



'Forming the new society': work, social justice, and the Paris Peace Conference

Hazel Hutchison & Neil McLennan

To cite this article: Hazel Hutchison & Neil McLennan (2021) 'Forming the new society': work, social justice, and the Paris Peace Conference, *First World War Studies*, 12:3, 239-252, DOI: [10.1080/19475020.2022.2049338](https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2022.2049338)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2022.2049338>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 30 May 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 192



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

ARTICLE



OPEN ACCESS



'Forming the new society': work, social justice, and the Paris Peace Conference

Hazel Hutchison^a and Neil McLennan^b 

^aSchool of English University of Leeds; ^bCentre for Global Security and Governance, University of Aberdeen

ABSTRACT

A little-quoted line in the Treaty of Versailles declares that universal peace can 'be established only if it is based upon social justice'. However, accounts of the Paris Peace Conference, both factual and fictional, demonstrate that such high rhetoric was often at odds with its context. While many American diplomats and socialites experienced the Paris of 1919 as a hothouse of political intrigue and lavish entertainment, drafted soldiers found themselves locked into menial service in a war that no longer existed. Meantime, back home, the abrupt end to the munitions industry and the return of veterans searching for work created havoc in already fragile labour markets, causing hardship, racial violence, and unrest. This article examines American attitudes to social justice in the volatile months around the signing of the Treaty. In order to explore the contradictory impressions of the Peace Conference and its impact, it draws on the papers of James Duncan, a Scotsman serving in Woodrow Wilson's team, and examines literary representations of 1919 written in retrospect by writers such as Mary Borden and John Dos Passos. Employing a 'multiperspectivity' approach (Stradling 2003), this study offers interdisciplinary insights to this key moment in international affairs, domestic policies and social impact. It argues that, as in the Hall of Mirrors in 1919, different views can be sought from many positions to create progressive attitudes to work and social justice, and demonstrates that collaboration across contrasting perspectives is the essence of peace-making.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 June 2021

Accepted 28 February 2022

KEYWORDS

Versailles; Paris Peace Conference; peace-making; social justice; multiperspectivity; 1919

Part XIII of the Treaty of Versailles opens with the confident statement that universal peace can 'be established only if it is based upon social justice'.¹ The concept of social justice has never been easy to define, and sits uneasily against the opulence, intrigue, and corporate lobbying which characterize accounts, both historical and fictional, of the Paris Peace Conference 1919–1920. This article explores how, for many participants and observers of the peace-making after the First World War, the idea of social justice was firmly connected to attitudes to labour, in particular to the idea of 'good work' as a means to prosperity and to self-actualization. It examines how that relationship between work,

CONTACT Neil McLennan  neil.mclennan@abdn.ac.uk

Treaty of Versailles, Part XIII. Labour Section I Organization of Labour <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/partxiii.asp>

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

social justice, and the promise of peace was promoted and articulated by Woodrow Wilson's delegation, and how it was quickly codified in fictional accounts of the aftermath of the war.

When the Treaty of Versailles was formally signed in the Hall of Mirrors in June 1919, Part XIII committed governments around the world to participation in the International Labour Organization, a new body, designed to run parallel to the League of Nations, with unprecedented powers to monitor and coordinate how governments legislated on working conditions. Arguably the most successful outcome of the Peace Conference, the ILO has operated continuously since its founding. The British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, later described it as 'one of the most amazing and gratifying miracles of the post-war period'.² Ian Clark also notes that the ILO 'set the precedent for the much more intrusive international institutions that were to be established in the social and economic sphere after the Second World War'.³ Yet this element of the Treaty is rarely considered significant, and is more often viewed as a 'surprising' addition to an international peace negotiation.⁴ In reality, connecting labour conditions and political stability was entirely logical and politically expedient – although historians differ on how lofty the motives of the key peace-makers really were.⁵ The reliance of combatant nations on the mass production of increasingly sophisticated weaponry to sustain their military activities, and the recent Russian Revolutions of 1917, reminded those in authority that labour forces mattered and could, if provoked, assert their own strength. Given the numbers of mobilized men who would shortly be returning to volatile employment markets across Europe and America, making some provision for the regulation of those markets was critical to any plan for stability. The pages which follow also chart how – despite the dramatic failure of the US Congress to endorse the Treaty fully, or to sign up to the League of Nations – this concept of the inter-reliance of fair work and peace would develop as a powerful and enduring trope in American culture immediately after the war.

This article has two authors, a historian-educationalist and a literary analyst. Each of us views these past events and the related source materials through the lens of our own experience and training, but there is much common ground. By comparing the lived experience of a participant in the conference, in this instance the labour organizer James Duncan who served in Wilson's team in Paris, with fictional accounts of the events of 1919, especially those of Mary Borden and John Dos Passos, we are able to explore the ways in which history and culture inform and inflect each other. Operating across disciplinary lines of inquiry shows how contrasting viewpoints can be accommodated and unified through negotiation. Collaboration creates the new perspectives which are essential for the mutual respect and understanding that underpin social justice. This is why the concept of shared labour is so integral to the idea of peace. Working together generates new perspectives, in much the same way as a hall of polished mirrors creates multiple points of view.

