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**Review of *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930* by Nigel Anthony Sellars**

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

*Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies* uses the IWW in Oklahoma as a means of tackling issues that vex or fall outside the pale of IWW historiography. The role of the Oklahoma IWW as an incubator of the Agricultural Workers Association (AWO), the importance of the AWO in the structure of the IWW in the late teens and early twenties, the AWO's efforts in the Oklahoma oil fields, and the repression of the pre- and post-WWI years form the major foci of Sellars's study. Other chapters connect Oklahoma's experience to the wartime repression at the national level, the schisms within the IWW, and the factors that led to the IWW's decline.

The strength of Sellars's work is that it draws attention to the activities of the IWW at a local level during the least understood period of its history. This is particularly true of the book's focus on the AWO. A pioneer in the development of some of the IWW's most important strategies during this period, the AWO has received little previous attention. While Sellars illuminates the local, his work runs into trouble in its treatment of larger struggles within the IWW, the relative importance of the IWW's industrial unions, and the movement's culture. For example, although the book is replete with allusions to syndicalism—assertions of a labor based syndicalism on the part of the IWW in Oklahoma and agrarian syndicalism by tenant farmers—Sellars provides no analysis of syndicalism or its specific contributions to industrial unionism, nor does he treat the scholarship on syndicalism and the IWW.

More troubling is Sellars's conclusion—that while criminal syndicalist laws, vigilantism, and technological change took their toll, the real fault for the IWW's decline rests with the IWW “because the union had proven less adaptable to change than its leaders had be-

lieved.” In Sellars's view the unskilled workers who formed the IWW in the 1920s, “far from being the franc tireurs of the revolution—proved unable to sustain a union either financially or practically.” That the IWW continued to organize unemployed unions through the Depression, pioneered organizations of auto workers in Detroit, had a presence in the maritime industry (the Marine Transport Workers Union is also much in need of a historian), and was able to establish job control in the metal shops in Cleveland that lasted through the forties is not taken into account. Sellars also doesn't evaluate recent literature, such as Peter Rachleff's *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland* (1993) dealing with the packinghouse workers in Austin, Minnesota, during the 1920s. In this important study Rachleff demonstrates the enduring influence of the IWW through the Independent Union of all Workers which went on to establish locals in Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, and Iowa.

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