Crossing the Color Lines, Crossing the Continents

Comparing the Racial Politics of the IWW in South Africa and the United States, 1905–1925

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Now that the comparative and transnational turns are well under way, it seems high time to apply these methods to one of the modern era's most internationalist movements, the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW or Wobblies).[1] While framing histories within national boundaries is understandable and useful, many subjects benefit from repositioning them comparatively as well as transnationally.[2] Reframing labor history within a global, comparative, and transnational framework directs attention to cross-border linkages, activities, and processes that a ''methodological nationalism'' obscures.[3]

For far too long, labor historians—even of the obviously internationalist Wobblies—have straitjacketed the history of the IWW into a series of separate national stories, rather than one global history.[4] Yet the Wobblies were overtly internationalist, their movement operated across borders, and their traditions spread globally, across the Americas and into Africa, Asia, and Europe. The IWW was a radical current in the globalized world of the early twentieth century, part of an international upsurge of anarchism and syndicalism that challenged Marxism for leadership of the revolutionary left into the late 1920s,[5] ''the dominant element in the self-consciously inter-

[1] Syndicalism, or anarcho-syndicalism, is a left tradition that also has been referred to as left libertarianism, and emerged as part of anarchism in the 1860s. Generally, syndicalists believe in socialism and oppose capitalism; however, as with other anarchists, syndicalists are highly suspicious of the state and political parties. Rather, they believe that the working classes, effectively organized in labor unions, should take the lead in ushering in a ''new society from within the shell of the old.'' A useful discussion of syndicalism can be found in Montgomery, ''The 'New Unionism' and the Transformation of Workers' Consciousness.'' For a survey of the relationship between anarchism and syndicalism, see van der Walt and Schmidt, Black Flame, 7, 133–42, 149–159.

[2] Many others have devoted their energies to defining the term ''transnational.'' We refer readers to Bonner et al., ''Rethinking Worlds of Labour,'' esp. 144–8. The term ''comparative'' is far more easily understood as looking at several examples of the same phenomenon, generally two different societies, to see similarities and differences and, more broadly, better understand what has occurred and why; see ibid., 142–4.

[3] See van der Linden, ''Transnationalizing American Labor History,'' 1080–1.

[4] The official history of the (US) IWW, for example, follows such an approach: Thompson with Murfin, The IWW.

[5] ''[I]n 1905–1914, the marxist [sic] left had in most countries been on the fringe of the revolutionary movement, the main body of marxists [sic] had been identified with a de facto non-revolutionary social democracy, while the

nationalist radical Left'' from the 1870s and ''the main vehicle of global opposition to industrial capitalism, autocracy, latifundism, and imperialism.''[6]

There is much more to be learnt from studying the Wobblies using both comparative and transnational approaches; this essay will largely utilize comparative methods. There is very little work along either of these lines, but what exists demonstrates the utility of such analysis in examining how IWW politics played out in different contexts.[7] The IWW can be seen as a precursor of some of today's social justice movements, whose affinity with the anarchism and syndicalism that inspired the Wobblies—and their commitment to participatory democracy, direct action, and prefigurative organizing–is striking.[8]

While the small body of comparative literature on the IWW has raised some questions about its gender politics, it has not examined race matters. How did the IWW evolve in highly racialized societies? Moreover, to what extent might the IWW tradition have differed in colonial and imperial countries? This article develops an innovative comparative analysis of IWW racial politics in the United States (US) and South Africa (SA), with particular attention to activities among workers of color.

It argues that the IWW tradition, and organizations inspired by it, played a key role in struggling against racial discrimination and prejudice. By examining how the IWW consistently advocated for, and recruited, workers of color in the US and SA, we argue that the anarchist/syndicalist tradition was the first in both countries to fully embrace oppressed races and peoples: African Americans, black Africans, and other workers of color. That the Wobblies did so in two highly racist countries, in a highly prejudiced period, the First World War era, the apex of European imperialism, makes their efforts all the more remarkable. It pays close attention to how activists in the Wobbly tradition explained the roots of racial discrimination in each country, how they sought to build class solidarity within racially and ethnically divided working classes, and how effectively they organized workers of color. Given the importance of Wobbly sailors and dockers, the essay also pays particular attention to IWW-style syndicalism in Philadelphia in the US and Cape Town in SA.

Though founded in the US in 1905, the IWW must be understood, fundamentally, as a global and transnational current. Its doctrines, derived from a fusion of American and European anarchist and syndicalist ideas,[9] were diffused globally through labor migration, activist networks, and a vibrant radical press.

IWW unions and other organizations based on the IWW model spread across the settler colonies of the British Empire, including those in southern Africa, and into the United Kingdom itself. Understanding the contribution of sailors and longshore workers in the marine transport industry is essential to understanding the transnational dimension of the Wobblies; for instance,

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bulk of the revolutionary left was anarcho-syndicalist, or at least much closer to the ideas and the mood of anarcho-syndicalism than to that of classical marxism'': Hobsbawm, Revolutionaries, 72–3. Also see Thorpe, ''The Workers Themselves''; van der Linden and Thorpe, Revolutionary Syndicalism.

[6] Anderson, Under Three Flags, 2, 54.

[7] A pioneering attempt was De Shazo and Halstead, ''Los Wobblies Del Sur.'' The recent interest is evidenced by Shor, ''Wobblies Against War''; Shor, ''Virile Syndicalism in Comparative Perspective; Burgmann, ''Antipodean Peculiarities.''

[8] On anarchist influences, see inter alia, Epstein, ''Anarchism and the Anti-Globalisation Movement''; Graeber, ''The New Anarchists.''

[9] In addition to sources cited above, see Salerno, Red November, Black November, and van der Walt and Schmidt, Black Flame, 142–3, 159–64.

Marcel van der Linden has noted that ''Sailors ... played an important role in spreading the IWW model to other countries,''[10] and the IWW's Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union (MTW) maintained branches in ports across the proverbial seven seas.[11]

The IWW operated in Latin America, continental Europe, and Australasia, and influenced radicals in India, China and Japan.[12] Har Dayal, Indian revolutionary, was an IWW member and head of the Bakunin Institute in California; in 1915, his radical Ghadar Party led an armed revolt in the British Raj. Ko¯toku Shu¯sui, founder of Japanese anarcho-syndicalism, was profoundly influenced by the IWW.[13] Another key Ghadarite was Makhan Singh, father of East African trade unionism.[14] Meanwhile, Chinese anarchists like the renowned Liu Sifu (''Shifu'') translated IWW materials, and by 1917, had formed the first modern unions in China, with ''anarchist domination'' of labor movement in Canton and Hunan into the mid-1920s.[15]

Not only did the Wobblies themselves travel far and wide, then, but so did their ideas, literature, and tactics. Perhaps no left tradition before communism got its message out so widely or organized as globally as anarchism and syndicalism, and few syndicalists did so as successfully as the Wobblies. Nonetheless, while scholars have written extensively about the IWW in different countries, a reliable international survey of the IWW remains to be written.[16] Part of the problem is that the one of the IWW's most striking features—its transnational character—is not easily captured by either the ''old'' or ''new'' labor history, both of which take the nation state as their unit of analysis. Constructing the history of labor around supposedly discrete national societies and working classes, scholars have unconsciously embraced a ''methodological nationalism'' that tends to ignore ignores cross-border connections, movements, solidarities and identities, and the impact of regional and global processes.[17]

The IWW was not only a transnational movement in intent and practice, it was overtly committed to working class internationalism. It advocated ''one big union'' of all workers globally, so as to organize a global revolutionary strike against capital and modern states. In its ranks, Wobblies insisted, ''all workingmen were considered equal and united in a common cause,'' for it was ''not a white man's union, not a black man's union, not a red or yellow man's union, but a workingman's union.''[18] It was the Wobblies who devised and popularized the union hymn ''Solidarity Forever,'' still an anthem of mainstream US labor (and the anthem of black unions in SA in the 1970s); it was the IWW that coined the slogan ''An Injury to One is an Injury to All,''[19]

[10] Van der Linden, ''On the Importance of Crossing Boundaries,'' 364.

