



CONNECTICUT HISTORY REVIEW

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The Association for the Study of Connecticut History (ASCH) is a non-profit organization formed to promote the scholarly study of Connecticut history. In addition to publishing *Connecticut History Review*, ASCH sponsors conferences each year that are open to all individuals and institutions interested in Connecticut history. Membership and other information pertaining to ASCH is available at: <http://asch-cthistory.org/>

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Herbert Hoover. Finally, historians Heather Munro Prescott and Toby A. Appel describe the roles of women physicians fulfilling medical needs at home and abroad during the Great War. When paired with next spring's articles on the Connecticut women's movement and on the social hygiene movement during the Great War, these articles fill an important gap in the history of the achievement of women's suffrage in the post-war era.

The Research Notes section reports on a new digital initiative, the Connecticut Collections Platform, sponsored by Connecticut League of History Organizations, which will eventually enhance UConn Library's Connecticut Digital Archive. In its regular column, the Connecticut State Library Spotlight, State Librarian Kendall Wiggin reports on the archive holdings at the State Library, in this case the ambitious "Remembering World War One" state-wide documentation project.

What all this content reveals is that Connecticut history and heritage remains vital to our understanding of what previous generations have experienced, providing a window on contemporary issues of war and peace, humanitarian action, and ethnic diversity.

Once again, we remind readers that the new feature, "Letters to the Editor," is available for anyone who wishes to comment on or critique any part of this issue. Please e-mail us. Finally, thanks go to Dr. Yohuru Williams, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Fairfield University, for the financial support that his office continues to give to *Connecticut History Review*.

An important and exciting transition is underway for *Connecticut History Review*. ASCH has made collaborative arrangements with the University of Illinois Press to publish the journal through its offices. Beginning in 2017, subscription and marketing affairs will be handled by them. Editorial offices will remain at Fairfield University, and ASCH will continue to foster local history through its regular activities in addition to the journal. Our arrangement with the well-regarded University of Illinois Press will allow us to offer digital subscriptions for the first time and make all journal content, going back to 1973, available in digital form to our subscribers through JSTOR, the premier digital journal archive. Stay tuned for more information on these arrangements, which will come through e-mail and regular postal mail to our members, as well as updated on our website <aschcthistory.org>.

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Feeling the Unrest of the Times: The 1912 Labor Struggles in Willimantic, Connecticut¹

ANNA D. JAROSZYŃSKA-KIRCHMANN

On May 1, 1912, following the conclusion of two strikes and facing the third in the textile mills in town, an editorial in the local daily *Chronicle* reflected: "Willimantic for many years a place without labor troubles, is beginning to feel the unrest of the times."² Willimantic, a town whose economy had been dominated by the textile industry since the early decades of the nineteenth century, erupted in a series of confrontations between largely immigrant work force and the mill bosses. Between April and November 1912, hundreds of textile workers struck at the Quidnick-Windham Manufacturing Company, the American Thread Company, and the Windham Silk Company. Poles, French Canadians, Syrian Lebanese, and Russians—both men and women—walked out of the mills, rallied, and demanded pay increases, which they knew were being granted in other mills in the region. For several months in the spring and summer of 1912, Willimantic became a place of fierce competition for influence between organizers from the United Textile Workers (UTW), a craft union affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies), who both aimed to build up their presence in town.³

¹ This article was first presented as a paper at the Association for the Study of Connecticut History conference in the fall 2013. I would like to thank Janice Knudsen, who co-curated with me the exhibit "The Polish Experience in Windham and Willimantic" at the Windham Textile and History Museum in Willimantic in 2011, for her help in establishing a workable timeline of events, as well as for her able support in the work on the exhibit. Neither the exhibit nor this article could have happened without her.

² "Our Recent Strikes," *Chronicle*, 1 May 1912, p. 2.

³ In his overview of the town's industrial history, so far the only such work on Willimantic, Thomas R. Beardsley does not mention the strike of 1912. Thomas R. Beardsley, *Willimantic: Industry and Community, the Rise and Decline of a Connecticut Textile City* (Willimantic, Conn.: Windham Textile and History Museum, 1993). Beardsley, does, however, refer briefly to the participation of women workers in the strike in his *Willimantic Women: Their Lives and Labors* (Willimantic: Windham Textile and History Museum, 1990), 11-12. Steve Thornton discusses a strike at Quidnick-Windham, and mentions several episodes of the IWW involvement in Willimantic in 1912; Steve Thornton, *A Shoeleather History of the Wobblies: Stories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Connecticut* (Boston: The Shoeleather History Project, 2013), 55-56 (Quidnick strike), 105-107 (Benjamin Legere), 107-109 (Elizabeth Gurley

Although the labor unrest affected the entire New England region in 1912-13, the Connecticut tensions remain unexamined. The Willimantic episode, like those in other mill towns, reveals strong connections to the rest of the region and highlights not only business-working class conflict, but also frictions between the competing visions regarding the role and goals of labor unions, as reflected by the competition between the IWW's idea of industrial unionism and the UTW's craft unionism. These increased tensions between the ideas of reform and revolution, business unionism and industrial unionism, as well as the growth of socialist influence and party politics in the Progressive era were the trends which continued since the 1890s, but became particularly pronounced in the period between 1900 and 1914. In many ways the eruption of labor militancy during World War I and in its immediate aftermath stemmed directly from the developments of the previous decade, and brought further to the fore what was building up in American labor movement for half a century. As historian Melvyn Dubofsky noted, "American involvement in the war . . . appeared to intensify working-class consciousness, and this war-induced class consciousness affected relations between employees and employers, laborers and the government, workers and their unions."⁴

The events of 1912 in New England were as much a result of transformations within the American labor movement since the formation of IWW in 1905, as of the more long-term changes in the structure and mode of production in American industry. According to David Montgomery, throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century workers intensified their battle for the eight-hour day and for the collective control over the conditions of their work. The direct action strikes were not solely inspired by the IWW. The industrial workers spontaneously responded to the corporate consolidation in their industries, which affected all workers, and to the adoption of the efficiency systems (Taylorism), which particularly undermined the position of skilled workers. At the same time in the volatile economy, the cost of living rose and the security of employment plummeted. As a result, most strikes for the control over conditions were initiated by the skilled workers and those for the wage increases, by the unskilled.⁵

The Willimantic strikes of 1912 further demonstrated how complicated were the relationships between competing working class interests, as well as ethnicity and

Flynn). The strikes are listed in State of Connecticut, Public Document No. 23, *Twenty-Fifth Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the two Years Ended November 30, 1912* (Hartford, 1912), 58.

⁴ Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920*. Second ed. (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1985), 115-16.

⁵ David Montgomery, "The 'New Unionism' and the Transformation of Workers' Consciousness in America, 1909-22," *Journal of Social History* 7 (Summer 1974): 509-29. See also idem, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). An example of the craft workers' struggle for control is the 1915 strike of the munitions workers in Bridgeport, Connecticut, Cecelia Bucki, "Dilution and Craft Tradition: Munitions Workers in Bridgeport, Connecticut, 1915-19," in Herbert G. Gutman and Donald H. Bell, eds., *The New England Working Class and the New Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 137-56. See also Cecelia Bucki, *Bridgeport's Socialist New Deal, 1915-36* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

religion, which all played significant roles in the shaping of attitudes of Polish, French Canadian and Syrian workers, the three main groups of strikers. The solidarity of workers was challenged in consequence of infighting between the two unions pressures from the Catholic Church, as well as a strong push-back from the mill bosses. The foothold that IWW established in town in the spring and summer of 1912 all but disappeared by the end of the year, leaving in Willimantic only UTW, whose resolve was not to be again tested until more than a decade later.

LESSONS FROM LAWRENCE

The labor tensions in Willimantic came at the heels of the "Bread and Roses" strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, considered one of the most important battles between big business and organized labor in the history of American unionism.⁶ The strike in the textile mills of Lawrence began on January 11, 1912, when the workers hours, and thus their wages, had been cut. The Polish women weavers were the first to walk out, but the Italian workers took the lead in organizing the strike.⁷ Soon, the strike involved 20,000 workers from different textile plants. Representatives of many nationalities, including Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, Syrians, Greeks, Portuguese, Armenians, French Canadians, and Franco-Belgians formed a strike committee. The Industrial Workers of the World, whose local was already active in Lawrence, provided the leadership.

By 1912, the IWW was growing in strength and visibility. Established in 1905 Wobblies promoted a model of labor unionism based on the ideal of "one big union, designed to unite workers along industrial instead of craft lines, and committed to fight for the defeat of capitalism and the establishment of industrial democracy. Since 1909, the coalition which initially formed IWW had fractured, leaving a sma

⁶ Much has been written about the 1912 Lawrence strike. One of the best accounts remains Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), 306-50; and Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, abridged edition, ed. Joseph A. McCart (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 132-51. See also Donald B. Cole, *Immigrant City: Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1845-1921* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 177-9; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography, My First Life (1906-1926)* (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 127-151; Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 117-69; Bruce Watson, *Bread and Roses: Mills, Migrants, and the Struggle for the American Dream* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005); Fred Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years (1905-1975)* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1975), 53-63; Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of Syndicalism in the United States* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967), 131-156, although it is most based on Cole and Flynn; Paul F. Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism, Second Edition* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), 283-94. For a recent useful review, see also Mark W. Robbins, "Bread, Roses, and Other Possibilities: The 1912 Lawrence Strike in Historical Memory," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 40 (Summer 2012): 95-121, and *The Great Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912: New Scholarship on the Bread and Roses Strike*, ed. by Robert Farrant and Jurg Siegenthaler (Amityville NY: Baywood Publishing Co., 2014).

