seattle mayor Ole Hanson requested. “If the [federal] government doesn’t clean them up, I will. I’ll give up my mayorship and start through the country. We will hold meetings and have hanging places.”⁵⁰⁶

Luckily for Hanson, there was no need to resign since state governments were already organizing against the union.⁵⁰⁷ Although some municipalities had implemented their own criminal syndicalism laws, most had come from the state level. By 1919, criminal syndicalism laws had been enacted in 23 states and territories in the US.⁵⁰⁸ These laws were used to great effect against the union – countless Wobblies were arrested and charged with criminal syndicalism laws. So many were charged, in fact, that IWW journals began filling up with lists of names of fellow workers facing prosecutions.⁵⁰⁹

The threat of criminal syndicalism laws had noticeably limited the number of Wobblies migrating to some of the harsher states.⁵¹⁰ Yet, even though criminal syndicalism laws were

⁵⁰⁴ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 139, 157.

⁵⁰⁵ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 132.

⁵⁰⁶ “Cemeteries, Not Parleys, for I.W.W.,” *Washington Post*, 2 May 1919, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/28878224>, 1.

⁵⁰⁷ He did, however, resign from his mayorship anyway that same year because he was “tired out and ... going fishing.” “Mayor Ole Hanson Quits; Going Fishing, He Says,” *New York Tribune*, 29 August 1919, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/79059432>, 6.

⁵⁰⁸ See Dowell, *A History of Criminal Syndicalism Legislation*, 147 for the list.

⁵⁰⁹ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 146. See also “The Gruesome Story of American Terrorism,” *One Big Union Monthly*, March 1920, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/one-big-union-monthly/v02n03-mar-1920_One%20Big%20Union.pdf, 5-21; “The Gruesome Story of American Terrorism,” *One Big Union Monthly*, April 1920, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/one-big-union-monthly/v02n04-apr-1920_One%20Big%20Union.pdf, 12-14; “The Gruesome Story of American Terrorism,” *One Big Union Monthly*, June 1920, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/one-big-union-monthly/v02n06-jun-1920_One%20Big%20Union.pdf, 37, 39.

⁵¹⁰ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 200

successful in both scaring away Wobblies and prosecuting them, they soon petered out, and by the mid-1920s they had all but died out completely.⁵¹¹ Part of the reason was that there was simply no need for further prosecution – by the middle of the decade, the IWW was effectively dead, no longer representing a threat. At the same time, the hysteria of the Red Scare and the patriotic fervor of World War I had begun to temper, resulting in more sober-minded jurors, judges, and politicians recognizing the obviously repressive natures of such law. Washington's criminal syndicalism laws essentially became "a dead letter" as the cases began to shift in favor of the defendants by 1922.⁵¹² As some criminal syndicalism appeals made it to the Supreme Court, moreover, the constitutionality of such laws became increasingly questionable.⁵¹³ Later attempts by state legislatures to implement new criminal syndicalism laws routinely failed,⁵¹⁴ although so did most attempts to repeal or reform existing laws.⁵¹⁵ But by that point, of course, the damage had already been done.

The biggest repressive force against the IWW, however, was the federal government. State governments – especially those in the Western United States – routinely appealed to the federal government, urging coordinated, national anti-IWW action.⁵¹⁶ Prior to the outbreak of World War I, however, the federal government had recognized the IWW as a threat, but felt

⁵¹¹ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 188-9.

⁵¹² Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 200.

⁵¹³ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 218-20; Richard C. Cortner, "The Wobblies and Fiske v. Kansas: Victory Amid Disintegration," *Kansas History* 4, no. 1 (1981): 30-8, https://www.kansashistory.gov/publicat/history/1981spring_cortner.pdf. The Supreme Court did not explicitly rule against the constitutionality of any criminal syndicalism laws until 1969, when it declared Ohio's to be unconstitutional. "The Implications of the Brandenburg Case," *The Enquirer* (Cincinnati), 23 June 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/100725330>, 6.

⁵¹⁴ Dowell, *A History of Criminal Syndicalism Legislation*, 96-111.

⁵¹⁵ Dowell, *A History of Criminal Syndicalism Legislation*, 117.

⁵¹⁶ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 152-3; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 378-80, 393-4.

unable to effectively suppress the union because officials felt they lacked legitimate standing.⁵¹⁷ Instead, repression was left to state and local government, with the federal government's only real role being to send in troops to occupy Wobbly-heavy areas.

The eruption of the war, and especially American entrance into the war, represented a dramatic shift in governmental policy. Being at war, the federal government was able to play fast and loose with constitutional liberties in the defense of the war effort. Wobblies who had migrated from the Central Powers countries were rounded up into camps according to the 1798 Alien Enemies Act.⁵¹⁸ Unwilling to simply confine itself to historic legislation, Congress also went about creating new legislation to crush subversives. In early 1917, shortly before the US officially joined the war, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917 over Woodrow Wilson's veto, an expansion of the Immigration Act of 1903 (commonly known as the Anarchist Exclusion Act) which soon became an important weapon against the union.⁵¹⁹ In June, Congress passed the Espionage Act with Wilson's approval, which allowed the government to arrest and censor opponents of the war.⁵²⁰

Armed with a full arsenal against the IWW, the Wilson administration abandoned the crass, decentralized suppression by the states with military assistance in favor of a unified legalistic strategy. The administration's war was to be all-encompassing – multiple government agencies would play their roles. The Department of Justice would focus on prosecutions; Labor would focus on deporting immigrants; the Post Office would refuse to allow the IWW access to

⁵¹⁷ William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (University of Illinois Press, 1963), <https://archive.org/details/aliensdissenters0000pres>, 54.

⁵¹⁸ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 136-7.

⁵¹⁹ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 137.

⁵²⁰ Rabban, "The Emergence of Modern First Amendment Doctrine," 1217-27.

the postal service.⁵²¹ Central to the strategy was the relatively new Bureau of Investigation, which, on 5 September 1917, would coordinate dozens of raids of IWW halls around the countries.⁵²²

The raiding parties confiscated literal tons of materials based on search warrants so broad to be practically useless – or, from the perspective of the government, so broad as to be infinitely useful. The IWW’s defense protested, insisting that the warrant encouraged officers to seize “anything and everything” which may have been even remotely useful in the prosecution of the IWW.⁵²³ Other raids were conducted without warrants of any kind.⁵²⁴ Confiscated material from the Seattle branch included such damning evidence as dictionaries, blackboards, and a map of the state of Washington.⁵²⁵ IWW headquarters in Chicago even had furniture, paper clips, and rubber bands seized.⁵²⁶

Soon, the government began its trials against the IWW. The biggest trial against the IWW’s biggest leaders took place in Chicago, but smaller ones also took place in Sacramento, Wichita, and Omaha. In theory, at least, the trial was against the individual members rather than the IWW as an organization. Of course, this was only true when it was convenient for the government. When the defendants requested the return of items seized from the raids, the prosecution argued that the items had been seized from the IWW, not the individuals, and since the IWW was not a party to the case, the defendants had no standing.⁵²⁷ When it came time for opening statements, however, prosecutor Frank Nebeker found it advantageous to argue the

⁵²¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 395.

⁵²² Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 64.

⁵²³ “Memorandum in Support of Petition to Return Property Seized on Search Warrants,” February 1918, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

⁵²⁴ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 169.

⁵²⁵ “List of Properties of IWW’s Seized in Seattle,” 1917, IWW Materials Preservation Project.

⁵²⁶ Whiter, *Under the Iron Heel*, 103.