Social justice

The term 'social justice' is a contested term. Michael Novak notes that the phrase 'float[s] in the air as if everyone will recognize it in an instant when it appears', but he also observes that many who use the term find this 'vagueness indispensable'.⁶ Attempts at definition include: distribution of wealth, equality, the common good, the progressive

agenda, and compassion.⁷ Allan Ornstein suggests no fewer than thirty principles, ranging from a process of mobility to equality of opportunity.⁸ Some definitions also include distributive, procedural, or retributive and restorative justice, but leave it unclear whether economic justice is merely an element or is a determiner of social justice.⁹ The term has evolved since the industrial revolution, and enjoyed a surge of popularity during the First World War.¹⁰ It grew out of the Enlightenment's challenge to aristocratic power, and flourished as a rallying call for radical and progressive groups in nineteenth-century Europe.¹¹ It is now associated with centre-left political approaches, and few across the political spectrum oppose the concept directly. Social justice can also be seen to connect with the three 'critical domains' as defined by the United Nations: equity of rights, equity of opportunity, and equity of living conditions.¹² Modern public policy definitions tend to reflect dilemmas around whether social justice is the means to an end – economic prosperity perhaps – or something of worth in its own right.¹³

Given this diversity of views, a multiperspective approach to understanding 'social justice' may be of value. In historical studies, the concept of 'multiperspectivity' was developed by Robert Stradling in the early 2000s as method for teaching European history in the context of post-conflict situations, particularly in the former Yugoslavia.¹⁴ This method draws on diverse sources, narratives, and viewpoints, to add extra dimensions to traditional, sequential historical discourse, giving a 'richer and more complex account based on interlocking narratives'.¹⁵ It also highlights influences between different groups, and creates multilateral accounts. Lastly, and importantly, it can shed light on conflict situations, moving from myths and counter-myths to a nuanced understanding by reflecting on views from different times, people, places, and different disciplinary insights.¹⁶ Stradling notes that the method also has the power to generate understanding and forgiveness, when it is approached with 'a willingness to put oneself in someone else's shoes and try to and see the world as they see it, that is to exercise empathy'.¹⁷ In a literary context, 'multiperspectivity' is more often defined as a technique for the creation of a fictional narrative in which the story is focalized through different viewpoints or told by a series of narrators.¹⁸ However, the outcomes can be startlingly similar: a heightened awareness of differences and relationships, and of the impact of these on people and events; or the generation of empathy and understanding across boundaries of time or culture. This article therefore engages with an interdisciplinary multiperspective method, to allow an understanding of social justice and its relation to the conditions of work in 1919, as observed through both historical and literary source materials.

The inclusion of 'social justice' in the Treaty of Versailles gave it a global currency which was, and still is, problematic. In an attempt to define 'the Social', Hans Micklitz maps the progress of democratic development, intellectual ideals, and codified justice across German, French, and British history since the seventeenth century.¹⁹ For Micklitz, 'the Social' shows itself to have a distinct character in each nation: the English Model offers a liberal and pragmatic design for commercial use; the French model offers an intellectual political design; and the German Model offers a paternalistic market design. The implication of Micklitz's work is that social justice is neither objective nor fully international, but reflects the character of each society in which it is found. Similarly, the UN recognizes that the application of social justice requires a geographical, sociological, political, and cultural framework.²⁰ By adopting the phrase in relation to the

establishment of the International Labour Organization, the treaty negotiators designated it as achievable through well-regulated conditions of employment. Since 1919, therefore, social justice has been grounded in the concept of 'good work'. Indeed, the influence of Wilson's delegation on Part XIII may well have contributed to this outcome. Since Puritan times, American cultural attitudes have valorized hard work as an indicator of both social responsibility and individual resilience. Borrowing from Micklitz, then, one might argue that the American model of 'the Social' relates to industry, both at a corporate and a personal level, and that it was this interpretation of 'social justice' that found its way into the Treaty of Versailles. As the literature of the period shows, the virtue of work was a unifying theme across many strata of American and European society. Although the Treaty aimed to provide a basis for calming tensions around labour relations and thus preserving peace through the provision of 'good work', literary and cultural perceptions of the Peace Conference were often less positive about its impact.

