

BOOK REVIEWS

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<i>The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913</i>	Anne Huber Tripp	Shelton Stromquist
<i>The Fragile Bridge. Paterson Silk Strike, 1913</i>	Steve Golin	Shelton Stromquist
<i>Syndicalism in France</i>	Jeremy Jennings	Barbara Mitchell
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TRIPP, ANNE HUBER. *The I.W.W. and the Paterson Silk Strike of 1913*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago 1987. xiv, 317 pp. Ill. \$ 32.95.

GOLIN, STEVE. *The Fragile Bridge. Paterson Silk Strike, 1913*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia 1988. ix, 305 pp. Ill. \$ 34.95.

The appearance, almost simultaneously, of two books on the Paterson silk strike of 1913 offers an unusual opportunity to examine through varied lenses a critically important strike in Progressive-Era America. The books also represent radically different approaches to labor history and to a host of issues that surround the strike. Both books make important contributions to traditional historiographical debates about the Industrial Workers of the World, its relationship to the Socialist Party, and the reasons for its decline. Both contribute to making the Paterson strike the pivotal event that it deserves to be in Progressive-Era labor history. That we should now have two major books on Paterson and none on the Lawrence textile strike of 1912 is itself interesting.

Anne Huber Tripp has compiled an extraordinarily detailed account of the strike. Useful as an extended elaboration and codification of conventional treatments of the strike, it fundamentally breaks no new ground. She follows largely in the paths already blazed by others and adopts the conventional view on virtually every interpretive controversy of importance. Her narrative account of the strike is often tedious and lacking insight. She seems largely oblivious to recent historiographical developments outside the narrow track of institutional labor history, within which her book must clearly be located.

Steve Golin, on the other hand, has taken the same narrative line but woven into it original evidence and interpretive insights that situate his account of the strike in the midst of an expanding, new literature in women's history, class analysis, and intellectual history of the left. This context, together with new oral history evidence and a brilliant reexamination of old sources, provides the basis for a new reading of the strike, the IWW's development and the history of the left in the twentieth century.

The Paterson silk workers' strike is a worthy subject for intensive analysis (even two intensive analyses). Beginning on 25 February 1913 broad silk weavers struck their Paterson shops in opposition to the four-loom system that was gradually working its way into the industry. They were joined within days by dyers' helpers and ribbon weavers as the strike became general and the demands broadened to include the eight-hour day. More than 25,000 workers were out at the strike's peak. Despite impressive solidarity and considerable outside support, the strike ended five months later in the workers' bitter defeat. The strike's participants and its historians have been trying ever since to come to grips with the reasons for defeat and its effects.

Beyond the obvious reasons for the strike's significance – its size, duration, and connection with the IWW – the Paterson silk strike deserves close attention on a number of grounds. First, the strike's timing was crucial in terms of the growing sentiment for industrial organization. It followed by just a year the spectacular success of IWW-led textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Industrial organizing among the largely immigrant labor force in basic industry appeared to be gathering momentum. Success in Paterson would presumably have deepened and magnified that momentum. Second, the IWW had achieved new prestige through its assistance to immigrant strikers in the East. Its claims to be an alternative to AF of L were never more credible, and its appeal to a broad spectrum of socialists and progressive intellectuals, despite the recall of Bill Haywood from the Socialist Party's executive board, was growing. Third, the defeat at Paterson was a critical turning point in the IWW's development and in its relations with the socialists. Although it would survive and even prosper as an organization in some regions – the Great Plains and Northwest – and among some groups of workers – harvest hands and timber workers – the IWW would never again contest for the leadership of workers in the core mass production industries. Finally, the Paterson strike created, if only briefly, what Steve Golin has called, a “fragile bridge” between a community of radical intellectuals based in Greenwich Village and immigrant workers and their IWW allies in Paterson. Although the character and the utility of that bridge is the subject of considerable controversy, there is little disagreement that its primary creation – the Paterson pageant – was a moment of creative engagement unprecedented in the history of the American left.

Each of the books under consideration approaches this strike with a proper respect for its importance. Each is more or less in agreement on the central facts of the story. Each has sifted essentially the same newspaper accounts, memoirs, public speeches and government hearings for evidence with which to reconstruct the story. What is remarkable is how different the accounts are. Tripp and Golin are at odds on most of the key issues that surround the strike and define its significance. The

simultaneous appearance of their books offers the opportunity to explore those differences.

