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# Washington State's Pioneer Labor-Reform Press

## A Bibliographical Essay and Annotated Checklist

Carlos A. Schwantes

The Washington labor movement was seemingly born with an ax or shovel in one hand and a newspaper in the other. In the late 19th century, when organized labor first emerged as a recognizable part of the Northwest scene, life in Washington still meant physical isolation from America's main centers of commerce and manufacturing. Yet even in remote logging camps and mining towns, ubiquitous, sometimes clandestine, and frequently well-thumbed copies of labor and reform journals provided Washington's workers an exciting, panoramic view of labor developments in the East, in England, or in Australia. Whether perused and discussed in Knights of Labor reading rooms or passed quietly as treasured possessions from one worker to another, the region's pioneer labor publications constituted a veritable fount of inspiration for militant, reform-minded, producer-conscious workers.

Washington's pre-World War I house of labor rested upon a foundation laid in the mid-1880s. The cornerstone was the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor. Knights were responsible for launching most of Washington's early labor and reform journals. They also espoused an idealistic social and economic program that especially appealed to the workers who flooded the territory to claim the jobs and opportunities promised in literally tons of promotional pamphlets issued by railroads and real estate speculators.<sup>1</sup>

Washington, with its relative lack of restrictive social structure and inherited tradition, seemed to many workers an alluring land of new possibilities. Some dreamed of wealth; others dreamed of implementing reform ideas then popular. Unfortunately, severe and unexpected depression accompanied by completion of the Northern Pacific and Canadian Pacific railroads in the mid-1880s turned many a dream into a nightmare. The railroads' discharge of hundreds of Chinese construction workers heightened social tensions caused by unemployment and hard times. Because they competed with Caucasians for the few available jobs, the Chinese became scapegoats for mounting popular indignation and frustration.<sup>2</sup>

Anti-Chinese agitation was in one way or another associated with all of the territory's early English-language, labor-oriented newspapers. The *Seattle Daily Call*, which once claimed the largest circulation in the city, directed its blatantly sinophobic message at both workers and the community at large. It analyzed the causes of the depression and convinced many white workingmen that cheap Chinese labor was primarily responsible for their misery and destitution. Passions aroused in part by the paper culminated in the mob violence and martial law that rocked Tacoma and Seattle.<sup>3</sup>

The anti-Chinese hysteria eventually declined, and so, too, did the fortunes of the *Call*. Nonetheless, the *Call* was a prototype of several general circulation dailies and weeklies that sometimes attempted to boost readership by carrying items of special interest to the region's workers. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, for example, ran a labor section as a regular Sunday feature for a while in the early 20th century, and several papers carried columns of labor news and comment prepared by local trade-union leaders.<sup>4</sup>

A second type of labor-oriented journal appeared during the Seattle disturbances of early 1886. Because anti-Chinese agitation brought disappointingly few bene-

1. Several indigenous trade-union locals appeared briefly in scattered locations in the 1860s and 1870s, but their collective impact was negligible. See Harry W. Stone, "Beginning of Labor Movement in the Pacific Northwest," *OHQ*, Vol. 47 (1946), 155-64.

2. Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Seattle, 1979), 7, 25-29.

3. *Seattle Daily Call*, Sept. 17, Nov. 19, 1885; Robert E. Wynne, "Reaction to the Chinese in the Pacific Northwest and British Columbia, 1850 to 1910," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Washington, 1964), 177ff.; Jules A. Karlin, "The Anti-Chinese Outbreaks in Seattle, 1885-1886," *PNQ*, Vol. 39 (1948), 103-30. See also Howard H. Shuman, "The Role of Seattle's Newspapers in the Anti-Chinese Agitation of 1885-1886," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1968).