⁵²⁷ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 85.

opposite, informing jurors, “It is the IWW which is on trial here.”⁵²⁸

The trials were full of similar trickery and blatant disregard for the rights of the defendants. The Post Office continued to suppress the IWW’s mailing rights, preventing communication with defense attorneys and witnesses. When the IWW did send mail, couriers and agents often read letters or held packages.⁵²⁹ The jury at the Chicago trial was given a verdict form that, according to legal scholar Dean Strang, “did not give them a way to convict anyone, or all, on one or another count without convicting on all counts.”⁵³⁰ Combined with the fact that the Chicago trial had nearly 100 defendants, distinguishing the guilt of individual defendants on individual charges would have been a near impossibility had the jury cared to give the Wobblies anything resembling a fair trial, though the fact that they spent less than 30 minutes deliberating suggests that they had no such interest.⁵³¹

Cheering on the repression from the sidelines was the Fourth Estate. Newspapers around the country seldom presented a nuanced understanding of the IWW, and they came to the IWW’s defense even less often. Frequently, in fact, print media celebrated repression and encouraged greater action. During the San Diego free speech fight of 1912, the *San Diego Tribune* declared, “Hanging is none too good for them...; they are the waste material of creation and should be drained off into the sewer of oblivion.”⁵³² Others echoed similar sentiments. The *Drumright Derrick* in Oklahoma suggested a Wobbly might be better used as a “decoration for a telephone pole.”⁵³³ The *Tulsa World* suggested concentration camps – “Or, what is hemp worth now, the

⁵²⁸ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 177.

⁵²⁹ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 146-7.

⁵³⁰ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 162.

⁵³¹ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 161-2.

⁵³² Quoted in Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 266.

⁵³³ “Efforts of Agitators to Stir Up Trouble with the Oil Field Workers,” *Drumright Derrick*, 7 November 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/661313183>, 1.

long foot?”⁵³⁴ As if afraid they had been too subtle with this editorial, a little over a week later, the *Tulsa World* spelled out in explicit detail what it thought should be done with the IWW: “The first step in the whipping of Germany is to strangle the I. W. W.’s. Kill ‘em just as you would kill any other kind of a snake. Don’t scotch ‘em; kill ‘em. And kill ‘em dead. It is no time to waste money on trials and continuances and things like that. All that is necessary is the evidence and a firing squad. Probably the carpenters union [sic] will contribute the timber for the coffins.”⁵³⁵

Not every newspaper was quite so bloodthirsty. More moderate papers merely urged for government repression rather than lynching. “[T]he heel of the government should stamp [the IWW] out at once,” opined the *Wall Street Journal*.⁵³⁶ *The Outlook* agreed that the government had a duty “to put down the seditious Industrial Workers of the World unrest, and to prevent irresponsible attempts to usurp the place of the law.”⁵³⁷ Some periodicals never even bothered to put forward a solution for dealing with the problem, merely contenting themselves to unleash vitriol against the “Parasites!” who “live on the fat of the land” and “[play] upon the passions of workingmen.”⁵³⁸ Regardless, in his study of criminal syndicalism laws in the United States, scholar Eldridge Foster Dowell concluded that the press was “the great motivating power” that spurred on the “acts of violence against the I. W. W., their legal persecution and prosecution by the Federal Government, and the enactment of the state criminal syndicalism laws against

⁵³⁴ “Oklahoma Notes,” *Tulsa World*, 31 October 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/883140246>, 4.

⁵³⁵ “Get Out the Hemp,” *Tulsa World*, 9 November 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/87673468>, 4.

⁵³⁶ “Time for Action,” *Wall Street Journal*, 13 July 1917, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/32696787>, 1.

⁵³⁷ “The Industrial Workers of the World,” *The Outlook*, 15 August 1917, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.c2620586>, 572.

⁵³⁸ “Let the People Rule,” *Times-Democrat* (Pawnee, OK), 10 July 1913, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585016306>, 4.

them.”⁵³⁹

Although the prosecution and persecution of the IWW during and after World War I did not fully kill the union, it did cripple it. Many major IWW organizers and leaders were forcibly removed from the union, seriously limiting its effectiveness. Frank Little’s lynching had gotten rid of one of the IWW’s most militant organizers. Other organizers, like Fred Esmond, were held on criminal syndicalism charges until their imprisonment left them incapable of further union activity.⁵⁴⁰ Yet the federal trials were the most devastating by far, as nearly the entirely national leadership was taken out in one swift action. With the leadership gone, the IWW was left in the hands of inexperienced volunteers who simply did not have the capability to maintain normal functioning for the union.⁵⁴¹ Even the release of Wobbly prisoners was not enough to revitalize the union. William Haywood, by that point, had already fled to the Soviet Union, stripping the IWW of its “public face.”⁵⁴² Some who were released never returned to the union. Those who returned to the IWW found themselves distrusted by the membership and relatively weakened and ineffective from their time in prison.⁵⁴³ Moreover, when they returned to the union, they found it a fraction of what it had been before the repression.⁵⁴⁴ Some had lost much of their passion but returned because, as Ralph Chaplin pondered, “Where else could I go?”⁵⁴⁵

The leadership was not the only casualty of the repression; the government’s prosecution had all but destroyed the IWW’s infrastructure. Countless documents and records had been seized in the raid which were not only never returned to the IWW but were, in fact, completely

⁵³⁹ Dowell, *A History of Criminal Syndicalism Legislation*, 37.

⁵⁴⁰ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 195-6.

⁵⁴¹ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 57; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 449.

⁵⁴² Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 212-3.

⁵⁴³ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 222; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 210.

⁵⁴⁴ Nicolaas Steelink in *Solidarity Forever: An Oral History of the IWW*, eds. Steward Bird, Dan Georgakas, and Deborah Shaffer (Lake View Press, 1985), 201.

⁵⁴⁵ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 333.

lost and even destroyed.⁵⁴⁶ Aside from its legal defense efforts, the IWW was completely uncoordinated because there was no clear structure in place, and the union continued to rely on the Postal Service as the main means of communication.⁵⁴⁷ With so many local leaders caught up in the repressions as well as soldiers and police continually occupying halls, many IWW offices closed down.⁵⁴⁸ As a result, locals were unable to collect dues, which, combined with the massive amounts of money the union was spending on legal defense, depleted its already bare treasury.⁵⁴⁹

The IWW also suffered at the local level, though to a different degree. Deportations, raids, lynchings, and attacks on the union noticeably impacted locals' abilities to organize. Some of these attacks were so debilitating that IWW headquarters ordered members to abandon the strategy of attempting to fill the jails as had been the strategy during free speech fights.⁵⁵⁰ Local governments were even able to cripple organizing efforts by holding Wobblies for only a few days at a time rather than trying to imprison them long term, thereby interrupting IWW organizing efforts to great effect with little need for long, drawn out trials.⁵⁵¹

The natural consequence of all these effects was a severely weakened union. At the local and national level, the IWW was severely limited in its functioning. Combined with the concurrent issues discussed in previous chapters which exacerbated the effects of the repression, the fact that the IWW managed to function as a union at all during this time, and especially the fact that it managed to maintain a significant presence in some industries, is much to the union's

⁵⁴⁶ Foner, *Labor and World War I*, 313-4.

⁵⁴⁷ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 449.

⁵⁴⁸ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 148; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 210.

⁵⁴⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 449; White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 210-1.

⁵⁵⁰ White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 165-6.

⁵⁵¹ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 162; "The Campaign of the Agricultural Workers," *One Big Union Monthly*, August 1919, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/one-big-union-monthly/v01n06-aug-1919_One%20Big%20Union.pdf, 7-8.

credit. Ultimately, however, the IWW's scrappiness paled in comparison to the united forces of multiple levels of government, the masters of capital, right-wing and patriotic vigilante groups, and the media.

The New Ideological Landscape

At its height, the IWW was the darling of the radical American left. This American variant of syndicalism seemed destined to become a permanent feature of the American labor movement, with one critical scholar concluding in 1913 that this new movement was “something irreducible. We shall neither stop it nor lessen its pace.”⁵⁵² Many left-wing radicals and revolutionaries viewed the IWW as the vehicle for a new, brighter future. For the first time, so it seemed, the working class was in the driver's seat in the United States.

