

BOOKS

REBEL VOICES: AN IWW ANTHOLOGY, edited and with an introduction by Joyce L. Kornbluh (University of Michigan Press, \$12.50): Gone are the Wobblies—the men of the mines and the wheat fields, the lumber camps and dockyards and smelters, the bindlestiffs, gandy dancers and hoboes who sang *Hallelujah I'm a Bum* and espoused the cause of "one big union"—and there are chastening lessons to be learned from their demise.

Ranked high in the Communist pantheon, their leaders buried in the Kremlin, but always rather wary of Communist totalitarianism, the Wobblies were perhaps the only perfect examples of Rousseau's doctrines of original goodness. To some they were merely hooligans and know-nothings; to others, the very essence of the working-class spirit. In the early decades of this century, under the leadership of tough dedicated men and women like Big Bill Hayward and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Ralph Chaplin, Joe Hill, and

others, they preached the classic American Populist doctrine that the employing classes and the laboring classes have nothing in common. They gained their recruits—for the most part—from among the men who felt they truly did have nothing in common with the rest of a rapidly urbanizing and technological American society—the boomers and drifters and hard travelling men of the West.

Even to this day there are Wobbly locals in San Francisco, Stockton, Butte, but the notion of one big union never took hold among laboring men. It never took hold because American labor was never predominantly class conscious. But debates over direct versus political action which split apart the Wobbly conventions up through the first Wilson administration did, in a way, foreshadow current debates of a similar nature within the Negro civil rights movement.

Wobbly concern with automation was not very remote from what we are talking about today in West Virginia, but, with the furor over Sacco and Vanzetti and the Palmer raids of the '20s, the Wobbly impetus began to feel itself crushed against unequal odds. Through their in-

vention of the sit-down strike and their stress on working-class education, they did leave their permanent mark on America. But, when the New Deal of FDR broke the back of the old White Protestant oligarchy of money and inheritance, the Wobblies found themselves crying out in a wilderness with their doctrines of class consciousness to a nation that was fast seeking to become middle class.

Today, as President Johnson launches his War Against Poverty, it is worth recalling that it was just such a war which the Wobblies envisaged, only they inevitably tended to express their programs in terms of class strife and the expropriation of the expropriators.

It is not surprising, then, that they are beginning to make a small comeback at the very moment when Lyndon Johnson is preaching to the American people that the employing classes and the working classes have everything in common in the War Against Poverty and, to prove his point, is guaranteeing the large corporations 4.7 per cent profits on their investment in the struggle.

But I do not mean to sound bitter about what was an anachronism even before I was a kid. The other day, as I was crossing Manhattan Island in the No. 104 bus with a copy of Mrs. Joyce Kornbluh's excellent anthology of Wobbly songs, manifestos, poems, stories, and cartoons, I happened to glance up at the window and there were plastered the following stickers:

ORGANIZE TO TAKE OVER INDUSTRY

—IWW

LABOR IS ENTITLED TO ALL IT PRODUCES

—IWW

Could it be, I wondered, that somebody was playing a practical joke on me, knowing that I was reviewing such a book for *CAVALIER*? At any moment I expected to hear a chorus of hearty male voices from the rear thundering out:

*"When the Union's inspiration
through the workers' blood shall run,
There can be no power greater
anywhere beneath the sun.*

Alas, I could not have been more mistaken. Friends have since told me that these Wobbly stickers are sold by a Los Angeles trading company to college students, presumably along with bull fight posters and other such incunabula, as room decorations.

So that, in brief, is the history of what was once a great and powerful working-class movement which so threatened the powers-that-be that its leaders were regu-

larly thrown into jail on trumped up charges, lynched, beaten, waylaid by Pinkertons, hounded from town to town and again jailed, beaten, and murdered. Now the slogans of the once-proud Wobblies have become a status symbol in our college dormitories and the grandsons of former Wobblies sing their socially conscious hymns to the accompaniment of jukeboxes in beer parlors while studying Labor-Management Relations or, worse, while serving out their obligated military duties in the National Guard—the Wobblies' chief antagonists of yore.

I suppose it bespeaks wonders of a civilization such as ours that we can manage to envisage all these contradictions as if they were only a part of The American Way of Life. But, lest we become too smug about our betters—those working-class giants who struggled over Marx and Freud and Darwin in the Haldeman Julius blue books while serving sentences in the pokey for sedition and criminal espionage—it is my recommendation that we all buy Mrs. Kornbluh's useful compendium of the vanishing Wobbly world view. At least that way, the next time we start to sing *Paint 'er Red*, nobody will confuse it for a Sherwin Williams commercial.

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