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Bob Black
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Beautiful Losers

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Bob Black

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INTRODUCTION

In the disapproving words of a policy historian, Morton Keller, "much — indeed overmuch — attention has been paid to the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World,"[1] and in fact a large literature on the legendary radical union has accumulated, especially during the 1960s and since. A 1986 bibliography listed over 5,000 texts more or less related to the IWW, including 235 books which "represent significant works dealing with the IWW."[2] Whether this is too much attention is a heavily value-laden opinion. The IWW sought attention and, for better or for worse, it got it — from contemporaries and also, after decades of neglect, from historians. The historians have usually been more sympathetic than the contemporaries, except for court historians like Keller who naturally dislike the radically anti-political Wobblies as much as the Wobblies would have despised them. In part the judgment depends on what counts as important; in part it depends on the findings of an extensive but incomplete body of scholarship.

The Industrial Workers of the World — the IWW — was the most important radical organization, and the most radical important organization, in the United States in the early twentieth century. Although its membership probably never exceeded 100,000, its notoriety was for two decades out of all proportion to its size, and workers who at one time or another joined the IWW or came under its influence must have numbered in the millions.[3] Although its organizing efforts mostly ended in failure sooner or later — usually sooner — they introduced trade-unionism to strata of the work-

[1]Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Economy: Public Policy and Economic Change in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 116.

[2]Dione Miles, comp., *Something in Common — An IWW Bibliography* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 41, 525.

[3]Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920*, 1865-1920 (2d ed.; Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1985), 108.

ing class shunned by existing unions. The IWW put industry-wide or horizontal unionism on the agenda of a reluctant union movement, paving the way for the CIO's organizing successes in the 1930s. It demonstrated the organizational capacities of categories of workers previously dismissed as unorganizable. It was the first labor union unconditionally committed, in theory and in practice, to racial and sexual equality. Ironically, given its cynicism about political activity and the law, it dramatized and advanced the cause of freedom of speech. The IWW supplied leaders to later radical tendencies as well as songs and legends. Its colorful personalities, creative tactics, and — perhaps most extraordinary — its sense of humor not only heartened a generation of workers but inspired authors as various as Carl Sandberg, Jack London, John Dos Passos, Eugene O'Neill, James Jones and E.L. Doctorow.

In the IWW's heyday, which happened to coincide with the rise of professional history and social science, it caught the attention of contemporary academics who left a great deal of scholarship to posterity. The epitome of this first phase was Paul F. Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study in American Syndicalism*,[4] authored by a Columbia University institutional economist and first published in 1919. Although Brissenden did not share the IWW's ideology, he made himself well acquainted with its literature and had extensive contact with its leadership. His monograph — especially considering that it appeared at the height of the Red Scare anti-radical hysteria — was a model of dispassionate explication. Partly for its merit, and partly because the IWW shortly experienced a permanent decline in importance and in popular attention, Brissenden's book remained for over forty years the definitive work on the IWW. Historians of labor assumed that Brissenden had reliably provided at least as much as they would ever want to know about a virtually defunct anachronism which belonged to a vanished past. Revolutionary unionism

[4]Paul F. Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study in American Syndicalism* (2d ed.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1920).

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was by then perceived as an historical anomaly and dead end. From the 1930s until the 1960s, the only substantial direct contribution to IWW history, except for a few autobiographies, was produced by the vestigial IWW itself. In 1955 the organization published a history by a longtime Wobbly activist, Fred Thompson.[5] For an in-house history by an amateur, Thompson's book is quite good, and by no means uncritical of its subject. What the reader with otherwise acquired knowledge of the IWW is inclined to marvel at is the smooth flow of the narrative from 1905 to recent times as if the IWW since the 1920s were still an historical actor of any consequence. But professional historians have expressed respect for Thompson's book as well as appreciation for the generous help he has personally extended to their own research on the IWW. Still, Thompson's book might well be taken as an epitaph for its topic. When Brissenden penned a "Preface to the Second Printing of the Second Edition" of his own book in 1956,[6] he referred to Thompson's book and a few other post-1920 works without any hint that they necessitated any important revision of his facts or interpretation. And if that was what he thought, he was right.

Historiography is not only about history, it is one of its effects. The 1960s convulsed the academy and challenged the prevalent consensus history by its very existence as a counter-example. Social scientists in the 1950s had prematurely announced — and (to be fair) not as unalloyed good news, however others received it — the end of ideology (Daniel Bell) and the solution of the fundamental problems of the Industrial Revolution (Seymour Martin Lipset). With ironic justice, conflict resurged in their own faces, on campus, as well as in more important places. Coincidentally, fresh winds

[5]Fred Thompson & Patrick Murphin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years, 1905-1975* (Chicago, IL: Industrial Workers of the World, 1976). It is to this "corrected" edition of Thompson's 1955 book, augmented with an updating chapter by Murphin, to which reference will subsequently be made.

[6]Paul Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study in American Syndicalism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), vii-xi.

blew through the history profession, some from offshore — from the Annales group, the Cambridge Social History group — as some long-suppressed indigenous dissatisfactions welled up thanks to the relative tolerance of the post-McCarthyist period. Historians became more interested in popular "from the bottom up" history, on the one hand, and in the submerged history of American dissidence and radicalism, on the other. Indeed, they liked to explore, and occasionally exaggerate, the overlap between the inclinations. From both perspectives the IWW had natural appeal. Unlike the fat-cat AFL-CIO unions of the 1960s, the IWW embraced the humblest workers and — this counted for a lot in the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement — without regard for race or sex. And the IWW was unabashedly radical. There are even some respects in which, at least in very general ways, the IWW foreshadowed the new radical movement, the New Left. Like the Yippies and other politicized hippies, the Wobblies created a counter-culture of poetry, songs, cartoons, and "happenings." In 1964, Joyce Kornbluh published a widely and well-received anthology of, in effect, Wobbly culture[7] which may have imparted to some activists a sense of heritage. For these or some of these or other reasons, a lot of IWW history was written in the 1960s — more than anytime before or since — and subsequent scholarship has been conducted within the framework erected then or in self-conscious reaction against it. The general narrative histories dating from that decade remain, with Brissenden, the only general histories of the organization.

Historians of American labor identify three — or, I would suggest, three-and-a-half — phases in the historiography of their subject. Scholarship on the IWW roughly recapitulates these stages.

[7] *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1964). I attended U of M in 1969-1973 and my recollection is that this book was assigned reading in a number of courses and was rather widely read by students and/or leftists, although I didn't read it back then. Possibly this was a local phenomenon; I'm only passing along my recollection for what, if anything, it's worth.

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The first is so-called institutional history and (the one-and-a-half stage) its Marxist variant[8]; the second is worker history as social history, from the bottom up; the third is the cultural turn in labor history. And finally, there's a tendency to narrow the scale to regional or local histories of the IWW, which might use any or more than one of the other approaches.

INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

The first phase, then, is institutional history, the "Commons school" of John R. Commons and his associates, notably Selig Perlman, at the University of Wisconsin. By training these scholars were usually economists, not historians, but they were in revolt against the recently consolidated neo-classical economic orthodoxy which excluded from analysis what their micro-economic successors call "externalities," such as the influence of government or unions. As would-be scientists they found this wildly unrealistic; as intellectuals with Progressive sympathies they also found this attitude impolitic if not immoral, although they found it prudent not to say so explicitly in public. They were pro-union, but the sort of unionism they favored was the pure-and-simple unionism of the American Federation of Labor. That is, workers through their representatives should strive for improvements in wages, hours and working conditions, but not aspire to ownership or control of industry. According to their ideologue Perlman, uncontaminated working-class consciousness was what Lenin called trade-union consciousness: workers who sought to be and should be organized in unions, unions which business should accept as permanent negotiating partners, albeit junior partners, in a rationalized economic

[8]"Conceived some three decades apart and the products of diametrically opposed ideological perspectives, the two histories [by Commons et al. and by the Marxist Philip Foner] ironically resemble each other in many ways." Malvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (2d ed.; Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1985), 144.

order.[9] Institutional economists with liberal sympathies could and did endorse industrial unionism, but they disconnected horizontal unionism from revolutionary ideology, which is exactly how things worked out in the 1930s. As scholars, they took their subject-matter to be the structure and function of trade-unions organized to pursue incremental improvements within the industrial order, not to lay claim to the means of production.

The IWW didn't fully fit this pattern. On the one hand its unionism was even more pure-and-simple than that of its arch-rival the AFL, because the IWW totally shunned, and heartily denounced, politics in the sense that politics meant voting or any other involvement in the electoral system. The AFL very occasionally dabbled in electoral politics, but the IWW never did. On the other hand, the IWW was — depending how you look at unions and how you look at the IWW — less than, more than, or something else than a union. Strikes and the improvements they sometimes brought were good in themselves but even better as rehearsals for social revolution. The IWW was non-political not in a passive but in an active way. Although it never officially espoused anarchism, there was no space for the political state in its ideology, whereas the Wisconsin institutionalists viewed with favor the separation of working-class economic and political activity, not the abolition of the latter. The great merit of Brissenden is that he produced a detailed institutional history of the IWW although the organization did not behave as a union should according to institutionalist theory. The IWW rarely sought union recognition and rarely signed time contracts. It viewed strikes not as necessary evils and mere means to an end but as positive goods, as vivifying trials of

[9]Andy Dawson, "History and Ideology: Fifty Years of 'Job Consciousness,'" *Literature and History* 4 (Autumn 1978): 223-241; Maurice Isserman, "'God Bless Our American Institutions': The Labor History of John R. Commons," *Labor History* 17 Summer 1976): 309-328; John Schacht, "Labor History in the Academy: A Layman's Guide to a Century of Scholarship," *Labor's Heritage* (Winter 1994): 4-21.

Nobody ever had to romanticize the Wobblies. They really were romantic. Their heroes and martyrs were the real thing. Their undoing was in part an ironic aspect of their own success in forcing themselves upon public opinion. They made themselves seem more powerful, more organized, and more violent than they ever were. The time came when it served the purposes of their enemies to pretend to take IWW pretensions at face value. As Robert Tyler put it, the Wobblies fell victim to their own mythology.[153] That was far from the only thing they fell victim to, but it did contribute to their downfall.

The IWW was at once all-American and anti-American, individualist and collectivist, reformist and revolutionary. It demanded bread and roses too. James Jones got it about right: there was never anything quite like the IWW. But exactly what the IWW was, and what it was like, is something well worth further historical investigation.

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a proletarian, more likely to be a folk singer than a factory worker." Bob Black, *Anarchy After Leftism* (Columbia, MO: C.A.L. Press, 1997), 148. One wag has characterized syndicalism as "fascism minus the excitement."

[153]Tyler, 60-61, 60-61.

In his novel *From Here to Eternity*, James Jones has an old soldier tell a young one about the Wobblies: "There has never been anything like them before or since."[151] That is an eminently researchable proposition. Historians have never systematically compared the IWW with its predecessor the Knights of Labor or its successor the Congress of Industrial Organizations. There might be more continuity than historians specializing in particular organizations are in a good position to appreciate. Some Wobblies had been Knights and some CIO unionists had been Wobblies. The song tradition from the Knights to the IWW to the CIO and forward to the contemporary union movement is direct.

But no amount of research and no revisionist interpretation is likely to ever qualify by much the distinctiveness of the IWW. The novelist expressed, maybe not the literal truth, but the essential truth. The IWW was by any standard as remarkable and radical an organization of any importance as the United States has ever produced. The Wobblies knew it and so did their enemies, who regarded the Wobblies with fear and loathing not unmixed with a certain fascination and grudging respect. The historian of the culture of the Knights of Labor, Robert Weir, argues that the KOL counter-culture was swamped by the emergent general culture of mass consumption. The IWW counter-culture, in contrast, successfully withstood those tides when they were even stronger. Indeed, IWW culture has for all practical purposes outlasted the organization.[152]

[151]Quoted in Dubofsky, x.

[152]Contemporary historians of the IWW, all of whom are more or less respectful of the classical IWW, are condescending if not contemptuous about the remaining remnant of the organization. Tyler, for instance, calls it an anachronism, a "relic." Tyler, 218. The IWW of 1998 is, in effect, the dwindling conservative wing of social anarchism. Anarchism experienced a modest resurgence beginning in the 1970s, driven in part by its adoption by elements of the punk rock subculture, but the relative importance in the movement of Wobblies and other anarcho-syndicalists has steadily declined. The IWW's proletarian posturing has become a subject of ridicule: "A syndicalist is more likely to be a professor than

strength with capital, as occasions for expressing and cementing class solidarity, and as rehearsals for the strike to end all strikes, the general strike. Many of their contemporaries, including some craft unionists and reformist socialists, considered the Wobblies irrational and irresponsible. Brissenden, who was no syndicalist himself, was however well acquainted with many of the IWW leaders, and he set forth their ideology as calmly and clinically as he did their organizational forms.

Brissenden's book is of enduring interest for many aspects of the IWW, partly — but not only — because he drew on sources both oral and written which are no longer available. Thus his book would possess some lasting utility if only as a sort of surrogate for lost primary sources. But it is more valuable than that. As an institutionalist he naturally took seriously the IWW as an institution, an organization, which, after all, is how it regarded itself and intended to be. "Organization" was the IWW's talismanic word. And Brissenden paid some attention to how IWW ideology projected the economic organization of the post-capitalist future, including the famous "Wheel" or scheme of industry-wide organization which Samuel Gompers mocked as "Father Hagerty's Wheel of Fortune." Some later and lesser historians have disparaged Brissenden for devoting even as little attention, and however detached, as he did to the IWW's paper utopia (which probably did not mean a lot to the average Wobbly). That is, in hindsight, an easy posture to assume, since we now know that the IWW never organized enough workers in enough industries to approximate a shadow organization of industry in general as did such other syndicalist organizations as the French CGT and, later, the Spanish CNT. Academics would take seriously an organizational chart of the AFL-CIO although it might not be much less elaborate than the IWW wheel. When Brissenden was writing IWW history, the IWW was not yet (just) history. Its organizational schemes might have had a future.