But the luster soon wore off. Almost as soon as the IWW came into existence, it began to lose some of its earliest and most important supporters. Some felt that the IWW had abandoned them and attempted to rebuild the IWW in their own image – Charles Sherman and Daniel De Leon come to mind. Others felt similarly disillusioned but opted to merely slip out of the union. Mary Harris Jones, better known as Mother Jones, a prolific labor leader and agitator, had been an outspoken supporter at the founding convention, but, according to her biography, had “cooled to the Wobblies before the ink dried on their manifesto” and dropped out before the union's first split.⁵⁵³ Eugene V. Debs, Socialist Party leader and one of the most beloved figures among the American left, quietly let his membership lapse after the 1906 and 1908 splits and the departure of the WFM.⁵⁵⁴ Thomas Hagerty, the anarchistic Catholic priest who helped frame the Industrial

⁵⁵² Brooks, *American Syndicalism*, 11.

⁵⁵³ Elliott J. Gorn, *Mother Jones: The Most Dangerous Woman in America* (Hill and Wang, 2001), 151-2.

⁵⁵⁴ Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene V. Debs* (Haymarket Books, 2007), 256.

Union Manifesto and the IWW's preamble, suddenly dropped out of the union and the church in 1905, took on an assumed name, and seemingly disappeared into poverty and obscurity.⁵⁵⁵

Others stuck around long enough to grow disillusioned with the American variant of syndicalism promoted by the IWW and enchanted by the European Syndicalist movement; chief among these IWW Syndicalists was William Z. Foster. After spending time in Europe on the IWW's behalf, Foster became deeply impressed with the successes of both the French and British Syndicalists and soon sought to implement it in the United States. In a November 1911 issue of *Industrial Worker*, Foster laid out his plans: "[T]he only way ... is [for the IWW] to give up its attempt to create a new labor movement, turn itself into a propaganda league, [and] get into the organized labor movement."⁵⁵⁶

The fact that the IWW at large, which had devoted so much of its time and energy fighting an almost existential battle against the AFL for its right to exist in the American labor movement, rejected Foster's Syndicalist turn is unsurprising. What is surprising is that a small number of delegates and Wobblies accepted Foster's conclusions. At the 1911 convention, held a couple months before Foster's public article, Foster managed to recruit four or five delegates to his cause. He also claims to have convinced Frank Little of the need to turn towards boring-from-within, although the fact that Little was a long-dead martyr at the time of Foster's writing and had never left the IWW makes Foster's claim highly dubious.⁵⁵⁷

Regardless of Little's sympathy or lack thereof, Foster was nevertheless successful in

⁵⁵⁵ Roland Boer, "Father Thomas J. Hagerty: A Forgotten Religious Communist," *Monthly Review*, 14 February 2011, <https://mronline.org/2011/02/14/father-thomas-j-hagerty-a-forgotten-religious-communist/>; Gary M. Fink, *Biographical Dictionary of American Labor* (Greenwood Press, 1984), https://archive.org/details/biographicaldict0000unse_u4a9, 272-3.

⁵⁵⁶ Wm Z. Foster, "As to My Candidacy," *Industrial Worker*, 2 November 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v3n32-w136-nov-02-1911-IW.pdf>, 3.

⁵⁵⁷ William Z. Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin* (International Publishers, 1937), <https://archive.org/details/frombryantostalin>, 55-6.

luring a number of Wobblies away from American syndicalism to pure European Syndicalism. In 1912, he established the Syndicalist League of North America (SLNA) composed almost entirely of former IWW members convinced of the legitimacy of boring-from-within as a strategy, and local Syndicalist Leagues popped up around the Midwestern and Western United States and Canada.⁵⁵⁸ One newspaper affiliated with the SLNA insisted that the great Syndicalist shift was coming soon: “Prominent men, alive to the new conditions, are forsaking politics for Syndicalism. Active organizers in the I. W. W. are urging it upon that organization.”⁵⁵⁹ Truthfully, however, those Wobblies who converted to Syndicalism followed Foster out of the union. Jay Fox, editor of the anarchist bi-monthly newspaper *The Agitator* who had been an IWW member since the founding conference, joined the SLNA and took his paper with him.⁵⁶⁰ Lucy Parsons, wife of one of the Haymarket martyrs who had similarly been in the union since its founding, also left the union to preach the good word of Syndicalism.⁵⁶¹

Still others moved on from the IWW in less organized fashion. Frank Bohn grew increasingly dissatisfied with the presence of the “anti-political faction” in the union and largely retreated to the Socialist Party.⁵⁶² Once the United States entered World War I, however, he had abandoned even the Socialists out of a commitment to “the cause of the Allies against Germany.”⁵⁶³ William Trautmann, who had helped remove De Leon from the IWW in 1908,

⁵⁵⁸ Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin*, 58; Foner, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 428-9.

⁵⁵⁹ “The New Spirit of Labor,” *The Agitator*, 15 June 1912, reprinted in *The Syndicalist: Volume 1-3, 1910-1913* (Greenwood Reprint Corporation, 1970), <https://archive.org/details/the-agitator-complete-set>, 162.

⁵⁶⁰ Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin*, 59; Salerno, *Red November, Black November*, 81-2.

⁵⁶¹ Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1976), <https://archive.org/details/lucyparsonsameri00ashb>, 230.

⁵⁶² Bohn, “Is the I. W. W. to Grow?,” Frank Bohn, “The State of the Party,” *International Socialist Review*, October 1913, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/isr/v14n04-oct-1913-ISR-gog-ocr.pdf>, 238.

⁵⁶³ “Bohn Leaves Socialists,” *New York Times*, 26 September 1917, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1917/09/26/issue.html>, 13.

similarly tired of the IWW's anti-politicism and joined De Leon's rival union, though he soon abandoned this, too, in favor of more moderate industrialism.⁵⁶⁴ Justus Ebert, a prolific writer and propagandist for the union, soon devoted his skills to the AFL instead.⁵⁶⁵ Ben Fletcher, the most famous Black Wobbly of the era, left the IWW to form an independent longshoremen's union.⁵⁶⁶

Meanwhile, former general secretary-treasurer Vincent Saint John switched from organizing workers to prospecting for gold in New Mexico in 1915.⁵⁶⁷ In 1916, a combination of differing legal strategies and long-simmering personal feuds resulted in organizers Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, and Joe Ettor being all but expelled from the union by Haywood.⁵⁶⁸ While both Flynn and Tresca continued their activist politics – Flynn working with the ACLU and eventually joining the Communist Party and Tresca focusing on anarchist and later anti-fascist activism – Ettor abandoned the movement to run a wine business inherited from his father.⁵⁶⁹ Despite leaving the union, however, all four former Wobblies were initially dragged into the Chicago trial.⁵⁷⁰

However, as discussed in chapter two, the Communist movement was one of the biggest difficulties the union faced during its waning years. Once again, the IWW's own members were lured out by the grand promises of the Soviet movement, which William Haywood had assured

⁵⁶⁴ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 83.

⁵⁶⁵ Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too*, 144.

⁵⁶⁶ Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront*, 170.

⁵⁶⁷ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 138.

⁵⁶⁸ Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 216.

⁵⁶⁹ For more on Flynn's life, see Mary Anne Trasciotti, *Elizabeth Gurley Flynn: The Rebel Girl, Democracy, and Revolution* (Rutgers University Press, 2025). For Tresca's, see Nunzio Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel* (AK Press, 2010). Ettor's fate comes from Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 221.

