

## **Quakertown Blues: Philadelphia's Longshoremen and the Decline of the IWW**

**Peter Cole**

In the fall of 1920, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) suspended Local 8, a Wobbly branch that encompassed most of the waterfront workers along Philadelphia's Delaware River. The crime Philadelphia's longshoremen allegedly committed was loading a vessel with ammunition intended to supply the enemies of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The IWW's newspaper *Solidarity* claimed that the union "would rather face death and dismemberment than stand the disgrace of having its members render any assistance in keeping its workers enslaved to the Moloch of capitalism." Thus, the IWW suspended its largest and most durable branch as well as its only local with a sizable black membership and leadership. The Philadelphia Controversy had begun.

The period during and after World War I was one of the most turbulent in U.S. History. In the decade leading up to the war, the IWW had dominated America's radical Left. During the war, though, the Wobblies suffered from systematic and brutal governmental repression. Many historians believe this campaign deserves the primary role in explaining the union's decline, even though the union's highest official membership occurred after the war. Simultaneously, many people sympathetic to the Left found a new champion in the Soviet Union. To many, including some American Wobblies and Soviet leader V. I. Lenin, it seemed logical that the IWW should fold itself into the Red International. But that did not occur. How did communism affect the IWW? Why did the IWW, after a flirtatious courtship, reject the communists? Was it simply because the IWW had been rendered powerless by the combined governmental and employer offensive often referred to as the Red Scare? The answers to these questions are complex and cannot be fully reconstructed, but we can better understand the forces that the IWW experienced by analyzing its greatest postwar internal struggle, known as the Philadelphia Controversy. Hence, one of the primary goals of this essay is to examine the relationship between the IWW and communism, a topic almost wholly unexplored.

Local 8, whose members were notable for being majority African American and maintaining job control on the Philadelphia waterfront for more than half a decade, found itself suspended from the IWW twice after the war – first for allegedly subverting the Bolshevik Revolution, then for violating the IWW constitution. The IWW decision to suspend its most powerful and celebrated interracial local had much to do with the union's changing dynamics in this era. Or, as Wobbly organizer Claude Erwin phrased it, "There was not a large city in the U.S. that looked more promising from an organizational stand-

point than did Philadelphia. Why did we lose this chance?" Thus, the second main purpose of this essay is to understand that the collapse of the IWW had much to do with postwar events, including internal conflicts over centralization and communism, rather than only wartime repression. In fact, the rifts opened in the IWW over communism and local versus national control fed on each other, as the Philadelphia Controversy makes clear.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, these two themes are interrelated and, together, allow us to unpack at least partially the complex and often obscure story of this important labor organization. Ben Fletcher, Local 8 and the IWW's most well known African American member, discussed the meaning of these issues in the late 1920s, in correspondence with the pioneering historian of black labor, Abram Harris. Fletcher believed, as did Fred Thompson, the "in-house" historian of the IWW for four decades, that it was this IWW-Communist Party (CP) conflict that lay at the heart of the Philadelphia Controversy. Local 8 found itself caught in the midst of a vicious power struggle that greatly harmed the American Left in the aftermath of the war. The combination of the CP decision to focus on capturing the mainstream American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the ultimate IWW rejection of Bolshevik overtures resulted in a fierce split between these two competing left-wing organizations. It would appear that communists in the U.S. thereafter sought to destroy the IWW, beginning with the Wobblies most powerful branch, Local 8. Just as Fletcher and Thompson concluded that communism, along with Local 8's ongoing conflicts with the IWW national leadership, lay at the heart of the Philadelphia Controversy, so will this essay. In short, this essay argues that the decline of the IWW occurred in the 1920s, due to ideological and internal debates, rather than simply government repression during and after World War I, and that the Philadelphia Controversy elucidates these issues like no other.

After the bitter wartime repression that the IWW suffered, the Delaware River piers in Philadelphia were, very likely, the strongest link in a much-weakened Wobbly chain. Local 8 received its IWW charter in 1913, in the midst of a successful two-week strike that involved more than 4,000 waterfront workers. In the early 1910s, the IWW led several enormous strikes in the eastern textile industry, but in the aftermath of the failed Paterson silk strike of 1913, the gaze of scholars – if not the Wobblies themselves – shifts to the west. Local 8, however, remained quite active throughout the decade and well into the 1920s. Even during the war, when the IWW was fiercely attacked by the federal government and rival American Federation of Labor, Local 8 maintained near total job control. The strongly anti-union employers on Philadelphia's docks conceded Local 8's power by hiring Wobblies almost exclusively from 1913 through 1922, an unprecedented amount of control for a Wobbly branch. In addition, Local 8 members had done away with the hated hiring method, the

shape-up, earned among the highest wage rates among dock workers nationwide, and influenced how work would be performed in myriad other ways. Local 8's success was due to the application of the union's basic principles: *industrial unionism, ethnic and racial equality, and direct action at the point of production*. Regardless of ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, or skill, all workers in the marine transport industry were eligible for membership in Local 8, including longshoremen, boatmen, sailors, and even dockside sugar refinery workers. If an employer refused to hire Local 8 members, the longshoremen engaged in direct action tactics in order to force the bosses to accept worker power; for instance, Fred Taylor, who shipped grain through the port of Philadelphia, wrote to another shipping company executive of "a great increase since that time [the initial 1913 strike] in the number of longshoremen wearing the I.W.W. buttons. Two or three incipient efforts were made through the I.W.W. influences to threaten strikes on our boats unless certain men working on them without an I.W.W. button were knocked off." Through such militant tactics on the docks, Local 8 delivered the goods to Philadelphia's longshoremen, *decreased racial hostility on the waterfront, and proved to doubters that the union could not only preach revolution but also improve immediate wages and working conditions.*<sup>2</sup>

The primary reason that Local 8 was hailed by the national Wobbly press is because it was the only black-majority, black-led local in the entire IWW. Arguably, the ethnic and racial diversity of the U.S. working class has been the single most difficult challenge that organized labor historically has faced in lining up American workers. Not until the formation of the IWW did a working-class organization in America so thoroughly commit itself to racial equality. Indeed, Article I, Section I of the IWW's Constitution stated that anyone, regardless of color or creed, could become a member. There are several facets to this firm ideological stand. The founders of the IWW were steeped in the socialist belief that all members of the working class must unite in common *opposition to their "true" enemy, the employing class. Only through the solidarity of all workers, the Wobblies contended, could the present socio-economic order be overturned.* Crucially, those present in Chicago in 1905 had forged their views in the fires of organizing. They had experienced first hand the myriad ways that employers divided workers, particularly along racial and ethnic lines. Thus, one of the major criticisms of the AFL at the founding convention and ever after was that the AFL "does not represent the working class," as "Big" Bill Haywood put it. Generally, the AFL excluded many people on account of their ethnic or racial heritage, especially African Americans and Asian immigrants but also in many cases the "new" immigrants arriving from southern and eastern Europe in massive numbers into Atlantic port cities such as Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup>

Yet despite its inclusive ideology, rarely did the IWW organize African

Americans and even rarer still did blacks seek out the IWW or any other white-dominated union, left wing or otherwise. Of course, a long history of exclusion and discrimination by white-dominated unions convinced many African American workers that unions were not for them, or at least unions with white colleagues were not. As Claude McKay's character Zeddy exclaimed in *Home to Harlem* after scabbing in a New York dock strike, "I'll scab through hell to make my living. Scab job or open shop or union am all the same jobs to me. White mens don't want niggers in them unions, nohow." Further, the IWW was strongest in industries with little black presence (logging, hard rock mining, textiles) and in regions where few blacks toiled (the Mountain West or Pacific Northwest). The first significant attempt took place in the piney woods of Louisiana in 1911, but the Brotherhood of Timber Workers experiment ended prematurely as a result of massive blacklisting, jailings, and violence. This remained the only major Wobbly campaign in the South, where the great majority of African Americans lived and worked, most of them still in agriculture. It was not until the 1913 strike in Philadelphia that the IWW could test its racial ideology, with the thousands of African American and immigrant longshoremen who searched for a union that would not only accept them as members but also treat all of them as equals.<sup>4</sup>

African Americans made up a plurality of Local 8's initial members and soon, due to the rising numbers of blacks on the waterfront, made up a majority of the union.<sup>5</sup> Some of the blacks hailed originally from Philadelphia, but many migrated from the upper South and a few were men of African descent who had immigrated from the West Indies. Moreover, African Americans always held important leadership positions in the local, from chapter presidents to chairmen of meetings to strike captains. In particular, the native-born Philadelphian Benjamin H. Fletcher had been an important force in maintaining unity across ethnic and racial lines on the piers since the founding of the local. Fletcher, a rather dark-skinned African American, joined the IWW around 1911 – along with, quite possibly, the Socialist Party – and became an active street speaker for the IWW in Philadelphia by 1912, all prior to the formation of Local 8. Fletcher attended several IWW national conventions, organized dockers up and down the Atlantic coast throughout the decade, and was celebrated in the IWW press. He also was the sole black Wobbly to be arrested during the wartime raids. One of Fletcher's many fellow black longshoremen, James Fair, recalled years later, "We would have our pep talks and what not and Fletcher, after he made a speech or something or another, solidarity, all for one and one for all."<sup>6</sup>

The key to Local 8's success was its interracialism. If Local 8 had been all-black, its affiliation with the IWW still would be significant, but it must be highlighted that more than one thousand of the local's members were white –

that is, native-born European Americans, primarily of Irish descent, or European immigrants, mostly Poles and Lithuanians. Much recent scholarship, most notably that of David Roediger, argues that these “new” immigrants were not white upon arrival but, rather, had to learn what it meant to be white in the United States. In other words, European immigrants were forced to learn a set of race relations in which people of African descent were considered, by whites, inferior to those who hailed from Europe. In the short term, however, European immigrants who worked Philadelphia’s docks did not immediately perceive their black fellow workers as racially inferior and, by the same token, African Americans did not automatically see Poles, Lithuanians, or Italians as white, *per se*. Therefore, arguably, it was easier for African Americans to organize with these “new” immigrants than native-born whites, although as mentioned Local 8 included hundreds of Irish Americans, as well. Philadelphia’s longshoremen, thus, were black and white, native-born and immigrant, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish. Clearly, if any union was to succeed on the Delaware riverfront, it would have to address this issue. Local 8 was one of only a handful of unions prior to the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) era, perhaps the most successful one, that actively and effectively organized across ethnic and racial divides that ordinarily kept organized labor in the U.S. from being as effective as it could be. But, what separates Local 8 even from the other exceptional multiracial unions of the Progressive Era, such as Alabama’s coal miners and the longshoremen of New Orleans, is that Local 8 always was a fully integrated organization, usually with black leaders, while the others, technically, maintained segregated locals, mostly with white leaders, that worked closely together.<sup>7</sup>

