WorkingUSA
The Journal of Labor and Society

BOOK REVIEWS

Adler, William M. *The Man Who Never Died: The Life, Times, and Legacy of Joe Hill, American Labor Icon*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2011. 435 pp. illus. US$30 (hardcover).

Viewed from an era of embattled public sector unions and politicos' right-to-work states, it is all too easy to dismiss the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). William M. Adler overturns the stereotype. The Wobblies, he asserts, were not just a colorful group of bottom-rung laborers given to defiant rallies and revolutionary songs. For a "dozen years before America entered World War One the Industrial Workers of the World was the nation's most revered and reviled labor organization" (4). In their heyday, they massed in key industrial and seacoast cities to demand their rights to public protest.

In its labor spatiality, the IWW ranged from Union Square in New York City to the docks of Oregon and the shipyards of San Pedro, California. While its constituency was not usually identified with the Northeast, the Wobbly tribune Big Bill Haywood used "fire-eating oratory" (qtd. 38) to advertise the Wobbly presence at storied New England textile strikes. But it was the bard of the Pacific Northwest and West Coast, Joe Hill (1879–1911), who helped energize a movement with his satirical songs against bossism and for revolution. Wobs formed the tens of thousands of admirers for whom Hill produced "The Rebel Girl," "Casey Jones—the Union Scab," and numerous others still known to labor activism.

Hill himself, like many of his fellow Wobs, believed in open conflict with the agents of the state. While these "reds" were willing to begin or fend off fights with the agent of the state, it was the police who freely used nightsticks and guns to break up legal demonstrations and jail many.

Adler details Hill's clear-eyed understanding of how the wage system set skilled against unskilled with a songster's talent that universalized these truths. He was probably the best of the lyricist/composers. His 1911 inclusion strengthened the IWW *Songs to Fan the Flames of Discontent* aka the *Little Red Song Book*. This talisman pamphlet sold for a dime to itinerant "working stiffs" who carried

WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society · 1089-7011 · Volume 15 · March 2012 · pp. 135–144
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it—and the "red card"—in their freight-hopping travels. There is obvious appeal in the signature refrain of "The Preacher and the Slave," set to the gospel hymn "Sweet Bye and Bye":

> You will eat, bye and bye,
> In that glorious land above the sky;
> Work and pray, live on hay,
> You'll get pie in the sky when you die.

His compositions were catchy and often parodic of cherished American melodies. Though his lyrics were peppered with "labor sharks," "bulls and pimps," "bindle stiffs," and "hobo floaters" the standard English clarity of his compositions was easily understood by its supporters and critics alike.

Like others who wrote on Hill, Adler reminds us that the young man was more than a classic Wobbly songster who captured the movement's ironic humor and savvy anticapitalism. In this interpretation, as a defender of "One Big Union," Hill is multifaceted. Wobs as an international group were highly verbal—scores of periodicals in many languages appeared even after the First World War and the rise of the Communist Party of the U.S. Never abandoning the tuneful call to workers, Hill was also a serious political writer, particularly in what Adler labels out as his most productive years, from 1910 to his early death in 1914.

During that time, Hill was a serious contributor to the *Industrial Worker* as well as the *International Socialist Review* on tactics, objectives, and structures. Not averse to industrial sabotage, he argued it widened the importance of direct action at the point of production (273). As to the universality of this idea within the IWW, Adler takes issue with the seminal historian. Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All: The History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (1969), denies the pervasiveness of workplace violence and also, interestingly, has little to say on Hill.

The debates on both Hill's centrality and ideology need to continue outside these pages. But there is little doubt that, with his fellow Wobs, he saw the end of capitalism under a worker's state, creating a new society. Were they in the spotlight today, the Wobblies might well have the cross-trade following they sought one hundred years ago. Solidarity, comments Adler, "was the marrow of IWW doctrine" (138).

Hill's "official narrative" is well known. But is a biographical act of courage to follow Hill's many rebellious sites and dig for him in local records at home and abroad. Against all odds, the author uncovers evidence ranging from unpublished cartoons to his prison booking photographs upon his arrest in Utah. Archival ephemera do not solve the mystery of Hill's life, but they certainly augment our understanding. Especially compared to earlier writers, Adler amplifies the Swedish background of Joel Hagglund, born in a small town in 1879. In that country he researched Hill's early introduction to poverty, his musical talents, and profound labor sympathies. These pieces of the puzzle help to account for the "Joe Hill" who disembarked in New York City in 1902.