The virtue of work

Recalling the Paris Peace Conference in her novel *Sarah Gay* (1931), Mary Borden found the negotiating process as destructive as the war itself:

The Peace Conference rolled on. Like a whale, like a giant octopus, it wriggled slowly towards its clumsy end, heaving itself along by means of its dozen arms that clung to different parts of Europe, fastening blindly on forests, grain-lands and mountains, destroying the boundaries of nations and sucking away from beneath them the foundations of great, civilised communities. And the carnival of Paris whirled around its distended centre, attracting all the bright goldfish and giddy, rainbowed minnows of that big pond, the world of fashion and pleasure.²¹

Borden was a Chicago heiress who had used her own fortune to fund a hospital for the French Army during the war, an experience she would later relate in *The Forbidden Zone* (1929). By the spring of 1919, she was living in Paris with her second husband Edward Spears, a Major in the British General Staff. Their comfortable home attracted many minnows and goldfish of all nationalities during the Conference, including Lloyd George, Maynard Keynes, Jean Cocteau, Baron de Rothschild, and T. E. Lawrence.²² Yet, Borden was clearly troubled by the outcomes of the Conference. *Sarah Gay* recounts a love affair between a British soldier turned diplomat, Johnnie Gay, and a nurse, Sarah Howick, the wife of a disgraced General. The novel also satirizes the extravagance and frivolity of Paris in 1919, while 'this quartet of statesmen make a mess of the world'.²³ Finally united, and having renounced her late husband's fortune, Sarah and Johnnie find optimism for the future in the prospect of work, relying on Johnnie's new position as a bank clerk. 'They wouldn't be very well off, but Johnnie would work hard, like a nigger, he said cheerfully'.²⁴ The offensive word jumps off the page for the modern reader. However, Borden, who writes sensitively elsewhere in her fiction about race, perhaps chose the word deliberately to undercut the integrity of its speaker.²⁵ What follows is the narrator's assessment of what the reader of the novel has suspected all along, that Johnnie, despite his charm, his lost leg and his military medal, is not worth the personal price Sarah pays for his affection. Johnnie has little concept of the value or the challenge of working for a living: 'He had nothing to go by but his own experience. He couldn't see what was

coming. He didn't know any world but his own small comfortable one'.²⁶ What is coming is of course the Depression of the 1920s, which the novel blames squarely on the postwar Treaty – in which all the characters in the novel have been complicit. We are told that despite his role in the Peace Conference, Johnnie failed to notice 'the distant sound of continents cracking', and only 'heard the sound of small men's voices arguing disputing, wrangling and bargaining in many languages'.²⁷ Borden had already explored work as a theme in her fiction, most powerfully in the novel *Jehovah's Day* (1928), which dealt with the consequences of the 1926 General Strike on a mining community. When Borden lost her inherited fortune in the Wall Street Crash of 1929, her own work supported Spears's political career and sustained their family.²⁸ Borden herself, who was once arrested for throwing cobblestones at a Government office in Whitehall during a suffragette protest, never quite dropped out of the moneyed levels of society.²⁹ Yet in her fiction, the working-class characters regularly display more moral sense than the flighty upper classes, and a good attitude to work is generally a mark of authorial approval.

Contemporary debates about the nature of American national identity, new intensive farming methods, and the upscaling of industrial capability during the war also threw attention onto work as both a personal and a collective good both during and after the war. For millions of blue-collar Americans, work was also their primary means of participation in the conflict. As Mark Van Wienen observes, the control of food, especially grain, by the new Food Administration run by Herbert Hoover, was vital to bolstering US supply lines to Britain and France. Literature was also used to appropriate 'discourses of food production and conservation as well as the tropes of harvest and planting', which created a patriotic 'rhetoric' of work as a means of managing labour organizations into cooperation with the war effort.³⁰ David Rennie points out that this process was fraught with ironies. Not only were the great wheat fields of the Midwest 'a landscape at peace, being farmed in part to support the war'; after the Armistice, the economic impact of the war and its resolution devastated many rural communities:

With the increased wartime demand for agricultural produce gone, farmers struggled to pay debts incurred during the expanded production of the wartime years, while demobilized soldiers were faced with the difficulty of reintegrating into the society they were ostensibly guarding overseas.³¹

A further irony was that many of these rural communities were populated by German immigrant families. By some estimates, at the outbreak of war, almost one in four of the entire population of the US was of German descent – although by its close, many had renounced this connection or changed their names to avoid censure or violence.³² Pastoral and anti-pastoral themes pervade postwar novels as politically diverse as Zane Grey's *The Desert of Wheat* (1919), Willa Cather's *One of Ours* (1922), Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920), and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1933). Like Borden's novels, such books share an underlying belief in the need for honest work and fair reward as a redeeming element of human experience – although they present widely diverging views of what such fairness might look like or how it might be achieved.

