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**Elizabeth McKillen**. *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy, 1914-1924.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995. xiv + 295 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-2905-7.

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The end of the Cold War will doubtless have important consequences for the writing of international history. With superpower conflicts, limited wars, arms races, and credibility crises no longer part of the daily street scene of diplomacy, scholars are beginning to shift their attention to topics less obviously connected to power politics. The current climate of attenuated great power tension has encouraged a process of scholarly displacement in which economics is supplanting politics, cultural relations are displacing ideological relations, and informal private influences are overtaking formal state-centered diplomacy.

The informal dimension of foreign relations has always been present, of course, but of late it has been overshadowed by the overweening presence, in the United States, of the national security state that sprouted in the course of the Cold War. In the days before the United States had anything resembling an institutionalized global policy, private actors were far more influential figures on the diplomatic stage. Indeed, philanthropic foundations, intellectuals, missionaries, corporations, tourists, immigrants, and various cultural organizations were at one time the principal players in American foreign relations. So significant were the global consequences of their interactions in the late nineteenth century that governments were forced to formulate policies in response to the global processes inaugurated by private citizens. Though the relative visibility of these private actors has declined, they have continued to function in the background, exerting a cumulative and perhaps unglamorous day-to-day influence over the long range, while setting the agenda and the context for diplomacy proper. In short, the local and the global have been intimately connected for some time now.

A notable recent example of history from the bottom up that marks a distinct departure from the old elite-centered history is Elizabeth McKillen's *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy, 1914-1924.* McKillen's book chronicles and analyzes the foreign policy struggles of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), an AF of L-affiliated federation of local unions. In contrast to the conservative unionism of Samuel Gompers's AF of L, which sought corporatist-style cooperation with government and business at home while promoting conservative developmentalist labor policies abroad, the Chicago central was less than accommodating to the existing powers-that-be. From its point of view, Wilsonian policies like the League of Nations, the International Labor Organization, and postwar policies of economic expansion in Europe and Latin America were seen as diversions from the real issues in the struggle between labor and capital. The CFL's response to this conservative international agenda was a counter-program of international labor solidarity, revolutionary nationalism, decision-making authority in industry, anti-imperialism, and political isolation.

This radicalism, McKillen suggests, was the consequence of the local unions' more democratic orientation. The national unions had at this time already begun their shift toward conservatism, in which the leadership was becoming more interested in preserving itself than in heeding the more confrontational wishes of the rank-and-file. The Chicago central, by contrast, had its finger on the pulse of its constituent locals.

Why should labor have been so concerned with foreign policy issues? Critical in provoking the diplomatic initiatives of the CFL leaders were their close ties to local immigrant communities and their tendency to see debates over foreign policy issues as "organic extensions of local class struggles" (p. x). The CFL's critique of Woodrow Wilson's wartime policies seemed at the time to be an effective way of organizing the local labor movement, and, it was hoped, of gaining a larger working-class audience throughout the nation. Nationalism had an irresistible appeal to recent immigrants, who continued to empathize with the struggle to create sovereign national polities out of the remnants of the Eastern European empires. Radical ideology was also a potent attraction in

a city like Chicago, where the proportion of first- and second-generation immigrants, with their familiarity and acceptance of more radical traditions of class conflict and labor militancy rooted in Continental experience, formed a disproportionate share of the population in comparison to the work force as a whole. Then, too, the conditions of labor at the time were obviously far different than those obtaining today. Wages, hours, benefits, and working conditions were much inferior, even for members of those craft unions within the AF of L's "aristocracy of labor." It seemed the common sense of the matter that the international mobility of capital had to be matched with a corresponding cosmopolitanism on the part of labor.

McKillen's study has many virtues. Methodologically, it is a commendable example of multi-layered research that takes in the local, national, and international planes. It offers a useful reminder that what is true of Washington politics today was also true then: the policies and outlooks of the center did not necessarily reflect outlooks on the periphery. Thus, in addition to mainstream varieties of internationalism represented by Wilsonianism and 1920s-style corporatism, a more radical kind of internationalism was bubbling up from below.

Nevertheless, for all its admirable qualities, the book's primarily local focus makes it difficult to draw anything but modest conclusions from its story of labor radicalism in the foreign policy arena. McKillen tries to inflate the significance of the CFL's policies by asserting that they represented "a compelling ideological alternative to Wilsonianism." They were indeed an alternative to Wilsonianism, but their compelling nature was evident to far too few people to make any substantive difference in the end.

The problem with the CFL's program was that it was too simple and in too many ways internally contradictory. McKillen suggests that simplicity was a virtue when she adopts Michael Hunt's definition of ideology as a simplificatory schema. However, this characterization of ideology is itself much too simple. Ideologies are actually among the most complex of human intellectual constructions, which is why something like liberalism can organize an economy, a polity, and provide support for science and freedom of thought, as well as detailed programs for regulating our personal lives. Ideology is many things, depending on one's point of view, but it is hardly simple.

For example, it is obvious that labor radicalism was not nearly so "deep" ideologically as the complex and sophisticated vision of Woodrow Wilson. The calls for international self-determination and anti-imperialism were soul-stirring, to be sure, but it is difficult to determine what kind of international system labor leaders *imagined* in their minds' eyes that was capable of both doing justice to the workers and at the same time economically and politically organizing the world. At once isolationist, nationalist, and internationalist in outlook, labor foreign policy was less than well-thought-out with respect to ends. The means also failed to receive sufficient attention, as the disastrous postwar attempt to form a national labor party showed. Revolutionary nationalism was itself far too conservative on many occasions, as in the case of the Chicago Poles who were coopted by Wilsonian promises of Polish independence.

History is written by the victors, while the history of losers is written by historians. And this is definitely a history of the losers. But the question of why they lost–on both the foreign policy front and in their struggle with conservative national labor leaders–raises the issue of numbers. Just how representative of the working people throughout the country was the CFL? Are we to understand that majoritarian radical working-class ambitions were systematically frustrated by national leaders like Gompers in alliance with business and government? Or is it possible that American workers, in the main, hewed more sympathetically to the "bread-and-butter" principles of Gompers that accepted liberal capitalism as the cornerstone of the American social order? Questions of this kind can be answered only by counting, and that would have required a much wider frame for McKillen's study.

The predominantly local emphasis, though certainly admirable in many respects, also has its drawbacks. The role of the labor movement in relation to the Wilsonian coalition is not very clear, and the concerns of the statesmen with labor issues are not placed in any sort of convincing overall context. Given the considerable distance between its various structural layers, therefore, the view of international politics from the standpoint of this book resembles what one sees when looking through an inverted telescope: distant objects become more distant still.

McKillen credits the wartime locals as being "active agents in shaping patterns of resistance and accommodation to American foreign policy initiatives within the working class" during these years. Though resistance is the dominant ideological note, accommodation is the practical outcome. Neither at the time nor subsequently could labor generate foreign policy influence commensurate with that of capital. Though obviously sympa-

thetic to her protagonists, McKillen offers little evidence to show that this "new strain in American politics" was not, like so many other viral strains, relatively innocuous as well as short-lived. Without the power of the state to amplify its concerns, radical internationalism had next to no chance of success.

We have here a work that illustrates both the strengths and the weaknesses of the American system of doctoral training. A well-conceived dissertation has been transformed into a well-crafted first book that certainly enlarges our understanding of foreign relations. It is, however, a good book about a small topic, one whose methodology outweighs its substantive contributions.

Nevertheless, this is a fine first effort by a promising young historian. One hopes that, in the future, McKillen will turn her attention to projects of a more encompassing nature.

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