⁷ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 228.

group of labor leaders who quickly earned their reputation for radicalism, hostility to both craft unions and political parties, and the determination to mobilize workers for the "direct action at the point of production." In the eyes of business, the American Federation of Labor, as well as the general public, the Wobblies were considered to be dangerous revolutionaries, threatening the capitalist order and preaching violence, and that fear regularly produced particularly strong and unrestrained response from its adversaries.⁸

The American Catholic Church, whose teaching was relevant to many of the immigrant workers, also saw IWW as the forefront of approaching socialism, and actively opposed the union.⁹ The church leaders negotiated a complex course between charity and social justice, but they remained deeply suspicious of labor unions. Although the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Pope Leo XIII upheld the workers' right to organize and supported the concept of social justice, it also condemned socialism and reaffirmed the concept of private property rights. According to historian John Dolan, since *Rerum Novarum* was open to interpretation, the "American bishops and priests focused on the latter, and ignored the Pope's criticism of capitalism and his call for social reform."¹⁰ Their strong denunciation of socialism, which they later associated with IWW's call for revolution, led in time first to the church's support for the AFL and other more conservative craft unions as a counterweight to the perceived radicalism of the Wobblies, and later to the development of the church's own Catholic social doctrine.¹¹ At the same time the IWW, while claiming to represent workers of all faiths, openly criticized the Catholic church for upholding capitalism and thus participating in the exploitation of the working class, as well as for the lack of support for and endorsement of the industrial democracy.¹²

In 1909, the IWW could boast of a major victory in the steel industry strike in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, but its presence on the East Coast was limited at best. When the strike erupted at the American Woolen Company in Lawrence, the leading IWW activists, Joseph J. Ettor, Arturo Giovannitti, William D. (Big Bill) Haywood, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn seized the opportunity to take control of the strike. They quickly unified the workers, employing some new tactics such as vigorous mobilization, inspiring oratory, and almost constant rallying. The over two-month long strike unfolded in dramatic events and unexpected turns, such as for example the highly publicized exodus of children from striking families, and framing of Ettor and Giovannitti for inciting to murder by the city police. Those strike tactics solidified the IWW of the strikers, but also cemented the radical reputation of the Wobblies. The IWW leadership, as well as the strike committee, managed to overcome considerable organizational obstacles, including at times vicious propaganda war, brutality of the

police and militia, unfair courts, sabotage and provocation, and economic retribution by the mill owners ready to break down the strikers' resolve. In addition, most of the Catholic priests and other religious leaders sided with the opposition to the strike, denounced the IWW, and exerted pressure on their parishioners to abandon the fight.¹³

Particularly, the Lawrence strike sharply exposed the chasm between the IWW and the United Textile Workers (UTW). The UTW, established in 1901, espoused the ideology of other craft unions affiliated with the AFL, concentrating on providing immediate material gains to skilled workers and systematically moving towards the model of a centralized and bureaucratized "business unionism." While increasingly interested in becoming players on the political scene, the craft unions had no desire to address the needs of the unskilled workers.¹⁴ The UTW represented silk and cotton workers, but did not have a strong presence in the woolen industry. In Lawrence it organized skilled workers and craftsmen, mostly from among the more established ethnic groups, such as the Irish, Germans, French Canadians and Franco-Belgians, and the immigrants from the British Isles. After arriving in Lawrence when the IWW strike was in full swing, John B. Golden, president of UTW, quickly aligned himself with the anti-strike forces in town. Golden, himself a former weaver from Fall River, was known for his conservatism; in addition to his labor activities, he "also served on the board of directors of the militantly antisocialist, Catholic workers association, the Militia of Christ."¹⁵ He did not hide his extreme hostility to IWW or disdain for the immigrant labor force, calling them "foreign to our institutions."¹⁶

The AFL coalition led by Golden immediately engaged in destroying the early cooperation between the skilled and unskilled, engaging in hostile propaganda against the Wobblies, and driving a wedge between the craftsmen and other strikers. Golden also vigorously denounced the IWW in his testimony before the Rules Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, excluded strikers who wanted to continue the fight from access to relief aid, and entered into separate negotiations with the management, seeking a deal for the skilled workers. When the Lawrence strike ended with a victory for the striking workers on March 18, 1912, there was no love lost between the IWW and the UTW.¹⁷

The workers' victory at Lawrence has often been ascribed to the successful IWW tactics of involving workers from various ethnic groups in the strike's leadership

¹³ Foner, *History*, 329-35; Robert Biggart, "Why Labor Won: Tactical Innovation, Failed Repression, and Turning Points in the Bread and Roses Strike," in *The Great Lawrence Textile Strike*, 79-90.

¹⁴ Dubofsky, *Industrialism*, 77-100.

¹⁵ David J. Goldberg, *A Tale of Three Cities: Labor Organization and Protest in Paterson, Passaic, and Lawrence, 1916-1921* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 3.

¹⁶ Watson, *Bread and Roses*, 67.

¹⁷ About the strikebreaking role of Golden and UTW see Foner, 338-40; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 136. About the UTW views on unionization strategies, see Cletus E. Daniel, *Culture of Misfortune: An Interpretive History of Textile Unionism in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 22-24; and Robert W. Dunn and Jack Hardy, *Labor and Textiles: A Study of Cotton and Wool Manufacturing* (New York: International Publishers, 1931), 177-99, 212-33.

⁸ Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism*, 106-11.

⁹ For the broader context of the attitudes of the Catholic Church towards the labor issues as well as social problems of the industrial era, see Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 321-46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹¹ Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 302-310.

¹² Foner, *History*, 131.

structure through the nationality-based committees, which represented their interests.¹⁸ According to the recollection of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "It was estimated that there were at least 25 different nationalities in Lawrence. The largest groups among the strikers were: Italians, 7,000; Germans, 6,000; French Canadians, 5,000; English-speaking, 5,000; Poles, 2,500; Lithuanians, 2,000; Franco-Belgians, 1,000; Syrians, 1,000—with a sprinkling of Russians, Jews, Greeks, Letts [Latvians] and Turks." Joseph Ettor "selected interpreters to bring order out of this veritable Tower of Babel. They organized mass meetings in various localities of the different language groups and had them elect a strike committee of men and women which presented every mill, every department and every nationality." Bill Haywood made sure that all the speeches were translated into all the languages and had the translations double-checked for accuracy and to avoid provocation.¹⁹ As a result, the general strike committee had fifty-six, and later sixty, members, with the fourteen largest nationality groups represented by four elected members each; one representative of each group was also always a member of any subcommittee.²⁰

All nationalities had also their representatives on relief committees, while local fraternal, religious and mutual aid societies, and other ethnic organizations provided aid to their co-nationals who were out of work. Monetary contributions from outside Lawrence helped to sustain strikers in the winter months, especially those from their trade unions, Socialist organizations, as well as Polish, Portuguese, Italian, French, and Belgian national organizations. In addition to the Italians, who continued to play a leading role in the strike, Franco-Belgians, Poles, and Syrians became especially involved in the strike, lending their facilities for large IWW meetings and rallies. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recalled how Syrian workers once provided a safe haven to Bill Haywood when his life appeared to be threatened, housed him for several nights, and "had every family alerted and could muster 100 men if need be, with a signal in the yard."²¹ Poles were also said to have been particularly militant about enforcing strike rules and preventing scabbing; they fought the police and soldiers, and Polish barbers refused to shave men who remained at work. Young Polish girls, who gave their testimony during the Congressional Hearings on the Lawrence strike, attested to the dismal working conditions and wages, as well as submitting to fighting and resisting the police. Before the conclusion of the strike, 1,000 or more workers joined IWW; ninety percent of them Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, Syrians, French, Belgians, and Portuguese.²²

¹⁸ Foner claims that "at no time previously in American labor history were so many diverse nationality and language groups so effectively united in a strike." Foner, *History*, 320.

¹⁹ Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 128, 132.

²⁰ Foner, *History*, 318. On the inter-ethnic collaboration see also Stefano Luconi, "Crossing Borders the Picket Line: Italian-American Workers and the 1912 Strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts," *Italian Americana* 28, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 149-61.

²¹ Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 132.

²² Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 249-50; Foner, *History*, 320, 324; Janelle Bougeois, "'Believe Comes . . . the Day is Coming When Those at the End of Their Rope Will Require Struggle. It Will Be, Perhaps, Tomorrow.' Franco-Belgian Immigrants and the 1912 Strike," in *The Great Lawrence Textile*

There were, however, fault lines within the ethnic groups. One of them ran along craft distinctions. According to Dubofsky, the more established workers from the older immigrant waves, with more skilled workers within their ranks such as Germans, Irish, French Canadians, and the English speakers, all opposed the strike. Allegedly, there were no Germans on the strike committee and only one Irishman. Donald B. Cole noted that none of the Irish organizations paraded with the IWW, while there were many Irishmen among the city officials opposed to the strike; second-generation Irish were among the judges and marshals; a School Committee member John Breen was accused of sabotage; and Mayor Scanlon hired Sherman Agency detectives. French Canadians called for fair wages, but few supported the strike. A group of Socialist Germans did join it, but most of their co-nationals stayed away, and many scabs were recruited from among the English-speaking workers. Even within the groups represented in the strike there were divisions. For example, the Portuguese struck, but their attitude remained cautious, and Lithuanians were split in their support of the strike. Another dividing line ran along class distinctions. In addition, Italian shopkeepers and small businessmen distanced themselves from the strikers.²³

The attitude of the religious leaders made a difference, too. The Catholic clergy from poorer immigrant parishes often supported the strikers and organized relief funds for them, while Cardinal O'Connell of Boston and an influential local Irish priest Father James T. O'Reilly of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, aligned themselves with the anti-strike coalition.²⁴ Many other priests also denounced the strike and IWW, especially those from Irish parishes. Father Raymond Plasmans, a French Canadian priest, called on the strikers to return to work. The notable exceptions were Father Mariano Milanese, who supported the strike and organized a relief committee among his Italian parishioners, and Father Vasile Nahas from the Syrian church, who urged his parishioners to keep on fighting for fair wages. They both provided space for the strikers to meet, including hosting the IWW leaders. Some other churches also held special collections for the St. Vincent de Paul Society.²⁵

In her memoirs, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn noted that the IWW leadership was aware of the fact that most of the workers in Lawrence were Catholic, so they made

Strike, 15-36; Cole, *Immigrant City*, 188-8; Lucille O'Connell, "The Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912: The Testimony of Two Polish Women," *Polish American Studies* 36, no. 2 (Autumn 1979): 44-62.

²³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 236; Foner, *History*, 318-20; Cole, *Immigrant City*, 184-89. For an excellent example of a similar issue within the Polish community, see John J. Bukowczyk, "The Transformation of Working-Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Immigrant Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey, 1915-1925," in *Labor Divided: Race and Ethnicity in United States Labor Struggles 1835-1960*, ed. Robert Asher and Charles Stephenson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 283-300.

²⁴ James J. Kenneally, "Catholic Clerical Quandry: The Lawrence Strike of 1912," *American Catholic Studies* 117, no. 4 (2006): 33-54; Foner, *History*, 333-34, 348-49; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 244; Cole, *Immigrant City*, 187-88; Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 150-51.