'Accomplishing something'

Wilson appears to have been thinking about some kind of international labour solution in the weeks immediately after the Armistice.³³ However, there were divergent views at the Paris Peace Conference both about the desirability of an organization to oversee international labour conditions, and about its function. At one extreme, Britain wanted a system, a machine, or organization to progress matters related to labour affairs. At the other, France and America wanted merely the principles of good work and good management to be established.³⁴ Labour representatives across international lines, especially Gompers, appear to have been wary of creating an authoritarian system, which might side with governments and corporations rather than with workers.³⁵ With the eventual insertion of the reference to 'social justice', at the sixth meeting of the Labour Commission, governments became internationally accountable for promoting it by regulating industry and supporting 'good work'. The ILO was to have a seat at the League of Nations (Article 392) and related issues would escalate to the Secretary-General of the League (Article 398). Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the ILO, however, was its composition. All member states – and unlike the proposal for the League of Nations these included Germany from the start – would send four delegates to the annual policy-making conference: two representatives of government and one each for employers and labour. As Clark notes, this allowed 'representatives of labour and capital to have equal standing with governmental representatives' and as such to 'participate in decisions *binding* upon governments'.³⁶

The founding of the ILO was an ambitious move. However, the motivations of the key decision makers are not easy to quantify. Positive aspirations such as social ambition; a belief that peace relied on social progress; the political expediency of responding to growing labour pressure at international congress meetings in Leeds (1916), Stockholm (1917), and Berne (1918); or a fear of the threat of socialism: all played a part to some degree. Nevertheless, the creation of the ILO was a critical event in the beginnings of international regulation. The founding of the ILO also reflected the power of contemporary concerns around work, and formed an important forum for tackling social issues such as gender, race, and class. The creation of the ILO was then a prime example of a multiperspective approach. Designed in response to competing agendas and crafted to accommodate conflicting interests and viewpoints, it would over time prove itself flexible and inclusive enough to remain effective. This multiperspectivity was a reflection of the myriad attitudes to work at both a societal and at personal level.

For Wilson's own negotiators, as for cultural observers of the period, the relationship of work and social justice was riven with contradictions. The figure of James Duncan (1857–1928) exemplifies just how contradictory the labour environment was in the years around the war. A granite cutter by trade, Duncan was a labour and union man but also a stalwart of Wilsonian stability. A Scot by birth, Duncan was a key figure in American social politics, leading on various reforms. He was also an important actor in events in Paris, as a delegate to the Peace Conference and a member of the Labour Commission, which would be responsible for forming the ILO. He would spend 1919 travelling around European cities, including Paris, making links between international labour leaders, far from his initial upbringing. Born on a farm in Aberdeenshire in Scotland, Duncan did not grow up to work in agriculture, choosing instead another local craft of granite

cutting. Industrialization in nineteenth-century Scotland increased both poor working conditions and opportunities for connectivity and organization. An upsurge in demand for both granite and skilled granite workers in the American economy, and a temporary downturn in Aberdeen's economy, led to many Scots granite workers emigrating to the US.³⁷ On arrival in America in 1881, Duncan engaged in union affairs and progressed as a union official, first for the Granite Cutters Association and then the American Federation of Labour. The granite industry was a competitive environment; wages were low and safety was often compromised to keep margins down. Duncan's time as leader saw increases in granite cutters' wages, progress with the eight-hour working day, and papers written on safety issues with new technology.³⁸ Even as a young man, he was clearly an adept political force.

In 1886, aged twenty-nine, he attended the American Federation of Labour, and emerged as Second Vice President to President Samuel Gompers. For the rest of his life, he would support labour rights across different industries. Duncan went on to serve in federal government when, in 1913, Woodrow Wilson appointed him to a US commission looking at workers' compensation insurance. In 1917, Wilson sent a mission to Russia under Secretary of State Elihu Root, to investigate whether Russia might continue to participate in the war. However, Duncan's attitude to socialist concerns was ambiguous. At a speech in Petrograd, he warmly congratulated the Russian Trade Union Convention on the recent revolution, and his report back to the American Federation of Labour found much to admire in the new Russian system.³⁹ However, Kennan observes that anyone appointed by Wilson would be unlikely to appreciate the political position of even the moderate Russian Left: 'the thought that a man like Duncan would have any natural intimacy with Russian socialists was indeed farfetched, and the choice became an object of derision not only for contemporaries, but also for future Soviet historians'.⁴⁰ Yet again, the issue of differing perspectives and goals is worth noting. Duncan's notes show his awareness of very different challenges and 'historic' conditions for the workers in Russia:

The peasants were poor indeed, yet the men were big, strong, healthy, with perhaps a smattering of indolence, which might be excused because where returns or wages for labour performed are meagre, ambition to earn is not keenly in evidence.⁴¹

Certainly, Duncan's work in Russia gained further trust from Gompers and Wilson. When delegates were being selected for the American mission to Paris in 1919, Duncan was included.