⁵⁷⁰ Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 236-7; Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 164.

was the IWW's vision "all feathered out!"⁵⁷¹ Buying into the promise, some major figures in the union began to shift away from the IWW's traditional syndicalism to acting as little more than Communist ambassadors to the rest of the union. Organizers and officials like Charles Ashleigh, George Hardy, and Harrison George – the latter of whom published a pro-Bolshevik pamphlet entitled *The Red Dawn* – devoted themselves to winning over fellow Wobblies to the Communist cause.⁵⁷² Ashleigh, in fact, worked alongside Communist Party officials to try and lure in the ever-skeptical Ralph Chaplin, albeit unsuccessfully.⁵⁷³ Other former Wobblies and sympathizers also joined the throngs of new Communists, including John Reed and William Z. Foster.⁵⁷⁴

While many joined the American Communist movement, a handful went straight to the source and defected to the Soviet Union. Chief among those who fled was Haywood, who jumped bail and stirred up a great amount of bitterness as a result, especially among those who had helped pay his bail.⁵⁷⁵ Haywood was not the only one to flee to the Soviet Union on bail, however.⁵⁷⁶ Other Wobblies migrated to the Soviet Union without the threat of imprisonment. Yet regardless of how they came to the Soviet Union, a report from 1922 claimed that "a majority of those who have gone are trying to get back, but are not allowed to leave Russia."⁵⁷⁷ Historian Melvyn Dubofsky argues that, because the defection of so many major Wobblies to the Communist movement was damaging to the IWW, the American government seemed to

⁵⁷¹ Haywood, *The Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood*, 370.

⁵⁷² Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 298.

⁵⁷³ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 303-5.

⁵⁷⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 462. For more Wobblies who left the union for the Communist movement, see also Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 91; and Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 198-9.

⁵⁷⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 459-60.

⁵⁷⁶ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 302.

⁵⁷⁷ Unsigned letter to F. F. Sharpless, 5 December 1922, 1997.078, box 1, folder 3, Edwin Ludlow Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

recognize the benefits.⁵⁷⁸ A letter from then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover in which he states that “[n]othing on earth will do this country as much good as for the I.W.W.’s to migrate to Russia” seems to confirm this.⁵⁷⁹

Yet the rise of the Communist movement represented a much graver threat to the IWW than simply poaching off a few good Wobblies. The Communist movement was not a mere fad or another path for critics of the IWW; it soon became the standard bearer of the American left. As John S. Gambs explains, the cult of action which the IWW promoted gave way to a focus on finer discussions on philosophical doctrine.⁵⁸⁰ The IWW’s attitude, expressed by Haywood’s earlier quip that “I’ve never read Marx’s *Capital*, but I have the marks of capital all over me,” simply failed to impress the new breed of leftists.⁵⁸¹ In addition, the Communist movement’s centralization and focus on party discipline represented something of a breath of fresh air for those disillusioned with the chaotic disorganization and contradiction that came with the democratic decentralization of the IWW, resulting in an estimated 2000 defections for the IWW to the Communist Party.⁵⁸² As a result of the changing tides of left-wing loyalties, Communists became *the* left-wing movement in the United States. Dubofsky aptly sums up the reversal of fortunes in *We Shall Be All*: “Communists, not Wobblies, now led unemployed workers in protest demonstrations and hunger marches. Symbolically, Ralph Chaplin was silenced at a Chicago street-corner meeting by young communists who drowned out his voice by loudly singing *Solidarity Forever*, Chaplin’s most famous song.”⁵⁸³ By the 1930s, the IWW had effectively been

⁵⁷⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 460.

⁵⁷⁹ Herbert Hoover to Edwin Ludlow, 23 May 1922, 1997.078, box 1, folder 3, Edwin Ludlow Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, OK.

⁵⁸⁰ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 20.

⁵⁸¹ Quote from Lukas, *Big Trouble*, 233.

⁵⁸² Figure comes from Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 89.

⁵⁸³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 477.

replaced by the Communist Party on the socialist front and the CIO on the labor front.⁵⁸⁴

Those Wobblies who remained in the union, untempted by the allure of the Soviet experiment, did not necessarily stay true to the Wobbly vision, however. Seeking an alternative to the outside Communist or reformist movement and feeling a sense of disillusionment at the IWW's own syndicalism, some Wobblies were drawn to the nascent Technocracy movement of Howard Scott which sought to restructure society through technological efficiency and expert direction. Although the goals of technical control and worker control may seem incompatible, Simon Dowsett argues that Technocracy as laid out by Scott "could be seen as a realization of the union's long-standing leisurist goals."⁵⁸⁵

In practice, Scott's Technocracy movement served more as an ideological distraction for the IWW than a full-fledged takeover. Scott largely acted in an advisory role for the union and, consequently, a propagandist for Technocracy. At the 1920 convention, the IWW founded the Bureau of Industrial Research to be headed by Scott which would study "[e]ssential facts about the basic industries" to "prepar[e] the workers for the administration of industry."⁵⁸⁶ Although Scott failed to come through on almost any of his tasks – something that William Z. Foster and Earl Browder smugly noted was "of course, doomed to a miserable collapse"⁵⁸⁷ – he used his short time as an associate of the IWW to encourage Technocracy in the union. In an article for the *One Big Union Monthly* in October 1920, Scott – writing under the name "An Industrial

⁵⁸⁴ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 231-2.

⁵⁸⁵ Simon Dowsett, "Paradigm of Plenty: The Global Technocratic Moment," *Journal of Contemporary History* (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094251396896>. See also William E. Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream: The Technocrat Movement, 1900-1941* (University of California Press, 1977), <https://archive.org/details/technocracyameri0000akin>, 37.

⁵⁸⁶ *Minutes of the 13th Convention*, 14. See also Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream*, 38 for a basic summary of Scott's initial foray into the union, and Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 295-6 for Ralph Chaplin's perspective.

⁵⁸⁷ William Z. Foster and Earl Browder, *Technocracy and Marxism* (Workers Library Publishers, 1933), <https://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/foster/1933/technocracy.pdf>, 13.

Engineer” – insisted that although the IWW may have been “capable of operating [industries] as well as the capitalist, ... that is not sufficient.”⁵⁸⁸

Scott’s message found an audience in the union. Scott himself reported that roughly 100 Wobblies found themselves compelled enough to reach out to him personally.⁵⁸⁹ “Industrial efficiency” became a common topic in the pages of the *Industrial Pioneer*, the successor to the *One Big Union Monthly* and the latest in a never-ending line of IWW periodicals, throughout 1921.⁵⁹⁰ Others took to the periodicals to defend the necessity of the work of the Bureau, insisting that, with the Bureau’s research, “the machinery will be at hand for [workers] to immediately take up the tasks of production and distribution.”⁵⁹¹ Some prominent Wobblies also found themselves enamored with the Technocratic vision. Ben Williams, former *Solidarity* editor, became a supporter of Scott’s movement,⁵⁹² while Ralph Chaplin continued to write in favor of Technocracy into at least the 1930s.⁵⁹³ Chaplin was the exception, however. By 1922, the IWW had largely moved on from the Technocracy movement and from Scott. The Technocratic Bureau of Industrial Research was replaced with a more general Education Bureau in 1922, though this too lasted for only a short while.⁵⁹⁴

The IWW’s brief flirtation with Technocracy, in addition to the fact that so many Wobblies abandoned the union for a rival social movement or the quiet life of a non-activist tells

⁵⁸⁸ An Industrial Engineer, “Political Schemes in Industry,” *One Big Union Monthly*, October 1920, https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/one-big-union-monthly/v02n10-oct-1920_One%20Big%20Union.pdf, 9.

⁵⁸⁹ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 160.

⁵⁹⁰ See Rafael Mallen, “Industrial Efficiency,” *Industrial Pioneer*, March 1921, 14-6, [https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-pioneer/Industrial%20Pioneer%20\(March%201921\).pdf](https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-pioneer/Industrial%20Pioneer%20(March%201921).pdf).

⁵⁹¹ Bud, “Industrial Research,” *Industrial Pioneer*, September 1921, 8, [https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-pioneer/Industrial%20Pioneer%20\(September%201921\).pdf](https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-pioneer/Industrial%20Pioneer%20(September%201921).pdf).

⁵⁹² Akin, *Technocracy and the American Dream*, 38.

⁵⁹³ Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 359.