But, was Local 8 truly a model that other Wobbly branches should emulate? Were Local 8’s loyalties to the IWW and broader ideals of waging the class struggle or to the more mundane concerns of effecting wage increases and reduced hours? Perhaps it was just an AFL-style union in Wobbly clothing? These charges would be leveled at Local 8 on more than one occasion, and would come to a head in 1920. Events on the Philadelphia waterfront in the years following World War I tell us a great deal about what the IWW and millions of other socialist-minded American workers went through during this time. How would the IWW respond to the dramatic changes that included the continuing Red Scare, the employer’s national Open Shop campaign, rising racial and ethnic tensions, and the reshaping of radicalism the world over in response to the Soviet Union? In short, what course should Local 8 and the IWW steer in the turbulent waters of postwar America? The Philadelphia Controversy reveals what the main ideological issues confronting the IWW were, and how the union would respond to the rapidly changing national and international scenes. Incredibly, considering the ongoing fascination with the

IWW, the standard surveys of the IWW all are more than thirty years old and only a handful of case studies have been undertaken in the interim. Until recent years, Local 8, arguably the most fully integrated union of its time, has not attracted a scholar to tell its story. The first and one of the few historians to discuss Local 8, in fact, was uninterested in the issue of diversity; as John Gambs wrote, "The race question, however, though dormantly existing, does not concern us." Further, no historian satisfactorily explores the events that seem central to explaining why the IWW self-destructed after the war. Historians such as Melvyn Dubofsky, have discussed how communism ripped apart the IWW, but only in very general terms. The experiences of Local 8, especially the Philadelphia Controversy but also the appearance of Garveyism, provide insight into how and why the IWW ceased to be a dynamic organization by the mid-1920s.<sup>8</sup>

While not without difficulties, Local 8 forged a heterogeneous workforce into a unified and powerful group. Local 8 was a force on the Delaware River from 1913 until 1927. In its first decade, Local 8 was able to significantly increase the wages of its members, reduce the hours they worked, make the docks a safer workplace, and, essentially, decasualize waterfront work since most employers only hired longshoremen with that month's union button. Most impressively, considering that it was so rarely achieved elsewhere, was the interracial unity that the union achieved. African Americans made up a majority of the membership and leadership but significant numbers of Irish Americans, Poles, and Lithuanians also belonged to the organization. Further, integration not only existed in the union hall; Local 8 maintained integrated work gangs on the docks where previously, and after the fall of Local 8, gangs were segregated. No doubt, Local 8 retained the allegiances of the longshoremen because it successfully defused racial hostility *and* delivered bread and butter gains for its members. While the wartime repression hurt Local 8 – four of its leaders were among the hundred or so Wobblies arrested nationally – the union's power remained undeniable. One federal agent, who had travelled throughout the nation investigating IWW activities, reported in late 1918 that Local 8 included, "practically all the stevedores employed in this port...[and] absolutely controls the labor along the water front....I was more than surprised to find that the I.W.W.s. had gained more ground in Philadelphia than any other city in the United States, even more than in Seattle, and they are still gaining."<sup>9</sup>

Yet despite this success, in the summer of 1920, the IWW suspended Local 8. In their defense, Local 8 leaders E. F. Doree, Ben Fletcher, Walter Nef, and others compiled "A Complete and Detailed Statement of All That Has Occurred," which they entitled *The Philadelphia Controversy*. The cover page of this booklet boldly declared, "The I.W.W. must now decide whether it shall be an industrial union in name only or whether it shall be an industrial union in

fact. The day of test is here. We have sacrificed much for the principle of industrial unionism, now let's have it." How the members of Local 8 responded to these events would determine their future in the IWW and their ability to retain power along the Delaware River, as well as how the IWW responded to communism.<sup>10</sup>

On Thursday, August 5, 1920 word arrived at the New York headquarters of the Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union that the steamship *Westmount*, scheduled for loading in Philadelphia, was to take on ammunition intended for General Wrangel, a leader of a "White" Russian army fighting the "Red" Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War. The Soviet Bureau in New York threatened to publicize this "treasonous" act of Local 8 in the labor and radical press unless the loading stopped immediately. James Scott, a white man and secretary-treasurer of the Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union (MTW), sent a telegram announcing that he and several members of the IWW's General Executive Board (GEB), were traveling to Philadelphia on "important" business, without providing specifics. Scott arrived in Philadelphia that same evening and demanded that a meeting be called the next day to "knock the men off" the *Westmount* immediately or the union would be expelled. Local 8 leaders Ben Fletcher, Polly Baker, and others protested to Scott that such a meeting could not be arranged on such short notice. The local's by-laws specified that to call a meeting at any time other than the regularly-scheduled Tuesday session had to be announced in circulars and handbills distributed along the fifteen mile waterfront. Typically, two days were required to notify the 5,000 members. Fletcher also asked Scott why Local 8 had not received word from the full GEB in Chicago.<sup>11</sup>

Scott continued to press his case the following day. Local business agent Polly Baker, a Lithuanian immigrant, took Scott to see Meeting Chairman Sam White at Pier 19, where White, an African American, was working a ship. Like the other Philadelphians, White, who was officially responsible for calling Local 8's meetings, protested that a representative meeting could not happen so quickly. At Scott's insistence, White relented but prior to the meeting that night, he notified Scott that "as chairman, [White] could not conscientiously entertain any motion on the subject because of the small number present." Thus, the membership would continue loading the ship until precise instructions were received from national headquarters.<sup>12</sup>

That evening, Scott and the GEB members addressed the fewer than 200 union members who assembled at the hastily convened meeting. The long-shoremen informed Scott that they had not known the destination of the munitions, a reasonable possibility considering that countless tons of weapons and ammunition had passed through the port since the beginning of the war. Many of the Local 8 members present claimed that a larger meeting was required to

take action and decided that they would not halt loading the *Westmount* until such a gathering occurred. As evidence that the first meeting had been called too quickly to be representative, a good many members – notably Assistant Secretary George Hellwig, an African American, and rank and file leader Ernest Varlack, a St. Thomas native, both of whom had been working in distant parts of the port, did not even hear of the meeting until after the meeting.<sup>13</sup>

The next day, at a meeting in Chicago the General Executive Board decided to revoke Local 8's charter. The GEB based its decision on the reports of the two board members who had visited Philadelphia as well as one received from Scott that included a "Statement of Resolutions Committee of New York Branches" calling for Local 8's expulsion. In fact, New York's IWW branches printed an extra edition of their newspaper, *Fellow Worker*, in order to demand Local 8's expulsion. At its regular business meeting on Tuesday, August 10, Local 8's members voted to await word from the GEB on the "powder question." On August 13 the local finally received a telegram from General Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Whitehead informing them of the expulsion, with notice that they could appeal at the next general convention the following May, ten months away. According to Local 8, "The Philadelphia Branch was at the height of its power when the controversy over the 'powder' question started." There is no evidence that the white national leadership was targeting the black-majority Local 8 or that the Philadelphians believed their suspension to be racially motivated.<sup>14</sup>

Rather, Philadelphia's longshoremen were expelled for "a crime against the working class," namely loading munitions aboard a ship allegedly bound for Russia to supply the "white" Wrangel. The IWW, although primarily an American organization, preached solidarity with the working class throughout the world, as the very name of the union attests. Longshoremen and sailors were particularly conscious of international issues because of the industry in which they worked, or as one Wobbly put it, "To the marine worker the term industrial solidarity means international solidarity at one and the same time." Like many other socialist groups, the Wobblies strongly supported the Russian Revolution at first. The GEB claimed as late as 1920 that "The I. W. W. views the accomplishments of the Soviet government of Russia with breathless interest and intense admiration." Indeed, some Wobblies traveled to the Soviet Union to help build the world's first socialist state, thousands sent money from their limited wages to help the new nation, and others abandoned the IWW to join one of America's nascent communist parties. Thus, the longshoremen of Local 8 "betrayed the international labor movement by loading shrapnel shells consigned to the infamous Allied catspaw, Wrangel, for the purpose of drowning the Russian revolution in a sea of blood." Accordingly, the IWW expelled Local 8, despite its power on the Philadelphia waterfront; or, in the more col-

orful language of the Wobblies, the IWW “had bit off more than it could chew and [therefore] we had to spit it out.”<sup>15</sup>

While it is undeniable that the United States government actively worked to defeat the Bolsheviks during this period, there is simply no extant evidence to support or deny that the Whites were being supplied through Philadelphia or that Local 8 loaded any such vessel. In fact, far more likely, the U.S. was supplying its forces, based in the Siberian port of Vladivostok, out of Seattle; Seattle longshoremen had uncovered boxes of machine guns in crates marked sewing machines in late 1919. On one level, whether or not the longshoremen actually loaded ammunition intended for Wrangel is not as important as the accusation, for what ultimately was at stake was which path the IWW would take: join the communists who were sweeping through much of the Left worldwide or remain with an international group of syndicalists who were in the process of unsuccessfully challenging the Bolsheviks.<sup>16</sup>

The same day Local 8 received its expulsion notice, GEB Chairman George Speed arrived in Philadelphia. Speed – who had served time in Leavenworth with Local 8 leaders E.F. Doree, Ben Fletcher, Walter Nef, and John J. Walsh – had visited Philadelphia frequently over the years, most notably in May 1913 when he helped to organize the longshoremen during their initial strike. At the regular Tuesday meeting, August 17, the Philadelphia longshoremen explained to Speed that they had been on poor terms with the New York MTW, and James Scott in particular, ever since the MTW headquarters had been moved from Philadelphia to New York the previous year. Many members complained of Scott’s heavy-handed and domineering treatment of the Philadelphians, without a doubt the strongest branch of the MTW. In particular, Local 8’s power essentially to control the MTW’s elections, based upon its enormous membership, apparently irked Scott. According to veteran IWW organizer Walsh, an Irish American, the Philadelphians refused to listen to Scott, but they would stop loading if the GEB ordered them to do so. In his report to the GEB, however, Scott never mentioned that Local 8 was awaiting word from Chicago. Speed then addressed the membership for over an hour about the importance of international labor solidarity. After Speed’s talk, the membership unanimously passed a resolution boycotting all longshore work involving war material, accompanied by a notification of expulsion for any one who did load ammunition. The next morning Local 8’s business agent Polly Baker went to the Broad Street pier where the *Westmount* was being loaded and pulled the gang of forty Wobblies who had been working aboard it.<sup>17</sup>