Direct evidence of Duncan's direct input into the Treaty of Versailles is sparse. However, as Gompers's right-hand man it is likely that he was closely involved in reviewing and redrafting Part XIII, and his recent experiences in Soviet Russia may also have helped Wilson to accept the argument that more regulated working conditions and wages could play a role in averting the revolution elsewhere, especially in the US. Duncan's politics may not have been far enough to the left for everyone, but his track record in the AFL demonstrates his alertness to the social benefits of regulating work. In a pamphlet recounting his time in France, he reflected laconically; 'We had however accomplished something, especially in our conferences in Paris'.⁴² Duncan also provides an example of how in Paris in the spring of 1919, the pursuit of social justice contrasted with the fripperies of social entertainment. Wartime prudence turned to a celebratory mood driven by a mixture of

relief and triumph. As many contemporary accounts show, Paris was the epicentre of champagne celebrations, and the delegates gathering at Versailles were all invited. Duncan witnessed the party in full flow. His account of 'An American Labor Mission to Europe' contrasts his rough crossing to Europe marked by 'cold, raw weather, and not over a plentiful supply of food' and the 'silver lining' of Paris. Alongside international diplomacy, Duncan and his fellow delegates attended receptions and toured the sights, visiting London; Bologna; Paris; Brussels; and a train tour to Turin, Genoa, Rome, Florence, Milan, 'Seeing Italy in Six Days'.⁴³ He also made visits home to Edinburgh and Aberdeen. Like other delegates, Duncan saw the battlefields at first hand and met soldiers waiting to be demobilized. It was a powerful experience, especially the devastated road from Albert to Arras:

here and there are abandoned trenches half filled in by the train and mud of months, decaying sandbags, the road littered with relics of the fight, mouldy pack, helmets, shells of all descriptions, heaps of cartridges, and graves—always graves.⁴⁴

Duncan also noted the welcome of rural communities and the impact of the postwar exchange rate which made Americans so economically powerful. He observed 'if the French in large cities are forgetful of what America did for them, such cannot be said of the French peasant'. Such images sit uneasily alongside the grandeur of Versailles itself, which presented 'a crystal palace effect, for the snow and sleet had transformed the landscape into a veritable fairyland, glistening and sparkling in the bright morning sunlight'. Reflecting on the inside Duncan wrote: 'The interior of the palace exceeds even one's imagination. A combination of adjectives from the dictionary would not be sufficient to describe its splendour and beauty'.⁴⁵

Duncan, however, was already a figure of controversy and contradiction. Despite his work to regulate the working day and champion safer working, in 1896 he was accused of negotiating contracts in Southern states requiring employers to fire black granite cutters in favour of white workers.⁴⁶ Philip Foner noted Duncan siding with white workers, noting however a complexity for white workers in that they 'understood that they [white workers] could not raise their living standards while the Negro workers remain on the lowest rungs of the economic ladder'.⁴⁷ This perception of Duncan, which has recently prevented a memorial to him being erected in his home community of Portlethen in Scotland, further highlights the challenge of establishing 'good work' for all. Defending his actions to Gompers, Duncan wrote that the case made on behalf of the black workers was 'beautiful sentimentality bordering upon the ideal and covers a state of affairs which we all think ought to exist and hope may exist, but at the present time [...] is wholly unwarranted'.⁴⁸ Duncan's idea of social justice was apparently focused on issues of labour and class, but perhaps like Borden's character Johnnie, he was not effectively engaged with those of race. While the role of black troops was celebrated during the conflict, the hope that such service would build a 'social contract' in which they received in return 'recognition of social, political and professional equality' would fall short in the years after the war.⁴⁹ Duncan was clearly a complex figure, and is not easy to interpret. However, examining his perspective exemplifies the difficulties of clarifying social justice within a historical context, and highlights the ethical dilemmas at play in the negotiating rooms of Paris. Duncan also alerts us to the limits of traditional historical methods for judging and understanding the moral and social systems

within which people and events can be read and their motivations assessed. Fiction, on the other hand, provides a rich means of accommodating contrasting accounts, attitudes, and judgements, thus allowing cultural context to be viewed across a multiplicity of perspectives.

Negotiations

Jennifer Keene observes that 1919 was a year in which America seemed to be ‘coming apart’.⁵⁰ The immediate cancelling of wartime munitions orders plunged the economy into a period of recession, strikes, racial violence, and unemployment, which rose to nearly 12% as communities struggled to find good work for veterans. These frustrations would be poignantly explored in later novels such as Laurence Stallings’s *Plumes* (1924), Claude Mackay’s *Home to Harlem* (1928), or Thomas Boyd’s *In Time of Peace* (1935). Meanwhile, veteran organizations took up the cause of fair work, sometimes in violent competition with other labour groups, such as the International Workers of the World, or with black workers. Many branches of the newly established American Legion refused to accept black members. In 1919 alone, seventy-seven black citizens were killed by angry mobs, ten of them former soldiers.⁵¹ In a particularly vicious incident in the logging town of Centralia, Washington on the anniversary of the Armistice, a march by the American Legion led to an armed confrontation with the IWW in which four members of the Legion were shot dead. In retribution, one of the IWW leaders, Wesley Everest was kidnapped from the county jail, tortured and lynched from a nearby bridge.⁵²

