Traditionally Radical: The Butte Miners' Union, the Western Federation of Miners, and Irish Nationalism, 1878-1914

Cole Costello

"Then hurrah for Old Ireland, the land of good miners / The dear little isle that I see in my dreams / I'll go back to Old Ireland to the girl who waits for me / To hell with your mines and your mining machines."

-Song common in the mines of Butte, Montana, c. 1900[1]

The story of labor movements in the United States can be traced through industrial mining history. In the American West of the late nineteenth century, newly developed extractive technology and capital from industrialists of the Midwest and East combined to create a new form of mining, and labor. New techniques and financiers created "boom towns," in some cases cities constructed seemingly overnight, in countless remote locales notable only for what was beneath the earth, and in the process the industrial miner was born. In the late nineteenth century, this miner was in almost all recorded instances male; young, likely not living to old age; and often a first- or second-generation immigrant to the United States from Northwestern Europe.[2] Among these immigrants were the millions flooding out of Western Ireland in the wake of the Great Famine.

The Great Famine was the beginning of a decades-long population decline in Ireland, seeing its people flee around the globe for refuge. Ireland's historic relationship with England and the United Kingdom had almost always been fraught, but the Great Famine proved pivotal in developing strains of class

[1] Hand, et. al., "Songs of the Butte Miners," 32.
[2] Matthew L. Basso "Only White Men and Dagoes," in *Meet Joe Copper*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 19; David M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town: 1875-1925* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 9-10, 14.

consciousness. Though the potato blight responsible for the famine was indeed catastrophic, the Irish recognized that English rule and its refusal to aid exacerbated death tolls. Most who left Ireland in the years after the blight left with an acute awareness of exactly how a government could fail a people it deemed replaceable, forming a critical cornerstone of modern Irish nationalism.[3]

The continued Irish immigration over the second half of the nineteenth century was among the first large-scale influxes of immigrants into the United States who were not Protestant or from an industrialized nation. Most were poor peasants, and were unprepared for life in the United States' harsh industrial environs; Ireland's relative industrial virginity led to a genetic predisposition towards tuberculosis and miner's consumption as these immigrants acclimated to the pollution and urban filth.[4] Nonetheless, Irish communities formed in the cities of the East Coast as places of refuge where Irish culture could live on despite this hostility. These Irish enclaves soon became common in most large American cities as well as further west in growing extractive industries. Copper mines of West Ireland, particularly in County Cork, gave some Irish immigrants a familiarity with mining that led to large communities in areas such as the anthracite region of Pennsylvania and the copper districts of Michigan.[5] Butte, Montana, possessing some of the richest veins of copper in the world beneath its surface, would grow to one of the great industrial cities of the Rocky Mountains, exceptional both for its extensive Irish community and central place in the history of labor unions in the United States.

The mining conditions spawned of the Industrial Revolution bred many early labor unions to protect and advocate for workers' rights, and by the early twentieth century, some of these organizations, chiefly among them Bill Haywood's Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), were openly Socialist groups advocating for the overthrow of capitalist regimes. Labor historians of the era have pointed to numerous factors convening that led to the development of unions, with some remarking on the

[3] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 37-38.
[4] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 74-75.
[5] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 16.

origins of a unique Western working class: "Nowhere was the economic and social change which produced American radicalism in the late nineteenth century so rapid and so unsettling as in the mining West…industrial cities replaced frontier boom-camps…corporations displaced grub-staking prospectors."[6] The IWW failed in its intended goals, but provided a radical framework for organization that was adopted by numerous other labor movements of the twentieth century.[7] It also owed much of its early support and ideology to the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), a labor union founded in Butte in 1893.[8] Labor scholars of the early twentieth century noted that contemporaries viewed even the BMU as the "father" of the IWW.[9] Butte was often referred to as the "Gibraltar of Unionism," a moniker coming from the preponderance of unions for seemingly every profession, with the largest in size, clout, and historical importance being its mining unions.[10] Though recognized as a conservative presence overall, the Butte Miners' Union (BMU) was among the first of what could today be recognized as an industrial labor union.[11] When considering the overwhelming presence of Irish in Butte (around the turn of the twentieth century, the Irish represented over a quarter of the city's total population and over ninety percent of miners),[12] it must be examined to what degree Irish nationalist politics influenced the direction of these labor movements.

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[6] Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working-Class Radicalism, 1890-1905," *Labor History* 7, no. 2 (1966): 133. Dubofsky's work is critical to understanding the growing radicalism of the American West, pointing to many factors at play in extractive industries and their rapid industrialization.

[7] Jerry W. Calvert, *The Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1895-1920* (Helena, MT: Montana Historical Press, 1988), 150.