Still, it would be another month before the IWW reinstated Local 8. George Speed returned to Chicago with the intention of convincing the GEB to reverse their expulsion of Local 8 immediately. Speed argued that, by quitting work on the *Westmount* as soon as the members understood the situation, Local

8 had acted in the proper manner and he would not have approved of the local's expulsion if he had been fully informed. Speed later wrote Walsh that "I feel I made a grievous mistake in our hasty decision." The newly elected GEB decided that Local 8 should remain suspended for a while longer, in order to appreciate the gravity of the situation. But, the new GEB also acknowledged that "the Phil[adelphia] Dist[ri]ct is not wholly to blame" for the difficulties and decided to take control of the MTW until new officers could be elected. In October, when the longshoremen finally received their charter back, everyone thought that an unfortunate chapter in the history of the union would be put behind them.<sup>18</sup>

However, one other issue still remained that would drive a wedge between Quakertown's longshoremen and the national leadership. Local 8 blatantly violated the IWW's constitutionally mandated \$2 initiation fee. Although it is not clear exactly when it was first implemented – no such high assessment existed before or during the war – as of August 1920 Local 8 charged a \$2 initiation and a \$22.25 assessment, a total of almost \$25 for new members! The reasons for this change are important to understand. The union had been hurt by numerous events in 1920 including: the maritime depression that resulted in a huge surplus of longshoremen on the docks, the start of a major employer Open Shop campaign, the arrival of dozens of Wobbly "floaters" from Seattle who wanted to use the IWW's universal transfer feature to become instant members of Local 8, and a stand-off in Local 8's summer strike that involved almost 10,000 workers. In its document *The Philadelphia Controversy*, Doree and Nef argued on behalf of Local 8 that the rise in initiation fees was needed in order to operate effectively as a union, especially in the aftermath of a massive strike in which 4,000 members temporarily had joined at a rate of \$1.25. The longshoremen contended that, while the hike violated the constitution, there was no important principle at stake; Local 8 believed that it was more important to maintain a stable membership and treasury. Nevertheless, the IWW national leadership remained adamant that Local 8 reduce its initiation fee. The Philadelphians held a meeting on October 20, at a hall large enough to accommodate the entire membership, to discuss the issue. At that meeting, the members of Local 8 refused to compromise on the issue of lowering its initiation fee.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, although the "powder question" had been resolved, this second issue, lowering the initiation fee to the constitutionally mandated \$2, again threatened Local 8's position in the IWW. In other words, what had been a conflict over the IWW's stance on communism and the Soviet Union had transformed into a disagreement over the centralization of power within the IWW and the potentially contradictory goals of maintaining job control while also advocating the overthrow of the capitalist system. That fall a series of increas-

ingly adversarial telegrams travelled among Local 8 in Philadelphia, MTW headquarters in New York, and the GEB in Chicago. The MTW and GEB insisted that Local 8's initiation fee be lowered immediately to \$2 and no additional assessments be charged to new members. Recently-elected Local 8 Secretary Walter Nef, a German Swiss immigrant, consistently responded that the Philadelphians were considering the issue but did not want to destroy the organization they had worked so hard to build. Local 8 suggested that a nationwide referendum be held on the constitutional issue of initiation fees. As a result of Local 8's unwillingness to lower its initiation fee, the GEB informed Local 8 that they had until December 1 to comply or else stand suspended again.<sup>20</sup>

In a fascinating letter published in the IWW's main publication, *Solidarity*, Local 8 leader E.F. Doree, born in Philadelphia to Swedish immigrants, argued quite forcefully for a high initiation fee in order to maintain job control along the Philadelphia waterfront. Doree suggested that forcing Local 8 to comply ultimately involved two issues: whether the IWW should continue to experiment regarding the structure and tactics of the union and whether shop control should be sacrificed over a technical issue that did not compromise a "first" principle. On the subject of experimentation, Doree recalled that he and Nef helped found the Agricultural Workers Organization (AWO) in 1915, which had revitalized the entire IWW. The AWO charter also had violated the IWW constitution at the time, but the GEB, "acting as revolutionists and practical men rather than as ultra-constitutionalists, felt that the *experiment* was necessary." Doree maintained that the situation in Philadelphia paralleled the AWO's. As for the second issue, Doree contended that the IWW consistently had failed to maintain shop control, except in Philadelphia, where almost all waterfront employers had agreed to hire members of Local 8 exclusively. The local believed its continuing power depended upon limiting the entry of workers into an industry notorious for large labor surpluses and only could be managed through a high initiation fee. With low initiation fees and irregular work, many workers joined, dropped out, and rejoined the union. In order to establish a truly powerful union, as had occurred on the Philadelphia waterfront, Doree argued, "it must be built upon a permanent membership who pay dues regularly." Few Philadelphia longshoremen let their dues lapse in slack times because then they would have to pay the high initiation fee for a second time; thus Local 8 could maintain a large base of members. Clearly, Doree's argument follows those made by AFL craft unions – that to maintain power a union must fight for a closed shop and regulate those who can gain access to the union.<sup>21</sup>

Considering its success, Doree suggested that Local 8 be allowed to continue its "experiment," at least until the next convention when the issue could be discussed by the entire national organization. Doree condemned the mandatory low initiation fee – "this straight-jacketing of experiments" – that had

proven “a failure,” for it neither supplied the IWW with sufficient finances nor encouraged members to keep up their dues. In response to those who complained high initiation fees hindered organizing, Doree asked “WHERE ARE THE MEMBERS???” Doree contrasted the initiation issue with signing contracts that, according to him, did violate basic IWW principles. The IWW, including Local 8, never signed time contracts with employers because that would limit their ability to strike (either for their own benefit or in sympathy with fellow workers) and syndicalists must be able to act at the point of production in order to achieve their goals. Of course, the counter-argument was that by requiring such a high initiation fee, many workers could not afford the IWW’s red card. In response, Doree claimed that a high initiation fee did not compromise the IWW’s ironclad commitment to working class solidarity; in fact, in *The Philadelphia Controversy*, the longshoremen argued that since a Local 8 member could easily make \$40 in a week, the initiation fee was not exorbitant. Doree concluded that Local 8 had labored too hard building up its organization to sacrifice it in the name of a “technicality.” But, if forced to lower its initiation fee, “The Greatest shop-control of the I.W.W. will have passed away. The I.W.W. will have done what the bosses were unable to do.” At its November 9 meeting and again three weeks later, the branch reaffirmed that it would not lower the initiation fee.<sup>22</sup>

Not surprisingly, on December 4 Local 8 received notification from MTW headquarters that the longshoremen’s branch had been suspended, “On account of Philadelphia failing to live up to the Executive Boards [sic] instruction to live up to the Constitution of the I.W.W.” Further, Ben Fletcher and Ernest Varlack, as members of the now-suspended Local 8, were denied their seats as secretary-treasurer of the MTW and member of the General Organizing Committee respectively, despite being “overwhelmingly elected” in recent balloting. Since Local 8 made up a large majority of the MTW’s total membership, Fletcher’s and Varlack’s victories were givens. The second suspension conveniently kept Local 8 from taking control of the MTW.<sup>23</sup>

The significance and contentiousness of the issue kept the Philadelphia Controversy alive within the IWW for months after the suspension went into effect. Doree’s powerful letter actually was published in the pages of *Solidarity* several days after Local 8’s suspension. The following week, former GEB member August Walquist, who had belonged to the GEB when Local 8 initially was suspended in August, wrote, “A Plain Statement of Facts Regarding Philadelphia Situation.” While not apologizing for his actions, Walquist expressed his agreement with Doree’s argument for the need for experimentation and higher initiation fees. Walquist suggested that the MTW draft a referendum to be voted upon by the entire membership of the IWW. The following week, GEB Chairman Roy Brown and GEB member Adolph Lessing respond-

ed that Local 8's actions clearly were unconstitutional and that the GEB had no choice but to suspend it in accordance with the constitution. Instead of acting independently, the branch should have raised the issue at the national convention. The debate raged in the newspaper for several more months through letters from members and editorials. Even though many letters condemned Local 8's actions, one Wobbly, E. W. Latchem, praised the longshoremen as "they are the only branch of the I. W. W. who have been successful in organizing and holding within the organization any large number of colored workers."<sup>24</sup>

Ultimately, the Philadelphia Controversy concerned the manner in which the IWW would deal with the most pressing issue facing socialist organizations around the world – how to react to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Immediately after the revolution, support from the IWW and other left-wing organizations was nearly universal, believing the Bolshevik takeover signaled the beginning of the overthrow of capitalism worldwide. Many Americans, both sympathizers and opponents of the Russian Revolution, saw the events in America during 1919, most notably the Seattle General Strike, as evidence that the United States might be swept into revolution as well. By the summer of 1920, though, most of the strikes had been defeated, the Red Scare continued to expand, and support for the Bolsheviks had waned. Like many left-wing organizations, the Wobblies were divided into multiple camps, with some ardently in favor and others equally adamant in their opposition to the Soviet Union, while a third group remained sympathetic to but wary of the Bolsheviks. The quickness and severity with which the GEB initially acted in the Philadelphia Controversy suggests that the issues involved went far beyond the particular actions of Local 8. In 1919, the Soviet Union was trying to secure the IWW's allegiance and tolerated its "dual union" approach of organizing head-to-head against the more mainstream AFL. Concurrently, a pro-Soviet GEB sought to establish formal ties with the Soviet Union by urging the IWW to join the Soviet-dominated Third International (Comintern). Considering its sympathies, when the allegation of Local 8 loading munitions for the Whites surfaced, the GEB's swift suspension of Local 8 makes sense. The highly respected Local 8 leader Ben Fletcher later argued that General Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Whitehead, MTW Secretary-Treasurer James Scott and three members of the GEB were "agents of Moscow" and that Local 8's suspension was based upon a "flimsy charge."<sup>25</sup>

