

The Cult of Spontaneity: Finnish-Canadian Bushworkers and the Industrial Workers of the World in Northern Ontario, 1919-1934

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THE STORY of the spectacular rise, and equally spectacular fall, of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) has been told many times.¹ Organized in Chicago in 1905, the IWW gained international attention during the Lawrence strike of 1912 and the Patterson, New Jersey strike of 1913, before suffering a precipitous decline during the state repression of World War One. Many of its top leaders, including the legendary William "Big Bill" Haywood, left the IWW to join the newly-formed Communist Party. The IWW fought on in the 1920s, but internal dissension, Communist Party intrigues and attacks, and the general malaise of organized labour in the America of Coolidge and Hoover seriously weakened the vaunted spirit which had rejected the business unionism of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and called for the abolition of the wage system. Following the mid-August 1918 conviction of 101 leading members of the IWW for having supposedly committed more than 10,000 crimes, it became increasingly difficult for the

¹The major American works include John S. Gamba, *The Decline of the I.W.W.* (New York 1932); Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All* (Chicago 1969); Joseph Conlin, *Bread and Roses Too* (Westport, Connecticut 1969); Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (New York 1967); Robert Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, OR 1967); and Salvatore Salerno, *Red November Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (Albany 1989). The key Canadian work is Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1990).

J. Peter Campbell, "The Cult of Spontaneity: Finnish-Canadian Bushworkers and the Industrial Workers of the World in Northern Ontario, 1919-1934," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 117-46.

organization's adherents to convince their many critics that the revolutionary unionism of the IWW:

rejected violence because the nature of the revolution they envisioned simply did not require it. To the IWW, the new society was to be accomplished not by an electoral victory nor by taking to the barricades but by a general strike that would paralyze the economy and force the employing class to hand over peacefully the means of production ... Strikes for immediate gains were also rehearsals for the eventual general strike and therefore also need not be violent.²

The critics carried the day: in the ensuing years the Industrial Workers of the World became a synonym for violence and a symbol of the essential futility of indigenous American radicalism.³

Canadian historians, although often evincing a genuine admiration for the "Wobblies" in the Canadian context, have picked up the futility theme and focused on the organization's early demise.⁴ William Rodney has suggested that, due to the Canadian wing's dependence on the American organization, the IWW had "failed" by the end of 1913.⁵ Ross McCormack's summation of the fate of the Wobblies in Canada is that by 1914 IWW locals in western Canada were "disintegrating."⁶ Bryan Palmer gives the Wobblies a bit of a reprieve, but concludes that the IWW in Canada had become "nearly non-existent" by 1918.⁷ Gordon Hak's analysis of the IWW in British Columbia echoes McCormack's assessment by claiming that "the organizational structure of the IWW disappeared in the 1910s," although he adds that "IWW delegates continued to haunt logging camps" as organizers for the Lumber Workers Industrial Union into the 1920s.⁸ Stephen Gray points out that in the late 1930s the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) "faced the difficult task of convinc-

²Contlin, *Bread and Roses Too*, 97.

³As Melvyn Dubofsky points out, four months of testimony during the 1918 trials in Chicago were not enough to tie "a single Wobbly to a specific illegal act." See his "The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism in the United States," in Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, eds., *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective* (Aldershot 1990), 215.

⁴Even Mark Leier, the foremost defender of the IWW's contribution to the history of the Canadian left, dismisses the IWW of the early 1930s as "little more than a debating society." See his *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 108.

⁵William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929* (Toronto 1968), 9.

⁶Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto and Buffalo 1977), 116.

⁷Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto 1992), 188.

⁸Gordon Hak, "On The Fringes: Capital and Labour in the Forest Economies of the Port Alberni and Prince George Districts, British Columbia, 1910-1939," PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1986, 156.

ing men steeped in the Wobbly legend to adopt the longer-range plan of establishing the union and negotiating signed collective agreements instead of resorting to a strike over every 'two cent issue,'" as IWA organizer Hjalmar Bergren put it.⁹ The language is striking: Wobblies in the 1920s "haunt" the logging camps, as if they are ghostly apparitions, not flesh and blood human beings. IWA organizers in the late 1930s have to deal with the Wobbly "legend," a word that evokes images of the ethereal and the gone forever, instead of a politics of direct action and antiauthoritarianism that has over the course of the 20th century appealed to hundreds of thousands of workers of both genders, all colours, and speaking many languages.¹⁰

In his analysis of labour radicalism in the Ontario north woods, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, Ian Radforth chronicles the important role Finnish Wobblies played in the labour struggles of the 1920s and 1930s, putting a human face on the IWW in the 1920s. Radforth notes that the "remarkably tenacious" Finnish Wobblies who fled state repression in the United States "gained considerable influence" in northern Ontario. However, by suggesting that the "syndicalist phase" of bushworker protest ended before 1921, Radforth conforms to the prevailing view of both Finnish and non-Finnish historians of bushworker struggles that in the 1920s the Wobblies were largely hangers-on in a struggle led by the Communist Party.¹¹

Finnish Wobbly women have suffered a similar fate. Varpu Lindström-Best, in her pathbreaking work *Defiant Sisters*, notes in her introduction that she will not be able to explore the participation of Finnish immigrant women in the Industrial Workers of the World.¹² While a study confined to English-language sources can lay claim to few insights into a question a Finnish author has found few sources on, it can at least test the opinion of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, who worked with Finnish Wobblies in Minnesota during World War One, and who came to the conclusion that the Finns "are one people among whom the women are truly equal, participating in plays, meetings and all affairs, side by side with their menfolk, an example

⁹Stephen Gray, "Woodworkers and Legitimacy: The IWA in Canada, 1937-1957," PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1989, 57.

¹⁰In France prior to 1914 the syndicalist Confédération Générale du Travail was the largest union organization in the country. In Mexico membership in the anarchosyndicalist Casa del Obrero Mundial (House of the Workers of the World) approached 100,000 before the organization was outlawed and brutally repressed in 1916. As in Sweden and Germany, however, syndicalism revived in the 1920s in Mexico, with membership in the General Confederation of Workers, organized in 1919, reaching a peak of 80,000 in the 1920s. See John M. Hart, "Revolutionary Syndicalism in Mexico," and Wayne Thorpe, "Syndicalist Internationalism before World War II," in van der Linden and Thorpe, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 197-201, 238-9.

¹¹Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario 1900-1980* (Toronto 1987), 110, 119.

¹²Varpu Lindström-Best, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto 1988), 5.

for all others."¹³ What lends credence to Gurley Flynn's analysis is not only the prominent role women played in the social democratic movement in Finland, but also the prominent role they played in Finnish sports, social, and cultural organizations in Canada.¹⁴

The Industrial Workers of the World itself, however, like all left organizations of the early 20th century, was male-dominated at the leadership level.¹⁵ A reading of the English-language Wobbly press — *Industrial Solidarity*, most notably — indicates that the contributions of Finnish women were briefly noted, but almost always in connection with cultural and social activities. This was indeed the locus of women's activism, but the impact of that activism reached far beyond the social and cultural spheres. In northern Ontario in the 1920s and early 1930s Finnish Wobblies were not in a position to revolutionize Canadian society, but they were capable of convincing large numbers of bushworkers to rely on rank-and-file direct action in the workplace, and to reject the signing of collective agreements that prohibited strike and other action for the length of those agreements. Given that the Wobblies placed little emphasis on building up strike funds when not on strike, during labour disputes great demands were placed on the women responsible for feeding striking workers, picketing, selling pamphlets and newspapers, and organizing fund-raisers involving dances, plays, recitals, and political speeches. The Communist Party's characterization of the IWW as the "cult of spontaneity," as well as denigrating the commitment to rank-and-file initiative in the bush camps, also served to disguise the fact that the hard work of Finnish Wobbly women made such a strategy viable in the first place.

The question of the involvement of Finnish women in the Industrial Workers of the World goes right to the heart of the debate between the "centralizers" and "decentralizers" in the labour and socialist movement that had been a key debate within the IWW itself from its earliest days. As Patrick Renshaw indicates, the IWW's leading centralizers went into the Communist Party and supported the Third International, leaving a largely anarchosyndicalist leadership in the Wobblies. The decentralizers in the IWW were "uncompromisingly hostile" to the organization and

¹³Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *I Speak My Own Piece* (New York 1955), 200.

¹⁴For the contribution of Finnish women to their country's socialist movement see Lindström-Best, *Defiant Sisters*, 19-21, and for the indispensable role women played in the athletic, social, and cultural life of the Finnish immigrant community see Jim Tester, Dieter Buse, and Elvi (Salo) Duncan, *Sports Pioneers: A History of the Finnish-Canadian Amateur Sports Federation 1906-1986* (Sudbury 1986).

¹⁵Todd McCallum finds that the "Marxist masculinity" of prominent male leaders of the One Big Union compelled them to believe that women in the organization should be "active but subordinate." See his "'A Modern Weapon for Modern Man': Marxist Masculinity and the Social Practices of the One Big Union, 1919-1924," MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995, 6. An article based on McCallum's thesis will appear in a forthcoming issue of *Labour/Le Travail*.

discipline demanded by Lenin's theory of democratic centralism.¹⁶ It was this hostility that impelled members of the Communist Party to dismiss the Wobblies as the "cult of spontaneity," a pejorative casting in a negative light the organization's commitment to rank-and-file activism, antiauthoritarianism, and decentralization. It is a pejorative that disguises the success Finnish Wobblies experienced in linking the essentially "male" economic struggle in the isolated bush camps of northern Ontario with the essentially "female" social and cultural life of urban centres such as Timmins, Sault Ste Marie, and Port Arthur. While this paper — in part because the evidence dictates such an approach — will focus on the economic struggles of northern Ontario's Finnish bushworkers, its important subtext is that the efforts of Finnish Wobbly women made possible the continued viability and influence of the Wobblies into the 1930s.