[8] Paul F. Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism* (New York: Columbia University, 1920): 40; "When Toil Meant Trouble: Butte's Labour Heritage," *LibCom.org*, Last modified February 10, 2017, https://libcom.org/article/when-toil-meant-trouble-buttes-labour-heritage.

[9] Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism,* 167. Paul Brissenden, with his works on the history of the IWW published in the 1920s, is one of the premier scholars in the first wave to study the histories of these movements.

[10] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 4.

[11] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 71.

[12] David M. Emmons, "Ethnic Cohesion and Advancement: Irish Worker Conservatism in Butte, 1876-1906," *Journal of the West* 31, no. 2 (1992): 60.

Irish nationalism, a complex ideology of class consciousness and liberation that will be explored below, was ever present among new immigrants to the United States, and more so in the communities dominated by their presence. Butte "belonged to the Irish in almost the same way Salt Lake City belonged to the Mormons."[13] The presence of Irish nationalist politics in Butte is no coincidence, and this contributed to the basis of its union history. Recent scholarship focusing on radical labor politics, mining, and the Irish reveal fascinating trends, with an argument in favor of Irish nationalist politics playing a role in the labor movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. David M. Emmons, however, one of the premier scholars of Butte's Irish enclave, maintains the Irish influence was conservative; this will be addressed in depth below. The Irish played a formidable role in creating the radical WFM and later IWW,[14] and the first- and second-generation immigrants' Irish nationalism was at the root of this radicalism. The roots of this radicalism will be explored through expressions of the BMU and WFM.

Emmons' monograph *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925*, is a sweeping examination of the role first- and second-generation Irish immigrants played in Butte, representing the most exhaustive look at their influence. Though the Great Famine took place in Ireland during the 1840s, Irish continued pouring into the United States until the early twentieth century, many then settling in Irish enclaves; this meant newly arrived immigrants were common in places like Butte until around WWI. Speaking to the mindset of immigrants, Emmons states that the, "West Irish peasant of 1880 was far less likely to assume that famines were God's doing; God brought the blight but the government brought the famine. God could only be prayed to; governments could be brought down."[15] While still stating the importance of Irish nationalist politics itself, he posits that this influence played out conservatively, wherein a

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[13] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 63.
[14] Eric Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish-America," in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 199-200.
[15] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 37.

steady schedule of shifts, a home, and a family were ultimate ends.[16] This conflates the conservative BMU and its connections with Anaconda Copper with the Butte Irish writ large, overlooking Irish ties to brewing radical labor movements.

Many sources point to the greater Irish radical influence under the surface, like examinations of protest songs sung by the Irish miners or interviews with immigrants from Ireland. Radical Irish papers, such as *The Irish World*, also proliferated in the West.[17] Considering the WFM and their impact, historians note radical actions and primacy to the history of labor movements, but in many cases, the Irish influence is not emphasized, with Irish names as the only clues.[18] In any history of Butte or radical labor movements, the WFM must be addressed, but little attention has been given to the Irish influence. The WFM, centered in Butte, exercised tremendous influence over the founding of the IWW, but following its withdrawal from the IWW and a series of destructive riots, it would drift further moderate towards trade unionism.[19] Ultimately, neither the WFM or the IWW were able to maintain the power or influence of their early years, but this

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[16] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 7-8, 21, 26.

[17] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 160-161; Wayland Hand, Charles Cutts, Robert C. Wylder, and Betty Wylder, "Songs of the Butte Miners," *Western Folklore* 9, no. 1 (1950): 1-49; Jeremiah O'Donovan, *Irish Immigration in the United States: Immigrant Interviews: A Brief Account of the Author's Interview With His Countrymen, and of the Parts of the Emerald Isle Whence They Emigrated. Together With a Direct Reference to their Present Location in the Land of their Adoption, During His Travels Through Various States of the Union in 1854 and 1855* (Self-pub., New York, 1864. Reprint, New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969); Page S. Stegner, "Protest Songs from the Butte Mines," *Western Folklore* 26, no. 3 (July, 1967): 157-167.

[18] Eric L. Clements, "Pragmatic Revolutionaries?: Tactics, Ideologies, and the Western Federation of Miners in the Progressive Era," *Western Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (Winter, 2009): 445-67; Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 7-8, 53-54. "In his history of this [mining] labor movement, a history which ends in 1893…Lingenfeller lists over forty men with unmistakably Irish names in positions of leadership in the western unions"; Merle W. Wells, "The Western Federation of Miners," *Journal of the West* 12, no. 1 (1973): 18-35; Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 17.