When a new, anti-Soviet GEB took over in late August 1920 it became clear that the IWW would not ally itself with the Soviet Union. For instance, the new GEB immediately withdrew Harrison George's pro-Soviet pamphlet *Red Dawn*. That fall and winter, a bitter debate ensued over the issue of affiliation with the Third International until the IWW decided against joining. By the end of 1921, the IWW also had chosen not to join the Red International of

Labor Unions (RILU), a Soviet-led world federation of left-wing unions. Historian Melvyn Dubofsky cites the Philadelphia Controversy as one example of the IWW's increasing isolation from American and international radical movements that embraced the Soviet Union. That the American Wobblies opposed the communists was highly controversial – even if the Wobs' anarcho-syndicalist based fears of Soviet totalitarianism proved to be accurate in retrospect. Dubofsky also contends that due to the power it wielded, Local 8 “inevitably” came into conflict with the “putative” national leadership of the IWW. That is, without a power base of its own, the GEB “clung to outdated revolutionary precepts” (e.g. very low initiation fees) rather than attempting to adapt to a changing economic and political postwar America (that included an employer offensive as well as the rise of communism). In short, the conflict inside the IWW over communism and Local 8's problems with the national leadership are interconnected on multiple levels.<sup>26</sup>

Fred Thompson, the longtime in-house historian of the IWW, contends that communism was wracking the IWW from within and Local 8 was caught in the crossfire. In a 1982 letter, Thompson speculated that if, in fact, the United States had been shipping arms to the Whites, it would have been done covertly. Thompson wrote that, “In Seattle [a Pacific port], suspicious longshoremen wondering why so many crated sewing machines were being sent to Vladivostok [also on the Pacific Ocean, in eastern Siberia], let one crate break open and found guns – and stopped shipment. Something like this is plausible – but I wonder why ship to Vladivostok through an Atlantic port [like Philadelphia]? There was a well-equipped American force in Siberia – it mutinied eventually. I am certain that any Philadelphia IWW who knew arms were being shipped to intervene in Russia would have used union channels and procedures [i.e. direct action] to stop it.” Thompson concluded that it would come as no surprise to him if the Communist Party or its allies within the IWW had “cooked up” the Wrangel arms story to subvert the IWW in Philadelphia.<sup>27</sup>

Ben Fletcher, the most well known and respected leader of Local 8, offered a similar theory to Thompson's half a century prior, in the late 1920s. According to Fletcher, when the communists realized that they could not “capture the Port,” that is, seize control of Local 8 for the Communist Party, they engaged in a “Liquidating Program upon orders from Moscow,” although Fletcher offered no other specifics. As mentioned above, Fletcher also contended that James Scott, the New York leader of the IWW's maritime union, was a communist. While Fletcher's argument cannot be proven, interestingly, a 1922 IWW letter to the CP notes that Scott was no longer a member of the IWW – very possibly he had left for the CP. Finally, in a brief but tantalizing report, the IWW's own *General Office Bulletin* (October 1920) reported that, “When the [new] G. E. B. came into office, they were confronted with the tur-

moil of the Philadelphia situation; Communist influence being exercised with-in and without the organization.” Although it is not clear when he joined the CP, Roy Brown, the GEB Chairman in the summer of 1920 when the Philadelphia Controversy first arose, was organizing for the communists as late as 1930, according to historian John S. Gambs.<sup>28</sup>

Fred Thompson’s theory seems much more plausible in the context of the bitter fighting within the IWW over communism occurring in 1920. This battle, begun in 1918 and continuing through the early 1920s, was replicated in left-wing circles in America and throughout the world. Thompson correctly suggests that by late 1920, it became clear that nothing comparable to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia would occur in Western Europe or the United States, although pro-capitalist forces in the U.S. had engineered the Red Scare just to make sure. Many Bolsheviks, most notably Lenin, arrived at the same conclusion by the spring of 1920. With this realization, Lenin ordered communist supporters to abandon their dual unions and enter the mainstream labor movements in their respective nations. In the spring of 1920, Lenin wrote the pamphlet *“Left-Wing” Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, in which he attacked communist parties in West European nations for remaining outside of the mainstream, albeit “reactionary,” trade union movements. Lenin concluded that those working for communism “must imperatively *work wherever the masses are to be found.*” The Second Congress of the Communist International, held in Moscow in July-August, 1920, not surprisingly, adopted Lenin’s position on the necessity of a proletariat political party and ending dual unionism. However, most syndicalists present, including the British Shop Stewards’ Movement, opposed the Comintern’s policies. Notably, even the (U.S.) United Communist Party delegation, represented by the *former* Wobbly John Reed, voted against the measure because of their belief that the conservative AFL could never be taken over and turned to the left.<sup>29</sup>

In the United States the abrupt policy shift ordered by Lenin meant that all communists, including those still in the IWW, should abandon their dual, left wing unions and join the AFL. Only in industries in which no operative AFL union existed would the Communist International “permit” the IWW to organize – specifically, in the agriculture and timber industries and no others. In an unsigned “Instructions for [CP] Work in the United States,” it was ordered that “a consistent effort [be] made to bring into line the revolutionary and semi-revolutionary groups outside of the general labor movement [i.e. the AFL]”; the IWW was the first group targeted in this 1921 letter spelling out the Red International’s mission in the United States. The marine transport industry, however, arguably fell into a third category, since the AFL’s International Seamen’s Union (ISU) and the IWW’s MTW were of roughly equal strength in 1920-1921. After a failed strike in 1921, the ISU’s membership plummeted,

many lining up with the MTW. The communists were well aware of the MTW's power: A 1921 "Report on the IWW," commented, "Marine transport and textile organization being the only semblance of organized unions" still active in the IWW, these groups should be targeted for recruitment. According to the IWW's Thompson, as reliable a source as any on this murky subject, a debate apparently took place as to whether the communists should capture the MTW or ISU. Eventually, Thompson contends that the ISU was endorsed and communists told to enter its ranks. Those communists within the MTW "were told to encourage disruption there, rumor-mongering, waste of resources on things that wouldn't work, etc." Thompson wrote of the communists' "game plan – same as their lies about the MTW in Philadelphia shipping arms to wrangle [sic], and other disruptive acts throughout the IWW."<sup>30</sup>

The ongoing Russian Civil War is the other factor at work in the Wrangel story. In the late summer of 1920, General Wrangel was leading an offensive against the Red Army in the Crimea. By this time the Bolsheviks had defeated nearly all of their enemies in the Russian Civil War, and Wrangel's offensive represented the greatest threat to the Soviets' final victory. On August 19, the Politburo announced that "The Vrangel [Wrangel] front is to be recognized as the main one." In fact, the Bolsheviks were so fearful of Wrangel's "Russian Army" that they temporarily allied with another opponent, Nestor Makhno's band of Ukrainian peasant anarchists. It is conceivable that the same fear of Wrangel that led Lenin and Trotsky to collaborate with Makhno led some of their emissaries at the Soviet Bureau in New York to jump on a rumor and transform it into something much more, something that had to be stopped immediately and at all costs. Hence, the beginning of the Philadelphia Controversy. Whether communists invented the Wrangel story to subvert Local 8 or whether they hastily acted in an effort to support the Revolution in Russia is unknown. What is clear is that by August 1920, the conflict between the rising communists and declining IWW was very real. The Comintern's official policy was to bore from within the AFL, so the IWW chose not to attend future Comintern sessions. There would be no communist support for Local 8 or any other MTW branch of the IWW, but there remained a fierce struggle for the allegiance of thousands of Wobbly longshoremen and sailors in Philadelphia and across the globe.<sup>31</sup>

Information on communist influence in Local 8 is spotty at best and non-existent at worst. Ben Fletcher, who played only a limited role in Local 8 after getting out of Leavenworth, and Bureau of Investigation Agent Joseph McDevitt both make anecdotal references suggesting that communists belonged to Local 8 and had influence. There are no references to Local 8 in the Communist Party USA records that the Library of Congress possesses after receiving a microfilm copy from Moscow following the collapse of the Soviet

Union. Of course, the late 1910s and early 1920s was a heady time among leftists the world over, the United States included, so it is not unreasonable to assume that some Philadelphia Wobblies joined the Bolsheviks. Unquestionably, members of Local 8 frequently debated the subject of communism at their meetings; for instance, at an IWW open forum in Philadelphia on December 19, 1920, William E. Smith, the leader of the English speaking Philadelphia branch of the United Communist Party, spoke for an hour on the Bolshevik program. Still, nothing firm is known. Years after the Philadelphia Controversy, Big Bill Haywood, the famous Wobbly leader who jumped bail and spent his remaining years in the Soviet Union, was quoted by communist author Claude McKay as saying that the Polish members of Local 8 were decidedly anti-Bolshevik. Yet, it would be reasonable to assume that at least some Wobbly longshoremen in Philadelphia were attracted to the ideals and success of the Bolsheviks. However, since Local 8 had a black majority, the preaching of communism probably would have fallen on many deaf ears, if for no other reason than in the 1920s communists devoted little serious consideration to issues of race. Although key black leaders in the CP would join in the 1920s, it would not be until the 1930s that the Communist Party started attracting significant black support in America.<sup>32</sup>

Considering that the majority of Local 8's members were African American, though, possibly a greater threat to the IWW was the rising tide of black nationalism under the banner of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The UNIA was the largest mass-based movement in African American history up to that time and it displayed a good deal of strength in Philadelphia. In the summer of 1919 Garvey helped organize a Philadelphia chapter, Division 47, of UNIA. The Reverend James Walker Hood Eason, who founded the People's Metropolitan A. M. E. Zion Church and became disillusioned with the local NAACP, held the powerful Chaplain-General post in UNIA until August 1920, when he was promoted to "Leader of American Negroes," the third highest position in the international organization.<sup>33</sup>