Brissenden's book begins with a brisk review of IWW "forerunners" ranging from elements of the early European workers' move-

ment to the Knights of Labor and, with increasing specificity, to particular militant unions directly antecedent to the IWW, such as the United Brewery Workmen and the Western Federation of Miners. Brissenden emphasizes, and possibly overemphasizes antagonism toward the AFL as motivation for the formation of the IWW and a main impetus for its efforts. No one doubts that the founders of the IWW consciously created a union federation on principles opposed to those of the AFL.[10] But with respect to organizing, there was some but not a lot of direct competition, because the IWW specialized in organizing unskilled workers the AFL shunned anyway. IWW publications assailed the craft exclusivism of the "American Separation of Labor," more often than not the IWW tried to organize workers in whom the AFL had little interest. Industrial unionism was something the IWW was better at preaching than practicing, simply because only occasionally did it succeed in organizing enough workers to form genuine industrial or craft union locals, and often not for long. Most IWW locals were "mixed locals" of whatever sorts of workers it had managed to recruit. Some might say — some have said — that the IWW was for the most part not really a union at all, but rather a radical political organization. There is at least some truth to this, although it is only fair to note that some AFL and independent unions also had brief lifespans, a mainly phantom existence or both. Whatever the IWW was, employers and officials hated and feared it, if not for what it was then for what it threatened to become. The active hostility of its contemporaries is the best evidence against Keller's claim that historians have given the Wobblies more attention than their importance justifies.

[10]The AFL was formally condemned at the IWW's founding convention. *The Founding Convention of the I.W.W. — Proceedings* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1969).

ography.[149] This is not a bad thing, just one of those things. The conventional distinction between the Wobblies of East and West is a standing invitation to comparative history. The Conlin anthology includes an 81-page bibliography on sources for the local history of the IWW.[150] Some local studies, among others, will undoubtedly be culturalist in orientation, an approach which holds great promise with respect to the Wobblies.

A strangely neglected aspect of IWW history, considering current historical fashions, is the role of women in the IWW and the IWW's conception of women's roles. The IWW stood for equality between male and female workers; Lucy Parsons and Mother Jones spoke from the podium at the founding convention; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was for a time a leading IWW agitator; and several major IWW strikes, such as the Lawrence and Paterson strikes, involved thousands of female workers. On the other hand, most IWW strikes involved male workers only, all its most important leaders were male, and the vast majority of Wobblies must have been men. In IWW iconography, its cartoons for instance, the Wobbly worker is always male, usually white, and either a humbly-dressed hayseed or a burly, bare-chested super-hero. There are certainly unexplored opportunities here for historians of gender and culture alike.

I have suggested that it is also worthwhile to push past the traditional 1924 terminus of IWW history by a decade or so to improve upon existing explanations of IWW decline. A few of the union's twilight struggles are also important in their own right. Several are recounted in the Conlin anthology. One which is not is the brutal two-year Harlan County coal-miners' strike in which Wobblies were heavily involved. The pattern of general decline should not obscure episodes of local vitality.

[149]Conlin, "Introduction," 24.

[150]Dione Miles, "Sources for the Local History of the I.W.W.," in Conlin, *At the Point of Production*, 237-318.

can take away — and it took a lot back, for instance, with the Taft-Hartley Act. By the 1970's, worker militance was not only increasingly expressed outside of union channels, unions were often in the forefront of its repression.[147] Nor did it enhance the influence or image of organized labor when, in the 60's, the AFL-CIO strongly supported the Vietnam War while the once-militant Teamsters in effect merged with the Mafia. Structural changes in the economy, which played an increasingly recognized role in the decline of the IWW, have even more conspicuously contributed to the decline of business unionism from the 70's onward. Unions are mostly absent from the growth sectors of the economy — except government, whose employees are forbidden to strike and who have economic interests inherently at variance with those of the taxpayers. Twelve years of Republican administrations more anti-labor than any since the 1920's revealed how weak the unions really are without the government support they'd been taking for granted. Contrary to the sophisticated arguments of historians of "corporate liberalism,"[148] it turns out that many sophisticated American businessmen do not really value the services of class-collaborationist unions as their junior partners after all. They would just as soon dispense with unions — any sort of unions — altogether. The anti-statism and class-struggle orientation of the IWW no longer look so silly. The argument that nothing succeeds like success refutes itself when success turns to failure. The Wobblies lost, but they were beautiful losers. The business unions are losing too, but they are not beautiful.

Whither IWW historiography? Toward the recovery of the "many I.W.W.'s," which in the short run can only complicate, or even confuse, such coherence as Dubofsky reimposed on IWW histori-

[147]John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal* (Seattle, WA: Left Bank Books, 1988), esp. chs. 12, 13 & 16.

[148]E.g., James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State* (Boston: XXXXX, 1968).

John S. Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.* (1932)[11] is avowedly a sequel to Brissenden, covering what was then the second half of the organization's history, from 1917 to 1931. But Gambs, unlike Brissenden, is highly antagonistic to the IWW, so much so that he raises as a real question, ultimately unanswerable, whether the IWW suffered "persecution" during and after World War I. Even scholars with no sympathy at all for I.W.W. goals and methods, such as Harry N. Scheiber,[12] recognize that the IWW experienced what can only be called persecution, including legal and extralegal violence, on a large scale once the United States entered the war. Gambs implies that if the repression of the IWW reflected public opinion, it wasn't really repression, which is nonsense,[13] even apart from the fact that wartime public opinion is not exactly an independent variable but rather a product at least in part of government policy. Within a few years, at a time when scores of Wobblies still languished in prison, most Americans probably believed, as most Wobblies had, that entering the war was a mistake.

The evidentiary base of Gambs' book is narrower than Brissenden's. Aside from a modest amount of correspondence, Gambs , unlike Brissenden, seems to have had little direct contact with Wobblies or ex-Wobblies , although he makes reference, usually vaguely, to "conversations with members."[14] He does, however, identify the main causes of IWW decline, all of which were apparent at the time to the Wobblies themselves. Foremost among these, of course, was savage government repression, be it "persecution" or something else. By the time systematic repression commenced in 1917, also, most of its top leaders had dropped out (several more had been lynched), others would be imprisoned, and some would

[11]John S. Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

[12]Harry N. Scheiber, *The Wilson Administration and Civil Liberties*, 1917-1921 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960).

[13]Gambs, ch. 1.

[14]Ibid., 125.

defect to the Communist Party, notably Big Bill Haywood, who indeed jumped bail and defected to the Soviet Union. Although Gambs concluded that neither the Wobblies nor the Communists would ever have much appeal to American workers, he thought that party discipline gave the edge to the Communists. Whether or not that is all there was to it — what used to be called "Moscow gold" was also involved — we now know that the Communist Party did grow in numbers and influence while the IWW decline proved to be permanent. Gambs provides the most detailed account of the growing conflict between pro- and anti-Communist Wobblies and its climax in the schism of 1924.[15]

Gambs also noticed, as did contemporary Wobblies, that the class base of the IWW was eroding. To oversimplify, Wobblies were either Eastern immigrant workers or Western migratory workers. First the war and then the 1924 reform of the immigration law shut off the flow of immigrants. Even more important, the Western migratory worker — the quintessential Wobbly, the tramp or hobo, a homeless single man — was rapidly becoming an anachronism.[16] By the 1920's and still more so by the 1930's, the migratory farmworker, usually of Mexican birth or descent, was a family man with an automobile who typically had a permanent off-season urban habitation.[17] As poor and exploited as he was, he had something to

[15]Gambs, chs. 3-4. Fred Thompson writes that "most IWW oldtimers" — presumably including himself — "consider this 1924 split the definitely worst thing that ever happened to it." It is therefore amazing that he devotes all of one paragraph to the split and does not mention its ideological cause! Thompson, 151 (quoted), 150-151. Thompson himself is playing politics here. Since 1924, the official IWW ideology has been that the IWW has no official ideology; in fact, its unacknowledged but dogmatically upheld ideology has been anarcho-syndicalism.

[16]Nels Anderson, "Introduction to the Phoenix Edition," *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago, IL & London: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1961), xiv (originally published in 1923); Erik H. Monkonnen, "Introduction," *Walking to Work: Tramps in America, 1790-1935*, ed. Erik H. Monkonnen (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 2-3, 6-8.

[17]Devra Weber, Dark Sweat, *White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 63-66.

unpopular in that decade, but that cannot explain why, as Joseph Gambs noticed, the movement of members between two unpopular leftist organizations, the IWW and the Communist Party, was completely one-way.[145] Clearly the IWW was seen as a relic of the past, and the CP seen as the wave of the future.

Ironically, when large-scale labor militance resumed in the 1930's, it was under the leadership of Communists, Socialists, independent radicals and nonradicals who, through the Congress of Industrial Organizations, implanted a version of the industrial unionism espoused by the IWW in the heart of America's heavy industries. To be sure, Federal government support was crucial to the success of "labor's giant step," and the statist leftists were obviously more amenable to state involvement in labor relations than were the vestigial Wobblies, who were by then anarcho-syndicalists who as a matter of principle rejected defiling dealings with the state. But IWW anti-statism may not be the full explanation for the organization's failure to revive on any significant scale during the Great Depression. At no time, after all, had there ever been much love lost between the IWW and the state. And while the Wobblies' Communist rivals, for instance, had (to say the least) no objection to the state as such, they were as hostile to the existing capitalist form of the state as it was to them. Yet the Communists and other left-wing statists played a prominent part in the triumph of the union movement in the 1930's, the Wobblies played almost none. The relationship between revolutionism and industrial unionism proved to be contingent. IWW revolutionary industrial unionism was a failure, CIO reformist industrial unionism was a success.

Or so it seemed until recently. It is not so obvious any more that labor got the better of the deal when it accepted legal limitations in return for legal legitimation.[146] What the state gives, the state

[145]Gambs, 89.

[146]Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and the Unions: Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America*, 1880-1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

unions decline during depressions, and depression was the normal condition of the Northwest lumber industry in the 20's.

Another development — something Dubofsky and Tyler had earlier identified as a cause of IWW decline — was the implementation in some sawmills and logging camps of the rudiments of what labor historians call welfare capitalism. During the war, the Federal government had imposed some improvement in wages and hours on the industry which it found to be not so intolerable after all. Some employers belatedly provided their workers with decent shelter, bedding and food, and sometimes other amenities, and experimented with company unionism. In 1923 they improved the implementation of the blacklisting of Wobblies. But most important, according to Rajala, were the years of low demand for labor. Workers had little choice but to accept the employers' terms or seek their livelihoods elsewhere.[143]

One implication of Rajala's article is that the causes of IWW decline may not have been uniform even if their effects seem to be. Even the nationwide causes which have dominated previous explanations, such as repression and internal schism, may not have operated with equal force everywhere. After all, the organization had survived earlier schisms and bouts of repression. Unfortunately, all recent historians confine themselves to the pre-war IWW (Foner, Conlin, Winters, Salerno) or else conclude the story, as Dubofsky, Renshaw and Tyler do, by 1924.[144] It may be necessary to follow up on the IWW into the late 20's and even the 30's, as do Rajala and three contributors to the Conlin anthology, if not for the specific significance of later IWW activism then at least for the light it might shed on the causes of IWW decline. More respectable unions also languished in the 1920's, although they were not unduly afflicted with repression or splits. Left-wing radicalism was certainly

[143]Richard A. Rajala, "A Dandy Bunch of Wobblies: Pacific Northwest Loggers and the Industrial Workers of the World, 1900-1930," *Labor History* 37 (Spring 1996): 205-234.

[144]Conlin, "Introduction" to *At the Point of Production*, 15.

lose besides his chains. This development does not fully explain the IWW decline, for there were Wobblies on both sides of the border and some American Wobblies had even fought in the Mexican Revolution, but the decimated and demoralized IWW which emerged from the great split of 1924 was a rigidly, if unofficially, anarcho-syndicalist organization with no capacity to cope creatively with a changing social situation. Communists, not Wobblies, would organize some Hispanic farm-workers in the 1930's.

THE STALIN SCHOOL OF INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

After Gambs, historians all but completely lost interest in the IWW. A decades-long drought set in after the IWW ceased to be a threat and before it became a subject of leftist nostalgia. One small flap erupted in the late 1940's when novelist Wallace Stegner published an article in the *New Republic* suggesting that the IWW songwriter and martyr Joe Hill, executed for murder in Utah in 1915, may have been guilty as charged.[18] Stegner had fictionalized the case in his 1945 novel *The Preacher and the Slave* (also the title of one of Hill's best-known revolutionary ballads).[19] This aroused the righteous indignation of what was left of the IWW and a few other leftists as well,[20] but the controversy did nothing to revive interest in the IWW or influence how historians interpreted it. There is no doubt that once his political affiliation became known, Hill got a trial unfair even by the standards of the day, but nobody now living can say for sure if he was guilty or innocent. He was picked

[18]Wallace Stegner, "Joe Hill, the Wobbly Troubadour," *New Republic* 118 (January 5, 1948),: 20-24, 38.

[19]Wallace Stegner, *The Preacher and the Slave* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1945).

[20]Friends of Joe Hill Committee, "Joe Hill: IWW Martyr," *New Republic* 119 (November 15, 1948), 15-20.

up initially, not because he was a Wobbly, but because he was an unemployed drifter with no explanation for a gunshot wound received the night of the murder. He didn't take the stand, and his absurd public position was that his lips were sealed in order to protect a lady's honor. The IWW made Hill the organization's most famous martyr. In the 1960s, a new generation formed a taste for combining politics, humor and song as Hill had done, sparking a modest revival of interest in his case. Ironically, the main scholarly manifestation of the renewal originated, not in the New Left or the counter-culture, but with the prolific Communist Party historian Philip S. Foner. In The Case of Joe Hill (1965)[21] Foner affirmed Hill's innocence but without finding the smoking gun in someone else's hand either. By now it seems unlikely we will ever know much more about the case than Foner relates.

