

HISTORY CLASS AND THE LOCAL PAST: “REMEMBERING” THE WOBBLIES

郷土史授業中の世界産業労働者組合：ワシントン州の場合

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Having taught topics in United States history at Bunkyo University for the past four years, I have noted that much student knowledge of the American past has come from motion pictures. Hollywood's formidable medium offers an exciting presentation of psychological tensions and truths that is unrivaled by anything a textbook or teacher can do. Few students, for example, are unimpressed with *Mississippi Burning*, Alan Parker's melodramatic account of the actual murders of three young civil rights workers in 1964. "Why not a *Saitama Burning*?" I suggest. The question typically provokes a twitter of nervously incredulous laughter. Where did the teacher get the idea there is a Ku Klux Klan in Saitama? There aren't even any black people to speak of! I explain my question by pointing out the obvious universals involved whenever an insular group of 'insiders' somehow feels threatened by 'outsiders.' The proposal remains an improbable one just the same. What Japanese producer worth his salt would put up the capital to make a movie so obviously doomed to failure? And when did Saitama ever 'burn' anyway?

To the ears of the ancient Greeks any language other than

their own sounded like "bar bar." Hence we get our word "barbarism," a term that denotes the base and destructive behavior of foreigners. Naturally, students interested in the history of Saitama might know more about its ancient burial mounds than, for example, the mass lynching of Koreans in the chaotic aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. If human cruelty is to be made into a history lesson or a movie, then better it be of an event that happened long ago and far away. Hometown folks don't generally rape, pillage or burn. Do they?

Some say they don't. A lawsuit filed by 350 parents throughout Japan in April this year took issue against publishers and the government for including mention of the Nanking Massacre in the textbooks their junior high age children were using. As compensation each plaintiff was seeking 50,000 yen to alleviate the personal psychological pain this atrocious item was causing. As many as 300,000 slaughtered is understandably for Chinese parents another kind of pain. Their children know the 'rape of Nanking' as Japanese children know 'Hiroshima.'

The politics of denial and victimhood invariably seeps into history classes across the globe. The United States is no exception. Despite what Tocqueville might have observed about the American fondness for discussion, the teaching of the past to the young has been fraught with sins of omission due in no small part to a fear of controversy and a longing for larger-than-life heroics, what Japanese revisionist Nobukatsu Fujioka would characterize as "cheerful" history. Japan and the United States may be more alike in this dubious regard than is popularly believed, especially when the blind spot forms around history that is specifically local and still fresh in

living memory.

Educated on the West Coast myself, it is easy for me to appreciate how the vigilante madness of the Ku Klux Klan might seem distant and irrelevant. I grew up on the television news of the 1960s, duly grateful that my home state of Washington was not warring with the outside world like Mississippi, or with itself like that other state of madness, Vietnam. We were not immune from the same kind of arrogant complacency Japanese are accused of possessing: a sense that we were not only safe, but somehow better. Our Evergreen State may have seemed ever 'gone' from the pageant of American history, but neither were we mired in the grotesque karma of slavery. Of course there was the inglorious treatment of indigenous peoples to confront, but the burdens of guilt on that account were shouldered by every state in the Union.

The class in state history I took as a ninth grader left little impression on me. It was mandated by law and as such a kind of indoctrination. Our study followed Washington's history of pioneers, entrepreneurs and government projects, sprinkled with an occasional Noble Savage in the forest waxing eloquent on the evanescence of life. We gave to America Justice William O. Douglas and crooner Bing Crosby. Good people who did good things.

Then there were the Wobblies.

Locked in a cold war with the Soviet Union and a hot one with Vietnamese Communists, America was not a land where classrooms buzzed with objective and engaging discussions about Karl Marx and his ideas. Objectivity is too frequently misconstrued by impressionable minds as passive endorsement. Our teachers slaved

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to accomplish a certain standard of brainwashing. Film strips and movies had asked us to ponder the nightmarish prospect of Bolsheviks invading and occupying Anytown, U.S.A. Imagine our dads in jail as counter-revolutionaries! What if all of a sudden our five freedoms were stripped away and before we knew it, communism had triumphed in America? Like any bad dream, these movies seemed to last longer than they actually were; we could all heave a sigh of relief when they were finally over. In retrospect these were clumsily transparent ploys to convince us future taxpayers and potential cold warriors that defense was a national priority. They made no attempt to explain why millions of intelligent people around the world found something attractive in communism. What was more, they seemed to dismiss any consideration that communism might have an appeal to certain kinds of *Americans*.