Keeping in mind that the history of the left in the 20th century has been one of increasing compromise with bureaucracy, centralization, and the state, we are reminded by these Finnish Wobbly men and women of the rewards, and the cost, of maintaining a decentralized, rank-and-file politics against powerful forces on both the left and the right. If they are among the "losers" of Canadian history, they are "losers" who left an important legacy of defending ideas and practices absolutely fundamental to the creation of a democratic, mass-based, socialist politics. The story of Finnish Wobbly bushworkers is one small episode in a much larger drama, but it is a story with meanings and messages that reached far beyond the bush camps and socialist halls of northern Ontario.¹⁷

The *Industrial Workers of the World* became a force to be reckoned with as a result of a fortuitous convergence of events, the arrival in northern Ontario in the late teens and early twenties of two groups of immigrants: Finnish "Reds" fleeing "White" repression during and following the Finnish Revolution of 1918, and Finnish American Wobblies fleeing the draft and state repression in the United States. The Wobbly cause was further aided by the fact that most Finnish immigrants who had come to Canada since the 1870s, and settled in northern Ontario, were workers and peasants. A significant minority of these immigrants came from Turku and Pori in southwestern Finland, one of the centres of strong Red support during the revolution of 1918. The single greatest source of Finnish immigrants, however, was Vaasa in Ostrobothnia, the stronghold of the White forces during the revolution.¹⁸ Ian Radforth asserts that the majority of Finnish immigrants in this

¹⁶Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 246.

¹⁷This article is anything but a "definitive" history of Finnish Wobbly bushworkers in northern Ontario. The author hopes that at least one reader able to work in Finnish-language sources will be motivated to read *Industrialisti*, *Tie Vapauteen*, and other Finnish Wobbly sources, with the aim of putting to the test some of the ideas advanced here.

¹⁸For Finnish immigrants to Canada see Ahti Tolvanen, "Finns in Port Arthur in the Interwar Period: A Perspective on Urban Integration," in Michael G. Karni, ed., *Finnish Diaspora I: Canada, South America, Africa, Australia and Sweden* (Toronto 1981), 64-5; and Christine

period were either politically neutral or actively anti-socialist, and that many Finnish immigrants were radicalized after they came to Canada, a view shared with Varpu Lindström-Best.¹⁹ It seems, therefore, that few immigrants from Vaasa were socialists, but we can surmise that their experiences with the repression of the powerful White forces in their homeland made them potentially receptive to socialism and syndicalism in a Canadian setting, and to the antistatism, antiauthoritarianism, and antimilitarism of the Wobblies. We do know that in both small Finnish communities such as Intola, and in larger centres such as Port Arthur, Finnish politics in the 1920s were dominated by the Reds, not the Whites.²⁰ It was only on the eve of the Depression that Finnish Whites began to outnumber Finnish Reds, in part because Canadian immigration policies in the 1920s favoured White Finns.²¹

Support for the Industrial Workers of the World among Finnish immigrants, as Ian Radforth points out, cannot simply be read off from their class position.²² Finnish history, culture, and class structure were the foundation stones, not the direct cause, of the influence of the Industrial Workers of the World in northern

Kouhi, "Labour and Finnish Immigration to Thunder Bay, 1876-1914," *Lakehead University Review*, 9, 1 (Spring 1976), 19-20.

¹⁹Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 108-9; Varpu Lindström-Best, *The Finns in Canada* (Ottawa 1985), 10.

²⁰The accomplishments of Finnish Reds in places such as Intola, a small farming community some 10 miles west of Port Arthur, are little short of astounding. In 1914, when there were 60 Finns living in Intola, 37 of them were members of the Finnish Socialist Organization of Canada, which held a charter from the Social Democratic Party of Canada. These Finns and their neighbours built a socialist hall during World War One, and perhaps even more amazing, is the fact that Finnish Wobblies in Intola built a second, bigger hall in the early 1920s! See Christine Kouhi, *et al.*, *A Chronicle of Finnish Settlements in Rural Thunder Bay* (Thunder Bay 1976), 74-5.

²¹Edward W. Laine, "Finnish Canadian Radicalism and Canadian Politics: The First Forty Years, 1900-1940," in Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics* (Toronto 1981), 99, 101, 110 n. 57.

²²One must be doubly careful in terms of class analysis because the widespread use of the terms "workers" and "peasants" in the literature on Finnish radicalism is misleading. Most Finnish "workers" who came to Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as Christine Kouhi points out, were agricultural labourers, not industrial workers. It must be remembered, however, that in Finland industrialization occurred in the countryside before it happened in urban areas. Many agricultural workers, therefore, spent part of the year working as loggers or in the sawmills. Many Finnish immigrants of "peasant" background were crofters, landowning peasants who were religious and politically conservative. As Risto Alapuro points out, class politics in the Finnish Revolution of 1918 were characterized by the preponderance of landowning peasants in the White army, and a close working relationship between agricultural and industrial workers in the Red opposition. See Kouhi, "Labour and Finnish Immigration to Thunder Bay," 23; and Risto Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland* (Berkeley 1988), 14, 49, 183.

Ontario. There is no evidence to suggest that the IWW as an organization gained any kind of influence or organizational foothold in Finland itself. Prior to 1918 the Finnish left was dominated by the Social Democratic Party, organized in 1899 as the Socialist Labour Party. The growth of the Finnish SDP was little short of phenomenal, and in the election of 1907 — the first based on universal suffrage — the Social Democrats returned 80 members in the 200-seat parliament, thus becoming the single largest party. In the election of 1916 the Social Democratic Party increased its strength in the Finnish parliament, returning a slight majority of the members. With the exception of a small group of revolutionary marxists and anarchists, the Finnish left prior to the revolution of 1918 was firmly committed to the twin causes of social reform within the parliamentary system and gaining independence from the dominance of Tsarist Russia.²³

All of this changed when the Tsar fell in March 1917 and the Provisional Government declared its support for Finnish independence. However, when the Finnish parliament decided in July 1917 to assume all powers formerly held by the Tsar's Governor General, with the exception of military and foreign affairs, the Provisional Government dissolved the parliament. In the ensuing elections in October 1917, which followed an anti-socialist campaign by the bourgeois parties, the Social Democrats lost their majority. Faced with an increasingly hostile bourgeoisie, and disillusioned with the election results, many Finnish workers "began to lose faith in the efficacy of parliamentary action."²⁴ As Risto Alapuro points out, Social Democratic leaders had to be "compelled to participate" in the massive general strike of 13-20 November 1917 by the Red worker guards and the masses, "but they had no real vision of what should be done with the power they obtained."²⁵ Control of events increasingly passed into the hands of the worker guards, and the Social Democratic leaders were gradually forced to abandon class conciliation for class struggle by events they could no longer control. During the battles of the revolution itself, which lasted from January to May 1918, more than three-quarters of the Reds killed in battle were either industrial or agricultural workers.²⁶ The White soldiers they faced — mostly members of the landowning peasantry — were backed by a Jaeger battalion trained in Germany, and the majority of intellectuals and students. One of the consequences of the Red defeat was the imprisonment and

²³For the history of Finnish social democracy in the first decades of the 20th century see John Hodgson, *Communism in Finland: A History and Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ 1967), 3-52; Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 101-39; and L.A. Puntala, *The Political History of Finland 1809-1966* (London 1975), 62-101.

²⁴Hodgson, *Communism in Finland*, 29. Hodgson's point is echoed in Puntala, *Political History of Finland*, 103, and Marvin Rintala, "The Problem of Generations in Finnish Communism," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, 17, 2 (April 1958), 193.

²⁵Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 169.

²⁶Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 195.

execution of thousands of Red supporters, which resulted, as L.A. Puntila points out, in "suspicion and bitterness toward the state."²⁷

Finnish Reds who emigrated to Canada following the Finnish Revolution, and the relatives of Finnish Reds in Canada, belonged to a political culture deeply, and often personally, affected by class conflict, state oppression, and the tragic consequences of the failure of Finland's Social Democratic leadership to take decisive action during the Finnish Revolution. There was, therefore, fertile ground for the message of the IWW among Finnish bushworkers in northern Ontario, but more than the legacy of the events of the Finnish Revolution was needed to create a strong commitment to the IWW. Another element of that commitment is found in the story of Finnish leftists like Yrjö Sirola, who became an original member of the first central committee of the Finnish Communist Party organized in Moscow in August 1918. Prior to becoming a Communist Sirola was a leading member of Finland's Social Democratic Parliamentary Group. In 1910 he journeyed to the United States and settled in Duluth, Minnesota, a major centre of Finnish radicalism. In Duluth Sirola learned about industrial unionism, and came to appreciate the importance Finnish-American radicals placed on "direct, self-sustaining action by workers." He became convinced "that in the United States only a general strike could be effective due to the power wielded by trusts." The general strike also made sense to Sirola in an American context because so few class conscious socialists, in contrast to the situation in Finland, held high government positions.²⁸ By 1913 Sirola had become convinced that "unions would be the center of labor's struggle against capitalism."²⁹

Yrjö Sirola's journey to America, his embracing of industrial unionism and the general strike, and his subsequent political trajectory following his return to Finland are instructive. In America, as John Hodgson points out, Sirola "saw revolution as freedom from the bourgeoisie, whereas in Finland it had meant liberation from Tsarist oppression."³⁰ Of note is the fact that on Sirola's return to Finland he did not become an organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World, but rather returned to his involvement in Finnish Social Democratic politics. Following the Finnish Revolution of 1918 he became an organizer of, and leading figure in, the Communist Party, not a Wobbly. Industrial unionism, the general strike, and basing anti-capitalist struggles in the union, rather than the party, made sense to Sirola and other Finnish leftists in a North American context, but not so in a Finnish context. Highly literate and politically informed Finnish-American and Finnish-Canadian radicals understood that industrial unionism, the avoidance of electoral politics, and support for the general strike had an appeal to Finnish

²⁷Puntila, *Political History of Finland*, 123. Hodgson, *Communism in Finland*, 89 concludes that roughly three times as many Reds died in prison as died in battle.