4. *Seattle Union Record*, Feb. 22, 1902.

fits to white workers, some disillusioned laborers and their reformist allies turned to communitarianism as a better solution to the mounting social and economic distress associated with laissez-faire capitalism. Seattle attorney George Venable Smith and other former anti-Chinese agitators founded the Puget Sound Cooperative Colony at Port Angeles. They hoped that the colony would enable a group of workingmen to defy the growing power of corporations by producing and distributing goods on a cooperative basis. The colony's organ, the *Model Commonwealth*, carried the gospel of communitarianism to distant parts of the United States. It also featured discussions of other contemporary reform schemes, such as Henry George's single tax, and carried news of Knights of Labor activities in western Washington. The *Model Commonwealth* and similar publications, like the *Puget Sound Weekly Co-Operator*, were typical of the ideological reform journals that directed a special appeal to organized labor. This kind of labor-oriented publication especially proliferated in the Pacific Northwest during the hard times that followed the panic of 1893.<sup>5</sup>

The *Northern Light*, which appeared in 1887, was part of an earnest effort to give labor a base more solid than anti-Chinese hysteria. William Galvani, a civil engineer with a penchant for reform schemes, established the paper in Tacoma to propagandize for the Knights in western Washington. He further attempted to enhance his standing as a bona fide labor leader by organizing, in 1888, the Spokane Trades Council, a hybrid body that first united the community's structurally and philosophically diverse labor organizations. For a time, Galvani headed both the Knights and the trades council in Spokane, and the *Northern Light* served as the official voice of the Knights on Puget Sound and the central labor bodies in Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane. In the early 1890s, however, shortly after Galvani left the Washington labor movement to organize for the Farmers' Alliance in Oregon, the *Northern Light* died.<sup>6</sup>

Brief though its existence was, the *Northern Light* represented a third type

of labor-oriented journal to appear in pre-World War I Washington: the labor newspaper that also carried items of special interest to reform-minded workers. Such publications appeared not only in Tacoma and Spokane but also in other communities, including Seattle, Everett, Bellingham, and Aberdeen.

These three categories are at best loose constructs, for, as the careers of William Galvani and other pioneer journalists illustrate, the boundary between early trade unionism and reform was indistinct; during the turbulent 1890s it frequently disappeared altogether. The almost total collapse of job-conscious trade unionism in Washington during the four lean years that followed the panic of 1893 encouraged the rich diversity of thought that characterized the state's labor-reform press for the next two decades. Buffeted on all sides by massive unemployment, organized labor in the Pacific Northwest fortified itself with potent drafts of class consciousness, reformism, and political activism. The beleaguered American Federation of Labor (AFL) was in no position to act as a restraining influence on labor in the nation's far corner. Desperate workers flocked to join the several industrial armies that swept across the region in 1894, and together with angry farmers they swelled the ranks of the newly formed Populist party.<sup>7</sup>

The Populist revolt routed for a time Washington's Republicans and Democrats; it also spawned more than 60 protest journals in the state. Two papers in particular spoke for Populism's influential labor wing: the *Seattle People's Call* and the *Freemen's Labor Journal* of Spokane. The *Freemen's Labor Journal* was an iconoclastic publication that promoted industrial unionism and opposed the AFL. In this way it constituted a direct intellectual link between Populism, the Knights of Labor, and the Western Federation of Miners in the northern Rocky Mountains.<sup>8</sup>

Hard times coupled with the election of Populist governor John R. Rogers and the reformers' sweep of the legislative races in 1896 created in Washington a political and intellectual climate conducive to the consideration of reform panaceas far

more bizarre or radical than Populism. Chief among these were anarchism, socialism, and communitarianism—which came in both the anarchistic and socialistic varieties.<sup>9</sup>

The *Firebrand* of Portland, Oregon, until squelched by postal authorities because one issue contained an allegedly obscene poem by Walt Whitman, had a strong following among anarchists in western Washington. Beginning in 1898, anarchists at Home Colony, a new utopian settlement near Tacoma, published a series of journals to continue the proselytizing begun by the *Firebrand*. And several met a fate similar to that of the *Firebrand*.<sup>10</sup>

5. *Model Commonwealth*, June 10, 17, July 22, Oct. 7, 1887. See also Charles P. LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885-1915* (Seattle, 1975), 15-21.