Division 47 grew quite quickly and declined equally fast. Evidence of UNIA's popularity among Philadelphia's black population abounds. Despite the opposition of most of the city's black clergy and middle class, close to 10,000 people joined in less than a year, second in membership only to New York. Over 6,000 people attended a fundraiser at the Academy of Music for the Black Star Line, UNIA's shipping line intended to transport people of African descent back to Africa. Black Star Line stocks were traded in the city. In the spring of 1920 the Black Star Line vessel *Yarmouth* arrived in Philadelphia from the West Indies on its way to New York. That fall the chapter raised \$6,000 for the African nation of Liberia. In 1920 Garvey called Philadelphia "one of our

greatest strongholds.” However, over the next two years, massive internal dissension, violence among the membership, including the murder of Eason while in New Orleans, and financial problems led to a destructive split in the local chapter. In 1923, Division 47 still claimed 6,000 members but never equaled its power of a few years earlier.<sup>34</sup>

Generally Local 8’s black majority emphasized class solidarity across racial lines in an otherwise segregated and racist metropolis, but it seems impossible that at least some of the black longshoremen were not enticed by the powerful ideas of Garvey. Yet, there is but one reference, and that one indirect, to the potential influence of black nationalism in Local 8. A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen’s black socialist monthly, *The Messenger*, reported in the summer of 1921, in the midst of Local 8’s suspension, that at one meeting, “Alleged Negro leaders masquerading in the guise of race loyalty” urged the black members present to form an all-black longshoremen’s union. While the UNIA’s name is not mentioned, it is reasonable to assume that blacks calling for the voluntary segregation of unionists could have been influenced by Garveyism; no doubt the UNIA was interested in expanding its base to one of the most powerful black organizations in Philadelphia. Not surprisingly, *The Messenger’s* editors compared the idea of segregated unionism to Jim Crow or, “the Southern bugaboo.”<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps more surprising, black and white unionists disapproved of these attempts to split their ranks and continued to promote integration. Randolph and Owen, who frequently endorsed the racially inclusive policies of the IWW, approvingly noted that separation of workers into different unions according to their race “has been routed by the plain, unvarnished workers. In the Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union, No. 8, there are 3,500 men, three-fifths of whom are Negroes.” Still, to prevent further attacks from black nationalists, the membership decided to increase their educational efforts in order to remind the longshoremen of the advantages of their interracial organization. *The Messenger* quoted one member proudly declaring, “We have no distinctions in this union.” Meetings continued to be run by an African American chairman and a secretary of European descent. As the black longshoremen James Fair later recalled, “To my knowing at that time the IWW was the only thing that was accepting negro or black workers...I mean freely. They would accept them and they did advocate just this thing, solidarity.” Local 8 translated this egalitarian ideal from its union hall to the workplace; Fair also noted, “We worked decks together, we worked on the wharfs [sic] together, we worked in the hold together.” This striving for equality even affected the union members off the job. Prior to the founding of Local 8, black longshoremen faced the threat of violence when walking along the waterfront. However, with the advent of the union, blacks and whites worked and lived in some of the city’s only integrat-

ed neighborhoods. Further, Willy Krupsky, a retired longshoreman and the son of a Russian immigrant who worked as a longshoreman in Philadelphia, recalled in a 1980 interview attending an interracial picnic, when Willy was just a young boy. "I went to this picnic, a longshoreman's picnic, so it had to be in the early twenties...It was mixed, white and black were there, everybody knew one another, and we had a good time there. And that's the only picnic I [ever] remember going to, a longshoremen's picnic."<sup>36</sup>

Local 8's weekly series of Friday evening educational forums displayed the wide range of issues that concerned the membership but focused conspicuously on race. The first discussion, which hundreds of men and women attended, involved "The Relation of Organized Labor to Race Riots." The lecturer compared race wars to wars between nations, both of which benefited employers and their profit margins to the detriment of workers. In race riots, workers, divided along racial lines, allowed bosses to consolidate their power. Using a "colorful" metaphor, one speaker claimed, "If the white and black working dogs [sic] are kept fighting over the bone of race prejudice, the artful, hypocritical yellow capitalist dog will steal up and grab the meat of profit." He went on to contend that the segregated locals of the AFL's International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) played into the employers' hands by encouraging divisions on the waterfront. Numerous people that evening condemned the recent, brutal race riot in Tulsa, blaming the Ku Klux Klan for doing the employers' dirty work. Thus, while the city and country's racial climate continued to deteriorate in the early 1920s, the IWW's Local 8 provided its black and white members with an alternative to the prevailing tensions. Within the union, Philadelphia's waterfront workers had an opportunity to improve their lives together, which explains their loyalty in the midst of the brutal fighting between the local and national over communism and centralization.<sup>37</sup>

It seems clear that Philadelphia's longshoremen wanted to remain in the IWW but believed, based upon the evidence and logic most forcefully provided by Doree, that lower initiation fees would destroy their union. Time and again since 1913, Local 8's members had demonstrated their commitment to the IWW. They had suffered greatly from their affiliation with the IWW – their leaders jailed, offices raided, members spied on, and strikes crushed by a combination of private (employer and media) and public (city and federal) repression. Even after the wartime raids, the longshoremen participated in a wide range of IWW activities, including conventions and fundraisers for those imprisoned in the "class war." Simultaneously, the AFL's ILA made frequent overtures to the Philadelphia longshoremen as the only non-ILA port on the Atlantic coast. Joining the AFL would have made their union membership more palatable for their employers and themselves, especially during the war years

when coast-wide agreements formally excluded Local 8. Still, despite massive employer opposition and increasing red baiting, the longshoremen remained committed to the IWW, if only they could preserve their own strength. The black longshoremen's loyalty to Local 8 parallels the experiences of black workers in other left-wing unions, such as the Alabama Sharecroppers Union in the 1930s, and both the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union and the United Packinghouse Workers in the 1940s and 1950s. The numerous telegrams and letters from Philadelphia to Chicago and New York throughout the fall of 1920 thoroughly explained Local 8's position on initiation fees. True, as Dubofsky correctly notes, the Philadelphia Controversy partially resulted from the intransigence of the IWW's leadership. But, as Fletcher, Gams, and Thompson suggest, mostly the issue became intricately linked with the IWW's evolving relations with the Soviet Union and communism.<sup>38</sup>

Local 8's insistence on maintaining an unconstitutional initiation fee reveals how committed they were, first and foremost, to each other, their local union, and to what they believed were the "true" ideals of the IWW. The longshoremen placed their faith in the local union and its leaders. As discussed above, the membership did not place nearly as much trust in the leadership of their industrial union or national organization, whom they believed to be either unnecessarily domineering or communist-controlled. Considering the MTW's and GEB's post-war inadequacies and reversals over communism, Local 8's lack of faith is not surprising. The only GEB member whom Local 8 trusted was George Speed, who had helped found Local 8 in 1913. But even Speed, who quickly convinced them to stop loading the ammunition – impressive considering the countless tons of munitions loaded over the last six years – could not convince the longshoremen to lower their initiation fee. The longshoremen had fought many battles against employers and the government to preserve their union. In the final analysis, Philadelphia's longshoremen believed more strongly in the local organization they had built themselves than the union at large.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, Philadelphia's longshoremen wanted to return to the IWW and appeared at the IWW's national convention in May 1921 to discuss the matter. Local 8 sent a mixed-race delegation to Chicago to argue their case, in addition to delivering a letter from E. F. Doree. The convention devoted "two days of earnest debate" to the suspension of Local 8. George McKenna, who had been active in Local 8 since 1913, spent half a day facing questions from the floor and insisted that his branch would lose job control if they changed their current policy. A good number of other delegates agreed with the Philadelphians' argument. Some delegates supported Local 8 but believed that the GEB had acted correctly, as the constitution clearly mandated a maximum initiation fee. In the end, though, those present decided to stand by the GEB's

action of December 1, 1920. Shortly thereafter, a second motion passed that allowed for the immediate reinstatement of Local 8 as soon as it lowered its initiation fee. The convention also upheld the March 1921 suspension of a New York local of Italian bakers that charged an unconstitutionally high initiation fee of \$15. Indicating some support for higher initiation fees, representatives of the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union introduced a resolution calling for a sliding scale on initiation fees from zero to \$15, but that motion lost. There was little else Local 8's representatives could do.<sup>40</sup>

A few days later, the Philadelphians received a telegram from their branch stating, "Instruction of body if not reinstated after Phila [sic] controversy return home at once. Body knows change means suicide." Whereafter Charles Carter, William Green, and McKenna left Chicago, being given ninety more days to comply with the constitution or else the IWW threatened to establish a new branch of the MTW for Philadelphia's "loyal" longshoremen and transfer the 400 seamen and firemen to a separate MTW branch. When Doree, still serving time in Leavenworth, heard about the convention, he poignantly wrote to his wife, "It is hard to recall 15 years service in an organization and then, while in prison because of activities in its behalf, to be thrown out ... But by all means boys, stick, stand together. Let nothing separate you. You boys of the marine industry, must build a better and stronger union. We are with you in spirit if not in body."<sup>41</sup>

Not much is known about the Philadelphia longshoremen during their suspension. What is clear is that the longshoremen did not simply relinquish their control of the waterfront because they were suspended. The union continued to organize, educate, and agitate among the city's waterfront workers. The local issued a regular bulletin for the benefit of its members. In addition to their regular Tuesday evening meetings, Local 8 held open forums every Friday evening; A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owens, the co-editors of *The Messenger*, spoke at numerous Friday forums that summer. The local held larger meetings periodically at places like the People's House, Workingmen's Singing Society Hall, Labor Lyceum, and Lithuanian Hall. When out on bail, Local 8 leaders Walter Nef and E. F. Doree still participated in city-wide IWW activities.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, almost a year after being suspended, Local 8 was reinstated into the IWW. The Philadelphians had agreed to the IWW's demands, most notably to charge the standard \$2 initiation fee. On its front page, *Industrial Solidarity* hailed the return of the MTW's "most powerful subdivision, numbering several thousand members, and [still] commanding complete job control on the waterfront." The paper went on to proclaim Local 8 as "the most striking example ever seen in this country of the possibility of working-class solidarity between whites and Negroes. A large proportion of these fellow workers are

colored and these proved to be among the most devoted and class conscious members of the union."<sup>43</sup>