Indeed, radical socialism flowered on home soil in episodes far more compelling than the propagandistic fiction of social studies class. The saga of the Industrial Workers of the World, otherwise referred to as the I.W.W. or, more enigmatically, the "Wobblies," moans with thought-provoking significance in regard to ideals we had been taught to believe were intrinsically 'American': due process, freedom of speech, human rights and tolerance of diversity to name a few. But the Wobbly story was a treacherous ambiguity for schoolchildren accustomed to history as a gladiator battle between good guys and bad guys.

"There are forty-seven states and the Soviet of Washington." Thus quipped James Farley, campaign manager for Franklin Roosevelt over a half century ago. The remark underscores the Pacific

Northwest's reputation as fertile ground for both trees and progressive ideas. Life on the frontier created common sense priorities for survival forgotten in the East. Women were major beneficiaries of the 'common sense' society. The University of Washington awarded its first diploma to a woman as early as 1876; women were voting in the Pacific Northwest long before ratification of the 19th Amendment. Socialism belonged exclusively to the realm of idea when Wobblies arrived on the scene. The concept carried no geopolitical baggage—and if it seemed apocalyptic to some, it was still in the figurative sense of the term. Those who believed the world could be saved by using government means to redistribute wealth to the workers were brash and youthful, possessing a pugnacious determination to push aside capitalist domination through world revolution. Washington state's road to revolution was lined with prodigious spruce, hemlock and Douglas fir.

The virgin forests of the Midwest had been logged away by the turn of the century. Northern investors found the piney woods of the South too malarial, so it was westward they searched for trees. Lumber tycoon Frederick Weyerhaeuser found his in a deal offered by the Northern Pacific Railroad. For \$5,400,000—an astronomical sum for 1900—he bought 900,000 acres of timberland (one acre=4,047 square meters), thus joining the Northern Pacific and Southern Pacific Railroads as one of the three biggest holders of timberland. Here was extraordinary abundance. The timber stands of the Puget Sound area yielded an astounding five times more trees per acre than the eastern forests which, up until the Civil War, had been the nation's main source of wood. Predictably, the timber business fell victim to severe price slumps brought on by

over-production, meaning that labor had to be obtained cheaply and with few if any conditions attached.

Ideally, the best kind of logger was the transient bum to whom no company would feel any moral obligation. The work of harvesting timber and processing logs was exceedingly hazardous. Falling trees crushed men to death. Cables snapped and crippled. Or men just fell out of a tree or from an unexpected cliff. And always there was the mishandled ax or saw, costing a worker a finger, hand or arm—maybe his life. Workdays could last as long as sixteen hours and food was a simple matter of salt pork, flour, cornmeal and lard. There were few conveniences for 'freshening up.' Bathing was next to impossible and laundering work clothes was unthinkable. Woodworkers bedded down with vermin and rose wondering if they could face another workday without injury. This was an eminently expendable class of men that seemed to beg for protection, and their migratory nature made them unattractive to the American Federation of Labor. The A.F.L. was markedly 'conservative', drawing its clout from a white male constituency of skilled urban craft workers.

The Industrial Workers of the World was founded in Chicago in 1905 by a unlikely gathering of radical intellectuals and nuts-and-bolts unionists whose goal was to end capitalism by drawing all workers of a given industry into a single union. In turn that union would join similar labor organizations to form "one big union." This 'bigness' embraced the entire spectrum of working people, including women, blacks and other minorities. In their constitution preamble the Wobblies boldly proclaimed that "the working class and

the employing class have nothing in common.”