Of the many rebel encounters that ended in his jailing, little is still known. But *The Man Who Never Died*, the title a term coined in a 1934 song, correlates

the scant personal evidence with labor events. Whether he attended particular free speech rallies in Spokane, San Pedro, or elsewhere, he was very likely in those cities around those protest times. In any case, his political achievements and wanderings were his biography.

To destroy the icon, Adler argues, Hill was accused of the double homicide of a Salt Lake City, Utah, grocery store owner and his young son. It was alleged that on the evening of January 10, 1914, this political undesirable and an accomplice killed the two and fled the scene. As expected, the core of Adler's narration is the famous court proceeding that evoked international sympathy. To the end, the man claimed he was set up for murders he did not commit.

Adler is meticulous about the criminal events and alternate theories of the culprits. (He disagrees with Stegner and others, defending Hill's innocence.) The author uses a richly layered historical approach, especially to chronicle the twenty-two months from his subject's imprisonment to the execution morning of November 19, 1915. The man's oppositional reputation, which inspired conspiracies among corrupt local politics, fundamentalist Mormons, and civic leaders/entrepreneurs, receive much attention.

Crucial too is Adler's description of the energetic proletarian life Hill created for himself as a worker/writer/lyricist/striker in the months prior to the killings. But it is the cause célèbre narrative that dominates the book. Tens of thousands demonstrated in the streets of American and European cities, while letters flowed into the Governor demanding acquittal, clemency—anything but execution. Adler pays great attention as well to the anti-Wob hysteria surrounding the trial, the international defense committees, and the last-minute maneuverings of the defense and prosecution.

The author is particularly effective when he finds inconsistencies in the avalanche of witness testimony, trial proceedings, and prosecutorial logic. Hill's own mulish, or death-wishing, refusal to participate in his own defense is painstakingly analyzed, as are various interpretations of his real guilt. And Adler quite impressively controls the avalanche of political information, including Hill's literary production in jail: letters, songs, cartoons, political articles.

"Why," the introduction asks, "did he choose to die? What did he hope to achieve through martyrdom?" And "why did he join the IWW" in the first place? (19). In Adler's answers, Hill had found a home in this worldwide revolutionary movement. But through his incarceration he was, in Adler's argument, transformed by public reaction. In the end, Hill wanted a legacy greater than his songs could provide. In his last seconds, he commanded the firing squad: *Ready . . . Aim . . . Yes, aim, let it go! Fire!*'" (333).

Since this book uses a different framework, the personality of Joe Hill does not emerge as in Wallace Stegner's eponymous 1950 novel. But what does pull readers into this thorough volume is the way the IWW is discussed through the prism of its martyr.

More problematic is that in cross marketing to general audiences, labor constituencies, and labor scholars, the biography follows the trend of abandoning endnotes. Page by page documentation of phrases are listed at the end of the

book. This method is probably used because presses reject numbered entries as ponderous if not archaic. But it can also be an impediment. It is certainly as time consuming to read through as the endnoted approach. In probably another publishing requirement, the biography is distracting when it lists key sources at the end of each chapter's quoted phrases while providing a fuller bibliography just before the index.

But given the quality of the book, these are minor issues. Rather, the appearance of this biography so near the centenary of the death is propitious. After the union busting in the industrial heartland, how much divides a McDonald's server, Wal-Mart clerk, or firefighter facing unemployment from a Wobbly-era dockworker, copper miner, or "documented" harvest hand? In a decade when chants are more likely than "red" ballads to move the crowd, a Joe Hill would still be heard.

Also probable is that Hill would be an important historian and timely author for the Left. In the tumultuous labor history of a supposedly classless society, massive layoffs and wage cuts have always been facts of life. The working poor have always lived hand to mouth. And with nonnative speakers, shady practices have never ceased.

But the divisions in the labor movement itself would have most troubled Joe Hill and his contemporaries. In an era of degraded public discourse, the question raised by this important and meticulously researched book is how working-class people, many in the evolving American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations, can rewrite the IWW narrative. For those wedded to the principles Hill articulated, Adler's book is a warning: Crusading fervor is always crucial to a democratic coalition across trades, unions, and the wide spectrum of the unorganized.

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Raymond, Williams. *The Country and the City*. Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 2011. 307 pp. £19.95 (paperback).

The relationship between country and city is not only the reciprocal linkage of two mutually symbiotic ways of life: it is the very story of our material development as a human society, of the transition of a social system from feudalism to agrarian capitalism, and thence industrial capitalism. The social consequences of

these seismic shifts found particularly lucid expression in the poems and novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so that in choosing to examine the historical rural–urban schism through the prism of literature, Raymond Williams hit upon an illuminating and fascinating method of understanding the succession of social crises that shaped three centuries of human experience.