Foner spun the book off from his larger *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* of which the fourth volume, also published in 1965, is devoted to the IWW, 1905-1917.[22] In over 600 pages of prose he would probably be flattered to have called workmanlike, Foner narrates the history of the organization, for the years covered, in more detail than any other book. No other volume, for instance, collects within its covers accounts of nearly as many of the IWW "free speech fights," its efforts to spread its message in public places, meeting arrest and repression with massive nonviolent civil disobedience. If it happened, and if he can find out anything about it, Foner reports it. And "reports" is the right word for it. The book reads like solid investigative journalism, only a few decades after the fact. Not that it lacks a theoretical, or at least an ideological orientation: Foner writes like what he is, an unreconstructed Stalinist.

[21]Philip S. Foner, *The Case of Joe Hill* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

[22]Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

The Conlin anthology begins to redress the imbalance Conlin complained of in *Bread and Roses Too*, the overemphasis on the more picturesque Western Wobblies. Actually, had there never been any Western Wobblies, the Eastern Wobblies at Lawrence and Paterson and the Southern Wobblies in Louisiana would have sufficed to inscribe the IWW in labor history as the most radical and romantic of all American unions. It is only by comparison with the wild Westerners that other Wobblies seem staid. The anthology commences with four articles on IWW strikes in Northern industrial cities — Akron, Paterson, Pittsburgh, and Little Falls, New York — only one of which (the Paterson strike) figured prominently in earlier IWW histories. The next three articles about the IWW "on the extractive fringe" deal with activity in the South, in Nebraska and in Kansas, not in the far West. The last three articles do address particular IWW struggles in Washington and Colorado, but under the rubric "The I.W.W. After the Fall" — that is, they deal with local strikes (all unsuccessful) conducted in a few pockets of local IWW strength which for awhile outlived the organization's general demise. (By then IWW membership was concentrated mainly in the East and Midwest.[142])

Unlike the culturalist approach, the localist approach got off to a good start with Robert Tyler's *Rebels of the Woods* (1967), a careful, detailed and thoughtful narrative of the trajectory of the IWW in the Pacific Northwest. A recently published article by Richard A. Rajala improves upon Tyler by following the history of the loggers through the 1920's. By then, state repression of the IWW was minimal. Economic causes, according to Rajala, were much more important in the decline of the IWW in this region where it was once so formidable. Although the 20's, like the late 90's, were generally a prosperous period, like the late 90's they contained pockets of economic decline, and the Northwest lumber industry was one of them. Unless (as in the 30's) government promotes unions,

[142]Renshaw, 263.

versity,[140] and there are also extensive collections in other libraries. There are ample accessible sources for further explorations of IWW culture.

CONCLUSION

If there is any discernible trend, aside from culturalism, in recent IWW historiography, it is a turn toward local history. The former may even encourage the latter. Thus Robert E. Weir's study of the culture of the Knights of Labor turned out to be, to an unforeseen degree, a study of the several cultures of the Knights of Labor. This, in fact, is a stock criticism of culturalism: that its inherent tendency is to particularize and thus fragment worker history to the detriment of the broader understanding of workers as a class formed by a common experience. As yet it has not worked out that way in IWW historiography, but then, the self-consciously culturalist study of the Wobblies is still in its infancy. There are other spurs to the localist turn. Introducing *At the Point of Production*, an important 1981 anthology of local IWW histories, editor Joseph R. Conlin identifies one of them: the effect of Dubofsky's book "is to close the general subject of the I.W.W. for a while, just as Brissenden's book did in 1919."[141] But plenty of details remain to be filled in. Even aside from culturalism, community studies are the growth sector in labor history — relatively compact in scope and convenient to research, they are ideal topics for the dissertations from which so many monographs emerge. And — an important concern at the outset of an academic career — they are unlikely to give offence. If a local study confirms the generally accepted interpretation, that alone verifies its merit. If it does not, it is meritorious for qualifying the general interpretation, which is always appropriate in the practice of history, the science of the particular.

[140] Miles, 9.

[141] Conlin, "Introduction" to *At the Point of Production*, 23.

The result makes for an occasionally disconcerting mismatch between theory and practice. In theory, Foner writes as a dialectical materialist, but his methodology is positivist, and the result comes off as quaint. As for his many other books, his sources are resolutely traditional. He has an enormous appetite for digesting published sources, especially newspapers and magazines. The presentation is mainly chronological. As a Marxist, he might be expected to probe deeply into developments of American capitalism to which the IWW was a reaction, and explore in some detail the organization's class base, but he does less of this than the authors of any other general IWW histories. Instead he tells two stories: one is about how IWW-led workers confronted capital and the state, the other is about the internal politics of the organization, the conflicts among ideologues to determine its "line." The formerly invariably comes off as more heroic, although Foner, as a Leninist, cannot help but be keenly concerned with the latter. This is where Foner's Communist Party loyalism comes in.

The Communists adopted a rather convoluted attitude toward the IWW. In its heyday the IWW was almost the only game in town for anti-capitalist revolutionaries. Its goal of working-class solidarity through industrial unionism in a sense preserved , through Progressive reform and conservative reaction, elements of Marxism and a continuity with earlier labor movements like the Knights of Labor which might otherwise have been sundered. Important early leaders of the Communist Party, such as Big Bill Haywood and Helen Gurley Flynn — Foner's volume is dedicated to the "rebel girl" — had been prominent Wobblies, and a substantial number of rank-and-file Wobblies seem to have ended up in the newer organization which, judging from developments in Russia, knew the way to the

revolutionary future.[23] The IWW had, in the words of one of its favorite songs, "held the fort" for the revolutionary left.

On the other hand, the IWW was not Leninist. It was not, and it would not support, a political party. The IWW rejected Lenin's theory that it required an intellectual vanguard of bourgeois origins to convey class-consciousness to the benighted workers. And there was a significant if minority presence within the IWW of the anarchists, ancient rivals and enemies of the Marxists, and many more Wobblies had some anarchist tendencies. But the Communist Party, USA could afford to look with indulgence on the IWW as it was being destroyed during the Red Scare: it was no serious rival, indeed, the Party could pick up some of the pieces. The 1924 split lost the IWW many of its not so numerous remaining members to the CP; the anarcho-syndicalists were left in possession (they still are) of an almost empty shell. It served the Party's purposes condescendingly to cast the pre-CP IWW as its valorous and well-meaning if somewhat misguided precursor. So it appears in Foner's book. The CP is to the IWW what Jesus was to John the Baptist, the greater one who follows. The title of a 1956 pamphlet by Communist James P. Cannon confirms the point: *The I.W.W.: The Great Anticipation.*[24] Space limitations certainly suggested concluding Foner's narrative when it did, if not sooner, but it was also convenient to usher the IWW off the stage before the greatest hero made a debut.[25]

[23]Gambs estimated that the IWW had lost up to 2,000 members to the Communists, and that 10-20% of the CP was by 1932 "composed of former I..W.'s or former active sympathizers." Gambs, 89.

[24]James P. Cannon, *The I.W.W.: The Great Anticipation* (New York: Progress Publishers, 1956).

[25]In the 1920's the CP engineered an even more egregious hijacking of martyrs to other cases. It expropriated the politico-legal defense of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, convicted of murder in Massachusetts . The CP represented the defendants as generic working-class radicals to leftists and liberals, among them Felix Frankfurter, not as what they were, because the prostrate American anarchist movement lacked the organization and resources to lead the fight for its own.

longtime militants, not rank-and-file Wobblies, and such sources are notoriously self-serving, but historians of the IWW have long made substantial if cautious use of them. If anything, they may be even more useful to cultural historians of the IWW than to IWW historians with other orientations, because what these authors say (and don't say) discloses more, in retrospect, than the authors intended (if they even understood) about their own assumptions, ideas and purposes. Decoding such covert meanings is one of the things in which good culturalist history excels. And there are also some published oral histories taken from less illustrious ex-Wobblies in their senior years.[139] Despite the destruction of many records, "large holdings" from the IWW headquarters survive and were deposited in 1963 in the Reuther Library at Wayne State Uni-

England, Gastonia, Moscow (New York: Hillman-Curl, 1937); Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1948); Len De Caux, *Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to the CIO, a Personal History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970); Floyd Dell, *Homecoming: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1933); Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *Rebel Girl: An Autobiography* (3d. rev. ed.; New York: International Publishers, 1973); William Zebulon Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin* (New York: International Publishers, 1937); George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (London: Laurence and Wishart, 1956); William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood* (New York: International Publishers, 1929); Ammon Hennacy, *The Book of Ammon* (Salt Lake City, UT: the Author, 1965). A minor controversy swirls around Haywood's book, the product of his exile in the USSR: some claim that it was ghost-written by Stalinists. Possibly the answer may be found in the archives of the former Soviet Union.

Even Philip Foner, who — to his credit — does try to catch up with advances in labor history, assembled an anthology of mostly first-person accounts of some of the IWW free-speech fights, although he was not so up-to-date as not to misdescribe the collection as "an early form of what, may be called 'Oral History.' " Philip S. Foner, ed., *Fellow Workers and Friends: I.W.W. Free-Speech Fights as Told by Participants* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1981), viii. His sources had all been previously published and none had originated as interviews.

[139]Stewart Bird, Dan Georgakas, & Deborah Shaffer, *Solidarity Forever: An Oral History of the IWW* (Chicago, IL: Lake View Press, 1985).

It is too soon to judge the culturalist contribution to the understanding of the IWW. Were one to base the judgment only on the avowedly culturalist studies of Winters and Salerno, it would have to be negative. In their faults these books — though so different in content — are painfully similar, which might suggest there is something inherently flawed about culturalist history, at least as applied to the IWW. Both vulgarize and misapply half-digested fragments of social theories. Both are blatantly tendentious, driven by extraneous ideological commitments — in Winters' case to socially progressive Christianity, in Salerno's to some melange of anarchism, syndicalism and internationalism. Both betray the promise of the concept of culture for historians. Granted that, as Peter Burke says, "'Culture' is a concept with an embarrassing variety of definitions,"[137] most of them share an orientation toward comprehending social life as a meaningful whole. Winters and Salerno, in contrast, dart from detail to detail, refuting one here, asserting one there, each ending up with a short collection of essays exhibiting, at best, a very loose thematic unity. And how is it that these culturalists come to such dramatically different conclusions, not only about IWW culture in general, but even about the significance in particular of someone like Hagerty, to whom they both assign great importance as evidence for their utterly disparate theses?

If, however, one looks beyond the dubious first productions of the overt culturalists, there is a substantial if scattered corpus of cultural evidence and interpretation relating to the Wobblies to be gathered from Parker, Anderson, Barnes, Kornbluh, Conlin, Dubofsky, the Monkonnen anthology and other sources. Insofar as ideology is an aspect of culture, for instance, this dimension of IWW culture has been well and carefully scrutinized by scholars from several disciplines. Memoirs and autobiographies by one-time Wobblies abound.[138] Admittedly their authors are usually leaders or

[137]Burke, 188.

[138]E.g., Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1940); Fred Beal, *Proletarian Journey: New*

THE SIXTIES, OR, HISTORY FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Although Foner's IWW history came out in the 1960's, and for that reason probably enjoyed a larger audience than it would have had earlier, its kind of history was as out-of-date as its politics. A new generation of historians, including some Marxists, began to write labor history in a new way. Following E.P. Thompson, they reconceived class as something more complicated than occupying a certain slot at work. Where Marx, Engels and Lenin had distinguished the "class in itself," defined in economic terms as propertyless wage-labors, from the "class for itself" — the class conscious of itself as a class with its own economic (and political) interests — Thompson and likeminded historians believed that the distinction had cost more in meaning than it was worth in analytic clarity. Class was in important part constituted by class consciousness. That doesn't mean that people can wish themselves into or out of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat by creative visualisation or by clicking their heels together three times. Class, according to E.P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman, does have an essential subjective component — but it is mainly not a private psychological experience but a collective shared sense of identity. In other words, the making of the working class is very much a matter of the making of working-class culture. And this implies that in some degree the working class is its own maker.

With respect to the IWW, however, and indeed for most of the new American working-class history of the 1960's, this is running ahead of the story. The thoroughgoing culturalist conclusions which would later be drawn by some historians were for a time masked by the perception that the main lessons of the labor history version of the new non-institutional, from-the-bottom-up history were different. There was first the overcoming of the institutionalist equation of the history of workers with the history of

unions. At no time in American history have most workers belonged to unions. To confine labor history to union history is at one stroke to dismiss the experience of most American workers, past and present, as beneath notice. As if that were not bad enough, the dismissal is systematically discriminatory inasmuch as it systematically understates the importance of strata of workers who have always been underrepresented, if not unrepresented, by the unions: women, children, nonwhites, the foreign-born , the unmarried, the transient, and the unskilled. In the 1960's these critical failings in labor history were noticed and began to be corrected, and there were those who also noticed that the IWW was by 60's standards the most radically egalitarian organization of any consequence in American history. And it was a time to "do your own thing" both individually and collectively. Stonefaced sacrificial Stalinism lost what little attraction it ever had for idealistic youth or for idealistic academics, including those with leftist pretensions. The Wobbly boast — "Leaders? We got no leaders!" — was not really true, except by comparison with the Old Left, but it was in tune with the anti-authoritarian temper of the decade. Joyce Kornbluh's 1964 IWW anthology could not have been better timed.

John Higham wrote in 1965 that "it is reasonable to assume that a country gets, for the most part, the sort of history that it wants."[26] If so, America wanted history with a social and cultural flavor, sympathetic to popular movements, and what could be more congenial than an ethnically and sexually inclusive counter-movement, not only hostile to authority but irreverent toward it, whose goal was participatory democracy? In 1969, radical historian Staughton Lynd made the analogy explicit: like the Wobblies, the student left sought to build "the new society within the shell of the old."[27]

[26]John Higham, with Leonard Krieger and Felix Gilbert, *History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 68.

