ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS AND THE
WORKING CLASS IN PATERNON:
The Strike of 1913 in Ethnic Perspective

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The strike which erupted in Paterson in February 1913, bringing the city near to a standstill for six months, resulted in the arrests of more than two thousand strikers. It has become a landmark in the history of American labor—the “War in Paterson”—and a number of historians have studied it carefully. They have seen the events of 1913 as an aberration, albeit a spectacular one, an isolated and temporary breakdown of the city’s industrial and civic harmony. The strike is usually attributed to pressures on the industrial and social structure of the city. Thus, harried by competition from cheaper labor areas, the silk-mill owners opposed recently arrived immigrant workers, mostly Italian and Jewish, who were untutored in the practices of urban, industrial communities but fiercely resistant to the attempts of their bosses to “speed up,” cut wages, or dilute the quality of their products. The absence of an established trade-union movement and recognized traditions of collective bargaining in Paterson’s silk industry prevented employer and employed from finding a common ground upon which adjustment could be made. Instead, grievances were suppressed—so much tinder awaiting the spark that would set off a conflagration. In 1913 that spark was provided by the issue of technological innovation, and the flames were fanned by the agitation of I.W.W. militants. The disruption and violence that characterized the following six months in Paterson were but a logical progression.

So the story runs. With no intention of repudiating this interpretation of the events of 1913, it is my purpose to examine one aspect of the strike—its violence. The 1913 episode fitted into a longer-standing tradition of industrial disorder in the city. Moreover, it highlighted some particular problems confronting the city’s Italians and the reactions toward them of Paterson’s older residents, in particular those at the center of the turmoil, the city authorities.

The Paterson Police Department had long been a critical concern of the city’s silk manufacturers, particularly during strikes. Time after time they called upon the police to quell riotous strikers and to protect mill property. After each incident a ritual was repeated. Mill owners would issue a condemnation of “communistic” workers and censure city authorities for having inadequate numbers of policemen in the city and for failing to request the assistance of state troopers to suppress the disorders. “In the case of a strike,” a prominent silk manufacturer grumbled in 1897,
there is no move to protect loyal operatives from taunt, infamy and intimidation. Absolute violence must be committed before the city authorities will interfere. Hands are followed through the streets, jeered at and maligned without hope of protection in any form.  

Disorder or outright violence accompanied every major industrial dispute in Paterson’s silk industry in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and, by 1900, had become a familiar, if unpleasant, fact of life for the city’s silk magnates. At the turn of the century an official of the Silk Association of America affirmed: “The same spirit of unrest exists in Paterson to-day as it ever did.” Disorder, he explained, was endemic in the city, “whereas when you get into other cities you do strike a good vein of sound American common sense, honest and law-abiding character.” Even allowing for a complete absence of “sound American common sense,” disorder over such a time period suggests that something more fundamental was at the root of the mill owners’ problems. It suggests that disorder—and, specifically, the sensational disorder of 1913—cannot be seen as exceptional or atypical of the bargaining process in Paterson, but rather as a central, almost hallowed tradition, drawing sustenance from a variety of sources, but not least the failure of silk manufacturers to use the power of city authorities effectively in their own interests.

Why should this be so? Paterson was no frontier boomtown, lacking an established and responsible government. Nor were its workers the “lawless desperadoes” we associate with the American West. Paterson was an old municipality with, in normal circumstances, an effective and stable government where transitions between administrations were typically uneventful.

The explanation of disorder offered by Sam Bass Warner in his work on Philadelphia is scarcely more useful. There, immigrants rioted to demand political recognition. In Paterson, on the contrary, the government was traditionally responsive to workingmen’s pressure. It is this that explains the strike violence. The disorder was neatly tailored to the city’s industrial and social structure. Aimed against the mill owners, it depended on city hall’s favor or, at least, neutrality in industrial disputes.

The character and form of strike violence in Paterson are analogous to the “collective bargaining by riot” with which Eric J. Hobsbawm describes the actions of machine breakers in industrializing Britain. Unlike British machine breaking, however, disorder in Paterson was not the precursor of trade unionism, the first “primitive” response to the emergent capitalist order. The weakness, not the
absence, of trade unionism informed silkworkers' actions. Trade unionism never made much impact among Paterson's mill hands; largely limited to a minority of highly skilled workers, it flourished among the mass of silkworkers only at moments of crisis, and then only briefly. A handful of union activists could be relied on for leadership during industrial troubles, men such as Joseph P. McDonnell, who published the Labor Standard from Paterson for over twenty years, or Matt Maguire, a city alderman on the Socialist Labor Party ticket in the 1890s. But their pleas for a sustained and stable union of silkworkers fell on deaf ears. Without effective unions and lacking a tradition and established machinery of collective bargaining, Paterson's workers found disorder a natural and effective alternative. That it rarely gave rise to widespread fears of a breakdown of law and order, despite the scaremongering of manufacturers, is testimony to a general recognition of its limited nature. It was not an irrational expedient, born of futility and despair and threatening to rend all asunder. Directing their behavior against scabs, city authorities, workplaces, or even mill owners' private residences, mill hands expected and often obtained the sympathy of much of the city. In 1877, after a Board of Trade meeting at which the "in-
efficiency of the city authorities” was roundly denounced by mill owners, Mayor Benjamin Buckley refused to submit to demands for the protection of scabs and prosecution of disorderly strikers. He stormed out of the gathering.11 Almost twenty years later, both the mayor, Christian Braun, and the police chief, Frederick G. Graul, rejected similar demands from the Board of Trade during a general walkout in the silk industry. Indeed, when an “immense crowd gathered in the streets and cheered” a parade of strikers, Mayor Braun—a local brewer—accompanied his family to review the procession; he “removed his hat and bowed his acknowledgements,” promising all those assembled free beer once the dispute was settled.12

