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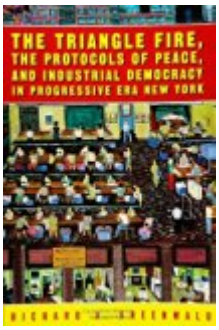

Richard A. Greenwald. *The Triangle Fire, the Protocols of Peace, and Industrial Democracy in Progressive Era New York.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005. xii + 222 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-59213-175-4.

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Most historians writing about Progressive Era reforms have ensconced the middle class, however defined, as the primary agents for change during the period. Richard Greenwald's *The Triangle Fire, the Protocols of Peace, and Industrial Democracy in Progressive Era New York* hews to this dominant interpretation. Greenwald focuses on labor relations in New York City and examines the city's industrial democracy experiments between 1910 and 1916; embodied in the Protocols of Peace (Protocols) following strikes in the clothing trades in 1909 and 1910, and the Factory Investigating Commission (FIC), created after the Triangle Shirtwaist fire of 1911 that killed 146 women workers. The resulting reform alliance among workers, businesses and the state helped create an industrial relations environment which "helped set the terms of discourse around labor for the remainder of the twentieth century" (p. 222), and provided a working model of the kind of state-sponsored liberalism that appeared during the New Deal. However, in the process, workers saw their influence diminished. Instead of the active role they took in shaping the Protocols, they eventually became clients of the nascent welfare state that resulted from the FIC. By 1916, paternalistic middle-class reformers set the tone for the trajectory of labor reform.

Greenwald offers a detailed, well-researched account that eschews simple characterizations. His complicated narrative details the class conflicts inherent in the development of an industrial relations system, the conflicts between labor leaders and rank-and-file unionists, the limitations of reform ideology, and highlights the importance of gender in the development of both the Protocols and protective legislation for workers proposed by the FIC. He divides the work into two segments: the first three chapters detailing the creation of the Protocols of Peace as a response to strikes in the New York City garment industry in 1909 and 1910, the final four chapters examining the Triangle fire and the subsequent creation and work of the Factory Investigating Commission.

The monograph's first three chapters provide a marvelous treatment of the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand," the 1909 strike of women shirtwaist makers and the 1910 strike of primarily male tailors. As a result of these two strikes, a

group of middle- and upper-class reformers worked with employers and workers to craft an industrial relations solution to labor strife. The negotiations sought to harmonize the interests of labor and capital by bringing the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), which organized both women and men in the clothing trades, to the bargaining table with employers and reformers representing the concerned public. Many of these reformers had been attracted to the cause of labor reform because of the brutal treatment accorded female strikers in 1909, joining the shirtwaist makers on the picket lines and inveighing against police mistreatment of vulnerable women. The resulting Protocols attempted to achieve industrial peace by rationalizing and standardizing the industry according to the scientific management principles espoused by Frederick Winslow Taylor. The protocols included a ban on strikes and lockouts, the "preferential" union shop as opposed to the closed shop, grievance and arbitration procedures and the expectation that the union would "police its own members for the benefit of the industry" (p. 74).

While investing the union leadership with some authority, the Protocols eventually foundered because of a lack of enforcement and because clothing workers increasingly came to realize that industrial democracy meant a surrender to employers. Although the ILGWU worked to be the kind of "responsible" union that aided employers in achieving industrial peace through top-down control and used organization as a way to standardize wages industry-wide, effectively contributing to the domination of large firms, clothing workers continued the contentious relationship with their employers.

Shortly after the creation of the Protocols, fire swept through the Triangle Shirtwaist Company, killing scores of workers who could not exit the building mainly because the company had chained an exit stairway shut. This tragedy resulted in reformers linking "the growing police powers of the state to the industrial democracy agenda" (p. 127). Replacing the "public" with the "state" in the tripartite industrial democracy alliance resulted in workers becoming "clients of political factions" (p. 128) rather than functioning as active participants in the industrial democratic process, further "empower[ing] reformers and experts at the expense of rank-and-file workers" (p. 128). The new variant of industrial democracy that emerged from the Triangle Fire put rank-and-file unionism on the defensive as union demands were channeled through union leaders and presented to the more activist state. Under the leadership of industrial democrats, labor turned into a special interest group, lobbying the state for favorable legislation. The Triangle fire laid the foundation for a welfare state that rested on paternalism as male employers, male industrial experts, male trade unionists, and middle-class reformers viewed women workers as "victims" the state needed to protect.

