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# William D. Haywood — Soldier to the Last

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Published in *The Daily Worker* [New York], v. 5, no. 120 (May 22, 1928), pg. 6.

The death of Haywood was not unexpected. The declining health of the old fighter was known to his friends for a long time. On each visit to Moscow in recent years which our Party work necessitated we noted the progressive weakening of his physical powers and learned of the repeated attacks of the fatal disease which finally brought him down.† Our anxious inquiries during the past month, occasioned by the newspaper reports of his illness, only brought the response that his recovery this time could not be expected. Nevertheless we could not abandon the hope that his fighting spirit and his will to live would pull him through again and the news that death had triumphed in the unequal struggle brought a shock of grief.

## **A Soldier to the Last.**

The death of Haywood is a double blow to those who were at once his comrades in the fight and his personal friends, for his character was such as to invest personal relations with an extraordinary dignity and importance. His great significance for the American and world labor movement was also fully appreciated, I think, by our Party and by the Communist International, in the ranks of which he ended his career, a soldier to the last.

An outstanding personality and leader of the pre-war revolutionary labor movement in America and also a member and leader of the modern Communist movement which grew up on its foundation, Bill Haywood represented a connecting link which helped to establish continuity between the old movement and the new. Growing out of the soil of America, or better, hewn

out of its rocks, he first entered the labor movement as a pioneer unionist of the formative days of the Western Federation of Miners 30 years ago. From that starting point he bent his course toward the conscious class struggle and marched consistently on that path to the end of his life. He died a Communist and a soldier of the Communist International.

## **Wrote Memoirs.**

It is a great fortune for our Party that he finished his memoirs and that they are soon to be published. They constitute a record of the class struggle and of the labor movement in America of priceless value for the present generation of labor militants. The career of Haywood is bound up with the stormy events which have marked the course of working class development in America for 30 years and out of which the basic nucleus of the modern movement has come.

He grew up in the hardship and struggle of the mining camps of the West. Gifted with the careless physical courage of a giant and an eloquence of speech, Bill soon became a recognized leader of the metal miners and developed with them through epic struggles toward a militancy of action combined with a socialistic understanding, even in that early day, which soon placed the Western Federation of Miners, which Haywood said “was born in a Bull Pen,” in the vanguard of the American labor movement.

It was the merger of these industrial proletarian militants of the West with the socialist political elements represented by Debs and DeLeon which brought about the formation of the IWW in 1905. The fame and outstanding prominence of Haywood as a labor

†- William D. “Big Bill” Haywood died of a stroke on May 18, 1928.

leader even in that day is illustrated by the fact that he was chosen chairman of the historic First Convention of the IWW in 1905.

### **First Convention of the IWW.**

The brief, simple speech he delivered there, as recorded in the stenographic minutes of the convention, stands out in many respects as a charter of labor of that day. His plea for the principle of the class struggle, for industrial unionism, for special emphasis on the unskilled workers, for solidarity of black and white workers, and for a revolutionary goal of the labor struggle anticipated many established principles of the modern revolutionary labor movement.

The attempt to railroad him to the gallows on framed-up murder charges in 1906 was thwarted by the colossal protest movement of the workers, who saw in this frame-up against him a tribute to his talent and power as a labor leader and to his incorruptibility. His name became a battle cry of the socialist and labor movement and he emerged from the trial a national and international figure.

He rose magnificently to the new demands placed upon him by this position and soon became recognized far and wide as the authentic voice of the proletarian militants of America. The schemes of the reformist leaders of the Socialist Party to use his great name and popularity as a shield for them were frustrated by the bold and resolute course he pursued. Through the maze of intrigue and machinations of the reformist imposters in the Socialist Party, he shouldered his way with the doctrine of class struggle and the tactics of militant action.

### **Headed Left Wing.**

The proletarian and revolutionary elements gathered around him and formed the powerful "Left Wing" of the party which made its bid for power in the convention of 1912. The "Reds" were defeated there and the party took a decisive step along the pathway which has led to its present position of reformist bankruptcy and open betrayal. The subsequent expulsion of Haywood from the National Executive Committee was at once a proof of the opportunist degeneration of the party and of his own revolutionary integrity.

Haywood's syndicalism was the outcome of his reaction against the reformist policies and parliamentary cretinism of the middle class leaders of the Socialist Party — Hillquit, Berger & Co. But syndicalism, which in its final analysis is "the twin brother of reformism," as Lenin has characterized it, was only a transient theory in Haywood's career. He passed beyond it and thus escaped that degeneration and sterility which overtook the syndicalist movement throughout the world during and after the war. The World War and the Russian Revolution did not pass by Haywood unnoticed, as they passed by many leaders of the IWW, who had encased themselves in a shell of dogma to shut out the realities of life.

