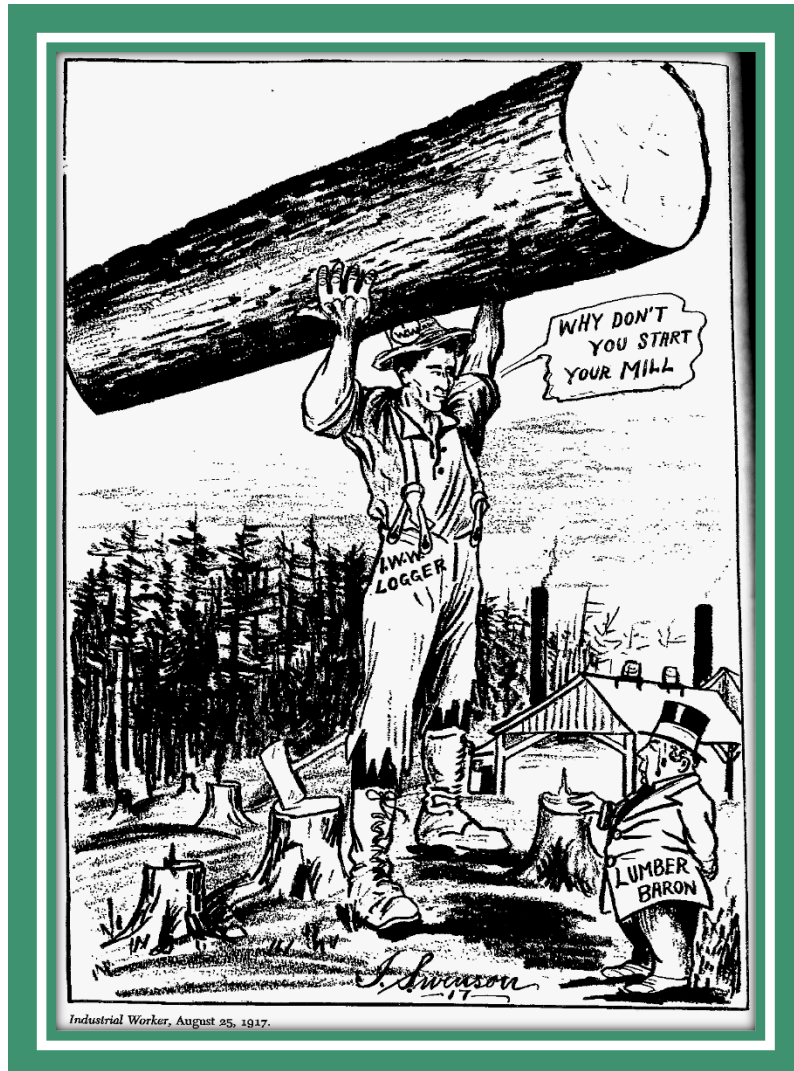


Chapter 1 : An Injury to One is an Injury to All!



“The mill men all insist on one thing: that the Government will grant the manufacturers protection from the lawless element of the I.W.W.’s”

—J. P. Weyerhaeuser, 1917

*Is there aught we hold in common with the greedy parasite,
Who would lash us into serfdom and would crush us with his might,
Is there anything left to us but to organize and fight?
The union makes us strong...*

—Lyrics excerpted from *Solidarity Forever*, by Ralph Chaplin, ca. 1915

The timber industry has, throughout nearly its entire history, been in the control of an elite minority of the very rich and powerful, and they have been especially avaricious, violent, and repressive towards all who would challenge their power. They have also—in spite of a barrage of slick propaganda trumpeting their careful management of the resource—depleted most of the virgin forests of the Pacific Northwest. Many environmental organizations can trace their origins to opposition to such practices, and in the struggles by environmentalists to preserve forestlands, timber workers have had a reputation for being their fiercest adversaries, and in many cases, this is true. Timber workers have a well-deserved reputation for being outspoken about the pride of purpose in their job, as well as a deeply ingrained cultural machismo. Yet lumber harvesting and production is historically one of the ten most dangerous jobs in the industrialized world, and timber workers are among those most exploited by their employers. One would logically expect the timber workers to be highly resistant to such treatment, but in recent years they haven't been. This wasn't always so. To understand why, one must examine the industry's origins.

Before the arrival of European-American settlers to the Pacific Northwest, the entire region stretching from northern California to Canada and Alaska from the Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountains was dominated by coniferous old growth forests. At least 20 million acres of this land was forested, dominated by various species of trees, some of them hundreds of feet in height, over a dozen feet in diameter, and centuries or even millennia old.¹ In the southwestern part of this region, stretching from Big Sur to roughly what is now the Oregon state line, in a belt that was at least twenty miles wide for most of its expanse a very unique species of tree dominated, *Sequoia sempervirens*, commonly known as the California redwoods, some of them standing over 350 feet tall. Their close (and similarly large) cousins, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, better known as the Giant Sequoia, only grew in a few isolated spots in the southern end of the Sierra Nevada foothills. These vast forests were far more than the trees, however. Hundreds, if not thousands of plant and animal species lived and flourished within these wooded habitats, and as far as is known, the indigenous population of the Americas had no significant lasting impact on California's an-

cient redwood forests, nor did they have any lasting effect on the timberlands of the Pacific Northwest in general.² Like the Native Americans, the old growth forests of the Pacific Northwest had remained left more or less untouched for thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of years.

The coming of the white man changed all of that. The Russians first began exploiting the redwoods for the construction of Fort Ross in 1812, during their very brief settlement there.³ As more Europeans arrived, the forests south of San Francisco were the first to be logged, usually through clearcutting, until these ancient stands were completely liquidated by 1860. In those days, loggers used hand saws, and felling an ancient redwood could take anywhere from two-to-five days to complete. The redwoods to the north of the Golden Gate in what is now Marin County were logged next, especially along rivers that allowed easy transportation by the available modes of the day. By this time, around 1881, the steam engine had replaced pack animals. Though this first wave of automation did not have a significant impact on the number of workers involved in the logging process, it greatly increased the impact logging had on the redwoods. Entire forests were liquidated, no matter how small the tree, because even the baby trees were used to build the skid roads used for hauling the larger ones. These forests were never replanted, and very few of them grew back, and in some cases, farmlands replaced them. By the beginning of the 20th Century, all but a few of these ancient trees were gone and logging operations migrated north to Sonoma County. One quarter century later, most of these old growth forests were likewise gone.⁴

The remoteness of California's "North Coast", stretching north from Point Arena, in southwestern Mendocino County, to what is now the Oregon border, which is comprised of mountainous, rocky terrain with few rivers and bays to provide easy access, helped keep that region free of logging until the latter half of the 19th Century. The California Gold Rush of 1849, however, greatly increased the demand for timber, and that helped draw opportunistic lumbermen to what is now Del Norte, Humboldt, and Mendocino Counties.⁵ The further discovery of

² "Redwood Summer, an Issues Primer", by Bill Meyers, *Ideas & Action*, Fall 1990.

³ "Chronology of California North Coast Timber Industry Activity 1767-1988", by R. Bartley and S. Yoneda, *Anderson Valley Advertiser*, July 25 and August 1, 1990.

⁴ Meyers, op. cit.

⁵ Bartley and Yoneda, op. cit.

