
Book Reviews

Robert P. Wolensky and William A. Hastie, Sr. *Anthracite Labor Wars: Tenancy, Italians, and Organized Crime in the Northern Coalfield of Northeastern Pennsylvania, 1897-1959*. Easton, PA: Canal History and Technology Press, 2013; 473 pp., 255 b&w illus., 3 maps, notes, ref., 2 append. (glos. and bios.), ind., paper, \$25. ISBN: 9780930973421

“Mineworkers’ history . . . centers on the worker at the coalface, on the surface, and in the broader environment and community. It looks at him as an employee, a union member, a labor activist, a family member, and a community citizen.” This comment from the preface of *Anthracite Labor Wars* is a superb summary of this outstanding book!

In three major parts, seven chapters, the authors present the history of the anthracite labor wars in Pennsylvania throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The first part, chapters 1 and 2, presents in detail the subcontracting system in the anthracite mines, in particular at the Erie coal companies. The second part, chapters 3 through 5, describes the labor-management conflicts at the Erie coal companies, as well as the bitter conflicts between various unions. In the third part, chapters 6 and 7, the leasing system is described, as well as labor’s response to it, and the decline of the anthracite industry. In the postscript, Chapter 8, the authors give a detailed overview of the Italian community in the anthracite region, and of its importance in labor history. The first appendix is an extensive glossary. The second one gives short biographies of people mentioned in the book.

One of the considerable merits of this book is that it repeatedly points out errors in previous

publications. A most valuable reminder that not all histories are created equal, and that skepticism is needed, always, even when reading “authoritative” histories.

Chapter 3 elegantly and impressively introduces a recurring central theme: the complex, intriguing, disturbing, yet fascinating entangled web of interactions, connections, conflicts, and relations between the Italian miners, the unions (especially the more radical ones), mine management, local, private, and federal police forces, the mafia, the Catholic Church, local authorities, the press, and the mingled multi-ethnic communities. The roots of multiple aspects of the situation are traced beautifully to sulfur mining in Sicily.

Chapter 4 carries these themes into the first half of the 1920s. Main emphases include the numerous, often lengthy and bitterly fought, wildcat strikes, the frequent extensive, bitter disagreements between locals and national unions, especially the UMWA, and the repeated continuing violence, as well as criminal Italian involvement. Main labor grievances continued to be the (sub)contracting coal mining system, as well as docking, weighing, and pay issues. The long, painful decline of anthracite mining started during the 1920s, accelerating towards the end of the decade within the context of the beginning of the Depression.

The impact on coal miners was severe, as described in Chapter 5. Also introduced in this chapter is the objection of miners to the introduction of mechanical coal loading equipment, a cause for strikes, although the contracting practice remained the main cause of contention. Several strikes, virtually all wildcat, turned exceedingly violent, a main topic of this chapter, as is the local and national responses to the violence. Profound

disagreements and strong tensions between the miners and the UMWA leadership were pervasive throughout this period.

By the early 1930s a new organizational arrangement, leasing, took over in the coal winning. A legally incorporated entity, rather than an individual, leased coal seams, and hired employees to mine them. This arrangement then became the main contentious issue between labor and management. It appears that this was associated with an ever more pervasive involvement in the industry by organized crime, largely Italian.

Chapter 7 impressively documents the impact of the corruption and organized crime pervasive in the industry, from operators through the UMWA, with a widespread, probably dominant, Italian mafia influence.

Chapter 8 drastically broadens the confines of the topic, well beyond that of the anthracite region, starting with an impressive illustration of widespread, deep-seated, anti-Italian prejudices (as well other similar anti-immigrant convictions), and the probably consequent underestimation or misrepresentation of the role of Italian immigrants in the early anthracite labor movement.

In this chapter the authors posed for themselves multiple major challenges: reconciling public, especially popular media, descriptions of Italian criminal activities with the constructive contributions made by the overwhelming majority of Italian immigrants; documenting the extensive Italian criminal activities in the anthracite fields as against Italians' major non-criminal contributions to the labor movement and to the industry; and documenting labor union corruption versus the unions' contributions to labor's welfare. In one of the singular accomplishments of this book, these challenges have been met exceedingly well, although possibly not in as much depth as one might have wished and with an occasional lack of focus. Obviously addressing all of these items in even more depth would have considerably increased the already substantial length of the book and required even more research than that already

displayed so impressively here.