Clearly industrial disorder was an effective weapon. But to seek reasons for its persistence solely in terms of the compliance of city authorities would be misleading. It was rooted as much in the character and work situation of the city’s labor force as in the nature of local government. As Hobsbawm makes clear, workingmen do not learn solidarity—the basis of an effective working-class movement—quickly and cannot, overnight, make it their unquestioned practice. Nowhere has this been truer than in nineteenth-century America, where the process of immigration alone impeded the growth of a working class with common traditions and experiences. Paterson shared with most other American cities in the recurring cycle of immigration, and with it a constant turnover of its work force. The sheer expansion of the city, from thirty-three thousand inhabitants in 1870 to over seventy-eight thousand twenty years later, and to over one hundred twenty-five thousand by 1910 is staggering in itself.13 Englishmen, Scots, Irishmen, Germans, Frenchmen and Dutchmen all came in large numbers. They were followed from the mid-1890s by Italians, Poles and east European Jews. Although they often came from artisan textile centers in Europe, these immigrants were for the most part unfamiliar with factory discipline and even with each other. Each group faced the problem of adjustment to its new life in the city’s mills.14 However, immigration into Paterson was continuous, spreading over half a century; adjustment to industrialism was uneven in its timing and impact. The absence of a common background with shared values and traditions, coupled with the forcing of older immigrant groups into new occupations or out of the city as “green” hands moved in, all made for a work force fragmented rather than unified. Although most immigrants underwent a similar process, the experience was never collective, and it was never likely to form the basis of a deep-rooted and permanent solidarity.

Stephan Thernstrom and others have portrayed nineteenth-century America as a highly mobile society, residually if not occupationally,
and although mobility statistics are not available for Paterson, there seems little reason to suspect that it differed substantially from Newburyport or Boston. A mere twenty miles from the world’s major port of immigration, Paterson’s work force probably experienced high rates of turnover, especially in light of the increase in unskilled and semiskilled work in the silk industry after the mid-1890s. Analysis of the ages of the city’s mill hands reveals further that for many, work in the mills was not a long-term prospect. A high proportion of the labor force was made up of young women at work in the years between school and marriage, or young men in their teens and early twenties awaiting the opportunity to move into skilled or more lucrative employment. They were scarcely good union material. A local organizer remarked: “By the time you get a few of them together and get them educated along the lines of the benefits of trade associations there is another big bunch in and you have to educate them, and those you have educated drift off.” The problem was insoluble and inevitable. “I have seen fifty organizations in my time in this city of all kinds and descriptions,” the organizer continued, but there was still

a lack of organization . . . on account of the great influx of immigration to this country . . . there are so many different classes, and they seem to be antagonistic to organization unless you can form an organization that will give them instant action. They want something to strike right away, and seem to think strikes is the only thing to benefit them.

In this context, orderly strikes were impossible. Street demonstrations, hooting, jeering, symbolic gestures, intimidation, and violence or the threat of it were the natural alternative, for they achieved an effective, though temporary, solidarity. As the Paterson Labor Standard remarked:

All the police in the world could not reach the annoyances that the [scab] weavers have at home and on the streets that are not particular offences—taunts and flings, insults and remarks. A weaver would rather have his head punched than be called a “Nobstick” and this is the class of injury that they hate the worst and that keeps them out more than direct assault.

Not only was the use of disorder encouraged by the weakness of trade unionism; it was a particularly potent weapon in an industry be-deviled by sudden market fluctuation. Slump followed boom in the textile trades throughout the nineteenth century, and nowhere was this more acute than in the production of silk. Bad harvests of silkworms or even the whims of fashion could suddenly disrupt production. As a luxury item, silk was dispensable when money was short, and economic depression usually hit the industry hard. Moreover, because silk pro-
duction responded to seasonal changes in fashions it hardly required the constant levels of production of more basic commodities. All made for an industry in which intermittent rather than constant pressure was necessary if silkworkers were to resist short time or the speedup. Spontaneous and disorderly strikes were to be expected. No carefully amassed strike funds were available for an orderly withdrawal of labor. Nor were any necessary. An outburst of strike violence was threatening. It demanded the immediate attention of mill owners who might have preferred to ignore the requests of less vociferous opponents.