Today, urban alienation is such an acknowledged fact that it is almost a cliché to speak about it earnestly; Sartre's famous observation that, in the modern world, "hell is other people" has itself grown banal. But it is easy enough to forget that the modern urban experience is a thing that grew almost from nothing: the densely populated streets, crowded with strangers, that are so normal to us today, looked positively threatening to Blake and Wordsworth, and were personified as portentous monsters in Dickens' prose. The processes of industrialization and urbanization precipitated a social condition in which apathy and estrangement began to be understood, through literature, as "a general phenomenon . . . a way of life." We get a sense, here, of the great malleability, down the ages, of what Williams calls "structures of feeling."

Williams sees, in George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, the essence of the modern novel as the reflection of a social crisis: "a crucial history in the development of the novel, in which the knowable community . . . comes to be known primarily as a problem of ambivalent relationship: of how the separated individual, with a divided consciousness of belonging and not belonging, makes his own moral history." In reflecting on these moral histories, it is helpful to maintain a healthy skepticism toward the reductive mythologies of nostalgia. To the extent that traditional accounts of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century development have tended to equate the rise of the urban centers with the predominance of a cynical and exploitative industrial capitalism, Williams counsels against an idealized conception of Britain's rural past, identifying in Eliot's ironic exaltation of "Fine old Leisure" in *Adam Bede* the archetype of a counterfactual notion of preindustrial leisured ease in which the sweat and toil and exploitation of the rural majority are effaced in a movement of "foreshortening [that is] characteristic of what has become a main form of the modern rural retrospect."

Williams rejects the limitations of a discourse that forces us to choose between two polar extremes: between a specious romanticism—"a liberal and patronising perspective"—and a reactionary perspective which idealizes the country against city. It was the British historian EP Thompson who wrote of reclaiming the lives of ordinary working people from "the condescension of posterity"; in a similar vein, Williams, who hailed from rural Wales, insists that Britain's agricultural laborers were not merely broken, passive victims of the juggernaut of historical progress. The Swing campaign of rick-burnings, the breakings of threshing machines, the collective effort of the Tolpuddle Union, were all a function of a "development of spirit and of skill"—people, in other words, trying to take back some measure of control over their collective way of life.

The narrative of class is as relevant to authorship as it is to the work itself, a question brought into sharp focus in Williams' chapter on Thomas Hardy. A recurrent theme in Hardy's novels is the separation of one or more characters

from a traditional way of life for which they had been marked out; they find themselves tied in, by virtue of family links, to the world they had meant to escape, and the novel's dramatic force derives from a set of seemingly irresistible antagonisms that are thus brought to light by the disruptive dynamic of social mobility. Williams reminds us that Hardy himself was "neither owner nor tenant, dealer nor labourer," an architect observing and chronicling a milieu of small employers, dealers, craftsmen, and cottagers; furthermore, he was writing for a literary public largely connected with the rural way of life portrayed in his novels. This schism, if we may call it that, is in Williams' view "the critical problem of so much of English fiction" in the wake of the ambiguous social change of the nineteenth century. Hardy would subsequently be patronized by a generation of critics who deemed him an "autodidact," not because he had not had an education, but because he had not been to Oxford or Cambridge. It's as fitting a comment on social mobility as anything in Hardy's own fiction.

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Early, Steve. *The Civil Wars in US Labor: Birth of a New Workers' Movement or Death Throes of the Old?* Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011. 409 pp. US$17.00 (paperback).

Steve Early was among the first and most insightful labor activists to warn about growing problems inside the fastest growing and seemingly most successful union in the U.S., the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). From 1.1 million members in 1996, the year Andy Stern was elected its president, to 2.2 million members in 2010, SEIU was the bright star in a labor movement that was steadily losing members and clout.

To add to its luster, SEIU brought many low-income workers of all races and nationalities into its ranks and various levels of leadership, won higher wages, improved benefits and better working conditions, and a greater voice at work and in society. Combined with support for health care reform, immigrant and gender rights, green jobs, international labor solidarity, and opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, SEIU was seen by many as one of the most progressive unions in the country. What was not to love about this union?

Unfortunately, beneath the public radar were disturbing warning signs that all was not rosy in Camelot, and worse, these internal problems were growing. Early reported on these troubles and urged corrective action. Unfortunately,

SEIU leaders choose to ignore him. The result was a debilitating civil war inside SEIU and the labor movement. Early shows with careful documentation that SEIU was the principal cause of labor's meltdown.

The timing was terrible. In November 2008, voters with massive labor support, and SEIU in the lead, elected Barak Obama and Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress. The Labor movement was poised to achieve several long overdue reforms for unions and society. First was labor law reform that would help bring unionization and its benefits to many unorganized workers. The second was health care reform that would cover everyone, protect quality and patient choice, and eliminate wasteful costs. Labor law reform died, and health care reform was weakened before its passage.