²⁵ James J. Kenneally, "Catholic Clerical Quandry: The Lawrence Strike of 1912," *American Catholic Studies* 117, no. 4 (2006): 33-54; Foner, *History*, 333-34; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 244; Cole, *Immigrant City*, 187-88.

concerted efforts to “not discuss religion and warned all speakers, regardless of their personal views, not to offend the religious feelings of the people.”²⁶ In hindsight, this was indeed a correct attitude, because once the accusations of the anti-religious character was used against the Wobblies in September 1912, it led to the IWW’s undoing in Lawrence. The highly publicized incident involved a banner “No God! No Master!,” which was unfurled by a group of Boston anarchists who arrived in Lawrence for an IWW-sponsored parade showing support for Ettor and Giovannitti, whose trial had just commenced. The anti-IWW forces seized the opportunity to portray the Wobblies as unpatriotic and Godless and responded with a counter rally for “God and Country.” Elizabeth Gurley Flynn concluded: “Disunity spread over the banner episode. It was a terrible climax to a great victory.”²⁷

The victory in Lawrence reverberated all over New England, and in its wake Massachusetts “was ablaze with strikes,” most of them affecting the textile industry.²⁸ About 16,000 workers struck in Lowell and 25,000 in New Bedford. Gurley Flynn wrote about those strikes, explaining that although they were short in duration and less publicized, “They were an aftermath of Lawrence and meant that thousands of workers had been encouraged and inspired by its example.”²⁹ According to Dubofsky, the Lawrence settlement:

failed to bring peace or sense of security [to New England]. . . . An uneasy fear lingered. The IWW remained in Lawrence, and to mill owners, public officials, and federal investigators that labor organization seemed to be the spearhead for a threatened social revolution. Textile industry employers throughout New England raised wages—partly in fear of the IWW, partly to arrest further industrial conflict, and partly to remove the possibility of social revolution.³⁰

By the beginning of April 1912, over a quarter million textile workers in New England had won wage increases.³¹ When the wage increases did not materialize, textile workers walked out, calling on either the IWW or UTW to assist them.

WILLIMANTIC’S IMMIGRANT WORKING CLASS

Willimantic’s advantage has always been its location on the swift Willimantic River, whose rapids became a source of electric power and facilitated Willimantic’s development in the early nineteenth century as a textile manufacturing center, producing first silk and then also cotton textiles. Since the 1840s, Willimantic had become an important railroad junction on the route running from Boston and Providence, through New London and Hartford, to New York, connecting the town to the movement of investment capital, products, and labor force. During the Civil

²⁶ Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 150.

²⁷ Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 150-51; Foner, *History*, 348-49.

²⁸ The 1912 strikes in Passaic woolen and worsted mills and the 1911-12 strike in Patterson silk mills did not, however, bring victories to those workers. Goldberg, *A Tale*, 31-36; 60-61.

²⁹ Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 143.

³⁰ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 147.

³¹ Foner, *History*, 343. Cole adds that “throughout New England wages went up so fast that 1912 became a banner year for the textile workers.” Cole, *Immigrant City*, 183.

War, the textile industry boomed and Willimantic quickly became a leading textile manufacturing center in Connecticut. The town’s largest employer was the cotton producing American Linen Company, located in town since the 1850s, and in 1898 absorbed by the American Thread Company (ATCO), which eventually gave Willimantic its nickname the Thread City. At the turn of the twentieth century, the town also had several silk mills and other light manufacturers.³²

From 1880 to 1910, the town’s population doubled from about six thousand to nearly twelve thousand residents.³³ Since the mid-nineteenth century, the English, Scots, Germans, Swedes, as well as substantial groups of the Irish and the French Canadians, found employment in Willimantic’s mills and on the railroads. Starting at the turn of the century, Poles, Italians, Syrians, Jews, and Russians settled in Willimantic, while the French Canadians continued to arrive in town. According to the 1910 census, 31.5 percent of Willimantic’s population was foreign-born, and many of the residents who had been born in one of the New England states or in New York had either one or both parents who were born abroad. The Irish, once the most dominant immigrant group in town, became outnumbered by the more numerous French Canadians in 1900. Ten years later, French Canadians constituted about 45 percent of foreign-born, the Irish over 15 percent, with the Poles in third place. The 1910 U.S. Census showed that Willimantic was truly a multi-ethnic town and a home to Syrians, Jews, Italians, Scots, Hungarians, Germans, French Canadians, English, Greeks, Swedes, Russians, as well as small numbers of immigrants from Belgium, Denmark, Azores, China, Egypt, Finland, Holland, India, and Switzerland.³⁴ The immigrants established their own communities in town, complete with lay mutual-aid organizations, churches and parish associations, a synagogue, and parish and Saturday schools. While the overwhelming majority of jobs were provided by the textile industry and the railroads, the upwardly mobile immigrants established their small businesses, which also gave employment to their country men and women, and served their communities.³⁵

³² Thomas R. Beardsley, “Willimantic: Textile City,” *Connecticut History* 42 (Fall 2003): 97-120.

³³ U.S. Census, 1880, 1910.

³⁴ U.S. Census, 1910.

³⁵ Beardsley, *Willimantic*, provides a solid history of the industry, while paying less attention to the experience of ethnic groups in town (other than the Irish in the post-Civil War period). The interviews included in the book attest, however, to the fact that Willimantic has been a vibrant immigrant town. A comprehensive study on immigration to Connecticut is still missing. For an earlier period, see Samuel Koenig, *Immigrant Settlements in Connecticut: Their Growth and Characteristics* (Hartford: Connecticut State Department of Education, 1938), brief histories of various immigrant groups in the New England region can also be found in *The Encyclopedia of New England*, ed. Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters, forward by Donald Hall (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). A brief article by Bruce M. Stave, “Coming to Connecticut: Immigrants in the Land of Unsteady Habits,” *Connecticut History* 49 (Fall 2010): 201-11, also barely scratches the surface. Oral history projects provide valuable primary materials for future researchers; see for example Bruce M. Stave, and John F. Sutherland with Aldo Salerno, *From the Old Country: An Oral History of European Migration to America* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994).

The three main ethnic groups involved in the 1912 strikes in Willimantic were Poles, French Canadians, and Syrians. The French Canadians had begun to arrive in town after the Civil War, but their ranks increased particularly since the 1880s, with the greatest influx in the first decades of the twentieth century. They were a part of the wave of French Canadian labor migrants who by the beginning of the twentieth century settled in New England and numbered close to half a million; French Canadians constituted 46 percent of labor force in cotton textiles in the region.³⁶ The "Little Canadas" which the French Canadian immigrants formed in many towns were centered on Roman Catholic parishes, and were mostly socially and culturally self-reliant. The French Canadian leaders, both lay and clerical, espoused the ideology of *la survivance*, or protection and continuation of French Canadian faith, language, and culture. To the workers this often meant loyalty to one's family, community, and church, which they had already learned while struggling against the Protestant British rule and dealing with the harsh economic reality of Quebec.³⁷ In Connecticut, larger communities of French Canadians existed in Putnam, Norwich-Taftville, Bristol, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, Meriden, Thompsonville, Willimantic, and Waterbury, among others.³⁸

The 1910 census for Willimantic listed over three thousand persons either born in French Canada or from French Canadian parents.³⁹ Initially, the French Canadians worshipped at St. Joseph's, a mostly Irish church established in the 1850s, but as their numbers grew, they built their own church. In 1905, St. Mary's received a designation as a nationality parish, with services in French. A parish school was also soon established. Like in other Little Canadas, the life of the Willimantic's French Canadian community revolved around the parish and its organizations; a local branch

³⁶ Gary Gerstle, *Working Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 21-22.

³⁷ On the general history of French Canadian immigrants see, for example, Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move: French-Canadian and Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1860-1914* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991); idem, *Crossing the 49th Parallel: Migration from Canada to the United States, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); *French America: Mobility, Identity, and Minority Experience Across the Continent*, ed. Dean R. Louder, and Eric Waddell (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

³⁸ For more on the history of French Canadians in New England, see Yves Roby, *The Franco-Americans of New England: Dreams and Realities* (Septentrion, 2000); Gerard J. Brault, *The French-Canadian Heritage in New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1986); Brigitte Lane, *Franco-American Folk Traditions and Popular Culture in a Former Milltown: Aspects of Ethnic Urban Folklore and the Dynamics of Folklore Change in Lowell, Massachusetts* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990); Yukari Takai, *Gendered Passages: French-Canadian Migration to Lowell, Massachusetts, 1900-1920* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Dyke Hendrickson, *Quiet Presence: Dramatic, First-Person Accounts - The True Stories of Franco-Americans in New England* (Portland, ME: Guy Gannett Publishing, 1980). For French Canadians in Connecticut, see Gregoire J. Fluet, *From French Canadian to Franco American: Cultural Survival and Reinvention of Nationality in a Connecticut Yankee Town, 1855-1895* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 2005); Rene L. Dugas, *The French Canadians in New England, 1871-1930, Taftville, (the early years)* (Taftville, CT: by the author, 1995).

³⁹ U.S. Census, 1910.

of the St. Jean Baptiste Society, formed in Willimantic in 1880, and Ladies of Saint Anne Society, formed in 1895, played a major role.⁴⁰

French Canadians were mostly textile workers and the American Thread Company became their main employer in town. French Canadians developed a reputation as hard workers, who, however, avoided participation in labor protests; at times they were even used as strike breakers. Historians have long debated why so few French Canadians engaged in the labor movement, at least in the early decades of the twentieth century. As historian Gary Gerstle explains, the French Canadian reluctance to support the unions could be understood within the framework of general hostility by the immigrants to any organizations associated with Anglo-American culture, including the Irish-dominated unions, as well as by the ethnic hostility directed at them by those union leaders. The most important factor remained, however, the anti-union position of the Catholic Church holding a major influence within the French Canadian communities. French Canadian immigrants did engage in disputes within the Catholic Church, demanding their rights and challenging the hierarchy for the recognition of their cultural needs, but in regards to the labor issues, they followed the teachings of their priests and remained generally distant from labor militancy.⁴¹

Poles began arriving in Willimantic in significant numbers only after the beginning of the twentieth century, although their communities in Connecticut dated back to the 1880s. Large Polish communities were formed in Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwich, Rockville, Stamford, Waterbury, and many other locations. Eventually twenty-four Roman Catholic parishes in Connecticut were designated as Polish, and in addition nine parishes were established by the Polish National Catholic Church in Connecticut.⁴² In Willimantic, Polish immigrants attended St. Joseph's church together with the Irish and the Italians. Unlike in other communities in Connecticut, Poles in Willimantic were unable to form their own nationality parish, perhaps because the more numerous French Canadians beat them to it. The Polish community was, how-

⁴⁰ Robert M. Sweeney and Arnold Dashefsky, "Changes in Motivation for Ethnic Identification: An Analysis of Organizations in French Canadian Community of Willimantic, Connecticut," *Ethnic Groups* 8 (1990): 267-280.