6. James Leroy Hunt, "A History of the Central Labor Council in Spokane, Washington," M.A. thesis (State College of Washington, 1940), 3-4; Marion Harrington, "The Populist Movement in Oregon, 1889-1896," M.A. thesis (University of Oregon, 1935), 17, 29.

7. Thomas W. Riddle, "The Old Radicalism in America: John R. Rogers and the Populist Movement in Washington, 1891-1900," Ph.D. dissertation (Washington State University, 1976).

8. In Spokane, the Knights remained a powerful influence long after they had declined elsewhere. W. J. Walker, editor of the *Freemen's Labor Journal*, organized for both the Knights and the Western Federation of Miners in 1897. *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, July 15, 22, 1897; *Freemen's Labor Journal*, Aug. 2, Nov. 5, 1897.

9. One unusual venture that combined the virtues of both anarchism and socialism was the Labor Exchange, a scheme conceived in Kansas to end hard times by putting idle producers to work in cooperative organizations. The Labor Exchange, which claimed more than 1,000 branches nationwide, had locals in Seattle, Port Angeles, Ellensburg, and possibly other Washington communities. These branches served as purveyors of utopian notions and contributed to the growing radical consciousness in the state; the Ellensburg exchange, for example, published the *Utopian* in 1896. *Progressive Thought* (Olathe, Kans.), July 1894; Feb., March, and April 1896.

10. There is also a direct link between the anarchism of the *Firebrand* and the

Members of the new socialist utopias on Puget Sound—Equality, Burley, Freedom, and others—also published lively journals devoted to reconstructing industrial society. So, too, did the urban socialists in Seattle. No wonder a radical journalist, after surveying the Puget Sound country, declared: “This region, as a whole, is full of germinal possibilities for radical thought.” He noted that there were, of course, those who opposed change; “nonetheless, there is a constant ferment of thought; and many minds are to be found receptive of new ideas.”<sup>11</sup>

That such an observation was made not during the heyday of Populism but rather in 1903 is but one indication that the decline of the Populist movement in Washington did not result in a concomitant decline of interest in radical solutions to society’s ills. If anything, the radical ferment increased as a number of erstwhile Populists, both farmers and workers, moved leftward to embrace socialism. There was also renewed growth among labor organizations. The conjunction of labor’s new prosperity and the increasing interest in socialism resulted in the appearance of two important new labor-reform journals in 1900: the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Seattle Socialist*.<sup>12</sup>

The Western Central Labor Union, the central labor council for Seattle and vicinity, endorsed publication of the *Union Record* in the hope that it would succeed where previous journals, such as the *Voice of the People* (1886), the *Workingman* (1889), *Western Organized Labor* (1894), and the *Labor Gazette* (1894), had failed. Gordon Rice, who had

presided over the two short-lived ventures in the mid-1890s, edited the *Union Record* during its formative years. The paper at first wavered between supporting regional labor movements and the AFL. It attacked the injustices suffered by workers and provided a forum for all schools of reform thought, thereby eliciting an enthusiastic response from single taxers and socialists. After the central labor council purchased it outright in 1903, the *Union Record* tended to become more conservative and pro-AFL; nonetheless, until its death in 1928, the paper managed to maintain a more or less independent stance in keeping with the frequently nonconformist nature of organized labor in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>13</sup>

The *Socialist* was born out of the frustration felt by Dr. Hermon Titus and other radicals when they failed to gain power in the revived Seattle labor movement. Launched “To Organize the Slaves of Capital to Vote Their Own Emancipation,” the *Socialist* became the leading exponent of left-wing socialism in the U.S. Its narrow, rigid view of socialism kept countless workers outside the local Socialist party, and, before it succumbed as a result of a factional dispute, the paper helped nurture several young radicals in the Pacific Northwest, including William Z. Foster, future head of the American Communist party. The tone of the other socialist papers in the state ranged from lukewarm to sizzling hot.<sup>14</sup>