¹ Foster, John Bellamy, *The Limits of Environmentalism Without Class: Lessons from the Ancient Forest Struggle of the Pacific Northwest*, New York, NY, Monthly Review Press (Capitalism, Nature, Socialism series), 1993, Part 2, "Ecological Catastrophe and Social Conflict".

gold along the Trinity River to the east of Humboldt County brought about a second, smaller but highly significant gold rush on the North Coast.⁶ The initial settlement in what became the city of Eureka at Humboldt Bay happened in 1850, the year of California's admission to the Union as the 31st American state.⁷ As early as 1870, logging and milling industries dominated the region's economy.⁸ Homesteading laws allowed (non-indigenous) settlers to acquire 160 acres of land at approximately \$1.25 per acre, and redwood forests produced on average \$1,500 per acre. This created a land rush on California's ancient forests such that by the turn of the Twentieth Century, most of them were in private hands.⁹ The Giant Sequoias only managed to escape destruction because they proved too difficult to log and transport in those days.¹⁰

The turn of the century Presidential administrations of Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt were, at the time, progressive on environmental matters, at least by the standards that existed in those days, and they built upon the progress of previous administrations. As early as 1876, the US Government began to concern itself with forest preservation. That year, an act of Congress created the office of Special Agent in the Department of Agriculture to assess the quality and conditions of forests in the United States. In 1881, the office was expanded into the newly formed Division of Forestry. The Forest Reserve Act of 1891 authorized withdrawing land from the public domain as "forest reserves," managed by the Department of the Interior, but this was not the result of grassroots environmental activism. The National Forest System was partly the result of concerted action by Los Angeles-area businessmen and property owners who were concerned by the harm being done to the watershed of the San Gabriel Mountains by ranchers and miners.¹¹ The Bureau would eventually become the US Forest Service in 1905, and its first chief was a man named Gifford Pinchot. Pinchot sought to turn public land policy from one that dispersed resources to private holdings

to one that maintained federal ownership and management of public land. Pinchot was a progressive who was a strong adherent to the efficiency movement, and in the matter of forestry, that meant the most efficient and waste free harvesting methods available. Under Pinchot's guidance, the early US Forest Service administrations promoted conservation, albeit on the service of maximizing the potential use of the resource.¹²

At the same time, the first groups of environmentalists fought the encroachment of commercial logging interests on wilderness throughout the Pacific Northwest. In 1892, John Muir established the Sierra Club, partly to duplicate his efforts to preserve California's Yosemite Valley, which, with the help of President Roosevelt, had become the nation's second National Park after Yellowstone in Montana.¹³ From these efforts the US Government established the National Park System, but almost from the start, the timber barons sought to undermine it, and successfully engaged in divide and conquer tactics to achieve that goal. As head of the US Forest Service under the Roosevelt and Taft administrations, Gifford Pinchot had jurisdiction over the National Park System, but his vision of "efficient resource use" clashed with Muir's. Their competing visions of conservationism came to a head over the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir and dam in 1908.¹⁴

During the early 1900s, the City of San Francisco had been battling with a private water company that provided subpar service at high prices. Their solution was the construction of a municipally owned water and power company to be created from damming the Hetch Hetchy Valley. In the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire which damaged much of the city, the private water company failed to provide adequate water supplies to prevent the destruction, thus creating a political tidal wave pushing for the Hetch Hetchy project. Muir and the Sierra Club opposed the project, but with Pinchot in command of the National Park System, the dam would eventually

⁶ http://www.nps.gov/redw/historyculture/area-history.htm#CP_JUMP_196761

⁷ Bartley and Yoneda, op. cit.

⁸ "Log Export History: Mill Jobs Exported", by Edie Butler, *Hard Times*, Vol. 3, #1, February 1983.

⁹ Meyers, op. cit.

¹⁰ "Forest Giant", by Eric Quammen, *National Geographic*, December 2012.

¹¹ "Federal Land Management: Observations on a Possible Move of the Forest Service into the Department of the Interior", GAO report, February 11, 2009.

¹² "The History of Forestry in America", page 710, by W.N. Sparhawk in *Trees: Yearbook of Agriculture, 1949*. Washington, DC.

¹³ Bartley and Yoneda, op. cit. Unfortunately, according to radical ecologist Mark Dowie, Muir's motivations were tinged with Eurocentric colonialism (*Sun Magazine*, August 2013), specifically the eviction of indigenous Miwoks, Mono Paiutes, and Ahwahnechee who migrated in and out of the valley seasonally subsisting off the land in a more or less harmonious, symbiotic relationship—quite unlike the European lumber baron settler-colonizers the Sierra Club was supposedly fighting.

¹⁴ Fox, Stephen, *John Muir and His Legacy*, Boston, MA, Little Brown, 1981, pages 139-47.

be built in 1912 under the Wilson administration.¹⁵ Although well intended, this project established the precedent that human interests came before biological ones—even in national parks—and in doing so the government opened the door for private exploitation of public resources. The implications of this decision would soon prove to be dire.

* * * * *

By the turn of the Twentieth Century, practically all private timberlands in the United States and Canada were already controlled by large corporations—called “trusts” and “monopoly groups” in those days—and among them, the largest were owned by Rockefeller and Weyerhaeuser.¹⁶ At one point, lumber corporations were so powerful and their holdings so vast, the United States Department of Commerce under the President Taft administration reported, “There (is) a dominating control of our standing timber in a comparatively few enormous holdings steadily towards the control of the lumber industry.” The commercial value of this timber was measured at no less than \$6 billion (in 1920-dollar amounts), owned by no more than “ten monopoly groups aggregating only 1,802 holders.” The amount of standing timber was measured at 1.2 *quadrillion* board feet, or approximately enough wood to build a bridge more than two feet thick, five miles wide, and 3,310 miles long (the approximate distance from New York City to Liverpool).¹⁷ The lumber magnates were exorbitantly wealthy and no less robber baron capitalists than those who owned railroads or vast oil reserves.

By contrast, conditions in those days for the lumber *workers* were abysmal. Workers were paid just barely enough to survive, if that, and ten or even twelve hour-workdays were common. Loggers tended to be itinerant workers and lived in camps where the living conditions were vile, bunk-houses unspeakably filthy and overcrowded, the water polluted, and the food rotten. Many workers had to pack their own blankets from job to job and many other conditions cried for improvement.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the sawmills

could credibly have been described as “satanic”. Workers endured similar long hours of work and pitifully meager wages, and few who worked as sawyers for any significant length of time escaped without at least one serious injury to one or both hands. Their fellow workers in the woods faced a similar daily array of horrors that could result in mutilation or even untimely death, and there were little or no safety standards to mitigate potential loss of limb or even life. Workers paid a monthly hospital fee of \$1, which was no small amount in those days. The hospital was company owned, and the doctor’s role was to dispense the injured or ill worker as quickly as possible with as little hassle to the employer as manageable. The profit of the “lumber trust” trumped all other considerations. To make matters worse, the vaunted American “democracy” was made mockery of by the realpolitik of corporate dominated timber communities. Whole towns, counties, even states—including all branches of the government—were owned lock, stock, and barrel by the timber corporations. In some cases, this was *literally* true, as lumber companies were known for creating “company towns”.¹⁹

Job security was nonexistent. Collusion between local authorities and lumber mill owners, shootouts, and lynching of dissident radicals characterized labor relations throughout the Pacific Northwest.²⁰ In most logging camps, timber fallers could not obtain employment unless they first obtained a ticket, for no small fee, from an employment agent, much like a modern temp agency. These agents, known to many workers as “job sharks”, worked in concert with the lumber corporations, generally to keep wages low and conditions abysmal. In some cases, the “shark” would be constantly shipping new gangs of workers to the logging camp, while the employers were working another gang, while meanwhile, the gang they had just discharged was on its way back to the employment agent, giving rise to the so-called “three-gang system”.²¹ IWW singer-songwriter Utah Phillips in somewhat nostalgic historical recollection half humorously referred to this as “the bosses’ idea of perpetual motion”, though to the timber worker this was no joke.²² If the worker complained about his

¹⁵ Fox, op. cit.