Ironically, this was also true of certain personality types within the organization itself who engaged in their own brand of class warfare. Many members proudly identified themselves as “proletarian rabble” and favored economic action—strikes or sabotage—over the more cerebral political action advocated by those of a decidedly aristocratic demeanor. Some of the “rabble” were transients from the Pacific Northwest and had firsthand experience of full social alienation. The more idealistic members of this group were imbued with a sense of mission for the greater good and a consoling reassurance that the world had a place for them. As Robert L. Tyler describes him in his book *Rebels of the Woods*, the most dedicated Wobbly was often disaffected toward circumstances that somehow stood in the way of the respectability a middle-class upbringing had promised; “[T]he committed Wobbly in this group was frequently the untutored intellectual who spent as much of his time of idleness in the public library as he did in the bar or brothel. Such Wobblies, on the soap box, interlarded their speeches with citations to Victor Hugo or Herbert Spencer.” The image of the logger or lumberyard worker in our time shares little in common with this egghead in a flannel shirt heard arguing a point of economic theory over mulligan stew. Curiously similar to Ragged Dick, the Establishment creation of Horatio Alger a generation earlier, the youthful Wobblies excelled in perseverance. Yet their brand of adventure was no boyish tale of dumb luck. The Wobblies fancied themselves in the vanguard of world revolution.

In the process the Wobblies earned for themselves a well-deserved reputation for craving attention through a number of

disruptive tactics. Their literature carried the playful symbol of a black cat grinning atop a wooden shoe, the emblem of sabotage. At best, sabotage meant a work slow-down as rationalized in the popular Wobbly slogan "a poor day's work for a poor day's pay." Tyler argues that Wobbly sabotage was less rampant and virulent than once believed, but Wobblies made no secret of their belief in it and were blamed for forest fires and a number of ingenious tricks that are today weapons of the ecoterrorists, among them driving metal wedges into tree trunks in a calculated attempt at destroying both the saw and the sawyer. Wobbly sympathy for the dispossessed was not evidenced by their violent treatment of "scissorbills," non-members booted off freight trains should they fail to enlist during "box car recruiting."

For the propertied or "master class," on the other hand, Wobblies vented their pent-up resentments in "free speech fights"—fights because they were strategic confrontations with law enforcement who were duty-bound to see that local ordinances banning street meetings be observed. These encounters were fueled with an extraordinary combination of gall and lung power. Participants belled indignantly as they were dragged off to jail. There they hurled unrelenting volleys of accusation and invective at the captors, all the while trembling and rattling about in their cells in a boisterous spectacle of frenzy. More conspirators would have themselves arrested for illegal proselytizing until jails filled beyond capacity and the feeding of inmates became an unjustifiable burden on the public coffers. Surrendering to their banter was one way of dealing with the Wobblies; another option was to just shoot them.

A promotional city located just 48 kilometers of Seattle, the seaport of Everett began as a jewel in the crown of John D. Rockefeller investments, a textbook target for Wobbly activism. In the first decade of the 20th century it evolved into an ostensible realization of the American Dream as defined by an absence of poverty and a homegrown population of proud and contented residents. But the jewel was kept securely in the pocket of the lumbermen who had vested interests in more than the city's lumber mills, but in its banks and retail stores as well.

In 1915 shingle weavers' wages were cut due to a drop in prices. A promise was made by mill owners to restore the old wage scale as soon as prices returned to their 1914 level. When prices finally rose, the promise was honored by all mill owners in the region except for those in Everett. The shingle weavers there walked out in the spring of 1916. The Wobblies arrived that summer uninvited to persuade the International Shingle Weavers, a rival organization with strong A.F.L. ties, that the Wobbly way of settlement was far less accommodating to employers. Spearheaded by an Irishman named James Rowan, the Wobbly campaign included the trademard streetcorner harangue which eventually led to Rowan being run out of town. Another Wobbly was sent by Chicago headquarters and was also chased away, this time with thirty-five sympathizers. This tactic was sustained into the fall when a passenger steamer with forty Wobblies aboard arrived in Everett for yet another free-speech fight. When they disembarked, a group of deputized vigilantes led them out of town to Beverly Park where they were forced to run a gauntlet of beatings by club, blackjacks, revolver butts and stalks of devil's club, a prickly bush

with fine and painful thorns. The bludgeoning incident only hardened the resolve of the Wobblies' pledge to taunt the authorities with a greater mass meeting in the days to come.