[27]Quoted in Alice Echols, "Nothing Distant about It: Women's Liberation and Sixties Radicalism," in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill, NC & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 159.

pirations through the IWW. Still, considered along with the other articles in the anthology, the Davis article raises an important challenge to the conventional wisdom about the relation of mobility to culture and community. It is almost axiomatic for most social scientists and historians that culture is grounded in community, and community is grounded in relatively stable, spatially concentrated primary relations. Geographical mobility (immigration, for instance) therefore disrupts community, and geographical mobility as a way of life virtually precludes it.[135] This explains the initial attraction of the culture-of-poverty thesis to Dubofsky. The people Lewis based the thesis on were not just poor, they were recent migrants to the city, uprooted from their traditional peasant cultures. Permanently migratory workers without kin should represent an even more extreme form of loss of community and culture. But the evidence is ample that tramps in general, and Wobbly tramps in particular, took their culture and community with them. Wherever he went, a tramp knew where to look for, and could expect to find, the main stem or a hobo jungle. There, as when working, he consorted with men like himself who tended to think as he did. Tramps clearly had a sense of group identity which could only have been reinforced by the anxiety and hatred they inspired in settled society. It may well be true that community and culture are more fragile and precarious among the geographically mobile, but that need not make them any less precious. No wonder the fundamental IWW value — class solidarity — had such a strong appeal to them.[136]

[135]Eric H. Monkonnen, "Afterword," in Monkonnen, *Walking to Work*, 235-247.

[136]Sociologists had already identified (deviant) subcultures which were not necessarily geographically localized, such as those of marijuana smokers and dance musicians, Becker, chs. 4-7. Becker and his school, preoccupied with promoting their own theory (that society, not the deviants, defines and so creates deviance), never noticed that some of their research called into question some implications of the master theory of sociology.

severe fluctuations, transient workers formed a crucial component of the workforce.[131]

One article in the Monkonnen anthology, by John C. Schneider, takes an explicitly "subcultural view" of tramping between 1890 and 1920.[132] By his definition, "members of a subculture share relatively distinct personal traits, engage in relatively unconventional behavior, and associate with one another on a relatively segregated basis."[133] Tramping workers met the definition. As to shared personal traits, they were mostly male, single, homeless, white, young (20s to 30s), native- or Canadian- or British-born manual laborers. They were unconventional in being unsettled, outside traditional homes, and living in a same-sex milieu (which, to an undetermined but not insignificant extent, was also a homosexual milieu). And they were segregated from the larger society not only by gender and transience but even in the winter off-season when they holed up in what the tramps called "the main stem," neighborhoods where they found "all the places they needed, not only cheap hotels and lodging houses but also second-hand clothing stores, employment agencies, saloons, inexpensive cafes and restaurants, and brothels."[134]

Schneider clearly proves that tramps formed, by his definition, a subculture, but he begs off establishing to what extent "such an inarticulate group" shared attitudes or beliefs. He does not mention the IWW. The contemporary observers Parker and Anderson assigned a prominent place to the IWW in their accounts of transient workers, and it is plausible, indeed tempting, to regard the Wobbly as the class-conscious tramp. To call tramps "an inarticulate group" begs the question whether they articulated their attitudes and as-

[131]Eric H. Monkonnen, "Introduction" to Monkonnen, *Walking to Work*, 1-17.

[132]John C. Schneider, "Tramping Workers, 1890-1920: A Subcultural View," in Monkonnen, *Walking to Work*, 212-234.

[133]Ibid., 212 — a definition of subculture which is very close to Howard Becker's definition of a subculture as a deviant culture. Becker, *Outsiders*, 79-82.

[134]Schneider, 213-226 (quoted at p. 225).

For awhile, some SDS theorists called for "student syndicalism," a phrase which would have baffled the old-time Wobblies. And since the student movement was above all an antiwar movement, it was easy for its more erudite participants to liken the government repression of antiwar Wobblies which commenced, with the support of the pro-war AFL, in 1917, to the government repression of their own movement opposing the Vietnam War — a war supported by the AFL-CIO. This is not to say that the IWW heritage influenced events in the 60's — or that it did not. That is one of those subjects about which too much has not been written, indeed, not nearly enough, no matter what Morton Keller thinks. But there were good reasons for interest in the IWW to revive in the 60's.

Two general narrative histories of the IWW appeared in the 1960's. The less important one was Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (1967),[28] a sympathetic 300-page popular history by an English journalist. It's not at all bad for being what it is, and it does not pretend to be anything more. Several subsequent academic historians have faulted him for errors of fact, such as erroneously putting certain Wobblies in times and places they were not, but nobody claims that these errors in detail seriously devalue the book. It would be interesting to know how well it sold (there was also a paperback edition). Its "Postscript: Workers of the World"[29] discusses briefly, but less briefly than any other general narrative, IWW presence or influence in other countries such as Canada, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, and Norway as well as among Mexicans on both sides of the border with the United States.

By general agreement, the foremost general history of the IWW is Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial*

[28]Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967).

[29]Ibid., 275-293.

Workers of the World (second edition 1988),[30] whose first edition appeared in 1969. In 561 pages it tells the story of the IWW from its origins among Western hard rock miners to the 1924 split. In far more detail than anyone else, Dubofsky relates the founding of the IWW in 1905 to the preceding fifteen years of often violent class conflict in the Western mines. By far the most important organization involved in the founding of the IWW, the Western Federation of Miners, was a product of that struggle. (Although the WFM soon took a cautious, even conservative turn and pulled out of the IWW, nearly aborting the infant organization.) Dubofsky's insistence on the "industrial frontier" origins of the IWW has been criticized as an attempt to provide the IWW with an immaculately American pedigree, as Brissenden had done in a period of nativist xenophobia. But not every evocation of the frontier commits the Turnerist heresy.[31] Granted that at this late date the Americanism of the IWW should not be critical to understanding it, some of the credit belongs to historians like Brissenden and Dubofsky who, by downplaying the foreign character of the IWW, downplayed the issue itself.

If only — but not only — because of the chronological limits of the general histories by Brissenden and Foner, Dubofsky provides the most detailed as well as the most up-to-date account of the repression of the IWW from 1917 to 1924. The next best account is by Gambs, but many more sources were available to Dubofsky. (Strictly speaking, the most detailed account is William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*,[32] but it is confined to the Federal government's role. So is Paul L. Murphy, *World War I and the Origin of*

[30]Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (2d ed.; Urbana & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

[31]No one could say so, for instance, about Patricia Nelson Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988).

[32]William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (2d ed.; Urbana, IL & Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

the ambulatory community and culture of the migratory workers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from whom the IWW drew much support, especially in the West. Introducing a 1984 anthology on tramps,[127] Eric H. Monkonnen discusses the social composition and economic role of these transient workers. There were many of them; in an earlier monograph, Monkonnen estimated that 10-20% of families in the late nineteenth century included at least one member who had at some time been lodged in the Gilded Age equivalent of homeless shelters, local police stations.[128] Prior to World War I, most tramps were "neither outcasts nor deviants," they were just workers going wherever work could be found. They were the most mobile, and most conspicuously mobile, members of an American working class which was in general remarkable for its spatial mobility.[129] These tramps (or hobos[130]) were usually young, single, American-born (but not Southern-born) white males, and most of them tramped for only part of their lives. They were both the products and among the producers of the most accelerated phase of American industrialization. The communications facilities of cities and the long-distance transportation made possible by the railroads (which usually winked at tramps "riding the rails" without paying) made it possible for tramps to locate and travel to short-term employment opportunities. At a time when industry was in general rapidly expanding, but also subject to

[127]Eric H. Monkonnen, ed., *Walking to Work: Tramps in America, 1790-1935* (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

[128]Eric H. Monkonnen, *Police in Urban America, 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 96. These people were not under arrest: they voluntarily sought overnight shelter on the floors of police stations. Ibid., ch. 3. Monkennen is the first historian of American policing to have noticed this once-important police service function, what he called "police welfare."

[129]Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920*, 13-14.

[130]Some have attempted definitions distinguishing tramps and hobos, such as Anderson, ch. 6, but judging from the Monkonnen anthology, present-day historians aren't doing so.

culture turns out to be just ideology, not the wider-ranging disclosure of attitudes, values and world-views promised by culturalist historians. As for "community," Salerno makes only perfunctory references to such settings of solidarity as hobo jungles and IWW halls, adding nothing to the sources he cites. These are among the places (jails[125] and workplaces are some of the others) to find Wobbly community and to anchor IWW culture.

Mahatma Gandhi was once asked what he thought about Western civilization. "I think it would be a good idea," he replied. Similarly, culturalist history of the IWW would be a good idea. The IWW is an ideal subject. It was rich with songs, poetry, cartoons, slogans, parades, legends, sound-bites, and publicity stunts. It consciously created culture and deployed it for its purposes. And there was so much of this material that, despite much that was lost or destroyed, far more remains than any historian has yet exploited. Miles' IWW bibliography, which is certainly incomplete, especially as regards foreign-language publications, lists 42 English-language periodicals and another 49 in other languages.[126] It's unfortunate that the first self-consciously culturalist monographs on the IWW, by Winters and Salerno, are so wretched. There is no reason why better work in this vein cannot be done.

Ever since E.P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman, historians have usually related working-class culture to working-class community. While Winters and Salerno have added little to the understanding of IWW community, several older works provide at least prolegomena to IWW sociology, such as Carleton Parker's *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* and, especially, Nels Anderson's *The Hobo*. Neither deals exclusively with Wobblies, but both relate them to

[125]Most of the major IWW poets "produced a good deal of their work while confined in prison." Winters, 100.

[126]Miles, 486-495. There were IWW periodicals in every major European language and also other languages such as Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Finnish, Croatian, Portuguese, Slavonian, Yiddish, Flemish, Romanian, Polish, Czech, and all the Scandinavian languages except Icelandic.

Civil Liberties in the United States (1979),[33] which examines the wartime repression as the context in which judicial enforcement of constitutional guarantees of free expression and association originated, although the early decisions were usually not very libertarian.) The Federal government, the states, and private powers ranging from the American Legion to the AFL all assailed the I.W.W. Hundreds of Wobblies went to prison, often for mere membership in the IWW, which violated the newly minted "criminal syndicalism" statutes whose very name announced their purpose to target the organization.[34] Justice Department officials seized all the records and correspondence at the Chicago headquarters in 1917 and they were burned by court order in 1923 — a serious loss to historians.[35]

In the second edition of his book, Dubofsky recants one of his original theoretical perspectives. He was at first much taken with anthropologist Oscar Lewis' concept of a "culture of poverty" which, according to Lewis, explained the self-defeating fecklessness and powerlessness of poor peasants in places like Mexico and Puerto Rico recently relocating to urban slums. Dubofsky originally thought that this concept illuminated the social base of the IWW. Wobblies, especially Western Wobblies, were rootless, footloose people, people with nothing to call their own and no place to call home. So some hobos and migrant workers noticed that they had nothing to lose but their chains and drew from this insight the political conclusions the Wobblies suggested. The Lewis thesis drew a storm of criticism, as Dubofsky soon saw, and acknowl-

[33]Paul L. Murphy, *World War I and the Origin of Civil Liberties in the United States* (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979).

[34]Eldridge Foster Donelly, *A History of Criminal Syndicalism Legislation in the United States* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939). Such legislation was held to be unconstitutional in 1969. Brandenburg v. Ohio, 395 U.S. 444 (1969) (per curiam).

[35]Dubofsky, "A Note on Sources," 531.

edged in the 1973 paperback edition.[36] The main criticism was that the adverse effects Lewis attributed to a "culture of poverty" were more plausibly attributable to poverty itself. Dubofsky confessed to this sin and also to another. The United States in the early twentieth century was not an underdeveloped or developing Third World country, it was the world's greatest industrial power. Even if the culture-of-poverty theory had some merit as applied to the Third World, it was unlikely to contribute very much to the understanding of the development of the twentieth-century United States.

Dubofsky nonetheless concluded that he had not led his readers "down an intellectual dead end." Like today's poor, the workers to whom the IWW appealed had to contest a hegemonic ideology which blamed their deprivation on their own shortcomings. The Wobblies were not culturally deprived: they openly articulated oppositional values.[37] Here, as elsewhere in the book, Dubofsky comes tantalizingly close to a cultural interpretation of the Wobblies, but never quite gets there. He does something more to reveal the social roots of the I.W.W., but does not really add much to what labor economist Carleton H. Parker wrote during World War I about migratory workers and their relationship to the I.W.W.[38] Basically Dubofsky confirms the traditional portrait of the I.W.W. as consisting of an Eastern wing of immigrant factory workers and a Western wing of miners and migratory workers, mostly native-born. There is no reason to think that any historian will ever challenge the substantial accuracy of this portrait.

Although it is not a history of the IWW as a whole, Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods* (1967)[39] is a narrative history of the union in one of its major regions of activity, the Pacific Northwest. There

[36]Dubofsky, "Preface to the 1973 Paperback Edition," v.

[37]Ibid., v-vi.

[38]Carleton H. Parker, *The Casual Laborer and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920).

[39]Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon Press, 1967).

ridiculous. And again, he says "conception of culture" when he seems to mean culture, although it is difficult to be sure and hardly worth puzzling over. What Dwight Macdonald wrote about Raymond Williams is even more true of Salerno: he has an "appalling prose style" and his "prose is that of a propagandist; it is fuzzy on principle, swathed in circumlocutions, emitting multisyllabic words as the cuttlefish does clouds of ink, and for very much the same purpose."[122]

Salerno's subtitle is "Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World," but there is little on culture and less on community in his slim volume. About it might be said, as I have said of another book on left culture, that, "much too short to do justice to its subject, considering its content one wishes it were shorter."[123] It is mainly about ideology, which is only one dimension of culture, and one which historians of the IWW have always dealt with. There is only one chapter specifically devoted to "Art and Politics," wherein the author uses some big words to say not very much besides the obvious about the ideology expressed in Wobbly songs and cartoons.[124] Salerno argues that the content of these artifacts, which are not quoted or reprinted in any quantity, reveals the IWW to be in a broad sense syndicalist, but in a pluralistic, nondoctrinaire way. The emphasis is on conveying simple fundamentals like class solidarity. That's true enough, but obviously expressive forms like songs and cartoons necessarily simplify meaning. The IWW's immense periodical and pamphlet literature could be, and was, more sophisticated and specific. But in any event, once again

[122]Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain: Essays on the Effects of Mass Culture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1983), 231. One of Macdonald's quotations from Williams sounds like Salerno: "The extension of culture has to be considered within the real social context of our economic and political life" — as opposed to, say, the fake political context of our economic and social life." Ibid.