[11] MTW branches could be found in ports from Adelaide, Buenos Aires, Hamburg, and Peurta de Tierra, to Stockholm, Tampico, and Valparaiso. On the MTW, see Bekken, ''Marine Transport Workers IU 510 (IWW)''; Ru¨bner, ''Occupational Culture, Conflict Patterns and Organizational Behavior,'' esp. 13–17; van der Linden, ''Second Thoughts on Revolutionary Syndicalism.''

[12] Organizations formally part of the IWW emerged, inter alia, in Argentina, Australia, Britain, Canada, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and the US. Organizations modeled on the IWW, or which adopted the IWW platform without taking its name, existed in places such as Canada, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, and South Africa. IWW influences, blended with other political traditions, were to be found inter alia in India, Japan, Nicaragua, and elsewhere.

[13] Crump, The Origins of Socialist Thought in Japan, 193–8; Puri, Ghadar Movement, ch. 2.

[14] On Singh, see Gona, ''Towards a Concrete East African Trade Union Federation.''

[15] Burgmann, Revolutionary Industrial Unionism, 88; Dirlik, The Origins of Chinese Communism, 214–15; Dirlik, Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution, 15, 27, 128, 170, 290.

[16] An incomplete and not altogether reliable international survey of the IWW is Renshaw, The Wobblies.

[17] Van der Linden, ''Transnationalizing American Labor History,'' 1080–1.

[18] Foner, The Industrial Workers of the World, 123–5.

[19] Preamble, IWW, The Founding Constitution; Dubofsky, ''Big Bill'' Haywood, appendix 2, 159–60.

which today graces the masthead of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), Africa's most powerful union centre.

Ben Fletcher, an IWW leader on the Philadelphia docks and the best-known black Wobbly, expressed this labor-integrationist perspective lucidly.[20] Writing in the radical and pro-IWW black monthly The Messenger—edited by African American socialists and IWW-sympathizers Chandler Owen and A. Phillip Randolph—Fletcher argued: ''No genuine attempt by Organized Labor to wrest any worthwhile and lasting concessions from the Employing Class can succeed as long as Organized Labor for the most part is indifferent and in opposition to the fate of Negro Labor.''[21]

Around this time, meanwhile, the South Africa weekly The International—published by the International Socialist League (ISL), a group deeply imbued with IWW syndicalism— advocated a working class movement ''founded on the rock of the meanest proletarian who toils for a master ... as wide as humanity,'' a movement that would ''recognize no bounds of craft, no exclusions of color.''[22]

Of course, declaring for ''internationalism'' and organizing workers of color are separate matters. As Elizabeth Jameson reminds us, ''It was easier to endorse inclusion than to practice it.''[23] How seriously did activists in the Wobbly tradition actually take the IWW commitment to racial inclusion? And, how did they address racial prejudices within the working class as well as racial discrimination by capitalists and politicians? The real test of this politics is the test of practice, particularly in racially divided societies.

Despite a voluminous literature in both countries on ethnicity, labor, and race, surprisingly little has been written on the IWW's racial politics. Besides some pioneering studies in the 1960s,[24] little general analysis of the IWW and race in the US exists, although numerous case studies exist. Even when the IWW has been recognized as racially inclusive, its contribution often has been underestimated. Several scholars, for instance, suggest that it was the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) that first broke with the ''American socialist tradition of relative indifference to the situation of African Americans.''[25] One very recent anthology of important scholarship on African American workers largely ignored IWW efforts, while two of the newest important monographs on race relations in specific unions celebrate the inclusive racial politics of the CPUSA, giving short shrift to the Wobblies.[26] A new survey of African Americans' labor history gives the IWW two brief mentions, and even a survey of African American history written by several labor historians almost entirely ignores the IWW.[27]

Similarly, syndicalism has, until recently, largely been written out of the history of labor and the left in SA, or at least relegated to a very inconsequential role. There is a well-established tradition of presenting all socialist groups before the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA,

[20] Cole, Ben Fletcher.

[21] Fletcher, ''The Negro and Organized Labor,'' 759.

[22] ''The Wrath to Come.''

[23] Jameson, All that Glitters, 158.

[24] Notably Brown, ''The IWW and the Negro Worker''; Foner, ''The IWW and the Black Worker.''

[25] For example, Berland, ''The Emergence of the Communist Perspective.'' Also see Foner, ''The IWW and the Black Worker.''

[26] Arnesen, The Black Worker; Korstad, Civil Rights Unionism; Gilmore, Defying Dixie.

[27] Zieger, For Jobs and Freedom, 67–8, 115; Kelley and Lewis, To Make Our World Anew.

formed 1921, dissolved in 1950; reorganized as the South African Communist Party, SACP, in 1953) as (at best) oblivious to the country's pressing racial problems or (at worst) overtly racist.[28]

This approach first appears in the works of writers linked to the CPSA and SACP,[29] where it plays a central role in a teleological narrative that places ''the Party'' at the center of left history, and that buttresses the party's vanguardist claims by asserting it alone ensured ''class struggle ... merged with the struggle for national liberation.''[30] The arguments of the ''Communist school'' are demonstrably misleading and contradictory, and often based on serious misquotation and misrepresentation,[31] yet its assessment of the SA syndicalists continues to be cited with approval.[32]

This article argues, on the contrary, that activists in the IWW tradition consciously fought against segregation and race prejudice on a left platform in both the US and SA prior to the emergence of communism, which only took on white supremacy haltingly at first. An inclusive perspective was, we argue, central to the politics of IWW-style syndicalists in both countries. Indeed, before, during, and after the First World War, the anarchist/syndicalist tradition pioneered, and embraced, an anti-racist approach in these countries. Wherever the IWW and its emulators organized, workers of color were recruited, racial segregation inside the union was not tolerated, and segregation in the wider society castigated. The shared interests of all workers were stressed, while specific attention was paid the racial oppression of workers of color; the class struggle was viewed as central to the abolition of this oppression. This was not a narrow ''workerism'' that ignored racial or national oppression, but a revolutionary class politics that aimed at the abolition of all injustices.

A comparative look at the IWW's racial politics enhances our understanding of not simply the IWW but also of the vital matters of labor and race in both countries, an endeavor also relevant to other countries that have diverse working classes and labor movements. While the lack of a transnational and global history of the IWW is a serious gap in the literature, it is also a Herculean task, far beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, we suggest that a comparative analysis of the sort we provide here is a useful starting point inasmuch as comparisons help identify similarities and differences that might otherwise go unremarked.33 A comparative approach also helps highlight features that the IWW tradition exhibited globally.

Comparisons also can help us to think about the transnational dimension of the IWW, a crucial task, for only by investigating the IWW across borders can scholars fully appreciate the organization's politics, history, and impact—this last point we believe sorely underestimated. Comparative studies of the IWW have been fairly rare but show great promise and open up exciting avenues; our essay intends to continue in this vein. Moreover, our study suggests that the IWW

[28] It is worth highlighting to those less familiar with contemporary South Africa that the SACP was—and still is—an important part of the ruling coalition, the ''Tripartite Alliance,'' of the African National Congress (ANC) and the largest labor federation, COSATU.

[29] Key works include Bunting, Moses Kotane; Forman, ''Chapters in the History of the March for Freedom''; Roux, S.P. Bunting; Simons and Simons, Class and Color.

[30] Simons and Simons, Class and Color, 609.

[31] Van der Walt, '''The Industrial Union Is the Embryo of the Socialist Commonwealth'''; van der Walt, ''Bakunin's Heirs in South Africa''; van der Walt, ''The First Globalisation.''

