William Haywood

Big Bill Haywood, Founder and Leader of the IWW

(1869 - 1928)

Description: One of the foremost labor radicals of the American West, "Big Bill" Haywood became a leading figure in labor activities across the United States. (From: Anarchy Archives)

Tags: labor unionist, socialist, iww, socialist party, industrial unionist, direct action, colorado labor wars, lawrence textile strike.

Quotes:

"...I want to urge upon the working class; to become so organized on the economic field that they can take and hold the industries in which they are employed. Can you conceive of such a thing? Is it possible? What are the forces that prevent you from doing so?" (From: "The General Strike," by William D. Haywood, 1911.)

"...on this great force of the working class I believe we can agree that we should unite into one great organization--big enough to take in the children that are now working; big enough to take in the black man; the white man; big enough to take in all nationalities--an organization that will be strong enough to obliterate state boundaries, to obliterate national boundaries, and one that will become the great industrial force of the working class of the world." (From: "The General Strike," by William D. Haywood, 1911.)

"...it is only by industrial unionism that the general strike becomes possible." (From: "The General Strike," by William D. Haywood, 1911.)

"If the workers can organize so that they can stand idle they will then be strong enough so that they can take the factories." (From: c.)

"...I know I owe my life to the workers of the nation, it is to the working class of the nation that I am under obligation, not to any subdivision of that class. That is why I am here now. That is why I am talking working-class solidarity, because I want to see the working class do for themselves what they did for me." (From: ...I know I owe my life to the workers of the nation, it is to the working class of the nation that I am under obligation, not to any subdivision of that class. That is why I am here now. That is why I am talking working-class solidarity, because I want to see the working class do for themselves what they did for me.)

"A few rich people own the lands and machines. The many labor and have nothing. This every worker knows." (From: "Industrial Socialism," by Frank Bohn and William D. Haywood.)

"...the historians have not been much interested in what the working people have done, although they have done almost everything worth while in the world." (From: "Industrial Socialism," by Frank Bohn and William D. Haywood.)

"For them it was work or starve. Work or starve it is still, not because
nature forces us to do so, but because we have not yet seen our way out of it. We are enslaved not to the soil but to the people who own the machines. The Socialist Movement has come to place the machines, the shops, the railroads, the land and the mines in the possession of the workers. That will mean freedom, security and opportunity for all who live." (From: "Industrial Socialism," by Frank Bohn and William D. Haywood.)

"Capitalists cannot live without wage-workers. Where one class exists there the other will be found. Furthermore, there is sure to be trouble between the two. The master is always scheming to get more profits out of the worker. The worker fights for more wages from his boss. The less one gets the more there is for the other. Hence we have, between the capitalist and his worker, what is known as the Class Struggle." (From: "Industrial Socialism," by Frank Bohn and William D. Haywood.)

"For the revolution to be successful, it will have to result in the ownership and control of the land, shops, mines and railroads by the workers." (From: "Industrial Socialism," by Frank Bohn and William D. Haywood.)

Biography:

One of the foremost labor radicals of the American West, "Big Bill" Haywood became a leading figure in labor activities across the United States.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1869, Haywood had a difficult life. He was only three years old when his father died, and at age nine he both lost an eye and worked in a mine. The economic desperation which led him to work as a child prevented him from ever receiving much formal education.

In 1884, Haywood became an underground miner at the Eagle Canyon mine in Nevada. After a brief stint as a cowboy and a failed homesteading effort, he returned to mining in 1896, this time in Silver City, Idaho. Here he began his labor career as a founding member of a local chapter of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), the industry-wide union that had been founded in 1893 in Butte, Montana. Haywood rose quickly in the union ranks, becoming secretary and president of his local, joining the national union's General Executive Board in 1900, and editing the union's magazine and serving as secretary-treasurer in 1901.

Haywood became co-president of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) union in 1902. Just as Haywood became one of the leaders of Western unions, labor relations in Colorado exploded into violence. Motivated largely by harsh working conditions, similar to the mines of Butte, Montana, the WFM launched a series of mining strikes in Colorado beginning in 1901. The next several years saw near warfare in Colorado's mining fields. The defeat of the strikes led Haywood to stress the need for "one big union" which could bring broader support to individual labor struggles; accordingly, in 1905 he played a key role in the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), commonly referred to as "the Wobblies."

The next year Haywood was charged with plotting the murder of a former Idaho governor. The jury acquitted Haywood, but businessmen and fellow labor leaders would continue to fear and even hate Haywood for his alleged endorsement of violence and sabotage. In 1915, he became the formal head of the IWW and helped to direct strikes from New Jersey to Washington State.

From 1905 to 1920, the IWW organized hundreds of thousands of workers in mines,
lumberyards, farms and factories; it never had more than about 150,000 members at any one time, but over 3 million people joined at one time or another. The IWW was strongest in the West, where it organized women and men, African-Americans and whites, recent immigrants and native-born Americans into large industry-wide unions. Wobblies were explicit about their eventual goal of toppling capitalism, and many of their leaders, including Haywood, expressed open admiration for the young Soviet Union. Wobblies quickly became a part of the folklore of the West, celebrated for their staunch egalitarianism and no-holds-barred style.

The domestic repression which World War I brought ultimately crushed both Haywood and the IWW. In 1917, the federal government arrested Haywood and one hundred others and charged them with violating espionage and sedition acts for calling strikes during wartime. All were convicted. When the Supreme Court rejected his final appeal in 1921, Haywood jumped bail and fled to the Soviet Union, where he died in 1928.

From: Anarchy Archives.

Works:
Author of The General Strike (March 16, 1911)
Author of Industrial Socialism (December 31, 1969)
Author of Bill Haywood Remembers the 1913 Paterson Strike (May 31, 1913)
Author of Speech of William D. Haywood on the Case of Ettor and Giovannitti (May 21, 1912)

Chronology:
February 04, 1869: William Haywood's Birth Day.

Links:
• Anarchy Archives: William Haywood Archive http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/haywood/index.html

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