¹⁶ Rowan, James: The IWW in the Lumber Industry, Chicago, IL, Industrial Workers of the World, 1922.

¹⁷ Smith, the Hon. Herbert Knox, The Lumber Industry, Part 1: Standing Timber, US Government, Department of Labor, 1919, reprinted in Rowan, James, op. cit.

¹⁸ “Lumber Workers: You Need Organization”, leaflet by the IWW’s Lumber Workers Industrial Union 120, ca. 1927.

¹⁹ Rowan, op. cit.

²⁰ The Great Lumber Strike of Humboldt County, 1935 by Frank Onstine, portions of which were reprinted in the *Country Activist*, September 1985.

²¹ Rowan, op. cit.

²² “The Origin of the Hiring Hall and Free Speech Fights”, by Utah Phillips, Making Speech Free, music and spoken word album, IWW, recorded May 7, 1999 in San Francisco, CA.

lot, took ill, or was injured on the job, the employers would contact the shark for replacements.²³

Meanwhile, workers in the mills were under constant pressure to maintain production. To speak out against these injustices was to risk not only (early) termination, but blacklisting as well. The employers made sure of this and they also kept close tabs on their revolving door employment gangs by enlisting the help of willing collaborators to serve as spies, who could be called upon to finger potential dissidents.²⁴ Resistance to this sorry state of affairs was difficult if not impossible individually, but the workers did have one thing on their side, and that was the power of mutual aid and collective action. In other words, they could organize a union.²⁵

The earliest attempts at union organizing were spurred on by radicals and idealists. Many of them were veterans of attempted utopian communities which experimented with rudimentary forms of socialism on an isolated, small village scale during the late 19th Century.²⁶ For more than half a century, numerous attempts to overcome the stranglehold over working conditions by the employing class was made by various progressive and/or radical movements, including the Knights of Labor, Populists, Progressives, International Workingman's Association, Union Labor Party, Greenback Labor Party, and various other utopians.²⁷ Fittingly, the earliest known attempts to organize a timber workers' union took place in Eureka in 1884. Shortly after its formation, it affiliated with the Knights of Labor, and at its height, its membership reached over 2,000 with locals in Eureka, Arcata, Freshwater, and several other nearby communities. One of its principal grievances was the hospital fee, and the union successfully—through nonviolent collective action—decommissioned the company hospital and forced the head doctor to leave town, never to be seen there again. It also successfully fought against wage reductions and exposed an ongoing scam by the California Redwood Company (CRC), to the unsuspecting public.²⁸

CRC was incorporated in California, but owned by absentee capitalists whose agenda—which the latter did little to conceal—was to obtain a monopoly of all redwood timberland and timber production facilities in California, and they did so by employing an underhanded, though technically legal form of trickery. In those days the US Government, and many western states and territories in particular, strongly encouraged the homesteading of “unclaimed” land (the long preexisting territorial rights to such land by indigenous peoples were, of course, utterly ignored). Knowing this, agents of the company would convince locals to file claims at the local land office which the latter would then sell to the company for a small profit, usually \$20. Of course, these agents didn't reveal their *actual* interests to their unsuspecting cats' paws, but their activities didn't escape notice by at least one wary local, a Eureka butcher by the name of Charles Keller, a member of the International Workingman's Association—the very same First International whose members included Michael Bakunin and Karl Marx. Keller took notice of the large number of customers who boasted about their land deals, suspected fraud, and conducted his own private investigation. What he discovered was astonishing, and he tried to expose the subterfuge only to find that the first three land agents he contacted were in the know. He was even offered \$60,000, on which one could retire in those days, by the perpetrators to drop the affair, but the butcher refused to be bought.²⁹ The fourth agent, likewise, was incorruptible, and with Keller, filed the following report in 1886:

“The agents of the company soon discovered (the new agent's) presence and business and attempted to defeat the investigation. Some of the witnesses were spirited out of the country; others were threatened and intimidated; spies were employed to watch and follow the agent and report the names of all persons who conversed with or called upon him; and on occasion two persons who were about to enter the agent's room at his hotel for the purpose of conferring with him in reference to the entries, were knocked down and dragged away.”³⁰

Keller was intimidated and blacklisted as was his shop. The local press, led by the *Humboldt Times* and the *Humboldt Standard*, both of whom were subservi-

²³ “Lumber Workers: You Need Organization”, op. cit.

²⁴ Rowan, op. cit.

²⁵ “Lumber Workers: You Need Organization”, op. cit.

²⁶ “The Public Outlaw Show: Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport”, Dave Chism and Bob Cramer, interviewed by Dan Fortson on KMUD FM, November 27, 1997.

²⁷ Detailed in Cornford, Daniel, *Workers and Dissent in the Redwood Empire*, Philadelphia, PA, Temple University Press, © 1987.

²⁸ Kennedy, James, *The Lumber Industry and its Workers*, Second Edition, Chicago, IL, Industrial Workers of the World, 1922.

²⁹ Fortson, op. cit.

³⁰ Cornford, op. cit.

ent to the interests of the CRC, denounced Keller as an outsider, influenced by foreign agency, which was ironic considering the actual nature of the CLC's owners. The smear campaign succeeded in forcing Keller to move to Tulare County in southern California, but the investigations continued and—with the collective solidarity of the labor union, to which Keller was sympathetic—the corrupted officials of the CRC were eventually indicted and the company was forced to shut down.³¹ The union itself managed by 1890 to successfully force the other employers to reduce the standard workday from twelve to ten hours, but a year later, the employers, eventually working together in concert, broke the union through an intense campaign of blacklisting and intimidation. The first attempt at organizing a timber workers' union had been successful on a small scale, but ultimately limited by the organized power of the employing class.³²

There would be several attempts to organize sawmill workers in northwestern California again, the majority of these beginning at the opening years of the Twentieth Century. These attempts stemmed from an upsurge in union organizing nationwide, which was reflected in California. From 1900 to 1904, the number of trade unions increased from 217 to 805 and the number of workers in unions soared from 30,000 to 110,000. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) made its initial attempts to organize in the lumber industry on the North Coast, focusing primarily on Mendocino County, where there was a particularly violent strike in 1902 and 03. In Fort Bragg the Union Lumber Company (ULC)—whose name stemmed from the merger of three smaller companies and whose hostility to *labor* unions was legendary—surrounded its mill in the coast town of Fort Bragg with barbed wire and hired armed guards to harass and intimidate strikers. During the course of the strike, these guards shot several of the strikers and the union efforts were crushed. Despite these setbacks, in 1905, the AFL still managed to establish a foothold in *Humboldt* County, accepting affiliation of the newly formed International Brotherhood of Woodsmen and Sawmill Workers (IBWSW), whose membership reached 2,000—consisting of over half the county's workforce—within two years of its founding. By then Humboldt County's lumber industry was dominated by three corporations at the time: Hammond Lumber Company, Northern Redwood