⁴¹ Gary Gerstle, *Working Class Americanism*, 38-41. On French Canadians and the Catholic church in Connecticut, see Dolores Ann Liptak, *European Immigrants and the Catholic Church in Connecticut, 1870-1920* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1987); idem, *Immigrants and Their Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1989).

⁴² For more on the history of Polish immigration to Connecticut, see Stanislaus A. Blejwas and Lynda Slominski, *The Poles: In Their Homeland, in America, in Connecticut*. The Peoples of Connecticut Multicultural Ethnic Heritage Studies Series, Number Six (Storrs: University of Connecticut, 1979); Stanislaus A. Blejwas, *St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Bristol, CT: 75th Anniversary, 1919-1994* (New Britain: Art Press, 1994); idem, *Hartford's Polonia* (1976); idem, ed., *Pastor of the Poles: Polish American Essays* (New Britain: CCSU, 1982); idem, *St. Stanislaus B. and M. Parish: Meriden, Connecticut: A Century of Connecticut Polonia, 1891-1991* (New Britain: CCSU, 1991); Rev. Boleslaw S. Kumor, SS, *Cyril and Methodius Parish and the Hartford Polonia, 1873-1980* (1985); idem, *Dzieje Parafii Sw. Jozefa, Norwich, CT* (Norwich, CT: n.p., 1980); idem, *Dzieje Parafii Sw. Krzyza, New Britain, CT* (1977).

ever, organizing and building its internal structure; in 1907, Polish immigrants formed the St. Joseph's Society, their first mutual aid organization, and in 1911, the Tadeusz Kościuszko Naturalization Club, which aspired to help the immigrants obtain American citizenship as well as protect and advance their rights. The 1910 census showed that over six hundred Willimantic residents were born in Poland, and the community kept growing both through natural birth and further labor migration. A majority of Poles were employed at ATCO, with a few starting their own small businesses, such as bakeries.⁴³

Although Poles were largely Roman Catholic and the structure of their communities, not unlike those of French Canadians, relied on the parish organizations, the Polish immigrant workers actively participated in—and sometimes led—strikes in many industrial centers all over the United States. For example, in the period from 1900 and through World War I, they were an important part of strikes in Brooklyn, Chicago, Lawrence, and Bayonne.⁴⁴ In 1912, in New York Mills, NY, mostly Polish textile workers formed a local of UTW and in March 1912 led a successful strike, which involved about 1,400 Polish-speaking and smaller contingents of Italian, Syrian, and French workers.⁴⁵

The IWW made enough inroads among Polish Americans that since 1907, it started publication of its literature in Polish. Several IWW locals with mostly Polish membership were established in the cities of Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Buffalo, St. Louis, and Minneapolis, as well as locations on the East Coast, including in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. An official organ of the Polish members of IWW, *Solidarność* (Solidarity), appeared intermittently, published first in Buffalo and then in Chicago.⁴⁶ In Connecticut, Polish workers formed their own branch in IWW Local 203, and Polish IWW organizers were active during several strikes in 1912.⁴⁷

According to the U.S. Census records, in 1910 in Willimantic there were already more than one hundred individuals identified as born in Syria.⁴⁸ Although the contemporary sources identified them as Syrians, and this term has been generally employed by historians of the period, most immigrants who arrived in New England were actually Syrian Lebanese, as Lebanon was then a part of geographical Syria,

⁴³ U.S. Census, 1900, 1910; Anna D. Jaroszynska-Kirchmann and Janice Knudsen, "The Polish Past in Windham and Willimantic," an exhibit at the Windham Textile and History Museum, Willimantic, 2011.

⁴⁴ John J. Bukowczyk, *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of Polish-Americans* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 30; Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans, 1954-1939* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1977), 11-126. The most comprehensive study on Polish workers in labor movement in the United States remains Adam Walaszek, *Polscy robotnicy, praca i związki zawodowe w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki, 1880-1922* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988).

⁴⁵ James S. Pula and Eugene E. Dziedzic, *United We Stand: The Role of Polish Workers in the New York Mills Strikes, 1912 and 1916* (New York: East European Monographs: 1990), 66.

⁴⁶ Adam Walaszek, "Polish Immigrants among the Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917," in *In the European Grain: American Studies from Central and Eastern Europe*, vol. 19, ed. Orm Overland (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990): 119-22.

⁴⁷ Thornton, *A Shoeleather History*, 59-62, 147.

⁴⁸ U.S. Census, 1910.

which was in turn part of the Ottoman empire. By World War I, close to 150,000 of Syrian immigrants had entered the United States and settled in many industrial centers.⁴⁹ On the East Coast, larger Syrian communities were formed in New York; Paterson, New Jersey; Boston and Lawrence, Massachusetts; Central Falls, Rhode Island; and Danbury, Connecticut.⁵⁰ Initially most immigrants undertook industrial occupations, but soon some of them found a vehicle to social mobility through peddling and commerce. The history of the working experience of Syrians in the textile industry has so far received less attention.⁵¹ In Willimantic, Syrian textile workers held skilled positions such as spoolers, weavers, doffers, twistors, and spinners; some of them might have had previous experience with textile production, particularly silk, prior to their emigration. Other Syrians engaged in peddling or operated dry goods and confectionary stores in Windham.⁵²

The diverse immigrant communities which were the heart of the working class in Willimantic at the turn of the century shared the economic fortunes and misfortunes of the textile industry. Since none of the ethnic groups in town established their own newspapers, the local daily *Willimantic Chronicle* became the main source of information on local events and developments in the entire region. In the first months of 1912, news from the strike in Lawrence occupied the front pages of both the *Willimantic Chronicle* and the *Hartford Courant*. By the early spring of 1912, the coverage turned to the dramatic events in town.

STRIKE AT THE QUIDNICK-WINDHAM MANUFACTURING COMPANY, APRIL, 1912

Willimantic indeed managed to avoid the major labor tensions which pervaded various American industries at the turn of the century. In 1894 and 1895, two larger strikes took place in the Natchaug Silk Company in town.⁵³ The 1911 *Connecticut Labor Bulletin* issued by the Bureau of Labor Statistics listed nine craft unions active in Willimantic; only one of them, the Spooler's Union, was directly connected to textile work.⁵⁴ In that year, which witnessed thirty-four strikes in Connecticut, only

⁴⁹ Sarah Gualtier, "Becoming 'White': Race, Religion and the Foundations of Syrian/Lebanese Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20 (Summer 2001), 30.

⁵⁰ Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 82-83. For more on the early history of Syrians in America, see Sarah M. A. Gualtier, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States before 1940*, ed. Eric J. Hooglund (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987).

⁵¹ On the experience of peddlers, see Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985). On the textile industry, see Matthew Jaber Stiffler, "A Brief History of Arab Immigrant Textile Production in the U.S.," <http://www.arabamericanmuseum.org/history.of.arab.immigrant.textile.production>.

⁵² U.S. Census, 1910.

⁵³ Beardsley, *Willimantic*, 69-71.

⁵⁴ They included: Bartenders' Union; Bricklayers', Masons', and Plasterers' Union; Building Trades Council; Carpenters' Union; Central Labor Union; Musicians' Union; Painters' Union; Plumbers' Union;

one took place in Willimantic, but it was not connected to the textile industry; in June 1911, about fifty track laborers struck against the railroad company demanding higher wages. After seven days, that strike folded without success.⁵⁵

Things were going to change when on Monday, April 22, 1912, two brief walk-outs, first by doffers and then ring spinners and warpers, took place at the Quidnick-Windham Manufacturing Company, which produced cotton in the mills on Bridge Street in Willimantic.⁵⁶ According to the coverage in the *Chronicle*, the workers protested the fact that they had not received agreed-upon pay raises, a consequence of the general pay increases in New England following the Lawrence strike. The next day, after the weavers had also joined the strike, the entire work force of Quidnick-Windham walked out in solidarity, demanding a ten percent raise and elimination of unpaid twenty minutes overtime which they were forced to work each day. *The Chronicle* reported the enthusiasm and self-reliance of the strikers, emphasizing the spontaneity of the action and the absence of the union: "It was a jolly crowd of men, women and boys. They were not in the power of any labor agitator or organizer but did their own business."⁵⁷ The strikers managed to secure the use of the town hall for their meetings. Some of their speakers pointed out that "all over New England, cotton operatives had been getting a ten percent raise and there was no reason why the Quidnick-Windham company should not use its help the same way." Two days of hall meetings and negotiations with agent W. B. Knight followed. The workers were faced with the difficult task of reconciling the demands of different trade groups, because weavers, doffers, spinners, and carders were each paid according to different scales and thus called for different concessions. By the end of the day on Wednesday, April 24, however, the strike had been settled and all employees did receive a ten percent increase in wages.⁵⁸ The Quidnick-Windham workers' victory no doubt inspired the actions of other workers in town.

STRIKE AT THE AMERICAN THREAD COMPANY, APRIL 1912

On April 26, 1912, two days after the successful settlement of the Quidnick-Windham strike, eight hundred workers walked out of the American Thread Company (ATCO), the largest employer in town. The majority of workers at ATCO were of "foreign stock," and were usually identified in the local press as French Canadians, Poles, English, or Russians, although this last category might have referred to Poles who came from the Russian partition of Poland.⁵⁹ The walkout was the largest

Plumbers'. Steam and Gas Fitters' Union; and Spoolers' Union. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Connecticut Labor Bulletin* (Hartford, 1911), 22.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁶ On the history of the company see Beardsley, *Willimantic*, 9-14.

⁵⁷ *Chronicle*, 23 April 1912, p. 1.

⁵⁸ *Chronicle*, 24 April 1912, p. 1. The *Chronicle* articles do not mention the presence of IWW in town at that point, although Thornton seems to suggest that the union sent out Benjamin Legere from Bridgeport. Thornton, *Shoelather History*, 56.

