

**Fighting Over the Red, White, and Blue: The Industrial Workers of the
World and Americanism in the Progressive Era**

Thesis

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Abstract

Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All* (1969) established the standard narrative of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), long considered to be the United States' most radical union. Dubofsky confirmed that reputation, arguing that the Wobblies were anarcho-syndicalists, committed to the utter transformation of the American political economy through mass action. Succeeding historical treatments of the IWW have complicated the story by emphasizing specific cultural and geographic features of the Wobblies. But, Dubofsky's characterization of the IWW has not been overturned.

This thesis seeks to establish the identity of the IWW within Progressive Era discourses of Americanism. I argue that the IWW sought to place themselves in an American radical tradition that stretched back through the abolitionists and all the way to the Spirit of '76. Wobbly Americanism discourse was central to the union's ideology, rather than merely a defense against charges of "anti-Americanism." Viewed in this light, the IWW represents a bridge, rather than a break, between the Knights of Labor and the CIO in American labor radicalism.

Dedication

Dedicated to Felicia Preece, who makes life an adventure worth living.

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This project has been profoundly shaped by the thoughts of dozens of people, many of whom are unaware that their contributions have made my thinking sharper and more informed. While I cannot expect that this brief note can repay such an extraordinary debt, it is a start. Dr. Eric Ash at Wayne State University and my fellow undergraduates in our history capstone course oversaw the 2007 senior thesis that eventually grew into this project several years later. Dr. Denver Brunsman and Dr. Aaron Retish taught me that history could be about storytelling as much as academics. The staff of the Ohio State University Libraries helped to procure an ever-expanding pile of books. The folks at the Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs in Detroit were especially helpful in accommodating a young researcher such as myself, especially during the sweltering summer of 2010. Thanks in particular go out to William LeFevre, whose knowledge of IWW materials is only surpassed by his knowledge of excellent places to eat on the East Side. Dr. David Stebenne and the students in my writing seminar identified errors of fact and of style. Dr. Kevin Boyle, my advisor, provided critical insight and exemplary editorial skills; this project is immeasurably better because of his efforts to improve my thinking and my writing. Felicia Preece provided editorial work as well as countless cups of coffee and boundless optimism that I was doing something worth doing.

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Introduction: “The Man in the Swivel Chair”

In the summer of 1918, while the guns of war thundered across the battlefields of Western Europe, Chicagoans followed the trial of the century taking place in their midst. One hundred and one prominent Wobblies (as the members of the Industrial Workers of the World – or IWW – were known) were on trial for conspiracy to commit crimes such as interfering with the draft, distributing seditious literature, and consciously undermining the American war effort against Imperial Germany.¹ To many Americans, the defendants represented the ragged dynamiters, European anarchists, and treasonous saboteurs who had populated hysterical media outlets for the past several months. The so-called Haywood trial, named after William “Big Bill” Haywood, Secretary Treasurer of the IWW (the union’s highest executive office), represented a culmination of the Justice Department’s year-long effort to repress the labor activists. Haywood, according to federal prosecutors, was “the man in the swivel chair,” pulling the strings of the grand conspiracy from the IWW’s Chicago headquarters.²

¹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., May 2, 1918. Opening Statements.” Folder 6, Box 103, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 2-3. The IWW was also charged with “interfering with the execution of several laws” including: “The US’s ability to dispose of enemy aliens,” “the repair of the infrastructure,” and “the building of the air force.”

² “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., August 10, 1918.” Folder 2, Box 117, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 11229-11236. This was not the first time Haywood spent time in a federal courtroom. Eleven years earlier, Haywood and two other members of the Western Federation of Miners were on trial for conspiracy to murder the former governor of Idaho, killed by a bomb planted outside his home. All three were acquitted in a jury trial. For

On the morning of June 25th, former mining corporation attorney Frank Nebeker, acting as a special prosecutor for the federal government, grilled Wobbly organizer James Thompson on the political intentions of the IWW. For days, Nebeker had been trying to get Wobbly defendants to admit that they wanted nothing less than the overthrow of the American government in a terrifying encore of the Bolshevik coup that had toppled the Russian democratic regime eight months previously. Nebeker asked Thompson if it was part of the IWW program “to change our form of political government.” But Thompson would not give the prosecutor what he wanted. The IWW, he said, believed “in the form of government as it is outlined in the constitution of the United States.” In fact, he added, “in the form of government of the I.W.W., the form of organization of the I.W.W., it is almost an exact copy of the United States government.”³ How could it be that one of the gravest threats to the American way of life modeled itself after the American government?

Earlier scholarship on the IWW has grappled with questions about the origins of the union’s radical ideology. Most scholars have emphasized either European or American radical roots. Salvatore Salerno’s book, *Red November, Black November*, explored immigrant Wobblies’ contributions to the union’s anarcho-syndicalist ideology to conclude that the IWW was the product of European labor radicalism.⁴ Paul

more, see J. Anthony Lukas, *Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

³ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., June 25, 1918.” Folder 1, Box 109, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 4961-4965. Thompson would also state: “We believe in industrial democracy. We believe in the form of government as it is outlined in the Constitution of the United States...the theory of the American Government is the one that we want to extend to the industries, political democracy and industrial democracy.”

⁴ Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). Salerno argues, in part, that European

Brissenden and, later, Melvyn Dubofsky, argued that the IWW's radicalism was forged in the fires of American labor violence of the 1890's and 1900's, particularly the battles of the Western Federation of Miners in Idaho and Colorado – the organization from which the IWW would draw most of its early membership and leaders like Vincent St. John and Haywood.⁵ For Dubofsky, the Wobblies' radicalism, however indigenous, was primarily economic and lacked a distinct national identity. This study offers a substantially different interpretation of the IWW's radicalism. In newspapers, pamphlets, strike bulletins, letters, and testimony, IWW members, organizers, and publicists fashioned a radical critique of Progressive-Era America couched in language that evoked fundamental American values and tropes. In doing so, the Wobblies challenged hegemonic mainstream American discourses surrounding citizenship, liberty, and patriotism. They also placed themselves within a long tradition that stretched back through the abolitionists all the way to Thomas Paine.⁶ Despite ideological differences, organized wage workers in antebellum New York City, the Knights of Labor, and the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs all juxtaposed Americanism with a critique of American

syndicalists brought anarcho-syndicalism to the IWW as they immigrated to the United States and joined the IWW.

⁵ Paul Brissenden, *The Launching of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1971); Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969). Dubofsky's book probably remains the best one-volume history of the IWW. Both authors argue that the anarcho-syndicalism of the Western Federation of Miners (and, later, the IWW) was the product of a long, painful learning process of waging class war against mine owners. "Fires of labor violence," is an understatement that accompanied an era of pitched battles between capital and labor, massive improvised prison camps, and exploding mines and trains. For more on turn of the century labor violence, see Lukas, *Big Trouble* or William Philpott, *The Lessons of Leadville; or, Why the Western Federation of Miners Turned Left* (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1995).

⁶ For Thomas Paine and radical American labor thought see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

capitalism.⁷ In the end, all of these organizations were rejected by the society they wished to change. Still, their failure did not diminish their psychological and emotional ties to the republic they called home. By recasting the IWW's sense of itself, I hope to restore the union to its place as part of an *American* labor radicalism, a key piece of an American political tradition.

The IWW tried to project its Americanism at a particularly volatile time. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the pressures of a growing population of foreign born “hyphenated Americans” and the increasing incongruity of nineteenth-century values in a modern industrial society inaugurated a national debate over what it meant to be an American.⁸ Beginning in the decades after the Civil War, businessmen nurtured a conservative Americanism that linked the free market, individualism, a restrained government, and nativism.⁹ This vision of Americanism was often used to discredit labor radicalism, a process that infused popular understandings of the Molly Maguires, the Haymarket bombing, and the labor violence of the 1890's. The progressive reformers who emerged after 1900 introduced a softer version of Americanism. If these reformers

⁷ For labor Americanism see: Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Robert E. Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); Nick Salvatore *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Gary Gerstle, *Working Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Salvatore's biography of Debs and Gerstle's history of Rhode Island textile workers deserve special mention as inspirations for this study.

⁸ The contested terrain of Progressive-Era American has been a fruitful one for scholars in the past half century. Some examples include: Robert Wiebe, *The Search For Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Arthur Link and Richard McCormick, *Progressivism* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1983); Steven Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of Progressive Movement in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009).

⁹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patters of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

tended to echo the ideals of Anglo-Saxon superiority carried by their contemporaries in the business world, they did not share conservative political values. Progressive reformers wanted to defend American virtue by creating a strong state that could rationalize capitalism and ameliorate the human suffering it caused. Such efforts at state regulation of capitalism marked the progressives as the dominant force of American liberalism.

The Industrial Workers of the World positioned themselves to the left of the progressives. This is not to suggest that the Wobblies and the progressives were allies, of course, but the IWW borrowed some of the progressives' ideas. Like progressive reformers, the Wobblies saw corporate capitalism as a direct threat to American values. Big business, according to both camps, had amassed enough power to corrupt the state itself. Rather than create a powerful state that could regulate capitalism, the Wobblies sought to save America by mobilizing the working class to appropriate the factories themselves; that is, to destroy capitalism. For a brief time during the war mobilization in the spring and summer of 1917, the Wobblies and progressives actually moved closer ideologically as the Wilson administration shifted left. Federal efforts to rationalize the war economy blurred the boundaries of private property. Moreover, the government's endorsement of the shop steward system empowered workers to assert control of the shopfloor.¹⁰ Still, despite its leftward swing during the war, the Wilson administration turned decisively against the IWW in the autumn of 1917. And the fragile connection was shattered in a paroxysm of repression.

¹⁰ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), particularly Chapter 8: "This great struggle for democracy."

My thesis is split into three, somewhat overlapping, chronological segments. The first section explains how the IWW used its Americanism to adapt to the severe difficulties it faced during its early years from 1905 to about 1916. This adaptation enabled the union to form a more stable organization as it bolstered its own American identity. This section also details the IWW's construction of the role of what I call the "citizen worker." Section two explores how the Wobblies navigated the initial crisis of American participation in the Great War that stretched from early 1917 into the summer, as popular attitudes concerning the war crystallized. As the gravity of the war and the machinations of government propaganda propelled the American people into a global crusade to sustain democracy, the Wobblies attempted to harness the power of Americanism to carry them through the war emergency. During this period, the union suffered intense, even violent, repression from private vigilantes and public authorities on the local and state levels. Eventually, the federal government would arrest and detain the majority of the IWW's leadership and organizers in September 1917. Now loyalty to the United States, if not approval of military action in Europe, proved fundamental to the creation of the citizen worker identity. Section three explains how the Wobblies reacted to repression by using Americanism as a weapon to attack their enemies. The thesis concludes with the result of the Haywood trial and how the conviction of dozens of Wobblies underscored a popular rejection of Wobbly Americanism. Furthermore, it grapples with the challenge of reconciling the radical left with American identity.