Lumber Company, and Pacific Lumber Company, who together owned 64 percent of the county's timberlands and accounted for 60 percent of its milling capacity.³³

Beyond the North Coast, there were numerous attempts to organize in the timber industry under the banner of various labor unions and federations, including the AFL, but their successes, if any, were always limited and short lived. This was due to various factors, including the organized power of the lumber employers, the tendency of these unions to organize on a small scale, and the tendency of many of the latter, particularly the AFL, to organize workers by skill or craft—often shunning unskilled workers—and to collaborate with the employer over various workplace issues. This extended well beyond lumber to most industries.³⁴ The AFL believed in the principle, “a fair day's wage for a fair day's work”, which meant that they believed in the principles of capitalism, but that workers deserved a bigger share of the pie. This principle conflicted, however, with the notion, once expressed by Adam Smith of all people, that labor creates all wealth and that the only fair way to share the pie was to divide the company's profits equally. Among timber workers in particular, those working in the mills were considered the skilled craftsman, and tended to be mostly of WASP descent, while those working in the woods were considered less skilled and tended to be of a larger variety of backgrounds, particularly northern, central, and eastern European, and sometimes even Asian or African American. Many unions, including the AFL shunned these unskilled, non-WASP workers out of racial and class prejudice. Veterans of these early labor struggles, who included some of the aforementioned utopians along with those radicalized by direct experience in these struggles, determined that something more than the existing model of unionism was needed, but what?³⁵

In response to this need, a group of these idealists and radicals held various meetings in Chicago in 1904 and established, in 1905, the Industrial Workers or the World (IWW), popularly known as the “Wobblies”. The new union announced its intent to organize all workers regardless of race, color, creed, national origin, sex, or skill into “One Big Union.” They pledged that they would organize all workers in the

³³ Bartley and Yoneda, op. cit..

³⁴ “Lumber Workers: You Need Organization”, op. cit.

³⁵ Thompson, Fred, and Jon Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World: It's First 100 Years, 1905-2005*, Cincinnati, OH, Industrial Workers of the World, © 2006, pages 1-16

³¹ Fortson, op. cit.

³² Kennedy, op. cit.

same industry into one union as opposed to competing craft unions. They stressed the use of the strike, direct action in the workplace, and building direct worker control over the means of production.³⁶ This intent was most eloquently spelled out in the Preamble to the Constitution of the IWW, which (as of 1908) began:

“The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

“Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system...”³⁷

The IWW proposed as the workers’ ultimate weapon, the “general strike” whereby all workers in the same industry (or, on an even larger scale, all workers worldwide) would cease work at the time and effectively lock out the employers, thus taking possession of the machinery of production once and for all.³⁸

The Preamble finished with:

“Instead of the conservative motto, ‘a fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work,’ we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, ‘Abolition of the wage system’.

“It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the every-day struggle with the capitalists, but also, to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.”³⁹

This vision wasn’t just revolutionary (replacing the leadership in charge of the economy and state), but

transformative, seeking to completely remake society from the ground up *using the tools that were hitherto used to enslave in the process of doing so*.

The IWW was inspired by a confluence of the socialism of Marx, the anarchism of Bakunin, and many indigenous American radical tendencies blended together and tempered by the experience of direct struggle by workers at the point of production. The union adopted as its slogan, “an injury to one is an injury to all,” which eloquently illustrated the ideal of working-class solidarity. The Wobblies also allowed members of other unions to hold membership cards in its own organization.⁴⁰ Many timber workers, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, who had become highly cynical of the AFL’s class collaborationism, were drawn to the IWW’s uncompromising militancy.⁴¹



The Wobblies’ presence was felt immediately in the Pacific Northwest. IWW members were known to have been active in Eureka as early as 1906, though at first their influence was limited.⁴² Many partially successful strikes took place involving IWW members in 1907, 1908, and 1909 in western Montana, where, in some cases, workers succeeded in reducing the daily hours of work to nine, but these efforts were undermined by the AFL’s collaboration with the companies. In 1907, 2,500 lumber workers struck for improved working conditions in Humboldt County, but the strike was crushed in six weeks due to conflicting

³⁶ “The IWW and the IWA: The Struggle for Radical Unionism in the Northwest”, by Troy Laried Garner, *Ecology Center Newsletter*, September 1990.

³⁷ St John, Vincent, The IWW: its History, Structure and Methods, Chicago, IL, Industrial Workers of the World, 1917.

³⁸ Haywood, William D., The General Strike, IWW, speech given March 16, 1911 and Chaplin, Ralph, The General Strike, Chicago, IL, Industrial Workers of the World, 1933.

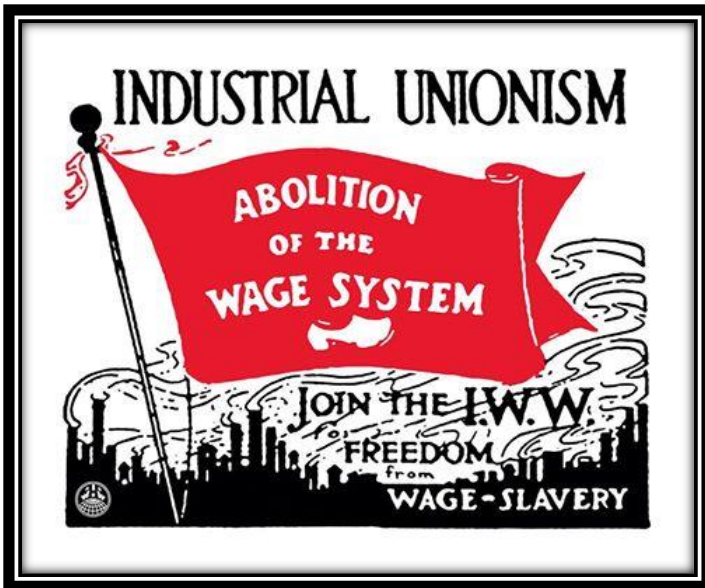
³⁹ St John, op. cit.

⁴⁰ Thompspon and Bekken, op. cit., pages 1-16

⁴¹ Garner, op. cit.

⁴² Cornford, op. cit.

positions by the IBWSW and IWW.⁴³ That same year, 2,500 sawmill workers struck in Portland, Oregon, bringing all lumber production in that city to a halt. Only a minority of the strikers were IWW, though they were “the leading spirits.”⁴⁴ The strike lasted three weeks but collapsed due to disagreements between the IWW and AFL.⁴⁵ According to the Wobblies, the leadership of the latter undermined the strike by caving in to the bosses’ demands against the will of their rank and file, even instructing their members to cross the picket lines, some of which were maintained by IWW members.⁴⁶



The IWW’s commitment to organizing all workers regardless of race or skill level pushed the boundaries of union organizing. In the American southeast—where the post-Civil War Reconstruction had collapsed due to the reascendency of the Confederate power structure in all but official declaration—the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, based in southwestern Louisiana, which started in 1910, affiliated with the IWW in 1912, with a membership of at least 5,000.⁴⁷ It was one of the first fully integrated labor unions in the United States. It won several strikes, with the solidarity of sympathetic small farmers, but was defeated by repression from the lumber companies which organized vigilante mobs, including the Ku Klux Klan and somewhat more “respectable”

Good Citizen’s Leagues, in response to the union.⁴⁸ Aiding the lumber bosses, Luther Egbert Hall, the governor of Louisiana, tacitly allowed the repression of the IWW, and this led to the union’s eventual defeat and helped prolong Jim Crow racism in the south.⁴⁹ In doing so, the employers weakened the power of organized labor in the Deep South such that it would have devastating effects on the power of timber workers to organize for over three generations, but elsewhere the Wobblies flourished.