⁵⁹⁴ *Minutes of the 14th General Convention*, 62; Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 162-3.

a great deal about the IWW. While its uniquely American syndicalism – the “IWWism” which so many of its opponents feared – excelled at winning over unorganized and neglected workers at its height, the fact that it was so popular is more a testament to good timing than anything else. The IWW was very much a product of its time, organized to respond to specific circumstances which existed in the early 20th century. As circumstances changed, however, whether at the personal level or on a societal level, IWWism became increasingly irrelevant. New and old movements focused on problems which the IWW ignored or failed to adequately address. And by the early 1920s, many of those who remained in the shattered union recognized this fact and tried to draw the IWW into the sphere of either the Communist or the Technocracy movement. When these attempts failed, the IWW was left in the hands of true believers trying to navigate a brand new ideological landscape with a seemingly outdated ideology.

A Changing Economy

The seeming outdatedness of the IWW was not merely the fault of new rival ideological movements; it was also the result of a fundamental shift in the economic landscape of the United States. The IWW had developed in response to the specific labor situation in the United States at the turn of the century, concerning itself primarily with organizing the workers who had been left out of the mainstream labor movement. As a consequence, as the labor situation shifted, the IWW struggled to maintain its relevancy.

One of the most devastating transformations in the United States was the changing agricultural landscape. By the mid-1910s and through the 1920s, the AWIU had been the union’s heart, representing the majority of its membership and its greatest source of income as well as the most effective demonstration of the IWW’s organizing capabilities. But its success had been reliant on the fact that it focused on organizing workers previously thought unorganizable –

unskilled migrant workers who hopped trains from job to job without permanent homes. The widescale presence of these hoboes and tramps greatly benefitted the IWW, which often had its own presence in the “jungles,” or hobo encampments, which they frequented.⁵⁹⁵ As Melvyn Dubofsky explained, the IWW’s red card even acted as a sort of “insurance policy against coercion” on the rails.⁵⁹⁶

In the aftermath of World War I, however, the prevalence of train-hopping migrants began to wane. Instead, agricultural workers increasingly relied on cars as a means of traveling from job to job. The birth of this new “gas tramp” was catastrophic for the union. Since they did not need red cards for train travel nor did they have any reason to stay in the jungles, IWW organizers struggled to recruit them.⁵⁹⁷ The use of the automobile also resulted in a shift from single male workers to families of harvesters whose “homeguard psychology” Wobblies found equally frustrating to deal with.⁵⁹⁸ Stymied by the new pattern of agricultural migration, one IWW member suggested the solution was “A chisel through the radiator [or] a sledge hammer on the cylinder head.”⁵⁹⁹

The new labor situation on the job was no less frustrating to the union’s efforts. Although the IWW had initially excelled at organizing immigrants, at least relative to the AFL, a new influx of immigrant laborers in the agricultural industry left the AWIU floundering. Hispanic and

⁵⁹⁵ Although something of a loaded term today, “hobo” was seen as a neutral term or even a point of pride for many Wobblies. See Salerno, *Red November, Black November*, 28-30; J. H. Walsh, “Developments at Spokane,” *Industrial Union Bulletin*, 4 April 1908, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iub/v2n06-apr-04-1908-iub.pdf>, 2; Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (University of Chicago Press: 2003), 110-2.

⁵⁹⁶ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 447.

⁵⁹⁷ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 222-3.

⁵⁹⁸ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 181.

⁵⁹⁹ John J. Hader, “Honk Honk Hobo,” *The Survey*, 1 August 1928, <https://archive.org/details/surveycharityorg60survrch>, 455.

Asian migrants often organized among themselves along ethnic or racial lines rather than joining the largely white IWW. In addition, both immigrants and the new harvesting families tended to be much more cautious about the potential consequences of organizing, preventing them from subscribing to the IWW's class war ideals.⁶⁰⁰

Making the situation even worse for agricultural organizers was the rise of new farming technology which lowered the demand for agricultural workers as well as the increasing collapse of small farmers. As Nigel Anthony Sellars pointed out, the AWIU was almost entirely dependent on the "harvest stiff," which was an "unskilled" position in the agricultural industry. As new agricultural technologies, especially the combine harvester, became increasingly available, the harvest stiffs were all but driven out and, with them, the AWIU.⁶⁰¹ Ironically, though the IWW was unprepared to adapt to the changing agricultural conditions, many had predicted them during the debates over the roles of small and tenant farmers in the unions, arguing that small farmers would be pushed out by larger, corporate farms. By 1924, many Wobblies felt that they had been proven right and, from the IWW's deathbed, they invited the displaced farmers into the union as workers.⁶⁰² Yet their predictions were not entirely accurate. While the IWW had predicted a mass migration into the fields which would revitalize the AWIU and the IWW at large, the combination of declining wages in agriculture and the growth of stable urban work instead led to the further decline of the harvest stiff, nothing short of disaster for the heart of the IWW.⁶⁰³

The IWW's sensitivity to the economic health of the United States extended beyond both the agricultural industry and the post-war period. As the labor scholar John R. Commons pointed

⁶⁰⁰ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 164-5, 173-4.

⁶⁰¹ Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*, 179-80. See also p. 176 for a similar effect on oil workers.

⁶⁰² John Hayhand, "The Farmers and Industry," *Industrial Pioneer*, July 1924, [https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-pioneer/Industrial%20Pioneer%20\(July%201924\).pdf](https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrial-pioneer/Industrial%20Pioneer%20(July%201924).pdf), 5-6, 14.

⁶⁰³ Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 189-91; Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies*, 146.

out in 1918, organized labor generally declines during periods of economic downturn.⁶⁰⁴ The IWW, however, which never had a sturdy treasury or an overly strong membership in the first place, was particularly sensitive to economic pressure. In 1907, as the IWW was still trying to find its feet, an economic crisis occurred which nearly killed the union before it had begun.⁶⁰⁵ Although the 1907 crisis was the most devastating for the union, it was far from the only one. Another recession in 1913 resulted in a major decline in membership. Vincent Saint John estimated the loss to be nearly 16,000 members that fell out of the union, which he attributed to the fact that “75 percent of [Wobblies on the West Coast] have been out of work in the last year and have not paid any dues.”⁶⁰⁶

Economic downturns would have been damaging enough to the union on their own, but the IWW, always interested in going beyond traditional union organizing, divided their attention into attempting to organize the unemployed as well. In the 1913 recession, the IWW set about building programs to unite unemployed workers and demand employment, hoping to grow its membership as well as prevent unemployed workers from strikebreaking.⁶⁰⁷ During the broader 1921 depression which occurred alongside the agricultural decline, the union also sought to spur on greater job growth through the shortening of the work day to six or even four hours.⁶⁰⁸ Yet the

⁶⁰⁴ John R. Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States* (MacMillan Company, 1918), <https://archive.org/details/historyoflabouri01commuoft>, 10-11.

⁶⁰⁵ Brissenden, *The I.W.W.*, 211; The Commentator, “The I. W. W.: Its Strength and Opportunity,” *Solidarity*, 25 February 1911, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1911/v02n11-w063-feb-25-1911-Solidarity.pdf>, 3.

⁶⁰⁶ *Industrial Relations: Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations Created by the Act of August 23, 1912*, vol. II (Washington Government Printing Office, 1916), <https://archive.org/details/industrialrelati02unitrich>, 1462.

⁶⁰⁷ “Railroad Agitators – Other News and Views,” *Solidarity*, 20 March 1915, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/solidarity-iww/1915/v06-w271-mar-20-1915-solidarity.pdf>, 3. See also David Schulze, “The Industrial Workers of the World and the Unemployed in Edmonton and Calgary in the Depression of 1913-1915,” *Labour/Le Travail* 25 (1990): 47-75, <https://www.lltjournal.ca/index.php/llt/article/view/4756/5629>.

⁶⁰⁸ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 130.