It is not clear why Local 8 suddenly agreed to lower its initiation fee, although most likely the longshoremen felt that they needed the support of the larger organization. In 1921 the maritime economy in Philadelphia experienced a depression. While the port's activity still far exceeded that of the era prior to America's entry into the war, from 1920 to 1921 the value of the port's foreign trade, the docks Local 8 controlled, dropped by close to \$500,000,000. The city's Commercial Exchange concluded in its annual report that the transition from governmental control back to normal trade had proven difficult. For instance, the nation's railroads raised freight rates to Philadelphia by 40%; as a result, Philadelphia's grain exports dropped dramatically as merchants transferred their grain to Gulf Coast ports. The national American Bureau of Shipping also lamented "the slump" which the entire industry experienced after the war. Less activity in the port meant less work for Local 8's longshoremen; hence their position was weaker than in previous years.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, Local 8 felt increasing competition from the AFL's longshoremen's union. The ILA periodically reappeared on the Philadelphia waterfront, usually in times of crisis. The Philadelphia Controversy proved no different. Continuing a partnership initiated during the war, maritime employers and the United States Shipping Board (USSB) collaborated to bring the ILA into Philadelphia in order to supplant Local 8 – the government and AFL still viewed Local 8 as a part of the IWW even if the IWW did not. The relationship grew even tighter as T. V. O'Connor, a former ILA president, assumed control of the U.S. Shipping Board. There are scattered references to the resurgence of the ILA in correspondence between the secretary of the MTW in Philadelphia and several Local 8 leaders still in Leavenworth.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, the ILA troubled Philadelphia Wobblies greatly. Philadelphia based agent J. F. McDevitt of the federal Department of Justice's Bureau of Investigation reported in June 1921 that over the last few months several hundred Wobblies had joined the ILA, led by African American organizer Glenn Perrymore, who had played a key role in Local 8's 1916 strike. The report of another agent, S. Busha, reveals that by July 1921, the ILA had chartered a new branch there, Local 1116, and managed to sign up over 1,000 longshoremen. Lending credence to both Ben Fletcher's and Fred Thompson's allegations, McDevitt believed that the defections resulted from disagreements over the Communist Party and favoritism in hiring. Perhaps most troubling for those loyal to Local 8, all of the new ILA longshoremen were African American, thereby endangering Local 8's precious interracial unity.<sup>46</sup>

Local 8 responded to this threat by reminding Philadelphia's black long-

shoremen of the AFL's racist policies. Local 8 issued a waterfront circular discussing racism in the AFL, which supported the Ku Klux Klan and the Tulsa race riot, according to the IWW. And no black worker needed to be reminded that many AFL unions denied blacks membership as a matter of course. The presence of the highly respected black socialists A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owens, who championed the interracial solidarity of Local 8 and the IWW, at numerous Local 8 open forums that summer was no coincidence. Also disturbing, at both their regular Tuesday night business meetings and Friday night open forums many Wobblies had heated arguments on the subjects, with some threats made against anyone who remained in the ILA. Further, Local 8's leaders believed that employers were, once again, trying to drive a wedge between the city's black and white longshoremen. In an appendix to *The Philadelphia Controversy*, Local 8 reprinted a suspicious waterfront circular that encouraged the black longshoremen to form an "Independent Union of Colored Workers," which had the "backing" of the Employing Stevedores Committee. *The Philadelphia Controversy* also included Local 8's response, which urged longshoremen to "beware of union disrupters" who tried to divide the union along racial lines.<sup>47</sup>

Local 8 managed to close ranks and rebuff the latest ILA challenge. Quite likely, the reinstatement of Local 8 into the IWW was instrumental. Given Local 8's and the IWW's commitment to and history of interracial solidarity, the African American longshoremen could rest assured that they would be treated equally and with respect. There is little question that in the early 1920s, blacks in Philadelphia experienced tremendous discrimination outside of Local 8. Similarly, the AFL devoted little energy either to opening up its membership to blacks or protecting their interests. Or, perhaps Local 8's strong-arm tactics of expelling any longshoreman who took out a second union card and joined the ILA, was decisive; as the longshoremen who flirted with the ILA discovered, the IWW still had a great deal of power on the Philadelphia waterfront, if not in many other parts of the nation. The lack of a Local 8 button meant, quite simply, no work on many docks. No matter how it occurred, Local 8 had withstood another challenge to its existence. Local 8 would find itself in a bitter and ultimately destructive lockout/strike near the end of 1922, in which employers successfully played the race card to divide the union members and break the power of Local 8. For the next five years Open Shop conditions existed while the IWW and ILA battled for the allegiance of the longshoremen. Ultimately, in 1927, the ILA gained control in Philadelphia, the last major port to align with the AFL. The crucial factors had been the active support of the U. S. Shipping Board, headed by a former ILA president, and the leadership of Polly Baker, an old Wobbly leader and Lithuanian immigrant, who successfully brokered a deal between the black and white dock workers to ensure black leader-

ship in the new ILA local.<sup>48</sup>

Historian Melvyn Dubofsky has argued that the IWW's decline began and essentially ended in 1917-1918, with massive employer and federal government repression. After the war the IWW stumbled on near-death, as it were, due to its own misguided policies and inability to adjust to the changing realities of the postwar era, that among other things led to the Communist Party's eventual dominance of the American Left. The continued power of Local 8, though, contradicts Dubofsky's claim that the IWW had ceased to be an effective labor organization and had become only a "legal defense organization" after the wartime raids. Fred Thompson, the unofficial historian of the IWW for over thirty years, offers a different theory. In 1972 Thompson wrote that he believed "the historians are quite in error in figuring the repression killed the IWW. I believe it was about as sturdy as it ever was in the summer of 1923, and that development from that point to its disruption in the 1924 split was its unfolding." Thompson's view is too optimistic. Despite maintaining members comparable to prewar levels, the IWW never recovered from the wartime government and employer repression. Too, the rise of the CP sapped energy away from the IWW after the war. But, clearly, the IWW – in Philadelphia, in Oklahoma, and in the Northwest – still was quite active in the early 1920s.<sup>49</sup>

Thompson's contention regarding the significance of IWW infighting needs to be modified to factor in the series of events that came to be known simply as the Philadelphia Controversy, and suggests that the IWW was in disarray prior to the 1923-1924 Emergency Program battle Thompson believes crucial. After World War I, while the national IWW and soon all of organized labor was reeling from a combined employer-government offensive, Local 8 had persevered. Even after its aborted strike of 9,000 waterfront workers in the summer of 1920, Local 8 maintained its strong position on the Philadelphia waterfront. Considering that it was one of the most, if not the most powerful local in the entire IWW at the time, it is reasonable to assume that the national organization would have done all in its power to ensure the continued health and allegiance of Local 8. That, however, is not what occurred. In fact, the IWW, through the IWW's General Executive Board in Chicago and MTW's national headquarters in New York City, did the exact opposite. At a time when the IWW should have been attempting to resuscitate its ailing organization, by building on still vital branches such as Local 8, the IWW chose to suspend Local 8 over an issue of debatable importance. Or as IWW organizer Claude Erwin put it in 1925, "First and greatest, because it hinders greatest, is internal dissension."<sup>50</sup>

There is no single reason that the Philadelphia Controversy occurred. The depleted leadership ranks of the IWW, due to the wartime trials, had allowed a new cadre to take control of the General Executive Board, which, according to

Dubofsky, apparently felt the need to assert its authority since it rested on no natural power base. And, as John Gambs notes, this postwar IWW leadership was decidedly pro-Soviet and worked to move the IWW towards communism. Local 8 also suffered from the wartime arrests, with its five most prominent leaders, especially Fletcher, sentenced to long terms in Leavenworth. That the longshoremen of Local 8 wished to remain in the IWW at this time of internal disarray and external repression amply demonstrates the commitment the longshoremen had to the IWW. Local 8's allegiance had its limits, however, as both the interest of some of the union's black longshoremen with the ILA and UNIA and the longshoremen's refusal to back down on initiation fees proved. As the Philadelphians demonstrated, they were not willing to maintain their IWW membership if that meant upsetting their local organization. Attacks on Local 8 from the national organization and communist manipulations, combined with employer and governmental opposition, might have led Philadelphia's longshoremen to abandon the IWW. Considering the deteriorating situation for African Americans and immigrants in Philadelphia and the nation at large, interracial, multiethnic organizations were both in short supply and increasing need. The men of Local 8 remained dedicated to the IWW's first principles of industrial unionism and solidarity, but refused to sacrifice their organization to the sectarian infighting that the (American) Left has become famous for. That a satisfactory solution could not be found by Local 8 or the national IWW indicates the profound crisis that the IWW experienced after World War I. In particular, the appearance of communism caused a fundamental realignment in left wing labor and political circles and the IWW was caught in this whirlwind. By the time the IWW decided to reject communism, the damage already had been done to its organization. Thus, the IWW expelled its largest, most powerful, and only interracial local, a questionable decision even in good times. That the IWW was willing to jettison Local 8 is indicative of the disarray that the IWW experienced in the early 1920s, primarily due to the battles over communism and centralization, and lends significant credence to the theory that the IWW, rather than its opponents, finally crippled the organization.

<sup>1</sup>Claude Erwin, "Philadelphia," *General Office Bulletin*, January 1925, p. 7, Box 32-1, IWW Collection, Reuther Library, Wayne State University. It should be noted that the larger project of which this essay is one part, places issues of race and ethnicity at the center of the study.

<sup>2</sup>"River Front Strike At Philadelphia," Fred Taylor to P.A.S. Franklin, June 26, 1913, Fred W. Taylor Papers, Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia.

<sup>3</sup>David Brundage argues that Haywood's beliefs on "working class internationalism" stem from debates and battles fought within and against the Denver labor movement, in which Haywood's Western Federation of Miners played a major role; see his *The Makings of Western Labor Radicalism: Denver's Organized Workers, 1878-1905* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997),

1-6, 34-52, 154-163.

<sup>4</sup> On black hostility to labor unions, see Booker T. Washington, "The Negro and the Labor Unions," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1913, 756-67; Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem* (1928; reprint ed., Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 42-49. On the BTW see, Foner, "The IWW and the Black Worker," 45, 49-57; Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, 329; James R. Green, "The Brotherhood of Timber Workers 1910-1913: A Radical Response to Industrial Capitalism in the Southern U.S.A." *Past and Present* 60 (1973): 161-200; David R. Roediger, "Gaining a Hearing for Black-White Unity: Covington Hall and the Complexities of Race, Gender and Class" *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1997). Also see Brown, "The I. W. W. and the Negro Worker."

