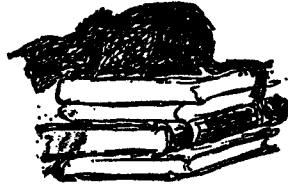


Book



Reviews

WE SHALL BE ALL: A HISTORY OF THE I.W.W., by Melvin Dubofsky. Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1969, 557 pp., \$12.50.

THE FOUNDING CONVENTION OF THE I.W.W. (Proceedings). Merit Publishers, New York, 1969, 616 pp., \$15.00. (Orig. publ. by the New York Labor News Co. New York, 1905; new edition photo-offset.)

Reviewed by Burton Hall

IN FEBRUARY 1917, James Slovick, the Secretary of the IWW's Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union, wrote to W. D. Haywood, the parent body's Secretary-Treasurer, asking for a special convention to consider a nationwide general strike in the event that Congress should declare war. His letter conceded that the odds were against the success of an anti-war general strike. The IWW, after all, was still too weak; the American working class was too patriotic; the capitalist class was too strong. But as a practical matter, he argued, the IWW had no choice. If war were declared and military conscription were introduced—as it would be if the war were to continue for any length of time—then the IWW would have to resist. And in consequence, Slovick said, “our organization will stand in danger of being completely destroyed.” Better to take the initiative and confront militarism head-on than sit quietly and be destroyed by it; by openly resisting, the IWW could make its principles clear and at least demonstrate to posterity that it was the only labor organization in the world willing to take a stand against bloodshed.

Slovick's arguments were undeniably realistic; indeed, his prophecies came true within a few months. What is more, his arguments accorded with everything that the IWW had been saying for the past twelve years, and especially with the IWW's 1916 Convention resolution promising anti-militarism in time of peace and, in time of war, general strike in all industries. Yet the IWW did not respond affirmatively to Slovick's appeal. Haywood simply rejected Slovick's request for a convention and filed his letter away, where the U.S. Justice Department found it a few months later. The IWW faced the war crisis passively—and, although the organization was not “entirely destroyed” in consequence (as Slovick had suggested it might be), it was permanently eliminated as a serious revolutionary force.

An ideal history would provide some clear explanation of why the IWW failed to meet its crisis of 1917 as militantly (and successfully) as it had met its earlier crises. Did the leadership, newly “centralized” by the 1916 Convention, suffer a failure of nerve? Had the wobblies become soft on the bosses' government (on the “slugging committee of the capitalist class”) ? Was it a failure of individual leaders or of the organization as a whole?

Prof. Dubofsky's new history is less than ideal: it offers no simple or

clear explanation. It does, however, demolish some facile ones: such, for example, as the one that would place all the blame on "Big Bill" Haywood. With the exception of Slovick and the soon-to-be-martyred Frank Little, very few leading Wobblies had any clearer idea than Haywood had as to how the IWW should deal with America's involvement in the war. And Gurley Flynn, retrospectively the heroine of Stalinist historians, was the most confused of all. In 1917-1918 the "rebel girl," in jail along with every other leading IWW figure, was busy boasting in the IWW press of her continued IWW membership and her devotion to IWW principles while at the same time writing secretly to President Wilson, asking to be released from jail on the grounds that she had left the IWW before America entered the war and that she no longer held any revolutionary ideas.

That the war did in fact provide the IWW with its greatest crisis is obvious: but for America's entry into the war, as Dubofsky notes, the IWW would very likely have organized heavy industry as successfully as the CIO did twenty years later. At the beginning of 1917 it had a solid base in agriculture, in logging, in non-ferrous metal mining, and in maritime and had, during the past five years, led tens of thousands of workers at a time to strike in textiles (at Lawrence and Paterson), in steel (at McKees' Rocks), in rubber (at Akron) and in iron mining (in the Mesabi Range).

Yet by the end of 1917 the IWW was all but destroyed. By July, when the IWW's General Executive Board met to decide how to respond to Wilson's draft law, the signs of danger were obvious. During the preceding three months IWW offices in Kansas City, Detroit, Spokane and Duluth had been raided and sacked by state militiamen, by "off-duty" U.S. Marines, local businessmen, soldiers and sailors, and other vigilantes. On July 12, 1917, only a few days before the GEB meeting, sheriff's deputies in Bisbee, Arizona violently "deported" 1200 IWW mine workers and alleged IWW "sympathizers" out of town and out of state, forcing them to subsist in the New Mexico desert for the next several months—a foretaste of the persecutions that were to come.

And on July 31, only a few days after the GEB meeting, GEB-member Frank Little was dragged by a gang of businessmen-vigilantes from his Butte, Montana hotel room, playfully tortured for a few hours, and then lynched from a railroad trestle—another foretaste of what was to come.

Nevertheless, when the GEB met in July it did nothing more radical than endorse Haywood's equivocal position which, beneath the fiery rhetoric, left the question of draft resistance up to each individual member's conscience. And in early September, after the Justice Department had raided IWW offices throughout the country, seizing the organization's books, records, correspondence, office equipment and everything else (more than five tons of such material from the Chicago office alone), Haywood reported to the membership that everything would be back to normal within a few weeks.

In reality, within a few weeks Haywood and more than 300 other leading wobblies were in jail on federal indictments charging them with various counts of sedition, obstructing the war effort, and striking companies engaged in war contracts. And most of those imprisoned wobblies remained in jail for years to come.