“The Continental Congress of the Working Class:”

Wobbly Americanism Before the First World War

The IWW defined itself as the nation’s great radical union in an era of reform. Like the Wobblies, progressives, the dominant political actors of the era that bears their name, reacted against the ever more apparent depredations of industrial capitalism. The shadow of Gilded Age capitalism loomed large in the minds of reform-minded politicians, journalists, and activists who marched under the progressive banner. Many of these reformers saw the regulatory state as a weapon to tame capitalism’s ill consequences. President Wilson’s “New Freedom” legislative agenda, for instance, sought to bust harmful trusts, reorganize the nation’s financial industry, and offer some protections to organized labor. Taken as a whole, these reforms sought to empower the democratic process by creating a balance of power between capitalism and the state.¹¹ Some progressive Wilsonians, like labor lawyer (and later co-chairman of the National War Labor Board) Frank Walsh, moved further to the left. Walsh and his allies saw a partnership between the state and organized labor as the only effective counterweight to industrial capitalism – what he called “industrial democracy.”¹² Both Wilson and Walsh saw unfettered industrial capitalism as the biggest problem of the Progressive age.

¹¹ John Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009).

¹² Joseph McCartin, *Labor’s Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

Progressives did not want to necessarily turn back the clock to yeoman America, but they valued American traditions of independence and liberty that were threatened by Standard Oil and U.S. Steel. The progressives were certainly not revolutionaries, but they did attack corporate power in new and meaningful ways.

Even further to the left were the Wobblies. Eschewing the role of the regulatory state as a moderating force against capitalism, the IWW argued that the sole power to rescue America lay within the masses of organized workers. IWW theorists cautioned workers that no change could ever be achieved in the legislative halls favored by the progressives. This anarcho-syndicalist radicalism won little sympathy from American reformers. Theodore Roosevelt, echoing the progressive view of the radical left, famously referred to Bill Haywood as an “undesirable citizen” in one of his more charitable estimations.¹³ In their commitment to the preservation of American democracy against capitalist depredations, though, the Progressives and the Wobblies shared a sliver of common ground.

The IWW’s official founding, in a Chicago meeting hall, seemed auspicious: it was, said Big Bill Haywood, “the Continental Congress of the working class.”¹⁴ In its infancy, the Industrial Workers of the World was a kaleidoscope of the left. Most of the members were miners from the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), but the union included anarchists, trade unionists, socialists from the Socialist Party of America

¹³ Lukas, *Big Trouble*, 460-461. Roosevelt made this remark during the first Haywood trial in 1907, something that might have gone unnoticed had it not galvanized a fundraising effort across the American left – an effort that even included a parade down the Lower East Side with marchers wearing “I am an undesirable citizen” buttons.

¹⁴ Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (Anchor Books: New York, 1968), 46.

(Eugene Debs was briefly a member) as well as Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party. The IWW's first three years were marked by turmoil as the union split into factions.¹⁵ With so many constituent elements, the IWW had no discernable ideology or strategy other than revolutionary radicalism. By 1908, however, labor radicals gained the upper hand as the union purged itself of supporters of political action.¹⁶ Afterward, the majority of Wobblies started to build an anarcho-syndicalist program predicated on "direct action." According to Wobbly theorists, working class power could only be expressed in the workplace, as opposed to formal political action (i.e. electoral politics).¹⁷

Given the highly democratic and decentralized nature of the IWW, the organization's ideology was open to individual interpretation. Broadly speaking, however, the IWW embraced a coherent set of ideas. Wobblies would wage an incessant class war against employers encompassing all forms of workplace resistance, including strikes, sabotage, picketing, and intimidation of replacement workers (or "scabs"). The IWW refused to sign contracts with employers, so the workers could strike at any time. Wobblies sought job control by organizing as many workers in a shop or industry as possible, sometimes through intimidation. Sabotage, most Wobblies were careful to point out, did not mean destruction of life or property. Rather, it took the form of "ca

¹⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, Chapter 5: "The IWW Under Attack, 1905-1907."

¹⁶ "Proceedings – 4th Annual Convention, from Feb. 27th, 1909, I.U.B." Folder 13, Box 1, Series I. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 2. The IWW was short on funds during the 1908 convention, so a report on the convention's activities was not published until the next year in the *Industrial Union Bulletin*. During the convention, the Western "Overalls Brigade" of syndicalist lumberjacks and miners removed the credentials of Socialist Labor Party leader Daniel DeLeon and his followers. After that, they amended the IWW Constitution to remove any mention of "political action."

¹⁷ This is not to say that Wobblies did not engage in political action at all. Many Wobblies were "dual card carriers" in that they were members of both the IWW and the Socialist Party of America (SPA). Indeed, Bill Haywood was on the Executive Council of the SPA until his removal in 1913. Organizationally, however, the IWW refused to participate in formal politics.

canny,” or going slow in response to poor pay.¹⁸ Sabotage could also mean temporarily disabling - but not permanently harming - machinery so it could not be operated by scabs.¹⁹ The ultimate goal of the union was to organize enough workers to stage a national general strike that would paralyze the nation’s industries. With capitalism ground to an abrupt halt, the workers would peacefully appropriate the machinery of production and create a “cooperative commonwealth”²⁰ where workers would run an egalitarian and utilitarian society. Though Wobblies would never fully agree on what the IWW stood for, most would accept this rough framework.

On a tactical level, Wobblies experimented with publicity drives, working class education, industrial strikes, and even sit-down strikes to boost membership.²¹ By 1908, most of the original membership, carryovers from the WFM, had left the organization. Attempting to organize migratory agricultural workers and lumberjacks in the West, the IWW launched “Free Speech Fights” in a number of western towns from Spokane, Washington to San Diego, California to protect its streetcorner organizers and agitators from about 1909 to 1914.²² The free speech fights marked one of the few times the IWW received positive attention of the national press, in part because it was able to attract middle-class allies. While the union often succeeded in overturning local ordinances

¹⁸ “Sabotage, E.G. Flynn.” Box 172, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 8. Flynn explained sabotage as the inverse of the American Federation of Labor’s motto, “A fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay.” For Flynn, “sabotage is an unfair day’s work for an unfair day’s wage.”

¹⁹ “Sabotage, E.G. Flynn”

²⁰ The term “cooperative commonwealth” comes from the Knights of Labor, who used it to describe their vision of the future, see Weir, *Beyond Labor’s Veil*.

²¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*. Dubofsky found the pre-1915 IWW to be experimental in terms of tactics, even if most job actions were failures. Dubofsky claims that the IWW launched America’s first sit-down strike in December 1906 against General Electric’s plant in Schenectady, New York.

²² Joyce Kornbluh ed., *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), chapter 4: “Soapbox Militants: Free Speech Campaigns 1908-1916.” Kornbluh’s anthology is the best published collection of IWW material to date.

barring street speakers, organizational gains turned out to be far harder to come by; moral victories did not necessarily translate into industrial victories.

The Wobblies then turned eastward in hopes of fanning the flames of discontent in the heart of industrial America. At first there were some triumphs, most notably among steelworkers in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania (1909) and textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts (1912), but the Wobblies failed to make any lasting gains.²³ Membership increases proved to be temporary and the publicity “won” by the organization usually turned out to be negative – usually surrounding post-strike trials of Wobbly organizers. Nineteen thirteen was a particularly catastrophic year. The IWW failed in a series of massive strikes, most famously among silk workers in Paterson, New Jersey, but also against Goodyear Tire Company in Akron, Ohio as well as Detroit’s Studebaker Motor Company.²⁴ From that point on, the Wobblies struggled to find a way to establish a union organization.²⁵ Still, the IWW had succeeded in securing its place as the preeminent labor organization on the left.

Fiercely independent, even from its central organization in Chicago, Wobblies claimed that all were “leaders” of the union.²⁶ Individual Wobblies learned the “organization dope” from IWW members and publications, but interpreted its meaning

²³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*. Victories against the Pressed Steel Car Company in McKees Rocks (just outside of Pittsburgh) and the American Woolen Company and various other textile mills in Lawrence failed to make for lasting gains because of an employer strategy of union busting that persisted after the strikes.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 279-281. To raise money for the Paterson strike, recent Harvard graduate John Reed penned a pageant depicting the Paterson strike itself – with actual strikers cast as themselves. The pageant ran for only one showing at Madison Square Garden and seems to have lost money.

²⁵ “Stenographic Report – 8th Annual Convention, 1913.” Folder 1, Box 2, Series I. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. The 1913 convention was filled with debates over tactics and the future of the union. Delegates argued over the merits of free speech fights, propaganda, education vs. organization, large/long strikes vs. short/quick strikes, etc.

²⁶ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*

for themselves. Neither newspaper editors nor union officers controlled the editorial line of IWW publications. *Industrial Solidarity* (hereafter referred to as *Solidarity*) editor Ralph Chaplin acknowledged that material from any member of the union would be published, as long as it was not fundamentally opposed to the values of the IWW.²⁷ Official IWW organs like *Solidarity* published seemingly contradictory messages. The newspaper's February 17, 1917 issue, for instance, (published as the United States inched closer to entering the Great War) included an article urging workers to take advantage of war production by organizing and demanding higher wages, while another article emphasized that the war would bring only "ruin and reaction."²⁸

Given the decentralized nature of the Industrial Workers of the World, it is remarkable how much Americanist discourse pervaded Wobbly ideology and propaganda. There was no "American faction" or "foreign faction" in the union. Rather, many Wobblies – either independently, or working with others within the IWW – constructed an identity and critique of Progressive-Era capitalism within the paradigm of Americanism. In this sense, IWW speeches, newspapers, and publications represent an intra-union discussion of ideas and values as well as a socio-ideological education that Wobblies hoped to disseminate among union members and a wider audience.

Often accused of being anarchists, Wobblies often retorted that they upheld Constitutional values. Joe Ettor defended himself against a trumped up murder charge resulting from his leadership role in the 1912 Lawrence strike by arguing that his

²⁷ "U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 19, 1918." Folder 7, Box 112, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 7740-7750.

²⁸ *Industrial Solidarity*, Author unknown, "Organization and War," 2; J.E., "A Financial Picture of War," 2. Microfilm. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI.

conviction would be an attack on free speech and the Constitution. “Now, as I understand my rights,” Ettor wondered aloud to the jury, “as far as free speech is concerned, I have the right to speak freely and air my views...I didn’t understand when I read the Constitution...in all of my experience I never yet have understood, and it is a novelty to me to understand from the District Attorney that I somehow guilty of murdering [a striker killed by militia] because I spoke to strikers...”²⁹ Rather than using his trial as an ideological showpiece, Ettor’s plea to the jury was a paean to American values of justice and freedom of speech. Ettor did not denounce the United States, nor did he grandstand against unfair capitalist justice. Instead, he fashioned a criticism of American capitalism from within an American discourse of rights and freedoms. In its free speech campaigns, Wobbly soap-boxers read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in an effort to win the right to speak on street corners.³⁰

Wobblies appealed to the American Revolutionary tradition as the core of their own revolutionary thought. The struggle against imperial authority waged by the Founders, as well as the Declaration of Independence and Constitution it wrought, were the touchstones for the IWW’s American identity. Two years after Ettor’s acquittal, IWW Secretary-Treasurer “Big” Bill Haywood regaled the United States Industrial Relations Commission with a Lockean interpretation of the Declaration of Independence. To Haywood, the Declaration meant that “if the Government...ceased to serve the best

²⁹ “Ettor and Giovannitti Before the Jury at Salem, Massachusetts, November 23, 1912.” Box 160, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 25-6. Ettor continued: “I want to state further, gentlemen, that whatever my social views are, as I stated before, they are what they are. They cannot be tried in this courtroom...away back thousands of years the trick was tried that man’s views could be brought into a courtroom or brought before a king...and judgment could be passed. And in those days they said, ‘The only way we can settle these new ideas is, first, send them to the cross;’ then, ‘Send them to the gallows,’ then to the guillotine, and to the rope.”

³⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*.

interests of the people, that the people have the right to overthrow it by legislative means if they can, but by revolution if that becomes necessary.”³¹ Haywood’s language was very much imbued with the Spirit of ’76 when he informed the Commissioners that “the American people have always fought for their rights, and they are going to fight for them again.”³² The IWW revolution, like the American Revolution, would create a freer, better republic that would protect the freedoms stolen away by plutocrats. That theme ran through much of the Wobblies’ discourse. By arguing that a capitalist “ruling class” had somehow destroyed the republic, Wobblies could simultaneously condemn the dominant capitalist order while upholding a genuine commitment to American values and myths. This marked an attempt to separate free-market capitalist ideology from Americanism. IWW English-language newspaper *Industrial Worker* (hereafter referred to as the *Worker*) would carry this argument three years later: “When people get wise to their rights and that laws and the constitution of government has turned over to the few those things on which the lives of all depend and to which they inherit natural and inalienable right, laws and the constitution are brushed aside. With the breath of liberty they say...let the few be damned.”³³ In short, the IWW revolution was a continuation of the American Revolution.

To the Wobblies, the American revolutionary tradition meant more than just the Revolution itself. The abolitionists represented crucial figures in the American historical

³¹ “Testimony of William D. Haywood Before the Industrial Relations Commission.” Box 174, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 54-55.

³² “Testimony of William D. Haywood...,” 66.

³³ *Industrial Worker*, author unknown, “Inalienable Rights of Man,” February 3, 1917, 2. Microfilm. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI.

pantheon, especially for union organizers who saw themselves as being on the forefront of fighting against human exploitation. In a 1909 stump speech in Chicago, Wobbly speaker Ben Williams urged his proletarian audience to replace capitalist exploitation with “Industrial Democracy.”³⁴ The Wobbly lecturer’s use of the term was no accident. Rather, he was pushing progressive ideals in a radical direction. Williams called on the “army of producers” to “form the structure of the new society within the shell of the old,” which sounded like nothing less than a revolutionary call to arms. The lesson to be learned, he insisted, was that of the abolitionist Wendell Phillips. Just as Phillips fought slavery, so should Wobblies fight to free “wage slaves” from capitalist bondage. By claiming Phillips’ mantle, Williams linked the IWW to a distinctly American form of radicalism. Phillips knew that the “Slave Power” would never capitulate to a passive anti-slavery movement. Williams argued that Phillips had advocated “direct action” and warned that “those who imagine the capitalist class will peaceably surrender the industries to an unorganized working class, are hugging a dangerous delusion.”³⁵

Wobblies also infused their specific demands with Americanist rhetoric. Higher wages and better conditions, they insisted, were necessary to create better citizens. Union delegates working among the migratory harvest workers promised “decent wages, food and conditions – *an American standard of living.*”³⁶[italics added] Benjamin Schraeger, editor of the Polish IWW newspaper, explicitly linked poor working conditions with the

³⁴ “Eleven Blind Leaders.” Box 160, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 28.

³⁵ “Eleven Blind Leaders,” 28. Williams would explain the IWW did not counsel violence against individuals, that it was an economic system that had to be destroyed: “The material fact [is] that men are products of their environments, and that changes in the mode of living of individuals are usually accompanied by changes in their hopes, aspirations and ideas.”

³⁶ “Harvest Time is Honey Time.” Box 163, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI.

failure of Polish Chicagoans to achieve their American citizenship.³⁷ Better wages and shorter hours would keep the Polish proletariat out of the saloons and out of the clutches of the political machine, he said – and would empower the working class. Even for immigrant Wobblies, Americanism and IWW ideology were compatible. Chautauqua circuit speaker, Gilded Age labor radical, and sometime Wobbly sympathizer Morrison L. Swift was one of the few public figures outside of the organization who recognized the IWW’s brand of Americanism. In a speech published and distributed by the IWW, Swift characterized the radical union as “the most typically American institution that we have today in the United States,” arguing that “the central motive of the IWW in this American sea of shame is to fulfill and carry to higher developments the great ideals for which all the best Americans have stood for.”³⁸ “The IWW,” he concluded, “is the re-embodiment of the spirits of Jefferson, Adams and Lincoln.”³⁹

Patriotic symbols played a key role in Wobbly rhetoric. Anti-IWW vigilantes often made Wobblies kiss the flag.⁴⁰ But IWW spokesmen insisted that they were, in fact, the flag’s true defenders. On the eve of the outbreak of the Great War, IWW pamphleteers argued that “*the flags and symbols that once meant great things to us have*

³⁷ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 31, 1918.” Folder 6, Box 114, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 9454-9457. Schraeger argues that, without IWW improvement of shop conditions, Chicago Poles “do not understand conditions at all in American citizenship nor in American institutions nor in anything else. They very seldom take out their first papers, and still less seldom conclude the full naturalization politics. They are used...as tools for the politicians.”

³⁸ “Americanism vs. Radicalism.” Box 156, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. Swift would go on to describe the IWW as fulfilling the functions of the US government for the working class. “We have no justice at present in the United States, for justice and capitalism cannot exist in the same sphere. That is why the workingman has to go to the IWW for justice instead of our courts. In point of personifying justice, the IWW is the Supreme Court of the United States.”

³⁹ “Americanism vs. Radicalism” the purpose of the IWW, for Swift, was to “teach capitalistic crushed Americans to study the Declaration of Independence again...every true American is IWW in spirit.”

⁴⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*.

been seized by our employers. Today they mean naught to us but oppression and tyranny.”⁴¹[italics added] *Solidarity* compared the Statue of Liberty to an Indian memorial statue to the dead. “A story is told of a young East Indian, who, upon first seeing the big ‘lady with the torch’ in New York harbor, asked a fellow passenger ‘to whom was that statue built?’” *Solidarity* informed its readers, “‘That, is the Statue of Liberty.’ ‘Ah,’ came the startling comment, ‘we, in India, erect statues to our dead just as you do in America.’”⁴² To Wobblies, the United States used to be a refuge for the huddled masses searching for a better life. By organizing those masses in the IWW, Wobblies sought to fulfill that promise.

The heart of Wobbly Americanism, then, was the defense of the nation’s core values. In 1776 the nation had been threatened by an imperial power. In the Progressive Age, Americans were again threatened, this time by industrialists, bankers, and the capitalist order. So, they too needed to be overthrown. The IWW warned Americans that “there are sinister influences at work right here in these United States to destroy Liberty and Democracy and to reduce the workers to a state of peonage so that they can be more effectively exploited by the American Business Oligarchy.”⁴³

It was not enough for Wobblies to attack capitalist domination of American industry and institutions. Wobblies also wanted to renew the nation. In fact, Wobblies took very seriously their mission to build a new society. In order to build the cooperative commonwealth they envisioned, the Wobblies believed that they needed to transform the

⁴¹ “The Revolutionary IWW.” Box 171, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 7.

⁴² *Solidarity*, author unknown, “The Land of the Free,” March 17, 1917, 2.

⁴³ “Who are the Conspirators?” Box 177, Series X, The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI, 1-2.

American working class into “worker citizens.” In the industrial workplace, Wobblies argued, workers produced all the goods and services necessary for the maintenance of society. In the cooperative commonwealth, the working class would have a direct say in how those goods and services were distributed. By thus transforming the American working class, the IWW could ensure a peaceful flow of economic and political power to the people. The Wobblies’ elevation of economic activity over more traditional political solutions was partly pragmatic. In the early twentieth century, many members of the working class could not participate in traditional electoral politics. As Haywood put it: “There are vote-getters and politicians who waste their time coming into a community where 90 per cent have no vote, where the women are disenfranchised 100 per cent and where the boys and girls underage of course are not enfranchised.”⁴⁴ Women lacked the vote, as did alien and migratory workingmen (often agricultural laborers or lumbermen) who failed to meet residency requirements. The IWW’s drive to organize the working class economically thus was designed to empower workers as citizens. For Haywood: “The broadest interpretation of political power comes through industrial organization: that the industrial organization...prevents the capitalists from disenfranchising the worker; it gives the vote to women, it re-enfranchises the black man and places the ballot in the hands of every boy and girl employed in a shop...”⁴⁵ The cooperative commonwealth was to be the embodiment of “We, the people.”

Having transformed America’s representative democracy with an actual democracy, the IWW proposed to substitute many of the administrative functions of the

⁴⁴ “The General Strike,” Box 162, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 8.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

state with the economic industrial apparatus – industrial unions – already embedded within the union itself. Wobblies acknowledged that the national general strike needed to overthrow capitalism would paralyze the American economy, darkening the cities and threatening many Americans with starvation. “We are organizing for that crisis more than for anything else,” James Thompson explained, “and when the responsibility falls on the back of labor...we are organized not only for the every day struggle but to carry on production shall have been overthrown, that is the most important function of the working class organization known as the IWW.”⁴⁶

The IWW combined its Americanism rhetoric with a genuine commitment to internationalism. The revolution was always meant to be global, but the Wobblies were not about to erase national differences. For the IWW, embracing American ideals and values did not mean adopting the jingoism of Theodore Roosevelt. Nor did it assume that the workers of the world were all alike. The Wobblies knew that their path to Industrial Democracy would vary from other nations even if they wanted everybody to enjoy “American” liberties and freedoms: the American citizen worker was not meant to be a global archetype. Wobbly professor Scott Nearing put it best: “Am I loyal to my home? Yes...to the United States? Yes. And I am also loyal to my fellow brother, man.”⁴⁷ This may explain why the IWW was much more interested in Americanism than it was in Americanizing immigrants. Foreignness was not a barrier to becoming a genuine worker citizen, the IWW insisted. Poles, Finns, Chinese, and others could be good Americans as

⁴⁶ “U.S. vs Haywood, June 25, 1918,” 4961-4965. In other words, the Wobblies believed that organized workers already had the knowledge and skills to run the economy after the overthrow of capitalism.

⁴⁷ “Scott Nearing’s Address to the Jury.” Box 172, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI, 15-16.

long as they adhered to the ideals of Wobbly worker citizenship; they did not have to shed their language or ethnicity to do so. The IWW's embrace of foreign language newspapers as well as its active encouragement of ethnic leadership in strikes attested to their inclusive brand of Americanism.⁴⁸ In this manner, the Wobblies' universalization of American values emulated the Revolutionary generation.

The Progressive Era was marked by a blistering critique of the industrial order that had emerged in the decades after the Civil War. With American values seemingly under assault from capitalists that controlled unimaginable power, progressives fought to defend American values. Further to the left, the Industrial Workers of the World also tried to undermine industrial capitalism in defense of America. Wobblies saw themselves as the modern incarnation of a radical American tradition that reached back to the founding itself. In doing so, they sought to separate capitalism from Americanism. In the early years of the Wilson administration, industrial democracy and the meaning of Americanism was contested terrain. After American entry into the Great War in the spring of 1917, everything would change.

⁴⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 241-242.

