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## 'The Question of Pratt' A Syndicalist Conundrum

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## ‘The Question of Pratt’ A Syndicalist Conundrum

I first encountered Edward Loucestre Pratt when researching catering workers’ strikes in pre-First World War Britain. In 1911 Pratt had joined a newly formed catering workers’ trade union and then travelled to southern Africa from where he corresponded with the union’s newspaper. By early 1914 Pratt was back in Britain, an enthusiastic syndicalist, seeking the overthrow of capitalism through the direct action of workers organised in industry-wide unions.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter Pratt was to establish three trades unions, successively edit two of British syndicalism’s leading monthlies (1915-1918) and in 1917 headed the British branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the American syndicalist organisation, commonly known as the Wobblies.<sup>2</sup> In summer 1918, and in mysterious circumstances he stepped down from the editorship of *Solidarity* and left Britain for the United States, where his connections with syndicalism ceased.<sup>3</sup>

Although syndicalism’s class consciousness in the early twentieth century distinguishes it from most current social justice movements, its informal trans-national networks built on personal relationships and its values of international solidarity and grass-roots decision-making are sufficiently similar to have revived historians’ interest.<sup>4</sup> With nothing more than a couple of footnotes in syndicalist historiography, Pratt’s activism appeared to merit investigation, particularly his international connections in the catering sector and his relations with syndicalist engineering workers during the First World War.<sup>5</sup> Without any intention on their own part, a subject’s sparse archival footprint makes them elusive to the micro-historian researching them as case-studies.<sup>6</sup> But as I traced the twists and turns of Pratt’s life up until 1918, I found more than the expected run of inconsistencies and unexplained gaps that occur when sources are scanty. Questions arose: did Pratt set out to deceive or would he have seen

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<sup>1</sup> See Bob Holton, *British Syndicalism 1900-1914: Myths and Realities* (1976), London; Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, *Revolutionary Syndicalism, an International Perspective*, (1990) Aldershot; Ralph Darlington, *Radical Unionism: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism* (2008).

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Cole, David Struthers and Kenyon Zimmer (eds) *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW* (2017), London.

<sup>3</sup> Acknowledgements to go here

<sup>4</sup> For an extended review of the recent literature see Lewis Mates, Syndicalism and the ‘Transnational Turn’, *Capital and Class* (2016), 40, 2, 344–404.

<sup>5</sup> The footnotes are in Branko Pribicevic, *The Shop Stewards' Movement and Workers' Control: 1910-1922* (1959), London, 76; and James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (1973), London, 285.

<sup>6</sup> Jill Lepore, ‘Historians Who Love Too much. Reflections on Microhistory and Biography’ *Journal of American History* 88, 1 (2001), 129-144.

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3 it as adapting to new circumstances? What might have made him an ardent syndicalist and  
4 why was there an eventual crisis in his comradely relations that led to what syndicalist  
5 engineer Jack Tanner referred to in 1919 as ‘the question of Pratt’?<sup>7</sup> Pratt first appears in  
6 Liverpool when aged twenty-eight he started a publishing venture linked an employer-  
7 friendly organisation for ship stewards. Thereafter, I concentrate on Pratt’s syndicalist years -  
8 1913 to 1918 - when he was trade union organiser and journalist. I examine his relations with  
9 his comrades, enquire into what he might have contributed to their struggle and look at how  
10 and why he was eventually forced out of the syndicalist movement, followed by a coda about  
11 his subsequent life as newspaperman and supporter of progressive causes in the United  
12 States. The article enquires into why syndicalism attracted Pratt and his utility to the  
13 movement and asks why his erstwhile comrades may have chosen not to remember him.  
14 What does such forgetting tells us about progressive social movements and their historians?  
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25 Except for his date of birth - that Pratt consistently reported as 18 March 1878 - nothing  
26 is certain about Pratt’s parentage and origins and when he died in 1952 there were no known  
27 relatives.<sup>8</sup> The earliest extant official record, his marriage certificate from 1910, names his  
28 father as Joseph Frederick Pratt, ‘deceased’ with occupation ‘journalist’; no such person can  
29 be traced. The United States Federal Census return for 1920 and 1940 reports Pratt’s parents  
30 of English birth - although in 1930 his mother is French. Pratt’s own place of birth varied. He  
31 reportedly told Percy Young, a trade union colleague, that it was Manchester but the 1911  
32 England and Wales Census records his birthplace as West Hartlepool in north-east England.  
33 And although there are records of several Edward Pratts born in England around his date of  
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42 <sup>7</sup> W.F. Watson, *Watson's Reply. A Complete Answer to the Charges of Espionage Levelled against W.*  
43 *F. Watson and an Exposure of the Espionage System* (1920), London, 60.

44 <sup>8</sup> The official records relating to Edward Louestre Pratt were obtained from the following sources:  
45 ‘Liverpool, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1813-1921’, accessed at Ancestry.com. 17  
46 January 2018; ‘England and Wales Census for 1911’, accessed at Findmypast.co.uk, 9 March 2018; 2018;  
47 ‘Passenger Lists Leaving UK 1890-1960’, The National Archives, Accessed at Findmypast.co.uk, 5 April  
48 2018; New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957, Year: 1918, Accessed at Ancestry.com, 8 April 2018;  
49 Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820-1897, accessed at Ancestry.com, 8  
50 April 2018; ‘United States World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918,’ accessed at  
51 FamilySearch.org, 13 March 2018; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, accessed at  
52 FamilySearch 5 June 2018; Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930 accessed at Family Search 23 June  
53 2018; Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, accessed 24 June 2018); United States World War II  
54 Draft Registration Cards, 1942 Family Search org; Certificate of Death, State of California, P.2285 -  
55 Provided by Effie McDermott accessed from Ancestry. Com ‘California Death Index). And in relation to  
56 Winifred Pratt (née Evans): ‘England and Wales Census for 1901’ Findmypast.com; Emergency Passport  
57 Application no. 9881, issued 9 August 1918 by American Embassy in London, ‘U.S. Passport  
58 Applications, 1795-1925’, accessed at Ancestry.Com, 6 April; ‘New York Passenger Arrivals (Ellis Island)  
59 1892-1924, 24 August 1918’, accessed at Ancestry.com, 22 March 1918; ‘California Death Index, 1940-  
60 1997’, accessed at Family Search.org, 18 July 2018.

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3 birth, all *their* life courses can be traced. As to *our* Pratt, after moving to the United States in  
4 1918, his birthplace changed to three different locations Florida – impossible to check as  
5 there was no state registration of births in Florida until 1899.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Pratt may not  
6 have been his original name. In her application in 1918 for an American passport Winifred,  
7 Pratt's British-born wife, included her husband's alias, 'Emmett O'Brien'. There are no  
8 British or American records of any Emmett O'Brien born in 1878 who could have become  
9 Pratt, begging the question as to whether he was born in Ireland (where records are  
10 incomplete).

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19 He first appears in Liverpool, in 1906, when launching the *Chief Steward* – 'a magazine for  
20 seafaring stewards' – that aimed to improve the professionalism of stewards and cooks and  
21 'to make their service as valuable as possible to their employers', the steamship owners, who  
22 were 'holding out a helping hand'.<sup>10</sup> Pratt's first editorial told his readers that having started  
23 his life at sea as a galley boy, he was now a sea-going ship steward, 'one of the foremost  
24 men engaged in victualling aboard ship'. In the next issue the *Chief Steward* quoted an  
25 unnamed journalist who commented approvingly on Pratt's editorial expertise.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile  
26 Pratt transferred the magazine's ownership to a newly created Society of Seagoing Ship  
27 Stewards that he managed as secretary and treasurer with some financing from a business  
28 partner and some 'help' from ship-owners. Along with the magazine, members benefited  
29 from a labour bureau, a benevolent fund and a reading room in the Society's head office in  
30 Liverpool. By May 1908, membership had risen to 1500.<sup>12</sup> Branches opened in Hull and  
31 London. The *Manchester Courier* wrote approvingly of the Society's objectives and of the  
32 ship-owners' support while Pratt emphasised the Society was *not* a trade union:

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44 We do not contemplate going into the "red flag" trade and our funds will assuredly  
45 not be devoted, not one jot or tattle, to the furtherance of schemes calculated to  
46 arouse the suspicion of employers.<sup>13</sup>  
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51 <sup>9</sup> In 1918, the immigration authorities in New York recorded Pratt's place of birth as Orange Bend; his  
52 draft registration card in 1942 records it as Jacksonville, over a hundred miles from Orange Bend; his  
53 death certificate states his birthplace as Miami.