Profound ideological differences kept the Socialist party of Washington in an almost constant state of turmoil and prevented it from exercising any real influ-

ence in the councils of organized labor. Individual socialists, however, did achieve prominence in several central labor bodies, and by the eve of World War I, socialists were editing two of the most important labor papers in the state, the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Spokane Labor World*, successor to the *Freemen’s Labor Journal*. E. B. (“Harry”) Ault, who as a teenager at Equality Colony had edited *Industrial Freedom* and the *Young Socialist*, turned the *Union Record* into one of the few labor dailies in the U.S. and pushed subscriptions to 112,000 shortly after World War I.<sup>15</sup>

A maverick among the state’s labor journals was the *Industrial Worker*, published by the Spokane locals of the Industrial Workers of the World. During the free speech fight that rocked Spokane in 1909, police halted printing of the paper, but ingenious Wobblies soon had their paper back on the city’s streets after making arrangements to have it printed in the safe haven of Seattle. The *Industrial Worker*, with its sardonic cartoon critiques of plutocrats, labor aristocrats, bourgeois moralists, and sundry other favorite targets, was without question the single most colorful labor journal to appear in Washington.<sup>16</sup>

Washington’s pioneer labor-reform press mirrors a labor movement in search of identity. Countless columns of news and comment record labor’s sometimes halting passage from youthful idealism and fascination with class consciousness and utopian radicalism to the sober maturity that results from success, social acceptance, and bureaucratization. Unfor-



unately, details of the transition are frequently obscured because, for several of these journals, only scattered issues survive. In some cases, nothing remains but a name: a paper is known to have existed only because it is mentioned in another journal. In fact, scrapbook clippings and a few miscellaneous issues in archives are all that remain of most of Washington's pre-1900 union papers. Publications of the various communitarian settlements on Puget Sound have been better preserved; nonetheless, in order to trace the evolution of the Washington labor movement during the late 1880s and early 1890s, the researcher must rely largely upon the minutes of the Western Central Labor Union and the Tacoma Trades Council. Two regional labor papers that help supplement council minutes are the *Denver Labor Enquirer* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* of San Francisco. Issues of the *Freemen's Labor Journal* and its successors, the *Spokane Record* and the *Labor World*, are available from 1897 to the present—except for an unfortunate gap from 1906 to 1910. More or less complete runs of the *Seattle Union Record* and the *Seattle Socialist* are likewise extant.<sup>17</sup>

The following is an annotated checklist of the various labor-reform papers published in Washington before World War I. Listed, if known, are the first year of publication, title, frequency, place and duration of publication, political orientation, editors and main contributors, and repositories. The list excludes reform papers that had no labor orientation.<sup>18</sup> □

**Carlos A. Schwantes**, professor of history at Walla Walla College, is compiling a second checklist for the period 1918-1970. He wishes to thank the many librarians, archivists, and historians who assisted with the preparation of this checklist, especially: Lynn M. Coppel, California State University, Fullerton; Margaret Riddle, Everett Public Library; Edward C. Weber, University of Michigan; Nancy Pryor, Washington State Library, Olympia; Richard C. Berner, Andrew Johnson, and Georgia Kloostra, University of Washington; James P. Danky, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Lawrence Dodd, Whitman College; and Jonathan Dembo, Charles P. LeWarne, and Terry Slatten, three knowledgeable sources of Pacific Northwest labor history.

syndicalism of the Industrial Workers of the World. A. Klemencic, prime sponsor of the *Firebrand* in Tacoma in the mid-1890s, later became one of the earliest supporters of the IWW in western Washington. *Demonstrator* (Lakebay, Wash.), Feb. 7, 1906.