Sunday morning, November 5, 250 Wobblies boarded an Everett-bound commercial steamer named the Verona in Seattle. Following them on a chartered steamer, the Calista, were another fifty. Relating what ensued, both historians Tyler and Murray Morgan relish the drama of what has become local folklore. Tyler writes of Hugo Gerlot, a Wobbly who had scaled the mast of the Verona and waved to the crowd that had gathered. As the ship tied up at port, he and his comrades burst into the song of the English Transport Workers, "Hold the Fort":

*We meet today in Freedom's cause,
And raise our voices high;
We'll join our hands in union strong
To battle or to die...*

*Hold the fort for we are coming,
Union men be strong.
Side by side we battle onward,
Victory will come.*

The sheriff asked, "Who's your leader?" The infamous reply, "We're all leaders." "Don't try to land here," the sheriff admonished. Some of the Wobblies ignored this warning and rushed the gangplank. Their movements were answered by a hail of bullets from a nearby warehouse. One deputy was visibly startled by the blood-

lust of his compatriots and fled the scene in disbelief. "They're crazy in there, firing in all directions!" A Wobbly managed to pistol whip the Verona's engineer into maneuvering the lumbering vessel out of harm's way and back to Seattle. En route the Calista reversed course and joined them on the sad voyage home.

Of the Wobblies there were four known dead; another would die later. The half dozen missing had probably fallen into the water after being hit. Because two of the 200 deputy sheriffs in the ambush had allegedly been killed by Wobbly bullets, the police were waiting for the Verona when it docked in Seattle. Seventy-four men faced charges of first-degree murder. Of that group only Thomas Tracy was put on trial. He was found not guilty and charges against the rest were dropped. The brand of justice of the "master class" had shown itself to be blind, even to the "proletarian rabble" that was committed to destroying it.

The "Wobbly War" escalated in wartime when the United States government turned to the forests of the Pacific Northwest for a rare material needed in its newest weapon—the airplane. Sitka spruce offered an ideal wood for wing spars. In 1917 the I.W.W. and the A.F.L. had united to exploit the opportunities this demand presented and staged a general strike of 50,000 lumber workers, only to have the strike broken by federal troops who harvested the spruce trees as scabs. World War I had advanced the anti-Wobbly cause beyond the dimensions of vigilante resistance and harassment.

It was the Espionage Act of 1918 that afforded the Wobblies' enemies the most sweeping means for dampening revolutionary

zeal. Couched in deliberately vague terms, an amendment to the act legitimized open season on radical labor unionists and socialists for harboring their widely unpopular political views. In addition to prosecuting those who tried "to interfere with the operation or success of the [U.S.] military or naval forces," the amendment sought to punish those who would "willfully utter, print, or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the flag." Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in his dissenting opinion in *Abrams v. U.S.* "that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market..." It was a curious use of the capitalist metaphor in defense of a Russian anarchist's right to criticize President Wilson's decision to send 10,000 American troops to Russia in what was later shown to be a covert war on Bolshevism. Justice John H. Clarke's prevailing view was that such an attack on the leadership of the American president helped weaken the government's position by attempting to foment revolution. In the approximately three years following the Espionage Act's passage, 1,055 were convicted of spying or sedition, including Wobbly charter member William "Big Bill" Haywood, later destined to direct coal operations in Soviet Russia as a political exile.

With the war over, labor fervor in the Pacific Northwest grabbed headlines for five days in February 1919 when a general strike was staged in Seattle. It was not just remarkable for being a first in American history; the Seattle general strike took root and assumed a life of its own without major Wobbly instigation, eventually losing momentum because no one was really sure of the message they hoped to convey with the strike, much less how to conduct one.

The strike lives in legend as a time of eerie and empty quiet in a major city, strangely symbolic of the still and rudderless condition of the labor movement in the Pacific Northwest at that time.

The war had enabled business to boom in the shipyards where special pay adjustments had been awarded workers to compensate for the relative expense of living out West. Once the Germans had surrendered, the pay scale became uniform across the nation. The special treatment was discontinued and no amount of pleading with the shipyard owners could restore it. A strike was called by various metalworking unions which sought and received sympathy from other unions. Their leaders, generally supportive of the A.F.L. opposition to striking as a political protest, were in Chicago for a *cause celebre* and unable to stop the action. Unions supportive of the shipyard workers spanned a rainbow of vocations, from long-shoremen to hotel maids to musicians. Not represented on the Central Labor Council were the Japanese unions, banned for racist reasons. They pledged to join the strike anyway. Also absent were the delighted Wobblies who sent delegates to serve as cheerleaders.