<sup>5</sup> Where African Americans had made up approximately one-third of Philadelphia's longshoremen in 1910, they accounted for well over half in 1920. Of the 4,036 longshoremen counted by U. S. Census takers in 1920, 2,388 were "Negro," 814 "Foreign-born white," 436 "Foreign of mixed parentage," and 397 "Native parentage" (*Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Vol IV: Population 1920: Occupations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1923), 1194).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census, 1910; Oscar Sokol, Ben Fletcher obituary, July 12, 1949, Box 5, John Nicholas Beffel Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit; Fred Thompson to Dick Brazier, New York, January 4, 1967; Thompson to Sam and Esther, January 6, 1967; Brazier to Thompson, January 7, 1967 all in Folder 12-26, Fred Thompson Collection, Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit; *New York Call*, September 5, 1920, 7; *Solidarity*, July 27, 1912, 4, August 10, 1912, 3 and September 28, 1912, 1; *Industrial Worker*, July 22, 1949, 4; Cole, *Shaping Up and Shipping Out*, esp. 82-84; Irwin M. Marcus, "Benjamin Fletcher: Black Labor Leader," *Negro History Bulletin* 35 (1972): 138-40; William Seraile, "Ben Fletcher, I.W.W. Organizer," *Pennsylvania History* 46 (1979): 213-32; Fred Thompson, "Ben Fletcher Remembered," *Industrial Worker* 73 (August 1981): 5; Transcript of interview with James Fair, 3, December 21, 1978, Deborah Shaffer Papers, Archives Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>7</sup> The literature on race and labor is voluminous and growing. For some recent treatments, see Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923*; (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930," *Radical History Review* 55 (Winter 1993): 53-87; Arnesen, "Up From Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race, and the State of Labor History," *Reviews in American History* 26 (1998); James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (Spring 1997): 3-44; Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Daniel Letwin, *The Struggle for Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Dominic A. Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago:*

*Workers on the South Side, 1880-1922* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991); Thaddeus Radzialowski, "The Competition for Jobs and Racial Stereotypes: Poles and Blacks in Chicago," *Polish American Studies* 33 (1976): 5-19; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 1999); Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Calvin Winslow, ed., *Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 135-137; Dubofsky *We Shall Be All*, 473-484. For a very interesting look at another locale where the IWW remained strong into the early 1920s, but without the issues of rising communist influence or a mixed race workforce, see Nigel Anthony Sellars, *Oil, Wheat & Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, *Investigation of the Marine Transport Workers and the Alleged Threatened Combination between them and the Bolsheviki and Sinn Feiners*, December 23, 1918, General Records of the Department of Labor (Record Group 174), General Records, 1907-1942 (Chief Clerk's Files), 20/544-20/580 (Box 89), Folder 20/580; 31-32; Thomas Dabney, Questionnaire for ILA Local 1116, January 20, 1928, Series 6, Box 89, National Urban League Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

<sup>10</sup> *The Philadelphia Controversy*; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 448-449; Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.* 135-137.

<sup>11</sup> Depositions of Ben H. Fletcher, John J. Walsh, Tom O'Mara, Paul Baker, and Amos Gardner, *Philadelphia Controversy*; *Solidarity*, August 21, 1920, 4, August 28, 1920, 3 and October 2, 1920, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Depositions of Ben H. Fletcher, John J. Walsh, Tom O'Mara, Paul Baker, George Hellwig, Ernest Varlack, and Amos Gardner, *Philadelphia Controversy*.

<sup>13</sup> Depositions of Ben H. Fletcher, John J. Walsh, Tom O'Mara, Paul Baker, George Hellwig, Ernest Varlack, and Amos Gardner, *Philadelphia Controversy*; *Solidarity*, August 21, 1920, 4, August 28, 1920, 3 and October 2, 1920, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Telegram of Thos. Whitehead to William D. Jones, August 13, 1920 and "The Philadelphia Controversy: A Brief History," *Philadelphia Controversy*; *Solidarity*, August 21, 1920, 4, August 28, 1920, 3, and October 2, 1920, 4; *One Big Union Monthly*, September 1920, 6-7; *Fellow Worker*, August 12, 1920, 1, Folder 22, Box 79, IWW Collection. On the rift between Philadelphia and New York MTW branches, see Cole, *Shaping Up and Shipping Out*, chapter 5.

<sup>15</sup> "A Brief History," *Philadelphia Controversy*; *Solidarity*, August 14, 1920, 2; E.W. Latchem, 15<sup>th</sup> IWW Convention, 1923; Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.*, 76-77; Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 60-68. The GEB's statement was reprinted in its entirety in the *One Big Union Monthly*, September 1920, 6. For an interesting short look at the IWW's early support for the Soviets, see "Hammer, Stinton, and Evans, "Report on the IWW," 1921, Delo 81, Reel 5, Records of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), Manuscript Series 21,966, Manuscript Division, Library

of Congress, Washington, DC “At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution the I.W.W. membership was enthusiastically in support of the victory of the Russian workers.”

<sup>16</sup> Harvey O’Connor, *Revolution in Seattle: A Memoir* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 158-159; Robert L. Friedheim, *The Seattle General Strike* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 17-18. For a look at the United States efforts to overthrow the Soviet Union, see David S. Foglesong, *America’s Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), esp. chapters 4, 6, and 7.

<sup>17</sup> Report of Henry Dotzert, June 13, 1917, Old German File 23176, Investigative Records Relative to German Aliens and Political Radicals, 1915-20 (Entry 31), Bureau of Investigation (Record Group 65), National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Depositions of Ben H. Fletcher, John J. Walsh, Tom O’Mara, Paul Baker and Amos Gardner, and Minutes of Local 8 Meeting, August 17, 1920, *Philadelphia Controversy*; *Solidarity*, August 28, 1920, 3. No reason ever was given for moving MTW headquarters from Philadelphia to New York. Perhaps, in 1919, when its influence was at its greatest in the IWW, communist sympathizers wanted to consolidate power in New York. Perhaps, either communists or others in the IWW wanted to limit Local 8’s power by removing MTW headquarters to another port. Perhaps the MTW, which did have a presence in New York, simply wanted to locate its headquarters in the nation’s largest port.

<sup>18</sup> Geo Speed to Jack Walsh, August 29, 1920, Telegram of Geo Hardy to Geo Speed, n.d., Telegram of Speed, Walsh, Fletcher, and Doree to Geo Hardy, August 21, 1920, Telegram of Geo Hardy to John Walsh, August 22, 1920, Telegram of George Hardy to William D. Jones, August 24, 1920, and Minutes of Local 8 Meeting, August 24, 1920 all in *Philadelphia Controversy*; *Solidarity*, August 28, 1920, 3 and October 2, 1920, 4. That fall, GEB member Roy Brown took charge of MTW headquarters in New York from James Scott. After Brown was elected Chairman of the GEB, GEB member Adolph Lessing replaced Brown in New York (Adolph Lessing to W. T. Nef, Oct. 28<sup>th</sup>, 1920, *Philadelphia Controversy*).

<sup>19</sup> E. F. Doree, Ernest Varlack, and Walter T. Nef, Report to General Executive Board, in *Philadelphia Controversy*; 7-8 *Solidarity*, October 16, 1920, 4. Kimeldorf attributes the raised fee to the labor surplus; see Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 56. On “floaters,” see Peter Cole, “From Emerald City to Quakertown: Longshoremen, Ideology, and the Fall of the IWW,” Pacific Northwest Labor History Association Conference, May 20, 2000, Tacoma. The only time I have discerned a conflict over the IWW policy of members being able to transfer with no additional initiation fees (universal transfer) was in reference to the Seattle Wobblies, presumably all white, moving into Philadelphia. The issue never appeared again.

<sup>20</sup> W. T. Nef to Geo. Hardy, Sept. 22, 1920; Geo. Hardy to W. T. Nef, Sept. 9, 1920; Roy A. Brown and Geo. Hardy to Members of Philadelphia Branch M. T. W., 510 (8), Oct. 20, 1920; W. T. Nef to Geo. Hardy and Roy A. Brown, Nov. 3rd, 1920. All in *Philadelphia Controversy*. For instance, on September 22, Nef wrote Secretary-Treasurer George Hardy that “Some leeway will have to be made or allowed to cope with this situation here, and the constitution will no doubt have to be changed next time as to fees in initiations, a minimum and maximum, and then no controversy would arise.”

<sup>21</sup> E. F. Doree, “An Open Letter to the Membership of the I. W. W. setting forth Why the I. W. W.

Should Permit a Higher Initiation Fee and Shop Control,” Folder 20, Box 79, IWW Collection (emphasis in original); *Solidarity*, December 4, 1920, 3. The constitutional issue involved with the AWO was that it entirely changed the structure of industrial unionism in the IWW by forming an industrial union that would charter branches rather than allowing autonomous locals to be combined into a national industrial union. The national industrial unions, one of which had existed in the marine transport industry, had ceased to exist by 1915.

<sup>22</sup> E. F. Doree, “An Open Letter to the Membership of the I. W. W. setting forth Why the I. W. W. Should Permit a Higher Initiation Fee and Shop Control,” Folder 20, Box 79, IWW Collection; *Solidarity*, December 4, 1920, 3 (emphases in original); Report to General Executive Board, Minutes, Phila. Br., Nov. 9th, 1920, and Regular Business Meeting of Nov. 30, 1920, all in *Philadelphia Controversy*.

<sup>23</sup> Benj. H. Fletcher, “Branch Suspended-Fletcher Not Seated” and Adolph Lessing, John Howard, P. Mashlykin, John Berg, J. H. Duffy to Walter T. Nef, December 4, 1920, *Philadelphia Controversy*; *Solidarity*, December 11, 1920, 2. No other information regarding this MTW election has been discovered. In March 1921, Local 46 of New York, consisting of bakery workers, also was suspended for charging an unconstitutional initiation fee of \$15 (Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.*, 137).

<sup>24</sup> *Solidarity*, December 11, 1920, 2, December 18, 1920, 3, January 1, 1921, 3, 4, January 15, 1921, 2. Members continued to write into the paper for months but only Latchem’s raised the race issue; see, for instance, “Observations of a Dock Worker,” March 19, 1921, 2, “As to M.T.W of Philadelphia,” April 2, 1921, 2 (both in *Solidarity*). The issue cropped up again in an IWW publication that fall (*General Office Bulletin*, September 1921, 2-3, Folder 4, Box 31, IWW Collection).

