



Silvertown: The Lost Story of a Strike that Shook London and Helped Launch the Modern Labor Movement

John Tully

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In 1889, Samuel Winkworth Silver's rubber and electrical factory was the site of a massive worker revolt that upended the London industrial district which bore his name: Silvertown. Once referred to as the "Abyss" by Jack London, Silvertown was notorious for oppressive working conditions and the relentless grind of production suffered by its largely unorganized, unskilled workers. These workers, fed-up with their lot and long ignored by traditional craft unions, aligned themselves with the socialist-led "New Unionism" movement. Their ensuing strike paralyzed Silvertown for three months. The strike leaders—including Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, Eleanor Marx, and Will Thorne—and many workers viewed the trade union struggle as part of a bigger fight for a "co-operative commonwealth." With this goal in mind, they shut down Silvertown and, in the process, helped to launch a more radical, modern labor movement.

Historian and novelist John Tully, author of the monumental social history of the rubber industry *The Devil's Milk*, tells the story of the Silvertown strike in vivid prose. He rescues the uprising—overshadowed by other strikes during this period—from relative obscurity and argues for its significance to both the labor and socialist movements. And, perhaps most importantly, Tully presents the Silvertown Strike as a source of inspiration for today's workers, in London and around the world, who continue to struggle for better workplaces and the vision of a "co-operative commonwealth."



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