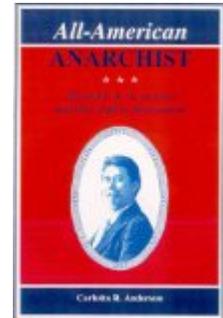


Carlotta R. Anderson. *All-American Anarchist: Joseph A. Labadie and the Labor Movement.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998. 324 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8143-2707-4.



Reviewed by Andrew H. Lee

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Joseph A. Labadie was a master printer, member of the Socialist Labor Party, Greenback candidate for Mayor of Detroit, single-taxer, founding member of the Detroit Knights of Labor, the first president of the Michigan Federation of Labor, composer of verse, publisher, newspaper editor, municipal employee, benefactor of the University of Michigan's libraries, and an anarchist. But for the latter, it would be surprising that there has not been a biography of him; however, luckily now that gap has been ably filled by his granddaughter, journalist Carlotta R. Anderson, Anderson's laudable goal is to rescue her grandfather from the "ashcan of history," and to a great extent she has successfully done so in a well-written and engrossing biography by examining what she calls Labadie's three passions: anarchism, the cause of labor, and his wife, Sophie.

Labadie's anarchism, while important to his place in American history, is paradoxically responsible for both his neglect and at the same time, his somewhat subterranean fame. Anarchism was an important ideology in the United States and Western Europe at the end of the nine-

teenth-century, and while native-born American anarchists such as Albert and Lucy Parsons have attracted attention, Labadie was neglected. This is undoubtedly because they represented different strands of the same movement. The Parsons offered a romantic history -- evolving from a Confederate veteran and his African American/ Latino/Native American wife who became Radical Republicans in Texas, then agitators for anarchism and workers' rights in Chicago, and finally both dying in horrible circumstances: he a Haymarket martyr in 1887 while she died in a house fire in 1942. Labadie's anarchism, however, was an individualist anarchism that eschewed violence and he was widely known as the "Gentle Anarchist" whose activism was concentrated in writing and publishing and had as patrons some of Detroit's most wealthy and prominent citizens. Though the Parsons and Labadie each represent important tendencies in the anarchist movement, the advocates of propaganda by the deed have always attracted much more attention, from both scholars and the police, than advocates of change through education.

Born in 1850 to a French-Canadian family that could trace its presence in North America to 1667, Labadie also claimed Native American ancestry through his father, who was one-eighth Ojibway. As Anderson's title indicates, Labadie was proudly American, once writing to a correspondent "I am no dam [sic] foreign 'Arnikist,' I'm on my native heath." (29) His father, a man whose occupation appears to have varied with the seasons, lived in the woods and raised young Jo to be a rugged individualist with great and lasting appreciation for the Native American way of life. In fact, Labadie's anarchism owes more to this and the influence of other American sources, such as Henry David Thoreau, than that of the other well-known anarchists of the time such as Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, Johan Most, and the leading advocate of individualist anarchism, Benjamin Tucker. Labadie knew all them (and many of the Haymarket martyrs), and, with the exception of Tucker, fiercely opposed their variants of anarchism. But he never advocated that they not speak out or denied them the right to believe as they pleased.

What is striking about Labadie is how active he was in the labor movement. Other important individualist anarchists tended to eschew the collectivism that the labor movement by its very nature implies, but not Labadie, as a fierce defender of individual rights he was an active participant in the labor movement on a level rarely seen in such an individualist. His activism was far ranging and one can learn a great deal about the history of labor in Detroit before the First World War. Anderson is particularly strong in linking Labadie's role in the birth and growth of the Michigan labor movement to the development and expansion of Detroit as an urban center. Organizing Detroit's first Knights of Labor chapter in 1878, he became active in Knights politics on the national, as well as the local and state, level. He broke with the Knights and their leader, Terrence Powderly, largely over the failure to defend the rights of the Haymarket defendants, men whose

views Labadie opposed but whose rights he saw being trampled in the desire to execute them. Samuel Gompers, the president of the fledgling American Federation of Labor and a competitor to the Knights, was an active advocate for clemency for the Haymarket defendants and consequently came to Labadie's attention. Labadie was drawn to Gompers and began a long correspondence with him that survived political stresses and strains. Gompers demand that the labor movement stay away from electoral politics appealed to Labadie, the veteran political campaigner, and he decided to join with the AFL. He played a major role in the founding of the Michigan State Federation of Labor and was its first president. The "Declaration of Principles" of the Michigan Federation were written by Labadie and were an "ethereal mix of socialist, anarchist, and single-tax tenets." (163) Labadie remained friendly with Gompers, even when the latter supported the First World War and offered to help the Justice Department in its persecution of radicals (225). Labadie was not a radical: he rejected the concept of class struggle and defended the participation and socializing of labor leaders with industrialists in organizations such as the National Civic Federation. He argued that it provided further venues for the voice of labor to be heard. However, that these labor leaders might become, in the term of the I.W.W., labor fakirs, never seemed to occur to Labadie.

While Anderson's account of Labadie stresses his labor activism, her explanations for the failure of the Knights and other activities on the national stage are limited. His activism was most effective on a local level and he appears to have had no substantive influence on either the Knights or later the AFL. Labadie's role in the labor movement, while important, ultimately faded away from the national stage.

It would appear from Anderson's account that in one area, the relationship between the sexes and within the family, Labadie was less of a revo-

lutionary than Goldman and others. The roles of both his wife and children are strictly traditional, his wife and daughters being important as the women who performed all the domestic chores. Labadie was married his entire life to Sophie Labadie, who did not share his anarchist views. Sophie, as a devout Roman Catholic, was particularly opposed to Jo's atheism. It is here, on the family, that Anderson offers the least insight. Her portrait of the family, while appropriately brief, is not done with a critical eye. There is criticism of her uncle Laurance's inability to settle down, apparently a source of great despair his parents. A man who held twenty-five jobs by his early thirties, Laurance primarily took care of his aging parents, but apparently even shifted much of that burden to his sisters. However, a fellow anarchist's account states that Laurance did perform domestic chores around his parent's house. Anderson's epilogue traces the origins of today's U.S. Libertarianism (a term that caused much confusion for Europeans when men such as Buckley proclaim themselves Libertarians) to much of the work that Laurance did in carrying on the tradition of his father and Tucker, and in his own writing.

Ultimately, we owe most of what we know about Jo Labadie and the labor and political movements he participated in entirely to Sophie Labadie, who unfailingly collected everything Jo wrote, saved almost everything he got in the mail, and more than anyone else, preserved the history that Anderson so compellingly tells. This material was donated in 1911 to the University of Michigan, despite the entreaties by John Commons and others for their respective depositories. Today, it is one of the nation's greatest collections on the left and labor, and still growing. Jo Labadie, a man active in many struggles, who never appears to have held a grudge or treat anyone unjustly, who valued the individual above all, yet fought for the rights of all, deserves to be better known.

Carlotta Anderson's admirable biography fills this gap.

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