Mill owners were not alone in appreciating the drama of the silkworkers’ action. Silk dominated the city’s economic life by 1900. Though it employed a mere three thousand workers in 1870, Paterson’s silk industry expanded at a prodigious rate, and by the turn of the century almost nineteen thousand—over 60 percent of Paterson’s work force—worked in mills and dyehouses in the city. Hardly a working-class household in the city did not shelter at least one silkworker. Moreover, the city’s commercial life depended on mill hands’ earnings. Saloon owners, shopkeepers, and much of Paterson’s petite bourgeoisie relied on workers’ patronage, perhaps extended credit to them, and had intimate ties to them in a score of familiar ways. Time and again during industrial upheavals it was this petite bourgeoisie, more often than not store owners and saloonkeepers, who provided support and, perhaps even more important, respectability to silkworkers’ actions. In 1894 a German saloonkeeper stood trial for planting a bomb under the house of a Paterson silk manufacturer. When an Italian saloonkeeper, that same year, assaulted a youth who was supplying scabs with food, the local press cynically commented:

It is supposed that [he] made the assault . . . . to show his sympathy with the strikers, to “make himself solid” with them so that they would further patronize his place . . . . These are the people who furnish the backbone of the strike; perhaps not all voluntarily, but out of necessity.

Yet despite the obvious community of interest between the shopocracy and mill hands, there is a grain of truth in such cynicism. As early as 1881 a local activist had urged shopkeepers not “to sympathize with the operatives for the special sake of the operatives” but “for their own interests.” Recalcitrant store owners were publicly denounced, their goods boycotted, and their stores “serenaded.”

No economic self-interest impelled the support of men such as the Reverend Joshua B. Galloway, a local Presbyterian minister, who remained the outspoken defender of workingmen’s interests in Paterson for more than a quarter of a century, nor that of the retired judge
from Newark who advised jailed strikers in 1901.25 Indicative of the widespread support silkworkers could command is the list of arbitrators they submitted during a protracted industrial dispute in 1887. It included a local contractor, a clerk, a wholesale grocer, a cap trader, a grocer, an assistant engineer of the fire department, a furniture dealer, a dry goods merchant, a school commissioner, a printer, and a local clergyman.26 Though the dimensions of such support remain largely unestablished, the involvement of such people suggests that a good deal of public opinion disowned manufacturers’ attempts to break workers’ resistance, and further that the form of that resistance received at least tacit support.

Those who held power in local government were less ambivalent. Dependent upon workingmen’s votes, the mayor and board of aldermen found it politically impossible to back mill owners’ demands for the prompt and outright suppression of strike disorders. Without support from the mayor, in whom was vested executive authority over the police force and from whom appeals to the New Jersey governor for the assistance of state troops had to emanate, silk manufacturers lacked the means to effectively combat strike violence. City aldermen proved another stumbling block. Often men of humble origins, some of whom worked in mills and workshops and most of whom depended upon silkworkers’ votes, they could scarcely be expected to succumb to the mill owners’ demands. And although aldermen lacked the mayor’s authority to influence the functioning of the police force, they did possess, through the city budget, control over the size of the police department, a factor of some concern to silk manufacturers. In 1880 the Board of Trade applied intense pressure to increase the number of policemen, but the mayor could still rebuke manufacturers for their demands, and the Labor Standard could dryly note that the mill owners’ arguments carried “little weight” with the Board of Aldermen.27 They had received sufficient warning a year earlier when the same journal suggested:

If any of our public officers want to be re-elected let them show their usefulness by advancing measures for the good of the work people. To all public employees, whether they be Aldermen, policemen or so forth who do their duty like decent men the Labor Standard will give full credit.28

The size of the police force in fact increased from twenty-four members in 1880 to just over a hundred by 1900. Considering that the number of inhabitants in the city more than doubled during the same period, it is unlikely that the increase was in response to mill owners’ requests.29 At times additions to the force seemed dramatic; in 1895, following the disorders of the previous year, over twenty additional
patrolmen were taken on. Yet within two years a truculent mill owner was calling for the “right of the workman to labor unmolestedly,” a right which he felt had been “violated during the past years by our officials, in whatever capacity, and by citizens at large who have encouraged disorder.”  

Save through the courts, Paterson’s silk barons could expect little assistance from public officials, and even here a cooperative judiciary was not guaranteed. Judges were state appointees: judicial sympathy with the mill owners’ predicament depended very much upon the political character of the state executive and the judges the governor appointed. A governor sympathetic to workingmen, such as Leon Abbott, elected in 1884 and again in 1890, was unlikely to appoint judges favorable to employers’ interests. From the mid-1890s, however, men such as Abbott were a dying breed in the state executive. Business interests increasingly dominated state government and brought in a series of governors with scant regard for workers’ interests. Their appointments were to have significant implications for industrial relations in Passaic County.

During the 1901 disorders Paterson mill owners for the first time successfully obtained an injunction from the Court of Chancery that prohibited crowds from gathering outside mills, “serenading” scabs, or even using “disrespectful treatment.” Arrests followed as strikers ignored the decision and were jailed on charges of contempt. The interest here, however, is in the reactions of police and city authorities to a judicial directive which seriously compromised their traditional stance, and in what the event reveals about popular attitudes toward manufacturers’ encroachment on striking silkworkers’ most potent weapon, control of the city streets.