“Fellow Worker Wilson” and the Fight to Make Industrial America Safe For Democracy

After the defeats of 1913, the Industrial Workers of the World was a shell of an organization. Though dedicated Wobblies kept the flame of the cooperative commonwealth alive, they had few tangible gains to show for their work. The outbreak of war in Europe, however, presented the union with new opportunities to organize. Allied war contracts snapped the American economy out of the recession that had stalled industrial production for much of 1914. Around 1915, the Agricultural Workers Organization (AWO)⁴⁹ developed the “job delegate” system, an organizing tactic that revolutionized the IWW.⁵⁰ Rather than using paid organizers, the IWW would invest migratory workers themselves (in the form of credentialed job delegates) with the ability to enroll workers into the union. Given the transitory nature of agricultural work, the innovation proved invaluable. Furthermore, the IWW capitalized on its greater mobility by “striking on the job.”⁵¹ These new strategies quickly spread to lumberjacks and

⁴⁹ Later called the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union, the AWO organized migratory agricultural laborers – both the fruit and vegetable pickers who lined the West Coast and then men who threshed and bundled the wheat produced on the plains all the way from Oklahoma to Canada.

⁵⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*. Dubofsky credits organizer Walter Nef for implementing the job delegate strategy. In fact, he argues that the success of Nef’s innovation made him perhaps even more famous than Secretary-Treasurer “Big Bill” Haywood. Nef would also go on to join the IWW’s longshoremen organization on the Philadelphia docks. Not only does Philadelphia represent one of the IWW’s most durable success story (the longshoremen union lasted into the mid-1920’s, and survived the destruction of the IWW), but it also represents one of the examples of a true interracial union during the Progressive Era.

⁵¹ “Striking on the job” could mean several different things in different contexts. It could mean actively enforcing union demands even if the employer refused to grant them. For example, Wobbly miners who were refused the 8-hour day simply left the mines after working eight hours. It could also mean working slowly and inefficiently to pressure the boss to give into union demands. Wobblies encouraged the use of

miners, mostly in the western states. By America's entry into the First World War, western agricultural, lumber, and mining – precisely those most essential to war production - were among the most powerful sectors within the IWW. By the summer of 1917, the Industrial Workers of the World had never been stronger or more secure. The IWW had perhaps 100,000 paid up members at the height of its influence.⁵² What's more, the toppling of the Russian monarchy in February led jubilant Wobs to believe that the American revolution might be just around the corner.

Despite the IWW's powerful pacifist credentials, the union never took an official stand on America's entry into the First World War.⁵³ In fact, the IWW's General Executive Board (GEB) released a statement in April 1917 saying that the organization was "bitterly opposed to the Imperial Capitalistic Government of Germany" but failed to remark on the United States government or the Wilson administration.⁵⁴ Wobbly delegates simply advised draft eligible males to register at their local boards. Wobbly stump speakers also kept mum on the question of the war, regardless of their personal inclinations, while IWW propaganda made it abundantly clear that the only war that

this tactic, which they also called sabotage, because it put enormous pressure on employers (especially those trying to meet war contracts) while the workers were drawing paychecks – unlike a traditional strike.

⁵² Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 349-350. Dubofsky estimates that the IWW peaked at about 100,000 members or more. During the Haywood trial, federal authorities reported membership at 250,000, an almost certain exaggeration. It should be noted, however, that such counts and estimates can be misleading. The IWW was chronically beset by members that failed to keep their union cards paid up. Also, workers that did not join the IWW may have acted in sympathy with them as well.

⁵³ "U.S. vs. Haywood et al., August 10, 1918." Folder 2, Box 117, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 11218-11221. Haywood explained that the IWW did not see the war as "an organizational matter." On a personal note, he added: "The fight of the IWW is on the economic field, and it was not for me, a man who could not be drafted for war, to tell others that they should go to war, or that they should not go to war."

⁵⁴ "Trial Evidence 123-130." Folder 14, Box 121, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 129.

mattered to Wobblies was “the class war.”⁵⁵ Many Wobblies were undoubtedly opposed to the European conflict, as were many other Americans. One of the most notable pacifists within the IWW was GEB member Frank Little, who tried to convince the board to throw the union’s strength into antiwar causes – a campaign that failed in the summer of 1917.⁵⁶ Instead, the union all but aligned itself with the war effort.

The critical point, for the IWW, was its place in the industrial system. Wobbly pamphleteers reminded the American public that “the IWW loaded United States’ government munitions for shipment overseas; that the IWW gathered in the nation’s crops that fed her people and the people of her allies overseas; that the IWW saved her great timber resources from destruction, and these timbers went into ships used to carry foods...”⁵⁷ E.F. Doree, secretary of the IWW’s longshoremen’s local in Philadelphia, reported that Wobbly longshoremen did all this vital work without a single accident or strike.⁵⁸ The *Worker* even sent out a call in the spring of 1917 for laborers to build a US Army camp in Rockford, Illinois, so “we will know that the job is done right.”⁵⁹ That is not to say that the IWW abandoned its radical Americanism. To Wobbly worker citizens, the democratic idealism encouraged by the war could only be achieved if the workers would fight for it. By controlling the industrial machinery, the workers would secure

⁵⁵ *Solidarity*, Author unknown, “The Only Fight Worth Fighting,” May 12, 1917, 2.

⁵⁶ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., August 5, 1918.” Folder 5, Box 115, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 10195-10205. GEB member Francis Miller testified that the board met in early July, 1917 to determine if the IWW’s Chicago headquarters would release a statement concerning the war. Little pushed for a statement that condemned the war. The GEB demurred, fearing that such an act would provoke repression of the union.

⁵⁷ “Lest We Forget.” Box 167, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 4-5.

⁵⁸ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 2, 1918.” Folder 4, Box 110, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 5940-5951.

⁵⁹ *Worker*, IWW Press Committee, “Four Thousand Men Wanted,” June 30, 1917, 4.

“the democracy of the people who make the world and all its progress...an ideal for which all who believe in freedom must work. No one can live in a democratic world until all live in a democratic world. Democracy never can exist until the workers and not the shirkers control industry.”⁶⁰ Haywood put the matter more eloquently when he recounted his time with striking flag makers in Paterson. “We weave the flag,” said the strikers, “we starve under the flag, we work under the flag, we wear the flag, but we are damned if we will scab under the flag.”⁶¹ Like the Paterson strikers, the Wobblies asserted that they were Americans, but they could be labor radicals too.

The IWW also stepped up its use of American history. The IWW pamphlet, “The IWW in Theory and Practice,” argued that the true fathers of the class struggle were not Marx and Engels but the “great American statesmen” Alexander Hamilton and James Madison. The pamphlet highlighted Hamilton’s observation that “all communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and well-born; the other are the mass and the people.” Madison was more direct when he argued, “Those who hold, and those without property have ever formed distinct interests in society.”⁶² Wobbly organizer James Thompson likewise compared IWW migratory workers to Washington’s

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1. Note the use of the term “shirker.” Shirkers were those that neglected, or “shirked,” their duties or responsibilities. During the war, shirkers connoted those that dodged the draft, quite a serious charge. By calling the capitalists shirkers, the Wobblies were attempting the place their enemies on the unsavory end of the wartime patriot/traitor binary.

⁶¹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., August 12, 1918.” Folder 3, Box 117, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI, 11283.

⁶² “The IWW in Theory and Practice.” Box 165, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 27-30. The pamphlet continues with Madison: “A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide civilized nations of necessity into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views.”

soldiers at Valley Forge, “bums without shoes” who “talked about liberty.”⁶³ Secretary-Treasurer Bill Haywood, too, found inspiration from the American past. Benjamin Franklin’s aphorism that “four hours of work was enough to produce all the comforts of life” provided Haywood’s rationale for the shorter work day.⁶⁴ In fact, argued Haywood, with modern machinery there was no telling how short the work day could be.

Other Founding Fathers could also be metaphorically “lined up with the red card.” “When we look back at our own revolutionary days we find the patriots then were infidels and free-thinkers like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Patriotism and revolution seem to go hand in hand,” said a propagandist by the name of Red in the summer of 1917, “for those who love their country best do all they can to better it, and this leads them to rebellion against the stand-patters...the point is that the men named loved their country well enough to chasten it in the face of insult and abuse. They served the idea; they lived to carry out a principle; they were true to their ideal. And this is what makes the IWW powerful...*it is composed of a body of men who are true patriots* in the best sense of that much abused word.”⁶⁵ The *Worker*, meanwhile, wondered “what the men who threw the tea into Boston harbor would do if they lived in the United States at the present time. Perhaps they would be giving a bunch of the bosses a drink of tea.”⁶⁶

The Industrial Workers of the World also continued to link themselves to the great cause of emancipation. Wobblies were fond of quoting the “lumber-jack” Abraham Lincoln on democracy: “As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This

⁶³ “US vs. Haywood, June 25, 1918,” 4944-4947. Thompson also characterized capitalists as the ones “licking the boots of King George.”

⁶⁴ “US vs. Haywood, August 10, 1918,” 11229-11236.

⁶⁵ *Solidarity*, Red, “True Patriotism,” August 25, 1917, 4.

⁶⁶ *Worker*, author unknown, untitled, August 15, 1917, 2.

expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is not democracy.”⁶⁷ Haywood, too, used Lincoln to defend the IWW. When asked why he counseled workers to steal food during wartime inflation, Big Bill noted that Lincoln had been his inspiration: “A message he [Lincoln] delivered during the Civil War when the profiteers had run the prices of foodstuffs up, 600 or 800 per cent...he said ‘take your pick-axes and crow bars and go to the warehouses and help yourselves.’”⁶⁸ James Thompson explained that Industrial Democracy would extend Abraham Lincoln’s version of political democracy – “Government of the people, by the people, for the people.”⁶⁹ As with earlier allusions to the Civil War and Lincoln, Thompson’s use of the Gettysburg Address was a bridge between the IWW and the great American cause of liberty.

Even as they laid claim to the war, though, Wobblies sustained their attack on the American industrial system. Wobbly organizer George Speed declared, “I am a believer in the present form [of the government of the United States], but it is not democratic enough to suit me.”⁷⁰ The son of sharecroppers, John Turner linked the Wobblies’ mission to destroy industrial capitalism with the creation of a better American citizenship.

⁶⁷ *Solidarity*, author unknown, “Another Pro-German,” 2. According to the story, probably apocryphal, a Wobbly agitator is arrested and searched. As the search reveals the quoted literature, the federal agent asks the Wob “Who wrote this vile and treasonable attack upon our nation and its great president?” The agitator smiles and tells the agent that it was Lincoln as he is shoved through the “dungeon door.”

⁶⁸ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., August 12, 1918,” 11358-11359. Special prosecutor Nebeker, apparently offended by Haywood’s remark asked, “Don’t you think that Abraham Lincoln would turn over in his grave, if he heard any such statement as that made by him?” Nonplussed, Haywood replied, “I do not, that is excepting in commendation of it.”

⁶⁹ “US vs. Haywood, June 25, 1918,” 4912-4916.

⁷⁰ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., October 18-21, 1917.” Folder 1, Box 103, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 50-54. When asked about lumber strikes in the Pacific Northwest, Speed denied that Wobbly strikers were trying to damage the US war effort: “The reason [for the strikes] was the horrible, unsanitary and miserable conditions that men has to put up with in the woods...the ones that is responsible is the capitalists themselves.”