In Murray Morgan's *Skid Road*, an account of Seattle's first century, one of the central personalities in the strike saga was journalist Anna Louise Strong, an ardent admirer of the Wobbly cause. Strong had covered the trial of Thomas Tracy for the *New York Post* and in the process had reaffirmed her pacifist convictions, achieving enlightenment, as Morgan describes it, "after a summer of brooding nights and days of desperate [mountain] climbing." Her antiwar writings for the *Seattle Call* exposed her leftist sympathies which were viewed with increasing suspicion by

a conservative public that had put her on the Seattle school board. Her academic record was unimpeachable, including a Ph.D. from Chicago, and her direct experiences in education made her more than suitable for the job. The attempt to recall her was unsuccessfully fought by a coalition of unions and intellectuals, including the Wobblies. Strong was tainted as the local "red," and her association with the city of Seattle would forever bear that stigma.

It was Strong's task to write an account of the strike for the *Union Record*, offering reassurances to mothers of babies and the sick, exhorting labor to struggle on toward some amorphous future goal. After the strike, her "No One Knows Where" editorial, among others, earned her an indictment for sedition.

Strong bemoaned the inability of strikers to cement a common resolve toward an agreed and unambiguous goal. Each was blaming the other for the failure of the strike, exposing a welcome weakness in the Left to a relieved public that had been fooled into thinking American 'Bolsheviks' might really take over Seattle. The 1920 election for president of the Central Labor Council was a sorry defeat for the radical candidate who lost to, of all people, a Republican lawyer. As Strong would lament to muckraker Lincoln Steffens: "the...fine speeches from workers all over the world have turned into nasty wrangles between carpenters and plumbers for control of little jobs."

While the carpenters and plumbers wrangled, Anna Louise Strong sought her utopian dream in Moscow where, in a matter of three decades, she was branded *persona non grata* and expelled. Strong returned to find a Seattle that was fully engaged in the free market, content in its irreversibly bourgeois pursuit of a

milquetoast happiness. Ever the idealist, Strong shifted allegiances to the Chinese brand of revolution and became an actual friend of Mao Zedong. So close was the friendship that she was one of the only Westerners trusted in China during the tumultuously xenophobic Cultural Revolution. It was at the height of this movement that Strong would die in 1970 in Beijing. Twenty years later the Chinese honored her with a commemorative postage stamp.

Southwestern Washington state was the setting for the strangest tale of Wobbly legend, combining grisly lynching with courtroom farce. I spent my early childhood in Montesano, a tiny town of barely 3,000 which is the county seat of Grays Harbor. Two years before the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, Montesano seized the national spotlight for a sensational trial of eleven Wobblies accused of murder held in its stately court house, an inappropriately grand landmark for a sleepy town that seemed to have as many milk cows as people. Whatever tales of violence might have been told within the court house chambers were eclipsed by the television age when Huntley and Brinkley reported lynchings and queer small town trials as a distinctly Southern thing. I grew up thinking that Montesano's "fifteen minutes of fame" were yet to come. They had come and gone, courtesy of the I.W.W.

The Wobblies in Centralia had always expected that something bad was about to happen. Small towns in the Far West were xenophobic enough during peace time, but the Wobblies set up their first meeting hall in Centralia when local boys were off in Europe fighting the Germans. The Wobblies brought that war home to the locals who felt it their patriotic duty to demolish the

Wobbly hall, beat its occupants to a bloody pulp and run them out of town. That they did during a Red Cross promotional parade in the spring of 1918. Vigilantes congratulated themselves for making Centralia Wobbly-free, seeming to relish a Wobbly return and the opportunity to do it again.

That opportunity came again on November 11, 1919. Now known as Armistice Day, it also marked the 13th anniversary of statehood. The Wobblies had come back, renting space on the ground floor of the Roderick Hotel on Tower Avenue which, coincidentally perhaps, was to be passed twice by the American Legion parade. The hotel owner was understandably concerned and failed to get any reassurances from the Chief of Police. A young attorney advised the Wobblies that they would be within their rights to fight back if need be. The Wobblies armed themselves within the hall and dispatched members with rifles to keep watch from the hotel on the opposite side of the street. Days earlier a Wobbly circular had been distributed in town informing Centralia's citizens and the working class at large that the "profiteering class of Centralia have of late been waving the flag of our country in an endeavor to incite the lawless element of our city to raid our hall and club us out of town..." The circular accused the so-called profiteers of conspiring to invite "returned service men to do their bidding" and that the "only crime [of the Wobblies was] solidarity, loyalty to the working class, and justice to the oppressed." Despite the leaden socialist jargon of the handbills, few locals could deny that this was one Wobbly message that rang of prophecy.