[19] Clements, "Pragmatic Revolutionaries?," 463.

does not negate the advances they were able to make or the hope given to the working class.[20]

When examining the origins, tactics, members, and active locales tied with the WFM and IWW, the connections to Irish nationalism become clear. This will all be examined and outlined, but we must first form the foundation of the narrative. To begin to understand what influence Irish immigrants might have, it is essential to consider what Irish nationalism is and the many implications this could have on the way one perceived the world around them.

Irish Nationalism and the Irish-American

Irish nationalism is difficult to define, with many separate branches for many differing times and places. At its core, Irish nationalism is a rejection of outside rule of Ireland, namely by England or the United Kingdom, "the most rapacious, unfeeling, ungodly and cruel government that has been established in any civilized or savage country under the canopy of Heaven."[21] In the decades following the Great Famine, this crystalized into an exile's mentality, seeing those leaving as the tragic result of English policies.[22] Jeremiah O'Donovan's accounts of travelling within the United States of the late 1840s and speaking with newly settled immigrants are littered with references to the crimes of the English, many seemingly unrelated and tangentially added into his narrative.[23] Among immigrants, Irish nationalism was an incredibly ubiquitous ideology to claim. When considering Irish nationalist politics among the Irish-American of the late nineteenth century, two of the most critical influences come from

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[20] Wells, "The Western Federation of Miners," 34. "…the organization took credit for making considerable headway in bringing about the eight-hour day and for doing a lot of pioneer work in industrial unionism." Here Wells notes the importance of the WFM to the gains of these labor movements.

[21] O'Donovan, *Irish Immigration in the United States*, 5. O'Donovan's remark comes unsolicited in otherwise unrelated prose.

[22] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 7-8, 37.

[23] O'Donovan, *Irish Immigration in the United States*, 36, 44. In the first example, he meets a man named O'Reily and then leads into a tangent about their rightful possession of County Cavan, if not for the English, and how they must meet their end "by strangulation or decapitation," as all tyrants should. In the second, he meets an Englishman and comments on his unlikable "English" characteristics.

the Irish National Land League of Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell, and Patrick Ford's *The Irish World*.

Though Irish nationalist groups had existed in America since the 1850s, with the Fenians and Clan-na-Gael as a few early examples, later developments directed Irish-nationalism into a decidedly radical territory.[24] In 1879, reacting to rising rents and evictions throughout Ireland at the hands of a burgeoning aristocratic Irish landlord class, Davitt and Parnell formed the Irish National Land League to help the common tenant. Their objectives quickly shifted towards a far more radical aim, "land for the people" and the mass transfer of land away from landlords.[25] By 1880, an American branch of the Land League opened to solicit donations from the many Irish-Americans still with ties to the island in their hearts, unifying the Irish nationalist cause in America in a way not seen before.[26] Although the Land League would fold within a few years, "it introduced thousands of Irish-Americans to modern reform and labor ideologies and helped to transform specifically Irish grievances and traditions into a broader critique of American society."[27] The Land League's influence on other organizations and ideologies has not yet been examined in full, as David Brundage has considered: "It seems highly probable that the influence of the Land League lingered well into the twentieth century. The task of assessing its legacy is only beginning."[28]

The Irish World and Industrial Liberator, commonly known as *The Irish World*, was a newspaper founded by immigrant Patrick Ford in New York in 1870. By the 1880s, its readership numbered in the tens of thousands, and it was omnipresent in Irish-American communities.[29] Commentators of the time remarked that the reach of *The Irish World* even stretched far out west, and that, "'there was scarcely a cabin…to which

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[24] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 45.
[25] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 155.
[26] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 156.
[27] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism,' 150-151.
[28] David Brundage, "After the Land League: The Persistence of Irish-American Labor Radicalism in Denver, 1897-1905," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 3 (1992): 21.
[29] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 51-54; Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 157.

some relative in America did not dispatch a weekly copy of the Irish World… It was as if some vast Irish-American invasion was sweeping the country with new and irresistible principles of Liberty and Democracy.'"[30] *The Irish World* was crucial to the reach of the Land League in America, collecting donations from across the United States. The Rocky Mountain silver mining center of Leadville, Colorado, which would also later play a significant role in the history of the WFM, was consistently a large benefactor.[31]

The Irish World was decidedly to the left of the political discourse of the day, and was not at all confined to issues of Irish home-rule: "Issues contained articles on anti-monopoly, land nationalization, strikes, women's rights, and temperance, as well as such pieces as 'How Labor is Robbed,' and 'Value – What Is It?' Ford declared the French Revolution 'one of the first great victories of labor'…"[32] The premier paper for Irish nationalist beliefs, which was nearly as ubiquitous as a local times might be in these communities, routinely put forth rhetoric that advocated for the rights of workers and other radical issues that would be at the root of labor movements in the coming decades. Though Ford himself was a controversial figure, it is highly likely that many of his words rung in the minds of readers long after setting *The Irish World* down.