[32] For instance, Drew, South Africa's Radical Tradition, 16; Johanningsmeier, ''Communists and Black Freedom Movements,'' esp. 156–9; Katz, A Trade Union Aristocracy; van der Linden, ''Second Thoughts on Revolutionary Syndicalism,'' 14–15.

tradition (and syndicalism generally) demands far greater attention in studies of black freedom movements—including comparative studies—than has been the case so far.[33]

In the United States, a country that prides itself on equality yet paradoxically has a history of sustained prejudice, the IWW both preached and practiced equality. In the early twentieth century the US was, perhaps, at its most racially divided since the abolition of slavery.[34] So, too, the US labor movement; the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the dominant and largest union, swam in a white supremacist tide. In principle, most AFL constituent unions allowed black workers to join, and the AFL had a substantial black membership, but many ignored African American workers, or segregated them (''Jim Crow'' unionism) or even excluded blacks entirely.[35] When AFL leaders argued for inclusion to a greater degree than often recognized, this was mainly by pragmatic appeals to white workers' self-interest: direct attacks on popular or official racism were exceptional.[36]

By contrast, the IWW was founded on the bedrock principle of the equality of all workers, committed to the inclusion of all races in the so-called ''one big union.'' At the founding of the IWW, the ''Continental Congress of the Working Class,'' delegates (among them black anarchist Lucy Parsons), indicted the US labor movement on grounds that it ''does not represent the working class.'' These ''new'' unionists condemned the AFL for refusing to line up the unskilled, for organizing on a craft rather than an industrial basis, and for discriminating against immigrants and workers of color. William D. ''Big Bill'' Haywood, who chaired the Chicago gathering, presented the charges: ''There are organizations that are affiliated ... with the A.F. of L., which in their constitution and by-laws prohibit the initiation of or conferring the obligation on a colored man.'' Instead, ''What we want to establish at this time is a labor organization that will open wide its doors to every man.''[37]

Hence, article I, section I of its constitution unequivocally stated that ''No working man or woman shall be excluded from membership because of creed or color.''[38] The IWW also committed itself to organizing semi-skilled and unskilled workers, cate-gories where workers of color were concentrated. ''I do not give a snap of my finger whether or not the skilled workman joins this industrial movement at the present time,'' Haywood declared, for ''when we get the unskilled and laborer into this organization the skilled worker will of necessity come here for his own protection.''[39]

The IWW's stand was rooted in its syndicalist ideology that stressed the necessity of class organizing for the defeat of capitalism and the state, the impossibility of waging successful labor struggles in the short term without the unity of all workers, and the argument that united class struggle was also the key to abolishing gender, race, and national oppression. As did many anti-

[33] Notably, George M. Fredrickson's path-breaking Black Liberation pays a substantial amount of attention to the communist role but almost entirely ignores earlier left currents. Similarly, syndicalism is mentioned, but its influence and ideas underrated and quickly passed over, by Johanningsmeier, ''Communists and Black Freedom Movements,'' 156–62.

[34] The best recent survey is Litwack, Trouble in Mind. Also see Logan, The Negro in American Life and Thought for the origination of the term ''the nadir'' in US race relations.

[35] On AFL racism there are many sources, for instance: Washington, ''The Negro and the Labor Unions''; Hill, ''The Racial Practices of Organized Labor''; Nelson, Divided We Stand, xxxi–xxxii.

[36] Zieger, For Jobs and Freedom, 61–2.

[37] IWW, The Founding Convention, 1.

[38] Ibid.; Foner ''The IWW and the Black Worker,'' 45–6.

[39] IWW, Founding Convention, as quoted in Foner, The Industrial Workers of the World, 37.

capitalist organizations, the IWW believed that class solidarity should trump craft, ethnic, gender, national, racial, or religious identities. It also believed that class struggle was an effective means of fighting against non-class oppressions.

The Wobblies' anti-racist approach was developed, in part, by the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), an integral section of the early IWW and the union from which Haywood hailed. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the WFM generally promoted industrial unionism and gradually included all workers regardless of their national heritage. Research confirms that Haywood and other WFM leaders witnessed how ''employers and the state used race'' and ethnic divisions ''to inflame'' white workers. Despite intense divisions on the issue, in 1903 the WFM leadership opened the union to Asians, the most hated non-white group in America's West; other workers of color already could, and did, belong.[40]

Many other left unions and political organizations claimed to support racial equality, but did little in practice and, generally, considered the matter secondary. As Eugene Debs, the Socialist Party of America's (SPA) legendary leader and a co-founder of the IWW, declared, ''we have nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make separate appeals to all the races. The Socialist Party is the party of the whole working class, regardless of color.''[41] Even if, as Will Jones convincingly has argued, Debs himself was more understanding of the profundity of American racism than the above quotation suggests, a great many in the SPA were overtly prejudiced; the party passed resolutions in 1907, 1910, and 1912 in favor of Asian exclusion from the US.[42]

When the WFM withdrew from the IWW, the Western mines remained a Wobbly stronghold, where the ideals of industrial unionism, inclusivity, and militant direct action attracted thousands of workers of color. The deep-shaft miners of the Rocky Mountains were incredibly diverse. In Southwestern copper mines, Philip J. Mellinger notes, ''Recent European immigrants, Mexican immigrants, and US-born Hispanics outnumbered Anglo-American and other northwest-European ancestry groups at every large copper mine, mill, and smelter in the Southwest.''[43]

The IWW miners' union (eventually, the Metal and Mine Workers' Industrial Union) attracted thousands of Mexican miners. IWW organizer JoseŔodrı´guez, speaking to miners in southern Arizona, ''urged Mexicans to join the IWW and claimed that it was the only organization prepared to unite workers the world over, regardless of their national origin.'' Wobblies fought alongside Ricardo Flores Magoń and Emiliano Zapata in the Mexican Revolution. Wobblies, Mexican and Anglo, actively participated in fighting on the Baja peninsula early in the revolution with the Magońista militias; according to Gerald Ronning, ''Undeniably, the IWW's participation in the [Baja] revolt demonstrated the union's commitment to class solidarity with Mexican workers on both sides of the border.'' The IWW also worked with the powerful Mexican syndicalist federation, the Casa del Obrero Mundial, formed in 1912.[44]

[40] Brundage, The Making of Western Radicalism, 26, 138, 154–7, 163; Jameson, All that Glitters, 151, 158.

[41] Cited in Rosenberg, ''The IWW and Organization of Asian Workers,'' 78. For a thoughtful counter to the standard critique of the ''Debsian view'' of race relations, see Jones, '''Nothing Special to Offer the Negro'.'' Jones argues that Debs did not simplistically believe that racial discrimination would disappear after a socialist revolution, though Jones agrees that most white Socialists of that time were racist or tolerant of white supremacy. Debs disagreed, even though not part of the SPA's anti-racist syndicalist wing.

[42] Crump, The Origins of Socialist Thought in Japan, 188–9.

[43] Mellinger, Race and Labor in Western Copper, 6, 140–3.

[44] Montgomery, ''What More to be Done?''; Caulfield, Mexican Workers and the State, 4–5, 11–15, 23, 32–36; De Shazo and Halstead, ''Los Wobblies Del Sur,'' 23–37; Ronning, ''I Belong in this World,'' 125–55 (quote from 153).

Through the Wobblies' Spanish-language press, especially LA-based El Rebelde, and a cross-border network of migrants, members, and activists, the IWW organized a transnational movement connecting the mines of Arizona and northern Mexico as well as the oil and port workers of Tampico, Mexico's primary oil port. A Mexican IWW was formed in 1919, and in 1921 merged with former Casa groups and others into the syndicalist General Confederation of Labor, the main independent union federation. The MTW dominated Chile's largest port, Valparaiso, from the late 1910s, and the Chilean IWW was a major part of the country's syndicalist-led labor movement.[45] The MTW's distinctive commitment to inclusive unionism led to the emergence of MTW chapters in Mexico, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Argentina.[46]

As in the mines, the IWW proved committed to organizing Asian, Mexican, and other workers of color on California farms, albeit with less success. In the rich fields of California's Central Valley, the agricultural wage labor force was a polyglot mix. One investigator reported in 1914 that ''Among the most important alien groups were Syrian, Mexican, Spanish from the Hawaiian sugar plantations, Japanese, Lithuanian, Italian, Greek, Polish, Hindu, Cuban, Porto [sic] Rican, and Swedish.''[47] Greg Hall notes that workers at one California farm spoke, incredibly, twenty-seven different languages.[48]

This workforce attracted little interest from either the AFL or SPA, which did not believe farm workers could be organized, and often saw Asians as racially inferior. ''The dominant policy of organized labor,'' Rosenberg notes, ''of the American Federation of Labor and of the Knights of Labor before it, favored exclusion of Asians from American shores and subordination of those already in the US labor force.''[49] Many leftists shunned Asian workers, leading Wobbly organizer J.H. Walsh to chastise ''a great many so-called American socialists, who claim to be socialists because of a scientific understanding of economics, and yet declare for the exclusion of these people from 'our' shores.''[50]

By contrast, Rosenberg notes, ''The evidence suggests that the IWW was one of the first (not specifically Asian) working-class organizations to actively recruit Asian workers,'' while Hall stresses that the IWW openly and repeatedly endorsed Asian immigration and union membership. Both find that Asian agricultural workers responded sympathetically, although the distrust created by white working-class racism proved a huge impediment. Thus, the main success was a large Japanese contingent in Hawaii.[51] It was in California that the IWW recruited and influenced key Asian militants such as Har Dayal and Ko¯toku Shu¯sui.[52]

In short, the evidence suggests that the IWW organized all workers regardless of race or ethnicity, including the most hated groups in the US West, Asians and Mexicans, attracted and developed key militants in all these groups, and was a profoundly integrated union with a multiracial and multinational leadership, and deep roots in communities of color. Undoubtedly, the IWW was certainly the most consistent in organizing workers of color in the early twentieth century. Still, most workers of color, like most white Americans, did not join unions, and many

[45] DeShazo, Urban Workers and Labor Unions in Chile, 154–7, 198.