Nothing happened on the first passing of the parade. It was on the return swing that the ranks began to thin and fall behind. The

maneuver for adjusting formation temporarily stopped the parade and the Centralia Legionnaires found themselves marking time squarely in front of the I.W.W. hall. As the parade began to move again toward the town center, someone in the platoon stormed toward the door. The formation broke as individual Legionnaires thronged for the charge, perhaps unaware that their targets had them surrounded. The attackers took bullets fired from Wobblies inside the hall and across the street—even from a hill several hundred meters away.

Three Legionnaires were dead by the time the bloodbath had ended. Wesley Everest had fired at the mob from the Wobbly hall and is believed to have been the gunman responsible for two if not three of the killings. He ran toward the Skookumchuck River with the vigilantes in full pursuit. A young man named Dale Hubbard caught up with Everest and, with seemingly pure intentions, urged him to drop his revolver and surrender. Everest was incensed by the youth's cheekiness and refused to turn himself in to anyone other than the police. Hubbard unwisely charged after the nervous Everest who fired his revolver yet again, killing Hubbard on the spot.

It was not long after his capture that Wesley Everest had his teeth kicked out in a Centralia jail. When he was handed over to the lynch mob the lights went out in town so that there would be no witnesses to the transfer of Everest from public to private custody. Under a railroad trestle spanning the Chehalis River, Wesley Everest was hanged until not quite dead so that he could be rehanged. His dangling castrated corpse was later found pumped full of lead. (Some speculated that his testicles were cut off on the

way to the river from town.) The county coroner used Everest as an example by compelling imprisoned Wobblies to inspect the mangled remains, later joking publicly that the death was probably a suicide.

Officially the American Legion did not condone the lynching, but clearly would not allow it to upstage the murders of their fallen comrades. Across the state Wobblies were being arrested as suspect conspirators in the killings since a new criminal-syndicalism law had emboldened police and prosecutors to go after even those Wobblies who were nowhere near Centralia. This stirred anxiety among conservative labor unions who foresaw being lumped together with the Wobblies as one big threat to society. Their calls to mainstream Washingtonians for moderation during the pre-trial hysteria appeared sympathetic to the Wobblies' dilemma, even if in fact an act of self-preservation.

A fundamental problem in preparing for the trial was where to have it. Centralia was in Lewis County where the bar association had sworn never to help Wobblies in any legal matters. Prosecutors, nonetheless, insisted a fair jury could be found there. The defense succeeded in having the venue changed to Montesano, but the star legal advocate for the I.W.W., George Venderveer, had arrived from Chicago and was doubtful that Montesano could be much different from Centralia. He was more comfortable with a city jury from either Tacoma or Olympia. To complicate matters further, the judge in the case was found to have a brother working for the prosecution and had to be removed. The new judge, Judge Wilson, ordered the trial be held in Montesano.

The ubiquitous presence of uniformed Legionnaires jammed the

court room when the trial began. Intending to intimidate Wobblies and their supporters, invading veterans were more frightening to the jurors and contributed to a growing unpopularity of the American Legion for years to follow among the mainstream working class of Grays Harbor. The Legionnaires had commandeered the Montesano city hall basement as a base camp from which to supply their growing numbers with provisions and shelter. The war zone atmosphere was heightened when genuine federal troops from Camp Lewis would arrive in the midst of the trial, called in by the governor at the request of the chief prosecutor who feared the town's citizens would need protection from a potential I.W.W. raid. The perplexed Judge Wilson eventually agreed to this farfetched measure, even though whatever 'military' strength the Wobblies had was, by now, drastically diluted by imprisonments and other forms of persecution. With the heavy presence of Legionnaires, it would have been foolhardy to stage a 'raid' even without the federal troops, yet having U.S. infantrymen in full view helped deepen anxieties about who the Wobblies were and the supposed dangers they posed for ordinary folks.

Veteran Warren Grimm was among the murdered Legionnaires. It was the manner of his death that served as the focal point of the trial. The judge believed that the animosities felt by Centralians toward the Wobblies were irrelevant to the case unless it could be proved with specific evidence that Grimm was a party to anti-Wobbly activities. Vanderveer tried to show how Grimm, who had fought in the recent Siberian campaign, hated the Wobblies and that the planned attack he took part in was launched before the commencement of gunfire. Before resting his case, Vanderveer called

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in 115 witnesses in a tedious attempt to build an ironclad case of self-defense. The jury did not buy it, but neither was Judge Wilson pleased when the jury appended its guilty verdict with a call for leniency. The Wobblies got the book thrown at them.