²⁸Hodgson, *Communism in Finland*, 17.

²⁹Hodgson, *Communism in Finland*, 18.

³⁰Hodgson, *Communism in Finland*, 18.

immigrant workers in the upper mid-west of America and northern Ontario that it could not have in Finland.

Many Finnish radicals in Canada and the United States were committed to industrial unionism, but an analysis of the Finnish Wobbly press must be done before it can be argued that bushworkers in northern Ontario saw themselves as sharing a political ideology with their European and American counterparts.³¹ What is true, however, is that bushworkers' strikes in northern Ontario — even in the early 1930s, when the IWW had been eclipsed by the Communist Party as the leading organization of the working class — were more infused with the Wobbly principle of "spontaneity," than they were with the Communist principle of "democratic centralism." As the Communists themselves admitted, the right of workers in individual camps to call strikes without prior approval by a vote of the district or full union membership was still tenaciously defended at the rank and file level.³² As Ahti Tolvanen points out, as late as the fall of 1933 the decision to strike was left up to the workers in each camp, in spite of the Communist Party's decade-long effort to rid northern Ontario bushworkers of this commitment to spontaneity.³³ Even in 1930, when the Wobblies themselves had come to question the effectiveness of strikes begun in individual camps, it was decided that strike committees composed of paid union officials should not be recognized.³⁴ The Wobbly commitment to local initiative was linked to the belief that the workers should "put

³¹In making this claim I am not questioning the fact that there was a small leadership group among the Finnish Wobblies who were syndicalists influenced by the European movements. Both John Wiita, who edited the Finnish Socialist paper *Vapaus* (Liberty) from 1919 to 1923, and A. T. (Tom) Hill, a Communist Party organizer and secretary of the Finnish Organization of Canada in the 1920s, identified the Finnish Wobblies as syndicalist or anarchosyndicalist. Wiita and Hill, both members of the IWW before joining the Communist Party, spoke from experience. It must be remembered, however, that their assessments concern leading members of the IWW, and reflect the Communist Party's official position on the IWW. Many Finnish bushworkers, one suspects, supported rank and file control over decision-making, favoured economic over political action, and supported the idea of the general strike without thinking of themselves as "syndicalists" with a strong affinity to their European brothers and sisters. See J. Donald Wilson, "The Ethnic Voice: The Canadian Sojourn of a Finnish-American Radical," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 16, 2 (1984), 103; and A. T. Hill, "Historic Basis and Development of the Lumber Workers Organization and Struggles in Ontario," *Thunder Bay Museum*, Box 980.83. 27-46, File A17/1/8, 3, 5-6. My thanks to J. Donald Wilson for sending me copies of these important sources.

³²National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), Communist Party of Canada (hereafter CPC), MG28 IV 4, *Report of the Fifth Convention of the Lumber-Workers Industrial Union of Canada*, 6-8 April 1929.

³³Ahti Tolvanen, "Finntown" *A Perspective on Urban Integration: Port Arthur Finns in the Inter-War Period, 1918-1939* (Helsinki 1985), 81.

³⁴*Industrial Solidarity*, 23 April 1930.

confidence in no leaders," a clear refutation of the importance the Communists attached to central executive committees.³⁵ Here we see the ideas of the IWW dovetailing with the legacy of recent Finnish history, as the Wobbly questioning of leaders bears a striking resemblance to the attitude of many Finnish workers toward the actions of Social Democratic leaders both before and during the Finnish Revolution of 1918.

Apart from this commitment to rank and file initiative and their critique of leaders and centralization, however, I am in agreement with Salvatore Salerno's observation that the IWW did not generally aim for or achieve "a formal position on ideology, tactics, or organizational form." Writing of the IWW's early American history, Salerno notes that its "amalgam of anarchism, syndicalism, and Marxism" produced a "revolutionary pluralism" that "formed an associational context rather than a single ideology, a sensibility based on the emotion of working-class solidarity rather than doctrine, and a concern with agency rather than fixed organizational formation."³⁶ Finnish Wobblies in northern Ontario, based in the Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU) no. 120, were part of and helped to shape this kind of "associational context" in the 1920s. The IWW's spirited fight against the power of an Anglo-Saxon capitalist class appealed to Finnish immigrant workers attempting to hold on to the Finnish language and culture in the face of powerful forces of assimilation. The Wobbly call to activism in the class struggle was heard by Finns with a long tradition of active participation in their own musical, theatrical, athletic, and political organizations.³⁷ In the 1920s in northern Ontario it all came together, and formed the basis of major labour struggles in the bush camps of northern Ontario in which Finnish Wobblies played an integral role.

By 1920 the Industrial Workers of the World had been in northern Ontario for at least a decade. An IWW branch was established in Sault Ste. Marie as early as 1910, and in November 1917 Finnish Wobblies organized a Sleigh Drivers Union in the Algoma District.³⁸ No doubt some of the organizers of this union were Finnish

³⁵J.D. Golden, "The Shabaqua Strike," *The Industrial Worker*, 9 January 1930. Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 176 observes that among Wobblies "there seems to be an aversion to referring to a man as a leader in a strike or demonstration."

³⁶Salerno, *Red November Black November*, 5-6.

³⁷The strength and variety of the associational life of the Finnish left in the 1920s in Canada and the United States had its counterpart in Finland. Historians of Finland point out that as the 1920s approached the Finnish left was increasingly breaking with, not increasingly coming under, the control of bourgeois ideas, influences, and organizations. Risto Alapuro notes that in the 1920s in Finland "the workers not only voted for their own parties, but they also played, read, sung, participated in sports, shopped, and deposited their savings primarily in their own organizations and enterprises." Alapuro, *State and Revolution in Finland*, 208. See also L.A. Puntilla, *Political History of Finland*, 120.

³⁸Nick Viita, "From the Beginnings of the Canadian Finnish Labor Movement," translation by Ahti Tolvanen from *Industrialisti*, 9-13 October 1970.

Americans who had fled the draft and state repression in the United States.³⁹ Significant numbers of Finnish American Wobblies escaped arrest and imprisonment by heading north into Ontario, a movement that was closely monitored by the Ontario Provincial Police. On 8 June 1919 Constable Campbell of Fort Frances, a small town 200 miles west of Port Arthur, wrote to Major J.E. Rogers, Superintendent of the Provincial Police. Campbell noted the recent arrival of a "brood" of Wobbly organizers, including William Salo, delegate no. 57, Guss Henderickson, delegate no. 43, Vaino Pelto of Superior, Wisconsin, and Viano Rallio or Kallio, as well as a man named Robertson, who Campbell believed was really Henderickson.⁴⁰ In the process of investigating their arrival, Campbell confiscated two suitcases containing 80 pounds of IWW literature. Salo was arrested on 23 May, and charged under Order-in-Council 2381, Section 3, Subsection 1. On 2 June, in one of the Ontario judicial systems more expeditious trial proceedings, he was sentenced to two years in Stoney Mountain Penitentiary.⁴¹

The Ontario Provincial Police were aware, as early as the summer of 1919, of IWW plans at the Lakehead. Constable Campbell observed in his June letter that it "would appear from the Papers and Membership Cards that I found in the suitcases and in the prisoners effects that the plan of the I.W.W. was to organize the lumber industry Makeing [sic] Port Arthur their base, as there are more Finns there to start with."⁴² Campbell's recognition of the importance of the Finns to any future IWW success was prescient. There were 1,566 Finns in Port Arthur by 1921, comprising 10.8 per cent of the total population, and by 1931 the Finnish population had grown to 3,252, or 16.4 per cent of the total population. The census of 1921 reported 5,258 Finns living in the Thunder Bay District, a number that had grown to 9,000 — in a total population of 65,118 — by 1931.⁴³ Left-wing Finns in this population shared the knowledge that they or their families had supported the Reds against the Whites in 1918, and were often people outspoken in their criticisms of organized religion and the capitalist state. In the years prior to 1918 the great majority of these Finnish leftists were members or supporters of the Social Democratic or Socialist Party of Canada, but after the Finnish Revolution of 1918 they quickly shifted their allegiance from the Social Democratic Party and the Socialist Party to the One Big Union (OBU), and just as quickly from the OBU to the Wobblies and the Communist Party.

³⁹Wilson, "The Ethnic Voice," 105; Hill, "Historic Basis and Development of the Lumber Workers Organization and Struggles in Ontario," 2; Auvo Kostianen, "Contacts Between the Finnish Labour Movements in the United States and Canada," in Karni, *Finnish Diaspora I*, 37.

⁴⁰The names in the text are as they appear in the letter.

⁴¹Provincial Archives of Ontario (hereafter PAO), Ontario Provincial Police Reports (hereafter OPPR), RG23, Series E, E30, Campbell to Rogers, 8 June 1919.

⁴²PAO, OPPR, RG23, Series E, E30, Campbell to Rogers, 8 June 1919.

⁴³Sixth Census of Canada, 1921, *Volume I — Population*, 482; Seventh Census of Canada, 1931, *Volume II — Population By Areas*, 426-7.

