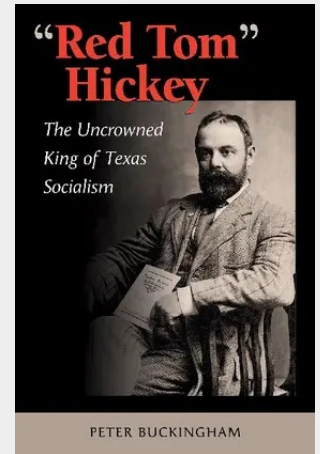


"Red Tom" Hickey

The Uncrowned King of Texas Socialism

This is the fascinating biography of a bright young working man, Tom Hickey, who came to the United States from Ireland in 1892, became a machinist, and soon joined the Knights of Labor and the Socialist Labor Party. His party boss recognized the potential in this Irishman and even made him an "enforcer" against those who questioned the boss's authority. The enforcer, though, eventually found himself forced out and moved west to start a new life. Ultimately, Hickey landed in Texas and saw an opportunity to use syndicalism as an organizing tool to build a state socialist party. He did just that. Within a few years, Hickey transformed the faction-ridden Socialist Party of America in Texas into a force strong enough to threaten the Republican Party at the ballot box. He gained a large following thanks to a unique mixture of evangelical rhetoric and militant industrial unionism. As biographer Peter H. Buckingham points out, Hickey failed to deliver his people into the Promised Land. Violence, poll taxes, voter suppression, and other forces made voting for socialist candidates problematic, and the Democratic Party soon co-opted the more appealing elements of socialism into watered-down, reformist planks for the Texan voter. By the time Hickey died of throat cancer in the mid-1920s, his moment had passed. "Red Tom" Hickey is an important contribution to Texas and American history, capturing a moment in time that Buckingham argues was the second sustained crisis in American history: a democratic society wrestling with the effects of industrial capitalism.

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