How could this have happened? How could the most promising union in the country, the belle of the ball, become the fly in the punchbowl?

The warning signs were there well before 2008. I worked for SEIU Local 660 in Los Angeles as a Labor Representative from January 1998 until 2007 and saw some of the problems soon after I began. The first sign was that a considerable number of members did not seem very connected to the union. When I requested help from members for current union campaigns, I received some support, but also silence, questions, or complaints. One exasperated nurse asked me, "When is the union going to do something about our staffing problems? I've got 12 patients again. I'm overwhelmed! This has been going on for years. We complain, but nothing could be done." She saw the union as the staff, not her and her coworkers. It was not a good sign that so many members seemed disconnected from the union, that the union did little to deal with serious problems, and that many members saw the union as a third party apart from themselves.

When I asked leaders at the union office about the understaffing problem I was told that little could be done. No law or contract provision was being broken. So, end of story.

I became politically active during the huge social justice movements of the late 1960s as a union auto worker and in the antiwar movement. Many in our generation did not fold up our tent when we were told there was no language in our contract to stop management from raising our production quota, or when we were told that only the government can end its genocidal slaughter in Vietnam. An injustice is an injustice, we replied, and we searched for ways to stop it, whether or not we had contract language or laws to help us.

We saw our union contract (which we fought to protect and improve), and government laws as a reflection of a balance of power between the top 1 percent, as the Occupy Wall Street movement says today, and the rest of us.

So, in the 1960s, we organized "work-to-rule" campaigns—slowdowns in the factory to stop job speedup. We organized to end the war by promoting draft resistance and soldier opposition, huge demonstrations, civil disobedience, blockades of war material, and massive student strikes.

I did not expect Local 660 to take this kind of stand, but I was hoping there would be some concern, discussion, and planning to try to stop the understaffing.

There were many other warnings. I was removed as the union representative at one hospital after helping to organize an effective Stewards Council there. The new staff let it deteriorate. After I organized an agency shop campaign to get all members of a 5,000 member bargaining unit to pay union dues, union officials told me to stop conducting steward-training classes, and I was reassigned. It was clear that the union officials had no interest in empowering members. It was clear that collecting more union dues was the main priority. Meanwhile, Andy Stern was talking to the national media about how SEIU was empowering its members. I felt like I was in Orwell's *1984*.

Stern *said* good things, but too often his words did not match his and SEIU's actions, and too often the good things—like organizing the unorganized, came at steep losses for other SEIU members. Stern talked about organizing the unorganized, combining workers in the same industry, building bigger locals (and appointing, not allowing members to elect its leaders, so he had control), and building international labor solidarity to deal with multi-national corporations (by pushing unions in other countries to adopt the model he imposed on SEIU.). He also talked about unity (on his terms), improving workers' wages, benefits and rights (while too often settling for less without a fight and giving away existing benefits and rights when it wasn't necessary), being transparent (except for the secret deals he and his top aides made behind closed doors that sold out members), and accountability (everyone being accountable to Stern). Early exposes the hypocrisy of all of these excellent goals with detailed documentation and a compelling account of the real story. In areas where SEIU made gains for members, it was usually due to the hard work of dedicated SEIU member-activists and local leaders outside Stern's widespread network of unprincipled officials.

Stern said that members were key in building the union, but Early explained that SEIU hired mostly young college graduates (many of whom had never worked at an SEIU job, or any job and had little feeling for the daily grind of most workers), and hired few SEIU members. Early wrote, "A talented and politically ambitious worker has a much better chance of making it into the top leadership of almost any other union than SEIU. Three-quarters of its current officers and EVPs (Executive Vice Presidents) have never been working members." And many of those were appointed by Stern so they would be more beholden to Stern than to the members. Also, being a working member does not guarantee good leaders either. Stern, who was an SEIU member, says candidly that he had no job-related problems while working as a social worker, and he got involved in SEIU because he received free pizza for attending a union meeting. I have found that most union officers are better leaders when they personally had to deal with real grievances as workers on the job and it was those grievances that prompted them to get involved in the union, not free pizza. It also helps when they understand how capitalism functions (and better yet have studied Marxism), have a pro-worker and progressive political approach to all injustices, and a sound ethical belief system.

If SEIU members had different ideas, Stern's team considered those members malcontents, even enemies. Early devotes a significant portion of his

book to the vicious war SEIU waged against one of its most successful locals, United Healthcare Workers West (UHW) in California.