Finnish Wobbly organizers were moving into a political culture very much like the one they had left in the United States, a political culture already influenced by the Finnish-American Wobbly press. Working-class Finns in Canada were very literate, and one of the working-class publications they read was *Sosialisti*, published from June 1914 to December 1916. After 1916 *Sosialisti* became *Teollisuustyöläinen* (The Industrial Worker), and later *Industrialisti*. Published by the Workers' Socialist Publishing Company in Duluth, Minnesota, *Industrialisti* was a publishing wonder in the late teens and 1920s, an industrial unionist daily with an American readership of approximately 10,000 and a Canadian readership of between 1,500 and 2,000, with 90 per cent of that readership in Ontario.⁴⁴ *Industrialisti* became the official Finnish language paper of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union no. 120.⁴⁵ In addition, the IWW's English language paper published in Chicago reported in March 1923 that in Sudbury, Port Arthur, and Timmins the circulation of *Tie Vapauteen* (The Road to Freedom), a Finnish Wobbly monthly also published in Duluth, was "advancing very rapidly."⁴⁶

Establishing the influence of the Finnish Wobbly press in northern Ontario is one thing: assessing the influence on Finnish bushworkers of tactics that one can identify as syndicalist or unique to the Industrial Workers of the World is quite another. What we do know is that in northern Ontario the tactics of the IWW proved more attractive to bushworkers who often worked in a different camp each season, or in several camps in the same season, than they did to workers with more stable employment in the mines and pulp mills. In the bush camps the IWW, an organization calling for direct action in the workplace and rejecting the signing of collective agreements which curtailed the ability to strike "spontaneously," gained adherents. An IWW pamphlet entitled "Appeal to Wage Workers Men and Women" described a number of strike tactics, including the passive strike, the intermittent strike, the opportune strike, the turning out of poor work, and going slow.⁴⁷ Salvatore Salerno points out that *Tie Vapauteen* "carried on an active propaganda in support of

⁴⁴Kostiainen, "Contacts between the Finnish Labour Movements in the United States and Canada," 42.

⁴⁵*Industrial Solidarity*, 2 February 1924. To John Wiita, editor of *Vapaus*, the decision to make *Industrialisti* the official paper of the union "was a slap in the face." He felt that *Vapaus* had played a major role in helping to organize the bushworkers, and that the "IWWites in their narrowmindedness" had alienated key union organizers such as district secretary Harry Bryan, who resigned in protest. Wiita's bitterness seems justified, and his experience provides an example of the ways in which the Finnish Wobblies hurt their own cause. Wilson, "The Ethnic Voice," 111. For Harry Bryan, who established Thunder Bay's first non-railway unions, see Jean Morrison, "The Organization of Labour at Thunder Bay," in Thorold J. Tronrud and A. Ernest Epp, eds., *Thunder Bay: From Rivalry to Unity* (Thunder Bay 1995), 121-2.

⁴⁶*Industrial Solidarity*, 24 March 1923.

⁴⁷NAC, Secretary of State (SS), Chief Press Censor Files (CPCF), RG6, Reel T-82.

anarcho-syndicalism ... well into the 1920s."⁴⁸ While it may no longer be possible to assess the actual impact of these ideas on rank-and-file bushworkers in northern Ontario, we do know that the espousal of tactics drawn from the European syndicalists gave Finnish and non-Finnish Communists the opportunity to claim that the Wobblies were in favour of localized, individualized, spontaneous forms of action, and were therefore opposed to class struggle and class unionism.

The Communist Party's on-going attempts to discredit the Wobblies as the cult of spontaneity notwithstanding, the Wobbly defence of local initiative in the calling of strikes was the cornerstone of their commitment to class struggle, the general strike, and working-class solidarity, not a repudiation of it. Like syndicalists in Britain, Finnish Wobblies "accepted the Marxist notion of class struggle and the utter primacy of the working class as the sole agency of revolution and transformation. They also accepted Marxist political economy as they understood it, if for no other reason than the absence of available alternatives."⁴⁹ As Marxists espousing class struggle, however, Finnish Wobblies were competing with Finnish Communists who could claim that they were the exponents of a Marxism that worked, had already worked in the Soviet Union, and represented the future of working-class struggle. Finnish Wobblies, as we shall see, were more bounded by their ethnic and linguistic community than were the Finnish Communists, and had much more difficulty in convincing workers that they could translate syndicalist tactics on the job into a full-fledged working-class revolt.

The centre of Finnish Marxism was Work People's College in Duluth, Minnesota, where Yrjö Sirola was an instructor during his stay in the United States. Founded in 1903 as the Finnish People's College, its original aim was to preserve the Finnish language and the Lutheran religion among young Finns. In 1907-08 Finnish socialists acquired control of the institution and changed the name to Work People's College.⁵⁰ Even after 1914, when the industrial unionists took control of the curriculum from the political socialists, the six-month course was based in Marxist economics. The sociology course featured the writings of Friedrich Engels, and there were also courses in mathematics, English, Finnish, public speaking, and labour history. The number of students enrolled in the 1920s declined, but Work People's College still gave 50-60 students a year a Marxist-based education. By 1931 the college had been attended by a total of 1,531 students from all over the United States, including a small number from Canada, and a body of female students that remained as high as 14 in 1929.⁵¹

⁴⁸Salerno, *Red November Black November*, 49.

⁴⁹Joseph White, "Syndicalism in a Mature Industrial Setting: the Case of Britain," in van der Linden and Thorpe, *Revolutionary Syndicalism*, 110.

⁵⁰*Industrial Solidarity*, 12 January 1924. Richard J. Altenbaugh, *Education for Struggle: The American Labor Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s* (Philadelphia 1990), 60, 64.

⁵¹Total attendance for Work People's College is in *Industrial Solidarity*, 13 October 1931. The 19 January 1927 issue of *Industrial Solidarity* reported that there were "a few students"

While the direct influence of Work People's College and English-language papers such as *Industrial Solidarity* is difficult to establish, we do know that Canadians — who were almost certainly Finnish — did attend the College, and in all probability a small number took the College's correspondence course. In 1913-14, when total enrolment was 157 students, 21 were from Canada, almost all of them from Ontario.⁵² Although the IWW did not formally recognize Work People's College as its official school until 1921, students attending in 1913-14 were taught by resolute industrial unionists such as Leo Laukki, who was directly influenced by the ideas of European syndicalists and rejected involvement in electoral politics.⁵³ Nick Viita, stationary delegate for the LWIU no. 120 in Port Arthur in 1925, a member of the LWIU no. 120 strike committee during the bushworkers' strike of 1926, manager of the Finnish Cooperative Restaurant in Port Arthur, and historian of the Finnish labour movement, attended Work People's College.⁵⁴

Finnish Wobblies, and supporters of the One Big Union, knew how important it was to educate young people if their ideas were to survive the powerful pull of English language and culture. In 1926 the RCMP was aware of at least four radical Finnish schools in northwestern Ontario, described as an OBU school in Fort William taught by David Aho, an OBU Sunday school for some 200 children in Port Arthur taught by a man named Amberg, as well as schools in Nipigon and Intola.⁵⁵ These were almost certainly IWW schools in terms of the ideas being taught, as there was an influential Finnish Wobbly press at this time, but no Finnish OBU press. The great majority of OBU supporters at the Lakehead were non-Finns, although it is entirely possible, given the past experience of Finnish Wobblies, that they told outsiders these schools belonged to the Canadian-based organization in order to give them more legitimacy. It is highly unlikely that the "Amberg" school was either an OBU or a "Sunday" school. Amberg was William Amberg — described as a Wobbly by Ahti Tolvanen — who in the early 1930s was the leader and probable organizer of the Canadian Junior Wobblies, who published a monthly entitled *The Junior Recruit*.⁵⁶ A.T. Hill recalls engaging in a number of public debates with

from Canada in the 1926-27 class. The figure of 14 women in the 1928-29 class is based on a count of the students in a picture that appeared in the 10 April 1929 issue of *Industrial Solidarity*.

⁵²Kostiainen, "Contacts between the Finnish Labour Movements in the United States and Canada," 41.

⁵³Altenbaugh, *Education for Struggle*, 65-7. By 1914 the split between the industrial unionists and socialists at Work People's College had become irreconcilable.

⁵⁴*Industrial Solidarity*, 21 August 1929.

⁵⁵Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, "Bulletin No. 334, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Headquarters, 9 September 1926," *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Early Years, 1919-1929* (St. John's 1994), 356.

⁵⁶*Industrial Worker*, 19 December 1933.

Amberg in 1919 and 1920, and describes him as representing the "IWW syndicalist standpoint."⁵⁷ These were Wobbly schools, and their existence reveals how deeply imbedded Marxism and industrial unionism were in the cultural life of the Finnish Wobbly left in northern Ontario, reaching even to the education of hundreds of Finnish children.

The staying power of the IWW in northern Ontario in unions such as the LWIU no. 120 was based in the Finnish associational life detailed by Ahti Tolvanen. In Port Arthur, for example, the Wobblies, in their Labour Temple at 314 Bay Street, and the Communists in the Finnish Organization of Canada (FOC) Hall at 316 Bay Street, put on plays, dances, and concerts, which served to educate the workers in left-wing ideology, and keep them out of the brothels and bootleggers' establishments.⁵⁸ The breadth and depth of this political culture based in Finnish associational life is perhaps best exemplified by the vibrancy of Finnish theatre, which had deep roots in nineteenth-century Finland. In both Canada and the United States there was no representative theatre; non-members of a particular ideological community would attend popular plays in the halls of rival groups. Finns in northern Ontario not only performed and attended plays written by Finnish-American playwrights, but also wrote plays of their own. Plays represented a means of escape for immigrant labourers, but the socialists favoured "proletarian themes that idealized and justified their struggle and cause."⁵⁹ Among the more popular plays of the years 1900-30 were *Työmiehen Vaimo* (The Worker's Wife), *Murtuneita* (The Oppressed), *Tukkijoella* (The Lumberjacks), *Luokkaviha* (Class Hatred), and *Yleislakko* (The General Strike).⁶⁰ Alf Hautamäki, principal Communist Party organizer of Finnish bushworkers in northern Ontario in the 1920s and early 1930s was also a playwright. His musical *Erämaiden Orjat* (The Slaves of the Wilderness) describes the life of forest workers in the Canadian bush camps. His play *Verijuhlat* (Festival of Blood), deals with pacifism and class struggle as its main themes, and is punctuated by long, direct quotes from the *Communist Manifesto*.⁶¹

As Ahti Tolvanen points out, and as pictures from the period attest, it was the Labour Temple, not the FOC Hall, that was the main centre of this associational life in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶² Finnish women were the backbone of this culture, and they also played a major role in the maintenance of boarding houses where

⁵⁷Hill, "Historic Basis and Development of the Lumber Workers Organization and Struggles in Ontario," 5-6.