The Land League folded in the 1880s after only three years of operation, but *The Irish World* stayed in publication for decades.[33] However, from this point in the late nineteenth century, historians have tended to understate the influence of ethnic Irish in workers' movements, though this is not from their presence missing in the record. Some attribute this to the common Irish disavowal of Socialism, though this did not always hold true either. Jerry Calvert, in *The Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1895-1920*, points out that by 1913, Irish made up the largest foreign-born percentage of Butte's Socialist Party.[34]

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[30] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 161. This quote Foner uses comes from William O'Brien, an Irish-born businessman with claims in many mining cities across the American West.
[31] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 176.
[32] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 158.
[33] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 151.
[34] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 63.

As Brundage states: "Part of the difficulty has been the sheer omnipresence of the Irish in the world of American labor…the Irish 'were everywhere and into everything,' it has been very difficult to 'sort out what is peculiarly Irish in their contribution to the labor movement.'"[35] Despite a wide array of beliefs and personal motivations, Irish immigrants to the United States in the late nineteenth century possessed a worldview and understanding of their rights as peoples and workers that was decidedly "radical;" this did not dissipate with the end of the Land League, and the early history of labor unions can prove ideological carryover.

The Butte Enclave and Labor Unions

In a short window of time, between the end of the Civil War and turn of the twentieth century, Butte, Montana grew from a small gold mining camp to a large industrial city, the largest population center between Minneapolis, Minnesota and Portland, Oregon.[36] In 1880, Marcus Daly arrived in Butte from Virginia City to examine ore deposits, and with capital from the San Francisco-based trio of George Hearst, Lloyd Tevis, and James Ben-Ali Haggin, Daly settled in for a career as "Copper King."[37] It was at nearly this exact moment in time that copper was valued more than ever. In *The Battle for Butte: Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier, 1864-1906*, Michael P. Malone aptly sums that the 1800s, "witnessed a true revolution in the role of copper in human history. With the invention of Morse's telegraph in the 1840s and Bell's telephone and Edison's incandescent lamp in the 1870s, the demand for copper wiring and conductors mushroomed dramatically."[38] For decades, new rail lines built in the region were routed through Butte to facilitate this flow of copper and

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[35] Brundage, "After the Land League," 3.
[36] C.B. Glasscock, *The War of the Copper Kings: Greed, Power, and Politics – The Billion-Dollar Battle for Butte, Montana, the Richest Hill on Earth* (Helena, MT: Riverbend Publishing, 1935. Reprint, Helena, MT: Montana Historical Press, 2002), 6.
[37] Michael P. Malone, *The Battle for Butte: Mining and Politics on the Northern Frontier, 1864-1906* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1981), 23-28.
[38] Malone, *The Battle for Butte,* 34-35; Glasscock, *The War of the Copper Kings*, 26-27.

capital in and out.[39] Daly founded the Anaconda Copper Mining Company (ACMC), named for the first copper mine he purchased there, and would exert an immense influence over Butte for the remainder of his life. Butte as a mining center, though extraordinary in copper deposits, was no real exception to any number of mining towns across the U.S. West, but where it was special was in its Irish enclave, which Daly may have also been crucial in forming.

Butte was home to one of the largest and most powerful Irish enclaves in the United States of the late nineteenth century. The Irish presence and influence were so great that a Butte rug merchant of the time felt compelled to change his name from Mohammed Akara to Mohammed Murphy, citing business reasons for the change.[40] Several factors may explain how the Irish came to control the city. Daly, Butte's most visible and powerful citizen, had lived the experience of many Irish; born in County Cavan in 1841, he spent his formative years in New York City selling newspapers before heading West into the mines.[41] Coincidentally or not, many Irish arrived already with experience copper mining. Hungry Hill, in County Cork, was home to some of the greatest copper deposits in Europe, and some of the first industrial operations in Ireland. By the 1870s, over 1,700 miners worked ten hour shifts up to seven days a week in shafts that reached down a quarter-mile deep.[42] Finally, Butte was a blank slate in a nation with a notable anti-Irish bias. The Know-Nothing party, which experienced its most political success in the 1850s, was predicated on nativism, anti-immigration, and hostility to Catholicism, all in clear reaction to growing numbers of Irish immigrants.[43] The folk song "No Irish Need Apply" also speaks