Strikers themselves found it easy to defy the injunction by simply “enlisting some adjoining property-owner or resident in their cause” in order to “occupy the front stoop of his place and from this vantage point . . . defy all efforts to remove them from the block.” “This,” a local observer remarked, “seems to be a ‘horse’ on Mr. Injunction.” The resourcefulness of silkworkers was not limited to mere evasion of the law. Silkworkers had a sense of proprietorship in the public domain—by custom the streets were theirs, and their political influence guaranteed that custom was to be respected. Mass gatherings of strikers condemned the courts. Local labor leaders attacked the rigorous implementation of the injunction with a curt warning: “We have not yet forgotten that police officials are employees and not masters, and we won’t forget it next fall.” A demand was issued to the Board of Aldermen calling for an investigation of police actions. The outcome was the passing of a new
city ordinance, in a City Hall crammed with strikers, that permitted picketing in the city.  

Although the 1901 troubles suggest that police officers were zealous in their desire to curb unruly strikers, the department as a whole was far from uniform in its pursuit of such aims. Chief Graul faced an unenviable dilemma. Sworn to uphold the law, he lacked a sizable enough force to wage all-out war on the strikers. As head of the department since the 1860s, he doubtless recognized the weight of sentiment behind the strikers’ contempt for the injunction. Counselling reason, Graul strove to maintain a position of impartiality not unlike that of his superior in City Hall, the mayor. That conflict existed between Graul and his second-in-command, John Bimson, seems fairly certain. Bimson had proved a bane to workers in previous strikes, but not so his chief. During a wave of strike violence seven years earlier, a delegation of silk dyers had called on Graul, and he had encouraged them to elect their own stewards to assist police at street gatherings. Now while Bimson was condemned by silkworkers for “abuse of his authority,” Graul was applauded for resisting pressure to ban public meetings of millhands. Again in 1902, when the wholesale wrecking of dye shops forced Mayor John Hinchcliffe to bow to mill owners’ demands for state militia to assist the police department, Chief Graul bore the brunt of responsibility for failing to suppress the disorders. Hinchcliffe, no doubt anxious to deflect responsibility, denounced the chief before suspending him from duty.

The insistence of successive mayors and police authorities on maintaining a position of neutrality in effect denied mill owners the degree of control they needed to combat disorderly strikers effectively. One manufacturer bitterly complained: “The authorities in Paterson seem to have done their best to drive manufacturers from the city... in the large strikes that have occurred in the past few years they have taken sides with the men against manufacturers.” Confronted with their failure to control city government, Paterson’s mill owners faced one of two alternatives: either they could move to new locations where labor was more pliable and city authorities more amenable to their requests, or they could seek to create changes in the form of local government that might make it more responsive to their needs. Clearly mill owners had such calculations in mind. As one of them put it: “As for the politicians who imposed obstacles in the path of the city’s progress, there is but one thing to say. They should be shorn completely of the power which they have wielded so perniciously.”

Too much can be made of the IWW’s role in Paterson’s great strike.
The press identified it as a Wobbly strike, and every subsequent history of the IWW has treated it as such. But the roles of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Big Bill Haywood, and Patrick Quinlan were essentially as coordinators and publicists. They gave the strike a personal focus and brought it to national attention. Thanks to their presence, reporters flocked to the city, and for a time it seemed as if a groundswell of liberal concern might prompt federal intervention and a favorable settlement, much as it had in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1912.41

But the IWW exercised very little authority over the day-to-day functioning of the strike, partly because the IWW ideology held that the workers were quite capable of managing their own affairs, and partly because the city’s workers had their own deeply entrenched strike traditions which no professional organizer could have hoped to domi-

*Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of the IWW addressing strikers at Paterson, July, 1913*
nate. Flynn observed that agitation and inspiration were easy tasks in Paterson. The bulk of Paterson's mill hands were, like generations of silkworms before them, unorganized and basically indisposed to unionism. "Almost virgin material," was Flynn's description, "easily brought forth and easily stimulated to aggressive activity."\(^{42}\)

It was less gratifying to the Wobbly leaders that Paterson mill hands took quite as naturally to violence and disorder. Violence became a hallmark of the strike. As they had done in Lawrence, IWW organizers boasted that their most violent action was to "Fold Our Arms and Refuse to Work." But the strikers' behavior mocked this sentiment. Once on the streets, they acted on their own initiative.\(^{43}\) Crowds gathered to jeer and hoot. Scabs were beaten up; their houses were stoned and even bombed. Mill property also was attacked; attempts were made to blow up mills, and, more commonly, factory windows were smashed and mill foremen and supervisors were singled out for assault.\(^{44}\) On the face of it, the strikers of 1913 appear to have acted quite within the traditional industrial patterns of the city.