IWW's attempts to tackle the question of unemployment, aside from distracting from its labor organizing with few results, also met with harsh reception by some communists who concluded that the IWW "apparently ... no longer knows [the] elementary truth" that the only solution to the unemployment problem was "proletarian revolution."⁶⁰⁹

The IWW's demands on the job were more successful, but often at great cost in the long run. IWW strategy relied on a two-prong approach to organizing: First, it would focus on immediate demands like wages, hours, and conditions. Second, after conditions had improved, Wobblies would agitate for greater revolutionary demands like the takeover of industries. As William Haywood explained, the IWW "talked for the necessities of life, food, clothing, shelter, and amusement. We can talk of Utopia afterwards."⁶¹⁰

Yet the official IWW position was not always in sync with the views of the workers who did, or could have, joined the union. Robert F. Hoxie argued that most workers simply desired "more here and now for themselves and their immediate associates and care little for the remote future or the revolutionary ideal."⁶¹¹ Some Wobblies recognized this as well. One organizer, explaining in the *Industrial Worker* how to appeal to lumberjacks, insisted that the path forward was "not to display ... a picture of an ideal state in the dim, distant future, but to produce the 'goods' here and now."⁶¹²

This contrast between Wobbly leadership's long-term visions of revolution and the rank-and-file's focus on improved conditions in the here and now often resulted in some tension during strikes. During the 1917 Bisbee strike, for instance, leaders found themselves trying to

⁶⁰⁹ Hugo Oehler, "The I. W. W. and the Unemployment Problem," *The Militant* (New York), 15 April 1931, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1931/v4n08-apr-15-1931.pdf>, 8.

⁶¹⁰ *Industrial Relations*, vol. XI, 10,598.

⁶¹¹ Hoxie, "The Truth about the I.W.W.," 797.

⁶¹² E. J. Foote, "How to Get the Lumber Worker," *Industrial Worker*, 2 September 1909, <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/industrialworker/iw/v1n25-sep-02-1909-IW.pdf>, 1.

balance the two perspectives. As more radical Wobblies increasingly pushed for more utopian demands during the strike, more levelheaded and realistic organizers insisted that focusing overly on such unrealistic demands would have been the union's "greatest mistake."⁶¹³

And indeed, when the IWW did prioritize its revolutionary fervor, it often met with rebuke and disappointment from workers. In the aftermath of the failed Paterson strike, for example, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn made the baffling claim that the strike had not actually been a failure because the workers had gained class-consciousness, and "it is better to gain in spirit than to gain economic advantage."⁶¹⁴ Rather unsurprisingly, the workers at Paterson did not agree, and few turned back to the union.⁶¹⁵ Writing about the IWW, labor scholar David J. Saposs noted similarly that local leaders often found themselves disappointed with the union's priorities and increasingly uninterested in subordinating themselves to the Wobblies.⁶¹⁶

In a rather cruel irony, even when the IWW did improve conditions, it still continued to suffer. The IWW grew specifically in response to dire working conditions; the more intolerable a job was, the more likely the IWW was to appeal to its workers. And though the IWW did gain a reputation for making gains in conditions, as discussed above, it did not have such a reputation when it came to keeping said gains.

Both directly and indirectly, the IWW spurred on improved conditions for workers in industries such as mining, lumber, and agriculture. Even when its strikes were seemingly unsuccessful, employers nevertheless sometimes felt frightened enough by the threat of a

⁶¹³ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 38-40.

⁶¹⁴ "The Truth About the Paterson Strike," reprinted in Judith Anderson (ed.), *Outspoken Women: Speeches by American Women Reformers 1635-1935* (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1984), <https://archive.org/details/outspokenwomensp0000unse>, 52.

⁶¹⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 285.

⁶¹⁶ David J. Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism: A Study of Radical Policies and Tactics* (International Publishers, 1926), <https://archive.org/details/leftwingunionism>, 148-9.

renewed strike to improve conditions anyway.⁶¹⁷ Similarly, many employers began to recognize that moderate improvements – better working conditions, shorter hours, and higher wages – were preferable to either protracted industrial warfare if the IWW continued to fight or, even worse, worker control of industry if the IWW succeeded.⁶¹⁸ Although unwilling to give the IWW any credit for their changes of heart, many employers sought to make working conditions tolerable – or at least, less intolerable – out of fear of an organized working class.

The government, too, took a similar line. In the aftermath of the Wheatland hop riot, the California Commission of Immigration and Housing devoted itself to untangling California from the IWW's influence. Although it recognized organized force against the IWW as part of its strategy, it also recognized that the improvement of conditions on the jobsite would severely dampen the influence of the IWW.⁶¹⁹

As with the overall strategy of repression of the IWW, the federal government took cues from California's approach when it decided its own time had come to bring the IWW to heel. Members from California's commission approached the federal government urging, in addition to open warfare, the amelioration of working conditions "that made labor agitation easy."⁶²⁰ The federal government, along with state governments and employers, increasingly recognized that if the IWW was to be undermined, one of the most effective tools in their toolbox was to give the union what it wanted. Since few Wobblies were members of the union out of commitment to long-term goals of revolution, by granting workers the immediate demands that the IWW demanded – without giving due credit – the IWW had little left to entice non-revolutionary workers, and it suffered from its own successes.

⁶¹⁷ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 330.

⁶¹⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 446-7.

⁶¹⁹ Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday*, 11-2.

⁶²⁰ Strang, *Keep the Wretches in Order*, 46.

Conclusion

The IWW was, in just about every way imaginable, a product of its time. On the one hand, the fact that the IWW was so of its time benefited it. It focused on issues that plagued workers that other unions ignored, its philosophy and strategy were catered to the conditions of the American economy and political structure in the early 20th century, and its goals were shaped by the society and culture in which it was formed. Had the IWW been formed 100 years earlier or later – or even 20 years earlier or later – it likely would have taken an entirely different shape and looked wholly unlike the IWW we know.

Yet the fact that it was so firmly structured to respond to the problems of pre-World War I America also meant that, as the world and the country began to change, the IWW struggled to keep up. After 1917 especially, between the beginning of the American government's crackdown and the birth of the international Communist movement, the IWW was constantly on the back foot, condemned to respond and react to developments rather than to define its own way forward. Rather than pivoting to embrace the new society, or even to defiantly resist change, the union instead almost sought to ignore it, unwilling to make the necessary transformative changes to survive in the new world.

In a bizarre twist of fate, the IWW, which had so proudly declared itself as the most forward-thinking union and which had appointed itself the vanguard of the American working class, dragged its heels at the prospect of advancing into the future. Yet it was not so much that the Wobblies were unwilling to enter into the future as it was that they were unwilling to enter into *that* future. For well over a decade, the Wobbly press had predicted an increasingly strong proletariat with a growing class consciousness, the decline of the middle class and small farmers and industrialists, and a mass influx of workers who would see the true light of IWWism and

abandon the AFL to create a working-class revolt. When the union's incredibly overambitious goals did not come to fruition, however, they were met unawares. They had prepared for a utopian future like that laid out in Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget's novel *Syndicalism and the Co-Operative Commonwealth*; what they got instead, however, was closer to the dystopian vision presented in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*.⁶²¹

⁶²¹ Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, *Syndicalism and the Co-Operative Commonwealth: How We Shall Bring About the Revolution* (New International Publishing Company, 1913), <https://archive.org/details/syndicalismcoope00pata>; Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (Macmillan Company, 1908), <https://archive.org/details/ironhee00lond>. See also White, *Under the Iron Heel*, which repeatedly discusses London's relationship with the IWW and uses *The Iron Heel* as a framing device.

Conclusion

The reasons for the IWW's decline were multifaceted. It was not simply the result of government suppression, a single fatal schism, or an unwillingness to grow and adapt. Rather, it was a combination of each of these factors and more, working in conjunction with each other to form a perfect storm which the IWW had little hope of weathering. Certainly, the IWW's decline was not inevitable; few things in history truly are. But the IWW was unprepared to take the actions necessary to overcome the problems it faced, and indeed, it often contributed as much to its own decline as any outside force.

The IWW was built on shaky foundations, a hodgepodge of ideas and ideals pulling in every which way. Although the union managed to somewhat unify its direction in its early years, it managed to do so by ousting rivals rather than mending fences, weakening it in the process. Once the true revolutionaries were left in charge, moreover, they often forgot that the IWW was, at least ostensibly, a labor union and not a revolutionary cell. The organization was left in the hands of people who often lacked either the experience or the interest needed to build a genuine labor movement. Incompetence, corruption, apathy, and yet more internal disagreements culminated in one final dramatic split in which the IWW shook off yet more rivals – this time ousting the even truer revolutionaries, leaving the union in an uncomfortable position of too radical for the rest of the labor movement and not radical enough for the other revolutionaries.