The killing of Wesley Everest is among several real-life incidents reimagined in *1919*, the middle volume of John Dos Passos’s epic trilogy *USA* (1930–1938) which charts American society through the first three decades of the twentieth century. Dos Passos’s method is distinctively multiperspectival. He progresses his narrative through passages presented from the viewpoint of a series of loosely connected characters – some fictional, some less so – interleaved with a disembodied stream of consciousness entitled ‘The Camera Eye’, and a rolling series of headlines and newsclips entitled ‘Newsreel’: LEVIATHAN UNABLE TO PUT TO SEA/BOLSHEVIKS ABOLISH POSTAGE STAMPS /ARTIST TAKES GAS IN NEW HAVEN/FIND BLOOD ON \$1 BILL.⁵³ More like free verse than fiction, these disjointed, paratactical commentaries combine to provide a strangely cohesive statement about the values and brutalities of modern life. Time doubles back on itself in the gaps between the narrative sections, and the boundary between history and invention evaporates in Dos Passos’s text. Real-life figures such as Woodrow Wilson and J. P. Morgan are given neither more nor less interior validity than the fictional figures whose lives are connected to or ruined by the Peace Conference. Dos Passos, who served as an ambulance driver and later enlisted, was serving in the US Army in France in 1919. He used many of his wartime impressions in his novel *Three Soldiers* (1922), which finishes by darkly satirizing the futility of enforced military service in a war that has already finished.⁵⁴ The war recurs again and again in Dos Passos’s fiction and his historical writing. Yet by focusing on 1919 rather than the years of conflict in *USA*, Dos Passos asserts that it was the economic settlement, rather than the fighting that shaped American society. Money and work dominate the lives of his characters; everyone seems to have either too little or much. The young legal clerk Ben Compton is sent to prison in Atlanta for ten years for speaking at a labour meeting. The sailor Joe Williams ekes out a living on war freighters, drinking and fighting. The real-life figure of Joe Hill, anti-war

songwriter for the IWW, is executed for a murder that he probably did not commit. Meanwhile in Paris, the clerks, diplomats, and charity workers of the Peace Conference work, drink, sleep with each other, make ill-thought-out choices, and walk away from responsibilities, while the people of Europe 'read in the papers that Meester Veelson was for peace and freedom and canned goods and butter and sugar'.⁵⁵ At the heart of *1919*, indeed at the dead centre of Dos Passos's trilogy, presides the figure of J. P. Morgan, silently brooding over his inherited banking empire, and directing events through the power of his war loans and investments: 'by the end of the Peace Conference the phrase *J. P. Morgan suggests* had compulsion over a power of seventyfour billion dollars'.⁵⁶ The novel closes with Dos Passos's powerful evocation 'The Body of an American', which meditates on the identity of the unknown warrior buried in Arlington National Cemetery, a multiperspective fusion of every ordinary working American man whose life has been appropriated by war.

Originally greeted as 'a Marxist epic', *1919* has been repeatedly repositioned on the political spectrum, up to and including Mark Whalan's reading of the text as a 'history of an emergent global oil system' as the basis of 'petromodern' capitalism.⁵⁷ What is less often articulated is that Dos Passos's narrative method, in which opposing views and interests clash with and play off each other, itself mimics the process of negotiation, and provides a verbal model for the conditions of social justice, in which the view and the actions of each individual have value. This is multiperspectivity at work, both as a literary device and as a means of understanding history in order to generate insight across lines of division. As one early review astutely noted: '*Nineteen-Nineteen* is a chronicle of humbug and cruelty, violence and subtle horror. But beneath the rugged surface there is latent beauty, and a quiet sympathy and pity'.⁵⁸ Or as Stradling might say, reading Dos Passos requires a willingness to 'put oneself in someone else's shoes and try to and see the world as they see it'.⁵⁹ Dos Passos's politics have continually proved hard to locate, but the map of his fiction demonstrates a keen awareness of the social and empathetic conditions of peace.

The mission statement of the IWW reflected its radical, pacifist agenda: 'Forming the new society within the shell of the old'.⁶⁰ This goal was often opposed by US authorities, by more moderate voices within the labour movement, such as Duncan, and by more conservative public opinion. However, it has a deep synergy with that of the statesmen gathered in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles – who were very visibly designing new forms for society within the ornate shell of an old system of governance. Both groups focused on the creation of social justice which relies on economic justice, and that it is through opportunities for 'good work' that self-actualization and community stability become possible. As the fiction of the period shows – indeed, as the fiction of any period shows – by engaging with and accepting diverse perspectives we come to acknowledge that the self-actualization of individuals of other nations, races, genders, or classes is as important as our own. Whether reflected in the mirror of history or that of literature, multiperspectivity remains a powerful tool for both teaching the past and understanding the present.

Despite the flaws in the Treaty of Versailles, it did promote the idea of social justice, at least for some groups. Labour relations were escalated to an international concern, and there were also many references to women's equality in postwar deliberations. However, this was part of a longitudinal process. While some political and legal equalities were

being won, economic equality remained far off, as did racial equality, not least in the US. The idea that redistribution by governments can create ‘better’ or ‘more decent work’ also remains debatable. However, there is evidence that the idea of an inter-reliance of fair work, social justice, and peace did develop as a powerful trope in aspects of postwar American culture. Thus, perceptions of social justice, like those of history and fiction, are in the eye of the beholder. It all depends on what you see in the mirror.