However, strike violence in 1913 differed in important ways from the patterns of the late nineteenth century, and these differences reflected the recently changed ethnic (and social) composition of the city. It was, in fact, an Italian strike. Adolph Lessig, a strike organizer, pointed to this when he summed up local opinion for the Industrial Relations Commission in the summer of 1914: "Every one blamed it on the Jews and Italians for having been responsible for the strike. The year before there had been a strike and they called it a Jew strike, and last year they called it an Italian strike."\(^{45}\) Italians and Jews certainly predominated among the strikers placed under arrest. Of the more than eleven hundred arrested persons who can be reliably characterized, almost 50 percent were Italians and another 25 percent were Jews.\(^{46}\)

To a remarkable extent, most of the victims of strikers' assaults came from older immigrant groups, often scabbing on the strike. Further, although the city's petite bourgeoisie supported the strikers as it had usually done, this class was now heavily ethnic—Italian—in composition. Last, and most important of all, Italian silkworkers could not rely on the tacit support of city authorities as their predecessors had; indeed, they faced open hostility from both the mayor and the police department. This marked a significant new departure in Paterson's industrial history.

The rift between English-speaking workers and their immigrant brethren was most clearly marked in the brutal assaults on strikebreakers. In the final week of March 1913, for example, a scab weaver, Joseph Thomas of Straight Street in the Ninth Ward, limped into court,
supported by two policemen, to give testimony against three Italian strikers who had attacked him a few days previously. The case was quickly heard, and the Italians were convicted and duly led away. It was a common sort of incident; such assaults were an almost daily occurrence during the strike. The assailants were Italian (or Jewish); the victims were second-generation immigrants—usually of British, Dutch or German origin—who were strikebreaking. Often the blackleg had been warned to quit work, sometimes in so many words but often by “serenading” outside his home. More ominously, and especially if the strikebreakers were Italians, they received “Black Hand” letters. These letters, usually cryptic, were signed with the symbol of a “grinning face”; the symbol, a local journal was quick to point out, was “significant to the foreigner” and was meant “to imply death.” Yet neither the courts nor the rough justice meted out by pickets did much to reduce the frequency of such attacks. English-speaking workers continued to scab, and strikers continued to ignore the shackles of the law. In sentencing the assailants of Joseph Thomas, City Recorder Michael Dunn warned them: “I want to impress on you men that you have overstepped the bounds.”

 Paterson’s Italian population had increased dramatically during the 1890s and even more so in the opening decade of the new century. From a mere one thousand in 1890, it had risen to almost fifteen thousand by 1910. Viewed principally as cheap labor ready to break strikes, the Italians were heaped with scorn by Paterson’s workingmen.

 As early as 1886 a former mayor had warned manufacturers against “bringing cheap labor to Paterson” because it “would result in riot, as the importation of Chinamen, Italians and other cheap labor was not regarded with favor by the working classes.” Strikes against the employment of Italians in the city’s mills did little to relieve tensions during the 1890s. As the number of Italians increased in the city’s silk mills, sporadic attempts were made to form unions among them; one such was “la Lega dei Tessitori,” formed by Italian radicals in the late 1890s. More often than not organization took place, if at all, along ethnic lines, and it did little to reduce tension between Italians and the older English-speaking groups, who were increasingly being forced out of the lower-paid, unskilled jobs in the industry. English-speaking workers survived in strength only in the skilled weaving departments. When the United Silk Workers organized skilled and predominantly English-speaking workers in the early years of the new cen-
It made little attempt to organize those branches of the industry in which Italians were most numerous, and it positively opposed the affiliation of silk dyers, who were overwhelmingly Italian.\textsuperscript{53}

Census materials provide some idea of the extent and rapidity with which Italians supplanted older ethnic groups in the city’s mills. The Third and Ninth wards of the city, to which the newcomers most commonly flocked, spotlight the process, for they were heavily populated by mill and dyeshop workers. Both were transformed abruptly by mass influxes of Italians. In 1905 Italians constituted almost 13 percent of the population of the Ninth Ward, but a decade later their numbers had increased to almost 30 percent—and this at a time when the population of the ward was growing. The Third Ward presented a similar picture: the Italian population increased from 12 percent to 25 percent. The effect of these newcomers on employment patterns in the silk industry was even more dramatic. While the silk work force remained nearly constant, the number of Italian silkworkers in both wards increased substantially: from 20 percent in 1905 in the Ninth Ward to 30 percent by 1915, and from 10 percent in 1905 in the Third Ward to 20 percent.\textsuperscript{54}

In both wards it was older ethnic groups, British, German, and Dutch, that left the industry and their residences to make way for the Italians.

Unlike other textile cities (such as Lawrence, Massachusetts), where the older settlers were displaced by a variety of new immigrants, Paterson was dominated by Italians.\textsuperscript{55} Jews too came in substantial numbers after the turn of the century. But Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Russians, and the host of other European nationalities who made up America’s “new immigration” were notable in Paterson for their absence.

This pattern of immigration had important consequences for the attitude of established mill hands to Italians. Because Italians were conspicuous, they were saddled with every prejudice, stereotype, and animosity typically aimed in America at exotic newcomers.