A system that kept kids in the factory or the fields instead of the classroom robbed American children of their right to be good citizens as well as it sapped their health. What could be treasonous, asked Turner, about trying to overthrow a system that “is producing a race of weaklings?”⁷¹ College professor and Wobbly lecturer Scott Nearing, on trial for publishing a book about Wobbly ideology, lectured the jury as he would a group of students: “This is America in which I am on trial, and America’s proudest tradition is her tradition of liberty. For three hundred years people have been coming to America...not because of the hills and valleys, not because of the climate...but because of the liberty of America. That is the choicest and greatest heritage, that which Americans love.”⁷² Nearing established his claim on Americanism by professing his adherence to American values and traditions: “All through my life, I have been interested in preserving the institutions of democracy. I believe that democracy is a better form of social organization than aristocracy, or monarchy or any other form of Government that the world has ever known...the Constitution does not guarantee us only the right to be correct, we have a right to be honest...”⁷³ Wobbly organizers asked potential recruits, “Do you love freedom well enough to fight for it? Then join the IWW.”⁷⁴

By combining Americanism rhetoric with the class war and a critique of American capitalism (and not a little dark humor), Wobblies tried to offer the country a radical American experience of the war. *Solidarity* assured its readers that the IWW “will never be guilty of ‘giving aid or comfort to the enemies of the United States.’ We

⁷¹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 25, 1918.” Folder 5, Box 113, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 8652.

⁷² “Scott Nearing’s Address to the Jury,” 25-26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁷⁴ *Solidarity*, author unknown, untitled, Oct. 13, 1917, 2.

have been fighting the plutocratic parasites of industry since the inception of our organization, and we are going to keep on fighting them.”⁷⁵ If the enemies of the United States were the capitalists, then by implication, the Wobblies were the true patriots. “In this country is a theory of government that the majority rule and surely the working class constitute a majority of this nation. Hence, by being loyal to the working class we are being loyal to the country,” said Wobbly Stephen Dodd a few weeks after the US entered the war.⁷⁶ Lumberjack organizer Peter McEvoy echoed *Solidarity*’s sentiment when he declared that “the fact that the majority of workers are working every day proves that they are lending assistance to the government.”⁷⁷ The *Worker* put the matter bluntly: “The workers are the true patriots, because they provide all the soldiers and material necessary for the war.”⁷⁸ IWW propaganda even tried to identify the union’s interests with the interests of the soldiers. “The I.W.W. is fighting that battles of the soldiers as well as of the workers, and every move made against the I.W.W. is a move against the interests of the soldiers who must return to work in the industries at the close of the war. The returning soldiers must accept the conditions in the mines, mills, factories and workshops, or else become a rebel himself...”⁷⁹

At the same time, Wobblies cast doubt on the assertions of patriotism and loyalty made by their enemies. “When it comes to being in favor of democracy the IWW has it

⁷⁵ *Solidarity*, Author unknown, untitled, April 21, 1917, 2.

⁷⁶ *Solidarity*, J. Stephen Dodd, “Loyalty,” April 14, 1917, 3.

⁷⁷ Series V, Box 103, Folder 2. “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., October 26, 1917.” Folder 2, Box 103, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 109-111. Still, McEvoy was not an uncritical observer of society. His interpretation of American political economy was deeply informed by his own class consciousness. When asked if the laws and policies of the United States were not in the interests of the whole, McEvoy responded: “Those facts can be proven in the daily press.”

⁷⁸ *Worker*, E.W. Atkins, “Law,” August 22, 1917, 2.

⁷⁹ *Worker*, Author unknown, “The Birth of a New Day,” March 30, 1918, 2.

over the average patriot. The IWW members love democracy so much they want to bring it on the job with them. Mention job democracy to the average boss, who says he wants to make the world safe for democracy, and he has a spasm. He will tell you it's damned anarchy."⁸⁰ Wobbly propagandists often attacked industrialists as war profiteers.

Solidarity ridiculed John Rockefeller's true support for the war, "May 22nd – John D. to Give Millions in War – Headline / May 23rd – Standard Oil raises price on gasoline 2c a gallon."⁸¹

Similarly, when mine owners refused to accede to government arbitration and negotiate with unions, Wobblies screamed treason. Conflict in the western copper mines exploded in the summer of 1917. "Sedition! Colorado coal mine owners have gone on strike as a protest on the price placed on coal by the national fuel administrator... Suppose that the mines had been closed by an IWW strike instead of an employers' lockout, wouldn't there have been a great yell set up by the plute's press."⁸² It seemed as if the Wobblies had learned the lessons of red-baiting all too well. The price of commodities such as copper, iron, and spruce skyrocketed during the war. To union officials, mine owners and lumber barons were extorting money from the government. Abysmal working conditions and low wages, to the Wobblies, were even worse than the autocracy that the United States was fighting against in Europe. "If it is called 'treason' for a worker to strike against intolerable conditions and inadequate wages during war time, what would you call the efforts of the blood-glutted grafters of Big Biz to force these things on the workers in the name of 'patriotism' – and by means of shillelaghs and

⁸⁰ *Worker*, author unknown, untitled, August 29, 1917, 2.

⁸¹ *Solidarity*, author unknown, "Generous John," June 2, 1917, 2.

⁸² *Worker*, author unknown, "Coal Operators Aid Kaiser," April 27, 1918, 2.

machine guns.”⁸³ In essence, the IWW was saying that American business leaders were exploiting both their workers as well as the government (as “grafters”). Though the welfare of the workers, not the government, was always the primary interest of the IWW, the Wobblies had a point. How could U.S. Steel justify raising the price of steel while simultaneously advising its employees to purchase Liberty Bonds?

Though the Wobblies would never cross the line between identifying themselves as the vanguard of the citizen worker and actually throwing the weight of the organization behind the war effort, at times IWW publications certainly blurred that line.⁸⁴ Matters of the mind and of the heart, for the worker citizen, were not “official” union business, and could be safely left up to the individual conscience. Wobblies demanded no loyalty tests among their own; union members were free to hold any position on the war that they pleased, but as individuals. What counted, for the Wobblies, was how one behaved in the workplace.

Wobblies also refashioned Wilsonian wartime rhetoric to their own ends. Having worked for years to bring about “industrial democracy,” the IWW proved especially receptive to wartime slogans. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the IWW’s appropriation of Wilson himself. The *Worker* applauded “Fellow Worker Wilson’s” October 1917 exhortations to be steadfast in the fight against tyranny.⁸⁵ The banner editorial of the November 10, 1917 *Worker* read: “If there is one thing we love more

⁸³ *Solidarity*, author unknown, untitled, June 2, 1917, 2.

⁸⁴ The “pacifism” here refers to international pacifism, or anti-militarist and anti-war ideology. While Wobblies did engage in violence in self-defense or, at times, to protect their picket lines, such violence was not unusual in Progressive-era labor disputes.

⁸⁵ *Worker*, Author unknown, untitled, Oct. 13, 1917, 2. The *Worker* quotes Wilson’s speech: “If the forces of autocracy divide us they will overcome us; if we stand together victory is certain and the liberty which victory will secure. We can afford then to be generous, but we cannot afford then or now to be weak.” The *Worker* notes that: “Every IWW member can applaud the sentiment so ably expressed.”

deeply than another in the United States, it is that every man should have the privilege unmolested and uncriticized, to utter the real convictions of his mind.’ Woodrow Wilson in 1916. Spoken like a true IWW, Fellow Worker Wilson.”⁸⁶ It was not just the wartime Wilson the Wobblies embraced. In his 1913 book, *The New Freedom*, Wilson had argued that the economic concentration of corporate trusts threatened to destroy American democracy. In 1917, the Wobblies became avid fans; the *Worker* gave away copies of *The New Freedom* along with Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* to union members who sold the most newspaper subscriptions.⁸⁷ Famous Wobbly speakers, such as Bill Haywood and John “Red” Doran, used *The New Freedom* in their speeches. James Thompson could even quote portions of the book from memory.⁸⁸

The Wobblies also justified war industry strikes by invoking the President. In order to ensure labor peace during the war, President Wilson and the Labor Department endorsed the eight hour day. IWW lumbermen in the Pacific Northwest struck against their employers in 1917, not to impede the government, but to enforce Wilson’s proclamation. Lumberjack organizer “Red” Doran boasted, “We have beated down to their knees the lumber barons, a group who up till this time have...defied the President of the United States in his request for the 8 hour day.”⁸⁹ Sensitive to the charge that the IWW was targeting essential war industries, the union was careful to point out that any strike was designed to improve conditions rather than obstruct war production.⁹⁰ If there

⁸⁶ *Worker*, Author unknown, untitled, Nov. 2, 1917, 2.

⁸⁷ *Worker*, Dec. 8, 1917.

⁸⁸ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., June 27, 1918.” Folder 3, Box 109, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 5263-5269.

⁸⁹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., June 28, 1918.” Folder 6, Box 109, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 5375-5377.

⁹⁰ “US vs. Haywood August 10, 1918,” 11229-11236.

was interference with war production, according to the IWW, the operators were to blame. Lumber barons not only disregarded the government's labor policies by forcing their workers to work ten to twelve hours a day, they were also "treasonous" war profiteers who artificially raised the price of raw materials for government contracts.⁹¹ In prison, patriotic Wobbly miners begged the government to take over the copper mines.⁹² Striking Wobbly miners defended themselves from charges of treason by answering that they were merely trying to survive the brutal wartime inflation. Indeed, federal strike mediators sided with the strikers, but mine owners threatened to shut their mines if it meant paying the union wage.⁹³ "As far as I am concerned," said copper magnate William Clark, "I will close [the Clark mines] down, flood them and not raise a pound of copper before I will recognize the anarchistic leaders of the Union."⁹⁴ In the face of such truculence, the miners argued, striking was the only option. "In striking, the IWW has at no time carried the thought of aiding the Central Powers in the war, in fact the IWW is more against Kaiserism than any other force in America today. Nor have our strikes been without a solid economic reason."⁹⁵ Wobbly strikers responded by calling for government ownership of the means of production, a sudden turn for a union that had rejected state socialism years before. The spark of labor unrest in Montana, meanwhile, stemmed from the Speculator disaster, a fire that broke out in the huge Speculator mine,

⁹¹ *Worker*, Author unknown, "Strikes in War Time," March 9, 1918, 2.

⁹² "U.S. vs. Haywood et al., May 21, 1918." Folder 2, Box 105, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 1918-1920.

⁹³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁹⁵ *Worker*, author unknown, "Strikes in Wartime," March 9, 1918, 2.

killing 164 miners.⁹⁶ For the miners, enough was enough. The Metal Mine Workers Union in Butte, Montana was “willing and anxious to...lay down their lives for the government, but not for the Anaconda Copper Mining Company.”⁹⁷

The Wilson administration’s wartime labor policies strengthened the IWW’s goals of achieving industrial democracy. The grand aim of the Wilson administration’s mobilization policy was to use the state to coordinate private economic activity in various war related industries (e.g. steel, railroads, copper), thus creating an efficient war machine on the homefront. A critical part of the economic harmony desired by war planners was the establishment of peaceful labor relations in war industries. The biggest effort to ensure labor peace was the federal government’s creation of the National War Labor Board (NWLB). Frank Walsh, since his days as commissioner of the United States Committee on Industrial Relations, had beseeched the Wilson administration to use government policy to shape American labor relations. Co-chairing the board with former President William Taft (itself a sign of the high priority the administration accorded to labor relations), Walsh relished the opportunity to make industrial democracy a reality. The NWLB had a mandate to arbitrate labor disputes and promote economic efficiency, but Walsh hoped to commit the board to the support of union organization in American

⁹⁶ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 366. What made the disaster even worse in the eyes of the miners was that concrete bulkheads installed to prevent the spread of an underground fire did not include manholes that would have enabled the trapped miners to escape the inferno.