Even then the IWW remained tame. Not only did the wobblies submit

peacefully to arrest but, more suprisingly, the IWW's defense strategy for the next two years was entirely legal and almost purely legalistic. It limited itself almost entirely to raising funds, setting up defense committees, and conducting the battle in the courtrooms—apparently concerned lest any militancy on its part embarrass its lawyers or increase the hysteria of the assault against it.

BACK IN 1905, Haywood had told the IWW's founding convention that "this organization will be formed, based and founded on the class struggle, having in view no compromise and no surrender" and declared that its one object and purpose was "to bring the workers of this country into the possession of the full value of the product of their toil." If early adversity toughens commitment to such principles, the IWW's early history would seem a guarantee that it would remain loyal. At the time of its founding the IWW rested organizationally almost entirely upon two already-established labor bodies both of which shortly thereafter abandoned it: the Western Federation of Miners (which withdrew from affiliation the next year) and the Socialist Labor Party's "Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance" (which withdrew two years after that). Shorn of these two constituent elements, the IWW was reduced by 1907 to a handful of revolutionary agitators bound together by nothing more than a clear and consistent set of revolutionary principles.

The most important of those principles, after 1908 at least, was that workers should reject such seemingly "easy" paths to the victory of their class as politics and the ballot box. The workers must learn to exercise their own strength, their own solidarity—said wobblies on soap-boxes and in meeting halls all over the country—instead of relying upon lawyers and politicians and "radical" political parties.

Because of that basic and painfully-established principle, the IWW has been and still is uniformly attacked both by Party-lining labor historians and by CIA-subsidized ones. Yet it is also because of that principle that the IWW was able to develop the workers it influenced into active revolutionaries—instead of into the passive "supporters" and "followers" that a "radical" political party would have made of them.

The IWW's rejection of politics became definite in 1908. During the next ten years it fought its great struggles. It organized such previously "unorganizable" industries as agriculture and logging. Teaching workers to fight against oppression *directly*, it filled the jails of such cities as Spokane, Fresno and San Diego in defense of free speech and it threatened general strike unless such early "class war prisoners" as Ford and Suhr, or Ettor and Giovanitti (not to mention Haywood himself) were set free. Its reputation for genuinely radical tactics, for revolutionary *direct* action, led great masses of workers to ask it for strike leadership. That same reputation led several established labor organizations to affiliate with it (the marine firemen, or MFOW, for example, and the Philadelphia longshoremen), and led several miners' locals to leave the WFM and *re-affiliate*. The IWW raised the class struggle in America to a pitch never reached before and at the same time built itself into a flourishing and potentially gigantic labor organization.

Having done so much by acting on its principles, the IWW unaccountably suspended those principles when faced with a direct attack by the federal

government. Had it acted militantly it might not have been successful. But the results of *not* acting militantly were disastrous: the IWW was transformed into a minor and ineffectual radical sect. And so it has remained ever since, ever-diminishing in substance and import.

Prof. Dubofsky has written a good history of the IWW, though to call it "definitive" would be a bit excessive. It is more complete and fully-rounded than Prof. Brissenden's classic of 1919 (though its publications is nothing like the major event that the earlier work's was). It is undeniably a better history than any of the works on the IWW that have appeared *since* Brissenden's and, except for Joyce Kornbluh's magnificent collection of IWW "voices," as readable as any.

MUCH OF WHAT THE IWW MEANT in American radical history is expressed in the *Proceedings* of its founding convention of 1905. The IWW had yet to fight its battles and hammer out its principles but the spirit it began with was expressed in that first convention, which brought together such radicals as Haywood, Debs, De Leon, Mother Jones, Lucy Parsons, A. M. Simons, Luella Twining, T. J. Hagerty and W. E. Trautmann (to mention just a few). These *Proceedings* have long been a treat to students of radicalism and of American history; their republication now is a boon to the public and to those libraries that do not already have this valuable book on their shelves.

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FIVE LECTURES by Herbert Marcuse. Beacon Press, Boston (1970). 107 pp.
\$1.95.

Reviewed by Keith Brooks

"FIVE LECTURES" BY HERBERT MARCUSE is a collection of five essays based on lectures delivered over the course of eleven years (1956-1967). The first two essays, "Freedom and Freud's Theory of Instincts" and "Progress and Freud's Theory of Instincts" are further attempts to put Freud in the service of the revolution by pointing out what for Marcuse are the revolutionary implications in the Freudian model of the person. The third essay, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man" (1963) tells us that Freudian Man, as portrayed in the first two essays and most comprehensively in *Eros and Civilization*, no longer exists due to social and historical changes under capitalism. While some have held that Freudian Man never existed, and that was a good thing, Marcuse holds that the person describable in Freudian terms no longer lives, and that is a bad thing. Thus the very obsolescence constitutes a social critique. "The End of Utopia" is a statement to the effect that a reorganization of productive forces in the richest and most powerful nation in the history of the world would and could mean, not just a quantitative increase in progress, but a qualitative leap or break from the way of life is experienced now. The potential realm of freedom prepared by the wealth of the capitalist realm would transform the very nature of work. It would not solely be a matter of organizing work in the most rational way possible, reducing it to the bare minimum, but rather that work and its meaning would change; the difference between work and play would become minimal.