[123]Bob Black, *Beneath the Underground* (Portland, OR: Feral House, 1994), 75 — referring to *Labor's Joke Book*, ed. Paul Buhle (St. Louis, MO: WD Press, 1986).

[124]Salerno, ch. 5.

tory of Chicago anarchists (which does not mention Hagerty) devotes an entire chapter, the final chapter, to "Ex-Anarchists in the Gay Nineties"[120] : they were numerous, maybe Hagerty was one of them.

The IWW press often disparaged anarchism.[121] The IWW cartoon printed on the very cover of Salerno's book does so. Heads-in-the-clouds visionaries with such labels as "Communist," "Socialist," "Sky-Pilot" — and "Anarchist" — raise their arms heavenwards. A worker in overalls points to a factory labelled "Industries" and roars, "Organize!" (Remarkably, all are left-handed.) On this as on other topics, Salerno writes as if desperate to make a name for himself by debunking something, anything.

And he writes badly, producing jargon-riddled verbiage he may not even understand. He complains that "little [evidence] has survived to provide a sense of the lived activity and culture of the Wobbly." If so, his own book on IWW "Culture and Community" must be an exercise in futility, but my present point is that Salerno is parroting catchphrases without noticing their meaninglessness. "Lived activity" — as opposed to what, unlived activity? In the last sentence of his book, he asserts that IWW art "actively shaped a dynamic and revolutionary conception of workers' culture." Shaping is always active. And does Salerno really mean to say that Wobbly art shaped a "conception" of workers' culture, or rather that it shaped workers' culture itself? He provides some scanty evidence that the Wobblies had a culture, but no evidence that they had a conception of culture. They had not, after all, read Gramsci or even Lukacs. The book is littered with pretentious sentences like this one: "Wobblies replaced the institutional base of unionism with a conception [that word again!] of culture and community that was primary and constitutive." Taken literally, this says that Wobblies "replaced" organizing with philosophizing about culture, which is

[120]Nelson, ch. 10.

[121]Barnes, 181-183.

its appeal was primarily to lumberjacks and secondarily to lumber mill workers, although it was also involved with other workers, such as seamen. The "overalls brigade" from this region played a key role in ejecting Daniel de Leon and his pro-political faction from the IWW in 1908 (De Leon thereafter referred to this stratum of workers as "the bummery"). Tyler contends that this marked the onset of Western predominance in the organization (he should have said: its restoration, since the Western Federation of Miners dominated the founding convention).[40] The free-speech fights which for several years preoccupied the IWW were almost entirely Western phenomena, although not just Pacific Northwest phenomena. A rare victory in Spokane, Washington not only secured the Wobblies' freedom of public speech, it substantially achieved what they were speaking for, revocation of the licenses of most of the labor "sharks" who sold nonexistent jobs to migratory workers.[41] Later this was the scene of a great Pyrrhic victory by the IWW, a 1917 strike won against the labor industry — employers as reactionary, exploitative and violent as any in the country. Unfortunately, it coincided with United States entry into World War I, and the lumber industry was considered a critical war industry. Lumbermen and their allies in state and local government badgered the Federal Government to suppress the IWW as a menace to national security, although their motives were clearly not entirely disinterested and patriotic. The Wobblies of the Pacific Northwest suffered probably the most severe repression of any Wobblies.[42]

Tyler ventures an intriguing point of interpretation. Like Dubofsky, he appreciates the IWW as a radical response to large-scale, rapid social change. In the Pacific Northwest, the transformation from frontier to factory, and from many small entrepreneurs to near-oligopoly, was speedy even by the heady timetable of the

[40]Ibid., 5, 23-24.

[41]Ibid., 33-39.

[42]Ibid., ch. 5.

Gilded Age. But there was also a conservative reaction to industrialization by the IWW's enemies, the industrialists themselves, with eerie similarities to the IWW critique. Both drew upon an agrarian and egalitarian heritage whose values were threatened by industrialization. Workers and bosses both craved the economic independence supposedly enjoyed by the frontiersmen and yeoman farmers of old; unfortunately, for each side that could only come at the other side's expense. And both bosses and workers, especially Wobbly workers, in this all-male economic sector asserted the rights they claimed with manly truculence and swagger.[43] Tyler is suggesting that there was an element of the agonistic Wild West reaction to an affront to honor which honed what was already, on purely economic grounds, a sharp conflict between capital and labor.

A sure sign that the IWW had arrived as a topic for historians was the publication in 1969 of Joseph Robert Conlin's *Bread and Roses Too*,[44] not another narrative history but a topical, "an analytical study."[45] Insofar as the essays have a general theme, it is that historians have not sufficiently appreciated the IWW for what it professed to be: a labor union. (Although Foner, whatever his other limitations, cannot be criticized on this ground.) The IWW can only be understood as a conscious alternative to AFL craft unionism. That was the felt need which drew otherwise disparate trade-unionists and radicals to the founding convention in 1905. The primary demand was "bread" — the "roses too" were secondary. The implication is that emphasis should shift from the more colorful, more violent, more alienated Westerners to the Eastern factory workers whose strikes were more like ordinary union strikes (insofar as any strikes at that time could be said to be ordinary) than the mini-insurrections in the Western fields and forests. Con-

[43]Ibid., ch. 1, esp. at p. 3.

[44]Joseph Robert Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too: Studies of the Wobblies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1969).

[45]Ibid., xiv.

he never did.[118] Even assuming that this was the same Hagerty, fifteen years can change a man and clearly did. The anarchist of 1889 was later ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, a bizarre and, so far as I know, unique transit. Salerno does not even mention it, an omission which verges on scholarly malpractice. Anarchism and Catholicism were bitter enemies in those days.[119] Conceivably a priest could be an ex-anarchist, but for a priest to continue to be an anarchist is so improbable that Salerno just ducks the issue. That Hagerty may have once been an anarchist does not carry even a presumption that he still was one in 1905. Bruce Nelson's his-

[118]Salerno, 73-75. The letter is in Labadie's papers in the University of Michigan library. Salerno, 171 n. 13.

[119]Mainstream anarchism has always been atheistic and vehemently anticlerical — more so than Marxism. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin and Johann Most all produced anti-religious diatribes. In Hagerty's time the only significant exception was Leo Tolstoy, but — even aside from the fact that Tolstoy declined to identify himself as an anarchist — their views on two fundamental issues were incompatible. Tolstoy, although a Christian, was anti-clerical; Hagerty was a cleric. And Tolstoy affirmed nonviolence, whereas Hagerty had ranted to a Socialist Party rally that "we must have revolution, peaceable if possible, but, to tell the truth, we care not how we get it." Salerno, 73. In later years there were a handful of Catholic anarchists, such as Dorothy Day and Ammon Hennacy (a former Wobbly), but the overwhelming majority of anarchists considered them freaks. "No God, No Master" is a traditional anarchist slogan. At the outset of the Spanish Civil War, the anarchists torched hundreds of churches and executed every priest they could get their hands on.

A Father Schneider, rector of St. Alphonsus Church in Manhattan, is more typical than Hagerty of the attitude of the Catholic clergy toward the IWW. In 1914 the IWW was organizing among the unemployed. Led by the Wobbly Frank Tannenbaum (later a prominent scholar), a procession of the unemployed went to the church asking for food and shelter. The priest refused this request for Christian charity. Since there was no room in the inn — not for them, anyway — the men (who had been sitting quietly in the pews) got up to leave, but detectives stopped them until 20 paddy-wagons arrived to cart off Tannenbaum and 190 of the unemployed. The New York Sun praised the priest for refusing to dispense false philanthropy: "A priest has put into operation the machinery to suppress this portentous and carefully contrived onslaught on the institutions of law and order." Foner, 445-447.

Like Winters, Salerno conscripts Hagerty for his own polemic purposes, but since their purposes are so disparate, so are the ways they take the measure of the man. Salerno claims Hagerty as an anarchist without ever mentioning that he was a priest. Winters claims Hagerty as a priest without ever mentioning that he was an anarchist. That Hagerty was a priest nobody denies. That Hagerty was an anarchist is, if true, the only new fact of any interest which Salerno has dredged up out of all the archives he claims to have delved into. But is it true?

As Salerno and other historians have related, Hagerty formed ties with the Western Federation of Miners around 1902 and briefly itinerated as a Socialist Party speaker until his increasingly revolutionary and anti-political rhetoric placed him outside even the relatively broad ideological bounds of the party at that time. He went on to edit two labor journals. At the Chicago convention he represented a shadowy organization about which nothing is known, the Industrial Workers Club of Chicago.[117] Its members included both socialists and anarchists, so the affiliation implies nothing as to Hagerty's own ideology. Hagerty spoke frequently at the convention, but said nothing explicitly anarchist. Salerno would have us believe that this circumspection was deliberate deference to the unity theme, but that's just self-serving speculation.

Salerno presents exactly one piece of hard evidence of Hagerty's anarchism: a letter he wrote to Joseph Labadie dated March 31, 1889 — fifteen years before the founding convention. Hagerty says he had been active in Haymarket defense work but "inactive" since the execution of four of the defendants. He explains that his anarchism derived from reading Benjamin Tucker's Liberty (which is a bit odd, since Tucker was an individualist anarchist) and his own sense of justice. He doubted he was equal to Labadie's request that he write a pamphlet exposition of anarchism, and apparently

[117]Salerno, 73-77.

lin believes that around 1916, after years of false starts and internal strife, the IWW was settling into the primary role of a, so to speak, congress of industrial organizations — politically radical to be sure, but in that respect not fundamentally different from its CIO successors, industrial unions some of which were Socialist or Communist in their politics. The wartime and postwar repression, however, acknowledged no such evolution or distinctions: it fell heavily on the IWW everywhere.

The notion that, but for the unpleasantness of American intervention in World War I, instead of the AFL-CIO we would now have the AFL-IWW is calculated to titillate those charmed by counterfactuals (what if the South had won the Civil War or, as in the Thurber story, what if Grant had been drinking at Appomatox?). One consideration which lends some credence to the Conlin scenario is that in some respects there was more difference between the AFL and the IWW in theory than in practice. At that time the legitimacy of any kind of union movement was by no means a part of any American consensus. The IWW had a reputation for violence — which, as Thompson, Conlin, Dubofsky and others have noticed, is largely undeserved — but in fact AFL and independent unionists were at least as likely to resort to violence as the Wobblies.[46] On several occasions, IWW competition goaded the AFL into organizing drives and the founding of industrial unions.[47] There is even a certain parallelism in the organizations' aversion to electoral politics and their assignment of primacy to economic organization. The "pure and simple unionism" of the AFL of Gompers, like the

[46]Louis Adamic, *Dynamite, the Story of Class Violence in America* (rev. ed.; New York: The Viking Press, 1934), ch. 18 & passim. Occasionally the AFL resorted to tactics associated with the IWW. In 1910 the local AFL trade council led a 20-day general strike in Philadelphia involving up to 146,000 workers. Montgomery, 93.

[47]Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "Private Eyes, Public Women: Images of Class and Sex in the Urban South, Atlanta, Georgia, 1913-1915," in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 248-250.

anti-political industrial unionism of the IWW, held that workers should rely upon their own power, the independent power they wielded at the workplace, not on divisive, compromising and subordinating alliances with parties or politicians. The AFL may not have sought to smash the state, but it sought to keep it at a safe distance — until 1917, when it joined government and big business in wartime corporatist collaboration. If the AFL's hope that this episode would inaugurate a new era of union respectability and influence went unfulfilled in the 1920s, it at least preserved the AFL from the destruction which befell its IWW rival.

In some respects, Conlin's avowed revisionism was ill-timed. He announced his intention to correct certain misinterpretations common to previous IWW history up to and including Foner. But Dubofsky's big book came out in the same year and, as Conlin has since acknowledged, it too made some of the requisite revisions.[48] Dubofsky's book also induced Conlin to correct one of his own corrections. Conlin had earlier argued for retiring the word "syndicalism" from discussion of the IWW (his first chapter is titled "A Name That Leads to Confusion"). Some Wobblies had repudiated the term, others never used it, and there is some reason to doubt whether it always meant to Wobblies what it meant to European syndicalists. And too often the argument whether the Wobblies were really syndicalists got caught up in the argument over how American they were. Unlike, say, "industrial democracy" — another IWW catchphrase with no precise single meaning — "syndicalism" has a foreign sound to it. By 1981, Conlin admitted that this had been one of his own motives for shunning the word, but Dubofsky had persuaded him that insistence on the "peculiarly American origins and character of the I.W.W." — a conclusion he shared with Dubofsky — was compatible with Dubofsky's "latitudinarian" conception of

[48]Joseph R. Conlin, "Introduction" to *At the Point of Production: The Local History of the I.W.W*, ed. Joseph R. Conlin (Westport, CT & London, England: Greenwood Press, 1981), 19.

None of this is evidence of anarchist influence at the founding convention. The Haymarket labor martyrs had been anarchists — although even that has been called into question[114] — but they were commemorated in Chicago, not as anarchists, but as labor martyrs. By then, their anarchism long since interred with them, they were remembered as heroic leaders of the eight-hour movement, a lowest common denominator cause any unionist could rally around at a convention bent on forging unity.[115] That they assembled in Chicago made it only that much more obligatory as a matter of common courtesy to pay homage to the local heroes. The presence of Lucy Parsons on the platform had exactly, and only, the honorific significance of the presence of, say, Coretta King on the platform of a Democratic Party convention. Coretta King has no influence on the Democrats and Lucy Parsons had none on the Wobblies.

Salerno identifies by name five anarchist delegates to the founding convention (there might have been several more) — out of 186 delegates. They included, in addition to Lucy Parsons, Jay Fox ("who did not play a major role in the proceedings"), Josef Peukert, Florecia Bazora and, most importantly — Father Hagerty![116]

[114]Bruce C. Nelson, in his history of the Chicago anarchists from 1870 to 1900, argues that these self-styled anarchists, despite how they referred to and regarded themselves, were really part of a generic radical socialist trade-union movement which took little interest in, for instance, the emergent conflict between Marxists and anarchists. The Haymarket defendants, after all, were not just anarchists, they were the leaders of the Chicago trade-union movement in its strong drive for a legislated reform, the eight-hour day. Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick, NJ & London: Rutgers University Press, 1988). Salerno does not reference Nelson's book, which came out the year before his own — maybe there was not enough time to do so, but there was time to take into account the articles Nelson published in 1986 in two journals and an anthology, articles which were substantially incorporated into Nelson's book. Nelson, xii.

