

**A. ROSS MCCORMACK**  
UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

*The Industrial Workers of the World in  
Western Canada: 1905-1914\**

The development of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in western Canada demonstrated the facility with which men and ideas moved back and forth across the forty-ninth parallel in the years before 1914. The same revolutionary industrial unionism which inspired thousands of wretched unskilled workers in the United States was carried to the western provinces by such Wobbly<sup>1</sup> luminaries as Bill Haywood, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Frank Little and Joe Hill. But more important propaganda was conducted by faceless Wobblies who agitated while they worked beside hard-rock miners, loggers, construction workers and harvesters and then moved on to take up the fight elsewhere. The IWW was able to inspire the western Canadian workers whom it organized in the same manner it did American workers because the men's experience on either side of the border was essentially similar. If there was nothing peculiarly Canadian about Wobbly doctrine or appeal, the IWW became, nonetheless, part of a western radical tradition. During the first two decades of the century, workers in the Canadian West demonstrated a significant and persistent commitment to militant industrial unionism, a commitment which resulted in three campaigns against craft union hegemony in the labour movement. By 1905 the experience of workers in British Columbia had already produced a manifestation of militant industrial unionism. Indeed the IWW grew directly out of the first western rebellion against pure and simpledom. And Wobblies played a role in the second campaign, weak and abortive though it was. Part of the continuum which culminated in the One Big Union, the IWW conformed to what might be regarded as the pattern of militant industrial unionism in western Canada. Its doctrine was Marxist; its syndicalism was pragmatic; and it flourished during industrial crisis. The purpose of this essay is to place the IWW in the continuum of militant industrial unionism and assess its significance in the development of that radical tradition.

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