In February of that same year, various IWW lumber workers’ locals in the Pacific northwest consolidated into an early attempt at a regional industrial union, based in Seattle, Washington, and helped lead a strike that began as a wildcat in the sawmills of Aberdeen, Hoquiam, and Raymond, against the ten-hour day and low wages. Only a minority of the workers were IWW members, but the strike was partially successful. Various strikes took place Oregon, Montana, Minnesota, and western Washington which were, again, all partially successful at modestly increasing wages, maintaining the nine-hour day, and slight improvements to camp conditions.⁵⁰

Many of these gains were made in spite of lawless repression from the employers. Many strikers were often arrested and jailed on trumped up charges, while others were dragged from their beds at night, violently assaulted, and driven away by agents of the company. Local governments were often complicit in such activities, and the press tended to blame the *IWW*, accusing the latter of creating a climate of fear and lawlessness, even though the Wobblies remained for the most part nonviolent, albeit militant and uncompromising in its anti-capitalism.⁵¹ In the face of the northwestern timber bosses’ repression—which was no less violent than in the Deep South—the IWW proved most creative at resisting it.

The IWW carried out much of its organizing through its effective distribution of handbills, pamphlets, and newspapers (many of which were published in multiple languages) as well as street corner oratory, better known as “soap-boxing”. This latter tactic proved to be quite effective, and in many instances the employing class sought to thwart it by any means necessary. In some cases, lumber dominated towns would pass ordinances banning soap-boxing,

⁴³ Bartley and Yoneda, op. cit.

⁴⁴ Rowan, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Garner, op. cit.

⁴⁶ Rowan, op. cit.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, op. cit.

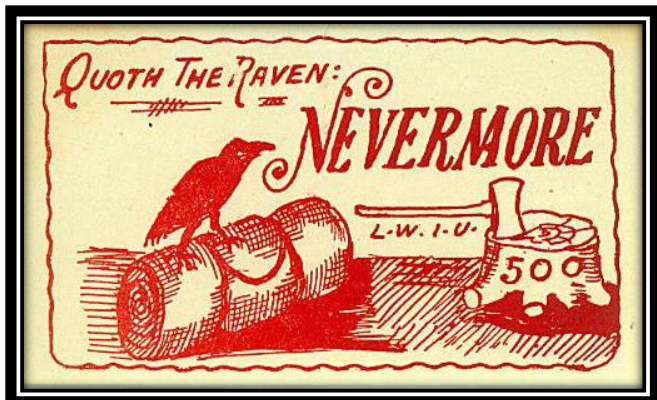
⁴⁸ Roediger, David R. ed., *Covington Hall: Labor Struggles in the Deep South & Other Writings*, Chicago, IL, Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1998.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, op. cit.

⁵⁰ Rowan, op. cit.

⁵¹ Kennedy, op. cit.

which the Wobblies would fight against by engaging in free speech fights, one of the most famous of these taking place in Spokane, Washington in 1909, to assert the right to practice their supposedly constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties.⁵² In this particular case, the anti-soap-boxing ordinances allowed only religious organizations, such as the Salvation Army (whose preachers were known to excoriate the IWW and other “godless communists” for their “blasphemy”) to perform their hymns. The Wobblies had a good many members with a flair for music and folk song writing—including its most famous martyr, Joe Hill—and they would often turn up at these free speech fights performing the Salvation Army songs with new lyrics “rewritten so they made more sense,” with a distinct class struggle orientation.⁵³ From these fights and the publication of song sheets with red covers to raise funds for various organizing campaigns, the IWW’s very famous Little Red Songbook was born, and the Wobblies became known as “the Singing Union.”⁵⁴



The IWW’s free speech fights were legendary and powerful, sometimes even to the point where they could turn back the tide of the bosses’ repression. In some cases, like Spokane, the IWW would call upon its members to “fill the jails” in order to cost the employers and their compliant governments as much money as possible, thereby rendering political repression prohibitively expensive. These tactics sometimes even proved effective at turning local merchants against the timber companies and gaining sympathy for the union.⁵⁵ The Wobblies are still re-

⁵² Detailed in Duda, John, ed. Wanted: Men to Fill the Jails of Spokane! Fighting for Free Speech with the Hobo Agitators of the I.W.W., Chicago, IL, Charles H Kerr & Co., © 2009.

⁵³ Phillips, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Green, Archie, et. al. ed., The Big Red Songbook, Chicago, IL, Charles H Kerr & Co., © 2007

⁵⁵ Duda, op. cit.

membered today, most generally for colorful tactics such as these, but such romantic accounts usually neglect to mention that even these things, by themselves, are not the IWW’s true mark upon history.

The Wobblies antics helped spread its reputation and increase its influence among sympathetic workers, but they hadn’t yet built the organized economic power at the point of production, which was the goal its founders originally sought. Certainly, the IWW’s agitation among the lumber towns of the region brought about small gains and small scale reforms, but this was only the beginning of what was needed. In most cases, the IWW was little more than an organized minority of the membership involved in these struggles, though it often played crucial leadership roles in them and many of the timber workers were sympathetic to the Wobblies. If nothing else, their fights demonstrated the power of effective organization and the futility of the craft unionism of the AFL.⁵⁶ To their credit, the organizers of the One Big Union recognized that limited struggles and organization were not enough to achieve lasting victory, and being “democratic to a fault” as their more centralist socialist competitors often labeled them, the Wobblies debated and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of their strategies and tactics constantly. The urgency of their efforts was well warranted, because the power of the lumber trust continued to grow, often with the help of the United States government.

* * * * *

As the timber barons logged out their private holdings, they began to encroach upon the lands that had been supposedly set aside in the public trust. Ironically, one year after he had successfully fought off the Sierra Club’s challenge to Hetch Hetchy, Gifford Pinchot found himself in John Muir’s shoes. In 1908, President Taft had replaced his predecessor’s Secretary of the Interior, James Rudolph Garfield—the son of President James Garfield and a staunch conservationist—with former Seattle Mayor, Richard Ballinger. The new secretary shared neither Muir’s strict preservationist nor Pinchot’s pragmatic multiple use conservationist views on wilderness, and proposed opening them up to unfettered resource extraction. While Pinchot was opposed to a complete prohibition of logging in the national forests, he still believed that public timber should be sold only to small, family-run logging outfits, not corporations. Pinchot had envi-

⁵⁶ Kennedy, op. cit.