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[39] John F. Carr, "The New Northwest and the Railways," *The Outlook (1893-1924)* 86, no. 17 (August, 1907): 878.
[40] Basso, "Only White Men and Dagoes," 29.
[41] C.P. Connolly, "The Story of Montana: The Treasure of Butte Hill and Development of the Great Copper Industry," *McClure's Magazine (1893-1926)*, September, 1906, 455; Glasscock, *The War of the Copper Kings*, 27.
[42] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 40-42.
[43] K. Lee Lerner, Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, and Adrienne Wilmoth Lerner, *Immigration and Multiculturalism: Essential Primary Sources* (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006): 48-51.

to challenges finding work for newly arrived Irish in the East.[44] Daly's arrival paved the way for an Irish community to grow under his watch.[45]

Irish culture flourished in Butte, facing far fewer challenges from nativists. Folklorists have documented this in various areas, such as the superstitious Irish reluctance to enter the mines on Friday the Thirteenth leading to shift delays and songs sung for Miners' Union Day calling the miners "Celtic warriors."[46] "These hardy men of the Emerald Isle had their own songs, many of which were suffused with national fervor… On Saint Patrick's Day, for instance, it was the common thing in the Anaconda, the Neversweat, the St. Lawrence, and other 'Irish' mines to hear the Sons of Erin singing 'The Wearing of Green,' 'God Save Ireland,' 'Ireland Boys, Hurray,' and many another patriotic song."[47] Joe Kennedy, an Irish miner, was one of the most noted composers of protest songs set to Irish tunes, including one criticizing Cornishmen for breaking strikes in the turbulent years before WWI.[48] The miners of all ethnicities sang many songs underneath Butte, but most were set to traditional Irish melodies.[49] Irish national social clubs, like the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) and Clan-na-Gael, also known as the Robert Emmet Literary Association (RELA), thrived and exercised tremendous influence in the community.[50]

In addition to the remarkable Irish community, Butte was also home to some of the earliest modern labor unions. In 1878, following a strike to ensure daily pay of $3.50, the Butte

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[44] Lerner, et. al., *Immigration and Multiculturalism,* 56-58.
[45] Basso, "Only White Men and Dagoes," 30.
[46] Wayland Hand, "The Folklore, Customs, and Traditions of the Butte Miner," *California Folklore Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (1946): 11; Wayland Hand, "The Folklore, Customs, and Traditions of the Butte Miner (Concluded)," *California Folklore Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1946): 171.
[47] Hand, et. al., "Songs of the Butte Miners," 7.
[48] Stegner, "Protest Songs from the Butte Mines," 158. The song referencing Cornishmen is, "A Scabby Cousin Jack." "Cousin Jack" was a common nickname applied to the Cornish by the Irish, and this song references the ever-present rivalries between the ethnic groups. Scholarship suggests the Cornish-Americans were far more conservative in practice.
[49] Hand, et. al., "Songs of the Butte Miners," 25. "Wearing of Green" was one of the most common tunes miners' songs were set to.
[50] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 104.

Workingmen's Union was born, narrowing its occupational focus in 1885 and changing its name to the Butte Miners' Union.[51] In 1893, at a convention in Butte, many Western mining unions, with the BMU as the largest and most powerful, joined together to form the Western Federation of Miners.[52] These unions were central to burgeoning labor movements, and Butte is dominant in the history of both, but the goals, tactics, and grander ideology of the two were almost always completely antithetical. To this day, the BMU's association with the WFM causes unresolved contradictions that historians struggle to reckon with. Though the BMU is commonly cited as one of the first industrial labor unions, its legacy is that of corporate cooperation and peaceful relations for over three decades without striking once.[53] The WFM, in contrast, is remembered as a militant labor union, embracing Socialism and responsible for violent actions; in the constitution of the WFM, phrases like "wage slave" and "class struggle" are thrown about.[54] One contemporary article (published anonymously and reading as if its author potentially had business interests at stake) denounces the WFM as terrorists and vigilantes.[55]

Irish-Americans also dominated the ranks of the BMU, making it nearly indistinguishable from the Irish nationalist social clubs that proliferated in Butte.[56] The BMU's ethnic composition among other factors, has led scholars to contend that Butte's Irish exercised a conservative influence.[57] But this is not the case; the WFM had many Irish with just as strong of ties to Butte, including

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[51] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 71; Wells, "The Western Federation of Miners," 20.
[52] Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism,* 40; Dubofsky, "Origins of Western Working-Class Radicalism," 138; Wells, "The Western Federation of Miners," 22.
[53] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 183-184.
[54] Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism,* 47; Dubofsky, "Origins of Western Working-Class Radicalism," 143-148.
[55] "The Western Federation of Miners," *The Outlook (1893-1924)* 83, no. 10 (1906): 551-5. This article, in response to another published months earlier and praising the WFM, speaks to inherent "danger" from this group and their political aspirations, also noting their avowed purpose of destroying capitalist systems of power. Having been published anonymously speaks to its likely nature as a smear campaign.
[56] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 186-187, 293.
[57] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 183.

radicals Dan Shovlin, James Maher, and the first WFM president, Ed Boyce.[58] The root of the conservative influence came from capital ties, not ethnic ones.