⁵⁹ Most Poles who came to Willimantic hailed from Galicia, or the Austrian partition of Poland. The 1910 U.S. Census listed only twenty-four individuals who gave Russian as their language.

action of this type, both at ATCO and in town. ATCO employed about 2500 people and, according to some estimates, reported profits of \$900,000 at the beginning of 1912.⁶⁰ The tensions at ATCO had already begun in December 1911, when the company laid off several dozen workers right before Christmas.⁶¹ Now the strikers cited the company's failure to grant a promised ten percent increase in wages; after the employees had received their pay envelopes, they discovered that their wages grew only between two and nine percent. Pay raise inequalities particularly affected French Canadian and Polish workers in the manufacturing department: spinners, doffers, ring spoolers, and carders. Polish workers were reportedly the first ones to walk out.⁶² The strike of the manufacturing department made it eventually impossible for the remaining seven hundred employees to continue work.⁶³

The strikers gathered for a meeting at the corner of Chapman and Ives streets, in the heart of the multiethnic working-class community. Speakers spoke in Polish and French. According to the *Chronicle*, the majority of workers were not organized and the strike had a spontaneous character. Only the spool tenders belonged to the UTW, which had helped them settle problems with the management a few years before. Now the spoolers, also dissatisfied with their pay, dispatched a telegram to John Golden requesting that he comes to Willimantic to represent them.⁶⁴

By the next day, about 1500 people employed at ATCO were already on strike, demanding a flat ten percent raise. The immigrant character of the ATCO working class became most evident during the town hall meeting of the strikers, which featured speeches in English, French, and Polish. Despite general enthusiasm, no official delegation had yet been sent to Eugene S. Boss, an agent at ATCO.⁶⁵ Later that day, organizers from both AFL and IWW arrived in town and spoke at the meetings. The two AFL organizers were John J. Cunningham, and Joseph Tyloff (Tylkoff), a Polish-speaking organizer from New York; Joseph Tyloff was active as a union organizer from UTW during the successful New York Mills strike led by the Polish textile workers in March and April, 1912. An IWW representative by the name of Loigeo (the name might be misspelled) also spoke to the strikers, and recalling the victory in Lawrence, appealed for workers' unity.⁶⁶ The arrival of the two competing union organizers marked the beginning of the period of struggle between UTW and IWW in Willimantic, which was to last throughout the summer.

⁶⁰ "American Thread Co. Must Pay Income Tax." *Chronicle*, 9 February 1912, p. 1.

⁶¹ "Thread Co. Lays off Thirty Hands." *Hartford Courant*, 23 December 1911, p. 16.

⁶² "Hundreds Struck;" "Thread Company Workers on Strike." *Hartford Courant*, 27 April 1912, p. 20; "Hundreds Struck This Afternoon at Thread Plant," *Chronicle*, 26 April 1912, p. 1.

⁶³ "Hundreds Struck This Afternoon at Thread Plant," *Hartford Courant*, 26 April 1912, p. 1.

⁶⁴ "Hundreds Struck This Afternoon at Thread Plant," *Chronicle*, 26 April 1912, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Eugene Stowell Boss was a Commissary General of the Connecticut National Guard, and was customarily referred to as General Boss. Before becoming the agent for ATCO, Boss had risen through the company ranks, being employed, among others, as a book keeper. Boss, a Willimantic native, died in Willimantic at the age of 87 in 1920, after working for ATCO for fifty-eight years. Beardsley, *Willimantic*, 26; obituary at http://distantcousin.com/Obits/NY/1900/1920/Jan/11/Boss_Eugene_S.html.

⁶⁶ "Two Mills of the Thread Company Are Closed Today," *Chronicle*, 27 April 1912, p. 1; Pula, *United We Stand*, 94-95.

The next day, on Sunday April 28, IWW's Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of the recent Lawrence fame also arrived in Willimantic to address the strikers. It was her first, but not last, appearance in town. The *Chronicle* described her: "She is a young woman and has great ability as a speaker. She spoke at length and had the people with her." Gurley Flynn wasted no time drawing distinctions between the two unions and bringing up the lessons of the Lawrence strike. She openly criticized the UTW and directly attacked John Golden "and the way he did business."⁶⁷

The presence of IWW in town began to cause "considerable uneasiness." The *Chronicle* commented: "In all justice to the speakers of this organization up to the present time they have not said anything to start any violence. They have all advocated refraining from violence. All they have told the strikers is to stick together and in that way they would win out."⁶⁸ At this stage of the strike, when the majority of workers at ATCO were not affiliated with any union, it was still unclear who would claim the leadership role, but the support for IWW began to grow. On the morning of April 29, 1912, the mule spinners, who wanted to join the UTW, considered ending the strike but "were informed that it would not be for their best interest to go back to work."⁶⁹ Echoing the strategies employed in Lawrence, IWW led more mass meetings, with speeches in Polish, French, Syrian, and English. At the same time, the strike committee continued to negotiate with General Eugene Boss, who finally agreed to a flat ten percent increase in wages. On April 30, 1912, ATCO employees returned to work, finishing what the *Chronicle* called the strike "of short duration and exceedingly orderly."⁷⁰

The ATCO strike, like the Quidnick-Windham strike before it, was mostly spontaneous and not led by any particular union, although organizers from both IWW and UTW arrived in town after its outbreak. Throughout both strikes, the immigrant workers displayed inter-ethnic solidarity, which did not fracture along the skilled-unskilled lines. Mayor Daniel P. Dunn and the board of selectmen, who made the town hall available for the strike meetings, showed restraint and a relatively friendly attitude towards the workers' demands. ATCO agent Eugene S. Boss was also responsive to the strike committee's demands.⁷¹ An editorial in the *Chronicle* struck a self-congratulatory note when it concluded: "The manufacturers of this city are to be congratulated for their alertness and promptness in meeting the situation and settling the difficulty."⁷² In the shadow cast by the Lawrence events, Willimantic was ready to support workers' demands as long as it meant preventing the spread of IWW

⁶⁷ "Strikers Held Big Mass Meeting at the Town Hall," *Chronicle*, 29 April 1912, p. 1.

⁶⁸ The only reported disturbance was a fight between two intoxicated Polish workers over one calling another's wife a scab. "Strikers Held Big Mass Meeting at the Town Hall," *Chronicle*, 29 April 1912, p. 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁰ "The Strikers All Returned to Work," *Chronicle*, 30 April 1912, p. 1; "Thread Company Grants Increase," *Hartford Courant*, 30 April 1912, p. 18.

⁷¹ *Chronicle*, 29 April, 30 April 1912.

⁷² "Our Recent Strikes," *Chronicle*, 1 May 1912, p. 2.

influence in town. The self-congratulatory tone might have been, however, premature. Willimantic was headed for a long spring and summer of labor troubles.

WINDHAM SILK STRIKES – MAY-AUGUST, 1912; SEPTEMBER 1912

On May 1, 1912, the weavers at the Windham Silk Company demanded a fifteen percent pay raise, which was higher than the ten percent called for in other textile factories of the region.⁷³ Many of the silk weavers employed at Windham were Syrian immigrants, who might have had previous experience in silk weaving, which was considered a skilled occupation. As the mill officials turned down their demand, the Windham Silk Company workers' committee called on John J. Cunningham, a representative of John Golden. The weavers belonged to the UTW and Golden had been previously involved in "adjusting differences between the weavers and the company" in Willimantic.⁷⁴ John Golden and UTW quickly obliged and took charge of the negotiations between the weavers and Windham Silk. However, instead of securing a quick settlement like the ones achieved at Quidnick-Windham and ATCO, when Golden presented the weavers' demands to President Frank Larrabee and General Manager Charles Fenton, the mill's management refused to grant any concessions, leaving Golden empty-handed.⁷⁵ The second round of discussions between Golden and the bosses brought no resolution either, so on May 6, the silk weavers announced a strike. John Golden and his representatives John J. Cunningham and Sarah A. Conboy (or Conway) were to take charge of the strike and represent the workers.⁷⁶

The bosses at Windham Silk were clearly determined to break the strike. They announced that the company had decided to close the mills "for an indefinite period," trying to starve out the strikers. The weavers who were members of the UTW received each week several dollars from the union's strike support fund and many believed that the wealthy company would eventually grant them concessions.⁷⁷ To continue the strike and subsidize the strike fund, on May 31, the silk weavers' UTW local organized a benefit dance at the town hall, with the proceeds going to the strike fund. Over six hundred tickets were sold and people who attended the dance came from as far as Norwich, Taftville, the Windhams, and the state college at Storrs, showing a strong popular support for the strikers' cause.⁷⁸

The strike, however, was going to be prolonged. Weeks passed by without any resolution as Windham Silk remained closed. Finally, on July 2, the *Chronicle* carried a notice that during a meeting held at the office of the Windham Silk Company the directors "unanimously voted to resume operations at their mill as soon as a sufficient corps of operators can be secured." New silk workers were encouraged to

⁷³ For more on the silk industry in Willimantic, see Beardsley, *Willimantic*, 78-85.

⁷⁴ "Silk Company Refuses Request of Its Empl[oy]es [sic]," *Chronicle*, 1 May 1912, p. 1.

⁷⁵ "Silk Weavers Will Vote Regarding a Strike Today," *Chronicle*, 4 May 1912, p. 1.

⁷⁶ "Silk Weavers Refused to Work This Morning," *Chronicle*, May 6, 1912, p. 1.

⁷⁷ "Directors of the Silk company Met Last Night," *Chronicle*, 7 May 1912, p. 1. After a delay, the first checks for strikers arrived on May 17. "Weavers Held Meeting," 17 May 1912, p. 3.

⁷⁸ "Social and Dance of the Silk Weavers," *Chronicle*, 31 May 1912, p. 1.

apply for positions with Superintendent L. A. Nichols.⁷⁹ Nichols carried out the scab recruitment scheme to Norwich, Greeneville, and New London. He was accompanied on this errand by Joseph Ferris, a Syrian former weaver at the plant who together with his father Rezuek and his brother George had previously publicly criticized and repudiated the strike.⁸⁰ Nichols apparently offered potential strikebreakers eighteen dollars a week and protection from violence. Rumor had it that, despite the weavers' warnings that scabs would not be welcomed in Willimantic, the company had managed to secure twenty-five Syrian and fifteen Greek weavers to come to town.⁸¹ The strikers delivered on their warnings; when the first few Syrians arrived by train in Willimantic, they were met by their countrymen and quickly convinced to leave peacefully, which they did.⁸²

The Syrian community also apparently dealt with the Ferrises. Joseph Ferris promptly disavowed any association with Nichols and scab recruitment, stating that he only accidentally ran into Nichols in Norwich, while he was there to buy produce for his family grocery store. His father Rezuek Ferris was moved to write an open letter to the *Chronicle* asking that the constant picketing in front of his fruit and tobacco store finally end and promising that none of the Ferrises would ever be seeking any further employment in the mills.⁸³ At that point nobody could predict that the problem with the Ferrises was not over and was to return with gusto at a later date.