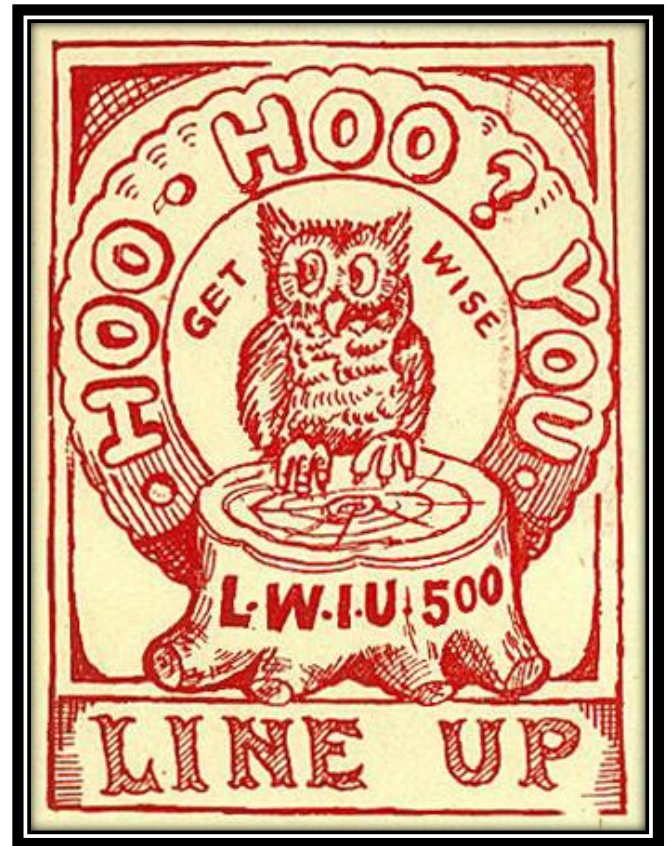
sioned a “working forest” for working people and small-scale logging at the edge, preservation at the core. After a scandal in which Pinchot accused Ballinger of graft, specifically that the latter was enabling the exploitation of federal lands by private enterprise illegally, Taft dismissed Pinchot in 1910 and left the USFS under the direction of Pinchot’s protégé, William Greely.⁵⁷

The contrast between Pinchot and Greely could be seen immediately. After a year of devastating forest fires in 1910, Greely, a deeply religious man, became obsessed with the prevention of them, and he claimed that the fires were the wrath of “Satan.” Under his watch, the forest service became primarily a fire department, and he accepted the prescription of the timber barons who argued that clearcut logging was the best preventive measure against them. As a result, Greely allowed the lumber trust to log public lands for private profit, and Pinchot’s well intentioned policies were scuttled. Upon seeing the results, Pinchot lamented, “So this is what saving the trees was all about. Absolute devastation. *The Forest Service should absolutely declare against clear-cutting in Washington and Oregon as a defensive measure.*”⁵⁸ His warnings went unheeded, however.

Conservation organizations, such as the Sierra Club, protested the wholesale destruction of the forests, but by this time, among labor unions, the IWW was one of the few to likewise echo the environmentalists’ warnings. During Greely’s tenure, the IWW’s many periodicals published articles and editorials warning of the threat to the long-term sustainability of the great forests of the Pacific Northwest at the hands of the greedy lumber trust who was mowing them down all for the sake of profit and greed. One article from this time “denounced the ‘totally destructive’ character of then-current methods of reforestation, and pointed out that under the administration of workers’ self-management that the IWW proposed, such thoughtless destruction would be inconceivable.” Another “called for immediate ‘conservation action’ to stop the lumber companies’ ‘criminal and wholly unnecessary wastage’ of forests: ‘Nothing but mute stumps over thousands of

acres...Where is it going to end?”⁵⁹ However, criticism of Corporate Timber’s rapacious logging wasn’t limited to environmentalists, the IWW, or progressive officials. Even some former lumber barons themselves began to lament the monster they had spawned. For example, in 1912, E. C. Williams, who had been one of the four original founders of the first commercial sawmill in Mendocino County on the coast observed the effects of clearcutting and bemoaned the destruction to the local environment he witnessed firsthand.⁶⁰

* * * * *



Even though the power of the timber corporations grew, the IWW grew in opposition to it, but they still lacked a viable organizational model necessary advance their struggle to the next level. That would soon change. In 1915, the IWW’s Agricultural Workers Organization (AWO), provided the inspiration and organizational type that the timber workers needed. The AWO was the IWW’s first *true* industrial union, with branches rather than autonomous locals, and a roving delegate system—which allowed the un-

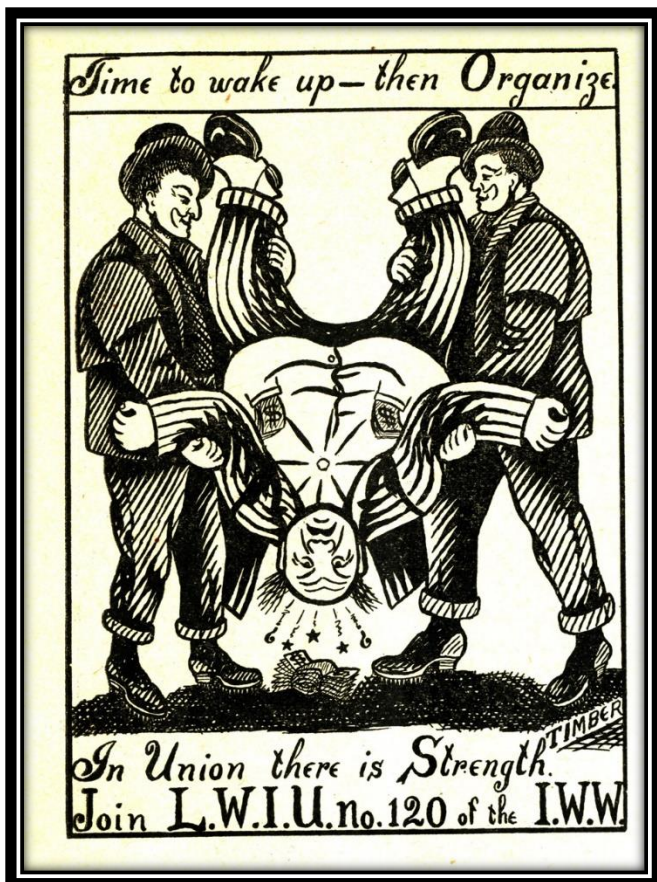
⁵⁷ John T. Ganoe, “Some Constitutional and Political Aspects of the Ballinger-Pinchot Controversy”, *The Pacific Historical Review*, 3 (3) (September 1934), page 323.

⁵⁸ Egan, Timothy, *The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt & the Fire That Saved America*, New York, NY, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008, page 281. Emphasis added.

⁵⁹ “Earth Firsters, Meet the IWW”, by x322339, *Industrial Worker*, May 1988.

⁶⁰ Bartley and Yoneda, op. cit.

ion to initiate and organize workers at the jobsite or in transit to it (which was often achieved by means of “riding the rails”, out of economic necessity, hence the IWW’s cultural association with hoboes). The AWO organized on the job and proved most effective, growing to perhaps over 100,000 members at one point before the introduction of the combine facilitated the rapid automation of harvest work and resulted in the AWO’s eventual decline by the early 1920s. The IWW did not decline overall, however, and much of the efforts that went into building the AWO were instead channeled into organizing industrial unions in other industries, including timber. Since harvests were seasonal, some of these harvest workers also went to work in the woods and brought the AWO’s organizing methods along with them.⁶¹



The efforts bore fruit almost overnight. In the autumn of 1916, approximately 5,000 IWW lumbermen who were part of the by then 22,000 strong AWO, voted to form their own, similarly structured Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU).⁶² The LWIU aimed to organize all the workers in the lumber camps and sawmills and to win the eight-hour

day, and by so doing abolish unemployment in the lumber industry, thereby making it impossible for the employers to discriminate by its use of blacklists and job sharks against the active workers and to protect each worker on their job.⁶³ Once formed, the LWIU immediately launched a campaign to organize all workers in that industry throughout the Pacific Northwest, which they attempted in spite of increasing efforts at repression by the lumber companies and the complaint governments of the region, including the infamous Everett Massacre which took place on November 5, 1916, in which five Wobblies were murdered by police and many others wounded.⁶⁴