Thomas F. Morgan, a loom fixer who had worked in the city for more than two decades, put it thus: “As the standard of wages went down the class of workers that came in got poorer.” That “poorer class” was identifiably Italian.\textsuperscript{56} The English-speaking groups that remained in Paterson’s silk mills did so predominantly in the skilled branches of the industry, such as warping and loom fixing and in some branches of the ribbon-weaving trade. Here they formed small and exclusive craft unions, anxious to keep at arm’s length “immigrants coming into the silk trade who did not thoroughly understand the workings of our organization, or had not become Americanized, and the manufacturers hiring those foreigners at all kinds of wages.”\textsuperscript{57}
Morgan’s concerns about Italian newcomers were shared by other Paterson residents, although often for very different reasons. Squalor and disease were early associated with Paterson’s Italians. In 1882 the Board of Aldermen instructed the city’s Health Committee “to take some measures relative to the improvement of the filthy condition of the Italian quarters of the city.” The local press greeted the instruction with a howl: “The Italian must go!” The same month eight Italians were arrested for stealing. County jail Warden John F. Buckley found them “utterly filthy and unutterably afraid of water”; and searching their clothes he found them to “fairly bristle with weapons of a deadly character...knives, stilettos, daggers and other weapons.” Seen as degraded and filthy, violent and criminal, Italians were hardly greeted as most desirable newcomers. Moreover the stigma attached to them does not appear to have diminished as their numbers increased. Lurid accounts of Italian knifings and vendettas were a common feature in the city’s newspapers. During the 1894 depression, when a hastily organized Citizens’ Relief Committee was investigating applicants for alms, Italians were reprimanded as “shirkers” and “impostors.” One of the inquirers, an eminent local woman, “had an unpleasant experience”: not only did the Italians “turn out in large numbers to meet her,” but the “filth was more than she could endure, and when she was leaving the Italians followed her.” Such examples could be multiplied. And even if it was the product of middle-class fastidiousness, distaste for the “swarthy” newcomers served, along with the economic objection to cheap labor, to single out Italians for general vilification.

Between 1900 and 1908, opposition to the city’s Italians assumed a new dimension. In July 1900 an Italian foreman at a leading dyehouse was shot dead by a fellow countryman, Louis Caraboni, who in turn killed himself. No motive for the murder readily appeared, but hearsay circulated in the press. Caraboni, a self-proclaimed anarchist, was pictured as avenging fellow Italians fired by his victim, “a tyrant” who “respected nobody and maltreated his countrymen and workmen.” “Secret societies” and the “Mafia” were rumored to have plotted the killing. A letter said to have been found on Caraboni allegedly indicated that his name had been drawn in an anarchists’ lottery to assassinate the king of Italy. Certainly a meeting of Italian anarchists in a saloon on Straight Street did little to dispel such visions; the assemblage collected one hundred dollars to provide Caraboni with a fitting burial and proclaimed him “a hero.”

The significance of Caraboni’s actions became evident a week later when Gaetano Bresci, a fellow Italian anarchist from Paterson, assassinated King Humbert in northern Italy. Federal Secret Service agents
descended on the city as fantastic stories of plots and conspiracies in Paterson and all over New Jersey proliferated.64 Ironically, local newspapers and city authorities took—or at least articulated—a more level-headed view of Paterson’s Italian colony. They knew that a strong contingent of Italian anarchists had been established in the city since the mid-1890s. Leading socialists and anarchists, fleeing repression in Italy following the Sicilian uprisings and the Fatti di Maggio in Milan in 1898, had formed an émigré group in Paterson, publishing journals such as Il Proletario and La Questione Sociale. Enrico Maltesta, Luigi Galleani, and Giuseppe Ciancabilla, among others, had visited or lived in the city during the years immediately preceding 1900.65 But despite the international notoriety of these figures, the group as a whole had maintained a quiet and seemingly uneventful existence. The local press and government tried to counter the irresponsible and often unfounded claims of the New York newspapers. They were familiar with the anarchists and knew they were not dangerous. The overriding aim, however, was to dispel the hysteria surrounding Paterson. “Red City,” a haven for foreign radicals in which law and order existed only at the mercy of subversive “secret societies,” was hardly the image savored by local boosters.

Paterson’s Italians were “model neighbors and painstaking citizens with a wide and careful outlook for the future of their children and for the good of the whole town,” the Paterson Evening News announced. The city government reiterated: “Beyond a few strikes,” Mayor Hinchcliffe proclaimed, “we have had no particular trouble with the five thousand Italians who live in the city.”66 A public service in commemoration of the deceased king, attended by over a thousand of the city’s Italians, seemed to support the mayor’s assessment. The congregated were “the better class of Italian resident,” a local journal noted, and clearly hostile to the anarchist element, which was reported to have “laughed derisively” outside the church.67 The Paterson press was anxious to diminish the apparent influence of the anarchists on the city’s Italians by picturing the anarchists as a minority of desperate radicals shunned by the vast bulk of their countrymen. Yet the characterization reflected stereotypes, long in vogue among nativists, that could easily be extended to embrace the whole Italian community. The anarchists were “an absolute danger to the lives of the people of this community,” the press screamed, “a murderous and bloody” collection of “stilettocarriers and blood loving swarthy devils.”68 Events during the next two years would provide the excuse for characterizing the whole Italian community in the same way.