[46] Caulfield, Mexican Workers and the State, 23.

[47] Parker, The Casual Laborer, 173.

[48] Hall, Harvest Wobblies, 48.

[49] Rosenberg, ''The IWW and Organization of Asian Workers,'' 77–8, 82.

[50] Walsh, ''Japanese and Chinese Exclusion.''

[51] Rosenberg, ''The IWW and Organization of Asian Workers,'' 77–8, 82; Hall, Harvest Wobblies, 51, 53, 57–8, 121.

[52] Crump, The Origins of Socialist Thought in Japan, 193–8; Puri, Ghadar Movement, ch. 2.

Asians or Mexicans formed ethnically based unions. Similar issues confronted the IWW when organizing African American workers.

Far and away, African Americans were the largest minority group in the US, until recently. While discrimination has been experienced by many in the US, African Americans had a ''special and inferior status,'' enduring slavery until 1865, facing a century of Jim Crow discrimination thereafter, and a more systematic and ongoing exclusion than any other group.[53] Despite being overwhelmingly working-class, early twentieth-century African Americans generally remained aloof from—and were ignored by—most unions. The Pan-Africanist W.E.B. Du Bois recognized this vicious cycle: ''Race prejudice is a two-edged sword, and it is not to the advantage of organized labor to produce among the Negroes a prejudice and fear of union labor such as to create in this country a race of strike breakers.''[54] Yet few unions heeded his advice, and he himself despaired of the possibility of an interracial union movement. Meanwhile Booker T. Washington, arguably the most prominent African American leader in this era, attacked the AFL for racism and actively encouraged blacks to break strikes to gain jobs.[55] Such advice, in turn, reinforced white-dominated unions' distrust of black workers.

The IWW, by contrast, appealed directly to African Americans. The Wobbly pamphlet Justice for the Negro claimed that ''There is only one labor organization in the United States that admits the colored worker, man or woman, on a footing of absolute equality with the white—the Industrial Workers of the World.'' Likewise To Colored Working Men and Women contended: ''[T]he employing class seeks to engender race hatred between the two. He sets the black worker against the white worker and the white worker against the black, and keeps them divided and enslaved.''[56] Wobbly organizers stressed the common experience of class oppression yet also recognized that African Americans suffered uniquely:

> The wrongs of the Negro in the United States are not confined to lynchings, however. When allowed to live and work for the community, he is subjected to constant humiliation, injustice, and discrimination. In the cities he is forced to live in the meanest districts, where his rent is doubled and tripled, while conditions of health and safety are neglected in favor of the white sections. In many states he is obliged to ride in special ''Jim Crow'' cars, hardly fit for cattle. Almost everywhere all semblance of political rights is denied him.

Where could African Americans look for assistance? Wobblies claimed: ''In the IWW the colored worker, man or woman, is on an equal footing with every other worker.''[57] Thus, the notion that class struggle and One Big Union was essential to the liberation of all workers, as well as the means of emancipation from racial oppression.

The IWW also coupled discussions of revolution with pragmatic appeals, critical in building unity among skeptical black and white workers. The Wobblies maintained that every worker must belong to the One Big Union. Industrial Worker explained: ''Leaving the Negro outside of

[53] Zieger, For Jobs and Freedom, 2–3.

[54] Quoted in Whatley, ''African-American Strikebreaking,'' 527.

[55] Washington, ''The Negro and the Labor Unions,'' 756–9, 764.

[56] Justice for the Negro: How He Can Get It, box 166, and To Colored Working Men and Women: Why You Should Join the IWW, box 158, both in IWW Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA.

[57] Justice for the Negro.

your union makes him a potential, if not an actual scab, dangerous to the organized worker, to say nothing of his own interests as a worker.'' David Roediger called Wobbly interracial organizing in Louisiana ''stomach equality,'' in order to stress the pragmatic side,[58] but it should be conceded that the IWW also actively fought against racial prejudice and black oppression.

The first place the IWW lined up many black workers was the woods of Louisiana and Texas. In 1912 the IWW welcomed the independent Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) into its fold and radicalized the BTW, especially on race matters, into the region's first truly interracial union. Prior to joining the IWW, the BTW was biracial, maintaining separate branches though these locals worked closely together. Biracialism was, in itself, quite impressive in the Jim Crow South, but created conflicts through practices such as white leaders being in charge of all financial issues, including the black locals' dues money.[59]

The IWW forced the BTW into integrating its ranks, meetings, and locals. Famously, at the 1912 BTW convention, Haywood—fresh from the Wobblies' stunning victory among multi-ethnic textile workers in the Lawrence, Massachusetts ''bread and roses'' strike—expressed shock that the membership met simultaneously in white- and black-only halls, so called for integration. In defiance of local law and custom, and with the aid of Covington Hall, a white, New Orleans-based Wobbly poet,[60] the membership agreed, thereby desegregating the union in one dramatic act. It also was the IWW leadership that convinced timber workers to elect black representatives to the IWW national convention, instead of solely whites. None of this can be explained on purely pragmatic grounds: the BTW had waged previous battles despite internal segregation. Thus, the IWW demonstrated its commitment to organizing black workers and confronting segregation.[61]

The IWW's ''Philadelphia story'' is perhaps even more remarkable, as the diverse longshoremen in one of the nation's largest ports forged not just the most successful interracial local in Wobbly history but also the most inclusive union of its time. In 1913, when Local 8 was founded, Philadelphia's longshoremen were roughly a third African American, a third native-born white Americans (especially Irish Americans), and a third European immigrants (particularly Irish, Poles, and Lithuanians). Though discussing the period after the fall of Local 8, local longshoreman John Quinn also described the time before: ''It was not uncommon that the gangs would be pitted against each other, white against black, Irish against the Polish.''[62]

Out of this melange, fostered by employers who understood how competitive diversity undercut unionism, Local 8 arose, led by Philadelphia-born African American leader, Ben Fletcher. After Local 8 seized control of the deep-sea piers, it eliminated the hated and racially divisive shape-up and integrated the previously segregated work gangs. Moreover, the union proved committed to a mixed-race leadership during meetings and in leadership positions and maintained integrated social gatherings.[63]

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[58] Industrial Worker, 1 August 1914; Roediger, ''Gaining a Hearing for Black-White Unity.''

[59] Green, ''The Brotherhood of Timber Workers,'' 176, 185; Roediger, ''Gaining a Hearing for Black-White Unity,'' 143.

[60] Hall, Dreams and Dynamite.

[61] Green, ''The Brotherhood of Timber Workers,'' 177, 186–7; Haywood, Bill Haywood's Book, 242; Hall, Labor Struggles in the Deep South, 127–9.

[62] John Quinn, shooting script, 7, Labor on the Delaware Oral History Project, Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia, PA.