This uncertainty about the IWW's place in either the labor movement or the radical left is reflected in how the union approached external groups. The IWW was certainly not isolationist – it sought ties to other groups, organizations, and movements. However, Wobblies often assumed that they would be the leaders in any coalition they formed, something which few organizations found tolerable. Instead, any “alliances” were merely temporary agreements when the IWW and another movement shared a common cause. Even still, the IWW remained intensely distrustful of

outsiders, brushing off anyone who was not, or could not be, a member – especially those from outside the IWW’s conception of the working class. The distrust often went both ways, however, with other organizations similarly seeking to keep the IWW at arm’s length if it was not willing to be subservient.

The IWW’s difficulties – both with its own operations and with its relationships with other organizations – left the union unprepared for the changes that shook the world around it. A war on the IWW from employers, governments, and private groups forced the IWW to go on the defense rather than expanding its organizing capacity. While the union focused on defending itself from the Iron Heel, the velvet glove of reformism also helped to strangle the union, minimizing the poor work environments that spurred the resentment for employers that the IWW relied on to recruit. With the IWW faltering, and having proved itself to be less than reliable, many workers and revolutionaries found alternative causes to support, seeing the IWW as little more than a brief, if powerful, flash in the pan.

Despite ambitious hopes and an auspicious peak in the 1910s, the IWW was unable to maintain what strength it had gained in any meaningful sense. Although 1924 did not entirely kill it, it damaged the union irreparably. Ahmed White argues that the IWW’s “last great strike” was in 1927 – a strike of coal miners in Colorado – but it was, in fact, little more than a last, sad echo of the problems which had faced the IWW since its inception: The IWW concerned itself overly with issues outside of union organizing, the companies responded with both repression and reform to weaken the unions, and the strike resulted in the growth of the United Mine Workers at the expense of the IWW.⁶²²

Still, the IWW did not die. The union continued to maintain a strong branch in Cleveland

⁶²² White, *Under the Iron Heel*, 220-2.

through the 1940s, which still maintained job control and held true to the labor unionism which the IWW was ostensibly focused on. Yet the IWW at large, which still held onto its intense distrust of the state and outside parties, refused to accept the legitimacy of the Taft-Hartley Act and the National Labor Relations Board. The Cleveland branch, wanting to get into the labor movement, left the IWW in 1950 so that it could follow the new direction. The IWW no longer had any branches with serious job control.⁶²³ The loss of the Cleveland branch started a further decline of the already struggling union, and by 1961, the union was reduced to a mere 115 members.⁶²⁴

And still, the IWW did not die. Crawling back from the brink of total collapse, the IWW experienced a minor revival in the 1960s. Although it was not enough to bring the union back to the main stage of the labor movement, it provided enough positive momentum for the IWW to take its mission seriously once again. In addition to campaigns in traditional IWW fields like agriculture and manufacturing, the Wobblies once again found that the United States labor movement had left behind countless workers: Prisoners, fast food employees, and sex workers, among others. During the 1960s, the union had even briefly flirted with the idea of organizing homemakers and students.⁶²⁵ Since its inception, for as long as there have been gaps in the established labor movement, the IWW has sought to fill them and leave no worker behind.

There are two major lessons to be drawn from the IWW's story. The first, of course, is a lesson of celebration about the power of perseverance: Despite their long and difficult journey, the Wobblies never gave up, and, because of that, they have managed to maintain their relevance and their independence, if not their size. But this, alas, is not the lesson which this thesis is

⁶²³ Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 179,183-5.

⁶²⁴ Robinson, "Social Movement Organizations in Decline," 197.

⁶²⁵ See *Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Constitutional General Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (n. p., 1968), 14-6, IWW Materials Preservation Project for homemakers and students.

intended to teach.

The second lesson to be drawn is a lesson of warning. The trials and tribulations which the IWW faced, both internally and externally, are still faced by modern social movements. For instance, many of the strategies used against the IWW by governments and employers were perfected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) during the middle of the 20th century as part of their Counter Intelligence Program, or COINTELPRO.⁶²⁶ Although COINTELPRO was eventually outed and ended in 1971, many of those same strategies continue to be used against activists today. Echoing the exaggerated claims of “sedition” and “criminal syndicalism” against the IWW during the Red Scare, many environmental activists are accused of “ecoterrorism” as part of what has been termed the Green Scare.⁶²⁷ At the same time, protests in Europe and the United States against Israeli action during the Gaza War have been met with similarly harsh repression from both the state and from private actors.⁶²⁸

External threats are not the only problem which modern movements also face. In addition to repression, the IWW also struggled with an abundance of internal organizational failures. Here, too, the 1960s provide an echo – in the form of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The SDS was a left-wing students’ group associated with the New Left and the anti-Vietnam War movement. Like the IWW, however, the SDS was also a broad coalition of varying

⁶²⁶ For an explanation of these methods, see Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement* (South End Press, 1988), <https://archive.org/details/agentsofrepressi0000chur/37-62>; David Cunningham, “Understanding State Responses to Left- Versus Right-Wing Threats: The FBI’s Repression of the New Left and the Ku Klux Klan,” *Social Science History* 27, no. 3 (2003), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40267812>, especially 335-41.

⁶²⁷ For example, see Rebecca K. Smith, “‘Ecoterrorism’: A Critical Analysis of the Vilification of Radical Environmental Activists as Terrorists,” *Environmental Law* 38 (2), <https://cldc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Ecoterrorism-article.pdf>, especially 573-5.

⁶²⁸ Wilfred Chan, “‘The Palestinian Exception’: Why Pro-Palestinian Voices are Suppressed in the US,” *The Guardian*, 1 November 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/01/palestine-us-activism-firings-speech>; Josephine Solanki, “The Pillars of Repression,” Transnational Institute, 15 January 2026, <https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-pillars-of-repression>.

ideologies. At their 1969 convention, the organization experienced a devastating split, effectively crippling it.⁶²⁹ In fact, some SDS members even fled to the IWW in the wake of the split.⁶³⁰

Questionable leadership and poor financial mismanagement have also been repeated problems. The Black Lives Matter organization acquired an abundance of funds in the early 2020s from a wave of donations. Local leaders of the organization expressed frustration with how that money was spent, feeling that they had been excluded from decision-making about the organization's finances.⁶³¹ Of course, such a decentralized network also allowed less-than-scrupulous individuals to come to power at the local level and act for their own benefit, as the case of the Oklahoma City branch of the organization seems to suggest.⁶³²

The fact that the IWW's problems are so universal, even though the IWW itself is so unique, is rather unsurprising. In fact, sociologists have laid out theories of the phases of social movements for decades now, with the theory first laid out by Herbert Blumer in 1951.⁶³³ The stages as laid out by Blumer do not necessarily fit the IWW exactly, but subsequent sociologists have expanded on his theory and established four primary stages: Emergence, coalescence, bureaucratization, and decline.⁶³⁴ As Jonathan Christiansen points out, the term "decline" does not necessarily equate to failure; in fact, he states that decline can come as a result of

⁶²⁹ Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (Random House, 1973), <https://archive.org/details/sds0000sale>, 557-99.

⁶³⁰ Fred W. Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years* (Industrial Workers of the World, 1976), 209-10.

⁶³¹ Aaron Morrison, "AP Exclusive: Black Lives Matter has \$42 Million in Assets," *AP*, 17 May 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/government-and-politics-race-ethnicity-philanthropy-black-lives-matter-5bc4772e029da522036f8ad2a02990aa>.

⁶³² "Executive Director of Black Lives Matter OKC Charged with Wire Fraud and Money Laundering," Western District of Oklahoma, Department of Justice, 11 December 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdok/pr/executive-director-black-lives-matter-okc-charged-wire-fraud-and-money-laundering>.