As Calvert explains, "Capitalism in Butte was not an abstraction. It was personified in the powerful and ruthless Anaconda Copper Mining Company, and it was visible in the fine homes of the rich and well-to-do and in the shacks and boarding houses where the workers lived."[59] The Gilded Age was an era of extremes, seeing wealth and poverty on the most illogical of scales; the poor immigrant, especially in places like Butte, where Marcus Daly frequently drank with miners, could also see their fortunes reversed quickly.[60] For Irish in Butte, connections meant everything, for in addition to the AOH, the RELA, and the BMU, there was another great Irish social club in Butte: "Indeed, one of the largest and certainly one of the most influential Irish 'clubs' in Butte was the Anaconda Copper Mining Company. The Irish miner enclave understood the benefits implied by Irish run mines."[61] The conservatism of the BMU cannot be understood without examining its links with the ACMC.

The Anaconda Copper Mining Company, the Butte Miners' Union, and the Essence of Radicalism

Radicalism can take many forms, but it is characterized by a recognition of exploitation. Dubofsky outlines radicalism well: "…not murder mayhem, but a concept of social change and a program for altering the foundations of American society and government…"[62] When examining the labor unions of Butte and their broader influence, both the BMU and the WFM reflected values that could be understood as radical. Brissenden, in his 1920 study of the IWW and its predecessors, notes how all reflected a belief in the "irrepressible conflict" that existed between labor and

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[58] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 231-232.
[59] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 57.
[60] Kevin Hillstrom, *Defining Moments: Workers Unite! The American Labor Movement* (Detroit, MI: Omnigraphics, 2011): 35; Malone, *The Battle for Butte,* 64-65.
[61] David M. Emmons, "An Aristocracy of Labor: The Irish Miners of Butte, 1880-1914." *Labor History* 28, no. 3 (1987): 288.
[62] Dubofsky, "Origins of Western Working-Class Radicalism," 132.

capital.[63] It is the varying reactions to this battle between labor and capital that reveal different expressions of Irish nationalism.

The conservatism of the Butte Miners' Union must be addressed. Famously, the BMU never enacted a strike, which many point to as the prime example of its conservatism, but the union's friendly relations with the ACMC is far more indicting.[64] Among other offenses, the BMU bought ACMC stock, favored the corporate consolidation that came with Amalgamated Copper, and were avowedly anti-Socialist.[65] Marcus Daly saw the benefits of this alliance with the union, believing it key to a stable workforce: "Daly argued that good wages made prosperous communities, and the more prosperous community, the safer his rights and properties were from the assaults of agitators."[66] The BMU and its close relations with the ACMC also contributed to an Irish dominated workforce. Perhaps as a result or by design, the Irish workforce was consistently awarded special treatment both in hiring and job placement.[67] Depending on one's angle, this could be seen either as corruption or a radicalized ethnic enclave protecting their own.

Another factor contributing to the perceived conservatism of Irish-Americans is the lure of the "lace curtains," or trappings of middle-class bourgeoisie. John Francis Maguire, an Irish immigrant himself, wrote of his travels in Irish-American communities of the late 1860s, and remarked on the propensity for land ownership among many he meets. "Peter," he says of a man he meets in a Nova Scotia Irish community, "like all sober and steady Irishmen whom I have met with in America, had a keen relish for 'real estate,' and having been already possessed of an odd 'lot' here and there, he had his eye on other bits in convenient sites."[68] Prior to 1900, those arriving from Ireland were fleeing starvation, rent exploitation, and other calamities, and it is clear that, once given the opportunity, many acted on the chances to buy property and accumulate wealth. As even Emmons argues: "The

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[63] Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism,* 110.
[64] Basso, "Only White Men and Dagoes," 31.
[65] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 230.
[66] Connolly, "The Story of Montana," 459.
[67] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 145.
[68] John F. Maguire, "Chapter 1," In *The Irish in America*. D. & J. Sadlier & Co. (1868): 22.

point is not that the Irish were inherently conservative or that they had succumbed to the temptations of lace curtains… In their own minds the Irish miners were simply protecting the enclave by protecting their jobs, their families, and their health."[69] The phenomenal size and strength of the Butte community provided many examples of Irish immigrants accumulating vast wealth and bourgeoisie prestige, with Daly perhaps the ultimate example. While still displaying accoutrements of Irish nationalism, such as membership in mutual aid societies, subscriptions to *The Irish World*, and donations back to the Emerald Isle, this middle- and upper-class Irish society, particularly in Butte – and featuring leadership of the BMU, ACMC officials, and other society leaders – certainly exerted a conservative influence.[70] The numbers reveal that this influence was, in fact, limited. By 1900, the BMU's membership was roughly seven thousand, but Butte's union hall could hold fewer than ten percent of this total. Further, election turnout over forty percent was rare.[71] By this logic, the policy of the BMU was decided and dictated by a small group with the ACMC's interests at heart.