[63] Thirteenth Census of the United States, 589; Bill ''Willy'' Krupsky, 29 June 1980, tape 1, Labor on the Delaware Oral History Project; Thomas Dabney, ''Questionnaire for ILA Local 1116,'' Labor Union Survey, Pennsylvania, 1925–8, Box 89, Series 6E, National Urban League Collection, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC;

Local 8 worked hard to maintain unity in its own ranks. Local and national Wobbly papers highlighted the leadership of Fletcher, a brilliant speaker and one of the keys to keeping the longshoremen united. For his part, Fletcher maintained that black workers' interests were the same as those of white workers, though few African Americans considered their class identities above their racial ones. Local 8 combated numerous employer attempts to drive racial wedges into the union's ranks: during one strike, employers sent letters to the homes of Polish longshoremen appealing to them to return to work; when the Poles refused, employers sent similar letters to the African Americans, who also refused; and then finally to Italian longshoremen. During strikes employers frequently used African American replacements, playing on America's legacy of race and strikebreaking.[64]

Given the many forces at work, including a city and nation increasingly racist, xenophobic, and anti-union and especially a repressive federal government (the top 100 leaders of the IWW—including Fletcher and five other Philadelphians—were arrested in 1917), it is not surprising that Local 8 eventually, after a long-fought battle, lost control of the waterfront in 1923. Nevertheless, its decade-long run of dominance set the US standard for a union committed to organizing workers of color.[65]

While the IWW's success in organizing workers of color in the US was uneven, its principled stand was unprecedented. It is difficult to quantify the racial and ethnic composition of the US IWW—its record-keeping was poor, it did not record members' demographics, and the government destroyed all IWW records confiscated during the First World War. Still, the evidence strongly supports Greg Hall's view that ''Although it is difficult to make judgments about whether all Wobblies accepted the racial and ethnic inclusiveness of the union, one is hard-pressed to find racist or ethnically prejudiced sentiments in IWW newspapers, official publications, or in the oral histories left behind by Wobblies.''[66] Three more decades of scholarship, particularly Cole's research on Local 8, confirms Philip Foner's claim that it was the ''only federation in the history of the American labor movement never to charter a single segregated local,'' which ''united black and white workers as never before … and maintained solidarity and equality regardless of race or color such as most labor organizations have yet to equal.''[67]

It is not surprising to learn, then, that only the IWW received the high praise of leading black radicals at the time. Chandler Owen and A. Phillip Randolph held joint meetings with IWW speakers and promoted the union and its politics in the 1910s and 1920s.[68] Jamaican-born radical writer Claude McKay praised the IWW,[69] as did Du Bois, who editorialized: ''We respect the

The Messenger (July 1921), 214–15; Du Bois, The Philadelphia Negro, 135, 330–3; Cole, Wobblies on the Waterfront, 21–2, 57, 97.

[64] Solidarity, 22 July 1912, 4; Industrial Worker, February 1929; Fletcher, ''The Negro and Organized Labor''; One Big Union Monthly, July 1920, 7; E.F. Doree and Walter Nef, The Philadelphia Controversy, 16–17, Box 170, IWW Collection, Reuther Library; Norwood, Strikebreaking and Intimidation; Cole, Wobblies on the Waterfront, 43–5, 96–8, 149–50.

[65] Franklin, ''The Philadelphia Race Riot of 1918''; Hardy, ''Race and Opportunity,'' 208–10; Cole, Wobblies on the Waterfront, chs 4 and 8.

[66] Hall, Harvest Wobblies, 243.

[67] Foner, Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 111, 119.

[68] Spero and Harris, The Black Worker, 391–2.

[69] McKay, ''Socialism and the Negro.''

Industrial Workers of the World as one of the social and political movements in modern times that draws no color line.''[70]

There are critical differences between the situations in the US and SA that should be borne in mind in proceeding with our analysis. Firstly, the US economy was based on advanced capitalism and the use of a large pool of predominantly free labor. In contrast, SA capitalism (from its industrial revolution in the late 1880s into the 1930s) was a colonial one, centered on agriculture and mining, plagued by labor shortages, and reliant on unfree labor.

Here, the majority of workers were Africans, from conquered peoples across the southern African region. The majority of the African workers in modern industry were male migrants who worked on limited contracts and whose families resided in rural homesteads in African reserves. Their contracts made strikes and ''desertion'' illegal, their movements were controlled by internal passports; many lived in closed compounds, and almost all worked in low-wage unskilled jobs. They faced racial discrimination, including official efforts to enforce segregation and prevent black urbanization, as did the small population of free urban African workers, including a small layer of white-collar workers, as well as professionals and small capitalists.[71]

English-speaking white workers, mostly immigrants of British origin, dominated the skilled trades and had a tradition of craft unionism. These unions started to move towards ''white labourism,'' a platform of social democracy, segregation, and Asian repatriation. Although white workers dominated skilled jobs, many whites (notably local Afrikaners) were unskilled and poor. When these workers started to unionize, they often embraced racial exclusion via white labourism or Afrikaner nationalism. Further complicating the divisions, there was a large free population of Westernized ''Coloured'' (mixed-race, ''brown'') workers concentrated in the Cape province (many of slave, servant and sailor descent), and a substantial Indian population in Natal (mostly derived from indentured workers).

Free labor of all races, perhaps a third of the urban working class and often concentrated in multiracial slums, feared replacement by unfree African migrants—and by one another. One result was ongoing African-white conflict, including race riots, in the Witwatersrand slums. The unfree Africans were themselves divided, ethnic rivalries leading to a long history of violent ''faction-fights'' on the mines.[72]

Comparisons are often drawn between US and SA segregation but there are key differences. Most African American and white miners in the US, for instance, had relatively similar incomes, family structures, jobs, and cultures; African Americans had some citizenship rights. By contrast, African and white miners in SA were structurally divided into unfree and free, migrant and urban, skilled and unskilled, divided by colonial status and state intervention in the labor system, and by language and culture.[73]

The IWW tradition also played out in the two contexts somewhat differently. US syndicalism was centered on a single, large, IWW union federation. In SA, the IWW was expressed through

[70] Du Bois, ''I.W.W.,'' 60.

[71] For foundational texts and perspectives, see Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold; David Yudelman, The Emergence of Modern South Africa.

[72] See, for example, Harries, Work, Culture and Identity, 121–4.

[73] Alexander, ''Race, Class Loyalty and the Structure of Capitalism.''

a variety of different organizations, including unions for all practical purposes Wobbly.[74] There were unions explicitly modeled on the US IWW, such as the local IWW (formed 1910) and Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA, formed 1917), but these were but part of the diverse syndicalist milieu. David Montgomery, writing about the US, notes that the IWW's battle for ''working-class revolt against industrial hierarchy'' was a task ''much more widespread and diverse than the IWW itself could possibly embody.''[75] Such certainly was true of SA, with its diverse expressions of Wobbly influence.

IWW-style syndicalism started in SA among radical immigrants, galvanized by the 1910 and 1914 speaking tours of English syndicalist Tom Mann.[76] These immigrants remained in close touch with the London anarchists around Pyotr Kropotkin, and the Clydeside syndicalists in Scotland. There was an important split in the US IWW in 1908 between factions aligned with Haywood (the ''Chicago IWW'') and Daniel De Leon (the ''Detroit IWW,'' linked to De Leon's Socialist Labor Party, or SLP).[77]

In March 1910 a local Socialist Labor Party (SLP) emerged in industrial Johannesburg, aligned to the De Leonists, followed in June by an IWW union, aligned to the Haywood faction, a division that provides eloquent evidence of the immersion of local radicals in global IWW trends. The local IWW organized strikes of Johannesburg tramway workers in 1911, established a 'local' among government railway workers in nearby Pretoria, and a branch in the port of Durban in Natal.[78]

Both the local SLP and IWW were defunct by 1913, although their veterans played a role in the white workers' general strike that shook the entire Witwatersrand region that year. The next year they joined the militant anti-war left wing of the (predominantly white laborite) South African Labor Party to form the ''War-on-War League,'' which became the syndicalist ISL in 1915. Wobbly ideas were seen in the ISL's commitment to ''the union of all workers along the lines of industry; not only as a force behind their political demands, but as the embryo of that Socialist Commonwealth which ... must take the place of the present barbaric order.''[79] In May 1918 militants in the port city of Cape Town formed a separate Industrial Socialist League (IndSL) on the Chicago IWW platform.[80]

All these organizations stressed that the ''one big union'' must be interracial and rejected the exclusionism of the existing unions and the Labour Party. Archie Crawford, editor of the Voice of Labour, a local pro-IWW weekly published from 1908, stressed these points. Similarly, Henry

[74] This discussion of syndicalism in South Africa draws upon arguments developed in van der Walt, '''The Industrial Union Is the Embryo','' van der Walt, ''Bakunin's Heirs in South Africa,'' and van der Walt, ''Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa.''