Greenwald's final three chapters detail this movement toward a paternalistic industrial democracy that, through the FIC, imposes a middle-class view of reform on its unequal labor partners and sees the labor question through an ever-narrowing lens. In these chapters, workers disappear from the narrative as their voices are buried within a Democratic political culture or find expression in the words of labor leaders like Samuel Gompers. Chapter 5 focuses on city and state politics and demonstrates how New York City's Democratic party moved closer to the FIC and middle-class reformers whom they viewed as "a conduit to working-class voters," abandoning "a direct relationship with workers themselves" (p.166). Chapter 6 looks at the work and qualified successes of the FIC: investigations into fire safety; sanitation, industrial diseases and poisoning, and various administrative reforms. Some investigations met with success: by 1914 New York state had adopted the "most technically advanced set of fire codes in the nation" (p. 175), others with failure: efforts to improve working conditions and protect

workers foundered due to lax enforcement of existing laws or employer opposition. In Greenwald's final chapter, he demonstrates how the FIC increasingly focused on protecting women and children, reflected in its unsuccessful advocacy of minimum wage laws. By 1915, the FIC had disintegrated, but reformers working on the committee had "gained faith in their own ability to reform" (p. 213), a faith some took with them into the New Deal.

Greenwald's effective narrative could have been stronger contextually. First, he sets the development of industrial democracy in an international context when he discusses the British Fabian Socialist influence on theories of industrial relations. However, he basically ignores a major domestic effort to harmonize the interests of labor and capital, the National Civic Federation (NCF). Several prominent figures in the creation of the Protocols of Peace had gained experience in industrial relations through their work in the NCF, which had striven since its inception in 1900 to demonstrate that the interests of labor and capital were not inimical. The focus on arbitration, avoidance of strikes, sanctity of contracts, and a tripartite structure including business, labor, and professionals were key ideological and structural components of the NCF, a decade before the Protocols. Ultimately, as did the Protocols, the NCF failed in its mission, largely because business interests had no desire to arbitrate wages and/or working conditions. Surprisingly, Greenwald draws no material from either of the two major works on the NCF.[1]

Second, Greenwald offers only brief comments on the violence endemic in turn-of-the-century labor disputes without telling the reader about the staggering numbers of strikes and lockouts nationwide during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. For scholars in the field of labor history or industrial relations this may not be consequential, but this is important context for scholars outside those fields or for a more general audience. Indeed, the efforts of groups like the NCF and the Protocolists in New York were specifically designed to reduce workplace disruptions, a point Greenwald makes but a point that would be strengthened with additional labor conflict context.

This additional context would also strengthen Greenwald's assertion that "American workers, and garment workers in particular, were better off because of the Protocols and the FIC" (p. 20), a perspective likely not shared by those workers who saw their efforts to gain some control over their workplace frustrated by reformers' efforts to impose on the garment industry their own vision of industrial democracy. The subsequent decade demonstrated the emptiness of the nostrum of middle-class industrial democracy for working people as anti-radical purges of labor unions, the development of the "American plan" of open-shop employment and the consistent defensive posture adopted by the AFL attest to the success of a concerted anti-union campaign by business, abetted by the state. While future U.S. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins could claim she "would rather pass a law than organize a union" (p. 213), workers who saw employers ignore laws with impunity likely disagreed.

Despite its narrow focus, Greenwald's monograph makes an important contribution to the historiography of the Progressive Era. He demonstrates the importance of looking at the broader industrial relations culture in order to understand the nature of the "labor question" during this time period. His work delineates the class and gender components that were so important to producing a fledgling welfare state that featured a paternalistic approach to society's less fortunate individuals, and starkly sketches the limits of a reform approach based on the reformer's belief in their own superiority. Finally, despite his somewhat optimistic view of the efficacy of reform efforts in New York, Greenwald highlights the cyni-

cism inherent in a reform alliance among unequal partners. This fine case study offers thought-provoking insights into the intersection of work, class, gender, urban politics, and reform. At minimum, it should be of interest to urban, gender, business, labor and Progressive Era historians as well as to scholars of industrial relations and labor studies.

Note

[1]. See Marguerite Green, *The National Civic Federation and the American Labor Movement, 1900-1925* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1956); and Christopher J. Cyphers, *The National Civic Federation and the Making of a New Liberalism, 1900-1915* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2002).