54 <sup>10</sup> *Chief Steward (CS)* July 1906.

55 <sup>11</sup> *CS*, October 1906..

56 <sup>12</sup> *CS*, May 1908.

57 <sup>13</sup> *Manchester Courier*, 24 October 1908; *CS*, January 1909.  
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3 But in spring 1909 arrived in Liverpool a competitor: Jo Cotter, a former ship steward, had  
4 started a new, 'red flag', National Union of Ships Stewards (NUSS).<sup>14</sup> Seeking to recruit  
5 the Society's members, Cotter attacked Pratt's cosy relationship with the ship-owners and in  
6 December that year attended a meeting Pratt had organised in Glasgow where Cotter declared  
7 that the Society was no good, 'the *Chief Steward* was all rot and its advertisements bogus'.<sup>15</sup>  
8 The next issue of the NUSS journal subjected Pratt's balance sheet to a forensic analysis, and  
9 declared it fraudulent, concluding, 'This union cannot exist side by side with frauds and non-  
10 descripts and we are forced to destroy before we can build up'.<sup>16</sup> By summer 1910 the NUSS  
11 had grown to 3,500 and its leadership had aligned with the burgeoning syndicalist  
12 movement.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Pratt meanwhile was in financial difficulties. Without informing his business partner nor  
15 the membership, in April 1910, he secretly sold for £500 the *Chief Steward* – the Society's  
16 principal asset - to a new owner in London while continuing in control of the Society. The  
17 money from the sale failed to free Pratt from his difficulties and in June, the same month that  
18 he married twenty-year old Liverpool-born Winifred Evans, he down-sized the Society's  
19 head office to a room above a restaurant. He also converted the Society into a company,  
20 fraudulently valued at £2000, selling seventy percent of its value to four shareholders made  
21 company directors.<sup>18</sup> Yet, Pratt was still short of money. Only in late October when staff  
22 clamoured to be paid, did the directors demand a meeting with Pratt, from whom they had not  
23 heard since signing the company papers in July. Finally, from Pratt's assistant, they learnt of  
24 the secret sale of the *Chief Steward*; their shares were worthless.<sup>19</sup>

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26 Pratt may not have set out to deceive but when his grandiose scheme failed he resorted to  
27 fraud and duplicity. According to one of the bamboozled share-holders, James Gibson - a  
28 Liverpool restaurant owner - Pratt was a confidence trickster - 'the most immaculate liar of  
29 his age' in whose statements Gibson had had 'implicit confidence'.<sup>20</sup> Yet, in a letter to the  
30 *Chief Steward's* new owner Pratt described himself as misunderstood, 'and it hurts me very  
31 much to think that after all the struggles and sacrifices the Society must go to the wall'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur Ivor Marsh, and Victoria Ryan. *The Seamen* (1989), Oxford.

<sup>15</sup> *Union Magazine*, August 1909; September 1909; January 1910.

<sup>16</sup> *Union Magazine*, May 1910.

<sup>17</sup> Marsh and Ryan, p. 43;

<sup>18</sup> National Archives BT 31/13340/111097.

<sup>19</sup> The new owner of the *Chief Steward* published a full account of the affair in the issue of December 1910.

<sup>20</sup> Letter dated 30 October 1910, published in the *CS*, December 1910.

<sup>21</sup> *CS*, December 1910.

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Pratt and Winifred departed Liverpool for London with no forwarding address.<sup>22</sup> They took a room in a boarding house in in the East India docks where on census night (March 1911) Pratt reported his occupation as ‘ship-steward’ - although he may have been working as a waiter, as was common for ship stewards when not at sea.<sup>23</sup> According to Percy Young, general secretary of the Waiters Union, in 1911 Pratt had been one of the founding members of this ‘red flag’ union of the type Pratt had previously disparaged.<sup>24</sup> Waiters and kitchen workers in luxury hotels, clubs and restaurants worked extraordinarily long hours and, unless they succeeded in rising to the top of their profession, earned little money.<sup>25</sup> There was an international labour market and when they struck for the first time in Britain in 1913 they copied strike tactics of French and American syndicalist catering workers. According to Constance Bantman, transnational ideas and actors significantly influenced British workers’ militancy before the First World War but in the hotel and restaurant sector workers also learnt to be militant through their workplace encounters with men of other nationalities.<sup>26</sup> Some voyaged further afield including in Argentina, the United States and South Africa. It was his South African connection that had initially brought Pratt to my attention.

The first issue (January 1913) of the *Catering Trade Worker*, the monthly joint organ of the catering workers’ unions, carried an article authored by Pratt with the by-line ‘Livingstone, South Africa’. Livingstone in fact the capital of the newly created Northern Rhodesia and Pratt may have been employed in Livingstone’s luxury hotel, opened in 1909 to accommodate wealthy visitors to nearby Victoria Falls.<sup>27</sup> In his article, Pratt describes himself as always having been a waiter -

One who has travelled practically the world over, serving in hotels, clubs and restaurants of every class, I know only too well how far from decent is the standard of

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<sup>22</sup> BT 31/13340/111097.

<sup>23</sup> See Dave Marlow, *Coming Sir! The Autobiography of a Waiter* (1937), London.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Herald (DH)*, 18 September 1913.

<sup>25</sup> For a general labour history of the sector see Patricia Van den Eeckhout, ‘The History of Labour and Labour Relations in Hotels and Restaurants in Western Europe and the United States in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: an Introduction’, *Food & History* 11, 2 (2013), 199–221.

<sup>26</sup> Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880-1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalization*, (2013), Liverpool.

<sup>27</sup> Andrea L. Arrington, ‘Competing for Tourists at Victoria Falls: A Historical Consideration of the Effects of Government Involvement’, *Development Southern Africa* 27, 5 (2010), 773-787 (780).

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3 life and comfort of the men and women whose labours enable the shareholders to a  
4 life of ease and to draw big dividends.<sup>28</sup>

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6 Pratt published two more articles in the *Catering Trade Worker* with the Livingstone  
7 by-line. He made no observations about the working conditions in his place of residence but  
8 concentrated on the situation in Britain. Pratt wrote that it was only by combining in 'a real,  
9 live, fighting trade union' that waiters could advance their interests, contrasting such a union  
10 to the Loyal British Waiters Society (LBWS) and similar associations that he strongly  
11 attacked for co-operating with management - 'a bogus union subsidized by and in the  
12 interests of the employers'.<sup>29</sup> Pratt was singing a different tune from his days in Liverpool  
13 where his Society for ship stewards bore a strong family resemblance to the LBWS. Pratt's  
14 Damascene conversion likely explains the ferocity of his sustained attack including in his  
15 first pamphlet.<sup>30</sup> George Orwell was to observe how the waiters he worked alongside in the  
16 1920s came to identify with the class they served - as Pratt's case when in 1906 he  
17 established his own 'bogus union', subsidized by ship-owners. When things then started  
18 going wrong, Pratt may have felt the ship-owners had abandoned him to his fate and when  
19 the Society 'went to the wall', Pratt converted from capitalist toady to revolutionary  
20 syndicalist. Waiters and ship stewards alike experienced analogous conditions, particularly at  
21 the luxury end of the market where first-class passengers in ocean liners expected a de-  
22 personalised subservience as that provided in upper-class hotels, restaurants and clubs and an  
23 article in the socialist *Daily Herald* hints at personal anger. A waiter, Pratt wrote, was 'a  
24 slave in the midst of splendour':

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26 A being whose every hour is occupied in attending to the creature comforts of  
27 others but whose own comfort is the last thing to be considered; a pariah almost  
28 among his fellow working men.<sup>31</sup>

29 And continuing the theme in another, catering union, paper -

30 The waiter is the victim of the superciliousness of the rich, the jokes of the poor and  
31 the oppression of the proprietor.... by the very nature of his trade he has been  
32 inoculated with all the vices of Conservatism and parasitism which militate more

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<sup>28</sup> *Catering Trade Worker (CTW)*, January 1913.