[75] Montgomery, ''What More to be Done?,'' 361.

[76] Mann, ''Latest News from South Africa''; Mann, Tom Mann's Memoirs, 245–7.

[77] The split centered on the tactic of standing in elections. By 1908 Haywood had adopted the orthodox syndicalist position of boycotting all elections, while De Leon, also an IWW founder, insisted that elections could be used to make propaganda for the ''one big union'' and to disrupt the state. De Leon did not believe in parliamentary socialism (a ''gigantic Utopia''), and insisted that ''the Industrial Union is at once the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of Capitalism, and the successor of the capitalist social structure itself.'' However, this was too much for Haywood et al., and the union split. Quotes from Socialist Labor Party, The Socialist Labor Party and De Leon, ''Industrial Unionism.''

[78] Boydell, ''Foreword,'' xii; ''Heard and Said,'' Voice of Labour, 14 June 1912; Glynn, ''Recognition''; Dunbar, ''IWW Propaganda Notes''; ''The 'Sherman' Agitation.''

[79] ''The Break up of Capitalism''; ''Branch Notes.''

[80] Harrison, Memoirs of a Socialist, 64; ''What WE Stand For.''

Glasse, a pioneer of SA anarchism since the 1880s, stressed: ''For a white worker in this South Africa to pretend he can successfully fight his battle independent of the colored wage slaves—the vast majority—is, to my mind, simply idiocy.''[81] The IWW proudly described itself as a ''class-conscious revolutionary organization embracing all workers regardless of craft, race or color,''[82] to ''fight the class war with the aid of all workers, whether … skilled or unskilled, white or black.''[83]

Likewise, the ISL committed itself to ''the organization of the workers on industrial or class lines, irrespective of race, color or creed … for the emancipation of the workers.''[84] The IndSL demanded for ''every worker, white or colored … the full value of what he may produce.''[85] White workers must not stand ''with their feet on the native worker but … shoulder to shoulder with him in their industrial organizations.''[86]

Though committed to fighting racism, the pioneers of anarchism and syndicalism in SA were white workers, such as Glasse, an Englishman, Andrew Dunbar, the Scots-born IWW general-secretary, and Welshman David Ivon Jones of the ISL. Unlike many white immigrants, who quickly adapted to local white racism, however, these men imagined a world of class solidarity. Rather than defend the colonial racial hierarchy with its stratified working class, they envisaged an interracial ''industrial republic,'' forged through an inclusive one big union, which would also be an ''an integral part of the International Industrial Republic.''[87]

For the groups of the period 1910 to 1914, this was largely a theoretical commitment. Despite their achievements in developing an analysis of the country's colonial society, their focus was in practice on white workers. They failed to actively organize workers of color, although activists such as Jock Campbell of the SLP, a Clydeside Irishman, were certainly the first on the Witwatersrand to make propaganda among the African workers, advocating ''unity among all wage slaves, regardless of color.''[88]

The vital step—to combine principled opposition to racial oppression with active union work among workers of color—was taken by the ISL and IndSL. The ISL not only argued for the futility of white labourism, nor stopped at stating that racial discrimination and prejudice benefited only the ruling class. It went further, arguing that the struggle against racial oppression must be combined with the anti-capitalist struggle through the one big union and so ''succeed in shaking South African capitalism to its foundations.''[89]

In its view, the struggle against racial oppression had to be linked to an understanding of the role of unfree labor in the capitalist economy: ''What makes native labor so cheap and exploitable in South Africa? Laws and regulations which, on the pretence of protecting society from barbarism, degrade the native workers to the level of serfs and herded cattle for the express uses of Capital.''[90] African labor, ''cheap, helpless and unorganized,'' ensured ''employers generally and particularly industrial employers, that most coveted plum of modern Imperialism, plentiful

[81] See, for example, letter from Glasse, Voice of Labour, 26 January 1912.
[82] Voice of Labour, 22 July 1910.
[83] Voice of Labour, 25 November 1910.
[84] ''League Conference''; ''The First Conference of the League.''
[85] ''Socialism and the Colored Folk.''
[86] Lopes, ''Socialism and the Labour Party.''
[87] ''Industrial Unionism in South Africa.''
[88] Cope, Comrade Bill, 93.
[89] ''The Parting of the Ways.''
[90] ''International Socialism and the Native.''

cheap labor.''[91] So ISL organizers declared at a 1916 Johannesburg meeting attacking the 1913 Land Act that radically restricted African landownership.[92] To this event belongs the distinction of being the ''first coming together in the Transvaal of white socialists and the African National Congress,''[93] the African nationalist body formed in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). The next year saw the ISL hold a public protest meeting, also addressed by SANNC leaders, against the Native Affairs Administration Bill that essentially placed Africans under rule by decree.[94] This was a ''historic occasion as socialists demonstrated for the first time on the Rand against racial legislation that did not directly affect whites.''[95]

It is often assumed that links between African nationalists, and anti-capitalist radicals, date to the efforts of the CPSA from the late 1920s onwards; evidently, however, it was the syndicalists who pioneered this cooperation. That said, the syndicalists did not really agree with the SANNC approach, which centered at the time on deputations to the authorities and requests for the extension of a qualified franchise. For the ISL and IndSL, the one big union was the means of overcoming racial and national racial oppression, the broom whereby the ''tyrant laws must be swept away.''[96] George Mason of the ISL, addressing a racially mixed meeting in Johannesburg, argued for these to be ''repealed by the strength of Trade Unionism'': African workers must ''train and organize themselves'' to ''compel respect.''[97] The one big union, for the ISL, would enable simultaneous struggle against capitalism and racism: ''Once organized, these workers can bust-up any tyrannical law.''[98] At the same time, the one big union could scarcely be formed unless ''founded on the rock of the meanest proletarian who toils for a master.''

It was this outlook that led the ISL to develop links with the SANNC in 1916, and to actively organize among workers of color in 1917. In fact, the ISL frankly doubted the reliability of the SANNC leadership, which it described (accurately enough) as dominated by African ''attorneys and parsons,''[99] ''small capitalists''[100] and the ''native property owner",[101] mainly moderates fearful of industrial action and ''a universal general strike'' against capitalism.[102] In 1916, the organization was predominantly white, although the British core was now supplemented increasingly by Jewish immigrants fleeing the Russian empire.

Yet within a year, the ISL had transformed itself, recruiting key activists of color and forming a number of syndicalist unions among workers of color. New ISL recruits included T.W. Thibedi (a radical African school teacher from downtown Johannesburg), Fred Cetiwe and Hamilton Kraai (hailing from the African districts of the Eastern Cape), Johnny Gomas and K.C. Fredericks (Coloured tailors from the mining town of Kimberley) and R.K. Moodley and Bernard Sigamoney (Indian militants from Durban, the latter a school teacher).

[91] ''Workers of the World Unite.''
[92] Ibid.
[93] Forman, ''Chapters in the History,'' 54.
[94] ''Workers of the World Uniting.''
[95] Simons and Simons, Class and Color, 198; also see Johns, Raising the Red Flag, 71.
[96] ''International Socialism and the Native.''
[97] ''Call to the Native Workers.''
[98] ''The Pass Laws: Organise for their Abolition.''
[99] Ibid.
[100] Proletarian, ''The Problem of Colored Labour.''
[101] ''Beware of Labour Cranks.''
[102] Proletarian, ''The Problem of Colored Labour.''

The ISL was directing its attention to ''the great mass of the proletariat'' that ''happens in South Africa to be black, and therefore disenfranchised and socially outcast.''[103] Prominent ISL members in the white trade unions, such as Bill Andrews and Mason, were joined by Cetiwe, Kraai, and Thibedi in trying to reform—without much practical success—these bodies along suitably revolutionary lines (including opening the unions to all races).[104]

In March 1917 ISL activists helped launch an Indian Workers' Industrial Union ''on the lines of the IWW'' in Durban.[105] Organized by Gordon Lee, an IWW veteran, and Sigamoney and Moodley, it attracted workers in catering, on the docks, and in laundry, printing, and tobacco, and had contacts on the coalfields and sugar plantations.[106] Study classes pored over De Leon, while at open-air meetings ''the Indian Workers Choir entertained the crowds by singing the Red Flag, the International and many IWW songs.''[107]

The ISL also organized among Coloured workers in Kimberley, forming a Clothing Workers Industrial Union and a Horse Drivers' Union, which won several strikes.[108] The drivers were mostly employed by the Kimberly municipality and railways, excluded from the Municipal Employees Association; Coloured union militants, such as Gomas, K.C. Fredericks and Jan C. Smuts, joined the ISL.[109] The Clothing Workers Industrial Union subsequently spread to factories in Durban and Johannesburg.

