

observer captures the reader's attention and instils hope that an English translation will be undertaken in the near future.

Ralf Hoffrogge

c/o Jahrbuch für Forschungen zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung
Weydingerstraße 14-16, D-10178 Berlin, Germany
E-mail: hoffrogge@uni-potsdam.de

McKILLEN, ELIZABETH. *Making the World Safe for Workers. Labor, the Left, and Wilsonian Internationalism.* [The Working Class in American History.] University of Illinois Press, Urbana [etc.] 2013. xii, 299 pp. Ill. \$55.00. doi:10.1017/S002085901400056X

Not since Ronald Radosh published *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy*¹ nearly fifty years ago has an historian examined carefully the role played by the labor movement in the shaping of President Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy. Where Radosh's book examined labor's foreign policy initiatives from World War I through the depths of the Cold War and relied on the concept of "corporate liberalism" to explain the actions of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its president, Samuel Gompers, Elizabeth McKillen concentrates on the Wilson presidency, places labor diplomacy into a transnational context, and focuses on critics of the AFL at home and abroad. Radosh and McKillen, however, share an ungenerous and critical interpretation of the policies pursued by Gompers and the AFL. For McKillen, Gompers's domestic and foreign labor adversaries represented the true advocates of working people and international comity. Socialists and anarcho-syndicalists serve as McKillen's virtuous subjects.

McKillen's introduction neatly summarizes what follows in the seven substantive chapters that trace Wilsonian diplomacy from the Mexican Revolution through World War I, the Versailles Peace Conference, and the political struggle in the United States over the treaty and the League of Nations. The book limns the partnership that developed between President Wilson and the AFL leaders from its tentative beginnings during the Mexican Revolution to its culmination in the creation of the International Labor Organization (ILO) within the framework of the League of Nations. As Gompers and the AFL shifted from criticizing Wilson's imperialistic interventions in Mexico to becoming partisans of his World-War-I-era diplomacy and peace-making, labor leftists in the United States, Latin America, and Europe refused to believe that Wilsonian internationalism furthered the interests of the world's workers. Because Wilsonian diplomacy conflated democracy with the interests of capitalism globally, McKillen asserts that labor leftists and their socialist allies opposed Wilson's policies toward the Mexican Revolution, preparedness for war, participation in World War I, and peace-making afterwards.

1. Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969).

In the case of Mexico, the AFL and those on its left allied to oppose US intervention and influenced Wilson to reject military action. On the issues of military preparedness, war, and peace, however, the AFL and the labor and socialist left split. McKillen portrays Gompers and his allies in the AFL as conservatives who favored immigration restriction, neglected less skilled workers, disparaged industrial unions, disdained women workers, and shared racist sentiments. Thus, it was easy for them to change from anti-imperialist and anti-war positions to advocacy of preparedness, intervention in world war, and Wilsonian peace-making. The labor left and socialists in the US fought preparedness, refused to support US participation in the war, and opposed the Versailles Treaty, the League of Nations, and the International Labor Organization (ILO). Indeed, McKillen credits the left with an influential role in the political defeat of Wilson's peace-making efforts.

What is new or different in McKillen's telling of this story? Historians have long established that Gompers and the AFL rejected US military intervention in Mexico, that they backed Wilson's initiatives during and after World War I, especially the ILO, which Gompers fathered. We have also understood that Gompers expected the Wilson administration to benefit labor interests in return for AFL support. That had been the case even before war became an issue as Gompers steered the AFL into a political alliance with the Democratic Party that produced a number of legislative and administrative benefits between 1913 and 1916 (McKillen wrongly suggests otherwise on p. 242). It is equally common knowledge that US socialists, unlike most of their European comrades, by a substantial majority condemned US intervention in World War I. In the US case the Socialist party majority rejected war while a minority faction endorsed Wilson's decision to go to war, a significant number of whom became players on the president's diplomatic team. Where McKillen's tale differs from the more conventional narrative is in stressing the size and strength of leftist resistance.