<sup>29</sup> *CTW*, August 1913

<sup>30</sup> E.L. Pratt 'White (Shirt-front) Slavery' (1913).

<sup>31</sup> *DH*, 18 September 1913

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3 strongly than anything else against him uniting with his fellows for the common  
4 objects of reform.<sup>32</sup>  
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6 Shared this belief in waiters' conservatism hotel and restaurant employers were extremely  
7 surprised when in March 1913 waiters joined forces with kitchen workers in 'lightning  
8 strikes' in London and the provinces.<sup>33</sup> During the Great Labour Unrest (1911 - 1914)  
9 observes Yann Béliard hitherto unorganized sections of the proletariat, 'encouraged by the  
10 struggles of its largest battalions', struck for the first time, including taxi drivers, cricket ball  
11 makers and hotel workers'.<sup>34</sup> But the case of the hotel workers is more complicated than  
12 such a summary indicates. Although 1913 witnessed their first nationwide strikes, hotel and  
13 restaurant workers had not been 'hitherto unorganised' - albeit with a small membership. The  
14 English-led Waiters' Union, founded by Percy Young in 1911 and that Pratt had joined as a  
15 founding member, had merged in 1912 with the longer-established German-led Catering  
16 Employees Union (itself descended from the defunct Amalgamated Waiters Society) to  
17 become the Amalgamated Union of Hotel, Club and Restaurant Workers (commonly known  
18 as the Hotel Workers Union). Young - a former builder and socialist who had been shocked  
19 by the working conditions of club waiters - was its General Secretary and its Treasurer was  
20 Oskar Beck, a German book-keeper who boarded with waiters and had been Secretary of the  
21 Catering Employees Union.<sup>35</sup> The unions' amalgamation and subsequent strikes may have  
22 well been encouraged as by the generalised labour unrest in Britain but the strikes were not a  
23 consequence of any recent deterioration in working conditions that Beliard suggests to have  
24 been the case for other workers. Rather, they are better understood in terms of rising  
25 expectations.  
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iIn the 1890s the Amalgamated Waiters Society had failed to secure legislation for hotel, club and restaurant work to be recognized as a 'trade' with corresponding labour rights, and consequently the sector continued to be viewed as domestic service beyond the purview of the state.<sup>36</sup> The 1913 strikes resulted from the Hotel Workers Union having finally secured legislative recognition: with the support of the Independent Labour Party's Keir Hardie, the Shop Act Amendment Act of 1913 established minimum rights relating to working hours and

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<sup>32</sup> *Catering Worker* October 1913

<sup>33</sup> *Restaurant and Hotel Review*, April 1913.

<sup>34</sup> Yann Béliard, 'Introduction: Revisiting the Great Labour Unrest, 1911-1914', *Labour History Review*, 79, 1 (2014): 1-17 (1).

<sup>35</sup> Percy Young, 'Why I Turned Agitator', *CTW*, September 1913.

<sup>36</sup> see author's earlier article in press



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3 rest days for waiters and kitchen staff.<sup>37</sup> This success would appear to have been an instance  
4 disproving the syndicalist argument that political action through parliament was useless and  
5 that workers would only secure their rights through workplace struggle. On the other hand,  
6 the legislation had not provided for the Bill's enforcement. To secure employers' compliance,  
7 the Hotel Workers Union therefore joined forces with the largely French-led and syndicalist  
8 Kitchen Workers (*Syndicat des Cusiniers*), sharing their office in London's Little Newport  
9 Street and becoming joint editors of the Kitchen Workers' monthly paper, *Le Travailleur des*  
10 *Cuisines* that from January 1913 became the *Catering Trade Worker*, with articles in French,  
11 English, German and Italian.

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19 In March 1913, waiters and kitchen staff in luxury hotels and restaurants struck without  
20 notice. Wilf McCartney was a syndicalist kitchen worker in London -

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22 Five minutes before 6.30 the dinner gong sounded, calling all the well-fed parasitical  
23 guests to 'dine'. They took their seats, ushered by smiling, bowing waiters, who were  
24 treated with contempt by the guests.... 7p.m. A stranger walked into the dining  
25 room, he wiped his forehead with a white handkerchief- the signal agreed upon at the  
26 secret meeting. Waiters stood like statues, except one or two. The kitchen got the  
27 'wire' and everyone stopped work at once. Some sat down, out came pipes and  
28 cigarettes, a terrible offence in all kitchens. Kitchen porters, women and boys, looked  
29 at the guests' lovely sweets - the cooks said, "Help yourselves", and soon all the  
30 pastry had vanished. Meanwhile, what a scene in the dining room! The waiters, who  
31 were just dirt beneath the notice of these important guests, suddenly realised It was  
32 the cooks and the waiters who were now important.<sup>38</sup>

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41 These 'lightning strikes' initially succeeded in obliging proprietors to respect the new  
42 legislation, but within months the strikers' gains were eroded by LBWS blackleg labour and  
43 by management agreements with the sector's employer-friendly mutual societies. As the two  
44 unions' joint efforts became less successful, so by late summer of 1913 their collaboration  
45 was proving difficult to sustain. Differences of culture, language, and work situation became  
46 more problematic. Wilf McCarthy – in observations similar to George Orwell's – contrasted  
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<sup>37</sup> The initial amendment had been introduced by Conservative MPs in an attempt to prevent the new Act's application to the hotel and restaurant sector, but at the committee stage Keir Hardie re-drafted the amendment that definitively confirmed waiters and kitchen workers as falling within the Act's purview while at the same time introducing new clauses relating specifically to the sector.

<sup>38</sup> Wilf McCartney, 'Dare to be a Daniel! A History of One of Britain's Earliest Syndicalist Unions', 12 (published in 1945 as 'The French Cooks' Syndicate', republished in 1992 by the Katesharpleylibrary) Writing thirty years after the events, McCartney occasionally erred with names and dates.