Daly was at the forefront of this conservative Irish interest. "By giving preferential treatment to Irish miners, joining their associations, paying for their churches, attending their wakes, and serving generally as an example of Irish enterprise, Daly blurred class distinctions and contributed to worker conservatism."[72] Irish who embraced radicalism, such as Ed Boyce, charged Daly as being "the worst kind of Irishman," who had become just as villainous as the landlords of Ireland.[73] Boyce also believed Daly's control of the BMU and Butte was so complete that he would push for the WFM's move to Denver rather.[74] The BMU is left with an odd legacy blending Irish nationalism and conservative working-class values.[75]

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[69] Emmons, "An Aristocracy of Labor," 297.
[70] Emmons, "An Aristocracy of Labor," 290-291; Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 188.
[71] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 188.
[72] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 190.
[73] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 298.
[74] Emmons, "An Aristocracy of Labor," 291-292.
[75] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 211-212.

Though in some respects an extension of the corporate arm of the ACMC, the BMU exerted what could be construed as a radical reaction to radical circumstances. The BMU's collusion with the ACMC contributed to practices like old or infirm miners being placed in easier jobs, such as above-ground roles, and other preferential treatments to those within the enclave.[76] After the consolidation into Amalgamated Copper, accountants in New York deemed these rewards unacceptable and worked to put an end to them.[77] Practices put in place by the BMU to take care of their community were vetoed by a faceless corporate accounting team once the benefits were recognized: something here does not feel very conservative. It is also worthwhile here to remember the welfare and mutual aid organizations of the Irish, and how parallels could still be found in the BMU's treatment of its Irish enclave. It could even be argued that the BMU's favoring of corporate consolidation had benefits: Amalgamated Copper's consolidation led to higher wages among Butte's miners.[78]

If the conservative influence of the BMU is overstated, the radical influence of the Irish through the WFM has been understated. Though the BMU never enacted a strike in Butte, it did aid strikes begun by sister unions, such as those in Coeur d'Alene of 1892 that begat the WFM, sending money to help support miners and their families while picketing.[79] The WFM was organized largely in response to the disunified nature of local mining unions, as well as the miner's tendency towards itinerancy, but the idea for federation may have come from common practice among Irish clubs.[80] Though not as uniformly composed of Irish-Americans (naturally, as the WFM stretched the whole west and not just Butte), the WFM did have a high number of Irish involved in its formation and operation, with the most prominent being the

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[76] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 146-147.
[77] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 248.
[78] "General Increase of Wages," *The Independent ...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts (1848-1921)* (1906, Nov 29) 61.
[79] George Edgar French, "The Coeur D'Alene Riots, 1892: The Story of a Great Strike," *Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine* 26, no. 151 (July, 1895): 33.
[80] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 227.

aforementioned Boyce.[81] In grander labor movements, the WFM played a crucial role in defining the ideology of what an industrial union was supposed to be. As Brissenden explains, "The Federation's bitter fights with the mine operators, especially in Colorado, Montana, and Idaho, prepared the ground and spread the sentiment for the extension of revolutionary industrialism beyond the relatively narrow limits of the metalliferous mining industry."[82]

Finally, though a strict reading of the history tells us Irish-Americans were frequently anti-Socialist due to rhetoric from the Catholic Church, this should not be accepted at face value, and particularly in Butte. Calvert has shown us that the Irish were a formidable percentage of Butte's Socialist party, winning many victories in Butte city elections from 1903-1913.[83] Eugene V. Debs, one of the most renowned Socialist politicians of the early twentieth century, spoke many times in Butte.[84] Debs frequently spoke to many ideas at the heart of Irish nationalism, in one speech claiming: "Workingmen can combine, federate, unify, cooperate, harmonize, act in concert… By acting together they could overthrow monopolies and trusts. They could squeeze the water out of stocks… *They could make the cornering of the food products of the country a crime* [emphasis added]… Such things are not vagaries…They are practical. They are honest."[85] One imagines Debs' words would have found many a like mind among Irish in Butte, particularly those who had read Patrick Ford.