In the summer of 1901, President William McKinley was assassi-
nated by an anarchist in Buffalo, New York. Paterson’s Italian anarchists were an obvious object of suspicion as a wave of antiradical sentiment swept the nation. The New Jersey legislature rushed through an antianarchist law that made the advocacy of hostility or opposition to any and all government punishable by up to fifteen years in prison. It gave the city authorities leave to harass and suppress radical gatherings and contributed to a growing wave of anti-Italian sentiment.  
When the following year Italian dyeworkers rioted during a general walkout in the dyeing industry, ransacking mill property and exchanging gunfire with the city’s police force, anti-Italian feeling reached fever pitch. Whereas only a year before city authorities had cooperated with English-speaking workers by nullifying an injunction granted to the manufacturers, the mayor now appealed to the governor for state troopers. The anarchist leaders of the strike were jailed or forced to flee the city after Mayor Hinchcliffe pledged to destroy the “anarchist element” even “if every Italian in the town had to be driven out.”  
Apparently the anarchist minority among the city’s Italians had become the majority. And with Italians increasingly taking up employment in the silk industry, the city’s industrial relations could scarcely remain untouched by the “red scare.” In 1908 antianarchist sentiment was to culminate in the suppression of the Italian radical journal published in
the city. The anarchist publication had brought "the fair name of the city" into serious question, the mayor explained in justifying his decision, and had caused "great financial loss to this City and deep mortification and regret to its citizens."71

This new synthesis of nativist and antiradical sentiment reached its peak in 1913. Police Chief John Bimson's aim was to "nip the strike in the bud."72 His force banned IWW speechmaking, broke up picket lines, and dispersed demonstrations; it closed an Italian hall serving as a strike headquarters and arrested the owners.

More important, the press, the government, and the local and county courts lined up behind Bimson. "New York with its big army of policemen can safely permit agitators to influence the passions of a few of its workers," a local editor explained:

nothing serious can happen. A big strike in New York is merely an incident. A big strike in Paterson means business paralysis and a state of uneasiness for every resident in this community. New York can let professional labor agitators rant and roar because it does not affect public safety. A similar policy in Paterson would mean a constant menace to life and property.73

Even private detectives drafted into the city by mill owners were "clothed with the authority of the police." As two federal investigators noted, "the police authority of the State was, in effect, turned over to the mill owners."74

This nontraditional campaign cannot be explained simply in terms of the IWW's lurid national image. Indeed, the police left Wobbly personages relatively unmolested, taking instead, in a number of instances, actions that had an obviously ethnic character. "Several of the officers," one striker noted, "seemed to discriminate in certain ways as to arresting Italians and Jews, principally." Another striker explained that the police "generally came with drawn clubs, and sometimes with curses on their lips, especially if there were a foreign element on the picket line, and told them to get out of there, and called them Waps [sic] and Jews and such names as that, which incensed the workers a great deal."75

Such repression scarcely seems possible in a city where workers had traditionally used their influence at City Hall and among the petite bourgeoisie to guarantee tacit approval of their actions. In little more than a decade, mill owners appeared to have taken control.

Some middle-class support was forthcoming in 1913. The owner of a local theater lent the facility to the strikers for meetings. Similarly, Turn Hall was made freely available. Shopkeepers and saloon owners often gave not only provisions on credit but more active support as well.
A restaurant provided a relief center for strikers' families, and two horse-drawn wagons distributed provisions. As in earlier disturbances, barbers, bakers, shopkeepers, cafe owners, and even a "well known contractor" were arrested.  

But this support too differed from that given in earlier strikes; it was heavily ethnic. The owners of Turn Hall and the arrested shopkeepers were all Italian. The restaurant and relief wagons were provided by James De Luccia, an Italian of some standing in Paterson. The main financial support for the strike came from the Sons of Italy, a fraternal lodge for immigrants. Italians provided bail for the arrested Carlo Tresca and Bill Haywood; an Italian lawyer undertook their defense.  

But a change in the structure of city government is more important in explaining the new role of City Hall and the Paterson Police Department in 1913. The "progressive" reform of city government six years prior to the strike had removed these entities from popular accountability. The new city charter left the mayor the sole elective office in local government. To the mayor fell the task of appointing various boards of commissioners—for finance, public works, police and fire services and so on—to superintend the governing of the city. The new city charter in effect completely altered the character and personnel of local government. The commissions did not need to be responsive to workingmen's wishes, nor indeed did they even include the mayor as a member. Composed, as a local journal noted at their inception, of "sound businessmen," the commissions represented, as James Weinstein has noted, "a plan to make government more businesslike and to attract businessmen to government."  

From the perspective of Paterson's Italians, the most important impact of "progressive" reform was its effect on the policing of the city. Not only was the police force now accountable to a nonelective board of commissioners, but within the department a range of new appointments and responsibilities was instituted. The new Board of Police Commissioners immediately increased the strength of the force by over 50 percent. It added a mounted division to police patrols and recruited a squad of detectives which included an "Italian Department." Chief Binson, determined to root out "shirkers" and patrolmen who were "not on the level," announced a general shake-up throughout the force. The "efficiency of the department" became the watchword of police reform; it included a more "vigilant" patrolling of Italian sections of the city. Binson installed a new telegraph system to link patrolmen on the beat with police headquarters and established a precinct station in the heavily Italian Riverside section. In addition, Binson went to some
lengths to recruit two Italians to the force in order to provide a more efficient policing of the immigrant communities.\textsuperscript{80} It was surely no coincidence that the suppression of the Italian anarchist group in the city followed shortly after, in 1908.