⁵⁸Tolvanen, "Finntown," 40-1.

⁵⁹Timo Riippa, "The Finnish Immigrant Theatre in the United States," in Michael G. Karni, ed., *Finnish Diaspora II: United States* (Toronto 1981), 282.

⁶⁰Riippa, "Finnish Immigrant Theatre in the United States," 283-5.

⁶¹Taru Sundstén, "The Theatre of the Finnish-Canadian Labour Movement and its Dramatic Literature, 1900-1939," in Karni, *Finnish Diaspora I*, 87.

⁶²Tolvanen, "Finntown," 108. The Labour Temple was the main centre for a very practical reason as well — it was bigger.

unemployed or striking workers could find cheap food and lodging.⁶³ They were also an integral part of fund-raising efforts, and at Finnish cooperative restaurants women volunteers served cheap or free food, much of it donated by Finnish farmers and coop stores.⁶⁴ When J.A. McDonald visited the Labour Temple in 1926 it was the activities of the women that he was most impressed by. According to McDonald all the waitresses were members of the IWW, and one of the cooks was a woman who had served a year in a Finnish prison for her activities on behalf of the Reds during the Finnish Revolution of 1918. One of the waitresses he describes as "the greatest dramatic artist I have seen for many years on any stage," and McDonald was equally impressed by a Miss H. Aaltonen, who played the lead role in the Finnish opera "Katja, the Dancer" while in Port Arthur.⁶⁵ As the attendance of Finnish women at Work People's College attests, however, Finnish Wobbly women could be as engaged and as well versed in Marxist theory as in the theatre. The social and cultural life of the Finnish left was very important to them, but they wanted more than to "dance through the revolution."⁶⁶

The Finnish community's capacity to aid striking bushworkers was enhanced by the formation of the *Canadian Teollisuusunionistien Kannatusliitto* (Support League of Canadian Industrial Unionists) or CTKL in 1924-25. The organization was closely associated with the IWW, provided support during strikes, and helped sign up new members. The CTKL, which boasted some 23 halls in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, was impressive evidence that the Finnish Wobblies represented a powerful countertrend to the general malaise of North American labour and left-wing radicalism in the 1920s.⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, the organization of the CTKL corresponded with the Communist Party's attempts in the mid-1920s to more fully integrate ethnic members into the daily organizational life of the party.⁶⁸ Some Finnish Communists responded to this "Bolshevization" policy by leaving the party, but in northern Ontario others were able to maintain a strong connection to Finnish associational life through the IWW, one of the reasons why the IWW Labour Temple, not the FOC Hall, was the centre of the Finnish left's social and cultural activities in places like Port Arthur.

In a very real sense, therefore, Finnish bushworkers were part of a working-class culture that paralleled in many ways the culture of the tramping artisans of

⁶³Finnish women were also employed in the bush camps, where they worked as cooks, kitchen staff, laundresses, and clerks. See Ian Radforth, "Social History of Finns in Ontario: Finnish Lumber Workers in Ontario, 1919-46," *Polyphony*, 3, 2 (Fall 1981), 26.

⁶⁴Tolvanen, "Finntown," 40-1; Radforth, "Social History of Finns in Ontario," 34.

⁶⁵J.A. McDonald, "Training for Freedom," *Industrial Pioneer*, March 1926.

⁶⁶Lindström-Best, *Defiant Sisters*, 138. For the activist role played by Finnish women in socialist organizations see as well Joan Sangster, "Finnish Women in Ontario, 1890-1930," *Polyphony*, 3, 2 (Fall 1981).

⁶⁷Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 119-20.

⁶⁸Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 228.

the nineteenth century.⁶⁹ The Industrial Workers of the World found a home among Finnish bushworkers through the strength of Finnish associational life, the spread of IWW ideas in the Finnish press, and the influence of students who attended Work People's College. The leading vehicle of Finnish Wobbly radicalism in northern Ontario was the Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU), which grew out of the British Columbia Loggers Union organized in January 1919. The union became the LWIU in July 1919, and its insistence on industrial unionism was in part derived from the influence of Wobblies in British Columbia. The union grew rapidly, and from its base in Vancouver district offices were opened in Prince George, Prince Rupert, Cranbrook, Edmonton, Prince Albert, The Pas, and Sudbury, Timmins, and Cobalt in northern Ontario.⁷⁰

Although the Lumber Workers Industrial Union was officially affiliated with the One Big Union until March 1924, the minutes of the Port Arthur LWIU local indicate problems with the Vancouver headquarters, conflict between Finns and non-Finns in the union, and the influence of the IWW appearing within months of the OBU's creation. At the 3 November 1919 meeting chairman Koivisto resigned when organizer Keane demanded that the meeting be conducted in English.⁷¹ At the 2 February 1920 meeting the outcome was rather different, as the only non-Finnish speaker in attendance left the room, a Mrs. Henricson was elected chairperson, and the proceedings were conducted in Finnish.⁷² At the same time that the LWIU was becoming a more Finnish organization, it was also breaking with the Vancouver headquarters and showing signs of IWW influence. At the 5 May 1920 executive board meeting a motion was passed empowering the secretary "to write L.W.I.U. head quarters that we have quit from them according to last business meeting held May 3rd." It had been moved at the 27 April meeting that the decision to strike in the camps should be based on a two to one vote, and that the members in the camps themselves should decide what kinds of action should be taken in order to enforce the union's demands, whether "walk out" or "slow down," or any other tactic.⁷³ Here we see the syndicalist influence very early on in the history of the union, an influence that emanated from the Wobbly press and Wobbly organizers, not from the OBU leadership in Winnipeg.

⁶⁹See Bryan D. Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft and Culture in Historical Perspective," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 1 (1976).

⁷⁰Harold A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1948), 281 puts LWIU membership at 23,000 in mid-1920, while David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men* (Toronto 1978), 136 puts peak membership at 17,000 at the end of 1919.

⁷¹Lakehead University Archives (hereafter LUA), MG3 FINN VII B ii 1, LWIU(OBU) Minute Book, 3 November 1919.

⁷²LUA, MG3 FINN VII B ii 1, LWIU(OBU) Minute Book, 2 February 1920.

⁷³LUA, MG3 FINN VII B ii 2, LWIU(OBU) Executive Board Meetings, 27 April 1920 and 5 May 1920.

There is no doubt that the OBU was in rapid decline in these years, and that the influence of Wobbly members was on the increase.⁷⁴ Yet it was not until the annual convention of the LWIU (OBU), held in Sudbury on 27 December 1923, that the actual decision was made to hold a referendum on affiliation with the Industrial Workers of the World. The convention noted the increase in circulation of *Industrialisti* among Finnish workers in Canada, and there were many calls "for abolition of contract and piece work."⁷⁵ All the referendum ballots had been counted by 1 March 1924, and members of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union officially decided to affiliate with the Industrial Workers of the World.

Even though the IWW now had control of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union no. 120, which claimed a membership of 2,000, the actual number of bushworkers who were paid up members on an on-going basis was likely between 150 and 200.⁷⁶ The majority of left-wing Finnish bushworkers belonged to the Lumber Workers Industrial Union of Canada (LWIUC), affiliated with the Finnish Organization of Canada and the Communist Party. That fact notwithstanding, the influence of the IWW was strong within the FOC and even within the Communist Party itself. Communist Party leader Tim Buck observed that in the 1920s "there were very large numbers of members who had lingering affection for the I.W.W." That affection had a long history, because prior to the formation of the Communist Party there developed in the FOC "a very strong wing which called themselves the Industrialists and they were opposed to the leaning of the Finnish Organization in the direction of parliamentary action, of political action."⁷⁷ Alf Hautamäki, organizer and secretary of the LWIUC, and for a time president of the Finnish Organization of Canada, was himself a former member of the Industrial Workers of the World.

In the mid-1920s Finnish Wobblies were able to maintain a viable social, educational, and political influence in a number of northern Ontario locations, including Fort Frances, Port Arthur, Fort William, Sioux Lookout, Nipigon, Sault Ste. Marie, Kapuskasing, Timmins, Schumacher, and Sudbury. By April 1924 the LWIU no. 120 had a supply station on Elm Street in Sudbury, where IWW literature was available in several languages from supply clerk Nick Viita. Educational meetings were held once a week.⁷⁸ In the summer of 1924 the IWW-affiliated Metal Mine Workers Industrial Union no. 210 opened up a hall and branch office at 34

⁷⁴Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 120.

⁷⁵*Industrial Solidarity*, 2 February 1924. The report identifies Oscar Freeman as the secretary treasurer, John Hill as the permanent chairman, and Jalmar Salmi and Uno Suomi as recording secretaries. In all probability Freeman and Hill, as well as Salmi and Suomi, were Finns. For the benefits and drawbacks of piece work for the bosses, and the abuses of the system workers were protesting against, see Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 72-7.

⁷⁶*Industrial Solidarity*, 18 November 1925.

⁷⁷NAC, MG32, G3, vol. 1, Tim Buck Papers, Reminiscences, Session 8, Take 2; Session 10, Take 2.

⁷⁸*Industrial Solidarity*, 5 April 1924.