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3 the servility of the waiter dependent on his tips with the independent spirit of the wage-  
4 earning kitchen worker. There were also ideological differences. The Hotel Workers  
5 leadership was friendly with the Labour MPs who had helped pass the Shop Act Amendment  
6 Act whereas the syndicalist Kitchen Workers had little confidence in the efficacy of  
7 Parliament to secure the victory of the working class that they believed could only be  
8 achieved through workers' control of the economy. At the height of the strikes Pratt had  
9 apparently been in Livingstone but now, at this crisis moment for the unions, he erupted into  
10 headlines.  
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20 'London trade union official kidnapped in New York'

21 'Supposed "arrest" by capitalist emissaries'

22 'Foul play feared'<sup>39</sup>  
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27 In September 1913, Percy Young, the general secretary of the Hotel Workers Union,  
28 informed the press of the disappearance of 'a founding and energetic member of the union',  
29 not seen nor heard from since arriving in New York from Cape Town the previous May. All  
30 other efforts to trace his missing comrade having failed, Young had now alerted the Foreign  
31 Office to the disappearance. E. L. Pratt, said Young, was a 'very extraordinary individual'.  
32 Born in Manchester, he had been a waiter in that city's pre-eminent gentlemen's club until  
33 1911 when he gave up his job and left Britain to organise a world-wide federation of catering  
34 sector unions.<sup>40</sup> Moving from one country to another, 'he had urged the workers to obtain  
35 redress from their wrongs'.<sup>41</sup> In 'strongly- worded pamphlets' he had stirred up hotel workers  
36 in America to a series of strikes.<sup>42</sup> But when the proprietors sought to convict him for libel,  
37 Pratt departed for southern Africa from where he had been in regular correspondence with  
38 Young. His last letter from Livingstone had mentioned his plans to start a periodical that  
39 would make him plenty of enemies – 'I shall not be surprised if I am roasted alive by hotel  
40 and restaurant proprietors, managers and other robbers'.<sup>43</sup> Shortly after, Pratt had apparently  
41 received a cable from New York, purporting to come from John Sherr, the world-wide  
42 federation's co-organiser:  
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57 <sup>39</sup> *DH and Dundee Courier*, 18 September 1913; *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*, 23 September 1913.

58 <sup>40</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*.

59 <sup>41</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 18 September 1913.

60 <sup>42</sup> *Dundee Courier*.

<sup>43</sup> *DH*

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3 Danger past. Hotel withdraws charges. Papers signed today. Come  
4 immediately. Organise for one year certain. Do not travel via England. Must  
5 negotiate with England and the Continent from here.<sup>44</sup>  
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8 According to Young, on receipt of the telegram Pratt took ship for New York but disappeared  
9 on arrival, most probably seized, said Young, by private detectives using a bogus arrest  
10 warrant, to railroad and likely murder him on the instructions of persons opposed to Pratt's  
11 vigorous trade union activities. Sherr vanished shortly afterwards.  
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15 Young's dramatic announcement to the press may have been an attempt to revive public  
16 interest in the condition of catering workers and thus encourage the continuance of  
17 collaboration between the sector's two unions. If so, it was a failure. Within weeks of the  
18 news of Pratt's disappearance, the Kitchen Workers Union took back the *Catering Trade*  
19 *Worker* title and moved into other premises while their general secretary, Fernand Garnier,  
20 represented them at the first International Syndicalist Congress in London.<sup>45</sup> For its part, the  
21 Hotel Workers Union started its own paper, the *Catering Worker*, that, in its first (October),  
22 issue, despite the publicity the union had given the case only a few weeks earlier, made no  
23 mention of Pratt's startling disappearance while publishing an article by Pratt – this time  
24 without a by-line as to his place of residence – about his new enthusiasm: an international  
25 catering federation.  
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36 While living there, Pratt wrote nothing of his experience in southern Africa and only did so  
37 later in an article in the syndicalist *International Socialist Review* where he referred to  
38 himself in the third person as 'formerly of South Africa, now in England' and mentioned 'the  
39 splendid movement of Comrade E L Pratt and the comrades in Africa'.<sup>46</sup> There is however no  
40 evidence of Pratt as active in the small but lively syndicalist movement in South Africa.<sup>47</sup> On  
41 the other hand, Livingstone could have been where Pratt reflected on his past false-  
42 consciousness while if still working as a waiter, continuing to experience what he had  
43 described as 'the superciliousness of the rich'. In Livingstone, he developed his idea for an  
44 international federation of catering workers trade unions that according to Young he had  
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54 <sup>45</sup> Garnier published his report from the Congress in the November issue of the CTW. He is listed as a  
55 delegate in Wayne Thorpe, 'Towards a Syndicalist International. The 1913 London Congress',  
56 *International Review of Social History*, 23,1 (1978), 33-78 (54, fn 43).

57 <sup>46</sup> *International Socialist Review*, April 1914, 620-21.

58 <sup>47</sup> For South African syndicalism see Lucien Van der Walt, 'Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa,  
59 1904-1921: Rethinking the History of Labour and the Left' (2007), PhD thesis, University of the  
60 Witwatersrand.

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3 already conceived before leaving England. Yet, Pratt's idea never moved beyond a critique of  
4 the present situation - and a pipe-dream of the future - to the discussion of a practical  
5 programme of change. He made no mention of steps already taken by six national catering  
6 workers' unions that together in 1906 had established an international trade secretariat that  
7 according to the *International Hotel Worker* provided for transferable membership between  
8 the unions involved.<sup>48</sup>

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13 By early 1914, if not before, Pratt was back in England but was to publish nothing more  
14 in the *Catering Worker*, organ of the Hotel Workers Union. Young may have felt he had been  
15 duped when giving credence to and widely publicising the kidnapping story and the union  
16 leadership's close relationship with the Labour Party was far removed from the syndicalism  
17 that Pratt was now manifesting in his *International Socialist Review* article. In May 1914,  
18 Young resigned as general secretary to devote himself to building a great Labour Hall for  
19 London and was succeeded by a close colleague, George Deighton, a former Baptist minister,  
20 and a Labour Councillor in Brighton, where as President of the Trades Council he had helped  
21 establish a successful branch of the Hotel Workers Union. Pratt meanwhile had abandoned  
22 his dream of an international catering federation and was supporting Winifred and her sister,  
23 Lottie, to start a new union, the National Association of Waitresses (NAW) - this at the same  
24 time as he was criticising 'the suicidal practice of splitting our forces into independent and  
25 often hostile groups.'<sup>49</sup> The NAW was established in direct competition with the existing  
26 waitresses' section of the Hotel Workers' Union, without the justification of offering a  
27 revolutionary alternative. Tea-shop waitresses were young women from respectable homes  
28 and the NAW would not have wanted to scare them with too much syndicalism. Rather, the  
29 union aimed to improve waitresses' pay and conditions without challenging the political and  
30 economic system and according to one newspaper report, the NAW leadership had even  
31 asked the Duchess of Marlborough to become their president.<sup>50</sup> 'Lightning strikes', it was  
32 reported, 'do not enter into the association's policy nor are the funds to be spent in any futile  
33 policy of revolt'.<sup>51</sup>

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Winifred told the *Liverpool Echo* that her idea for the union originated from when she  
had worked for two years as a waitress (not indicating when this was) in what she referred to

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<sup>48</sup> *International Hotel Worker*, October 1913.

<sup>49</sup> *International Socialist Review* 1914

<sup>50</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* 17 April 1914 citing a report of the *Evening Standard*.

<sup>51</sup> *Sheffield Evening Telegraph*

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3 as ‘a so-called better class of tea-shop’.<sup>52</sup> Preliminary to launching the union in April 1914,  
4 she and Lottie had undertaken a survey of waitresses’ working conditions, their findings  
5 written up for an article in an anarcho-syndicalist journal authored by Pratt. Without  
6 acknowledging Winifred and Lottie’s survey, this contained detailed evidence rather different  
7 from the overblown generalities of Pratt’s other writings, possibly indicating Winifred as the  
8 principal, albeit un-named author.<sup>53</sup> Pratt’s skills were undoubtedly as a publicist and the new  
9 union’s activities were regularly reported in the suffragist and socialist press. Belatedly,  
10 Beck of the Hotel Workers Union informed the *Daily Herald* of his own union’s work with  
11 waitresses, to be undermined by a subsequent anonymous article (very much in Pratt’s style)  
12 d in the syndicalist *Catering Trade Worker* urging revolutionary workers and trade unionists  
13 everywhere ‘to waive their technical disagreements’ and throw themselves into supporting  
14 the NAW.<sup>54</sup> By this time, however, news of the NAW was drying up as Pratt had turned his  
15 attention away from the catering sector to launch a National Union of Brewery Workers  
16 (NUBW).