⁶³³ Herbert Blumer, "Social Movements," in Alfred McClung Lee (ed.), *New Outlines of the Principles of Sociology* (Barnes & Noble Inc., 1946), <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.260951>, 203.

⁶³⁴ Jonathan Christiansen, "Four Stages of Social Movements," in *Sociology Reference Guide: Theories of Social Movements* (Salem Press, 2011), 16.

organizational failure, repression, co-optation, and even success.⁶³⁵ Although the IWW, as a specific organization rather than a broader social movement, does not perfectly fit the theory of social movement stages, the reasons for decline laid out in the theory all ring at least a little bit true in the union's case. The IWW struggled with internal weaknesses and an inability to commit to its own goals; this was organizational failure. The IWW experienced harsh crackdowns from governments and private parties; this was repression. Some of the leading Wobblies abandoned the anti-system ideals of the IWW for the allure of reform or passivity; this was co-optation. Finally, the IWW managed to win some of its strikes and the demanded reforms; this was success. All these elements contributed to the union's decline.

But what of the union's legacy? The IWW did not become a permanent staple of the American labor movement, but is that enough to sweep it, as Leon Trotsky so famously so eloquently declared, into "the dustbin of history"?⁶³⁶

In attempting to evaluate the IWW, it is, perhaps, tempting to write it off as a failure. And looking at the lofty goals which they hoped, and failed, to achieve – stopping World War I, uniting all workers into one big union, fomenting a global syndicalist revolution – it is an easy conclusion to come to. But analyzing the IWW for what it was and what it did, rather than what it *hoped* to do, paints a very different picture.

When the IWW came into existence, countless workers in the United States had been left out of the traditional labor movement. Women, Black people, Asians, and immigrants were excluded based purely on their identity. "Unskilled" and migratory workers were never organized because, in the eyes of traditional labor leaders, they couldn't be organized. When the IWW

⁶³⁵ Christiansen, "Four Stages of Social Movements," 16, 19-21.

⁶³⁶ Leon Trotsky, *My Life: The Rise and Fall of a Dictator* (Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1930), <https://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.17606>, 281.

came along, it was one of the first organizations to offer an opportunity to these people to organize and act as workers. And beyond providing a mere symbolic victory to these neglected groups, the IWW demonstrably proved that they could be effectively organized. Across language barriers and across the country, it managed to unite forgotten workers into one big union.

Other unionists took note of the IWW's success as well. John Gambs, in his study of the IWW's decline, points out that a number of unions forming during the 1910s and 1920s – such as the Ladies' Garment Workers Union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and the Amalgamated Food Workers of America – were inspired by the IWW's activism.⁶³⁷ At the same time, the Trade Union Unity League, a Communist-led industrial union affiliated with the RILU, positioned itself as almost something of a successor to the IWW, noting in its draft program its intention to avoid “the many serious mistakes of the I. W. W.”⁶³⁸ Even Jimmy Hoffa, the notorious president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters from 1957 to 1971, claimed to have cut his teeth in the IWW.⁶³⁹

The most important, and most successful, union to take lessons from the IWW was the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Founded in 1935, its initial member unions included the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, the Ladies' Garment Workers Union, and the IUMMSW, all of which were directly influenced by or tied to the IWW.⁶⁴⁰ Less directly, the CIO also took lessons from the IWW's successes and strategies in organizing; prior to the IWW, there had been no real

⁶³⁷ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 190-1.

⁶³⁸ *The Trade Union Unity League: Its Program, Structure, Methods and History* (Trade Union Unity League, c. 1929), <https://archive.org/details/TheTradeUnionUnityLeagueAffiliatedToR.i.l.u.ItsProgramStructure>, 30.

⁶³⁹ Christopher Davis, “Lord Jimmy,” *Esquire*, March 1975, <https://archive.org/details/Esquire-Magazine-1975-03>, 95.

⁶⁴⁰ Frank Emspak, “The Break-Up of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), 1945-1950,” *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global* (PhD diss., 1972), <https://www.proquest.com/docview/302599588?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Dissertations%20%20Theses>, 17.

examples of successful militant industrial unionism.⁶⁴¹

Although Wobblies were confident in their capabilities of achieving their visions of industrial utopia – confident enough to appoint themselves the revolutionary vanguard – the truth is that the IWW was an experiment in a new form of organizing. The IWW learned lessons, both positive and negative, from the Knights of Labor, and the minutes of the IWW's founding convention demonstrate that the soon-to-be Wobblies were conscious of their position as the successors to the Knights.⁶⁴² But though the IWW improved upon the structures and ideas laid out by the Knights of Labor, it was not able to perfect them.

Subsequently, the CIO viewed the IWW as a predecessor in much the same way that the IWW viewed the Knights of Labor. Even some Wobblies subscribed to this idea; James P. Cannon, for instance, argued that the IWW deserves a place in history because of its influence on the CIO by laying the groundwork for industrial unionism in the United States.⁶⁴³ Those who remained in the IWW well after its heyday, however, naturally resented this view. A *Time* reporter in 1946 noted that the IWW convention that year issued denunciations of both the AFL and the CIO – and, aside from further denouncing, did little else.⁶⁴⁴

Although it may not be the legacy that those founding Wobblies desired, as a labor union for the neglected and as a transition between the unstable Knights of Labor and the more mature CIO, the IWW made a clearly positive impact. It organized the unorganized, terrified the ruling class into improving wages and conditions, built up a sense of class consciousness which had been so lacking in the United States previously, laid the foundation for further industrial

⁶⁴¹ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 214, 216-7; James P. Cannon, *The I.W.W.* (Merit Publishers, 1967), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1955/The%20IWW-Greatest%20Thing%20on%20Earth.pdf>, 8.

⁶⁴² For example, see McDermutt, *Proceedings of the First Convention*, 288.

⁶⁴³ Cannon, *The I.W.W.*, 8.

⁶⁴⁴ “Again, the Wobblies,” *Time*, 1 April 1946, <https://time.com/vault/issue/1946-04-01>, 24.

unionism, and showed the power of a united working class.

Just as importantly, perhaps even more importantly, the Industrial Workers of the World, and its martyrs and heroes, remain in the pantheon of American, and indeed international, labor and the modern left. Joe Hill's request to William Haywood – "Don't waste any time in mourning – organize," which was soon shortened to "Don't mourn, organize" – become a battle cry for activists and agitators around the world.⁶⁴⁵ Ralph Chaplin's famous Wobbly anthem, "Solidarity Forever," similarly was taken up by both the broader left and the labor movement, something which Chaplin himself found greatly frustrating.⁶⁴⁶

More than just a handful of phrases, the IWW's commitment to a unified working class and a world without wage slavery, exploitation, or abuse live on. While the IWW as an organization, and the IWW's specific strategies and policies, may have faded, its concerns with the injustices that workers faced remain as relevant as ever. Although written well over 100 years ago, the blunt condemnation of one "Unknown Proletarian" – "We have fed you all for a thousand years / And you hail us still unfed" – remains as true as ever for countless workers in the United States and around the world.⁶⁴⁷ And yet no organization with the IWW's spirit – no organization so outrageously bold, naively dedicated, and uncompromisingly fierce – has since managed to gain the power the IWW once held. For now, then, the IWW stands unparalleled as the last hope, and the greatest lost cause, of the American working class.

⁶⁴⁵ William M. Adler, *The Man Who Never Died: The Life, Times, and Legacy of Joe Hill, American Labor Icon* (Bloomsbury, 2011), 325.

⁶⁴⁶ Ralph Chaplin, "Why I Wrote Solidarity Forever," *The American West* 5, no. 1 (1968): 24, <https://npshistory.com/newsletters/the-american-west/v5n1.pdf>.

⁶⁴⁷ Unknown Proletarian, "We Have Fed You All For a Thousand Years," in *I. W. W. Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent* (Industrial Workers of the World, c. 1922), <https://archive.org/details/iwwsongssongsofl02unse>, 28.

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