11. For a more detailed account of the publishing efforts of the various colonies, see LeWarne. The Seattle socialists published two short-lived papers in the mid-1890s: the *Socialist* in late 1895 and the *Clarion* in 1898; the *Clarion* editor was Leonard W. Kidd, compositor and vice-president of Seattle's central labor council. *Social-Democratic Herald* (Chicago), Oct. 29, 1898; Aug. 12, 1899. *Demonstrator*, July 15, 1903 (quotations, James F. Morton, Jr.)

12. *Social-Democratic Herald*, Nov. 11, 1899; Schwantes, 90-91.

13. *Seattle Union Record*, April 27, 1900; Oct. 29, 1904; Feb. 4, 1905. Minutes of the Western Central Labor Union, June 27, 1894, Box 18, Central Labor Council (King County) Records, University of Washington Libraries; *Seattle Labor Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1895. The often stormy history of the *Union Record* is detailed in Mary Joan O'Connell, "The *Seattle Union Record*, 1918-1928: A Pioneer Labor Daily," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1964).

14. *Seattle Socialist*, Aug. 12, 1900; see also Paul B. Bushue, "Dr. Hermon F. Titus and Socialism in Washington State, 1900-1909," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1967); and Harvey O'Connor, *Revolution in Seattle, A Memoir* (New York, 1964).

15. LeWarne, 88-89; E. B. Ault's autobiographical sketch (n.d.), Box 6, E. B. Ault Papers, University of Washington Libraries; Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle, 1964), 51.

16. *Industrial Worker*, March 18, 1909; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago, 1969), 176-80. Another regional IWW journal was the *Voice of the People*, published in Portland, Oregon, 1913-1915.

17. Minutes of the Western Central Labor Union and of the Tacoma Trades Council are preserved in the Central Labor Council Records, University of Washington Libraries. The missing issues of the *Spokane Labor World* were apparently destroyed sometime after James L. Hunt completed his research. To fill in the missing years, the researcher must now rely on Hunt's 1940 thesis.

18. This compilation is based primarily on information contained in annual issues of Ayer's *American Newspaper Annual and Directory*; the checklist in O'Connor, 287-89; Marlene Mitchell, "Washington Newspapers: Territorial and State—A Bibliography and Checklist," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1964); Meredith Allan May, "Everett's Socialist Paper: A Strident Voice in a Hostile Community," M.A. thesis (University of Washington, 1968); Joseph R. Conlin, ed., *The American Radical Press, 1880-1960*, 2 vols. (Westport, Conn., 1974); LeWarne; and Schwantes.

SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CaBViPA	British Columbia Provincial Archives, Victoria
CFIS	California State University, Fullerton
CSt	Stanford University Libraries, Stanford
CSt-H	Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford
CU	University of California, Berkeley
CU-B	Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
DL	U.S. Department of Labor Library, Washington, D.C.
DLC	U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
ICMILC	Center for Research Libraries, Chicago
ICN	Newberry Library, Chicago
IU	University of Illinois, Urbana
MdBJ	Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore
MH	Harvard University, Cambridge
MiD	Detroit Public Library
MiU	Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
MoS	St. Louis Public Library
NcD	Duke University, Durham
NcGreE	East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.
NcU	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
NJP	Princeton University, Princeton
NN	New York Public Library
NNC	Columbia University, New York City
NNU	Bobst Library, New York University, New York City
OrU	University of Oregon, Eugene
OrHi	Oregon Historical Society, Portland
Wa	Washington State Library, Olympia
WaE	Everett Public Library
WaHi	Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma
WaSpG	Gonzaga University, Spokane
WaPS	Washington State University, Pullman
WaPIP	Pacific Lutheran University, Parkland, Wash.
WaS	Seattle Public Library
WaT	Tacoma Public Library
WaU	University of Washington, Seattle
WaTC	University of Puget Sound, Tacoma
WaWW	Whitman College, Walla Walla, Wash.
WHi	State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison
[ ]	Partial or incomplete holdings
+	Prior or subsequent publication without labor-reform orientation