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18 Unlike the waitresses’ union, from the start the new brewery workers’ union was  
19 declaredly syndicalist: at its first public meeting in May 1914, Pratt as General Secretary  
20 made a forthright attack on capitalism, as did fellow speaker, Jack Carney, a friend of the  
21 Irish syndicalist Jim Larkin.<sup>55</sup> There was also a ‘Miss Woodward’ to speak about the rights  
22 of women workers and thereafter Pratt enlisted the support of suffragist Nellie Best to  
23 encourage the female bottling plant workers to join the union.<sup>56</sup> That he was proud of this is  
24 evidenced by his publishing (and possibly authoring?) an anonymous letter from a ‘brewery  
25 girl’ in the first issue of the *Trade Unionist* that he was to edit from November 1915:

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Once when our General Secretary was trying to organise us and some of the girls  
were so very slow and would not even come to the meeting, he told us that the  
motto of the National Union of Brewery Workers was: If at first you don’t succeed,  
try and try again’....At the next meeting all the girls were there, and after joining the  
union, we voted for our General Secretary to go and see the director about a 2s rise,  
waterproof aprons, proper pay for overtime, and work to stop at one o’clock on  
Saturdays. There was no trouble and we did not have to strike.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> In an interview with the *Liverpool Echo*, 11 June 1914.

<sup>53</sup> *Herald of Revolt*, May 1914, 58-59.

<sup>54</sup> *DH* 25 May 1914; *CTW*, July 1914.

<sup>55</sup> *DH*

<sup>56</sup> This may have been Kathleen Woodward, active in the National Federation of Women Workers.

<sup>57</sup> *Trade Unionist*, November 1915.

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Meanwhile, throughout the summer of 1914 Pratt fed the *Daily Herald* with news of the brewery workers' militancy. 'Nothing but real revolutionary Industrial Unionism had been preached to the brewery boys' and according to Pratt, the members were free to decide when they wished to strike: there would be no top-down bureaucratic control from union officials.<sup>58</sup> A union newspaper was soon to be published, 'edited by E. L. Pratt who patches no fig leaves for the naked truth'; the *Herald* noted approvingly that 'Brewery workers are taking their place among the most alert and active rebels in the land'.<sup>59</sup> It is difficult to distinguish Pratt's propaganda from real achievements, an official history of the British brewing industry has noted that the militancy of this period resulted in the employers increasing welfare provision.<sup>60</sup>

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When war started in August 1914, brewery workers like other trade unionists, ceased their militancy. Despite this and in protest at the brewery companies' encouragement of their unmarried employees to enlist, Pratt drafted a manifesto addressed to his members. He sent the 'The War and its Workers' to the American anarchist journal, *Mother Earth* -

Your employers allow you only one change of uniform. It is either the miserable rags of your servitude or the Khaki tunic of a yet baser tyranny, the mad tyranny of the soldier fighting his own class for the benefit of the money lords.<sup>61</sup>

Although there is no evidence that the manifesto was ever circulated in Britain, it was reported by the *Herald* that Pratt's campaign to reduce employers' pressure on their workers to volunteer for the army had had some success.<sup>62</sup>

In 1915, Pratt turned his attention to his old union, the Hotel Workers. As soon as war broke out some of its members had returned to their home countries. Germans and Austrians remaining in Britain lost their jobs and the Union offered help with naturalisation applications, and free meals for members and their families.<sup>63</sup> The union struggled on with a reduced membership and by early 1915 Beck and Deighton were forced to give up their Little Newport Street office to work from home.<sup>64</sup> Pratt meanwhile appears to have persuaded

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<sup>58</sup> *DH* 6 August 1913.

<sup>59</sup> *DH* 28 July 1914; 25 July.

<sup>60</sup> Terence Richard Gourvish, *The British Brewing Industry 1830-1980* (1994), Cambridge, 516.

<sup>61</sup> Sent to *Mother Earth*, September 1914 and published in 9,10 (December 1914) 312-314.

<sup>62</sup> *Herald*, 3 Oct 1914.

<sup>63</sup> *CW*, September 1914.

<sup>64</sup> Letter from George Deighton to a union member, 22 February 1915, Hastings Museum, HASMG:989.34.28.

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3 some of the remaining membership to resign and help him start a new National Union of  
4 Catering Workers (NUCW). Like the majority of Britain's trade unionists, Deighton  
5 supported the war effort and this, plus his union's affiliation to the Labour Party, may explain  
6 the viciousness of Pratt's language in an open letter he wrote to the catering workers.<sup>65</sup>  
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10 Dishonesty, mismanagement, laziness and greed of officials.... petty, picket-pocket  
11 jumped-up officials who had swooped down on the Union like vultures from God  
12 knows where.<sup>66</sup>  
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15 Pratt's attack deployed the syndicalist critique of the larger industrial trade unions whose  
16 relatively well-paid and full-time officials syndicalists accused of class treachery, out of  
17 touch with rank and file members, whose interests they ignored. Whatever its general truth,  
18 this critique was far from the reality of the small and fragile Hotel Workers Union, other than  
19 that its officials were not catering sector workers (a point that Pratt did not make). Possibly  
20 for Pratt, the end justified the means; in an echo of Cotter's attack on the Ship Stewards'  
21 Society, he wrote, 'We are forced to destroy before we can build up'. The only way to be rid  
22 of 'the vaporous vipers that called themselves leaders' was to 'kill the Union to save its  
23 life.....opening the way for men of brains, integrity and good will to come forward'. The new  
24 NUCW was open to all catering workers but despite the syndicalist Kitchen Workers Union  
25 having dissolved at the outbreak of war, and despite their ideological affinity with Pratt, in  
26 their subsequent recollections of this period, two of its leaders, Wilf McCartney and Fernand  
27 Garnier ignored its existence and Garnier went out of his way to affirm in 1921 that the  
28 catering section of the Workers' Union was the heir to the pre-war coalition that organised  
29 the 1913 strikes.<sup>67</sup>  
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41 The new union's paper took an anti-war stance but as it had probably had few  
42 members and was in a sector of the economy insignificant for winning the war, it presented  
43 no challenge to the authorities.<sup>68</sup> To make an impact, Pratt would need to associate himself  
44 with trade unionists in an industry of fundamental importance to the war effort, notably the  
45 leading syndicalists, including Tom Mann, in the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE),  
46 whose membership grew from 170,000 in 1914 to nearly 300,000 by 1918.<sup>69</sup> Most British  
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53 <sup>65</sup> For Deighton's pro-war stance see Brighton Trades Council EC Minute Book 1912-1918, East Sussex  
54 Records Office, AMS 6848/6/1/15.

55 <sup>66</sup> The letter, dated 3 April 1915, is enclosed in a pamphlet by Pratt, 'The Impasse in the Catering Trade',  
56 TUC Special Collections, HD 6661 2351.

57 <sup>67</sup> See article by Garnier in *The International Hotel and Restaurant Workers Gazette*, July 1921, and  
58 McCartney's *Dare to be a Daniel*.

59 <sup>68</sup> *The Catering Worker*, July 1915.

60 <sup>69</sup> Pribicevic, 193.