The capitalists’ fear was based on the very real threat that the IWW might win and take over the means of production, at least in the agricultural and lumber industries. The employers’ backlash only strengthened the LWIU’s resolve and faced with an ever increasingly militant workforce, the lumber corporations turned to the state governments to maintain their economic grip on the Pacific Northwest. A number of states, starting with Idaho, on March 14, 1917, passed “Criminal Syndicalism” laws which were ostensibly intended to fight those who advocated “crime, sabotage, violence, or unlawful methods of terrorism as a means of accomplishing industrial or political reform,” which for all intents and purposes meant the IWW. The Wobblies, of course, did none of these things, but the timber barons spread no shortage of falsehoods and innuendos suggesting otherwise, which was dutifully parroted by the capitalist press. The other states of the Pacific Northwest soon passed similar “Criminal Syndicalism” and “Criminal Anarchy” laws.⁶⁵ California was no exception, passing their version in 1919, which was used specifically to try and thwart the efforts of IWW members to organize lumber workers, such as Oscar Erickson who was tried twice and acquitted by a hung jury in the Mendocino County town of Ukiah in 1924.⁶⁶

Still the IWW continued to organize more or less undaunted. In the Spring of 1917, the union announced plans for a strike centered in, but not limited to, northwestern Washington for various demands, including clean bunkhouses with mattresses; table and chairs; 8 hours work with no work on Sunday and Christmas; a living wage of \$60 per month; no dis-

⁶³ “Lumber Workers: You Need Organization”, op. cit.

⁶⁴ Detailed in Smith, Walker C., *The Everett Massacre, a History of Class Struggle in the Lumber Industry*, Chicago, IL, IWW Publishing Bureau, 1917.

⁶⁵ Rowan, op. cit.

⁶⁶ Bartley and Yoneda, op. cit.

⁶¹ Rowan, op. cit.

⁶² Rowan, op. cit.

crimination; free hospital service; and hiring from a union hall.⁶⁷ The AFL's various timber and sawmill workers' locals also voted, independently, to strike for the eight hour day, no doubt influenced by the IWW's call, hoping to prevent their own thunder from being stolen.⁶⁸ In response to the strike call, the employers formed an association known as the Lumbermen's Protective Association (LPA) to protect their interests and resist the strike in concert.⁶⁹ The strike began in the lumber camps and rapidly spread to the rest of Washington, Idaho, and Montana and several sawmills. The sheer lack of timber caused those camps and mills that hadn't joined the strike to halt production anyway.⁷⁰

The lumber barons had never faced a near total loss of control such as this before, and they used every means of they could at their disposal. Sometimes, they appealed to the strikers on nationalistic grounds, but they still couldn't recruit anywhere near enough strike breaking scabs to even create the pretense of production. Moses Alexander, the governor of Idaho, who was sympathetic to the lumber bosses, toured the lumber camps of his state appealing to the strikers' "patriotism" to try and end the strike, but they wouldn't budge. More often than not, however, the employing class turned to repression. Armed thugs harassed strikers. Spies working undercover attempted to undermine the strike by causing dissension and disruption from within its ranks. Law enforcement agents subservient to the lumber trust arrested and jailed hundreds of strikers, including those perceived to be its "leaders". The press editorialized against the strike and its organizers, even in some cases spreading false information such as claiming the strike had ended, when it hadn't. Vigilante mobs stirred up by the lumber companies and anti-union propaganda attacked and sometimes destroyed IWW halls. In Troy, Montana, one jailed striker was burned to death.⁷¹

In most cases, the LPA directed most of these efforts, sometimes overtly, but often under the cover of "law and order" and "patriotism", a matter of great concern since the United States had entered World War I by this time. One lie in particular, spread by the LPA in the late summer and fall of 1917, was that the

strike had been covertly instigated and financed to the tune of \$100,000 per month by German agents, including particularly Kaiser Wilhelm himself, seeking to obstruct the harvesting of spruce being used by the United States government to manufacture war planes. This claim was demonstrably false. The summer had been especially dry throughout the region, and striking IWW members had joined firefighting crews—and sometimes, being the most experienced woodsmen, served as foremen, saving millions of dollars of standing timber, including spruce. In Missoula, Montana, fire fighters had been hired directly by the government from IWW hiring halls, and the sworn testimony of the US Government states that the strikers had been not just helpful, but *absolutely essential* to the firefighting efforts, saving millions of acres of forests, including spruce. The US fire Warden repeatedly described the Wobblies serving on his crews as "the most efficient and reliable men he ever had." Yet this detail went unreported by the capitalist press.⁷²

In fact, the employers' claim about Spruce was actually a cover story to distract attention away from their own graft. Another detail that escaped their attention was the fact that very little spruce, which grows primarily in Oregon, was affected by the strike, and the strike didn't involve much of that state.⁷³ The press also ignored the fact that the lumber magnates deliberately held back spruce production to discredit the strikers.⁷⁴ The *Spokane Press* did report that before the war, the price of spruce had been \$16 per thousand feet, but during the war, the price rose to *at least* \$116, and sometimes as much as \$650. Further investigations by the *Seattle Union Record* revealed that this price increase was a case of deliberate gouging by the timber corporations. The Woodrow Wilson administration even admitted that the accusation against the IWW was a bald-faced lie, because Secretary of War, Newton D. Baker expressly requested that the lumber trust grant the eight-hour day, but his demands were ignored.⁷⁵

That's not to suggest, however, that the IWW never provided their adversaries with the ammunition that the latter in turn used against the union. For several years, the Wobblies had advocated *ca'canny*, which they often also described as "sabotage", as a tactic to advance its collective struggles at the point of production, but to the IWW and the employing class this

⁶⁷ "The Dawning of a New Day", by Roanne Withers, *Industrial Worker*, July 1990.

⁶⁸ Todes, Charlotte, *Labor and Lumber*, New York, NY, International Publishers, © 1931, pages 163-64.

⁶⁹ "Lumber Workers: You Need Organization", op. cit.

⁷⁰ Kennedy, op. cit.

⁷¹ Kennedy, op. cit.

⁷² Rowan, op. cit.

⁷³ Rowan, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Kennedy, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Rowan, op. cit.

meant entirely different things. To the Wobblies it meant the conscious and collective withdrawal of efficiency at the point of production, such as an entire work crew, shop, or even industry working more slowly or inefficiently to slow down the pace of work, thus impacting the employers' bottom line and improving their working conditions. In other words, it was an economic strategy intended for the working class to use as a tool to gain the upper hand. Sabotage described thusly in detail had been made most famous by IWW organizers Walker C. Smith⁷⁶, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn⁷⁷.



To the employing class, however, sabotage meant the wanton destruction of property, or at least it was framed this way, and this misconception was used to further discredit the Wobblies. Members debated the issue, and the consensus was that the tactic of collectively withdrawing efficiency at the point of production itself was justifiable, but the term “sabo-

⁷⁶ Smith, Walker C., *Sabotage: Its History, Philosophy & Function*, Chicago, IL, Industrial Workers of the World, 1913.