In Chapter 8, "The Italian Community on Strike," the authors plead passionately for recognition of the contributions by Italian immigrants to the labor movement, particularly in the Pennsylvania anthracite fields. Supported by extensive documentation, they argue that this story, this narrative, has been distorted and diminished. They most certainly succeed in redressing those past shortcomings.

At least somewhat surprisingly, *Anthracite Labor Wars* contains very little discussion of health and safety. This is particularly noticeable given the repeated, frequent mention of pillar robbing, and seemingly extreme robbing. One is left with a very strong impression that health and safety, in the half century covered, were not high-priority issues for miners or their unions. On the other hand the book contains one revealing anecdote about how mine management corrupted mine safety inspectors and repeated indications that safety was not a high priority, to put it mildly, for management either.

An interesting sideline that recurs is the never-ending conflicts between railroads and coal companies.

This book is superbly illustrated, with an extensive collection of judiciously chosen illustrations providing a revealing and fascinating visual context. The authors beautifully integrate oral histories into their stories, thus, through individual stories, frequently putting human faces on their broad presentations, analyses, and discussions.

It obviously is not possible to reflect the richness of this book in a brief review. Only reading, and rereading, it will do. *Anthracite Labor Wars* tells a riveting story, exceedingly well written and presented, about an interesting time in mining history intimately intertwined with multiple aspects of society at large: immigration, economic and industrial development, rise and decline, multi-ethnic communities, Italians and their influence in labor organizations and in criminal activities, law and order policies, and so on.

The sympathies of the authors clearly are with labor. Even so, they give considerable valuable and interesting insight into the thinking, philosophies, and approaches of management.

Fun reading probably is not the right phrase. Gripping, fascinating, engrossing, certainly describe the book. Informative is too weak; insightful, revealing or eye-opening gets closer. The century-long tragedy of the Appalachian anthracite fields deserves to be remembered and understood. The authors have made a major contribution, in all probability the seminal contribution, towards assuring that goal.

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Norman Rosenblatt. *Dance with the Bear: The Joe Rosenblatt Story*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013; 288 pp., 22 b&w photos, 3 append., notes, bib., ind., cloth, \$45. ISBN: 9781607812364

Joe Rosenblatt was one of Utah's most remarkable and productive citizens. *Dance with the Bear*, written by Norman Rosenblatt, a son, first gives some background on the Rosenblatt family and its determination to rise above poverty. Norman then outlines the highlights of his father's long life.

For devotees of mining history, Joe Rosenblatt was responsible for the success of the EIMCO corporation. He and his brother, Morris, took a struggling Eastern Iron and Metals Company, which had been primarily a firm that bought, refurbished, and sold used mining equipment, and built it into the dominant force in mucking and then process filters. Even more remarkable, its growth started at the low point of the Great Depression, with a "Eureka!" moment, fittingly in Eureka, Utah.

The moment came when Morris visited the North Lily mine and became aware of an inven-

tion by the hoistman Burt Royle: the overshot mucker. The result of this meeting was that Jack Finlay, the mine superintendent, and Royle left the employ of the mine. Finlay retired, receiving royalties on the invention, and Royle became a full-time consultant for EIMCO. Even though the Depression was at its worst, the mucking machine was successful, especially in the gold mines.

By 1934, EIMCO, not wanting to be a single product company, diversified into making filters for the mining industry. Unlike with the mucking machine, EIMCO faced stiff competition in the filter business, as Dorr-Oliver was well established in that field. By working closely with clients, EIMCO became a significant force in filter manufacturing, even making filters for use in the Manhattan Project. EIMCO also branched out into building construction equipment, such as dozers and front-end loaders. While the company's products offered advantages over its larger competitors, the commercial competition was overwhelming and EIMCO's market was primarily government organizations.

EIMCO became the fourth largest private employer in Utah, behind Kennecott, U.S. Steel, and U.S. Smelting, Refining and Mining. In 1958, the Ogden Corporation purchased EIMCO. Joe Rosenblatt agreed to stay on as president of EIMCO for five more years.

Rosenblatt spent considerable time on civic and governmental matters while running EIMCO, and his retirement proved to be anything but idle, as he continued his involvement with hospital boards, the Federal Reserve Bank, and the arts, especially the Utah Symphony. He later was asked to study and to recommend changes in the Utah State government which were ultimately made. It should be noted that most of Rosenblatt's post-retirement activities will be of interest to someone familiar with Utah and its politics.

The last part of the book deals with Joe Rosenblatt's descendants and their lives to the present. The source of the unusual title, *Dance with the*