Anne Huber Tripp views the Paterson strike largely in terms of the leading role of the IWW. Her opening chapters focus on the development of the IWW and its organizing efforts in the silk industry and Paterson. We are treated to an extraordinarily detailed account of the competing efforts of the Detroit and Chicago factions to lead the struggles of Paterson's silk workers. Indeed the origins of the 1913 strike are seen largely in those terms. By expanding the struggle of the broad silk weavers into a general strike over the eight-hour day, the IWW, in her view, imposed its own revolutionary agenda on Paterson's silk workers, to the detriment of their own interests. In its most extreme form, she states her thesis thus: "The long battle between the silk employers and the I.W.W. was a fight between two determined adversaries [. . .]. The workers themselves were like pathetic spectators in a war between the two. The strike only came to an end when a portion of them, seeing nothing ahead but continued hardship for themselves and their families, broke with the union and sought to salvage whatever modest gains the employers would concede" (p. 238). Beyond the misguided leadership of the IWW, Tripp sees the failure of the strike as rooted in the peculiar, decentralized and highly competitive structure of the silk industry, and the consummate skill with which the local authorities (having learned from Lawrence) managed to contain and limit the effectiveness of the strikers. The Paterson pageant, though an artistic success in Tripp's view, on balance "did more harm than good". On this point she follows in the well-worn paths first blazed by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and later trod by most historians. She views the strike as the key event in the decline of both the IWW and the city of Paterson, whose claims to be the "Lyons of America" would only grow more hollow as the twentieth century progressed.

None of this breaks ground that is very new. Thanks to Tripp's we know considerably more detail about the events that she recounts, but her frame of reference, which places blame for the strike's failure largely at the door of the IWW and its misguided leadership, is by now quite standard.

Steve Golin's book takes issue with most of the historiographical tradition in which Tripp's work is rooted. His central argument is that the strike sprang from the needs and traditions of Paterson workers. To the extent that it took a revolutionary course, and Golin is well aware that the motives and objectives of Paterson silk workers varied, that direction was defined by the workers themselves. "And that is the main point", Golin writes, "the IWW speakers did not teach revolution in Paterson as much as either their critics or their partisans supposed – because they didn't have to. The strike itself taught revolution. What the silk workers learned about their right and ability to run the mills for themselves they learned primarily from running the strike" (pp. 69–70). Golin's first chapter focuses not on the IWW but on the work traditions and prior struggles of Paterson's ribbon weavers, dyers' helpers, and broad-silk weavers. He sketches a much more limited role for the IWW, consistent both with their own ideology and with the local traditions of organization and struggle in which the strike was embedded. When Haywood first came to Paterson as a leader [. . .]. You are the members of the union and you need no leaders [. . .]. The union belongs to you." A voiced called from the gallery, "And

we're going to keep it, too" (p. 41). Golin is well aware of the crucial role that IWW leaders, as speakers and publicists, played at certain points in the strike. But they did not dictate its course. In fact, one of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's later regrets was that they had not done so.

Golin's interpretation of the strike, with its "rank and filist" orientation, places his work in the midst of current debates among labor historians. While Tripp is preoccupied with institutional developments and organizational dynamics, Golin emphasizes the texture and pattern of working-class behavior in the community and the workplace. He manages to bring the strike to life in ways that previous historians, including Tripp, have not. He is particularly sensitive to the subtle and complex relations between IWW leaders and rank and file activists, the emergence of women as major figures in the strike, and the transformative power of the strike experience in peoples' lives. He adds important new evidence in the form of oral history that gives texture and depth to this reinterpretation. A Jewish girl who attended strike meetings with her father, asserted years later, the IWW "was not just a union. We really thought we were building a new society. It wasn't only hours, it wasn't only an increase in pay. It was changing everything; that's what we felt" (p. 71).

Golin has quite different views from Tripp on the effectiveness of local authorities. Public authorities, and police chief John Bimson in particular, wholly misread the character of the strike, attributing it to "outside agitators". His use of violence and arrests against picketers had the effect of spreading the strike and reinforcing the solidarity of the strikers. In Tripp's view, the Paterson authorities' "calm, deliberate actions" (p. 227) are evidence that they learned from the mistakes made in Lawrence; the Paterson city administration "was far more skilled in the handling of its strike". And that skill, in her judgment contributed materially to the strikers' defeat. At the same time, the strikers refused to deal separately with individual employers who in March and April showed signs of being willing to sign separate agreements. This strategy, which Tripp sees as evidence of IWW domination and Golin argues is the result of the silk workers distrust of their employers, had the effect of producing employer solidarity in a highly competitive and contentious industry.

Golin offers a very persuasive analysis of the conditions that produced a deadlock in the strike by mid-May. The strike had polarized the community; its "middle-ground" had virtually disappeared. The conviction of Patrick Quinlan for "advocating violence" on the first day of the strike, the deepening hunger, the provocative behavior of the police, and the sudden closing of the meeting halls to the strikers in Paterson by order of the Mayor, produced a deadlock in the strike and frustration in the ranks of the strikers.