Second Avenue in Timmins.⁷⁹ Picnics and "entertainments" were held in all of these centres, such as the successful picnic held on 24 July by the IWW in Timmins. The evening's entertainment was held in the Italian Hall, but as was so often the case with Wobbly cultural events it was the Finnish Women's Industrial Union Aid Society that played the prominent role in organizing the event. Also typical of Wobbly socials in northern Ontario, the money raised was in support of fellow workers in the United States, this time striking Wobbly workers in San Pedro, California.⁸⁰ Branch secretary J.D. Golden reported that an IWW entertainment held in Sudbury in the late winter of 1925, also organized by the Finnish Women's Industrial Union Auxiliary, raised \$23.10 for class war prisoners.⁸¹

As the reports in *Industrial Solidarity* reveal, however, it was a struggle to maintain viable locals in northeastern Ontario. The Wobblies continued to depend on a relatively small cohort of dedicated organizers and secretaries, not all of them Finnish, and not all of them bushworkers. The most trusted and dependable Wobblies moved from local to local on a fairly regular basis, and there was a constant pull from the Lakehead, where the Wobblies were most firmly rooted in the workforce and the associational life of the Finnish left. Nick Viita, who was supply clerk for the Sudbury local of the LWIU no. 120 in the spring of 1925, was the stationary delegate in Port Arthur by the summer of that year. Viita replaced John Pesola, who had been removed, for reasons not revealed by the IWW press, by the membership. When Viita left Sudbury he was replaced by J.D. Golden, who himself was replaced late in the year by A.E. Windle.⁸² Viita's move to Port Arthur was symbolic of the fact that the IWW in northern Ontario was based among Finnish bushworkers in northwestern Ontario, a reality confirmed in the summer of 1926 when the LWIU no. 120 moved its headquarters from Sudbury to Port Arthur.⁸³

Moving the headquarters to Port Arthur allowed the Wobblies to take a leading role in the bushworkers' strike of 1926, a role rivalled only by the IWW's leadership of the railway navvies who struck the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk lines in British Columbia in 1912.⁸⁴ The strike, which commenced on 16 September 1926 and ended on 8 November 1926, involved 2,000 bushworkers in the area of Port Arthur, Fort William, and Nipigon.⁸⁵ Although the organizing committee was jointly composed of the Communist-affiliated LWIUC and the IWW-affiliated LWIU no. 120, the IWW had initiated the strike by calling the LWIUC to join it in a joint conference.⁸⁶ The initiative and commitment of the Wobblies has been misrepre-

⁷⁹*Industrial Solidarity*, 20 August 1924.

⁸⁰*Industrial Solidarity*, 13 August 1924.

⁸¹*Industrial Solidarity*, 1 April 1925.

⁸²*Industrial Solidarity*, 22 July and 26 August 1925; 6 January 1926.

⁸³*Industrial Solidarity*, 14 July 1926.

⁸⁴Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 47-52.

⁸⁵NAC, Strikes and Lockouts Files (hereafter SLF), MF 2389, vol. 337, strike 76, *Strike Report of Alf Hautamäki to Department of Labour*, 29 November 1926.

⁸⁶*Industrial Solidarity*, 6 October 1926.

sented by the claim that the union's headquarters were moved to Port Arthur after the strike was over, when in fact they were moved before the strike, as was the *Industrialisti* news bureau.⁸⁷ The IWW's claim to leadership of the strike was not disputed in the Communist Party's paper *The Worker*, and in 1929 the annual convention of the LWIUC noted that the Communist-led union had become the "real organizational expression of the main body of workers employed in the logging camps of Ontario" following the 1926 strike.⁸⁸

During the strike all the elements of Finnish Wobbly culture came together to provide strong support for the striking workers. J.A. McDonald reported that the Industrial Union Cooperative Lunch, managed by Nick Viita, was furnishing strikers with very good food for \$20 a meal. On 27 September an entertainment given by the Industrial Union Auxiliary at the IWW labour temple raised \$188.00, while a similar entertainment at the FOC Hall raised \$23.00, further evidence that the IWW's Labour Temple was the centre of Finnish associational life and strike support in northwestern Ontario.⁸⁹ In early October an IWW branch meeting decided to send circulars to all labour bodies in Port Arthur and Fort William seeking support for Sacco and Vanzetti, demonstrating the tenacity of the internationalist vision of Finnish Wobblies, even in the midst of a long, bitter local strike against tremendous odds.⁹⁰

Initially strike solidarity was remarkable, given the potential for conflict among social democrats, IWW's, and Communists. Each union had its own strike committee, and there was a general strike committee. General strike meetings were held every other day, and the men gathered "either at the Labor Temple, the hall of the Industrial Union Auxiliary, or at the Communist Hall and do their business quietly and calmly without jangling or recrimination between the two unions concerned and then put what they have voted for into action."⁹¹ Cooperation between Communists and Wobblies at the rank and file level in the early weeks of the strike notwithstanding, by the end of October the strike was beginning to falter. Only 20 per cent of the striking workers were organized, and the approaching winter, lack of funds, and importation of strikebreakers weakened the resolve of Wobbly and Communist alike.

When Alf Hautamäki, on 25 October, declared that it was necessary to end the strike, the Wobblies were not in a position to offer an alternative strategy. Given that the LWIUC had more members than the LWIU no. 120, the general strike committee had more Communists than Wobblies on it. At the meeting on 28 October the united front collapsed when Uuno Jarvi, Hjalmar Salmi and other Finnish Wobblies walked out.⁹² The Communists were unable to keep the strike

⁸⁷Tolvanen, "Finntown," 56-7.

⁸⁸CPC, *Report of the Fifth Convention*, 6-8 April 1929.

⁸⁹*Industrial Solidarity*, 6 October 1926.

⁹⁰*Industrial Solidarity*, 13 October 1926.

⁹¹*Industrial Solidarity*, 6 October 1926.

⁹²Tolvanen, "Finntown," 53.

going, but the Wobblies could only suggest that "the strike should not be called off but be carried to the jobs, and that all those who broke certain job tactics and plans should be classed as scabs." The great majority of striking workers rejected such a strategy, and when voted on it was resoundingly defeated.⁹³ Finnish, as well as English, French, Swedish, Russian, and East European bushworkers wanted to strike openly, and could not be convinced to support the only really identifiable syndicalist tactic proposed by Wobbly leaders.

The 1926 strike demonstrated both the strengths and weaknesses of the Industrial Workers of the World in northern Ontario. The Wobblies took a leading role in organizing the strike, maintaining picket lines, providing food and shelter, and offering a social and cultural life for the men and women on strike. As the strike dragged on, however, the Wobblies were without a viable strategy to counter the workers' acceptance of a compromise settlement on monthly wages, and slight increases in the rate per cord of pulp wood cut for piece workers. When the strike ended on 8 November it was the Communists, not the Wobblies, who were in the best position to claim credit for the gains that had been made, although even Beckie Buhay, a leading member of the Communist Party, recognized that the successes of the strike had been made possible by the "united front of the two organizations."⁹⁴

Yet it remained obvious to Wobbly leaders themselves that the IWW had to more clearly affirm a viable organizing strategy in the bush camps of northern Ontario if the organization was to survive. The Finnish Communists still needed the support and cooperation of Finnish Wobblies in order to conduct effective labour actions, but the Communist leadership, its lingering respect for the Wobblies notwithstanding, was circling in for the kill. Rank and file Finnish bushworkers showed great solidarity during strikes, but there was always sectarianism, always the rivalry born of the knowledge that in the long run the north woods were not big enough for both organizations.⁹⁵ Until the 1930s, however, both sides were bound by a common enemy and a grudging respect for the other. Their fate, in many ways, remained a common one.

In the late 1920s the declining fortunes of the IWW, a fate shared by Finnish Communists, led to a number of attempts to reverse the trend.⁹⁶ The Wobblies responded to the partial defeat of 1926 by attempting to assess support in all the Ontario camps for a general strike, to be based in the widely supported demand for

⁹³*Industrial Solidarity*, 15 December 1926.

⁹⁴*The Worker*, 13 November 1926.

⁹⁵For the kind of vitriolic accusations and counter-accusations that passed between Wobbly and Communist leaders during the 1929 bushworkers' strike see Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 124.

⁹⁶By 1929 the LWIUC was in serious trouble. The membership was falling, the union was more than \$2,200.00 in debt, and organizational work was practically at a standstill. The situation was so serious that the report of the 1929 LWIUC convention notes that the "existence of the union is actually in danger." CPC, *Report of the Fifth Convention*, 6-8 April 1929.

the 8-hour day and an end to the piece-work system.⁹⁷ At the ninth Ontario district conference of LWIU no. 120 at Port Arthur on 7 October 1928 a resolution in favour of approaching the One Big Union concerning a merger was proposed.⁹⁸ Three weeks later, at the conference of the Sudbury district of the LWIU no. 120, the resolution in favour of approaching the OBU was rejected, but the call for a French-speaking travelling delegate for the Sudbury district was approved. It was also decided to encourage workers to subscribe to *Industrial Solidarity*, the English-language Wobbly paper published in Chicago.⁹⁹ The latter two developments would suggest that the rww's base among Finnish workers was beginning to weaken, a trend confirmed by the fact that in the spring of 1928 the rww branch secretary in Sudbury was R. Griffith, and in the spring of 1929 it was Fred Louchuk.¹⁰⁰

In the Port Arthur district, however, where Hjalmar Salmi was branch secretary of the LWIU no. 120 from 1928-30, the Finnish Wobbly associational culture remained strong, even in small rural communities. On 21 July 1929 an rww picnic was held at the Intola Hall, in the small farming community west of Port Arthur. A day given over to field athletics gave way to a night of songs, recitations, speeches, and a play presented by the Port Arthur rww vaudeville players. Over \$100.00 was raised to defray the expenses of an LWIU no. 120 organizing drive, the money being provided by the 387 people who bought tickets for the dance.¹⁰¹ It was not only this local strength in the Finnish community, but also the rww's continuing identification with Wobbly workers in the United States that kept the culture vibrant. An entertainment held at the rww Labour Temple on 14 December 1929 raised \$80.72 for the Class War Prisoners Christmas Relief Fund. The men, women, and children in attendance were treated to an evening of songs, recitations, piano and violin solos, a dialogue and dance, in addition to short speeches on the class struggle in Finnish and English.¹⁰² The depression was already deepening, and increasing numbers of bushworkers were joining the unemployment lines, but there was still time for sociability, and still a few cents to be found for fellow workers.