<sup>25</sup> Benjamin H. Fletcher, “The I. W. W. and Negro Wage Workers,” Abram Lincoln Harris Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.*, 75-85; Wayne Thorpe, “*The Workers Themselves*”: *Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913-1923* (Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic Publishers and International Institute of Social History, 1989), 100-106; Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 25, 75-76. On Soviet efforts to attract the IWW, see “Comintern exhortation to the Industrial Workers of the World and to others, 1920,” Delo 18, Reel 1, CPUSA Papers.

<sup>26</sup> William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood’s Book: The Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 360; Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.*, 75-85; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 448-449; Fred W. Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years, 1905-1975* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, 1976), 127, 135-137. It is not clear why the newly elected GEB was more hostile to the Soviet Union. By the summer of 1920, though, there had been increasing and significant criticism of the Soviets by the IWW and syndicalists worldwide. Hence, the IWW’s efforts to distance itself from the communists are hardly surprising. John S. Gambs, the recognized authority on the IWW in the postwar era, suggests that the Philadelphia Controversy might have been used by this new GEB as an excuse to distance the IWW from the Soviet Union, although how is not clear. Dubofsky’s multicausal analysis is insightful but also is not entirely clear; why did Local 8 and the national “inevitably” come into conflict? Why not, perhaps, encourage other locals to follow the model that Philadelphia’s longshoremen had provided? Harrison

George would be one of a number of Wobblies who would go on to leadership positions in the CP; see, for instance, file on George's suspension from IWW in 1926 over this issue in Delo 853, Reel 62, CPUSA Papers.

<sup>27</sup> Fred Thompson to Susan Dawson, July 30, 1982, Folder 3, Box 10, Frederick W. Correspondence and Papers. Reuther Library.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin H. Fletcher, "The I. W. W. and Negro Wage Workers," Harris Papers; John Grady to Mont Schuyler, August 11, 1922, Delo 158, Reel 9, CPUSA Papers, Library of Congress; Gambs, *The Decline of the I. W. W.*, 79, 91. Fletcher also claimed that the communists later "were successful in stampeding" Local 8 into its 1922 strike at a "rump" meeting.

<sup>29</sup> F. W. Thompson Oral History, 13, 17-18, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit; Fred Thompson to John Philips, April 16, 1977, Folder 1, Box 10 and Thompson to Dawson, July 30, 1982, Folder 3, Box 10, Thompson Collection; Lenin quoted in Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 161 (emphasis in original); Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," 134-145; Howe and Coser, *The American Communist Party*, 77-78. Also, see James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999). For Lenin's theoretical discussion on dual unionism, see V. I. Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism, *An Infantile Disorder* (New York: International Publishers, 1934).

<sup>30</sup> Unknown author to Cock, "Instructions for Work in the United States," 1921, Hammer, Stinton, and Evans, "Report on the IWW," 1921, Leo Tiura, "Labor Union Movement in America," 1921, all in Delo 81, Reel 5, CPUSA Papers; F. W. Thompson Oral History, 13, 17-18; Fred Thompson to John Philips, April 16, 1977, Folder 1, Box 10, Thompson to Susan Dawson, July 30, 1982, Folder 3, Box 10 and Thompson to Peter Carlson, January 29, 1981, Folder 12, Box 12, Thompson Collection; Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 54-60, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 262-271; Thorpe, "The Workers Themselves," 140-141, 168. For ongoing CP interest in the IWW, also see "Statement of the Communist Party of America to the Executive Committee of the Communist International," 1921, Delo 39, Reel 2, CPUSA Papers.

<sup>32</sup> Reports J. F. McDevitt, December 4, 1920 and S. Busha, December 27, 1920, File 202600-278, Record Group (RG) 65, National Archives; Claude McKay, *The Negroes in America*, Alan L. McLeod, ed. and Robert J. Winter, trans. (Port Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1979), 31-32. On African Americans and communism, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*. I have never come across any references to Philadelphians in the African Blood Brotherhood, an early cadre of black communists.

<sup>33</sup> Hardy, "Race and Opportunity," 221-222; Randall K. Burkett, *Black Redemption: Churchmen Speak for the Garvey Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 51-53; Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 145-150. The popular Eason would continue to be active in the movement until expelled in 1922 at the annual convention. It does not appear that Eason plays a

significant role in Philadelphia in 1920 and beyond, as he takes on a national position with UNIA and centers his work in New York.

<sup>34</sup> Hardy, "Race and Opportunity," 221-225; Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey*, 78; David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), 57. For more on UNIA in Philadelphia, see *Negro World*, March 7, 1925, 2. The sensational murder of Eason on January 1, 1923 is thoroughly covered in Stein, 171-185.

<sup>35</sup> *The Messenger* 3 (July 1921): 214-215; Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey*, 166, 175. Stein notes that the UNIA's "strong-arm tactics that had spread from New York to Philadelphia," and, later on, led to the creation of the Police and Secret Service Department of Division 47. A. Philip Randolph, who later in the 1920s helped found and lead the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, would become the most famous African American labor leader in the nation. Randolph remained committed to unionism and black equality but for most of his career did so within the AFL, who he had castigated in the late 1910s and early 1920s during his tenure with the more socialistic monthly magazine, *The Messenger*.

<sup>36</sup> *The Messenger* 3 (July 1921): 214-215; Transcript of interview with James Fair, 3, December 21, 1978, Shaffer Papers; Dabney, Questionnaire for ILA Local 1116, *National Urban League Papers*; Interview with Bill "Willy" Krupsky, June 29, 1980, Tape 1, Side 1, Labor on the Delaware Oral History Project, Independence Seaport Museum, Philadelphia.

<sup>37</sup> *The Messenger* 3 (August 1921): 234 and 3 (October 1921): 262-263; transcript of interview with James Fair, 3, December 21, 1978, Shaffer Papers.

<sup>38</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the national IWW's postwar decline, see Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 445-468, especially 448-449. On black loyalty in the face of red baiting, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*; Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 259-260; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*.

<sup>39</sup> Sellars' analysis of Oklahoma's agricultural and oil workers parallels the Philadelphia experience. Namely, as the national union became less powerful, a strong local organization focused on maintaining and extending its own domain. However, Sellars does not even see the issue of communism as important for the postwar IWW, which clearly this discussion of Philadelphia finds integral; see Sellars, *Oil, Wheat & Wobblies*, 150-151, 163-164, 173-175.

<sup>40</sup> *Minutes of the 13th Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World*, 7-9, 15, 20, 53-54, Folder 1, Box 3, IWW Collection, Reuther Library; Report of J. F. McDevitt, May 28, 1921, File 202600-1617, RG 65.

<sup>41</sup> Wm. Stockinger to J. J. Walsh, May 17, 1921, Wm. Stockinger to Walter Nef, May 20, 1921, E. F. Doree to Geo. Hellwig, May 18, 1921, all in File 4-2-3-14, RG 65, National Archives; *Solidarity*, May 21, 1921, 1; E.F. Doree to Chika Doree, May 22, 1921, original in possession of Ellen Doree Rosen, copy of letter in possession of author. Doree's letter went on to say, "What an irony. To be expelled by a movement while in prison for it's [sic] principles."

<sup>42</sup> Letters to Superintendent of Public Safety William B. Mills, 1921-1922, Box 134, Case File 1494, RG 32; Wm. Stockinger to Ben Fletcher, June 12, 1921 and Wm. Stockinger to C. L. Lambert, August 7, 1921 and Wm. Stockinger to Wenceil Francik, June 20, 1921, File 4-2-3-14, RG 65; *Industrial Solidarity*, July 2, 1921, 1, 3, July 23, 1921, 1. No copies of Local 8's own news-

paper have been found.

<sup>43</sup> *Industrial Solidarity*, October 29, 1921, 1, November 5, 1921, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Philadelphia Department of Wharves, Docks and Ferries, *The Port of Philadelphia: Its History, Advantages and Facilities* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1926), 15; U. S. Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, War Department, *The Port of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania including Camden, N. J., Chester, PA., Wilmington, DEL.*, Port Series No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 340-341; Commercial Exchange of Philadelphia, *Sixty-Seventh Annual Report: 1921* (Philadelphia: Otto-Jones, 1924), 39-40; American Bureau of Shipping, *Bulletin*, January 1921, 3 and May-June 1921, 3; Erwin, "Philadelphia," *General Office Bulletin*, January 1925, 8. Eric Arnesen reports similar problems with the New Orleans maritime economy in *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans*, 244.

<sup>45</sup> T. V. O'Connor to John McGrath, June 15, 1922, Box 1407, File 621-3-8 (Labor & Labor Conditions – Longshoremen & Stevedores: Philadelphia, PA, Entry 7, Record Group 32, National Archives; Wm. Stockinger to Walter Neff (sic), June 26, 1921 and Wm. Stockinger to J. J. Walsh, July 31, 1921, File 4-2-3-14, RG 65. For instance, William Stockinger wrote John Walsh that, "The Longshoremen are managing to hold their own but the dirty I. L. A. are doing their best to make trouble for them." On AFL efforts, more generally, to use the federal government to destroy the IWW during the war era, see Joseph A. McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 65, 174.

<sup>46</sup> Reports of S. Busha, July 15, 1921 and July 16, 1921 and Report of J. F. McDevitt, June 18, 1921, File 202600-1617, RG 65; *Philadelphia Controversy*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Reports of S. Busha, July 15, 1921 and July 16, 1921 and Report of J. F. McDevitt, June 18, 1921, File 202600-1617, RG 65; *Philadelphia Controversy*, 16. Dan Letwin provides evidence in the Alabama coal fields of the classic US employer strategy of sewing racial discord among workers; see Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism*, especially on the 1894, 1908, and 1921 strikes.

<sup>48</sup> With its return to the IWW, the stage was set for Local 8's final important battle, the strike of 1922; see Cole, *Shaping Up and Shipping Out*, chapters 7 and especially 8.

<sup>49</sup> Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 443-444, 448-449; Fred Thompson to Linda Bopp, February 15, 1972, Folder 14, Box 11, Fred W. Thompson Collection, Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

<sup>50</sup> Erwin, "Philadelphia," *General Office Bulletin*, January 1925, 7.