The guilty verdicts were for second-degree murder which earned between 25 to 40 years in the state prison at Walla Walla. The lawyer and one other defendant were found not guilty. Another was determined to be insane. After the denied appeal came calls for amnesty. Predictably many of these demands were generated from within the leftist movement. Some, however, came from what might be called the 'respectable' members of society who recognized an unfair trial when they saw one. Among them was Montesano prosecuting attorney W. H. Abel who believed the prisoners in Walla Walla deserved a pardon. The shooting incident and lynching of Wesley Everest had meant a lot of bad publicity for the town of Centralia. Well over 2,000 of its citizens joined Abel in petitioning the governor for a pardon. Again the Wobblies learned that the "master class" was not without its own sense of justice—even if arguably a self-serving one. The problem was that it could not be exercised amid mass hysteria, thus enabling the Montesano travesty to occur.

The mounting cry for clemency resulted in the eventual release of the prisoners from Walla Walla into a world where the Wobbly movement was rapidly fading into obscurity. With 13 of the minimum 25 years already served, the eight prisoners were granted parole by the newly elected Democratic governor. The public, now immersed in the Great Depression, had other things on its mind and had grown tired of hearing about Centralia. Significantly, however,

jurors at the Montesano trial expressed remorse for what had happened and shock at the stiff sentences meted out to the Wobblies. In statements signed or sworn the jurors related a common pang of guilt at succumbing to the pressure of public opinion and its prejudices.

What if these jurors had not given in? Why did the Legionnaires harbor such hatreds toward the I.W.W.? Were the Wobblies abusing their right to free speech? Does opposing a war constitute treasonous behavior by assisting the enemy if even indirectly and undeliberately? These are some of the questions that teachers could harvest from this fertile and suspenseful movement in American labor history and, more specifically, the history of the Pacific Northwest.

Incredibly, the principles espoused by the Wobblies are now largely taken for granted. Their tuneful cries for the eight-hour workday, better wages, safer working conditions and the right to form unions are today realities that can hardly be described as 'radical.' We need only recall the single-minded words and deeds of radical abolitionist John Brown to appreciate the fine line between 'mad' radicalism and sainthood. The Wobblies would be at home today among the most fervent of the politically correct, but their core purpose, the usurpation of capitalism, is a dark and sour note in the national folkore when compared to the stirring trumpets of emancipation. Given capitalism's 'victory' over communism with the collapse of the Soviet Union, its warts are more hidden than ever from the sleepy eyes of the faithful. Slick advertising has trained the general public to be worshipful of private enterprise. In the public mind the profit motive is still the lesser evil, despite

downsizing, despite irreparable harm to the environment and to public health in general.

There is everything right about using history as a forum for teaching civic values if the content is a balanced presentation of contending ideas. The national values of the United States government during World War I shared striking commonalities with the Germany and Japan of World War II. The story of the Wobblies underscores those commonalities in ways that diametrically oppose the hallowed perceptions of America as a beacon of freedom. Even in peacetime, the issues raised by radical socialism challenged the promises contained in the Pledge of Allegiance. Liberty and justice are not for all. The lesson of the Wobbly experience is that those civil liberties bonding the republic together can weaken and break when government conspires with mass hysteria. The more local these transgressions against freedom, the more poignant the lesson's message. No one is safe. Instead these illustrations of egregious failure in the national character are sacrificed for testimonials of the faith that history necessarily leads to better and brighter tomorrows.

In lieu of surveying history teachers or observing classes, the best barometer for measuring what is taught is the history textbook. I searched the University of Washington library without success for old textbooks on Washington state history that would give an indication of how the I.W.W. was explained to schoolchildren when it was even more recent past. Perhaps they had been turned into land fill, yet oddly not a single representative volume had been gleaned from the stacks of the doomed and dogeared for some future scholar to inspect. Librarians appeared nonplussed at this unexpected oversight. I had better luck in used bookstores. Generally, the books I

found from the last quarter century made only brief mention of the Wobblies, characterizing their fleeting popularity and violence as something of a youthful indiscretion that thankfully petered out after the Centralia massacre. The best coverage of the subject was in a text in current use: Charles P. LeWarne's *Washington State*. In it Anna Louise Strong actually rated a flattering portrait; several contemporary photos and political cartoons enhanced an unbiased representation of the Wobbly cause that spanned nine pages. This text was the exception, however.