Yet the problem remains: if the Finnish Wobblies were still a force to be reckoned with, why did they not take a leading role in the bushworkers' strike of 1929? In part the answer lies in the weakened condition of the Wobblies, in part in the changed strategy of the Communist Party. At the 1929 LWIUC convention the entrance into the Third Period, which called for the creation of independent

⁹⁷ *Industrial Solidarity*, 7 September 1927.

⁹⁸ Canada: Department of Labour (DL), Labour Organization in Canada (LOC), *Eighteenth Annual Report* (Ottawa 1929), 170.

⁹⁹ DL, LOC, *Eighteenth Annual Report*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ *Industrial Solidarity*, 16 May 1928; 3 April 1929.

¹⁰¹ *Industrial Solidarity*, 7 August 1929.

¹⁰² *Industrial Solidarity*, 1 January 1930.

Communist unions, determined changes in the CPC's strike policy. Arguing that the LWIUC had been wrong in participating with the IWW on strike committees, the convention endorsed freedom of action in conducting strikes in its own manner. In order to legitimate what proved to be a tactical blunder, the Communists denounced the syndicalist tactics of the IWW, noting that syndicalist ideas "are still quite strong among the lumber-Jacks, and our own comrades reflect the pressure of this ideology of spontaneity with which the Bush workers are impregnated." It was a tough battle, however, won over the desire of some delegates "to cater to the cult of spontaneity."¹⁰³

In effect, the strike of 1929 would appear to have been a test case for the Communist Party leadership in the effectiveness of their new tactics. The IWW took no official part in the strike, although IWW members, according to the Wobbly press, took control of organizing the pickets.¹⁰⁴ This was necessary because the Communist leadership of the LWIUC refused to cooperate with the Wobblies.¹⁰⁵ The result, as Ian Radforth points out, was "a disaster."¹⁰⁶ While *The Worker* claimed that 1,000 workers were involved in the 1929 strike, and the *Labour Gazette* report put the figure at 800, the *Industrial Worker* claimed that the number of strikers at any one time was closer to 100, with many of them finding jobs in other camps after one day off the job.¹⁰⁷ Alf Hautamäki and the Communist press railed against the IWW strikebreakers and "scab shippers," but the evidence seems to suggest that Hautamäki was attempting to create a strike where none existed. The Communists did, however, learn a lesson, and when the next major strike took place in the north woods cooperation between the Communists and the IWW would produce a much more effective strike than that of 1929.

Finnish Wobblies were still a key element on the left in places like Port Arthur, Nipigon, Sault Ste. Marie, and Sudbury, but there were unmistakable signs that the organization was hurt by the depression. Entertainments continued, such as the one that took place in Port Arthur in January 1931, which featured the usual speeches in Finnish and English, recitations and readings, piano and vocal solos, a one-act vaudeville play lampooning religion, and a three-hour dance. Attendance would appear to have been down, however, as only \$24.00 was raised.¹⁰⁸ An entertainment held in August 1931, organized by the Industrial Union Auxiliary in aid of striking miners in Kentucky, raised \$15.43.¹⁰⁹ In part, of course, this decline in monies raised by IWW social events was a product of the precipitous decline in the number of employed bushworkers in the late 1920s and early 1930s — the number of

¹⁰³CPC, *Report of the Fifth Convention*, 6-8 April 1929.

¹⁰⁴*Industrial Solidarity*, 4 December 1929.

¹⁰⁵*Industrial Solidarity*, 11 December 1929.

¹⁰⁶Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 124.

¹⁰⁷*Industrial Worker*, 23 November 1929.

¹⁰⁸*Industrial Solidarity*, 27 January 1931.

¹⁰⁹*Industrial Solidarity*, 15 September 1931.

bushworkers in the Ontario camps dropped from 21,000 in 1928-29 to 4,825 in 1932-33.¹¹⁰

Yet it was not just a question of unemployed workers not being able to support the social and cultural life of the Finnish Wobbly left. At the general membership meeting of 20 September 1931 it was resolved to establish a Canadian administration of the IWW, because changes in the immigration laws "make it practically impossible for organizers to cross from the States to Canada ... customs laws and new bans being made almost every day make it harder than ever to get literature and supplies which are made in the United States."¹¹¹ The Wobblies were hurting, for in spite of the strength of Finnish Wobbly associational life it remained the case that the IWW in northern Ontario needed a strong press to counter the influence of the Communist press, and by 1933-34 of the social democratic press as well. Young Finns from Red families were drifting away from the left, leaving behind the politics as well as the language and culture of their parents. It was the old guard that led the new Canadian administration of the IWW: in the spring of 1932 J.H. Lindholm was elected General Secretary Treasurer, and members elected to the General Executive Board included Nick Viita, Peter Aho, Henry Koivisto, Jalmar Salmi, and J.D. Golden.¹¹² The organization was in decline, the first Canadian IWW conference held at Port Arthur in September 1932 being able to draw only 17 members and delegates.¹¹³

What is also evident, however, is that try as they might the Communists were unable to go it alone, and attempts to discredit the IWW were no more successful in the Third Period than they had been in the 1920s.¹¹⁴ In 1932 the lumber workers won two short strikes in the Nipigon area, one at Don Clark's camp, and the other at Oscar Styffe's pulploading site. In October 1932 an article in *Workers Unity*, the paper of the Workers' Unity League, accused the Wobblies of strikebreaking during these confrontations. In the spring of 1933 the *Industrial Worker*, whose interpretation was that the IWW and Communists had "united to win" the two strikes, reported on a recent meeting in Nipigon. At that meeting supporters of both the IWW and Communist lumber workers' unions denied accusations that the Wobblies

¹¹⁰Ontario Department of Health, *Annual Report*, 1919-31, 1934-63; Department of Lands and Forests, *Annual Report*, 1932-6, cited in Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 250-1.

¹¹¹*Industrial Solidarity*, 20 October 1931.

¹¹²*Industrial Worker*, 19 April 1932.

¹¹³*Industrial Worker*, 27 September 1932.

¹¹⁴The strengths and weaknesses of the Third Period in general, and the Workers' Unity League in particular, have been the subject of an on-going debate among Canadian labour historians. Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montréal 1981), 287 is harshly critical of the "sectarian and adventurist policies of the Third Period," while John Manley, "Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period': The Workers' Unity League, 1929-1935," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 5 (Calgary 1994), 190-1 argues that in the Third Period the Communists were "free to respond" to the movements of the working class.

had engaged in strikebreaking, and called for the discrediting of the author of the article in question.¹¹⁵ In the early 1930s many Finnish Communists continued to defend the Wobblies, and efforts by the leadership and press of the Communist Party to falsely condemn the Wobblies were rejected by members of the rank and file.

The official policy of the Communist Party, which condemned working in cooperation with the Wobblies, was a rhetorical veneer covering the realization that effective strikes in the bush camps of northern Ontario required working in cooperation with the "syndicalists." By 1931, however, it was the Communist Party, in the form of the Workers' Unity League, that had clearly taken the lead in organizing against widespread unemployment, poor working conditions, and plummeting piece and monthly wage rates in the bush camps. In the winter and spring of 1932-33 employers cut the rate for a 4-foot cord of pulp below \$2.00, and workers also had grievances concerning unfair and unreliable measuring practices for piece-work by the company scalers. In August and September 1933 the rww, LWIUC, and the unemployed met in "United Front Conferences" to establish common goals.¹¹⁶ The result was a strike that began sporadically, although by 7 November 2,500 workers were out. Included in their number were the employees of the Spruce Falls Company in Kapuskasing, 60 per cent of whom were French-Canadians who had always been unorganized.¹¹⁷

The response may even have surprised the Communist and rww leaders themselves. In the first week of November the strike spread westward to Fort Frances, eastward to Cochrane and Ansonville, then crossed the Québec border into Rouyn. By mid-November 4,500 workers were on strike, not counting the 1,000 workers who had signed an agreement with the Spruce Falls Company on 8 November. In the Thunder Bay District alone 1,500 workers were on strike between 1 November and 8 December, resulting in a loss of 48,000 working days. The much better known and celebrated Stratford furniture workers strike, which took place in the same period, involved 600 workers and 26,000 working days lost.¹¹⁸ An agreement was finally signed on 9 December 1933, with the lumberworkers upholding a good part of their program, although some concessions were made to certain employers in the area of organizing rights.¹¹⁹

As was the case in 1926, the success of the strike was based in militant action, cooperation between the Communists and the Wobblies, and the extensive support network based in the relief efforts of Finnish women. In his report on the strike J.D.

¹¹⁵*Industrial Worker*, 2 May 1933.

¹¹⁶Tolvanen, "Finntown," 80.

¹¹⁷Tolvanen, "Finntown," 81-2. The 2 December 1930 issue of *Industrial Solidarity* reported that the IWW had a stationary delegate, Thomas Kaariainen, in Kapuskasing.

¹¹⁸DOL, *Labour Gazette*, 33 (October 1933) 983, (November 1933) 1075, (December 1933) 1162; Vol. 34 (January 1934) 17.

¹¹⁹Tolvanen, "Finntown," 87.

Golden observed that all Wobblies had left the camps, and that their activities had taken on a "real true action form." Groups of picketers went to the sometimes isolated bush camps, compelled any scabs in the camps to leave, and marched them as much as 45 miles into Port Arthur and Fort William. At the Lakehead and elsewhere there was the usual tremendous support, there being eight strike relief kitchens in Port Arthur and Fort William, and at least one in Nipigon.¹²⁰ The strike ended with a compromise settlement, although victory was claimed by the LWIUC.