On July 13, the strike committee again met with the directors of the company to discuss the situation, but rejected the company's offer of a five percent raise.⁸⁴ John Golden proposed a compromise of ten percent instead of the previously demanded fifteen percent raise, but the bosses dug in their heels.⁸⁵ Following some more rounds of negotiations, the strike was finally settled on August 2, 1912, when the Windham Silk Company, already a few weeks behind on the production of fall goods, agreed to the pay increase of seven and a half percent—precisely half of the original demand of the strikers. The raise was going to benefit not only the weavers, but all employees at Windham Silk. Moreover, the management also agreed to recognize the union. The *Chronicle*, a voice of Yankee middle class and mill owners in town, editorialized:

⁷⁹ *Chronicle*, 2 July 1912, p. 5.

⁸⁰ "Weavers Held Meeting," *Chronicle*, 17 May 1912, p. 3. According to the 1910 Census, Ferris Rezuke (in the *Chronicle* often as Rezuek), then age 41, was a Syrian born in Egypt, and a spooler. He lived with his wife Mary Rezuke and his then 18-year-old son Joseph on Broad Street in Willimantic. It seems that names Ferris and Rezuke were used interchangeably, as surnames, and that Joseph eventually adopted the surname Ferris.

⁸¹ "Silk Company Offering \$18 a Week to Strike Breakers," *Chronicle*, 8 July 1912, p. 1.

⁸² "Strike Breakers Arrived Here but Departed at Once," *Chronicle*, 9 July 1912, p. 1.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ "Strikers Refuse the Offer of the Silk Company," *Chronicle*, July 15, 1912, p. 1.

⁸⁵ "John Golden Met Silk Co. Officials," *Chronicle*, July 19, 1912, p. 1; "John Golden Talks on Strike Situation," *Chronicle*, July 27, 1912, p. 1.

Great credit is due the weavers of the Windham Silk Company for the orderly manner in which they conducted their strike. Each and every one of them behaved in the most gentlemanly manner and there was not the slightest thing which would bring about discredit on the men. They won the respect of the people by their actions and they also won the people's sympathy by the way in which they conducted their fight with the silk company. They agreed to a compromise and now the whole matter is over.⁸⁶

Although the hope was for industrial peace, the praise was obviously reserved for the UTW, a more acceptable alternative to the IWW. The UTW workers, however, were quite determined to defend their control over their working conditions. On September 23, about eighty weavers, winders, and pickers walked out again at Windham Silk, claiming that they would not work with Joseph Ferris, to whom the mill managers had given a job in the meantime. The workers were angered that Ferris was to benefit from what he did not fight for and demanded that Ferris be discharged for his involvement in scab recruitment during the summer strike. When, despite the mill official's promise to respect their demand, Ferris was still at his loom, the workers voted to strike. The firing of Ferris was their only demand. Perhaps expecting a longer fight, the UTW dispatched John Golden to Willimantic to meet with the strikers on the same evening, but Windham Silk's president Larrabee was not ready for another confrontation and swiftly discharged Ferris from the employment at the mill. The next day, on September 24, 1912, all of the workers returned to work.⁸⁷

LABOR UNION COMPETITION: IWW AND UTW, SPRING-SUMMER 1912

The spring strikes in Willimantic quickly attracted the attention of labor organizers from IWW as well as UTW and AFL. Initially representatives of the unions arrived in town to take control of the strikes, but after the strikes' resolution, they remained to organize the workers and establish permanent union locals. The period of the most intense competition followed the conclusion of the Quidnick-Windham and ATCO strikes, and coincided with the beginning of the Windham Silk strike in May 1912.

On May 1, the IWW held a mass meeting in the Armory on Valley Street. The meeting, which featured many important speakers, was to set the stage for the future of the IWW in town. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Benjamin J. Leger of Bridgeport, who was an editor of the IWW newspaper *Industrial Socialist*, spoke in English. A Syrian organizer Michael Saadeck and the French Canadian organizer August Detolnenaue of Lawrence, Massachusetts, gave speeches in their respective languages, while Jan Smit of Detroit (elsewhere as John Smith), a Polish IWW organizer, spoke in Polish.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ "The Strike at the Windham Silk Co. Settled Last Night," *Chronicle*, 3 August 1912, p. 1.

⁸⁷ "Another Strike at the Windham Silk Co. Today," *Chronicle*, 23 September 1912, p. 1; "Windham Silk Co. Strike Is Settled," *Chronicle*, 24 September 1912, p. 1. The 1920 Census shows no sign of the Ferris/Rezuke family in Willimantic.

⁸⁸ "Mass Meeting Held in the Armory on Valley Street," *Chronicle*, 2 May 1912, p. 1; "Labor Men Clash in Willimantic," *Hartford Courant*, 1 May 1912, 20.

It was the second appearance of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in Willimantic. The *Chronicle* described her as "the pretty 21 year old" who gave a spirited speech. Recognizing the accomplishments of the successfully concluded strike at ATCO, Gurley Flynn reportedly said: "On this beautiful May Day you operatives of the American Thread Company have much to be thankful for. You have won a moral as well as a labor victory in your strike for better wages and conditions. May 1 is recognized all over industrial Europe as the real labor day. By your action you have added a new spirit of independence to your lives." She also added that "the day was coming when there would be an eight hour working day and a \$3 daily wage for the textile worker." She then painted a vision of the better world to come:

The real cause of broken homes will be cured. Little children can attend the schools instead of stunting their lives in the mills. Mothers will have a chance to perform what the Almighty allotted them, the care of the homes instead of trying to eke out an existence under present conditions. The bread-winner, the father, will then perform the work and the homes will be more like heaven and there will be a contented lot of people.⁸⁹

Gurley Flynn then urged the establishment of an IWW local in town. As it was done in Lawrence, Gurley Flynn acknowledged the need for the participation and leadership coming from different immigrant groups, "French, Polish, Italian and Polish speaking people" who would be represented in a central committee. Concluding her speech, she "trained her guns on John Golden," criticizing him for making false statements and splitting the labor movement.

Editor Legere, who was to remain in town and watch over the organization of the IWW local, warned about rumors that ATCO "contemplated laying off over 200 Polish operatives in the very near future." "Show the company that you mean business," he encouraged the workers. Those gathered also adopted a resolution supporting Ettor and Giovanitti, the two imprisoned leaders of the Lawrence strike, and pledging that if they were not released and cleared of charges, workers in Willimantic would "unite with all other mill workers in New England and in the country to bring about a great general strike until they and all other imprisoned mill workers are set free." By the end of the rally reportedly nearly 600 operatives joined IWW and paid twenty-five cents initiation fee.⁹⁰ This obvious success of IWW was, however, quickly matched by the UTW, when the very next day John J. Cunningham organized mule spinners at both ATCO and Quidnick-Windham Manufacturing Company.⁹¹ Willimantic was suddenly becoming a union city.

The May Day IWW rally in Willimantic might have been, however, the highest point of the Wobblies' popularity in town, as well as of workers' solidarity. Since that moment the working class coalition, which had succeeded in winning two

⁸⁹ "Mass Meeting Held in the Armory on Valley Street," *Chronicle*, 2 May 1912, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid. See also Thornton, *Shoelather History*, 105-09; for Legere's brief biography, see idem., 130-34.

⁹¹ "Mule Spinners Organized last Night," *Chronicle*, 3 May 1912, p. 1; "Spoolers Dissatisfied," *Hartford Courant*, 1 May 1912, p. 8.

strikes, began to fracture. The old tactic of *divide et impera*, in the past consistently employed by business owners to divide and control the immigrant work force, was this time to be utilized also by the two competing labor unions, which seemed to focus most of their energy on fighting each other.

The *Chronicle* articles which appeared during the strike at ATCO particularly emphasized the Polish immigrants' receptiveness to the idea of unionism and their positive response to the Polish-speaking activists who came to town. For example, the *Chronicle* reporter noted great eagerness of Poles when Joseph Tyloff, an UTW organizer, addressed the crowds in the Polish language. In response to this speech, "The Polish people were very enthusiastic in [loud] demonstrations every few minutes. The men and women applauded and cheered the speaker. He [Tyloff] was from all appearances [considerable?] of a speaker and had his audience with him."⁹² Apparently impressed with the crowd's reaction, the reporter further commented:

One noticeable feature of the meeting was the way in which the strikers listened to addresses in tongues foreign to their own. When the men made their speeches in English the Polish people sat still and as attentive as though it was in their own tongue. Then when the Polish speakers delivered their appeals strikers who could not understand the language of the speaker kept their places in the hall. There was a great deal of cheering and it could be heard all over the building.⁹³

The *Chronicle* also considered the solidarity among Polish workers:

The Polish people on account of their very economical way of living have in most instances a little money saved and as they have undergone considerable persecution in their native land have come to stand by each other whenever in trouble. In strikes it is said that they are the last to give in. They were among the first to leave their work last Friday afternoon and they are constantly in attendance at the mass meetings.⁹⁴

The immigrant workers were also sensitive to the position of the Catholic clergy towards the labor unrest in Willimantic. Throughout the duration of the Quidnick-Windham and ATCO strikes, clergy of both Catholic parishes refrained from getting involved in the labor issues.⁹⁵ For example, on Sunday, April 28, Rev. Father Mooney, a curate at St. Joseph's church, reportedly refused to address the issue of the strike in front of his Polish parishioners. Rev. J. J. Papillon, pastor of St. Mary's church, also claimed that he did not wish to mix "into the affair," but stated later that "men of course had a right to stand for their rights but they should not use any violence."⁹⁶ The attitude of both parishes was quickly validated by the prompt and peaceful settlement of the strikes.

⁹² "Two Mills of the Thread Company Are Closed Today," *Chronicle*, 27 April 1912, p. 1.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "Strikers Held Big Mass Meeting," *Chronicle*, 29 April 1912, p. 1.

⁹⁵ For comparison, according to some reports, the Catholic clergy in Jewett City, CT, was very outspoken against IWW activities there in May 1912. Thornton, *Shoelather History*, 57-58.

⁹⁶ "Strikers Held Big Mass Meeting," *Chronicle*, 29 April 1912, p. 1.