The war ensued because UHW leaders, under President Sal Rosselli, and its members strongly opposed givebacks that Stern secretly negotiated with employers, including a plan to split off 65,000 home health care workers and "give" them to one of the weakest and most corrupt SEIU locals in the country, Local 6434 in Los Angeles, run by Tyrone Freeman. Later, Freeman, a Stern appointee, was exposed for embezzling $1 million from the Local 6434 union treasury, taking dues dollars from among the lowest paid workers in all of SEIU. (SEIU proves the adage that a fish rots from the head down—the decay seeps downward into the ranks of the organization. SEIU was and still is plagued with corrupt, unethical, and/or mediocre to incompentent officials—most were appointed and promoted by Stern or his allies. In California they include Annelle Grajeda and Alejandro Stephens—both of Local 660 which became 721 in Los Angeles and both were forced to leave in disgrace; Dave Regan, originally from Ohio and now the autocratic and disgraced appointed head of trusteed UHW in California; Rickman Jackson, a top aide to Tyrone Freeman who was appointed a top official of SEIU in Michigan, to name only a few. Early details the sullied histories of these current and former SEIU officials, as well as others.)

When the original UHW members under Sal Rosselli protested, Stern removed the elected officers of UHW, along with the elected Executive Board members, and 2,000 elected shop stewards, and put UHW into Trusteeship. Stern then appointed his trusted lieutenants to run it.

Once Stern's SEIU started down the road of secret sell-out deals, lying to members, and trying to destroy those who would not buckle under to Stern's autocracy, the deterioration, corruption, and viciousness increased. Early details the sordid, union-busting wars that Stern's SEIU waged against Unite-HERE, the California Nurses Association, the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation, and the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW)—the new union that was formed by the old leadership of UHW after Stern got rid of them.

Early also shows SEIU's slide into thuggery and violent attacks. In April 2008, a SEIU goon squad assaulted union members from many different unions at a Labor Notes conference in Dearborn, Michigan, which I witnessed, that left one union member hospitalized and another dead. Stern's core philosophy was expressed throughout his 2006 book, *A Country that Works*, where he repeatedly tells union members to work harder to "add value" to their employer's business so they can better compete with non-union employers.

Yet, despite this misleadership and the viciousness, growing numbers of SEIU members, and union leaders, activists, and members from many other unions spoke out against SEIU, isolating the pariah union in the labor movement and in society. Finally, the pressure became so great that Stern resigned in April 2010. (Stern now sits on the Board of Directors of a drug company.) His handpicked successor, Anna Berger, was rejected by the SEIU Board and resigned from SEIU shortly thereafter.

SEIU's new president, Mary Kay Henry, had supported Stern's program for years but is trying to distance herself from Stern's disgraceful legacy. Yet she continues SEIU's war against NUHW and the culture of fear, rigidity and conformism that Stern imposed on SEIU.

But NUHW survives. Early points to it as a model of real progressive unionism in both word and deed. I concur. I worked as a volunteer for NUHW and saw firsthand a vibrant, democratic, and member-run union that was fighting for high standards for workers everywhere.

Civil Wars in Labor is a critical book for a critical time in the labor movement and in our nation. This book will alert us to the warning signals of weak leaders and even turncoats in our unions. As corporate capitalism and their right-wing political forces intensify its war on labor and the working class, the struggle for member-run, democratic unions is more important than ever because that is where our strength is—in our millions of members.

Workers and union leaders must understand that the nature of capitalism is to generate ever-greater profits. It does this by the continual exploitation of workers. No amount of deal-making, begging, jumping into bed with management, or imploring workers to help "add value" to capital's bottom line is going to change this. There is a class struggle, whether Andy Stern and his followers in SEIU know it or not. The capitalists know it and have intensified their class struggle against the working-class for the past 35 years. It is time more workers knew there was a class struggle too. Steve Early's book will help greatly in preparing our unions for the struggles ahead.

Paul Krehbiel was as a union autoworker in the late 1960's and early 1970's. He was managing editor of the national Furniture Workers Press of the United Furniture Workers of America, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor—Congress of Industrial Organizations in the mid-1980's. He became SEIU chief negotiator for 5,000 Los Angeles County Registered Nurses in 2003, and organized Stewards Councils at large County hospitals. Krehbiel was elected president of United Union Representatives of Los Angeles to five consecutive terms. He is author of Shades of Justice, about young workers involved in the 1960s and 1970s labor, peace and justice movements in the USA, available at http://autumnleafpress.com. Address correspondence to Paul Krehbiel, PO Box 6528, Altadena, CA 91003, USA. E-mail: paulkrehbiel@earthlink.net