Notes

1. ILO, ‘Part XIII’, 332.
2. Lloyd George, vol. 1, *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*, 670.
3. Clark, *International Legitimacy*, 109.
4. *Ibid.*, 107.
5. See, for example: Kennan, ‘World War I, Then II, Then ...’; Sharp, *The Consequences of Peace*; and Macmillan, *Peacemakers and Paris 1919*.
6. Novak, ‘Defining Social Justice’.
7. Novak, ‘Social Justice’.
8. Ornstein, *Social Justice*, 546–548.
9. Sabbagh and Schmitt, *Handbook of Social Justice*, 1.
10. ‘Social justice’, <https://books.google.com/ngrams>.
11. United Nations, *Social Justice in an Open World*, 11–12.
12. *Ibid.*, 15–17.
13. See, for example, Mowat, ‘Closing the Attainment Gap’, 299–321, and Bøyum, ‘Fairness in Education’, 856–870.
14. Stradling, *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching*, 10–15.
15. *Ibid.*, 15.
16. *Ibid.*, 16.
17. *Ibid.*, 14.
18. Hartner, *Multiperspectivity*.
19. Micklitz, *The Politics of Justice*, 47–118.
20. United Nations, *Social Justice in an Open World*, 12.
21. Borden, *Sarah Gay*, 199.
22. Egremont, 82–89.
23. Borden, *Sarah Gay*, 201.
24. *Ibid.*, 302.
25. For example, see her portrayal of the wounded North African conscript ‘*Enfant de Malheur*’ in *The Forbidden Zone*, 66–92.
26. Borden, *Sarah Gay*, 303.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Conway, *A Woman of Two Wars*, 74–78.
29. Borden, *The Technique of Marriage*, 124–126.
30. Van Wienen, *Partisans and Poets*, 150.
31. Rennie, ‘In the Fields of Democracy’, 24.
32. Harries and Harries, *The Last Days of Innocence*, 32.
33. Jones, *Code of Peace*, 35.
34. Clark, *International Legitimacy*, 106–109.
35. *Ibid.*, 112.
36. *Ibid.*, 127.
37. Harper, ‘Transient Tradesmen’, 65–66.
38. McLennan, *From Portlethen to Paris*, 24.
39. Duncan, *Address*, 73.
40. Kennan, *Russia Leaves the War*, vol. 1, 20.

41. Duncan, *Address*, 14.
42. Duncan, *A Few Thoughts*, unpaginated.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*
46. McLennan, *From Portlethen to Paris*, 25.
47. Foner, *History of the Labour Movement*, 356.
48. Letter to Samuel Gompers, 16 June 1896. Cited in Foner, *History of the Labour Movement*, 357.
49. Keene, *Doughboys*, 163.
50. *Ibid.*, 164–165.
51. Whalan, *American Culture in the 1910s*, 178.
52. Keene, *Doughboys*, 169.
53. Dos Passos, *1919*, 648.
54. See also Hutchison, *The War That Used Up Words*, 224–235.
55. Dos Passos, *1919*, 568.
56. *Ibid.*, 647.
57. Josephson, ‘A Marxist Epic’, 109. Whalan, ‘Oil Was Trumps’, 476.
58. Bower-Shore, ‘Review’, 121.
59. Stradling, *Multiperspectivity*, 14.
60. Van Wienen, *Partisans and Poets*, 73–102.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Neil McLennan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6115-6813>

Bibliography

- Borden, Mary. *The Forbidden Zone*. London: Heinemann, 1929.
- Borden, Mary. *Sarah Gay*. London: Heinemann, 1931.
- Borden, Mary. *The Technique of Marriage*. London: Heinemann, 1933.
- Bower-Shore, Clifford. “Review.” In *Bookman*, December (1933): LXXXV, 198–199. Reprinted in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, edited by B. Maine, 121–123. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Bøyum, S. “Fairness in Education—A Normative Analysis of OECD Policy Documents.” *Journal of Education Policy* 29, no. 6 (2014): 856–870. doi:10.1080/02680939.2014.899396.
- Clark, Ian. *International Legitimacy and World Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Conway, Jane. *A Woman of Two Wars: The Life of Mary Borden*. London: Munday, 2010.
- Dellot, Benedict, Rich Mason, and Fabian Wallace-Stephens. *The Four Futures of Work: Coping with Uncertainty in an Age of Radical Technologies*. London: Royal Society of Arts Manufactures and Commerce, 2019.
- Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Division for Social Policy and Development: International Forum for Social Development, Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations*. New York: United Nations, 2006.
- Dos Passos, John. *USA*. Ed., D. Aaron and T. Ludington. New York: Library of America, 1984 [1930-1936].
- Duncan, James. *Address of James Duncan, President of the Granite Cutters’ International Association of American and Vice President of the American Federation of Labor: May 5 1917 to August 18, 1917*. Washington, DC: American Federation of Labor, 1917.