The situation changed after the above mentioned May Day rally, which celebrated the end of the ATCO strike and announced the establishment of the IWW local in Willimantic. In the speech delivered in Polish, the IWW organizer Jan Smit allegedly condoned the occasional use of violence, such as damaging the machinery, in order to force the management to negotiate. Since Smit spoke in Polish and the only group in the audience who understood him were the Poles, it is unclear how Smit's remarks became known to the French Canadians and others in the audience, or even if Smit had ever called for violence in his speech. For example, in Lawrence the anti-strike coalition repeatedly used provocation and spread rumors to divide the strikers. Nevertheless, from then on, public opinion identified the Polish workers at ATCO as the most supportive of IWW and all its tactics.

On May 3, some French Canadians from the ATCO manufacturing department held a separate meeting, distancing themselves from their Polish co-workers, the IWW, and the idea of violence. According to the *Chronicle* report, they protested publicly "so that the people of the community would learn that they were not in sympathy with such methods."⁹⁷ They discussed relinquishing their membership in IWW, justifying their decision with the arguments about the Catholic hierarchy's opposition to the Industrial Workers of the World. The French Canadian workers even contemplated organizing a separate, independent union for all ATCO employees.⁹⁸ This became exactly the opening for which the UTW had waited; John Cunningham immediately proceeded to strengthen his position with the French Canadians at ATCO, offering to organize them within the UTW.⁹⁹

On Sunday, May 5, both IWW and UTW again held mass meetings in Willimantic; the Wobblies rallied at the Opera House, while the UTW met at the town hall. The *Chronicle* pointedly commented: "Both organizations are fighting for a foothold here."¹⁰⁰ The UTW speakers, one after another, drew stern distinctions between themselves and the Wobblies, depicting the IWW as radical and Godless, given to violence, chaos, corruption, and lies, and ultimately leading its members to failure. Sarah A. Conboy, an organizer for the AFL, said pointedly: "My organization believes in God, country and flag." John Golden refuted the IWW accusations of splitting the working class and added that he was not afraid of IWW, "this wild cat organization," since it was "a good deal like the small pox in this city. We are soon going to get rid of it."¹⁰¹

At exactly the same time, the Wobblies led a rally in the Loomer Opera House with a much larger crowd in attendance, reportedly reaching 500 people. The main speaker again was Editor Benjamin Legere, who defended the record of IWW. He said:

The Industrial Workers of the World do not shake hands with the bosses and never will. This fight for the uplifting of humanity is no pink tea engagement or afternoon party, it's your class against the bosses. Under the present system the bosses do not want to give you a chance for advancement. They do not want you if they can help it, educate yourselves as you should by the reading of the books and other literature on modern economics.¹⁰²

But Legere was also forced to respond to the charges of lack of patriotism. He brought up the incident of trampling on the American flag during the IWW-led May Day demonstration in New York City and explained that it was an unfortunate accident, which was being investigated. He also attacked John Golden and UTW, concluding that craft unions had outlived their usefulness. More importantly, Legere directly responded to the issue of Jan Smit allegedly saying that "violence should be resorted to if mill owners refused to at any time act with the strikers." Legere assured that the "Polish people who were present . . . were ready to testify that Smit made no such remark." The last two speakers at the IWW rally came from Willimantic. Miss Shykrie Swyden, herself a mill employee, spoke to the Syrians, and John Buzskelze (name must be misspelled) spoke to the Poles.¹⁰³

The reactions of pastors of the two Catholic parishes in town proved as important as the speeches at the two competing rallies. On Sunday May 5, priests at both St. Mary's and St. Joseph's broke away from their previous attitude of non-involvement in the workers' struggles. Rev. Mooney of St. Joseph's spoke in Polish to his parishioners during a Polish mass, apparently telling them to terminate their support for the IWW. Protesting the message of his sermon, eleven Poles demonstratively got up from the pews and walked out of St. Joseph's. Although later on, a delegation of other Polish parishioners met with Father Mooney to assure him that not everybody approved of the behavior of the protesters, this unprecedented public demonstration must have further sealed the public opinion about the radicalism of the Poles in Willimantic.¹⁰⁴ At the same time at St. Mary's, Rev. J. J. Papillon read a prepared statement, in which he condemned the IWW's ideology as incompatible with the teachings of the church and warned that "the church has decreed severe punishments against the transgressors of her dogmas."¹⁰⁵ In the light of this pronouncement, his French Canadian parishioners faced a choice of either distancing themselves from IWW or facing consequences from the church that played a central part in their community.

During the following week the union agitation, mass meetings, speeches, marches, as well as occasional gatherings with dances and music continued, attracting hundreds of people. The IWW conducted meetings to organize employees of the Rosie Velvet Company. Like earlier in the year in Lawrence, the IWW organizer

⁹⁷ "National Labor Bodies at War," *Hartford Courant*, 4 May 1912, p. 16.

⁹⁸ "French Employes [sic] of Thread Company Held a Meeting," *Chronicle*, 4 May 1912, p. 1.

⁹⁹ "National Labor Bodies at War," *Hartford Courant*, 4 May 1912, 16.

¹⁰⁰ "Miss S. A. Conboy and John Golden Gave Addresses," *Chronicle*, 6 May 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Indeed, that summer there was a small-pox epidemic in the area.

¹⁰² "Mass Meeting at the Opera House Sunday Afternoon," *Chronicle*, 6 May 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ "Polish People Left the Church During the Services," *Chronicle*, 6 May 1912, p. 1. Rev. John Fleming also preached against IWW at other masses at St. Joseph's.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.; "Willimantic Priests Denounce Labor Unions," *Hartford Courant*, 6 May 1912, 1; "Textile Workers Oppose I.W.W.," *Hartford Courant*, 7 May 1912, 12.

spoke directly to the English, Polish, Syrian and French Canadian workers in their own languages and carried out elections for secretaries and committees among different nationalities.¹⁰⁶ The IWW seemed committed to building its organization in town. The top floor of the McAvoy building on Main Street was rented for the Connecticut and Rhode Island headquarters of IWW, and editor Benjamin J. Legere was to move to Willimantic to publish *The Industrial Socialist* from there.¹⁰⁷ Legere also challenged John Golden to a public debate to take place in Willimantic, and to discuss advantages of industrial unionism over craft unions, but Golden did not accept his challenge.¹⁰⁸ By May 10, national IWW organizer Jean E. Spielman claimed 1,400 IWW members in Willimantic, including 700 Poles, 400 French Canadians, 150 Syrians, and 150 Americans. It is of course impossible to confirm—or refute—any of those numbers, but if we accept at least their general direction, they seem to indicate that, although the largest support continued to come from Poles, the IWW managed to hold on to a sizeable contingent of French Canadian members.¹⁰⁹

Since not all French Canadian operatives abandoned the Wobblies, the organization was forced to confront the issue of the Catholic Church's opposition. In a somewhat unexpected twist, Rev. C. J. Lemieux, curate of St. Mary's church, himself attended one of the IWW meetings, perhaps signaling his willingness to learn first-hand about the union's "means and aims." During that meeting, the IWW speakers told the audience "that it [labor union] was not a question of religion but a question of industrial rights."¹¹⁰ They further emphasized that "the IWW was mainly concerned about the bodies of the working people not their spiritual welfare. The IWW did not care whether the working people were Catholics, Protestants, or of any religious denomination. What the IWW was striving for was to help the working people in their struggle with the manufacturers and capitalists."¹¹¹

Although the labor agitation in town continued, by the middle of May, the Wobblies began to encounter problems with renting halls for meetings, and the Willimantic chief of police refused to grant permits to hold any meetings in public. Such police tactics were nothing new to the IWW activists, who encountered them in Lawrence and many other locations. On May 13, an IWW meeting on Main Street, organized without a police permit, ended with a police intervention and the crowd was

¹⁰⁶ "Union Meeting Held Last Night in Armory Hall," *Chronicle*, May 7, 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ "Willimantic May Be Headquarters," *Chronicle*, 6 May 1912, p. 1; "Headquarters I.W.W. to be in This City," *Chronicle*, 8 May 1912, p. 1. The Willimantic IWW Local 165 initially located its headquarters in the Sadd block annex over Remington's clothing store. "Two Hundred Present At Meeting at Old Armory," *Chronicle*, 13 May 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ "John Golden is Challenged to Debate by Benjamin Legere," *Chronicle*, 11 May 1912, p. 1; "Two Hundred Present at Meeting at Old Armory," *Chronicle*, 13 May 1912, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ "Organizer Spielman [sic] Addressed Workers," *Chronicle*, 11 May 1912, p. 1. Around the same time the *Chronicle* reported that UTW had "several hundred" members in the local branch. "Police Broke Up a Mass Meeting," *Chronicle*, 14 May 1912, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ "Industrial Workers Have Small Audience," *Hartford Courant*, 11 May 1912, p. 1. See also "Industrial Workers Have a Mass Meeting," *Hartford Courant*, 13 May 1912, p. 17; "Industrial Workers Forced to Disperse," *Hartford Courant*, 14 May 1912, p. 1.

¹¹¹ "Organizer Spielman [sic] Addressed Workers," *Chronicle*, 11 May 1912, p. 1.

ordered to disperse.¹¹² The IWW responded with more rallies, including one in mid-July held in the Center Street Armory, where national IWW organizer J. T. Bienkowski of Lawrence, Massachusetts, decried police actions and warned that the IWW could soon send to town fifty speakers who "would address the people from every corner in an open battle for the right of free speech."¹¹³ On August 6, the Wobblies defied the police again by staging a mass meeting on Main Street, which featured a speech by Benjamin Legere. This time the police did not intervene.¹¹⁴

The vigor of agitation could not be sustained for much longer and as the summer wore on, the labor activities in Willimantic began to wane. Legere, busy with other pressing issues, did not stay in town as originally planned. IWW Local 165 moved from its headquarters over the Remington's clothing store to 79 Main Street, in the middle of the Polish community. The locale belonged to the Polish bakery and served also as a meeting place of the Tadeusz Kościuszko Club, a Polish organization; in mid-July, the IWW still boasted between 400 and 500 Polish members in town.¹¹⁵

STRIKE AT ATCO, NOVEMBER 1912, AND ITS AFTERMATH

Although the summer eventually brought the resolution of the weavers' strike at Windham Silk, the textile industry in New England experienced a new wave of strikes. On July 15, 1912, a large strike began in New Bedford, Massachusetts. IWW and AFL descended on the city and engaged in what the *Chronicle* described as "open warfare."¹¹⁶ According to the Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, among the forty-eight strikes in Connecticut during the thirteen months prior to November 1912, thirteen took place in the textile industry, including, in addition to Willimantic, strikes in Mechanicsville, Eagleville, Jewett City, East Windsor, Norwich, Middletown, and Mystic.¹¹⁷ The strike in the Hartford Carpet company in Thompsonville was especially hard-fought.¹¹⁸ The Wobblies were additionally preoccupied with their efforts in support of Ettor and Giovanitti, whose court trial commenced on September 30. Willimantic was losing its importance as a union battle ground, and the attention of both IWW and UTW organizers turned to other areas. The mill bosses quickly decided to move against the unions.