In June 1917 the ISL established a study group among Africans, the nucleus of the IWA—the first union in SA to organize African workers—that was explicitly modeled on the IWW.[110] Prominent lecturers included Jones, S.P. Bunting and Dunbar, the latter stating that the ISL wished to ''make the natives who are the working-class of South Africa be organized and have rights as a white man.''[111] The solution: ''If we strike for everything, we can get everything… If we can only spread the matter far and wide amongst the natives, we can easily unite.''[112] These radical views meant the ISL and IWA were monitored by the police, discussed in Parliament, and subject to ongoing official harassment. For their part, conservative African nationalists in the SANNC and elsewhere deplored the news that ''Bolshevism and its nihilistic doctrines are enlisting many Natives up-country.''[113]

It was through the IWA that the ISL recruited figures such as Cetiwe, a leader in the union's all-African management committee, who insisted that ''We are here for Organization, so that as soon as all of your fellow workers are organized, then we can see what we can do to abolish the Capitalist-System.''[114] The union's literature, in several African languages, circulated across the

[103] ''Those 32 Votes,'' The International, 2 February 1917.

[104] Johns, Raising the Red Flag, 64–9. Also see van der Walt, ''Bakunin's Heirs in South Africa,'' 81–2.

[105] ''A Forward Move in Durban.'' Also see Mantzaris, ''The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike'' for a brief discussion.

[106] Lee, ''Indian Workers Waking Up.''

[107] Mantzaris, ''The Indian Tobacco Workers Strike,'' 117.

[108] Musson, Johnny Gomas, 17–18; ''Kimberley Tailors' Strike''; The International, 19 December 1919; The International, 27 June 1919; The International, 4 July 1919; ''Kimberley Strikes: More White Scabbing.'' Also minutes of City Council, Kimberley: 9 December 1919, 501, 23 December 1919, 511–12, and 1 January 1920, 550–1, 3/KIM 1/1/1/16, Cape Archives.

[109] Musson, Johnny Gomas, 18.

[110] Detective R. Moroosi, report on meeting of 11 October 1917, Department of Justice, ''The ISL and Coloured Workers,'' JD 3/527/17, National Archives, Pretoria, hereafter Department of Justice.

[111] Detective Wilfrid Jali, report on meeting of 19 July 1917, Department of Justice.

[112] Jali, report on meeting of 26 July 1917, in Department of Justice.

[113] D.D.T. Jabavu, [July 1920] ''Native Unrest,'' in Karis and Carter, From Protest to Challenge, 124.

[114] Unlabelled report, May 1918 (full date illegible), in Department of Justice.

Witwatersrand and into rural areas across the country.[115] This declared ''There is only one way of deliverance for you Bantu workers. Unite as workers ... let Labour be your common bond.''[116] The union's base was among the urban Africans of the downtown slums of Johannesburg: it never organized the mines but drew its members mainly from the small secondary sector.

In 1918 ISL and IWA activists and radicals in the Transvaal SANNC cooperated in an abortive African general strike movement ''not for one shilling a day but for Africa which they deserved.''[117] While the SANNC was on the whole a very moderate body, a section of its Transvaal wing, covering the Witwatersrand, was radicalized in the late 1910s. This was partly due to rapidly deteriorating conditions and rising class struggle,[118] but due credit must also be given to syndicalists such as Cetiwe, Kraai and Thibedi, who seem to have decided to work within the SANNC milieu. The strike fell through, the militants were prosecuted, and for ''the first time in South Africa, members of the European and Native races, in common cause united, were arrested and charged together for their political activities.''[119]

ISL and IWA leaders Cetiwe and Kraai meanwhile attended the August 1918 SANNC congress in Bloemfontein, where they unsuccessfully proposed a policy of general strikes and direct action, shocking the moderate majority.[120] The 1918 strike movement was followed in 1919 by an SANNC anti-pass law campaign, in which Cetiwe and Kraai were prominent. The link between passes, cheap labor, and national liberation was made clear by Cetiwe: ''These passes are main chains, enchaining us from all our rights. These passes are the chains chaining us in our employers' yards, so that we cannot go about and see what we can do for ourselves... It is the very same with a dog.''[121]

It was in Cape Town that the IWA truly came into its own as the most successful single Wobbly-style union in the country, based on the docks.[122] In 1919 Cetiwe and Kraai left for the African ghetto of Ndabeni at Cape Town, and organized a new IWA section.[123] (In Cape Town, the majority of workers were Coloureds, followed by whites; Africans were a minority confined to the worst jobs). They linked up with the IndSL, worked with the Cape Native Congress (later part of the SANNC) in Ndabeni, and turned their attention to the docks, the largest employer in the city and the main employer of African and Coloured workers. The IWA and IndSL organized the union's first public meeting on 10 July 1919, with 200 Africans and Coloureds present.[124]

The IndSL was then a dynamic force with a strong orientation towards Coloured workers. Like the ISL, its initial core was white, and, in this case, mainly immigrant Jews. A program of deliberate diversification was adopted. Its offices in District Six, and subsequently downtown,

[115] Hirson, The Delegate for Africa, 173; Johnstone, ''The IWA on the Rand,'' 258–60.

[116] Attached to report on meeting of 1 November 1917, Department of Justice.

[117] ''The Geweld Case.'' Also see Forman, ''Chapters in the History,'' 68.

[118] Emphasized by Bonner, ''The Transvaal Native Congress.''

[119] Skota, The African Yearly Register, 171. There were nineteenth-century precedents, such as the 1808 revolt against slavery in the Cape: Ulrich, ''Abolition from Below.''

[120] Sol Plaatje, 3 August 1918, ''Letter to the President, Kimberley Chamber of Commerce, 18 November 1918,'' in Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings, 237.

[121] Report on meeting of Transvaal Native Congress and Industrial Workers of Africa, 23 May 1918 by Wilfrid Jali, in JD 3/527/17.

[122] The story of the Cape Town radicals is covered in detail in Lucien van der Walt, ''Anarchism and Syndicalism in an African Port City: the revolutionary traditions of Cape Town's multiracial working class, 1904–1924,'' Labor History (forthcoming).

[123] Wickens, ''The One Big Union Movement among Black Workers,'' 393.

[124] The International, 25 July 1919; Hirson, Frank Glass, 20–1.

attracted ''considerable numbers of Coloured and native people,'' ''the movement ... growing in numbers and importance.''[125] When it moved to central Cape Town, its new Socialist Hall drew a crowd of ''between 300 and 400 persons,'' many ''Cape Malays'' and ''colored trade unionists.''[126]

As Manuel Lopes of the IndSL reported, ''We are gaining ground slowly, especially among the colored and native people.''[127] The IndSL now included Coloured activists such as B. Kies and A. Brown, and worked closely with figures like M.A. Gamiet, a sympathetic unionist who organized the mainly Coloured Tailors' and Tailoress' Union.[128]

With a hopeful (if ill-informed) eye on events in Moscow, the IndSL published the monthly Bolshevik and established close contact with the ISL, and the Workers' Dreadnought in Britain.[129] Visiting Wobbly sailors from the MTW, '''rebels' in the best sense of the term ... taught the League to sing,''[130] and seemed to have used the IndSL offices as their local meeting place. In 1918 the IndSL formed a syndicalist union among the Coloured and African workers in the confectionery factories of the city center, the Sweets and Jam Workers' Industrial Union.[131] It was headed by an African and Coloured committee, among them Kies, and the African activists Mpanpeni and Nodzandza.[132]

The IndSL also worked in the Cape Federation of Labour, a mainly craft union federation that had a significant Coloured membership, where it got resolutions of support for the Russian Revolution and industrial unionism passed, although not implemented.[133] It also ran a library, study groups, socialist Sunday schools, and a Young Socialist Society, as well as hundreds of lectures.[134]

On the docks, the IndSL favored the IWA over another emergent independent union, the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU) led by Clements Kadalie. Despite tensions, the (then) mostly Coloured ICU and mostly African IWA cooperated in an important December 1919 dockworkers' strike for higher wages and against food exports.[135] The strike was called at a joint meeting of the two unions and the Cape Native Congress on 16 December in Ndabeni, attended by 800 and chaired by Kraai.[136] It was Cetiwe who moved for a strike, and who wrote to the town council conveying the unions' demand for 10 shillings a day for unskilled workers.[137] The two unions held daily mass assemblies on the Grand Parade in the mornings to keep up morale, followed by evening meetings on Adderley Street,[138] their campaign attracting widespread sympathy, including from a section of white labor.