[115]Unity between former (and, as it turned out, future) antagonists was the prearranged theme of the founding convention, but "the pleas for unity evinced a recognition of disunity as much as of anything." Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too*, 42.

[116]Salerno, 81-83.

word "sabotage" was a recent import but the practice was not.[110] Salerno pretends to be radically revising the regnant history of the IWW, but really just quibbles with it. His assessment of foreign influence on the IWW is indistinguishable from that of Barnes,[111] and not significantly different from those of Brissenden, Dubofsky and everybody else.

Not for its intrinsic interest — no part of this book has much of that — but as a case study in Salerno's shortcomings, let me review in much more detail than it deserves his chapter on "Anarchists at the Founding Convention." Here is his most of his case for significantly raising prevailing estimates of anarchist influence on the IWW. He first cites the expressions of solidarity with the Haymarket anarchists martyred two decades before which issued from the podium; there was even a pilgrimage to their graves. Indeed , one of the opening speakers was Lucy Parsons, widow of executed Haymarket defendant Albert Parsons.[112] Mrs. Parsons, however, was so far from speaking as an anarchist that she actually apologized for using the word "anarchy." As Joseph Conlin described the scene, "while almost all the delegates claimed to be socialists, there was also present a small group of anarchists, the remnants of the Chicago group. Lucy Parsons was honored by a prominent seat and spoke several times. But she functioned primarily as platform decoration and had little influence on the proceedings. Her ignominious role characterized the dilemma of the less eminent anarchists: tolerated in attendance, they went all but unheard. Mrs. Parsons sheepishly apologized for employing the term 'anarchy' in a speech, and the few avowedly anarchist proposals that reached the floor were summarily rejected."[113]

[110]Salerno, ch. 4.

[111]Barnes, 5.

[112]Salerno, ch. 3, esp. 71-73.

[113]Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too*, 43 (cited but not quoted by Salerno, pp. 72 & 171 n. 9 as an unconvincing argument Salerno does not, however, directly address).

syndicalism as unions as the vehicles of social revolution and the embryonic forms of the future society.[49] As Ludwig Wittgenstein put it, the meaning of a word is its use. Syndicalists may be concerned to distill the essential meaning of their ideology, but historians have no urgent need to do so. Scholars from Brissenden to Renshaw who put the word "syndicalism" in the subtitles of their books about the IWW were not just imposing an abstract word on the Wobblies, they spoke a word which was already in the IWW vocabulary. If it had, and has, no certain single meaning, it is like most words for matters that matter.

FROM IDEOLOGY TO CULTURE

According to anthropologist Everett C. Hughes, "Wherever some group of people have a bit of common life with a modicum of isolation from other people, a common corner in society, common problems and perhaps a couple of common enemies, there culture grows."[50] The Wobblies satisfied all these conditions, and among them culture grew.

The third age of American labor history is cultural history. Although it is always easy to predict events after they have happened, there is nonetheless something all too predictable, indeed something overdetermined, about how the new social labor history of the 60s and 70s mutated into the newer cultural labor history of the 80s and 90s. The prophets, Thompson and Gutman, had already inserted working-class culture into working-class history.[51] Culture interested them mainly as a field for resisting the encroachments of

[49]Ibid., 19-20.

[50]Everett Cherrington Hughes, *Students' Culture and Perspectives: Lectures on Medical and General Education* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Law School, 1961), 28, quoted in Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 80.

[51]Lynn Hunt, "Introduction: History, Culture, Text," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 4-5.

industrial capitalism. Workers insisted upon their traditional prerogatives, even in very untraditional new industries, to preserve some control over their working time and the conditions of their toil. In an article first published in 1974, historian (and former union activist) David Montgomery explicitly identified the IWW as one manifestation of the "New Unionism" of the early twentieth century whose general aim was workers' control of industry.[52] This approach satisfied the intellectual and emotional needs of the chastened Marxist historians. Workers were in part the makers of their own lives and ways of life, not just raw material worked upon by determining objective forces. They were engaged in the class struggle, although not always in familiar forms. They were not, in their resistance to capital or the state, the dupes of alien ideologies, they acted on the basis of their own healthy indigenous plebeian traditions.[53]

There was one fatal flaw in this otherwise so satisfying and so 60s a scenario. The new story ended, it had to end, the same way the old story had: the workers lost. There is no getting around that. Sooner or later, radical labor was everywhere defeated, and usually so was nonradical labor. Culture might have retarded but it never averted labor's defeat. "Saint Monday" is not just history, it is *just* history. Labor historians are invariably pro-labor historians. They would like to report good news about, and maybe even to, the workers,[54] but the news is not very good by any hitherto accepted progressive standard. Even the Commons-school liberals, were any still around, would be dismayed by the current state of organized

[52]David Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 91-93.

[53]Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture & Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), esp. ch. 1.

[54]As Gutman and his proteges attempted in American Social History Project, *Who Built America?* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

consequences for the anarchist and labor movements, on his violent rhetoric.[108] When Most was influential he was not a syndicalist, and when he was a syndicalist he was not influential. As with Exhibit A, with his Exhibit B Salerno equates influence with the mere opportunity for influence. Just because somebody is talking does not prove that somebody else is listening, much less believing.

Salerno's other evidence for foreign influences on IWW ideology is also flimsy. He identifies several prominent figures at the founding convention who were foreign-born, such as Brewers' Union leader William Trautmann and Socialist Labor Party leader Daniel de Leon.[109] Their birthplaces (New Zealand and Venezuela, respectively) hardly prove them to be vectors of alien ideologies, any more than were foreign-born Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Paine and James Wilson. Nor does the fact that they had some familiarity with current European ideological fashions: so did some native-born founders. Salerno also devotes a chapter to the closely related issue of the IWW's syndicalism, arguing for an "earlier" and "more complex" influence on the IWW of the French syndicalist organization, the CGT, than his predecessors report. Trautmann, for example, invited CGT attendance at the founding convention; Emile Pouget declined for reasons of distance and expense but extended his sympathy. This may be "earlier" than the 1908 date which Paul Brissenden assigned to the onset of CGT influence, but does not seem to be terribly "complex." The IWW press suggested that knowledge of the French experience might avert some mistakes. Revolutionary industrial unionism was home-grown. The

of Most's conversion to anarcho-syndicalism or else adjudges it, considering his waning influence, not important enough to mention.

[108]Woodcock, 461-462. Most's stock with anarchists fell even further in 1892 when anarchist Alexander Berkman tried to assassinate industrialist Henry Clay Frick. Most, hitherto the most vehement exponent of "propaganda by the deed," now found it expedient to repudiate it. Berkman's lover Emma Goldman was so infuriated by Most's about-face that she horsewhipped him. Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), 1: 105-106.

[109]Salerno, 58-62.

tion of Miners.[105] As is well known, the WFM (but not the UMW) played a role, and an important one, in the founding of the IWW, but soon broke away. Salerno fails to demonstrate the Paterson anarchists' influence on the WFM, much less the transmission of that influence on to the IWW. Nor does he claim any direct contact between the Right to Existence group and the IWW itself, although that should have been possible. The Paterson group apparently lasted until 1908, the year in which the IWW expelled the pro-political De Leonists and rewrote the Preamble to excise an ambiguous reference to working-class political action — moves which, without making the IWW anarchist, certainly made it more anarcho-friendly. No other published historian of the IWW mentions the Paterson anarchist group.

Salerno's Exhibit B is Johann Most, a German-born socialist who, in London exile, turned his newspaper the Freiheit into an anarchist journal between 1879 and 1880 and, after a serving a term in prison, he moved it to New York in 1882. Salerno says that "Most played a seminal role in the origins and development of American syndicalism" one page before acknowledging exactly the opposite. Most drafted the "Pittsburgh Manifesto" of the ephemeral International Working People's Association (1883), but the Chicago anarchists led by Albert Parsons and August Spies secured the removal of those parts of Most's text which rejected trade-unionism. By the 1890s, though, Most was an anarcho-syndicalist who in 1905 "expressed enthusiasm for the I.W.W., but died before the I.W.W. had gone through its first year."[106] But Most's influence declined after 1886,[107] notwithstanding his later conversion to syndicalism. Many blamed the Haymarket bombing of that year, with its disastrous

[105]Salerno, 49-50.

[106]Salerno, 50-51, 53.

[107]Thompson, 82. "It was only with great difficulty that Most kept alive Die Freiheit, which vanished after his death in 1906." George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Cleveland, OH & New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 465. Like other historians of anarchism, Woodcock is either unaware

labor. Thompson and Gutman would be even more unhappy. The only way to make the answer come out right is to change the question. Culturalism can do that. As a means to an end, such as social change, working-class culture has been a resounding flop, but if working-class culture is an end in itself, it is self-validating. The workers, especially the radical workers, may have been losers, but at least they were (borrowing a phrase from Leonard Cohen) beautiful losers. The means justify the ends if they are one and the same. The Wobblies may have nothing lasting to show for their struggles except their culture, but no one can take that away from them. I dreamed I saw Joe Hill last night, alive as you and me . . .

That is surely not the only source of the recent allure of cultural history, which is not always or even usually a gloss on working-class history. Historians are also recovering the cultures of abolitionists, Prohibitionists, lesbians, Communists and many more. Wider intellectual fashions have played upon the writing of history in a period of professional self-doubt and thus vulnerability. If the professionalizing historians of the late nineteenth century had a rather shaky claim to the methods of science, they all the more stridently affirmed their devotion to its objectivity. But by the 1960s, even the reflective portion of the scientific community was catching up with what philosophers of science at least since Mach had done to the notion of an objective reality "out there" absolutely independent of theory or perspective.[55] That is just not how practicing scientists work, no matter what they think they're doing. Even the social scientists have reluctantly parted with the claim to objectivity which they took from the natural sciences for the same reason the historians took it: to legitimate their disciplines.[56]

[55]Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2d ed., enlarged; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 206.

[56]Reviewing two recent anthologies, anthropologist Jay Ruby writes that no contributor to either volume contends that "an objective reality exists outside of human consciousness that is universal." "Objectivity Revisited," *American Anthropologist* 98(2) (June 1996), 399. The anthologies were *Social Experience and*

A dogma the historians had long proclaimed to affirm their loyalty to science now threatened to reveal their backwardness, their epistemological naivete, reducing them to the intellectual level of journalists.[57]

Only 23 years separate two respected histories of American history, John Higham's *History* (1965)[58] and Peter Novick's *That Noble Dream* (1988),[59] but they are ages apart in their judgments and even in mood. Surveying the scene in the early 60's — as yet apparently unaffected by the turmoil of the times — Higham found reason for qualified satisfaction in the development of the profession. If there was not much genius in evidence, there was nonetheless plenty of talent. There were more historians writing more history, and more kinds of history, than ever before. The assimilation of select social science methodologies proceeded apace, and most historians no longer feared that this threatened history as a distinct discipline, whether or not they used the new tools themselves. No grand syntheses appeared imminent — and none ever did appear — but there was no urgently felt need for them. There was plenty of detail work to be done. The situation resembled what historian of science Thomas S. Kuhn has called "normal science": the long stretch after the adoption of a guiding paradigm in which research

Anthropological Knowledge, ed. Kirsten Hastrup & Peter Hervik (New York: Routledge, 1994) and *Rethinking Objectivity*, ed. Allan Megill (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

[57]Jay Ruby — ironically, I suspect — claimed to regret that one of the anthology editors had not sought out a believer in absolute objective reality "for they can easily be found among journalists — print and broadcast, documentary filmmakers, Marxists, and the political and religious right." "Objectivity Revisited," 399. This is the historian's haunting fear: that he is only a journalist who has missed his deadline or, as Karl Kraus defined him, someone who doesn't write well enough to work for a daily.

[58]Op. cit., note ——.

[59]Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

emphasis fell, but Dubofsky's own judgment of the direction of his bias, diametrically opposed to Salerno's, carries some weight.

In strategy, Salerno resembles Winters (whom he unexplainably fails to reference — unless the resemblance is the explanation). Each propounds a major revisionist thesis but provides only pot shots by way of substantiation. Winters flits from scrap to scrap, from Father Hagerty's clerical credentials to IWW borrowing of gospel melodies, for shreds and patches of religion to relate to the Wobblies. Salerno does the same in his quest to overthrow a nonexistent scholarly preoccupation with indigenous origins. It may well be true that many historians assign less weight to foreign influences on the IWW than Salerno does, but it is not true that they attach the importance to the point that Salerno does. Like Winters, Salerno only cobbles together miscellaneous details, and not even a lot of them, to illustrate an argument they are insufficient to prove even if the argument had merit. And this additive approach — even if it added , or added up to, much — is the antithesis of what the concept of culture was supposed to provide to history, a holistic perspective in which the facts receive meaning from, and provide meaning to, one another within a more comprehensive frame of reference.