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3 syndicalists, including Mann, did not openly oppose the war, rather investing their energies in  
4 movements of rank and file workers led by shop stewards objecting to trade union  
5 officialdom's policy of a war-time industrial truce.<sup>70</sup> By mid-1915, when unofficial strikes  
6 were occurring in the strategic munitions, mining and shipbuilding industries, the most well-  
7 known syndicalist and ASE member, Tom Mann, judged the time right to start a new journal  
8 - the *Trade Unionist* - as a voice of the rank and file movement. In this he had the  
9 collaboration of a long-term associate, W. F. Watson, another engineer and Secretary of the  
10 London Amalgamation Committee that advocated the amalgamation of shipbuilders,  
11 engineers and metal workers unions with the ultimate aim of workers' control of industry.<sup>71</sup>

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19 How Pratt became the editor of the *Trade Unionist* is a mystery. Pratt was persuasive  
20 and he may himself have suggested. Despite no industrial background, Pratt's record with  
21 the brewery union and his journalistic skills might well have recommended him.  
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23 Furthermore, Mann had supported the unionisation of the catering sector since the 1890s,  
24 when helping establish its first national trade union, the Amalgamated Waiters Society, had  
25 enthusiastically welcomed the sector's first strikes in 1913 and may have been sympathetic to  
26 Pratt's having started a new catering union in the early years of the war, when so many  
27 unions were struggling.<sup>72</sup> Mann had worked closely with Cotter during the Liverpool  
28 Transport Strike in 1911 but might not have known about the debacle of the Ship Stewards  
29 Society - or possibly Pratt's subsequent track record made this irrelevant. And finally, Pratt  
30 was a good publicist, as evidenced by his advertising the *Trade Unionist* to be the 'hottest  
31 and most revolutionary industrial organ in the world'.<sup>73</sup> Within a year the new journal's  
32 circulation was at between 8,000-10,000.<sup>74</sup>

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41 The *Trade Unionist* supported a broad-based campaign by pacifists, syndicalists and a  
42 section of the Labour Party against conscription and when in early 1916 this was eventually  
43 introduced for unmarried men some leading campaigners were imprisoned for refusing to  
44 enlist. When in June conscription was extended to married men under forty years of age not  
45 employed in a reserved industry, Pratt would have been faced with the choice of prison or  
46 enlistment. A way out was to claim American citizenship. Before 1914 travellers normally  
47 required no formal identification to cross national borders, but when passports became  
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55 <sup>70</sup> Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Tom Mann, 1856-1941: the Challenges of Labour* (1991), Oxford.

56 <sup>71</sup> E. and R. Frow, 'W. F. Watson' in Joyce Bellamy and John Saville (Eds) *Dictionary of Labour*  
57 *Biography*, Vol. 6.

58 <sup>72</sup> *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, London, 1923, 125.

59 <sup>73</sup> *Merthyr Pioneer* 29 April 1916.

60 <sup>74</sup> *The Times*, 27 November 1916.



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3 generalised during the First World War, so Americans resident in Europe needed  
4 documentation. As many had no birth or naturalisation documents in their possession, the  
5 consulate in London validated claims to American citizenship through testimony from  
6 'reputable persons'.<sup>75</sup> For Pratt, a man who 'inspired implicit confidence', there may have  
7 been little difficulty in securing such testimonials and the first public indication of Pratt's  
8 American status came in November 1916, in relation to a charge brought against him and  
9 Watson, his *Trade Unionist* collaborator.

15 Worried by growing labour unrest, the government was exercising ever-greater  
16 censorship, making it a criminal offence to publish or distribute anything judged to impact  
17 negatively on the war effort and Watson and Pratt were found guilty and fine for  
18 contravening the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA)<sup>76</sup> Writing in the *Trade Unionist*  
19 Watson had argued the working class were the 'downtrodden dupes of the capitalists' while  
20 Pratt was found guilty of publishing Watson's piece and another unsigned article claiming  
21 patriotism was a sham – 'a mere cloak for robbery, trickery and oppression'. Both men left  
22 the court to cheers and the singing of the 'Red Flag' from an assembled crowd of trade  
23 unionists and supporters started raising funds to pay the fines.<sup>77</sup> Watson and Pratt were  
24 meanwhile summoned to Scotland Yard, where according to Watson's published account he  
25 was interviewed by the head of the Special Branch, Superintendent Quinn while Pratt was  
26 taken to another room and threatened with deportation should he not pay the fine. Learning of  
27 this, the supporters committee promptly paid the fine as 'it was felt that Pratt's services were  
28 just as much needed in this country as in India or America'.<sup>78</sup>

39 Notwithstanding Pratt being bound over to cease publishing the *Trade Unionist* and any  
40 other journal of a similar nature, he immediately launched with Tom Wakeling (Watson's  
41 assistant), a new monthly that revived a pre-war title, *Solidarity*. Yet, whereas, most of  
42 *Solidarity's* syndicalist readership sought to re-shape existing unions to represent the class  
43 interests of the rank and file, Pratt advocated a type of syndicalism originating with the IWW  
44 in Chicago and known as 'Industrial Unionism' - the creation of new industry-wide 'dual  
45 unions', purpose-built for revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. By now Watson was  
46 also a dual unionist but he failed to win over the majority of the rank and file movement and

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55 <sup>75</sup> Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America. The History of a Document* (2012) Oxford, 191-192.

56 <sup>76</sup> Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (2104), Abingdon.

57 <sup>77</sup> *The Times*, 27 November and 4 December 1916.

58 <sup>78</sup> Watson's account is in his pamphlet 'Are We Vermin?' 1917.

59 <sup>79</sup> Frow.

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3 its shop steward leadership.<sup>79</sup> By summer 1917 the intelligence service of the Ministry of  
4 Munitions was reporting that the rank and file movement had split and that the ‘extremists’  
5 Pratt and Wakeling, had joined the IWW – ‘a sinister departure which will not tend to make  
6 asier to preserve industrial peace in Britain’.<sup>80</sup> In June 1917, Pratt declared *Solidarity* an  
7 organ of Industrial Unionism and J T Murphy, the most prominent shop steward leader, was  
8 reported to have cancelled his customary subscription for three thousand copies, thus dealing  
9 a serious blow to the paper’s finances.<sup>81</sup> By September, Pratt’s office in Theobalds Road  
10 from where *Solidarity* was published had also become the headquarters of the IWW’s British  
11 branch and its paper, the *Industrial Worker*, edited by a long-standing IWW member was  
12 relaunched after a ten-month hiatus. Most of what little is about the IWW in Britain during  
13 the First World War comes from Ken Weller’s history known of the radical left in north  
14 London, based on memoirs and interviews with former members.<sup>82</sup> Pratt is missing from this  
15 history. Although the move to Theobalds Road is included, Weller does not mention this was  
16 Pratt’s office not that he had assumed leadership of the IWW.  
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31 Pratt’s formal allegiance to the IWW coincided with a crack-down on the greatly more  
32 significant IWW activities in the United States, where the Russian Revolution had led the  
33 authorities to view the Wobblies in a more dangerous light.<sup>83</sup> In response to a Parliamentary  
34 Question in October 1917 as to whether the British IWW was equally dangerous,  
35 Superintendent Quinn of Special Branch was reassuring: it was too small and impecunious to  
36 present any threat.<sup>84</sup> Quinn’s response drew on a police report that included Pratt’s private  
37 address (in a middle-class mansion flat) and the composition of the IWW executive  
38 committee, one of whom was Winifred. Pratt himself was the General Secretary and  
39 Treasurer, although according to the Special Branch report ‘if Pratt has not already severed  
40 his connections with the IWW, he is contemplating doing so’.<sup>85</sup> By February 1918, when the  
41 IWW was next in the news, Pratt was no longer reported as secretary but he was still  
42 promoting the IWW line in pamphlets such as ‘Industrial Unionism’ and the ‘Royal Road to  
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<sup>80</sup> National Archives MUN 5-54-200.

<sup>81</sup> MUN 5-54-200

<sup>82</sup> Ken Weller, *Don’t be a Solider! The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London, 1914-1918*, (London) 1985, 63-69.

<sup>83</sup> Patrick Renshaw, ‘IWW and the Red Scare’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 3, 4, (1968) 63-72.

<sup>84</sup> National Archives HO 144-879, dated 27 October 1917.

<sup>85</sup> HO 144-879.