When the strike erupted in February 1913, Chief Bimson acted quickly to quell disturbances. He ordered the whole force to police headquarters. Cots were installed; a kitchen and even a barbershop were improvised. In addition the entire city fire department was sworn in as “special deputies.”\textsuperscript{81} All policemen were assigned to extra duty and expected to be available at a moment’s notice. Bimson was clearly determined to suppress strike disorders, and, freed from the shackles of a restraining mayor and an indignant middle class, he was plainly able to do so.

An analysis of the police force in 1913 suggests that there was little disagreement within the force over the police chief’s strategy. Of the 147 members of the police department in 1913, personal details can be traced in the 1915 state census for 107. Of this number the overwhelming majority were native Americans or old-stock immigrants. One hundred one were of American, Irish, British or German origin, with the Irish clearly predominating. Italian representation on the force amounted to two members; there were no Jewish policemen. Moreover, almost 60 percent of the force had been appointed since the 1907 revision of the city charter and reorganization of the police; many of them were Chief Bimson’s personal selections. Predominantly Irish or native American, they reinforced the old-stock immigrants’ domination of the department. The new recruits’ average age in 1913 was a mere 34 years, almost 15 years younger on the average than the remaining members of the force. These recent appointments constituted, in effect, a new generation of policemen in the city, men with no official experience of the disorders that had accompanied previous disputes, and groomed under a police chief proud of the efficiency and discipline of his force and pledged to destroy the alien radicals in his midst.

There seems little reason to doubt that most patrolmen shared not only the anti-Italian sentiments of their chief but also those of the English-speaking workers in the city’s mills. Certainly police hostility to strikers was not based upon an unfamiliarity with the problems of the city’s silkworkers. Police Captain Andrew J. McBride noted that many patrolmen had relatives working in the mills, and that “all sympathize with the laboring men and women in getting better conditions.”\textsuperscript{82} Of the members of the force traced in the census almost half were found to have at least one relative working in the silk industry or to be sharing a house with at least one silkworker. Of the remainder, only 18 were living
without a mill hand as a close neighbor (within two houses). Such evidence can only suggest that ethnic tensions dominated the officers’ fierce hostility to the strikers.

The dispute of 1913 marked a turning point in the industrial history of Paterson. Although the strike was rooted in a long tradition, Paterson scarcely seemed the same community as twenty years earlier. The change was more dramatic because, ostensibly, the strike seemed little different from previous disputes. Political influence had traditionally enabled Paterson’s immigrants to wage a constant, and often successful, struggle against the city’s mill owners. With the arrival of Italians this influence appeared to evaporate overnight. The rapidity of Italian immigration and its association with a host of nativist prejudices certainly played its part in alienating these “new” immigrants from the community. More important, perhaps, was the character of the city’s work force. It was composed of people only beginning to appreciate their new status as an industrial working class. Moreover the impact of immigration ensured that that work force did not change its essential form. “Primitive” characteristics endured; expressed during strikes through communal intimidation and disorder, and sanctioned by the city administration. No trade union movement or established machinery of collective bargaining emerged. Indeed, the success of communal disorder appeared to the workers to obviate the need for such institutions and procedures. In the opening decade of the twentieth century that illusion was shattered. Reform of local government exposed the fragile basis of workingmen’s influence. It left Paterson’s silkworkers helpless.
Notes


4. Textile America, October 16, 1897.


9. In 1899 McDonnell groaned: “The labor movement in Paterson is like a corpse.” Even two years later, at the height of a major silkworkers’ strike, he still felt it necessary to urge millhands to take a more active interest in their union. National Labor Standard, January 26, 1899, April 25, 1901.


35. Ibid., August 22, 1901.


40. Ibid., December 18, 1897.

41. *Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3:2547; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “The Truth


43. Conlin, Bread and Roses Too, p. 98.

44. Paterson Guardian, March 3, 12, April 14, June 26, 29, July 22, 1913.

45. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3:2467.


51. La Questione Sociale, June 30, December 15, 1897.


54. These figures were compiled from the manuscript volumes of the New Jersey State Census, 1905, 1915.

55. Cole, Immigrant City.

56. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3:2423.

57. Ibid., 3:2621.


60. Paterson Daily Press, July 10, 1894.


64. Newark Evening News, August 4, 1900; New York Times, August 3, 1900; Paterson Evening News, August 2, 1900.


66. Paterson Evening News, July 31, August 1, 1900.
67. Ibid., August 10, 13, 1900.
68. Ibid., July 31, 1900.
73. Paterson Guardian, February 27, 1913.
75. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3:2463, 2594.
76. Paterson Guardian, March 18, 27, July 18, 1913.
77. Paterson Guardian, February 26, April 30, May 22, June 6, 21, July 9, 1913; Mason, “Industrial War in Paterson,” p. 287.
82. Commission on Industrial Relations, 3:2563.
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