⁹⁷ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., May 24, 1918.” Folder 1, Box 105, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 1493-1494. Anaconda Copper was a new trust at the time, formed in 1915 by John Rockefeller by merging several mining companies. Today, Anaconda is owned by British Petroleum subsidiary Atlantic Richfield and is involved in one of the EPA’s largest “Superfund” sites to clean up contamination in the area from decades of sloppy mining operations.

industry.⁹⁸ Though the board lacked the authority to enforce its decisions, wartime conditions lent powerful weight to NLRB rulings. Disputes at Bethlehem Steel, General Electric, and Bridgeport munitions manufacturers (to name a few) enabled the board to regulate job classifications, hours, and wages. Furthermore, the board endorsed unionization as a form of employee representation – industrial democracy in action. If NLRB rulings only directly involved a relatively few companies, the outcomes of its rulings had national implications. Indeed, as Joseph McCartin shows, NLRB activity and the labor organization it encouraged (union membership spiked during the war) tended to increase labor unrest, as workers became increasingly prone to assert their own demands on the shopfloor.⁹⁹

Perhaps the NLRB's biggest contribution to wartime labor militancy was its sanction of the shop delegate system.¹⁰⁰ In short, the shop delegate system meant that workers in a particular plant could elect their own labor relations representatives on a shop-by-shop basis, effectively enabling workers to directly bargain with employers. Not only did shop delegates diminish the role of the foreman in resolving worker grievances, but they also limited the ability of national union organizations to curtail labor militancy. With the tacit support of the federal government, workers enthusiastically elected shop delegates and bargained with their employers. In the name of maintaining industrial stability, shop delegates secured higher wages, shorter hours, and improved working

⁹⁸ McCartin, *Labor's Great War*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁰⁰ Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*.

conditions.¹⁰¹ If such militancy made more conservative labor leaders nervous, it also marked the possibility of the tripartite labor relations regime envisioned by reformers like Walsh.¹⁰² For a time, it seemed as if the government had forged a new alliance with labor.

To the Wobblies, the federal government's endorsement of the shop delegate system mirrored what the IWW had already been doing. As the IWW grew substantially during 1915, it elected delegates to bargain with employers in shops and camps where Wobblies made up a majority of workers. Keeping a distance from the state, Wobblies saw no need to appeal to the federal government in order to bargain with the boss.¹⁰³ Still, during the height of the NWLB, labor relations in a Wobbly lumber camp in Oregon could look very much like those at an AFL-organized packinghouse in Chicago. Whether through the sheer force of labor organization or the imprimatur of the state, both the IWW and the Wilson administration implemented industrial democracy during the war – though only the IWW would use labor organization as a springboard for revolution.

As the IWW and the federal government inched toward each other in the first few months after US entry into the war, however, state and local governments turned violently against the union. Before the war years, anti-IWW repression usually accompanied specific events, such as strikes or free speech campaigns. After the outbreak of the First World War, repression grew more severe. Early on the morning of

¹⁰¹ For more on shop delegates, see Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*; James Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

¹⁰² McCartin, *Labor's Great War*.

¹⁰³ Even after the creation of the NWLB during the war, the IWW declined to file complaints with the board.

July 12, 1917, armed vigilantes broke into the homes of miners and laborers in the town of Bisbee, Arizona and herded the men onto the local baseball field. Those with known union sympathies were seized off the street as well. From there, vigilantes and deputies (at this point, the two were indistinguishable) packed the prisoners into boxcars and cattle cars. In all, around 2,000 armed, deputized men rounded up around 1,300 men and shipped them off into the New Mexico desert.¹⁰⁴ Despite protests from Wobblies and outraged observers, the Wilson administration declined to request an investigation into the mass deportation. While the US Army set up a cantonment in the desert to temporarily house the exiles, those without the money for a train ticket could do nothing but wait for relief that might take months to come.¹⁰⁵

Union members were shocked and appalled at the naked use of force as well as the fact that there was no state or federal effort to punish those involved with the mass deportation. Following the events in Bisbee, *Solidarity* printed a cartoon transposing German soldiers deporting Belgian citizens with American deputies deporting miners under the headline, “It’s So Different in America!”¹⁰⁶ Lurid tales of German depredations in Belgium had been circulating in the Allied countries since the beginning of the war, an effective means of keeping populations committed to the war against “the Hun.” The United States was not immune from such mythmaking; government propaganda routinely referred to the Germans as ruthless barbarians. By comparing anti-IWW citizens to the dreaded foe, the Wobblies were making an emotionally charged

¹⁰⁴ Len DeCaux, *The Living Spirit of the Wobblies* (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1978), 124-5.

¹⁰⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 348-351.

¹⁰⁶ *Solidarity*, July 21, 1917, 1.

statement about what could happen in a supposedly free society. “The mining interests of Arizona have taken to themselves a power greater than that of the government of the United States,” explained the *Worker*, “*they have shown themselves the real anarchists,* according to their own definition of anarchy, while claiming to be the supporters of the law and order they evoke only when it serves their profits.”[italics added]¹⁰⁷ Notice, however, that the *Worker* did not lash out at state and local authorities. While the IWW would condemn the sheriff, the union blamed the “mining interests” rather than the state. Of course, the Wobblies’ circumspect distribution of blame can partly be explained by their traditional Marxist analysis of power politics, that economic elites ultimately controlled the actions of the state. In refusing to lay the blame on the state of Arizona, though, the Wobblies also reinforced their worker citizen credentials. Union officials beseeched Arizona and federal officials to investigate the incident and punish those involved.¹⁰⁸ Asking the state for justice hardly sounds like the typical activity for an alleged band of bloodthirsty anarchists.

Three weeks later, on the first day of August, masked vigilantes kidnapped IWW executive board member Frank Little from his Butte, Montana hotel room. Under the cover of twilight, they drove him out to the outskirts of town and tortured him. Half awake and crippled from a recent injury, Little could hardly resist his attackers.¹⁰⁹ Then, in the hours before dawn, the men strung the bleeding and naked man from a railroad trestle. Little’s lynching elicited a similar reaction from the IWW. As in Bisbee, the crime was not investigated by state or federal authorities. Outraged Wobblies called for

¹⁰⁷ *Worker*, author unknown, “Anarchists,” July 21, 1917, 2.

¹⁰⁸ President Wilson condemned the deportation, but no investigation was made.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*,

justice to be done to Little's murderers, but to no avail. "The brutal murder of Frank Little leaves another blot on American history that can never be erased," wrote Wobbly Louis Millis, "German atrocities and frightfulness are shadowed by the 'democratic' methods by which all semblance of civil law was disregarded. In the guise of patriotism and defense of the flag these brutal assassins have disgraced the flag and the nation."¹¹⁰

Soon thereafter, western states like Minnesota and Washington began rounding up dozens of Wobblies and placing them in "bullpens," or temporary jails, in addition to using the militia to break strikes.¹¹¹ In a letter to Washington Governor Ernest Lister in the summer of 1917, IWW attorney George Vanderveer pleaded with the governor to halt the widespread arrest of Wobblies. Their imprisonment, noted the lawyer, was a "grievous social and industrial wrong."¹¹²

Fierce wartime repression at the hands of private citizens and government agents elicited still more claims of American identity from the union. When states began to experiment with "criminal syndicalism" laws during the war years, using vague terminology about "advocating a change in government" to target Wobblies,¹¹³ the IWW echoed its revolutionary forebears as it threatened to "throw the tea in Boston Harbor."¹¹⁴ Careful to avoid attacking the government directly and compromising its own identity as a loyal American union, the IWW blamed the arrests of dozens of union organizers on

¹¹⁰ *Worker*, Louis Mellis, "Another Blot," August 22, 1917, 3. Mellis also compared the hanging of Little to the "abominable outrage" of the hanging of John Brown.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 15: "Employers Strike Back."

¹¹² "U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 11, 1918." Folder 6, Box 111, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 6827-6828.

¹¹³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 381-382.

¹¹⁴ "U.S. vs. Haywood et al., June 27, 1918." Folder 3, Box 109, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 5214-5236.

malicious capitalists and the popular wartime hysteria.¹¹⁵ The *Worker* notified Wobblies that “James P. Thompson wishes us to announce that he will be unable to deliver his lecture on ‘The Spirit of American Freedom,’ owing to the fact that he is in jail.”¹¹⁶ Economic interests were behind the state repression, argued Wobbly spokesmen, as during the days of the Fugitive Slave Laws and the Dred Scott Decision.¹¹⁷

For the first few months after American entry into the Great War, federal officials refused to join their counterparts on the state level in repressing the IWW. Not that the Wilson administration was ignorant of the violence and mass arrests that were happening. Wobblies protested their treatment to sympathetic Congressmen as well as administration officials like Secretary of Labor William Wilson and Attorney General Thomas Gregory. They also appealed to President Wilson himself. The IWW’s antagonists, state officials and businessmen, launched their own lobbying effort during the tumultuous months of 1917, but with a very different goal in mind. Western governors and proprietors of strike-prone industries inundated the Justice Department, the President, and even the United States Army with what amounted to a call to arms.¹¹⁸ Through the summer of 1917, Washington refused to budge. By the fall, however, the turmoil in the western lumber and copper industries had grown too large to ignore. Sometime at the end of August, the Justice Department determined that the IWW had become a large enough

¹¹⁵ “Break the Conspiracy.” Box 157, Series X. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. The IWW’s conviction in the Chicago trials was the “blackest and most vicious conspiracy ever conceived in the minds of men.” It was run by the employing class, the mainstream press (“white livered pencil pushers”), and the AFL “treacherous labor fakers.”

¹¹⁶ *Worker*, author unknown, untitled, Oct. 19, 1917, 2.

¹¹⁷ Series X, Box 164. “Is Freedom Dead?” The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 14.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

threat to begin planning an assault on the organization. The Bureau of Investigation, in partnership with local police, raided scores of IWW halls across the country in early September and secured paperwork, membership lists, and even furniture from the Wobblies.¹¹⁹ Arrests soon followed, and 166 Wobblies were under indictment by the end of the month, though a few dozen were released not long afterward. According to Wilson biographer John Cooper, the administration's about-face was the consequence of the president's deferral to subordinates in the Justice Department – namely Attorney General Gregory.¹²⁰ Evidently, western officials and businessmen prevailed in their campaign to enlist Uncle Sam in their war against the IWW. The idea that Wilson merely delegated such a massive federal undertaking to pursue other business seems a bit far-fetched. While it is true that Wilson became increasingly involved in foreign affairs after the United States' entry into the war, it would be stunning if one of the largest federal prosecutions in history was left to subordinates. More telling was the Wilson administration's growing hostility to dissent that would culminate in the Espionage Act, passed in the spring of 1918.

Such an outcome was not inevitable. For the first few months of the war, the IWW and the Wilson administration actually grew closer. Wobblies moderated their radicalism by staying out of the war controversy and elaborated an Americanism rhetoric that embraced American values and traditions. The IWW also clung to Wilsonian critiques of industrial capitalism, echoing the president's notion that agglomerated capital was a threat to democracy. Like Frank Walsh, Wilson's protégé on the National War

¹¹⁹ Ibid. The officers proved to be thorough investigators, confiscating literally tons of material from the IWW – up to and including typewriters and paper clips.