The most original aspects of Golin's study emerge from his account of the creative response of the strikers and their IWW allies to their predicament in May. The strikers moved their public rallies, so essential to maintaining solidarity, to the nearby socialist town of Haledon, where their culture of solidarity was celebrated. "Haledon was always a picnic", one strike participant recalled; "it was always a joy to go there" (p. 155). Haledon was also a "crucial link in the bridge from New York to Paterson" (p. 151).

This "fragile bridge" forms the interpretive centerpiece of the book. Golin reconstructs the way in which this alliance of New York's radical intellectuals and

Paterson's beleaguered silk strikers was fabricated. Unlike so much of the literature on the subject, he takes seriously both sides of the partnership and explains how the alliance met real needs of each. The vibrant world of Max Eastman's *The Masses*, the radical feminists' "Heterodoxy", and Mabel Dodge's salon found its match in the strikers' solidarity so manifest in Paterson and Haledon. While Golin does not underestimate the problematic side of the relations between workers and intellectuals, he finds the label "radical chic", so often applied to the New Yorkers' involvement, an inappropriate characterization. The ties to the New Yorkers were important personally and politically for Flynn and Haywood, as they were for the silk strikers. They overcame mutual suspicions to create a network of support from which all drew benefits. The bridge, then, was broader and more sustained than the Paterson Pageant, but the pageant was its highest expression.

The pageant – a dramatic rendering of the strike by the strikers themselves under the direction and with support of their New York friends before a packed house in Madison Square Garden – has been a source of continuing controversy about the strike. Most historians, taking their cue from Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's critical post-mortem, have judged the pageant an artistic success but an economic and political failure. Golin challenges their verdict on the latter counts. First, Golin takes the reader back to the origins of the pageant as a tool for publicizing the strikers' cause and building public support. It was not devised as a narrowly conceived fundraising project. Second, the pageant was a genuine artistic collaboration of strikers and their intellectual allies, which produced an original form of revolutionary art and profoundly reshaped the consciousness of all its participants. (Golin brilliantly situates the drama within the then-flourishing tradition of pageantry.) Third, Flynn argued that the pageant diverted energy from the strike itself – picketing in particular – and sowed dissension in the ranks of the strikers over who got to participate in the performance. Golin sees no evidence to support these charges, and some that suggests even greater striker enthusiasm after the pageant than before, despite the fact that it showed no profit. On these points Golin makes a plausible case, but one which largely lacks direct evidence. On the issue of profit he is more persuasive. Profit from the single performance was never a primary objective of the organizers; the audience, a significant portion of whom were Paterson and New York workers who were admitted free, could not have provided the income in one performance to meet the costs of production; and the long-term financial return, in increased donations to the strike, that resulted from the favorable publicity surrounding the pageant, more than compensated for the absence of short-term profit. On virtually every issue surrounding the pageant, Tripp follows those historians "who accept and repeat [Flynn's] analysis [. . .] that the dramatic reenactment did more harm than good" (p. 231).

Why was Flynn so critical of the pageant in its aftermath and why have historians so slavishly adopted her view? On Flynn, Golin can only speculate. He suggests that the bridge was more the work of Haywood; it fed his needs and enhanced his prominence. Flynn, more than any other IWW leader, had made Paterson her world. While a participant in the bridge-building, she was not its architect. In both personal and political terms, Flynn gave less to the bridge and got less from it. The later stages of the strike fueled a latent rivalry between Flynn and Haywood. In the strike's aftermath that rivalry deepened and grew more embittered. One of the great

strengths of this book is Golin's ability to get inside the experience and the consciousness of some of the strike's major figures, to see the unfolding events as they may have seen them. The account is sympathetic at different times both to Flynn and Haywood. While emphasizing Flynn's greater detachment from the community of New York intellectuals, Golin also explores sympathetically her complex relationship to the radical, largely middle-class feminists in Heterodoxy (pp. 121–127).

Toward scholars who have uncritically adopted Flynn's version of the pageant and her explanation for the failure of the strike, Golin is less charitable. He sees those views as largely reinforcing an intellectual parochialism that separates the work of social and cultural historians and a cynical anti-intellectualism that can imagine no common ground between workers and committed intellectuals.