### **Becomes a Communist.**

These world-shaking events combined with the hounding and dragooning of the IWW by the United States government — the "Political State" which syndicalism wanted to "ignore" — wrought a profound change in the outlook of Bill Haywood. He emerged from Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1919 in a receptive and studious mood. He was already 50 years old but he conquered the mental rigidity which afflicts so many at that age. He began, slowly and painfully, to assimilate the new and universal lessons of the war and the Russian Revolution. First taking his stand with that group in the IWW which favored adherence to the Red International of Labor Unions, he gradually developed his thought further and finally came to the point where he proclaimed himself a Communist and a disciple of Lenin. He became a member of the Communist Party of America before his departure for Russia. There he was transferred to the Russian Communist Party and in recognition of his lifetime of revolutionary work, he was given the status of an "old party member" — the highest honor anyone can enjoy in the land of Workers' Triumph.

As everyone knows, Haywood in his time had been a prisoner in many jails and, like all men who have smelt iron, he was keenly sensitive to the interests of revolutionaries who suffer this crucifixion. He attached the utmost importance to the work of labor defense and was one of the founders of the ILD [International Labor Defense]. He contributed many ideas to its formation and remained an enthusiastic supporter

right up to his death. What is very probably his last message to the workers of America, written just before he was stricken the last time, is contained in a letter which is being published in the June [1928] number of *The Labor Defender*, now on the press.

As a leader of the workers in open struggle Haywood was a fighter the like of which is all too seldom seen. He loved the laboring masses and was remarkably free from all prejudices of craft or race or nationality. In battle with the class enemies of the workers he was a raging lion, relentless and irreconcilable.

His field was the open fight and in mass strikes his powers unfolded and multiplied themselves. Endowed with a giant's physique and an absolute disregard of personal hazards, he pulled the striking workers to him as to a magnet and imparted to them his own courage and spirit.

### **Akron Strike.**

I remember especially his arrival at Akron during the great rubber workers' strike of 1913, when 10,000 strikers met him at the station and marched behind him to the Hall. His speech that morning has always stood out in my mind as a model of working class oratory. With his commanding presence and his great mellow voice he held the vast crowd in his power from the moment that he rose to speak. He had that give, all too rare, of using only the necessary words and of compressing his thoughts into short, epigrammatic sentences. He clarified his points with homely illustrations and pungent witticisms which rocked the audience with understanding laughter. He poured out sarcasm, ridicule, and denunciation upon the employers and their pretensions and made the workers feel with him that they, the workers, were the important and necessary people. He closed, as he always did, on a note of hope and struggle, with a picture of the final victory of the workers. Every word from beginning not end, simple, clear, and effective. That is Haywood, the proletarian orator as I remember him.

There was another side to Bill Haywood which was an essential side of his character revealed to those who knew him well as personal friends. He had a

warmth of personality that drew men to him like a bonfire on a winter's day. His considerateness and indulgence toward his friends and his generous impulsiveness in human relations were just as much a part of Bill Haywood as his iron will and intransigence in battle.

"Bill's Room" in the Lux Hotel at Moscow was always the central gathering place for the English speaking delegates. Bill was "good company" in the best sense of that old-fashioned term. He liked to have people around him and visitors came to his room in a steady stream; many went to pour out their troubles, certain of a sympathetic hearing and a word of wise advice.

### **Feared by Ruling Class.**

The American ruling class hounded Haywood with the most vindictive hatred. They could not tolerate the idea that he, an American of old revolutionary stock, a talented organizer and eloquent speaker, should be on the side of the exploited masses, a champion of the doubly persecuted foreigners and Negroes.

With a 20 year prison sentence hanging over him he was compelled to leave America in the closing years of his life and to seek refuge in Workers' Russia. He died there in the Kremlin, the capitol of his and our Socialist Fatherland, with the red flag of his class floating triumphantly overhead.

Capitalist America made him an outlaw and he died expatriated from his native land. But in the ranks of the militant workers of America, who owe so much to his example, he remains a citizen of the first rank. He represented in his rugged personality all that was best of the pre-war socialist and labor movement, and by his adhesion to Communism he helped to transmit that inheritance to us. His memory will remain a blazing torch of inspiration for the workers of America in the great struggles which lie before them.

His life was a credit and an honor to our class and to our movement. Those who pick up the battle-flag which has fallen from his lifeless hands will do well to emulate the bigness and vision, the courage and the devotion, which were characteristics of our beloved comrade and friend, Bill Haywood.

*Edited by Tim Davenport.*

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