Salerno's Exhibit A for foreign influence is his report — relying exclusively upon an "unpublished manuscript" by George Carey whose location is not indicated — that in the three years before the IWW founding convention in 1905, a group of Italian and Spanish anarchists with syndicalist leanings in Paterson, New Jersey (the "Right to Existence" group) made contact with the embattled miners of Colorado. The group reportedly publicized both the miners' struggles and syndicalist ideology its "organ" which had some distribution among the Western miners. Carey, according to Salerno, claims that members of the group went West to assist the organizing efforts of the United Mine Workers and the Western Federa-

The latest culturalist monograph on the IWW, Salvatore Salerno's *Red November, Black November* (1989), resembles in form the books of Conlin and Winters — a fairly brief collection of interpretive essays. Salerno is quite convinced that all previous histories of the IWW are fundamentally flawed, especially in exaggerating the indigenous American origins of the IWW: "Concerned chiefly with establishing the indigenous character of the I.W.W, historians have uniformly argued that the I.W.W. owed its birth to an interaction between exceptional economic and political conditions in the United States and the responses of American labor activists."[101] Now this is manifestly untrue, if only because none of the major historians of the IWW made its origins his chief concern. A chapter on the "forerunners" of, plus a chapter on the "birth" of the IWW occupy 52 pages of Brissenden's 350 pages. Foner devotes one chapter out of 24 to the founding, and he displays no interest in how American the IWW was. Fred Thompson (himself foreign-born) devotes proportionately perhaps the greatest attention to IWW origins — just over 25% of the pages on the history of the organization to 1921 — but no attention to its national origins.[102] Renshaw devotes a little over 20% of his pages to the antecedents and founding of the IWW.[103] In absolute terms, Dubofsky has written more than any narrative historian on IWW origins, but that only occupies about one-sixth of his book. And he soon came to think that he had not stressed enough the indigenous origins of the IWW: "Those who read this book for the first time should also bear in mind a point not emphasized sufficiently in the original edition. The IWW was a movement in the American mainstream, never an alien aberration."[104] He might be wrong and Salerno right about where his

[101]Salerno, 1.

[102]Brissenden, chs. 1-2; Foner, ch. 1; Thompson, chs. 1-2. Gambs, recounting the decline of the IWW, naturally has nothing to say about its origins.

[103]Renshaw, chs. 1-2.

[104]Dubofsky, chs. 1-4; "Preface to the 1973 Paperback Edition," vi.

is directed to working out its implications.[60] The only difference is that historians were elaborating a paradigm without having one, at least, none that was explicit. Doing "normal history" meant applying not a theory so much as an approved methodology.[61]

Even as Higham was writing his overview, the academy came under assault from without and within. Scholarly claims to objectivity fell subject to the same skepticism as Establishment claims to uphold liberty, equality and democracy. Indeed it drew notice that prominent historians, among other academics, were pushing both causes.[62] There was a widespread loss of trust in authorities and experts, who might have other than objective grounds for promoting objectivity and, in so doing, promoting its presumptive guardians, themselves. Subjectivity reasserted itself in the general culture, as in scholarship, as one of the legitimate doors of perception, and feelings gained respect for their own sake. It was a neo-Romantic decade and a psychologizing decade, among many other things. One of the first repercussions for history, "psychohistory," was mercifully short-lived. But the new labor history, with its culture-conscious conception of class, swept the subfield and went far toward leading the new social history, of which it formed the vanguard, into primacy over American history generally. Thompson, Gutman and their followers brought the subject back into labor his-

[60]Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2d ed., enlarged; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1970). It might be significant that Higham never mentions the first edition of this book, although it was to exert immense influence on the practice of history and the social sciences.

[61]Is it possible that this is true of natural science too — that the normal course of research is guided more by established methods of investigation than by what high theory directs investigation into? There's an old joke about a drunk who lost his keys and was found looking for them under a lamp-post. Why was he looking for them there, since there was no reason to think that's where he lost them? "Because the light was better." Why not look where the light is better? It might not be the likeliest place to find anything, but there's no point looking where you can't see anything even if it's there.

[62]Jesse Lemisch, *On Active Service in War and Peace: Politics and Ideology in the American Historical Profession* (Toronto, Canada: New Hogtown Press, 1975).

tory, but not by himself. The subjectivity that interested them was not so much individual psychology — although Gutman did not entirely forego biography[63] — as the socially shared attitudes and values of people collectively interpreting and coping with a common experience of the process of production.[64] Another word for that — Gutman's word for it — is culture.

Culture was so conspicuous a dimension of the new labor history that "culturalism" appears to have originated as a "term of abuse" for it.[65] But there's a fork in the road of the new labor history. As practiced by, say, Herbert Gutman, the new labor history was novel for focusing on social relations at the point of production, especially worker struggles to assert some collective autonomy there, and for focusing on the cultural resources which workers drew upon to sustain their solidarity on the job and their class community after hours. Their common themes are working-class agency, autonomy and authenticity. Both imply that working-class history is much more than just union history.[66] But the relation between workplace resistance and cultural autonomy may be contingent, not necessary. Culture might be compensatory, not empowering. For example, that is how Marxists have traditionally interpreted religion, a thoroughly cultural phenomenon. Even if the reality is more complex, as it surely is, there is ample evidence that

[63]Gutman, *Work, Culture & Society*, ch. 3 (about black United Mine Workers leader Richard L. Davis); Herbert G. Gutman, *Power & Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New Press: 1987), ch. 2 (about Paterson union activist Joseph P. McDonnell).

[64]"Thompson's understanding of class as the precipitate of common experiences within a system of productive relations, and of class consciousness as the cultural articulation of those experiences, was also Gutman's." Ira Berlin, "Introduction: Herbert G. Gutman and the American Working Class," in Gutman, *Power & Culture*, 19.

[65]Leon Fink, "Culture's Last Stand? Gender and the Search for Synthesis in American Labor History," *Labor History* 34 (Spring-Summer 1993), 178-179.

[66]Ava Baron, "Gender and Labor History: Learning From the Past, Looking to the Future," in Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, 2-3.

were used for the specific purpose of drowning out IWW soapbox speakers.[98] As Ralph Brazier remembered, J.H. Walsh, "the 'Father of the Little Red Songbook,'" proposed a battle of the bands: "we have as many tunes and songs as they have hymns; and while we may borrow a hymn tune from them, we will use our own words. If they do not quiet down a little we will add some bagpipes to the band, and that will quiet them."[99]

Winters cannot seem to imagine that it is possible for a counterculture "to turn the system's images against it," to detourne ("divert") them, as the Situationists used to say. Rather he supposes that only the opposite is possible, recuperation — to again employ Situationist terminology — the system's "recovery" or cooptation of insurgent tendencies.[100] But if, for the Christian, all roads lead to Rome, the historian should be open to following other trails too. Usually, when an historian ascribes a religious character to a secular movement, he is trying to discredit it, as Carl Becker sought to discredit the Enlightenment and assorted Cold Warriors have sought to discredit Communism. Winters is unusual among those taking this tack in that he means no disrespect — his book is dedicated to the Wobblies — he must believe (as few of them would have) that in disclosing their supposed spiritual dimension he is humanizing them, or at least Americanizing them. But though the spirit is willing, the flesh — the evidence and argument — is weak. Christianizing the Wobblies is really too heavy a cross for anyone to bear.

[98]Winters, 48-56

[99]Brazier, 95, 94, quoted in Winters, 51.

[100]Robert C. Black, "The Realization and Suppression of Situationism," 7(1) *Journal of Unconventional History* (Fall 1995), 43. For some of the Situationists' own expositions of detournement, see Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, "Methods of Detournement," in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 8-14; "Detournement as Negation and Prelude," ibid., 55-56; Mustapha Khayati, "Captive Words: Preface to a Situationist Dictionary," ibid., 170-175.

seem to be an unduly daunting research project, for instance, to undertake content analyses of IWW songs, cartoons, even editorials and pamphlets. No one has ever even bothered to determine how many of the melodies in the successive editions of the Little Red Songbook were gospel tunes, pop tunes or original compositions. There is likewise no way of knowing how representative are the samples of IWW culture which historians have previously referred to, including the selections in the most extensive anthology of IWW culture, Joyce Kornbluh's Rebel Voices. Winters, for instance, predictably tries to make much of a few references in IWW literature to Jesus as a working man, a carpenter, a poor man, a homeless man. The Social Gospel movement had already made cliches of these rhetorical gambits by the time the IWW got going. Similarly, if persecuted Wobblies occasionally likened themselves to Jesus, that is only to be expected in a cultural context in which Christianity was still ambient and the analogy was instantly and universally meaningful. The back wards are full of paranoids who identify with Jesus, but Christian historians like Winters — if Winters is a historian[96] — are not rushing forward with volumes on the religious essence of mental illness. Freud long ago made the connection in The Future of an Illusion.[97]

Even Winters acknowledged a very practical function of IWW hymnody: it was a weapon in the IWW's public struggle against "its despised antagonist, the Salvation Army." Both organizations went out into the streets to seek the support of the down-and-out. The IWW preached revolution, the "Starvation Army" (as the Wobblies referred to it) preached submission. Band music and hymn-singing were prominent aspects of Salvation Army outreach, and

[96]Winters is identified as a faculty member in Humanities at the College for Working Adults of Minneapolis Community College. His book is a volume in the "Contributions in American Studies" series published by Greenwood Press. There is no indication where (if anywhere) or in what field he earned his Ph.D.

[97]Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1975).

religion can be a hindrance to or a distraction from class consciousness.[67] It must be possible to write workplace-oriented new labor history without devoting much attention to culture, since some has been written — for example, David Montgomery's *Workers' Control in America.* Conversely, there is cultural history of workers when they are not working, such as Robert E. Weir's book on the culture of the Knights of Labor.[68] This pure culturalism has now been applied to the IWW in, among other places, two monographs: Donald E. Winters, Jr., *The Soul of the Wobblies* (1985)[69] and Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November* (1989).[70]

Pure culturalism is not so completely original as its advocates and detractors seem to think, not even with respect to as specialized a topic as the IWW. One component of culture is ideology, and almost every major historian of the IWW except for Gambs, beginning with Brissenden, has devoted a chapter or more to the organization's ideology.[71] An unpublished 1962 dissertation by Donald M. Barnes[72] was entirely devoted to IWW ideology as a chapter in intellectual history. Barnes made several positive contributions to some still-ungoing controversies respecting the IWW. A few years later, Conlin would argue that calling the IWW "syndicalist" was

[67]For example, Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), suggests that the persistent religiosity of French-Canadian workers in a Rhode Island manufacturing city played an important part in deradicalizing its highly effective labor movement.

[68]Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Nights of Labor* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

[69]Donald E. Winters, Jr., *The Soul of the Wobblies: The I.W.W., Religion, and American Culture in the Progressive Era, 1905-1917* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1985).

[70]Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989).

[71]E.g., Brissenden, ch. 3; Foner, chs. 5 & 6: Dubofsky, ch. 7.

[72]Donald M. Barnes, "The Ideology of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1921" (Ph.D diss., University of Washington, 1962).

more confusing than enlightening, basing his case on the disparate ways Wobblies seemed to use the word and the varying attitudes they adopted toward whatever they thought it meant.[73] Barnes found enough coherence in IWW ideology to conclude that it was broadly syndicalist, the only serious difference from European syndicalism being the IWW's rejection of the strategy of "boring from within" existing unions, an exercise in futility in American conditions.[74] For most of the kinds of workers organized by the IWW, there were no existing unions to bore into. Conlin later repudiated what by then seemed to him to be his "futile little campaign."[75]

Barnes also weighed in on the once-raging question of foreign inspiration and influence: he thought that they mainly supplied a radical vocabulary, although if one cares to characterize the biological determinism of Darwin and the economic determinism of Marx as foreign influences, then Wobbly ideology was very much under alien sway.[76] (Why is it that nobody ever frets over whether the Social Darwinism so influential in later nineteenth-century America represented foreign influence? And why is Karl Marx a foreign influence but Adam Smith is not?) Barnes ventured the first serious academic criticism of the quasi-Turnerian frontier activism theory of IWW origins — and this before Dubofsky presented the thesis in its most persuasive form. As he purported to be doing nothing more than intellectual history, Barnes could not actually challenge the thesis on social or economic grounds, but he denied its plausibility: harsh exploitation in the Western mines times frontier Western rugged individualism equals organized radical working-class resistance. Whether taken straight up as economic determinism or

[73]Conlin, ch. 1 ("A Name That Leads to Confusion").
[74]Barnes, ch. 6.
[75]Conlin, "Introduction," *At the Point of Production*, 19-20.
[76]Barnes, 5, 99-100; Kornbluh, "Preface," v.

anything social which is not religious. When baseball fans do "the wave" in the stands, or punk rockers slam-dance in the mosh pit, they act as religious celebrants whether they know it or not. To define religion so broadly is to empty the word of specific meaning and render it useless as a tool for understanding what is non-religious, since there is no independent phenomenon to which it might be compared. When you compare something to itself, it is hardly surprising to discover stunning parallels.

More mundane, non-circular explanations for Wobbly hymnody have been provided by the Wobblies themselves and by those who knew them at first hand. As sociologist and ex-tramp Nels Anderson wrote: "There are many types of tramp songs but most conspicuous are the songs of protest. The I.W.W. have done much to stimulate song writing, mostly songs of the struggle between the masses and the classes. Most hobo songs are parodies on certain popular airs or on hymns. One can easily determine when certain songs were written if he knows when certain popular airs, to which they are fitted, were the rage. The tunes most used by the tramp song writers are those that are so well known that the song may be sung by any group of transients. When the songs are parodies on hymns there is usually a note of irony running through them."[95] Here we have the makings of a sub-celestial explanation. Wobblies appropriated gospel tunes for the same reason they appropriated pop tunes: everybody already knew them. And when it was gospel tunes that they borrowed, their new lyrics were usually "ironic," i.e., anti-religious.

A serious deficit in IWW scholarship, especially of a cultural turn, is the almost total absence of quantification. Although the destruction of so many records, including those of the national headquarters, does impede quantitative analysis, there have been few efforts to apply it even to what evidence survives. It would not

[95]Anderson, 207-208. Curiously, Winters never cites Anderson and omits him from his bibliography.

vention, or anywhere else, evidenced any religious influence on his politics, or the politics of the IWW. Shortly after the convention he disappeared, never to be seen again, unless possibly as a skid row alcoholic in Chicago many years later.[90]

In a chapter on Wobbly "hymnody," Winters sees a "striking parallel between the Wobblies' use of music and that of American Protestantism."[91] Wobblies loved to sing. Richard Brazier recalled: "What first attracted me to the I.W.W. was its songs and the gusto with which its members sang them. Such singing, I thought, was good propaganda, since it had originally attracted me and many others as well; and also useful, since it held the crowd for Wobbly speakers who followed."[92] Wobblies often put their own words to the tunes of familiar hymns, especially the simple, emotionally direct gospel songs which had become an important expression of popular Protestantism in the 1870s. Even Winters cannot deny that parody was part of the purpose of these expropriations: in other words, they evidence not the religious but the anti-religious orientation of the Wobblies. But he prefers to dwell upon the "common purpose" of gospel songs and Wobbly songs: "developing group consciousness and cohesiveness," a point "which is, perhaps, extremely obvious."[93] That it is. Also obvious is Winters' lapse into the reductionist fallacy he promised to avoid. Of course when people sing together they are expressing solidarity, whether they are singing the Doxology in church, the national anthem at a political convention,[94] "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall" on a bus en route to summer camp, or the choruses at a Grateful Dead show. If the collective expression of solidarity is religious, then there is little if

[90]Dubofsky, 93.