In the book's final chapters, Golin dissects the end of the strike, attributing its failure to the ability of the manufacturers to endure its pain longer than the workers. In the end, despite all the mistakes and miscalculations of the employers and public authorities, "Pennsylvania and hunger gave the manufacturers the victory" (p. 188). Their ability to get work done at satellite mills in Pennsylvania where the strike had never taken root and the desperation of the strikers that fueled internal dissension brought the official end on August 2. The simplicity of Golin's formulation belies his sophisticated analysis of the unraveling of solidarity among the various trades. Although the particulars of Tripp's analysis are not fundamentally different, her sensitivity to the internal dynamics of the strike in its last month is less acute. The failure of the strike was in her view primarily a failure of the IWW to follow a strategy that fit the circumstances they faced in Paterson, instead pursuing a revolutionary course that was inflexible. Specifically, that failure was reflected in their "steadfast refusal to accept shop-by-shop settlement" and in their failure to adjust their "extreme" demands to what Paterson's silk manufacturers could realistically meet (pp. 236–237).

Viewing the 1913 strike in the context of Paterson's labor wars that spanned the 1870s to the 1930s, Golin argues that the manufacturers won, "but not by a knockout" (p. 203). In the short run, some groups of strikers actually made significant gains in wages and hours and in stopping the spread of the four-loom system. But the strike also destroyed the solidarity that the strike in its most creative period had embodied. The IWW became a faction among Paterson silk strikers. On the national stage, the Paterson strike took a heavier toll on the IWW, according to Golin. Consumed by a profound sense of defeat and personally debilitated by months of struggle, the major figures of the strike turned on each other and their former allies in an orgy of recrimination. Organizationally, the IWW veered toward tighter central control and away from the immigrant communities of the East that seemed to hold such promise after Lawrence and before Paterson.

Each book, then, in its own way tells a powerful story that both participants and subsequent historians have recognized as an important turning point in the history of the IWW and the left in the twentieth century. Tripp has recounted the story in scrupulous detail while not venturing out of the well-worn interpretive paths that others blazed. Golin has moved the story to a new level and illuminated the inner workings of the strike, the roles of its key figures, and the unique collaboration of workers and intellectuals that formed the bridge between Paterson and New York. He has taken us inside the events by using tools of analysis and concepts of the new

labor history and feminist studies, and by self-consciously applying the imagination of a committed scholar engaged with the problems of the left in twentieth-century America. In so doing he has restored the “fragile bridge” of the Paterson strike that fused art and class consciousness, and he has constructed new bridges between the scholarly domains of social and cultural history and between the “moment” of 1913, so filled with revolutionary promise, and our own time.

Shelton Stromquist

JENNINGS, JEREMY. *Syndicalism in France. A Study of Ideas.* [St Antony's/ Macmillan Series.] Macmillan, Basingstoke, London 1990; in assoc. with St Antony's College, Oxford. viii, 276 pp. £ 45.00.

In *Syndicalism in France: A Study of Ideas*, Jeremy Jennings examines syndicalist theory from the late nineteenth century through the 1950s. Happily he avoids the trap of presuming that only intellectuals such as the Sorelian syndicalists spoke exclusively for the movement and informed its philosophy. Instead he devotes a generous portion of his study to examining the thought of numerous working-class leaders who organized the syndicalist movement into the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) in 1895. What Professor Jennings' work elucidates is that although there was wide divergency of opinion among militants and intellectuals, there remained a consistency in syndicalist theory that needs to be identified. That unity of thought has been labeled *ouvriériste* and anarchist, but it was an intellectual system that remained flexible enough to adapt its tactics to changing circumstances, and yet consistent in its anti-Jacobin stance and its reliance on working-class autonomy and direct action.

It is the ability to expose the consistencies that existed among such a variety of disparate thinkers that adds to the genius of the exposition. In his early chapters Jennings explores the thought of Fernand Pelloutier and other anarchosyndicalist militants, the theories of the Sorelian syndicalists, and those of the venerable champion of reformist syndicalism, Auguste Keufer.

The “father of revolutionary syndicalism”, Jennings agrees was Fernand Pelloutier. What Pelloutier sought was the establishment of a new moral and rational order based on associations of producers. The route to this future society was not to be found in parliamentary government nor through anarchist violence. Instead the workers would deliver themselves from social and economic bondage by direct action, which for Pelloutier meant education through the *bourses du travail*-sponsored programs and action in the form of a general strike.

Although Pelloutier's philosophy regarding the general strike has been dealt with before, most notably in the work of Jacques Julliard, Jennings' exposition of this generally misunderstood tactic, which became the bastion of syndicalist theory, is clear and particularly useful for an English-speaking audience. He shows how Pelloutier's thinking on the subject moved from a rather naive belief that the general strike would consist of a workers' sitout, to a more realistic definition of the general strike as workers striking in strategically placed major industries, carrying on a kind