¹²⁰ Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson*, 399-400.

Labor Board, the Wobblies pursued a vision of industrial democracy that, while fundamentally different, promoted economic efficiency by empowering workers vis-à-vis the employer. The Wilson administration, concurrently, moved left. By 1917, Wilson had built a Democratic coalition that included labor. Though Wilson's vision of industrial democracy would never go as far as the IWW's (or, even Walsh's), the president did recognize that 19th century industrial capitalism was a threat to America. Through the NWLB, the federal government encouraged union organization and arbitrated wages, hours, and other issues that had been part of progressive efforts to humanize modern capitalism. That the two sides had grown somewhat closer made the September raids and arrests all the more shocking. In the matter of a month, the Progressive President had abruptly shifted from industrial democracy to traditional repressive means of resolving labor disputes. The arrests would decimate the IWW's leadership cadre and force the union onto the defensive. But, rhetorically, Wobblies would assert an even more aggressive brand of radical Americanism.

“They Have Shown Themselves the Real Anarchists”:

Wartime Repression and Turning the Tables on the Bosses

In early September 1917, the Justice Department raided IWW halls across the nation, apprehending scores of Wobbly organizers, officials, and job delegates, and seized literally tons of office equipment, paperwork, and furniture. A few months later, the Post Office deemed IWW newspapers unfit to be mailed. The federal legal assault shut down further organization. Resources that would have gone into strike funds or organizing drives were now diverted into bail funds and defense publicity campaigns.

With much of its leadership in jail, the IWW’s battle to reclaim the soul of America shifted from the factories, mines, and streets to a Chicago courtroom. The most prominent historian of the IWW, Melvyn Dubofsky, speculated about why a radical union that apparently did not think it could get a fair trial in a capitalist court voluntarily surrendered to authorities and participated in the Chicago trial of its leadership. Dubofsky argued that the Wobblies, believing that they had done nothing wrong, treated the trial as a matter of conscience. Furthermore, by winning acquittal in a federal trial of that magnitude, the IWW could score a substantial propaganda victory.¹²¹ Dubofsky is partly correct. But IWW participation in the Chicago trials was also consistent with the union’s sense of itself as an American organization. Committed to constitutionalism¹²²

¹²¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 426.

¹²² As Thompson stated, the IWW thought of its Constitution as a model for its own organization, a model of the United States government.

and loyalty, Wobblies submitted to trial because it could not do otherwise – even if they were fearful of capitalist influences on the court. Furthermore, the IWW had enjoyed a relatively successful record of acquittal during its short history.¹²³ While the motivations of all 101 Wobblies who gave themselves up to federal authorities for the Chicago trials will never be known, their actions fit with the IWW’s Americanism.

The IWW trial commenced on April 1, 1918, nearly a year after American entry into the war.¹²⁴ While its leadership languished in the Cook County jail since the September arrests, the union had mobilized to fight the class war on the shopfloor and raise money for the legal fight in Chicago. Much like the fighting in Europe, the trial would drag on through the spring and summer, finally terminating six months later on the last day of August. The federal government set out to prove that the IWW engaged in a national conspiracy to overthrow the republic. For weeks, the government weaved IWW publications and correspondence into a terrifying tapestry of bloodshed, horror, and revolution. Terms like “sabotage,” “direct action,” and “the destruction of the capitalist class” took on dark and distorted meanings before the jury. Government witnesses remembered Wobblies calling on miners and laborers to unite together to build a new world from the ashes of the old. The head of the IWW defense team, George Vanderveer, tried to point out that most of the state’s evidence came from before the American entry into the war, and this lay outside the scope of the indictment. Indeed, some of the Wobbly defendants had left the organization years before 1917. To federal prosecutors, proving the existence of a grand conspiracy was particularly important because they

¹²³ In trials such as the Etor and Giovannitti case, the Everett trial, dozens of free speech trials, the IWW won acquittal.

¹²⁴ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 423.

failed to produce any evidence of revolutionary acts.¹²⁵ Ultimately, the state rested its case on rhetoric. How could an organization so dedicated to revolution be engaged in anything other than a seditious conspiracy?

The IWW, of course, had a different narrative in mind. Taking the stand in their own defense, Wobblies explained the meaning of the revolution that they meant to launch. Using President Wilson's *The New Freedom*, they explained how corporate America had corrupted the democratic process and usurped the state itself. Accused of conspiracy, IWW stump speakers retorted that they were merely following Wilson's prescription. The prosecution tried to avoid the embarrassment of accused traitors using the President's book in their defense and moved to have it stricken from the record. Vanderveer shot back: "An attempt has been made to make it appear that this belief [capitalist domination of the government] is a peculiar, lawless belief of the organization...[which] found encouragement...in the declarations of the President of the United States."¹²⁶ If Wobbly speaker James Thompson and Woodrow Wilson say the same thing, asked Vanderveer, how can one be a traitor and the other be President? "When the man at the head of the Government speaks about the government and its relation to capitalists and says just what the witness [Thompson] says, [the prosecution attacks] as a false doctrine of the philosophy of [the IWW]."¹²⁷ Despite all the rumors of sabotage and treason, the IWW reminded the jury that it was law enforcement officers and vigilantes who assaulted

¹²⁵ Excepting, of course, the aforementioned strikes – though the Wobblies asserted that strike activity during the war was not revolutionary in nature.

¹²⁶ "U.S. vs. Haywood et al., June 27, 1918." Folder 3, Box 109, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 5263-5265.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 5263-5265. Ultimately, Illinois federal judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis ruled Wilson's *New Freedom* inadmissible in the trial. Three years later in 1921, Landis, baseball's first commissioner, would permanently ban eight members of the 1919 Chicago White Sox for their infamous conspiracy to throw the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds.

Wobblies, not the other way around.¹²⁸ IWW members found the idea that they were a threat to America laughable. To Wobblies, the IWW *was* America. Vanderveer, confident that weeks of IWW testimony would be more than satisfactory to acquit the defendants, declined to offer the jury a closing statement.

Wobbly defendants repeatedly emphasized Americanism in the trial. Wobbly locomotive engineer Norval Marlatt used the Declaration of Independence to justify the IWW program. “There is a very valuable document in the country, called the Declaration of Independence,” said the railroader, “It says in effect that to secure life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, governments are instituted among men...the present government has been destructive to those ends. Our present industries are managed and operated destructive of those rights.”¹²⁹ While the Declaration justified the overthrow of one government to be replaced by another, Marlatt emphasized the fact that Wobblies were after control of industry rather than Washington. “No sir,” said Marlatt on the stand, “I don’t want to overthrow the government. I only want to change the policy – that part of it which interferes with the liberty and happiness of a majority of the people.”¹³⁰ George Andreytchine, editor of the Russian language IWW newspaper, argued the IWW radicalism was part of a long tradition of progressive ideas. “There is nothing radical in the world; everything is natural,” explained the Russian immigrant to the Chicago courtroom, “some are more progressive and have advanced ideas, and ultimately they triumph, like the ideas in 1776...when they triumphed in the United States. Then later

¹²⁸ Trial summary from Boxes 103-118, Series V The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI.

¹²⁹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 31, 1918.” Folder 6, Box 114, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 9411-9415.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

when Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips and other American citizens, including President Lincoln, were fighting...against slavery in the South, then later it triumphed.”¹³¹ Wobblies found their inspiration in the Spirit of ’76 as well as the Abolitionist impulse, ideas that earlier generations of Americans considered radical. On trial for disloyalty and subversion, IWW members staked their claim on Americanism.

The *Solidarity* cartoon depicting the Bisbee deportation also showed up in court. According to government prosecutors, the cartoon’s depiction of deputies as analogues of German soldiers was a disloyal act. Ralph Chaplin, the editor, defended his cartoon: “The deportation of these miners from their homes and their families here in the United States of America, was just as great an atrocity and injustice as the deportation of the Belgians by the Hun troops in Europe.”¹³² As with IWW attempts to identify itself with the Wilson administration’s wartime labor policies, federal prosecutors quickly moved on. Repression of the radical labor union was nothing new, Wobblies usually thought of vigilantes as the mailed fist of the capitalist order. During the war, however, Wobblies articulated a very different theme. Anti-IWW vigilantes were no longer merely “capitalist thugs,” they had transformed into “anarchists” and “German soldiers.” The IWW, it seemed, had adopted the vocabulary of patriot citizens and the mainstream press.

In response to apparent war profiteering and unfavorable press coverage, the IWW declared in early 1918: “we doubt the patriotism of the lumber and copper trusts; we doubt the patriotism of the capitalist press; we doubt the patriotism of the paid

¹³¹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 25, 1918.” Folder 5, Box 113, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 8589-8593.

¹³² “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 19, 1918.” Folder 7, Box 112, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 7718.

servitors of the industrial plunderbund. We doubt also the pretensions of law and order coming from those who violate every law...”¹³³ By adopting the weapons of their adversaries, the Wobblies revealed that they well understood the contested ground of Americanism during the Progressive Era.

Widespread arrests of union organizers, insisted the Wobblies, undercut the sincerity of the Wilson administration. In October 1917, the *Worker* reported that “There are several hundred wobblies who have been placed in a position [jail] where they would feel freer if the world were made safe for democracy.”¹³⁴ In “Our Changing Americanism,” a Wobbly identified only as B. Itso lamented how the war crisis destroyed American freedom of opinion as federal agents raided IWW halls. Finding that conformity provided the only safe way to avoid repression, Itso mocked Americans for splitting the country into patriots and traitors:

It was formerly that any person who was native-born or naturalized was known as an American; but that is entirely changed now. A new system is in vogue, and since its adoption... whether one is or is not an American chiefly depends upon who was talking to you last and upon what the last one’s personal opinion of your personal opinion happened to be. If the two opinions coincided, you remained an American; but if the opinions clashed, you automatically and instantly became un-American, and such you would be obliged to remain until such time as you would meet some kindred spirit who would re-place the stamp of approval upon you.¹³⁵

¹³³ *Worker*, Author unknown, “Industrial Pirates Seek to Disguise the Issue,” Feb. 23, 1918, 2.

¹³⁴ *Worker*, author unknown, untitled, Oct. 13, 1917, 2. Coming a month after the federal government’s arrest of over a hundred Wobblies, as well as during a campaign by several states (California, Idaho, Washington, Arizona, and Minnesota) to round up IWW organizers, the comment is typical of the union’s dark humor. But, it is also a reflection of the ominous turn of events that afflicted the IWW over the past several months.

¹³⁵ *Worker*, B. Itso, “Our Changing Americanism,” Sept. 1, 1917, 4. Itso went on: “The old-time simplicity no longer exists; you can no longer tell who’s who or what’s what as easily as formerly. Today the population is composed of American citizens, un-American citizens, American aliens, un-American aliens, German spies, and IWW.”

The article was a reminder that Americans should not so easily surrender the values and freedoms that they had long championed. Wobblies wondered how Americans could fight for democracy in France as they destroyed it in America.