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3 Emancipation' and the Wobblies still used his Theobalds Road office rent-free. It was there,  
4 following a tip-off, that the police caught four Wobblies (including two Americans) with  
5 2000 freshly-printed copies of a seditious leaflet they were planning to distribute that same  
6 evening at a public meeting. The four men were imprisoned for six months.  
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10 Who had tipped off Special Branch? Harald Edwards, an IWW member, had an  
11 'unpleasant memory' of an internal investigation into whether the informer was A. B.  
12 Elsbury.<sup>86</sup> Editor of the *Industrial Worker* and regular contributor to *Solidarity*, Elsbury  
13 would have been well known to Pratt. According to Weller, Elsbury was eventually acquitted  
14 but in which case, if the informer were not Elsbury, who was it? In April 1918 *Solidarity*  
15 published a letter from an 'E.G.' wanting to know –  
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20 Why we do not expose a certain American citizen who is going about among London  
21 workmen as an *agent provocateur*, or in English words, one who spies and tries to stir  
22 up strife for the benefit of State Capitalism?  
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26 In his editorial reply Pratt observed that everyone who needed to know who was the spy did  
27 know and were thus on their guard, implying there was no need to expose him. One of those  
28 who may have known the spy's identity was the shop steward leader Jack Tanner, a  
29 syndicalist since 1912 and who in 1917 had become leader of the West London engineering  
30 shop stewards' movement. Tanner was to be Pratt's nemesis. In May 1918 Tanner published  
31 a parallel, 'West London' *Solidarity*, containing much of the contents of the official May  
32 issue but replacing Pratt's more abstruse items, including an essay on the origins of slavery,  
33 with down-to-earth news from the shop floor. By June, it appears that Tanner had obliged  
34 Pratt to resign his editorship and *Solidarity* reappeared as a June/July issue, edited by Tanner,  
35 and in his first editorial informed the readers that 'Comrades Pratt and Wakeling have been,  
36 owing to circumstances, forced to relinquish control'. Tanner also stressed the paper's  
37 indebtedness and recognizing that *Solidarity* relied heavily on voluntary contributions, he  
38 promised that from henceforth regular accounts would be published - implying this had not  
39 been the case during Pratt's time in charge. James Hinton attributes Tanner's quarrel with  
40 Pratt to the latter's 'unrepentant dual unionism' and *Solidarity's* consequent bias, but Tanner  
41 may have had graver doubts about Pratt, and not just relating to his financial integrity.<sup>87</sup>  
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53 What *is* certain is that Pratt left England in a hurry and never returned.  
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57 <sup>86</sup> Harald Edwards, 'A Revolutionary Youth', fragment of a memoir available at Libcom.net. Accessed 15  
58 June 2018.

59 <sup>87</sup> Hinton, 285, fn.  
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3 Was Pratt the un-named American citizen mentioned in the April 1918 issue of  
4 *Solidarity*? After the Russian Revolution in 1917, the state's surveillance of radical trade  
5 unionists, socialists and syndicalists had increased significantly, including the use of  
6 informers.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, one such informer was Pratt's close colleague Watson, recruited by  
7 Special Branch in July 1918 (coinciding with Pratt's departure) and paid by them until his  
8 imprisonment the following year for speaking at a 'hands off Russia' meeting. While Watson  
9 was in prison and in answer to a parliamentary question, a Home Office minister made public  
10 Watson's links to Special Branch. The syndicalists could not hush this one up and on  
11 Watson's release Tanner chaired an engineering workers' investigative committee that found  
12 Watson culpable of informing - while accepting that Watson had not caused any material  
13 harm to his comrades. Watson's defence was that his intention had been to mislead the police  
14 by taking their money and feeding them false reports and he subsequently published his case  
15 in a pamphlet that included a letter from Tanner to Watson:

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17 *The committee accepts your statement that you had no connection with the police till*  
18 *July 1918* [italics in the original pamphlet], and the question of Pratt does not enter  
19 into the matter at all, so far as the committee is concerned.<sup>89</sup>

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21 Did this mean that the committee recognised Watson had had no role in the betrayal of their  
22 four comrades in February 1918? 'The question of Pratt'? Was *he* the informer who tipped  
23 off the police to raid his own Theobalds Road premises? Had he been 'turned' when he met  
24 Special Branch officials following his and Watson's arrest and trial in December 1916? If  
25 Pratt were an informer, fear and greed may have influenced his decision - fear that the  
26 Special Branch would use the Defence of the Realm Act to have him deported unless he  
27 worked for them and a desire for money. Watson had been paid three pounds a week - no  
28 small sum, considering that many working men earned only a third of that. If Pratt had  
29 received the same, it may explain how he and Winifred could afford to live in the middle-  
30 class comfort of a mansion flat and save enough for a new life in America.

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52 Pratt took ship from Liverpool on July 18, 1918, travelling to New York on a passport issued  
53 by the US Embassy in London; Winifred followed him two weeks later. By then Pratt was in  
54 Union Springs, Alabama, negotiating the purchase of the local newspaper, whose proprietor

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59 <sup>88</sup> Millman.

<sup>89</sup> *Watson's Reply*, 60.

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3 found Pratt's sufficiently strange to write to the Bureau of Investigation in Washington DC.  
4 'Recently arrived from England .... and as he has said he has lately had some correspondence  
5 with your department, we would like to know just what information you have, if any, on  
6 him.'<sup>90</sup> America was at the height of its first 'Red Scare'. Over one hundred Wobblies were  
7 on trial for subverting the government's war efforts and in August 1918 all were found guilty,  
8 receiving long prison sentences and heavy fines.<sup>91</sup> It would have been reasonable for Pratt to  
9 worry about his IWW background being known to the authorities but if had indeed  
10 communicated with them, the Bureau did not admit to it. It replied they had no record of  
11 Pratt but that the writer should let the Bureau know should he have 'any information  
12 indicating that Pratt is not loyal to the United States.'<sup>92</sup> Pratt had already moved on and by  
13 mid-September he and Winifred were settled in Morgantown, Indiana (population 800),  
14 proprietors of its local newspaper.<sup>93</sup> Pratt promptly showed his loyalty to the United States by  
15 registering for the draft on 18 September. He is recorded as of white race, medium build,  
16 medium height with brown eyes and light brown hair, occupation 'newspaper man'.  
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29 Pratt and Winifred soon left Morgantown, thereafter publishing small town newspapers  
30 in Nebraska and Arizona. By 1925 the Red Scare was over and Pratt could support  
31 respectable progressive causes.<sup>94</sup> In 1927-28, the Pratts were in Lemoore, California, where  
32 he published a short-lived monthly journal, the *Herald of Peace*, wherein 'opponents of war  
33 ... will find copious material in support of their views'.<sup>95</sup> In 1931 they settled in Pismo  
34 Beach, California where a community of mystics – artists, musicians and poets – was living  
35 among the beach's great sand-dunes. In partnership with Winifred, whose loyalty speaks in  
36 his favour and who may well have played a major part in his endeavours, he launched and  
37 edited the *Pismo Times* for twenty years. Winifred joined various women's professional clubs  
38 and Pratt was a 'civic leader', representing Pismo Beach in a California-wide organisation  
39 promoting coastal tourism.<sup>96</sup> Pratt joined the Technocracy movement - whose diverse  
40 intellectual origins included a dash of syndicalism - that swept through the United States  
41 during the early years of the Depression. Technocrats believed in replacing the uncontrolled  
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53 <sup>90</sup> US National Archives, FBI Case Files 1909-21, no. 281258

54 <sup>91</sup> Renshaw.

55 <sup>92</sup> FBI, no. 281258.

56 <sup>93</sup> *Ayers Newspaper Directory*, 1919, 264.

57 <sup>94</sup> Federal Census 1920; Pratt was cited as the editor of the Benson Daily News in the *Bisbee Daily Review*,  
58 18 March 1921; see also Ayer, 1922, Volume 1 p.51.