How does McKillen estimate the influence of the left within and beyond the labor movement? Mostly, she relies on the official publications of left-wing unions, their convention proceedings, and similar sources for anti-war socialists. She substitutes rhetoric for action, proclamations for evidence. She credits one-third of AFL members as socialists (p. 4), without party membership files to support her assertion. She asserts that three socialist newspapers and magazines had as large a readership as mainstream publications (p. 4), without the circulation data to prove her case. She argues that anti-war socialists tallied substantial votes in the 1917 and 1918 local elections, and that substantial numbers of American workers refused to register for conscription without placing the socialist votes in several cities in a broader context and providing data on working-class resistance to conscription. Yes, roughly one-third of the unions belonging to the AFL included socialist officers and socialist declarations in their constitutions but we have no way of knowing what proportion of the membership believed in or participated in socialist politics.

Among the unions credited as socialist by McKillen are the United Mine Workers (UMW), the International Ladies' Garment Workers (ILGW), and others unnamed (most likely the International Association of Machinists, the United Brewery Workers, and the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers); aside from the ILGW, however, I doubt that one-third of the members of those unions ever belonged to the Socialist Party or even voted socialist. Yes, in some municipal elections, especially in New York City, socialists garnered substantial vote tallies in 1917 and 1918 but the Socialist Party as a whole remained an insignificant actor in the national political arena. While two socialist dailies (one in Milwaukee the other in New York) maintained high journalistic standards

and enjoyed thousands of subscribers and likely more readers, the mainstream press counted its readership in the many millions. And non-socialist foreign language publications, many of which enjoyed large readerships among immigrant workers, were certainly more widely read than socialist ones. Although many male citizens refused to register for the draft and conscription did fuel an open rebellion of sorts in Oklahoma, most draft resistance was individualistic and spurred by peculiarly American notions of liberty rather than radicalism or socialism. Moreover, the members of a leftist labor organization that McKillen considers one of the most caustic and effective critics of Wilsonian diplomacy, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) by and large enrolled for conscription, a practice that the IWW's leaders endorsed.

Why, then, did workers and leftists in the US participate in the successful effort to reject the Treaty of Versailles and membership of the ILO unlike their comrades among victor nations that ratified the treaty and joined the ILO (even Germany and Austria joined the ILO before the US)? Here and there, McKillen hints at the reasons. A substantial share of US workers and union members were immigrants or the children of immigrants. Those from Germany, Scandinavia (among whom Swedes were the most numerous), Austria-Hungary, and Tsarist Russia had numerous reasons for acting as they did. Prior to the March and October 1917 revolutions in Russia, many Jewish American workers and the unions to which they belonged wanted no part of a war in which the US allied with the empire that they had fled. Between March and November 1917, however, they and their unions switched from opposition to the war to advocacy of the defeat of Imperial Germany and its allies. Still later, many came to oppose the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations because of the exclusion of Soviet Russia from the peace process and settlement. Likewise many Irish Americans resisted participation in a war that defended Great Britain and viewed the Treaty, the League, and the ILO as instruments of British domination.

No great imagination is required to understand why German Americans, German-speaking Austrian Americans, and many Hungarian Americans might resist Wilson's war- and peace-making, although numerous men of such ethnicities served willingly in the military. It is also relatively easy to understand why Czechoslovakian and South Slav immigrants might favor Wilson's policy of national self-determination. Still, Republican opposition to Wilson's peace-making and a long tradition of popular resistance to US entanglement with multi-national bodies and foreign governments likely played a far more significant role in the defeat of the Treaty of Versailles than resistance by the labor and socialist left.

The weaknesses of her book notwithstanding, it remains all to the good that McKillen has brought to our attention the role played by labor and the left in global affairs during the early twentieth century. It is equally beneficial that she has synthesized the large body of scholarship that exists on the subject as well as considerable evidence from leftist sources and government archives. And it would have been an even better book had she chosen to remove the rose-colored spectacles she has used to view the past.

Melvyn Dubofsky

Distinguished Professor of History & Sociology Emeritus
Department of History, Binghamton University, SUNY
Binghamton, NY 13902-6000, USA
E-mail: dubof@binghamton.edu