- Duncan, James. *A Few Thoughts: Incidental to an American Labour Mission to Europe on The Peace Treaty of 1919*. Undated pamphlet. Alice Marshall Women's History Collection, Archives and Special Collections, Penn State Harrisburg Library, Pennsylvania. James Duncan, Series II, Box 36, Call Number D921.D86 1920. Unpaginated.
- Egremont, Max. *Under Two Flags: The Life of Major General Sir Edward Spears*. London: Phoenix Gant, 1997.
- Foner, Philip. *History of the Labour Movement in the United States. Vol 2: From the Founding Fathers to the American Federation of Labour to the Emergence of American Imperialism*. New York: International, 1955.
- Harper, Marjory. "Transient Tradesmen: Aberdeen Emigrants and the Development of the American Granite Industry." *Northern Scotland* 9, no. 1 (2015): 53–75.
- Harries, Meirion, and Susie Harries. *The Last Days of Innocence: America at War 1917–18*. New York: Random House, 1997.
- Hartner, Marcus. "Multiperspectivity." In *The Living History of Narratology*, edited by P. Hühn, J. Pier, W. Schmid, and J. Schönert. Hamburg: University of Hamburg, 2012. (accessed 27 October 2019). <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/multiperspectivity>
- Hutchison, Hazel. *The War That Used Up Words: American Writers and the First World War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015.
- International Labour Office. 'Official Bulletin: Volume 1: April 1919–August 1920: Part XIII of the Treaty of Peace of Versailles'. Geneva: International Labour Office, 1923.
- Jones, Dorothy V. *Code of Peace: Ethics and Security in the World of States*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991.
- Josephson, Matthew. "A Marxist Epic." In *Saturday Review*, 19 March 1932, VIII, p. 600. Reprinted in *Dos Passos: The Critical Heritage*, edited by B. Maine, 109–112. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Kennan, George F. *Russia Leaves the War: Soviet–American Relations 1917–1920*. Vol. 2. New York: Norton and Company, 1984a.
- Kennan, George F. 1984b. 'World War I, Then II, Then . . .'. *New York Times*, 11 November, Section 4: 21.
- Keene, Jennifer. *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001.
- Lloyd George, David. *The Truth about the Peace Treaties*. Vol. 2. London: Victor Gollancz, 1938.
- Macmillan, Margaret. *Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War*. London: John Murray, 2001.
- Macmillan, Margaret. *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*. New York: Random House, 2007.
- McLennan, Neil. "From Portlethen to Paris Peace Conference: James Duncan at the Paris Peace Conference." *History Scotland* 9, no. 4 (2019): 24–26.
- Micklitz, Hans-W. *The Politics of Justice in European Private Law: Social Justice, Access Justice, Societal Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Mowat, Joan Gaynor. "Closing the Attainment Gap—A Realistic Proposition or an Elusive Pipe-Dream?". *Journal of Education Policy* 33, no. 2 (2018): 299–321. doi:10.1080/02680939.2017.1352033.
- Novak, Michael. 'Defining Social Justice'. *First Things: Journal of Institute on Religion and Public Life*. December 2000. Accessed 16 October 2019. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2000/12/defining-social-justice>
- Novak, Michael. 'Social Justice: Not What You Think It Is'. Heritage Foundation. 29 December 2009. Accessed 27 October 2019. <https://www.heritage.org/poverty-and-inequality/report/social-justice-not-what-you-think-it>
- Ornstein, Allan C. "Social Justice; History, Purpose and Meaning." *Social Science and Public Policy* 54 (2010): 541–548.
- Rennie, David. "In the Fields of Democracy: The Midwest in World War I." *Midwestern Miscellany* XLIV, Fall 2016: 23–38.

- Sabbagh, C., and M. Schmitt. "Past, Present, and Future of Social Justice Theory and Research." In *Handbook of Social Justice Theory and Research*, edited by C. Sabbagh and M. Schmitt, 1–11. New York: Springer, 2016.
- Sharp, Alan. *The Consequences of Peace: The Versailles Settlement: Aftermath and Legacy 1919–2015*. London: Haus Publishing, 2015.
- Stradling, Robert. *Multiperspectivity in History Teaching: A Guide for Teachers*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2003.
- Treaty of Peace with Germany (Treaty of Versailles), 28 June 1919. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0043.pdf> (accessed 29 October 2019).
- Van Wienen, Mark. *Partisans and Poets: The Political Work of American Poets in the Great War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Whalan, Mark. *American Culture in the 1910s*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
- Whalan, Mark. "'Oil Was Trumps': John Dos Passos, USA, World War I and the Growth of the Petromodern State." *American Literary History* 29, no. 3 (2017): 474–498. doi:10.1093/alh/ajx023.