Traditionally Radical

Butte's role in labor came to an explosive end in 1914, when the Miners' Union Hall was destroyed in a series of riots. Dating back to 1906 and the beginning of a murder trial implicating Bill Haywood, differing factions of the BMU, WFM,

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[81] Brundage, "After the Land League," 3.
[82] Brissenden, *The I.W.W.: A Study of American Syndicalism,* 167.
[83] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 63; Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 247.
[84] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 6.
[85] Eugene V. Debs, "What Can We Do For Working People?" *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* 14, no. 4 (April, 1890): 291-293. in Hillstrom, *Defining Moments: Workers Unite!,* 162.

and IWW had been at war with each other.[86] The BMU collapsed alongside the hall, the WFM limped on before shifting goals and drifting into obscurity, and Butte became an open shop town, with all mines refusing to acknowledge any union power.[87] By 1914, Daly had died, Boyce had left the world of labor politics to invest in luxury hotels of Portland, and the ACMC was now Amalgamated Copper and eyeing South American copper deposits. This was now a very different Butte from the one of the BMU and WFM's heydays. Butte's union history may have come to a screeching halt, but its role in these movements could never be erased. What should be made of the nearly four decades that unions and the Irish reigned alongside copper in Butte?

In 1907, two opposing sides of the BMU were fighting for control of the union. Calvert gives pointed insight into these two factions:

> On one side of the controversy stood the union's temporarily discredited 'conservative' faction, whose leaders were mostly Irish and Democrats. Their critics called them the 'company crowd,' because they believed that the conservatives were too friendly to the mining companies. On the other side were the ascendant progressives. Many of them were members and supporters of the

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[86] "Excerpt from Darrow's Summation in the Haywood Trial." *Famous American Trials: Bill Haywood Trial, 1907.* University of Missouri-Kansas City Law School. Available online at http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/trials/haywood/HAY_SUMD.HTM. in Hillstrom, *Defining Moments: Workers Unite!,* 172. Bill Haywood, among others, was indicted in the murder of former Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg during a riot. Though acquitted, this 1907 trial forever changed the labor movements he had been a part of: the IWW would lose influence after his departure, and the WFM drifted away from its militancy of prior decades under the leadership of Charles Moyer. This citation is Haywood's attorney, Clarence Darrow's, biting defense of the unionism Haywood was a part of founding, claiming, "Do you think there are no brave hearts and no other strong arms, no other devoted souls who will risk their life in that great cause which has demanded martyrs in every age of this world? There are others, and these others will come to take his place, will come to carry the banner where he could not carry it."

[87] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 87-88.

> Socialist Party, some were IWW men, and some were independents who simply objected to corporate influence in union affairs. Most of the progressive leaders were also apparently Irish.[88]

The Irish were everywhere among the conservative and radical sides of the union divisions in the early twentieth century, especially in the labor hotbed of Butte, and among both Irish nationalist politics were standard. The biggest differences were their interpretations of this doctrine, and how it applied to their lives as laborers and capitalists alike.

Irish-Americans of the late nineteenth century would have possessed a unique worldview, many holding what would be understood as radical views pertaining to land, workers' rights, and imperialism. But they were also opportunists, and it should be no surprise that the Irish also landed on the conservative side of many of these issues, in many cases because their direct interests may be at stake. Though not all Irish-Americans took up the radical cause in America, "few of them can have automatically or mindlessly rejected that radical side."[89] The Irish contributions to rhetoric and leadership of the WFM, as well as actions of the BMU such as aiding strikes in other communities or fighting for higher wages and standard of living, reveal the beginnings of their influence on broader contemporary movements.

The Irish influence in this field is beginning to be recognized on a broader scale, but there is still room for studies on the conservatism and radicalism stemming from Irish nationalism in America.[90] At the forefront of these studies should be the notion of class. Though strong and with immense influence in Butte of this era, the ethnic Irish community was not homogenous, and divisions of worker and company should be heavily considered. Eric Foner has stated this most succinctly: "Only when American historians have chronicled the evolution of the Irish-American working class, will the ultimate significance of the Land League and the legacy it bequeathed to Irish-America

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[88] Calvert, *The Gibraltar,* 72.
[89] Emmons, *The Butte Irish*, 331.
[90] Brundage, "After the Land League," 20; Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 180.

and the society at large be fully revealed."[91] The historiography has largely glossed over Irish nationalism's influence in Butte because of the conservative BMU's cooperation with the ACMC, the tendency (real or perceived) for Irish Catholics to disavow Socialism, and because Butte's unique enclave was large enough for the Irish to dominate all classes. But further studies would reveal that the Irish nationalist influence is essential to the labor history. The Irish were unique, traditional yet radical, and the influence from Irish nationalism into labor politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is critical to understanding these movements, their supposed conservative or radical nature, and even political/ideological divisions of our own time.

[91] Foner, "Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism," 200.