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[125] Commissioner of Police, 29 July 1919, letter to Secretary of Justice, in Justice Department, 86

[126] Lopes, ''Cape Notes,'' 24 January 1919; Mantzaris, Labour Struggles in South Africa, 4.

[127] Lopes, untitled.

[128] No membership lists survive, but see Mantzaris, Labour Struggles in South Africa, 4.

[129] For example, Walt, ''May Day in Cape Town''; Lopes, untitled.

[130] Lopes, ''Cape Notes,'' 24 January 1919; Also see Philips, ''South African Wobblies,'' 127.

[131] Lopes, ''Cape Notes,'' 27 September 1918; Mantzaris, Labour Struggles in South Africa, 13.

[132] Second meeting, 17 September 1918, in minutes of the first, second and third meetings of the Industrial Union of the Combined Sweet and Jam Workers, held in the Industrial Socialist League Hall, 1918, S.A. Rochlin Collection.

[133] ''Trade Union Notes''; Mantzaris, Labour Struggles in South Africa, 12–13, 25, n.106.

[134] The Bolshevik, November 1919; The Bolshevik, December 1919.

[135] Kadalie, My Life and The ICU, ch. 2. Several accounts, including Kadalie's self-aggrandizing autobiography, excise the IWA.

[136] Wickens, ''The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa,'' 30, 67.

[137] Fred Cetiwe, 21 December 1919, ''To the Mayor of the City of Cape Town,'' in ''Strike of Natives in Docks,'' 3/CT, 4/1/4/286, F31/4, Cape Archives.

[138] Kadalie, My Life and The ICU, 42; Wickens, ''The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa,'' 31, 69–74.

In 1920, Cetiwe and Kraai attended the SANNC conference in Queenstown, where Kraai sought unsuccessfully to get it to campaign for 10 shillings a day for African workers, enforced by a general strike.[139] The SANNC did, however, agree that a general labor conference should be held later that year.[140] This conference agreed on the merger of the ICU, IWA, and other bodies into ''one great union of skilled and unskilled workers of South Africa, south of the Zambesi.''[141]

There is no doubt that the new ICU was deeply influenced by the IWW. In 1923, Tom Mann (now a communist) addressed the ICU congress, reporting with ''real joy'' its commitment to ''One big union movement for African Workers'' and national liberation.[142] Then the ICU adopted the Preamble of the IWW in its constitution, declaring itself part of the international anti-capitalist struggle.[143] The vision of the ''one big union'' remained a recurrent theme: ''we will give you a damned good lesson, by putting a stop to all your railways, mines and harbors and domestic services; then you may do without us.''[144] Like the local IWW before it, ICU militants maintained correspondence with the US IWW.[145]

While IWW syndicalism was part of the ICU's ideological potpourri, it must be noted, it shared space with Garveyism, African Christianity, and liberalism. In the US, too, such overlaps existed between the IWW and other radicalisms—for instance, Hubert Harrison, the editor of Marcus Garvey's Negro World, was a former Wobbly who had moved to a 'race first' position;[146] in South Africa, Kadalie, an admirer of Garvey, also advocated ''one big union'' for ''abolishing the capitalist class.''[147]

The key point is that IWW ideas permeated the powerful ICU, and few scholars have acknowledged this—though many contemporaries did.[148] Moreover, paralleling the role of the American IWW in diffusing IWW ideas to Latin America and Asia, SA's IWW tradition played a key role in the promotion of labor radicalism in southern Africa more generally. By the 1930s, the ICU (now a movement of hundreds of thousands that dwarfed the CPSA and SANNC) had spread into South West Africa (now Namibia), and Northern and Southern Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe, respectively). In this way, the IWW vision, brought to South Africa by whites, was carried inland by Africans and Coloureds, and ''traveled'' with the ICU across the region.[149]

Thus it seems clear that, as in the US, the SA case demonstrates an unequivocal commitment by IWW-style syndicalists to organize workers of color, the importance of people of color in the

[139] Wickens, ''The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa,'' p. 109

[140] Kadalie, My Life and The ICU, 13; Wickens, ''The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa,'' p. 108.

[141] Quoted in Wickens, ''The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa,'' 145–146.

[142] Mann, ''S. African Natives and Colored Men.''

[143] See Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa, Revised Constitution.

[144] Report of private informer on 1926 ANC congress, appended to report by A.J. du Plessis to Divisional Criminal Investigations Officer, Bloemfontein, in Department of Justice file, JUS 915 1/18/26 part 1, National Archives, Pretoria.

[145] There is, for instance, material from the late 1920s in the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union folder, in the main IWW Collection at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit.

[146] Perry, A Hubert Harrison Reader.

[147] Divisional Criminal Investigations Officer, Witwatersrand Division, 1 May 1926, Confidential Report to Deputy Commissioner, South African Police, Witwatersrand Division, Johannesburg, in Department of Justice file, JUS 915 1/18/26 part 2, Pretoria: National Archives.

[148] For example, see Alfred Nzula, ''The Struggles of the Negro Toilers in South Africa,'' appendix to Nzula et al., Forced Labour in Colonial Africa, 206.

[149] Van der Walt, ''The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism,'' 237–43.

leadership and constituency of the movement, and the strong roots that the movement had in communities of color. The SA left before the CPSA has been fundamentally misunderstood as thinking ''the national oppression of the majority of people in our country was not really very worthy of consideration.''[150] It has even been described as accepting segregation.[151] Clearly such claims are most inaccurate. SANNC radicals in the 1910s were closer to the mark when they praised the syndicalists:

> One feels ashamed to see the sons of men going down into the bowels of the earth digging gold and diamonds and coal, yet only get three pounds per month. These men have found out that it is necessary to start an organisation which is known as the Industrial Workers of Africa.[152]

Likewise, the local Indian Opinion lavishly praised the Indian Workers Industrial Union, and cited with approval reports that news of its activities had reached Lahore in India, where the press asked: ''Is there no lesson for this to the working classes in India?''[153] A better understanding of SA history needs a better understanding of the early left, and that means locating it within the larger world of the IWW—and the anti-racist anarchist/syndicalist tradition that world represented.

In conclusion, we have argued that the IWW was a global movement that consciously set out to organize all workers, regardless of their color. The Wobblies did so not only in the country of the IWW's origin, the USA, but also in every other country where they spread their gospel of revolutionary industrial unionism, including SA. The IWW demonstrated its commitment to organizing African Americans and black Africans, not least on the waterfronts of Philadelphia and Cape Town, and played an important part in black freedom movements that needs to be more widely recognized. It organized, as well, among Asians, Hispanics and Coloureds, championing equal rights and winning the respect of black nationalists. Where other unions, even socialist ones, refused to go, the Wobblies dared.

As the working classes of the industrialized and semi-industrialized world become more diverse—due to massive worldwide migrations paralleling those of the IWW's glory days—and as industrialization reaches ever deeper elsewhere, surely only a labor union committed to organizing all workers, including workers of color, can be successful. Hence, the IWW, in its unprecedented efforts at doing so in an earlier era of globalization, mass migration, imperialism, and class war, blazed a path that other unions and political organizations also could follow, in the world of neo-liberal globalization. If they fail to do so, it will be at their own peril.

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[150] Cronin, ''Origins and 'Native Republic','' 11–12. Also see Bunting, Moses Kotane, 19; Simons and Simons, Class and Color, 191–2.

[151] For a critique of the literature, see van der Walt, ''Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa,'' ch. 3.

[152] Quoted in ''From South Africa.''

[153] Cited in The International, 9 November 1917.

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