59 <sup>95</sup> Advertisement in the *Modern Language Journal*, 12, 5 (1928) 404.

60 <sup>96</sup> Oxnard Daily Courier, 1 March 1937; *Oakland Tribune*, January 16, 1933.

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3 and destructive capitalism that had caused the Depression with centrally directed planning to  
4 create material abundance for enjoyment by all.<sup>97</sup> In 1933 Pratt started a monthly journal, the  
5 *Technocrat*, which later became the official organ of one branch of the movement. After  
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8 Technocracy faded away, he campaigned for vegetarianism, launching in 1943 the monthly  
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10 *American Vegetarian* that claimed a national circulation of over 18,000 copies.<sup>98</sup> He also  
11 tinkered with his life story: he told Harold Loeb, one of the leaders of the Technocracy  
12 Movement, that he had been born in Florida, went to London in his youth, was a British  
13 socialist and then, before eventually settling in California, was world correspondent for the  
14 *Manchester Guardian* (not substantiated by that newspaper's staff files and contributors'  
15 ledgers).<sup>99</sup>  
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22 Eric Hobsbawm controversially concluded that syndicalism was more a slogan than a  
23 programme for social transformation and has been accused of downplaying the role of  
24 syndicalism in left political culture and labour struggles in the late nineteenth and early  
25 twentieth century.<sup>100</sup> Recent studies have rectified Hobsbawm's bias and labour history's  
26 biographical turn has provided accounts of the contribution of individual syndicalists –  
27 influential intellectuals or skilled organisers – albeit with sometimes complex and even  
28 ruthless natures.<sup>101</sup> The present article on the other hand has depicted a man that better fits  
29 Hobsbawm's conclusion: E. L. Pratt was neither thinker nor serious practitioner but rather a  
30 sloganeer, a propagandist, attracted to syndicalism's utopian vision, as later in his life he was  
31 to be drawn towards other utopian movements. He also appears to have been a fantasist as  
32 with the improbable story of his kidnapping by counter-revolutionary agents or his purported  
33 career as international correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. There are also instances  
34 of his deceitfulness towards others, not only relating to the Society of Sea-going Stewards  
35 where he earned the sobriquet of 'immaculate liar', but also towards his trade union and  
36 syndicalist comrades. In his life of Canadian syndicalist Robert Gosden, Mark Leier  
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50 <sup>97</sup> See Henry Elsner, *The Technocrats: Prophets of Automation* (1967), New York.

51 <sup>98</sup> *Obispo Tribune*, 30 September 2013.

52 <sup>99</sup> Elsner p 59; correspondence with University of Manchester, John Rylands Library archivist, 4 July  
53 2018.

54 <sup>100</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, (1984), London, 277; for a critique of Hobsbawm, see Dave Featherstone's extended  
55 book review, *Journal of Global History*, 7, 3 (2012) 535-538.

56 <sup>101</sup> See for example, the studies in Dave Berry and Constance Bantman, (Eds.). *New Perspectives on*  
57 *Anarchism, Labour and Syndicalism: the Individual, the National and the Transnational*, (2010); Jonathan  
58 Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist: JT Bain, a Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa* (2006),  
59 Johannesburg; Emmet O'Connor, 'James Larkin in the United States, 1914–23,' *Journal of*  
60 *Contemporary History* 37, 2 (2002), 183-196.

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3 attributes Gosden's spying on his comrades as due to his having been an intelligent man  
4 'forced to take up near-slave labour'.<sup>102</sup> Gosden was an unskilled labourer who resented the  
5 skilled workers of the labour aristocracy. Did Pratt likewise have a chip on his shoulder?  
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7 'Wage slavery' was a common syndicalist trope that Pratt developed to describe waiters as  
8 'slaves amidst splendour'. Necessarily subservient to their wealthy clients, waiters were  
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10 mocked and treated as 'almost pariahs' by their working-class peers and although Pratt had  
11  
12 succeeded to escape from the marginalised catering sector to become a comrade of the rank  
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14 and file activists in the engineering industry, he may have wondered whether they saw him as  
15  
16 an outsider. 'The question of Pratt'. What indeed did Tanner think of him?  
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19 Coincidentally or otherwise, 'Pratt' is an archaic synonym for 'trickster'. Albeit only a  
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21 pale copy of his younger contemporary, the fantasist and trickster, Netley Lucas, Pratt  
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23 nevertheless appears to belong to Lucas' biographer, Matthew Houlbrook's category of  
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25 'subjects given to tall tales'.<sup>103</sup> That Pratt got away with it – at least until June 1918 -  
26  
27 indicates that information flows within syndicalist networks were imperfect. Why did Cotter  
28  
29 not tell Mann about Pratt? Why did nobody appear to have noticed a likely falsehood when  
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31 Pratt implied he had been active in South Africa's syndicalist movement? Were there no  
32  
33 South African syndicalists among the readership of the *International Socialist Review*? Why  
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35 did the New York-based International Hotel Workers Union seemingly believe Pratt's  
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37 kidnapping story, despite apparently never having heard of him prior to receiving Young's  
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39 letter? Alternatively, any stories circulating about Pratt may have simply been ignored for as  
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41 long as he was judged Pratt to be doing useful propaganda work until – as seems likely – his  
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43 comrades found sufficient evidence of his betraying them to force him to leave the country.

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45 Did syndicalism attract people like Pratt? Mark Leier cites a contemporary comment that  
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47 syndicalism attracted 'the most unselfish and courageous, together with the self-seeking and  
48  
49 the semi-criminal'.<sup>104</sup> Leier argues that Gosden was a mixture of both; as to Pratt, there is  
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51 insufficient evidence to reach a definitive conclusion. Yet, the question of Pratt intrigues, not  
52  
53 least because it begs a question about processes of remembering and forgetting within  
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55 progressive social movements. Pratt's relative absence in the primary syndicalist sources is  
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57 interesting. That he managed to edit two newspapers largely produced for and mainly read by  
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59 industrial workers is a tribute to his enterprise and his potential for influence but his marginal  
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<sup>102</sup> Mark Leier, *Rebel Life. The Life and Times of Robert Gosden* (revised edition 2013), Vancouver, 105.

<sup>103</sup> Matthew Houlbrook, *Prince of Tricksters: The Incredible True Story of Netley Lucas, Gentleman Crook* (2016) Chicago, 17.

<sup>104</sup> Leier 106.

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3 status from a catering background may explain why he was rarely billed as a public speaker  
4 at syndicalist meetings - thus keeping him out of the public eye and consequently less in the  
5 purview of labour historians. Over and above this, is it also possible that Tanner and the other  
6 comrades stayed deliberately silent about Pratt, annoyed and angry that he had managed to  
7 delude and deceive them?  
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11 In today's social movements I have met some individuals resembling Pratt. They are  
12 articulate self-publicists, highly persuasive, with an over-inflated sense of their own  
13 capacities, they exploit the good will of their comrades who for too long give them the  
14 benefit of the doubt.<sup>105</sup> Through fear of damaging the cause, they are rarely publicly exposed  
15 and as their former comrades prefer to forget them, social movement scholarship risks  
16 overlooking them. If, like the present author such scholars are sympathetic to the  
17 movement's aims, values and modes of organising, they may in any case prefer to rescue  
18 worthier individuals from the condescension of history.<sup>106</sup> Pratt's case helps *us* remember  
19 that social movements can also attract the less worthy.  
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34 <sup>105</sup> See Brian Marsh, 'Activists and Difficult People', *Social Anarchism*, 30 (2001), 27-47.

35 <sup>106</sup> See also, David Witwer, 'The Chapter Left Untold: Labor Historians and the Problem of Union  
36 Corruption', *Labor Studies in the Working-Class History of America* 8,2, (2011), 37-57.  
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