The Sault Ste. Marie strike in the fall of 1934 again involved the cooperation of the Workers' Unity League and the IWW in a protest almost entirely conducted by Finns. Tents were sent in from Sudbury, soup kitchens were set up in the Finnish Hall, and donations raised by the IWW and the Workers International Relief, a Communist organization, came from across Canada and the United States. Because the camps were scattered along the Algoma Central Railway Line, the task of maintaining picket lines and stopping the infiltration of strikebreakers was a gargantuan task. Workers were forced to sleep in tents near the rail line in sub-zero weather, and the transportation of pickets and supplies required an enormous effort by Finnish men and women who faced the hostility of much of the local press and Anglo-Saxon citizenry.¹²¹ The Relief Committee of LWIU no. 120 attempted to put a bold face on the eventual loss of the strike, pointing out that the union "had gained strength in membership" and a "wealth of knowledge," and would live to "again challenge the right of the Abitibi P&P Co. and other Corporations to maintain their rule of profits against the economic interests of the workers."¹²² In reality it was the last major strike in which the Wobblies would take a leading role, although locals were maintained into the early 1940s, and former Wobblies would play important roles in unions like the Mine Mill and Smelter Workers when the CIO came to Canada.

It is true, as Ian Radforth points out, that the appeal of the Industrial Workers of the World in northern Ontario was based in the material conditions of work in the isolated bush camps. When labour militance produced improved conditions in the camps, and mechanization both reduced the number of immigrant workers required and produced a more stable workforce based on a new set of skills the IWW's appeal to Finnish and other bushworkers suffered a serious decline. Yet it is also true that Radforth's emphasis on changes occurring at the worksite needs to be complemented by a recognition of the importance of Wobbly ideas and organizers. Given that the Wobblies placed great emphasis on rank and file initiative, and attempted to convince workers that they did not need leaders, the dissemination of

¹²⁰*Industrial Worker*, 19 December 1933.

¹²¹For a more detailed account of the strike see Livo Ducin(pseud.), "Unrest in the Algoma Lumbercamps: The Bushworkers' Strikes of 1933-34," in John Ferris, ed., *50 Years of Labour in Algoma* (Sault Ste. Marie 1978).

¹²²PAO, J.A. Palokangas Papers, Reel 15, *Financial Statement of the Relief Committee of the Algoma Strikers*, 28 November 1934.

the Wobbly press was crucial to the organization's well-being. The IWW in Canada also needed the support of organizers from the United States, and in the early 1930s state repression of the Wobbly press and tightening up of the border hurt the IWW. In addition, the Wobblies needed to expand their core strength beyond the Finnish community, where support was weakening among young Finns motivated by influences very different from those of parents who had lived through the Finnish Revolution of 1918 or state repression in Canada and the United States during World War One. Finnish Wobblies and their English-speaking allies did attempt to expand their influence into the French Canadian, Slavic, and Swedish workforces, but the effort bore little fruit, and it was the Workers' Unity League that was the more successful organization in this endeavour.

It has always been difficult, given the transience of Wobbly organizers and the largely immigrant workers they represented, to make the Industrial Workers of the World in Canada a living, breathing, reality of Canadian labour history. In northern Ontario they were just that, an integral, indeed indispensable element in the associational life and class struggle of the Finnish left in the 1920s and early 1930s. Finnish Wobblies fought long and hard for a future they saw in the preservation of the associational life of the Finnish left and in the socialist education of the younger generation. That commitment to the Industrial Workers of the World had to be firmly and proudly held because, as Marvin Rintala points out, "Bolshevik ideology rapidly found its way" into "the spiritual vacuum created by the failure of both parliamentary and extraparliamentary Social Democracy" in Finland in 1918. As Rintala points out, it was the Communists in Finland, not Wobblies, who became known in the months and years following 1918 for their "popular appeal" and "militant leadership."¹²³ Given that left-wing Finns emigrating from Finland in the 1920s were either Communist or Social Democratic supporters, Finnish Wobblies were constantly fighting an uphill battle. For strength they drew on the Finnish commitment to activism, to self-education, and to the withering away of the state embodied in the writings of Karl Marx and the life and thought of Finnish utopian socialists such as Matti Kurikka.¹²⁴

If the male leadership of the Industrial Workers of the World had more fully recognized, respected and encouraged the participation of Finnish women in the left's associational life, this culture would have been stronger and longer-lived than it was. The argument put forward by Ahti Tolvanen that without the aid of female-based support groups like the Finnish Women's Industrial Union Auxiliary "it is unlikely that adequate worker solidarity to gain improvements and carry through important strike actions would have been achieved" echoes that of A.T. Hill, who says that lumber workers' struggles "could not be carried out without

¹²³Rintala, "The Problem of Generations in Finnish Communism," 194.

¹²⁴Tolvanen, "Finntown," 45. For Matti Kurikka, his ideas and influence, see J. Donald Wilson, "'Never Believe What You Have Never Doubted': Matti Kurikka's Dream for a New World Utopia," in Karni, *Finnish Diaspora I*, 131-53.

many women's groups."¹²⁵ But women were more central to the Wobbly vision than this. J.A. McDonald was one Wobbly, at least, who saw women as an important part of "the structure of new artistic conceptions" that he saw as integral to "forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old." McDonald was inspired by the "lesson of Port Arthur," that Wobblies there could "through organization and endeavor form such a revolutionary center not only of I.W.W. organization on the job, but also of art, and thought and social life, under capitalism, what can not the workers do when they are free to give expression to all that there is within them of thought and emotion in a free society?"¹²⁶ There is in McDonald's evocation of the importance of thought and emotion a "feminist" ethos that stands in stark contrast to the "masculinist" ethos of the Western left in this period. In Port Arthur in 1926 J.A. McDonald came very close to recognizing that the Wobbly vision of a peaceful, antistatist, antiauthoritarian transformation to socialism must of necessity be founded in the self-activity and self-organization of women as well as men. If for no other reason than this the history of Finnish Wobblies in northern Ontario deserves our attention and our respect.¹²⁷

The decline of Finnish associational life, a decline both the capitalist state and male Wobblies themselves played a part in, was fatal to the Wobbly cause, because the organization was never very successful in winning support for striking on the job and other syndicalist-inspired tactics. Striking openly was favoured by the great majority of workers, although the Communists were forced to admit, even in the early 1930s, the great support there was in the camps for local decision-making and resistance to the dominance of central executive committees. The support was so strong that, as in the case of the 1929 bushworkers strike, the Communists could not conduct an effective strike without Wobbly support, a fact confirmed during the 1933-34 strikes.

In the end, the fate of Finnish Wobblies and Finnish Communists was not all that much different. The forces eating away at Finnish Wobbly culture were also eating away at Finnish Communist culture, and ironically, as the North American left moved into the era of the CIO and industrial unionism, bushworkers in northern Ontario were moving in the opposite direction. With the end of the Third Period and the disbanding of the Workers' Unity League came the dissolution of both the LWIU no. 120 and the LWIUC into the AFL-affiliated Lumber and Sawmill Workers'

¹²⁵Tolvanen, "Finntown," 40; Hill, "Historic Basis and Development of the Lumber Workers Organization and Struggles in Ontario," 10.

¹²⁶J.A. McDonald, "Training for Freedom," *Industrial Pioneer*, March 1926.

¹²⁷We know remarkably little about how women workers viewed direct action and the general strike as vehicles for the realization of their own conceptions of socialist transformation. Indeed, labour historians have been slow to address the larger question of the possible existence of an identifiable women's theory of revolutionary transformation. Only a thorough examination of the Finnish Wobbly press will tell us if Finnish Wobbly women were in the process of developing such a theory.

Union. Thus it was the victorious Communists who led the bushworkers in the direction of industrial legality that culminated with the passage of PC 1003 in 1944, all the while being credited with the lion's share of the radicalism and support for industrial unionism that came in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In the process the Wobblies, from whom the Communists had taken the banner and spirit of industrial unionism, were largely relegated to the margins of history. Not surprisingly, the Wobblies themselves were absorbed into movements that had deep roots in the Finnish left, the cooperative movement and social democracy. Nick Viita became a leading member of the People's Co-operative Society Limited of Port Arthur, and by May 1935 was the manager of one of its branch outlets.¹²⁸ The Wobbly press may have been cynical about the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, noting in 1934 that the CCF "has a big following, - but so has baseball," but could not change the fact many Wobblies made the journey from industrial unionism to democratic socialism and electoral politics.¹²⁹

The Finnish left in northern Ontario, of which the Wobblies were an integral part in the 1920s and early 1930s, was a culture of activists, of Finns — young and old, men and women, industrial unionist and political socialist — who participated in, rather than watched, sports, theatre, and the activities of the labour movement. There was an appeal to Finnish leftists in the IWW's spirit, in its call to create a live organization that was up and fighting in the struggle for better wages and working conditions, indeed for a better world for the workers of all lands. If Finnish Wobblies spoke a different language, came from a different homeland, and were often discriminated against on the basis of those differences, we must realize that the fate of Finnish Wobblies in northern Ontario now manifests itself to us as the fate of the left itself. The decline of the vibrant and varied culture they created was both a warning and a beacon for all workers and allies dedicated to the end of capitalism's relentless drive to flatten and destroy that activity and self-education that has always been at the heart of the socialist vision of the future.

I would like to extend my thanks to J. Donald Wilson, whose encouragement has been most welcome, and whose sources have been most helpful. Jean Morrison invited me into her home, told me everything she knew, and gave me everything she had. Salvatore Salerno read the manuscript with the care one would expect of someone who still cares, and I hope he sees the improvement his suggestions have made. Any mistakes in the Finnish language, or in my understanding of Finnish history, are my own — Tapio Bergholm and Hannu Ruonavaara have done their

¹²⁸Tolvanen, "Finntown," 24-6. In 1968 Nick Viita observed that his wife Hanna, who was a Wobbly activist in the 1920s, was still involved in IWW social affairs. Thanks to Jean Morrison for providing me with a copy of Viita's reminiscences as recorded by an unidentified interviewer.

¹²⁹*Industrial Worker*, 8 September 1934.

best to help me in these areas. Bryan Palmer insightfully critiqued the first version of this paper, and kept me going when I had my doubts about it ever seeing the light of day. Thanks to the reviewers, all of whose ideas have made their way into the final version, and thanks to Greg Kealey, Joan Butler, and the staff of Labour/Le Travail for just being there.

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