By fall 1912, the tensions at ATCO increased again, especially among the Polish IWW activists, who even decided to send a letter to *Ameryka-Echo*, the popular Polish-language weekly with a national circulation. M. Majurak and Kostek Seretny,

¹¹² "Police Broke Up a Mass Meeting," *Chronicle*, 14 May 1912, p. 1.

¹¹³ "I.W.W. Meeting," *Chronicle*, 15 July 1912, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Thornton, *Shoelather History*, 25.

¹¹⁵ "I.W.W. Change Headquarters," *Hartford Courant*, 14 June 1912, 20; *Chronicle*, 13 June 1912, p. 5; "I.W.W. Meeting," *Chronicle*, 15 July 1912, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ "Thousands on Strike in New Bedford," *Chronicle*, 15 July 1912, p. 1; "Open Warfare Is Threatened in New Bedford," *Chronicle*, 18 July 1912, p. 1. See also Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl*, 143-46.

¹¹⁷ State of Connecticut, Public Document No. 23. *Twenty-Fifth Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the Two Years Ending November 30, 1912* (Hartford, 1912), 58.

¹¹⁸ "Strike Situation in Thompsonville," *Chronicle*, July 23, 1912, p. 1.

who wrote on behalf of a committee elected on October 22 by Polish, Russian, and Lithuanian workers, expected retribution for their union activism. They complained that the company engaged in recruitment of new Polish workers from out of town, and planned to fire the union leaders. The letter writers asked *Ameryka-Echo* readers in search of work to stay away from Willimantic and not to scab there.¹¹⁹

When ATCO indeed fired a worker said to have been involved in IWW, on November 15 some five hundred Polish, Russian, and Syrian workers from the manufacturing department went on strike, protesting the firing. This time, the French Canadian workers did not seem to be involved. The police was immediately notified. Chief E. H. Richmond and his men kept watch at the gates to Mills No. 2 and 4, making sure workers could get to the factory without being harassed by the picketers. The strikers presented their demands and called for a 54-hour instead of a 58-hour work week at current pay rates, the end to speed-up, and a policy of hiring union-only workers. Polish workers remained in the forefront of the strike. The *Chronicle* commented: "As a race the Poles are fighters as experience in other places has proven. If they stick it out, as they say they will, the plant will have to be shut down."¹²⁰ Since the weather was turning colder, the concern grew about the effects of such a potential shut down on workers' families during the coming winter months.

The strikers called on the IWW leaders to come to town to represent them in the fight, but the Wobblies' organizers failed to appear in Willimantic. Strike representatives went to the train station in vain to meet every train. In the meantime, about half of the workers who initially walked out now gradually returned to work under the watchful eye of the police still stationed by the mill gates, despite the strikers' attempts to persuade them in their own languages to join them. No disturbances were reported.¹²¹ The general feeling was that the "public sentiment in the community is against the strikers," whom the *Chronicle* portrayed as "rough characters." It was reported that some strikers "loitered around the residence" of the superintendent, prompting police officers' presence both there and around Mill No. 4. Additionally, two officers were put on night duty to patrol "the Polish settlement of the city so that every movement of the men and women who are out on strike can be watched." The extra security measures turned out to be unnecessary.¹²²

On November 15, the strike committee met with General Eugene Boss and presented him with their demands. Boss rejected all of them. He only promised that the strikers, whom he considered no longer in the employ of ATCO, might be employed back "gradually as they need them."¹²³ The *Hartford Courant* commented: "The strikers did not gain a single thing by going out and lost their time."¹²⁴ The

¹¹⁹ M. Majruk, Kostek Seretny, "Baczność Robotnicy!" *Ameryka-Echo*, 9 November 1912, p. 8.

¹²⁰ "A Big Strike in the Mills of the American Thread Co.," *Chronicle*, 12 November 1912, p. 1.

¹²¹ "No Disturbance at the Mill Gates Today," *Chronicle*, 14 November 1912, p. 1.

¹²² "Strikers May Cause Trouble around the Mills," *Chronicle*, 15 November 1912, p. 1.

¹²³ "Strike Called off Friday Night," *Chronicle*, 16 November 1912, p. 1.

¹²⁴ "Willimantic Strike Turns Out Fizzle," *Hartford Courant*, 18 November 1912, p. 11. Surprisingly enough, the IWW newspaper *Solidarity* reported that the strike was a victory and the strikers' demands were granted. J. S. Biscay, "Another Victory," *Solidarity*, 23 November 1912, p. 1.

strike was over as quickly as it began. Although not all strikers were rehired at ATCO, Polish and Russian employees decided against further action. Twenty workers who had to leave ATCO, allegedly all leading IWW activists, moved with their families to Easthampton, Massachusetts, in search of work.¹²⁵ It is unclear how many Poles remained active members of IWW. It is also unclear why in January 1913, *The Hartford Courant* again reported that there was "dissatisfaction" among Poles at ATCO with the IWW. Taking advantage of the situation, the UTW put together plans to come to the city to organize spinners and carders at ATCO, and a Polish organizer for UTW was supposed to solicit members from among the Polish work force in the manufacturing department, but the information is lacking regarding how successful these efforts might have been.¹²⁶ By 1914, Willimantic's Local 165 was no longer listed among the IWW locals in Connecticut.¹²⁷

LESSONS FROM WILLIMANTIC

The collapse of the IWW organization in town had most likely many root causes but was not unique to Willimantic. As historian Philip Foner noted, the IWW organizations in practically all of the union's strongholds in New England declined just months after the strike victories, including Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, and Fall Rivers, and "the aftermath of the great Lawrence strike proved the I.W.W. to be as weak in building up a stable organization and maintain a permanent hold over its members after a struggle as it had been strong in leading the workers to victory."¹²⁸ Historians often point to the Wobblies' preference to win converts for the revolution rather than to win immediate concessions for the workers or build steady union structures within the communities, as well as to the insensitivity of some Wobblies' leaders to the religious feelings of the working class. Dubofsky additionally strongly emphasizes the impact of repressions and retributions by the business, police, and other anti-union forces, which did not hesitate to engage in outright violence, to use spies, provocateurs, rumors and false accusations, and to orchestrate court charges and similar measures to divide and eventually defeat the support for the union in Lawrence and other places.¹²⁹ The skilled-unskilled divisions among the working class, damaging competition between the craft and industrial unions, ethnic loyalty and ethnic resentment, influence of the Catholic Church, and class divisions within the ethnic communities further complicated the chances of success of the labor movement in general and IWW in particular in the first decades of the twentieth century.

¹²⁵ "Police on Guard in Thread City," *Hartford Courant*, 15 November 1912, p. 12; "Willimantic Strike Turns Out Fizzle," *Hartford Courant*, 18 November 1912, p. 11; "Nearly All of 500 Strikers Return to Work," *Hartford Courant*, 19 November 1912, p. 12; "Mill Hands Decide not to Declare Strike," *Hartford Courant*, 20 November 1912, p. 1.

¹²⁶ "Spinners and Carders Wanted," *Hartford Courant*, 6 January 1913, p. 12.

¹²⁷ Thornton, *Shoelather History*, 46.

¹²⁸ Foner, *History*, 349.

¹²⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 256-57; Goldberg, *A Tale*, 92-93.

In Willimantic, the textile manufacturers, frightened by the prospects of another Lawrence, initially quickly gave in to the workers' demands for higher wages, just like it was happening in other mills in New England. The town supported the mill owners' willingness to grant the workers' demands as long as the industrial peace was not disturbed and the move could prevent the spread of the unions' influence in town. The UTW, as a craft union hostile to the feared IWW, became a more acceptable alternative to represent the textile workers. Once the IWW arrived in Willimantic and began making inroads among the Polish, French Canadian and Syrian workers, public opinion turned strongly against the Wobblies, additionally aided by the anti-union stance of the Catholic Church. The bruising competition between the two unions divided the workers and perhaps emboldened the Windham Silk owners to dig in against the UTW-led strike, which lasted for full three months—longer than the Lawrence strike a few months prior.

The town's ethnic groups within the working class demonstrated remarkable solidarity. The Syrian weavers were in the forefront of the Windham Silk and Quidnick-Windham strikes, and unskilled Syrian workers supported the IWW at ATCO. Their commitment to the strike at Windham Silk was additionally confirmed by the way they dealt with those from their own ranks who did not support their cause. Poles, whose involvement in IWW was perhaps the strongest, were among the leaders of the two strikes at ATCO. They provided the fledgling Wobbly organization in town with facilities within their own community, and defied the anti-union message of the Catholic Church. Although historian Adam Walaszek maintains that the attraction of IWW among Polish workers in general proved largely temporary and was limited to strike situations, Poles in Willimantic demonstrated their readiness to support the union long past the conclusion of the April ATCO strike.¹³⁰ The French Canadian workers showed more labor militancy in Willimantic than in some other New England locations in the same period, and also supported the Wobblies in much greater numbers. Eventually, however, an incident which might have been a provocation, and the firm anti-Wobblies opposition from the local parish, drove a wedge between the Polish and French workers at ATCO. When in November 1912, in response to the retribution against IWW members at ATCO, the Polish workers tried again to evoke working-class solidarity, the changed labor climate in New England, the determination of the mill bosses to better control their workforce, the inattention of IWW leaders, and the refusal of French Canadians to get involved in another strike dealt a death blow to the chances of a unified working-class action.

With the advent of World War I, the workers' militancy again increased in New England and a number of labor confrontations took place in various industrial locations. Willimantic remained quiet. In 1916, just four years after the eventful 1912, *The Hartford Courant* commented about the town: "There is no textile community in New England which is so clean from labor agitators as Willimantic."¹³¹

¹³⁰ Walaszek, "Polish Immigrants among the Industrial Workers," 125-28.

¹³¹ "Think Austrians Cut Thread Co. Belt," *Hartford Courant*, 22 February 1916, p. 10.

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