All this begs the question of what is meant by "history class" in the United States. History scholar and teacher James W. Loewen has made a name for himself by arguing that history is not really what such classes are about at all. Rather than marketplaces of ideas, schools are marketplaces for, well, textbooks. Because publishing is a business, the textbook product is all too frequently crafted to please the customer for reasons that generally serve to promote a cherished image or idea. In the case of national history texts, states with more money to spend than others will naturally get more attention to their special public relations needs. Unpopular or 'un-American' ideas and eccentricities too often merit mere footnotes or are omitted altogether. Texts pertaining to the history of a particular region would require an even more upbeat tone lest they embarrass or offend schoolboard members who believe that the local dirty secret should stay forever secret from impressionable youth. Children, they will say, need role models and persons in whom they can identify and take pride. As the Nazis knew well, next to sports and physical education there is no better place than history class for teaching patriotic values and reverence for heroes great and small.

The history text is the official bible for this solemn rite of passage into citizenship.

In *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, Loewen devotes an entire chapter to the obsession for turning "flesh-and-blood individuals into pious, perfect creatures without conflicts, pain, credibility, or human interest." Loewen presents the case studies of Woodrow Wilson and Helen Keller, heroes through the "lie by omission." Both are represented as embodiments of American virtues for young patriots to emulate. If they made mistakes, they were noble mistakes. Or the mistakes are just ignored.

According to Loewen, anyone believing what was written in the twelve textbooks he examined for his study would either not know about Wilson's sexism, racism and paranoid politics, or would conclude that these character weaknesses were somehow not his fault. Wilson emerges as an idealist visionary.

All that can be said of the sixty-four years in the adult life of Hellen Keller is that she was some kind of "humanitarian." That she would devote her life to improving the lives of handicapped Americans comes as no surprise. It is also reasonable to assume that the frequency of blindness, disease, lost limbs and other physical impairments of Keller's time was a reflection of a less advanced state of medicine. Yet Keller was interested in the avoidable economic causes of these afflictions. She paid dearly for her concerns by attracting angry and insulting retractions of the accolades she had once received in the commercial press. What had she done to earn this scorn?

The perennial exemplar of courage and fortitude for generations of American schoolchildren decorated her study with a red flag in

support of Bolshevik Russia. Helen Keller had joined the Wobblies.

NOTES

The article on the lawsuit against Japanese textbook publishers appeared in three small paragraphs in the 4 April 1997 edition of *The Daily Yomiuri*. Controversial revisionist and educator Nobukatsu Fujioka's "cheerful" remark is taken from Sonni Efron's piece for the Los Angeles Times supplement to *The Daily Yomiuri*, 26 May 1997.

My outline of the timber industry's beginnings and the logger's life is borrowed in large part from Robin Biffle's article on the subject written for *City of Dreams: A Guide to Port Townsend* edited by Peter Simpson, Bay Press, 1986. The Farley quotation and the factoid about Clara McCarty, first diploma recipient from the University of Washington, are taken from Patricia and John Hedtke's somewhat faulty *Washington Trivia*, Rutledge Hill Press, 1991.

As I've already indicated within the essay, details of the Everett and Centralia massacres are a synthesis taken from several sources: Murray Morgan's *The Last Wilderness*, University of Washington Press reprint, 1990—and *Rebels of the Woods: the I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* by Robert L. Tyler, University of Oregon Books, 1967. *Wobbly War*, a book specifically about the Centralia massacre by John McClelland, Jr. is available from the Washington State Historical Society. McClelland combines Morgan's plain-talking journalistic flair with Tyler's academic thoroughness. A classic among Seattle histories also by Morgan, *Skid Road*, Ballantine reprint, 1974, provided my information on Anna Louise Strong and the Seattle general strike.

The fundamental premise of the essay is borrowed from James W. Loewen's brilliant *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, Touchstone, 1995. His is a bleak message and one can only hope that in time it will contribute to a general reform of the way history is taught in America's schools.