[91]Winters, ch. 3 (quotation at p. 37).

[92]Brazier, 91-92.

[93]Winters, 41.

[94]The IWW song "The Banner of Labor" was set to the tune of "The Star-Bangled Banner," Kornbluh, 13-14, but that evidences the cynicism, not the nationalism, of the IWW.

mixed with psychological determinism, the explanation "presupposes a deterministic epistemology."[77]

It would be easy, though, to charge this intellectual historian with his own determinism: idealism. The basic failure of the IWW, he maintains, was its doctrinal rigidity, its refusal to compromise with "any more stable leftist group."[78] Such as? It takes two to compromise. The AFL, which was not leftist anyway, had no more interest in compromising with the IWW than the IWW had in compromising with the AFL, and is difficult to imagine what the terms of such a compromise might be. Not even the nonrevolutionary CIO, after all, formed by industrial unions expelled by the AFL, reunited with it until twenty years had passed, and the IWW never had that much time. It was the Socialist Party which expelled Bill Haywood for belonging to the IWW, not the IWW which expelled Haywood for belonging to the Socialist Party. Eugene Debs was not expelled from the IWW, he resigned. There is reason to believe that at certain times and places there was substantial overlap in IWW and SP membership. The IWW did, it is true, expel Daniel De Leon in 1908, but he was notoriously the most rigid dogmatist on the American left, and he made sure that his miniscule Socialist Labor Party never compromised or cooperated with any other organization; its record of impotent ideological purity remains unsullied to this day. More important, with no argument for doing so, Barnes virtually ignores the impact of government, business and vigilante repression, abetted by the press, the AFL and pro-war Progressives, in smashing the IWW. Also ignored are structural changes in the American economy which are increasingly coming to the fore in explanations of the IWW's demise. The feeble position of AFL unions in the 1920s suggests that even taking the course of abject expediency would not have made a success of the IWW, it would only have stripped

[77]Barnes, 198. Of course, this is not self-evidently wrong, but not many historians employ a deterministic epistemology, and fewer still admit it. That is almost as shameful as admitting to be present-minded or Whiggish.

[78]Barnes, 13.

the Wobblies of the only thing no one else could ever take from them, their honor and pride.

Even aside from consideration of its ideology, the IWW did not have to await the cultural turn in labor history for its culture to be noticed. More conspicuously and self-consciously than any American labor movement before, and maybe any one since, the Wobblies appreciated what Herbert Thompson, Gutman and the culturalists have emphasized, the use of culture as a resource, even a weapon.[79] Their contemporaries, even those with no sympathy for their ideas and actions, were fascinated by the Wobblies' songs, slogans, cartoons, quips and "silent agitators" (tiny gummed paper stickers cheap to produce and easy to stick up everywhere).[80] It was especially the songs which were heard. Although the typical Wobbly was more often an avid reader than an illiterate,[81] and IWW halls were libraries as well as meeting-places (and sometimes crash pads) — nonetheless, the popular culture of which the Wobblies partook was more aural and oral than our more visually-oriented culture, and also more participatory. In 1907, a young Canadian arrived in Spokane, Washington, where — as he recalled 61 years later — "What first attracted me to the I.W.W. was its songs and the gusto with which its members sang them." Richard Brazier soon

[79]Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 119-120.

[80]During the 1970s, an elderly IWW typesetter, Dick Ellington of Oakland, California, was still reproducing these stickers. I put up scores of them around the *Washington Post* building in downtown Washington, D.C. during a long and bitter strike, finally defeated, against that liberal daily. I later had a chance to meet Ellington, who has since passed away, at a science fiction convention. The trouble with these stickers is the trouble with the IWW since 1924: they are the same stickers in a different world.

[81]Regarding the type of worker most drawn to the IWW, the transient worker — the hobo or tramp — sociologist Nels Anderson (who had been a hobo) wrote that he "is an extensive reader" in the first sentence of a chapter titled "The Intellectual Life of the Hobo." Anderson, *The Hobo*, ch. 13 (quotation at p. 185). To the extent the average Wobbly was more politicized than the average non-Wobbly , he was probably that much more avid of a reader.

some of its inadequately addressed topics are not without interest. Better historians might follow up on them later.

Winters' evidence for attributing a religious character to the Wobblies is very scattered and miscellaneous, as it would have to be. He begins with a chapter on an individual remarkable even by Wobbly standards: Father Thomas J. Hagerty, a suspended but not unfrocked Catholic priest, a revolutionary socialist who had been a popular stump speaker in the West during the brutal class conflicts in the mines. Hagerty did not regard his religion and his revolutionism as incompatible, although his ecclesiastical superiors not surprisingly thought otherwise. Hagerty's importance to IWW history is that, as a delegate to the founding convention in Chicago, he was the principal author of the celebrated Preamble to its Constitution, then and ever since the single most widely read IWW text. And he was also the creator of the "Wheel," a pie chart of all sectors of the economy intended to describe both the organization of the One Big Union by industry which the IWW aspired to be and the blueprint for the post-revolutionary reorganization of society as a cooperative commonwealth of the producers.[89] Samuel Gompers ridiculed "Father Hagerty's Wheel of Fortune" as a utopian pipe-dream, and later historians have sometimes criticized their institutionalist predecessors, such as Brissenden, for according it too much attention. Certainly the IWW never organized anywhere near enough workers in enough industries to put any flesh on Hagerty's skeleton. Nonetheless, the Wheel was widely disseminated and may well have concretized for some Wobblies the abstractions of syndicalism. And this suggests that there was something recognizably syndicalist about the IWW from the very beginning.

What it does not suggest is that there was anything recognizably religious about the IWW from the very beginning. Father Hagerty was momentarily prominent, but nothing he said or did at the con-

[89]Winters, ch. 2.

sense of solidarity and class consciousness, and a motivation to engage in a class struggle against the evil force of capitalism toward the end of creating a new order, a 'commonwealth of toil,' in the shell of the old."[88]

This is a pristine example of what logicians call affirming the consequent. Winters didn't notice that he assumed (that's what "if" means) what he purports to prove, that the IWW was "in any sense" religious. Nor does his "working definition of religion" work, since it implies, not only that IWW ideology is religion, but that belief-systems universally agreed to be religions — Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. — are not religions because none of them seek to develop in the working class a sense of solidarity and class consciousness, etc., etc. The reader might suspect that I have left out some minor premiss in Winters' syllogism — such as a general definition of what religion is (not what it is not) which does not define religion as IWW ideology — in order to make him look like a fool. I didn't: he did. So it hardly even matters that, after demanding a functional definition of religion, Winters never provides one. What is the defining function or functions of religion? Inasmuch as he never says, there is no way of evaluating his claim that the IWW was in any sense religious. It seems only fair and reasonable to adhere to the received view, also vociferously affirmed by the Wobblies themselves and by their contemporaries, that the IWW was (from the standpoint of the godly) at best non-religious, at worst anti-religious. Sometimes the conventional wisdom is right after all.

So conceptually and logically flawed is the Winters book that if the validity of its thesis were its only claim to attention, no one should bother to read it. However, Winters did delve into IWW sources — especially its West Coast newspaper, the Industrial Worker — with questions no other historian had asked. Frankly, the book is not much better in detail than in its overall analysis, but

[88]Winters, 11.

became involved in the preparation of the first edition of the IWW *Little Red Songbook*, which has gone through more than forty editions. It included a few ditties sung by American workers at least since the Knights of Labor, such as the "Internationale" and "Hold the Fort" (originally "Storm the Fort"), augmented by newly written lyrics set to the music of current pop tunes or familiar hymns. Within a few years, other Wobblies contributed classics like Joe Hill's "The Preacher and the Slave" (which added to the language the expression "pie in the sky") and Ralph Chaplin's "Solidarity Forever" (still the national anthem of American labor).[82] Even arch-institutionalists Paul Brissenden and Joseph Gambs, presumably the polar opposite of the culturalists, appended selections from the Songbook to their books.[83] And even Donald Barnes, the most hostile historian of the Wobblies in the last sixty years, grudgingly granted that "on the positive side, songs, legends, personalities and the idea of solidarity practically sum up their major contributions."[84]

A still more important proto-culturalist source is Joyce L. Kornbluh's 1964 Wobbly anthology *Rebel Voices*. This oversized volume of 419 pages is still, as when published, by far the richest single accessible collection of primary sources on what we would now refer to as the culture of the Wobblies, 191 texts interspersed with scores of cartoons and equipped with concise but helpful commentary. One chapter reprints songwriter Joe Hill's greatest hits. Others commemorate the free speech fights, the great Lawrence victory, the great Paterson defeat, the miners, the farm-laborers, the lumberjacks — and the Wobblies put behind bars in wartime and for long afterwards. Although she was apparently never a Wobbly herself, Kornbluh had been a union activist in Detroit, and she disdained to conceal her admiration for the IWW.

[82]Richard Brazier, "The Story of the I.W.W.'s 'Little Red Songbook,'" *Labor History* 9 (Winter 1968): 91-105 (quotation at p. 91).

[83]Brissenden, App. X, 370-380; Gambs, App. 5, 233-240.

[84]Barnes, 10.

The first full-length monograph on the IWW in what I call the pure culturalist mode is Donald E. Winters' *The Soul of the Wobblies*, which attempts to represent the relationship of the IWW to the Christianity of its time (1905-1917) as something more complex than reflexive hostility. He disclaims what he calls the "reductionist fallacy" of equating the revolutionary union movement with religion, but claims that the religious characteristics of the IWW went beyond mere fellowship and shared values.[85] But if he is prepared to concede the obvious — that the IWW was not a church — Winters does maintain that IWW ideology was, by a "functional" definition, a religion whose fundamental tenet was class solidarity. He supposes that most sociological definitions of religion are wanting because they assert that it is necessarily connected to a church. Whether or not that is true — it isn't[86] — all this does for

[85]Winters, 7-8. Winters accuses Wallace Stegner of committing the fallacy in writing, in 1950, that "no thoroughly adequate history of the I.W.W. exists," in part because existing histories are "lacking in the kind of poetic understanding which should invest any history of a militant church." Winters, 7, 1 (quoting Stegner, Preacher, vii). This is like saying that when Karl Marx referred to religion as the opiate of the people, he meant that religion is literally a physiologically addicting drug. Even more obviously than Marx, Stegner — a novelist penning what was, after all, the introduction to a work of fiction — wrote metaphorically. He meant that there were respects, hitherto neglected by historians, in which the IWW was like a militant church — which is the entire burden of Winters' own monograph. Winters sets up Stegner as his straw man to make it look as if he, Winters, was not the one who comes as close as anyone ever has to committing the reductionist fallacy.

[86]Winters' own example of what he calls "church-oriented analysis" (p. 9) refutes him: Ronald L. Johnstone's definition of religion as a "system of beliefs and practices by which a group of people interprets and responds to what they feel is supernatural and sacred." A "group" is not necessarily a formal organization such as a church or a corporation. There have certainly been religions previous to their institutionalization, there were Christians, for instance, before there was a Christian Church. For Winters the problem with the definition is not the group character of religion but its orientation toward the supernatural and sacred, which emphatically rules out the IWW as religious. Durkheim was the main inspiration for sociological functionalism, although he did not use the f-word. Percy S. Cohen, *Modern Social Theory* (London: Heinemann, 1968), 35-37.

Winters is establish that the IWW, since it was not a church, was not by definition non-religious.[87] But the same could be said about other non-churches such as the Little League or the Better Business Bureau without doing much to substantiate claims that they are "functionally" religious: "If the Industrial Workers of the World is to be viewed, in any sense, as religious, the central tenet of its faith must be seen as solidarity . . . The working definition of religion, then, that will serve for this study is as follows: a system of beliefs and symbols which seeks to develop in the working class a

[87]As if this were not confusionist enough, Winters goes on to characterize the IWW as a church after all — or rather, as a "sect." Winters, 89, 101, 105. Winters is making a highly selective use of the sect/church distinction drawn by Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942), ch. 7, who had in turn borrowed it from Ernst Troeltsch. Winters badly abuses it. It was never intended as a typology of anything but Christian denominations, so several of the distinguishing criteria are nonsensical as applied to the IWW, such as "adherence to strict Biblical standards" versus "acceptance of general cultural standards as a practical definition of religious obligation." Pope, 123. Of the 21differences between sects and churches identified by Pope, 122-124, Winters specifically claims only a few which apply to the IWW: a membership drawn from the poor; a "psychology of persecution"; a sense of alienation from the mainstream; a spirit of protest; and a stance of conflict, not reconciliation. Winters, 89-92, 101. Almost any organization seeking political or social change can satisfy enough of these criteria to qualify as a sect. Winters does not mention an important criterion which renders his argument ridiculous. A church aspires to be an all-embracing social institution, whereas a sect is an exclusivist fellowship of the worthy. By that measure the One Big Union was a church and the AFL was a sect.

Whether or not Winters has misapplied the church/sect distinction, what is more important is that it represents a covert definitional shift which lends spurious support to his earlier claim that the IWW was religious. When he made that claim, Winters tried to preclude the inevitable reaction that this is ridiculous by defining religion in such a way that it did not imply any necessary connection to a church. There he meant by "church" any organized group of believers, a sect or (in Pope's sense) a church — a distinction irrelevant in that context. But even if there can be religion without a church in the broad sense, there cannot be a church in any sense without religion. To ask whether the IWW was a sect or a church begs the question whether it was a religious organization at all.