⁷⁷ Flynn, Elizabeth G., *Sabotage: the Conscious Withdrawal of the Workers' Industrial Efficiency*, Chicago, IL, Industrial Workers of the World, 1916.

tage” represented a ball and chain that the employers could shackle to the organization thus undermining its reputation among the working class.⁷⁸ IWW member Ralph Chaplin, facing “criminal syndicalism” charges later recalled:

“The prosecution used the historic meaning of the word to prove that we drove spikes into logs, copper tacks into fruit trees, and practiced all manner of arson, dynamiting and wanton destruction. Thanks to our own careless use of the word, the prosecution’s case seemed plausible to the jury and the public.”⁷⁹

The lies spread by the timber bosses brought about increased repression and vigilante mob activity, but still the strikers stood their ground. There was only one problem that stood in their way, and that was the lack of funds to sustain a prolonged strike, and the employers were stubbornly refusing to give in for fear that the IWW would continue to gain control over the lumber industry and spark a political and economic revolution. Over time, the bosses would find a way to eventually recruit enough scabs to replace the strikers permanently. Some farsighted Wobblies recognized this threat and began advocating that the IWW transfer the strike to the job itself. The union would appear to end the strike, but while back on the job, the loggers and mill workers would engage in various forms of (non-destructive) sabotage at the point of production (though, of course, now they didn’t refer to such actions as sabotage). The workers would be paid in wages and in meals, but they would have just as much, if not a greater economic impact. This would also make it harder for the employers to hire scabs.⁸⁰

By the middle of September 1917, the strike ostensibly ended, and the press spun it as a victory for the lumber bosses, but while back in the camps, the workers slowed their pace considerably. Instead of working ten hours, the crews would collectively cease work after eight. Although the employers would usually fire the entire crew on the spot, and hire a new crew a few days later. The latter being just as sympathetic to the goals of the IWW, however, would repeat the actions again. Meanwhile the first crew was

⁷⁸ Foner, Philip S. *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume VII: Labor and World War I 1914-1918*, New York, NY, International Publishers, 1987, pages 246-63.

⁷⁹ Chaplin, Ralph, *Wobbly: The Rough and Tumble Story of an American Radical*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1948.

⁸⁰ Kennedy, op. cit.

duplicating these efforts elsewhere, as well as they could manage. The bosses could not defeat this “strike” by the workers’ starvation or attrition. Authorities could not single out and arrest the “leaders” because there was no way to identify who they were, and even when they tried, the arrests only further fanned the flames of the timber workers’ discontent. The employers could also not afford to organize a “general lockout”, because there was a high demand for lumber due to the prolonged conventional strike that had preceded the new “strike on the job”, and they had crowed so loudly about the disruption to spruce production. The IWW’s direct action at the point of production persisted throughout the winter. The employers were—temporarily at least—confounded.⁸¹



The timber corporations found a temporary solution due to a fortuitous circumstance. The US Government had placed Colonel Brice Disque in charge of spruce production on behalf of the war department. The colonel happened to be sympathetic to the LPA, and at their behest, he agreed to work with them to “stabilize the lumber industry” which meant undermining the IWW.⁸² Disque began this task by creating a company union called the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen (LLLL). Many of the lumber workers, particularly IWW members, referred to the new so-called union as “Little Loyalty and Loot”, though they often joined it anyway.⁸³ Disque made appeals to the workers’ sense of “patriotism,” but he didn’t just stop there. If the Colonel couldn’t per-

suade the workers to join, he would force them to do so by dispatching his soldiers to work in the lumber camps. Disque ostensibly did this to aid in spruce production, but most of the soldiers were placed in logging camps that had nothing to do with the harvesting and production of it.⁸⁴ Membership in the LLLL was effectively compulsory, and those that refused it were accused of being German spies and traitors, fired, and beaten by soldiers under the Colonel’s command. At least one man who spoke out against the LLLL was found dead by hanging the next morning.⁸⁵ It was clearly obvious that Disque’s actual purpose was the quashing of the Wobblies’ strike on the job.

The lumber companies in their insatiable greed sabotaged themselves, however. Not content with reining in the IWW, they took advantage of the soldiers as well, and the latter responded by adopting the Wobblies’ slowdown tactics. The employers were once again paralyzed. There was little choice left to the LPA but to concede defeat. To great fanfare, on March 1, 1918 Colonel Disque issued a statement on behalf of the timber corporations making the eight hour day official.⁸⁶ The bosses, their press, and many historians, including historian Robert L. Tyler, who wrote a fairly extensive account about the IWW’s struggles in the woods, have assigned credit for this victory to everyone but the Wobblies.⁸⁷ The IWW, on the other hand, never hesitated to claim credit where they believed it was due:

“This was one of the most successful strikes in the history of the labor movement. The efficacy of the tactics used is further emphasized by the fact that it was directed against one of the most powerful combinations of capital in the world. Two hours had been cut from the work day. Wages had been raised. Bath houses, wash houses and drying rooms had been installed. The companies were forced to furnish bedding.

⁸⁴ Kennedy, op. cit.

⁸⁵ Rowan, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Kennedy, op. cit.

⁸⁷ Tyler, Robert, *Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest*, Eugene, University of Oregon Books, 1967, pages 85-111. Tyler’s assessment of the situation is *extremely* dubious, if not intellectually dishonest. He argued that the class collaborationism of the LLLL won the eight hour day based on the later decline of the IWW—ignoring the various factors that lead to the latter, all the while refusing to acknowledge that the LLLL would never have been created in the *first place* if it weren’t for the class struggle oriented unionism of the IWW. Tyler also admits that the LLLL all but disintegrated a few years after its formation, and yet he argued that the workers favored the latter’s class collaborationism. Such a contradiction cannot honestly be reconciled.

⁸¹ Kennedy, op. cit.

⁸² Garner, op. cit.

⁸³ Rowan, op. cit.

Old-fashioned, unsanitary bunk-houses were displaced by small, clean, well-lighted and ventilated ones. Instead of bunks filled with dirty hay, beds, clean mattresses, blankets, sheets and pillows changed weekly were furnished. The food was improved a hundred per cent. In short, practically all demands were won.

“The lumber barons claimed they had granted these concessions ‘voluntarily’ ‘for patriotic reasons.’ In reality, they had granted nothing. All they had done was to bow to the inevitable, and officially recognize the eight-hour day after the lumber workers had taken it by direct action. The LLLL also claimed credit for the victory. This was the joke of the season. A skunk might as well claim credit for the perfume of a flower garden, after having failed to pollute it. At the present writing there is scarcely a trace left of the LLLL. The last feeble squeal heard from this conglomeration of boss-lovers was when they went on record in Portland as favoring a reduction of wages.”⁸⁸

For the first time ever, the power of the lumber trust had been effectively counterbalanced, and the bosses were deeply concerned that the IWW would gain the upper hand. No doubt the employers also worried that the Wobblies’ concern for the environment might draw support from their conservationist critics. A mass based, populist workers movement could, just possibly, bring about the very revolution the socialists and IWW sought to incite, and put an end to the robber barons’ reign. The implications were staggering and as far as the bosses were concerned, something had to be done. The IWW was well aware of this and readied themselves to complete “the historic mission of the working class.” History, however, took several unforeseen turns, and—much to the lumber trust’s relief—the Wobblies vision would be indefinitely delayed.



Author’s note on the IWW “Silent Agitator”

graphics: initially the LWIU adopted the industrial union number “500” (following the AWO’s use of “400”), but sometime between 1917 and the mid-1920s, the union systematized the industrial union numbering system such that AWO became “110” and LWIU became “120”, etc., hence the inconsistency between the “red” and “black” LWIU images. As of 2023, the LWIU *still* retains the number “120”.

⁸⁸ Kennedy, op. cit.