Not surprisingly, Wobblies found that war-time America did not measure up to the high standards of the Revolutionary generation. “Year by year, it must and will go back,” wrote an unnamed Wobbly in December 1917, “year by year, the tone of public feeling must sink lower down; year by year, the Congress and the Senate must become of less account before all decent men; and year by year, the memory of the Great Fathers of the Revolution must be outraged more and more, in the bad life of their degenerate child.”¹³⁶ Not all criticisms were that harsh. Infamously irreverent, the IWW quipped that “if Washington were to return to this country and take a look at our government he would lose no time in making another farewell address.”¹³⁷

The IWW clung to its left-wing Wilsonianism even as the Wilson administration indicted and arrested its leaders. The federal government’s turn against the Wobblies did not necessarily mark a break in its wartime labor policy in general. The NWLB continued to arbitrate labor disputes through most of the rest of the war and the federal government did not condemn non-radical labor unionism. Still, the prosecution of the Wobblies demarcated how far progressive Wilsonians were willing to go. A Walshian partnership between labor and the state was acceptable, as long as workers deferred to the decisions of federal agencies. The anarcho-syndicalism of the Wobblies, however,

¹³⁶ *Worker*, author unknown, “The Degenerate Child,” Dec. 22, 1917, 2. The *Worker* was inspired by Charles Dickens’ criticism of American materialism.

¹³⁷ *Solidarity*, author unknown, untitled, Nov. 23, 1918, 3. This quote appears in one of the first issues to appear after the war. Federal agents shuttered *Solidarity*’s press in late October of 1917 on sedition charges and the newspaper did not put out a new issue for thirteen months, until November 16, 1918.

proved too much to bear. As much as Wilson and the IWW did inch closer together during the war, they did not converge. Both visions of industrial democracy and Americanism collided in a Chicago courtroom in 1918.

Conclusion: Americanism Denied

Two months before the end of the war, the one hundred and one Wobbly defendants indicted by the federal government were found guilty by a Chicago jury. On August 31, 1918, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis sentenced them to prison terms ranging from five to twenty years and fines that totaled more than \$2 million.¹³⁸ The Wobbly ideal of the worker citizen, it seemed, had been thoroughly rejected. The stunned Wobblies did not plead for mercy, even though they did not think of themselves as guilty. A few used their last few hours in the courtroom to restate the case that they had been trying to make all along. Miner Stanley Clark remarked, “As far as conscious action in a conspiracy is concerned...my conviction is more of a shock to me on that account than it could have been otherwise. I would say this...if my incarceration would assist the Allied Government of this country in winning a victory, I am perfectly willing to stay in any position anywhere until that victory is won.”¹³⁹ Lumberjack organizer Joe Gordon simply stated, “I was found guilty for something what I consider I was exercising my rights – to resent or criticize any act by any official. That is all.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 437. In today’s dollars, the fines were roughly equivalent to \$28-29 million. Ben Fletcher, one of the leaders of the Philadelphia longshoremen union and the only African American defendant famously remarked at the strident sentencing, “Judge Landis is using poor English today. His sentences are too long.”

¹³⁹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., Judge’s instructions, sentences.” Folder 6, Box 118, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 17-18.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28. Of course, not all the Wobblies found such peace and equanimity before they were shipped off to Leavenworth. Ralph Chaplin snapped at the Judge, “I have been convicted of an imaginary crime by a stupid jury...” before he was silenced and led away.

The IWW trial empowered state governments to arrest and imprison Wobblies. With the precedent set by the Haywood trial, mere membership in the union triggered the application of state criminal syndicalism laws. In essence, the ruling only formalized a process that had already been underway since late 1917, when Wobblies would be indiscriminately thrown in jail until a writ of habeas corpus could be issued. After the trial, Wobblies began to run out of legal remedies to fight back. Alien Wobblies proved particularly vulnerable, and many were deported – especially in a particularly virulent series of legal actions in the Pacific Northwest that historian William Preston called a “labyrinth of deportation.”¹⁴¹

Out on bail for much of 1919 and 1920 while his conviction was running through the appeals process, Big Bill Haywood stumped around the nation to raise funds for the IWW’s ever-increasing criminal defense obligations. Given the precarious nature of his freedom, Haywood shied away from most of the labor turmoil of the period. As the “Red Summer” of 1919 gave way to the Palmer Raids of early 1920, his hope that peacetime would bring freedom to imprisoned Wobs around the country receded. That year, the United States Circuit of Appeals upheld the Wobbly convictions as President Wilson refused to grant clemency to the beleaguered union.¹⁴² With so many of his hopes dashed, Haywood’s thoughts began to drift to the Soviet Union. “Here is what we have been dreaming about. Here is the IWW all feathered out,” Haywood remarked to Ralph Chaplin.¹⁴³ Continually rejected by the America that he had longed to redeem, Haywood

¹⁴¹ William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).

¹⁴² Melvyn Dubofsky, *“Big Bill” Haywood* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 130-136.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

saw exile as his only option. On March 31, 1921, he skipped bail and fled to the Soviet Union. Steaming out of Hoboken, Haywood remembered coming on deck in time to see the Statue of Liberty as the ship passed. “Good-by, you’ve had your back turned on me too long,” said Haywood as he saluted the statue, “I am now going to the land of freedom.”¹⁴⁴

In this sense, what historians tend to think of as the “First Red Scare” started long before the battles of 1919 and the Palmer Raids. Official legal actions against Wobblies and extralegal violence inflicted against union members across the country took its toll. In the backdrop of a severe postwar recession and the split of the radical left caused by the creation of the Communist Party in America, the Industrial Workers of the World was utterly decimated. A rump organization would continue to function after the crushing defeats of 1918-1921. The mid-1920’s would witness spirited Wobbly efforts to organize the coal mines of Kentucky and Colorado, attempts that would end in bloody defeats. Today, the IWW still exists, perhaps still waiting for a time to construct “One Big Union.”

Historians, particularly those writing during the heyday of the New Left, tended to see the Wobblies as romantic labor radicals who enjoyed a meteoric rise before the war that was matched by an equally rapid fall. In popular memory, if the Wobblies are remembered at all, they are most often lumped in with the Communists or seen as an arcane radical organization unconnected to any larger American narrative. The arc of

¹⁴⁴ William Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 361. According to Haywood biographer Melvyn Dubofsky, Haywood’s autobiography was likely ghostwritten by the Bolsheviks, an assertion supported by several Wobblies that knew him. Still, even if the account of Haywood’s last moments in America was fictional, it seems to support Dubofsky’s argument that Haywood was never quite the same after leaving the United States.

American radicalism that runs through Thomas Paine, antebellum labor organizers, the Knights of Labor, and the IWW has been all but forgotten.

Radicals like the Wobblies saw Americanism as the foundation of their attacks on industrial capitalism. They sought to destroy what they saw as a threat to American values and traditions. In the best of times, it seemed as if the power of Tom Paine and the abolitionists would remake the nation. Yet, every time, radical Americanism failed to shake the foundations of capitalism. During the 1940's, even the CIO's vision of radical Americanism withered away, though the labor organization remained.¹⁴⁵ A more durable form of Americanism has wed traditions of liberty and freedom to the market.¹⁴⁶ Long before the Cold War linked capitalism with freedom, the American justice system had held freedom of contract more sacrosanct than other "protected" freedoms.¹⁴⁷ Capitalist Americanism has been reified by mainstream politicians with enthusiastic backing from a business community and its deep pockets. In seizing the terrain of Americanism, business has done much to shape the terms of debate in labor relations.

Conflating labor, particularly labor radicals, with "foreignness" and "un-Americanism" has long been a tool used by business to maintain its power over the American working class. In part, business has done so because it has been so effective. This thesis does not claim to explain why Americans, even workers, have so often accepted this harmful construction of labor. Perhaps it was because so many members of

¹⁴⁵ Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*.

¹⁴⁶ For capitalist Americanism after World War II, see Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); or Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹⁴⁷ William Wiecek, *The Lost World of Classical Legal Thought: Law and Ideology in America, 1886-1937* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

the American working class had, indeed, been born outside of this country, at least until the Second World War. Or perhaps the Communist Party, the labor radicals who picked up the banner of the radical left after the passing of the IWW, had such concrete ties to a foreign government made the message easy to believe. Labor, while it can be as self-interested and corrupt as other institutions in America, has long been trying to make “We the people” a reality for the masses of working people that have little power to determine the course of their lives on their own. Today, as the labor movement is at its lowest ebb since before the New Deal, conservative politicians and business organizations continue to marginalize labor. Even after the open shop drives of the 1980’s and 90’s, conservatives have successfully portrayed organized labor as a threat to our nation, our budgets, and our pocketbooks. Wobbly Americanism seems more remote than ever.

On the eve of the Second World war, after years of fighting the influence of Communists and fascists in the labor movement, ex-editor of *Solidarity*, Ralph Chaplin wondered if “a man learns to love his country only when someone tries to take it away from him.”¹⁴⁸ Yet, if he had looked back to the IWW’s struggles to assert its own Americanism during the 1910’s (some of which within the paper he edited for over a year), he might have realized that the seeds of patriotism were there all along. Wobblies always spoke in multiple voices, but, a powerful strain of Americanism persisted through the cacophony of ideas, opinions, and ideology. Like many Americans during the Progressive Era, historians have failed to weave together the American vision of the IWW, a vision that co-existed with vituperative attacks on capitalism and on the

¹⁴⁸ Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 409.

American institutions that it had corrupted. In a desperate letter to President Wilson, Wobbly copper mine organizer and victim of the Bisbee Deportation A.S. Embree begged for federal aid against the depredations of vigilantes. Embree tried to explain to Wilson that the Wobbly miners were dedicated Americans, even if “we make no frenzied protestations of loyalty or patriotism.”¹⁴⁹

Wartime repression snuffed out the flame of Wobbly Americanism along with the IWW itself. Devastated by the open-shop drives of the early 1920’s, the AFL retreated into cooperation and craft unionism. If the era is more known for jazz, the stock market, and Al Capone, it was also “lean years” for American workers.¹⁵⁰ The 1920’s were certainly lean for labor Americanism. The radical Americanism of the Wobblies lost out to the “American Plan” of company unionism. It would take almost twenty years for workers to again breath Americanism into the activism of the radical left. In the throes of depression, miners, steelworkers, autoworkers and others sought to replace industrial capitalism with social justice in the canon of American values. Radical CIO members sought to build a social democracy rather than a cooperative commonwealth, but the attack on unfettered industrial capitalism was similar. Others, to use Liz Cohen’s phrase, sought to establish a “moral capitalist” society.¹⁵¹ Though the legacy of Wobbly Americanism was lost, it was not altogether dead. The CIO (as well as labor movements around the world) would later adopt the IWW song “Solidarity Forever” as their own.

¹⁴⁹ “U.S. vs. Haywood et al., July 3, 1918.” Folder 1, Box 111, Series V. The Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Walter Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs, Detroit, MI. 6316-6321.

¹⁵⁰ Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker 1920-1933* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1966).

¹⁵¹ Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

Written by Ralph Chaplin in 1914-15, the song reminds workers that collective action is the key to victory. Set to the tune of “John Brown’s Body,” the same tune as the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” the song itself stands as a testament to Wobbly Americanism. Ironically, the most enduring legacy of the IWW – the song – is also the most misunderstood. With a tune that blends both the radical abolitionism of the antebellum era and American patriotism, “Solidarity Forever” is a reminder that the radical left still has a claim on the core of American traditions and values.

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