

Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930, by Nigel Anthony Sellars. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998. xii, 298 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BENJAMIN JOHNSON, YALE UNIVERSITY

This well-documented and clearly written work traces the organizing efforts of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Oklahoma during the early twentieth century. Focusing on the Wobblies' greatest sources of membership and financial strength, the wheat and oil industries, Sellars argues that the IWW was more important to Oklahoma history, and in turn Oklahoma was more important to the IWW, than historians have previously recognized.

The union did not have an auspicious beginning in the Sooner State. Although the "wageworker's frontier" in rapidly settled Oklahoma did not lend itself to the more conservative craft unionism of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the IWW at first made little headway. Founded in 1905, a year later the IWW claimed five locals in what would become the state of Oklahoma. The opposition of small-town merchants and professionals, the marginalization of women and African Americans, and disputes with the state AFL and Socialist Party meant that by 1914 the IWW had no organized presence in the state.

The turn to organizing migratory workers in the wheat industry resurrected the Oklahoma IWW. Sellars is at his best in describing how the labor demands and working conditions of wheat farming allowed the IWW to "harvest the harvesters." Semimechanized from its beginning, wheat farming required enormous amounts of seasonal labor. Seasonal workers often lived in "jungle camps" outside agricultural towns or slept on the ground near the employers' fields and then endured long hours, intense heat, and dangerous machinery once hired. By 1916, the Wobblies had recruited some 20,000 such workers into their agricultural union. This success changed the IWW itself, argues Sellars, moving it "away from revolutionary rhetoric and . . . toward more conservative issues such as better wages, food and lodging, and working conditions" (55).

Oklahoma's early oil industry also provided opportunities for organizing success. Organizing drives and several strikes from 1915 to 1917 succeeded in driving up wages and securing such benefits as lunch breaks and transportation to and from the work site. The tenant farmer background of many workers predisposed them to join, though to its detriment the IWW refused to allow tenant farmers themselves to join. On the other hand, powerful forces limited the Wobblies' success in the oil fields. Greater hierarchy and differentia-

tion between oil jobs made it difficult for all of the workers to feel a sense of solidarity, and the petroleum companies were more powerful and unified opponents than the wheat farmers.

A combination of industry-specific changes and wider political factors destroyed the Oklahoma IWW. The advent of the combine harvester and the welding of oil pipelines greatly reduced the labor needs of the wheat and oil industries, strengthening management's hand. The anti-IWW campaigns of World War I continued through the Red Scare and the 1920s rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Infighting over the degree of centralization within the union did not help matters. By the end of the 1920s, the Oklahoma IWW was all but dead.

If Sellars's research is painstaking and his attention to detail admirable, the wider significance of his account of the Oklahoma IWW remains unclear. On the one hand, he deems the Wobblies' struggle a "futile hope" (7), but at the same time he wants to claim some important legacy for his subjects. He argues that "radicalism in Oklahoma and the Southwest has its roots in a labor-based syndicalism" (13) but never really develops the point. His closing statement that "the IWW prepared the way for the CIO" (195) is also unsubstantiated. More exploration of the Wobblies' ideology and how it meshed with Oklahoma's socioeconomic reality might have enabled Sellars to speak to a wider range of historians. The relationship between the IWW and radical rural politics is particularly important to historians of all of the plains states, where industrialization, agricultural expansion, and labor and farmer protest all occurred simultaneously, which may make readers wish that Sellars's exhaustive study of the IWW in Oklahoma had been more ambitious.

Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, edited by David A. Horowitz. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999. x, 191 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY DOROTHY SCHWIEDER, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

In 1968, a search of a prominent Oregonian's probate records revealed a most unexpected historical treasure. Tucked away in Colon R. Eberhard's safe was an unmarked folder containing some 200 typed pages of the minutes of the LaGrange, Oregon, Ku Klux Klan, to which Eberhard had once belonged. Described by editor David A. Horowitz as the most extensive set of Klan minutes to be uncovered, the typed notes contained secret minutes as well as commentaries on the LaGrange Klan meetings from May 11, 1922, to April 22, 1924.

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