

NONFICTION IN BRIEF

By Richard J. Margolis

ROUGHNECK

The Life and Times of Big Bill Haywood.
By Peter Carlson.
Illustrated. 352 pp.
New York: W. W. Norton & Co.
\$17.50.

He was born in Salt Lake City in 1869 and died 59 years later in Moscow, a hero to some, a renegade to others. The Soviets buried half his ashes beneath the Kremlin Wall and shipped the rest to Chicago, there to be interred near a monument to the Haymarket anarchists. As Peter Carlson makes clear in "Roughneck," a well-told biography of William "Big Bill" Haywood, the apportionment of his remains suited the man's contradictory allegiances. He was "as American as Mark Twain," Mr. Carlson writes, yet he "seemed the very personification of proletarian rage, a capitalist's nightmare come to life."

Founder of the radical "Wobblies" (International Workers of the World), a little union with big dreams, Haywood was able to challenge the hegemony of Samuel Gompers's conservative craft unions. "Something in him moved people," notes Mr. Carlson. "Women sat at his feet; children scampered into his lap as if he were Santa Claus." In 1912 in Lawrence, Mass., Haywood's energy and charisma converted a timorous strike by immigrant textile workers into a brilliant victory: "Day and night Haywood scurried around the city, walking picketlines, leading marches, addressing rallies, chairing meetings. Expansive, optimistic, and charming, Haywood captivated the crowds. Strikers followed him wherever he went."

Over the years Haywood had not shrunk from violence, but the triumph in Lawrence made him an apostle of passive resistance. "When we strike now," he announced, "we strike with our hands in our pockets. We have a new kind of violence — the havoc we raise with money by laying down our tools." In the end, though, he was no match for labor's powerful enemies, including the United States Government. In September 1917,

Federal agents stormed I.W.W. headquarters in 11 cities and arrested hundreds of union leaders on charges of conspiracy to overthrow the Government. Two years later, Haywood jumped bail and embarked for Russia via Stockholm. Sailing past the Statue of Liberty, he was heard to mutter, "Goodbye. You've had your back turned on me for too long. I am going to the land of freedom." It was a characteristic remark, full of contentiousness and vain hope.
