Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999. x + 283 pp. $29.95 cloth; $12.95 paper.

*Capital Moves* is an important book written with a clear scholarly and political objective. Working in the mid-1990s, after the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization’s (AFL-CIO) defeat in the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) debate, Jefferson Cowie sought to discredit a conception of workers and labor held not only by union leaders’, but far too often by their allies in universities, politics, film, and literature as well. In this older conception, white men employed in the United States’ auto, steel, and related industries struggled mightily for decades, in cities like Pittsburgh and Detroit, to improve and defend their conditions and rights at work, only to lose their jobs because the President and the Congress did not prevent their employers from moving their factories to Mexico and Asia.

While Cowie would hardly deny the existence of such workers, their contribution to American industry and the labor movement, as well as their suffering, he quite rightly thinks that the older perspective badly distorts modern labor history. He argues that the movement of capital beyond US borders in the last quarter-century was simply a continuation of a process that had begun long before *inside* the nation. Moreover, insofar as Radio Corporation of America (RCA)—a cutting edge firm in consumer electronics—is representative, the workers who lost jobs because of capital relocation were as often as not women, including women of color, as well as men.

This misrepresentation of modern labor history hurt both workers and unions, Cowie argues. “Perhaps the most surreal episode,” he writes at the end of this forceful text, “was the moment when, having hitchhiked from Juarez [Mexico] to a friend’s house in Las Cruces, I sat, dusty and tired, watching the billionaire Ross Perot defend “workers’ interests” against the Democrat Al Gore in the NAFTA debate—on an RCA television, of course, made not far from where I sat” (263).

Cowie’s thesis is simple and bold. He argues that David Sarnoff, the long-term RCA board chairman, and his staff followed a clear plan to control labor and raise productivity, a plan that they pursued effectively throughout the company’s history. The manufacturing of radios and other consumer electrical products was a labor-intensive business, he notes, which experienced greater inter-firm competition than companies in many other industries. To cope with that problem, RCA executives put most of their production in a single city where unions were weak, under-employed young women were abundant, and decent cultural institutions were available for the managers that the firm brought in from elsewhere. The company started in Camden, New Jersey in the late 1920s. During the 1940s it moved the bulk of its manufacturing to Bloomington, Indi-
ana. In the mid-1960s they relocated, first to Memphis, Tennessee, then temporarily back to Indiana, and finally to Juarez, Mexico, where RCA’s main manufacturing facilities remained when the book appeared.

In each town except one, Memphis, RCA’s plan worked beautifully, Cowie asserts. In every city (including Memphis, in this regard) local workers and businessmen were thrilled when they heard that RCA would build a big new complex of factories in their town. Although they themselves were outsiders, RCA’s local managers acted like nineteenth-century cotton-mill magnates, working hard to cultivate a strong “family atmosphere” in the new town. Workers were trained and production would rise. RCA and the local chambers of commerce called Camden the “radio capital of the world” and, after they moved to the Midwest, bulletin boards in Bloomington called that town the world’s “Color TV Citadel.”

After some years, however, workers in each city organized into unions and began to feel like they owned their jobs. Despite management’s willingness—albeit reluctantly—to sign collective bargaining contracts, workers would strike, often in violation of the union’s commitments. RCA repeatedly responded by threatening to shut down their facilities; yet the workers nonetheless continued to protest. RCA consequently moved its principal operations from one city to another. Finally RCA moved its principal manufacturing operations to Juarez, Mexico. In moving across the Rio Grande, RCA started a mass exodus across the border by other large US manufacturers.

Drop antiquated conceptions of labor history, Cowie tells his readers. Capital has always moved. The relocation to Mexico and Asia in the past quarter century seems extraordinary only if we have a narrow national perspective. Moreover, ever since its founding in 1919 the Radio Corporation of America had always employed primarily women, the bulk of whom were young. And in contrast to the common conception of plant relocation as a sudden move, RCA repeatedly moved its operations by stages, operating part of its operations in the older city and other parts in the new one, for a decade, a strategy that allowed management to maintain maximum flexibility.

Cowie has written an important book that deserves close attention from scholars and teachers. Few labor historians have traced a corporation as it moved cities over many years. Even fewer have made international comparisons. Cowie’s argument about the similarities in management policies and Mexican and US workforces is persuasive. He crosses other intellectual boundaries as well, as he simultaneously discusses labor and management, women and men, unionism and technology. His research is deep; he writes with vigor; he provides a great deal of detail without ever becoming bogged down; and, most impressive of all, he never falls into simplistic claims about the possibilities of cooperation among workers. He offers many instances of workers in Bloomington and Memphis who were excited when RCA moved to their city, even though they knew that workers elsewhere suffered as a result.

Despite these great merits, his argument has a formalistic quality that weak-
ens the study. A major problem is that Cowie did not provide primary-source evidence that RCA had a master plan to pursue the path he describes, but instead only cites a relatively few remarks by corporate executives, generally drawn from newspapers. Although, it was probably not possible for him to do more than this, for US corporations have been far more secretive than unions in protecting their archives. Nevertheless, the result is an inadequate and almost certainly flawed interpretation of the corporation’s history. Cowie writes as if “General Sarnoff”—as RCA’s chief was called—and the corporation’s other top executives, knew exactly what they were doing when they moved their plants. Yet even the most brilliant leaders of institutions and states, including Stalin and Franklin Roosevelt, who ignored Germany and Japan’s invasion plans, and the Chief Executive Officer’s at the mammoth US corporations that are now failing, commit serious errors, or encounter unexpected and problematic consequences even when they succeed.

RCA’s move to Memphis illustrates this point. David Sarnoff decided to relocate their television manufacturing, their most important product in the 1960s, to that Mississippi River port after the workers in Bloomington would not stop striking. RCA executives were apparently unaware of the history of militant inter-racial CIO unionism in Memphis during the 1940s. Moreover, as Cowie notes, the RCA managers did not adequately train their new Memphis employees. In addition, confronted with price competition from other firms, they raised piece rates in Memphis too quickly. As a result, huge piles of defective television receivers rose outside the Memphis factories, further injuring the firm in the hot color television market. After the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis in May 1968, prospects for cooperation between RCA workers and management temporarily ended in that city too (85-93). Yet because of intra-industry competition, RCA managers were not able to slowly rebuild their relations with the local workers, as General Electric (GE) managers had done in Lawrence, Massachusetts in the 1920s, after the massive wartime and postwar strikes.

Cowie describes the problems that confronted RCA’s managers in Memphis well, but seems reluctant to fully acknowledge their failures, for they do not fit into his picture of US capital in the modern era as a dynamic, aggressive, and seemingly unstoppable force. Yet his interpretation is undermined not only by the events in Memphis but also by the evolution of RCA after Robert Sarnoff succeeded his father as chief executive. Like more than a few rich men’s sons, “Bobby” Sarnoff, as the new CEO was nicknamed, was loath to follow in his father’s footsteps. Instead, of re-investing in electronics manufacturing, he quickly moved their money elsewhere. RCA purchased Banquet Foods, Hertz Rental Cars, Rental House, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and weapons and computer manufacturing companies. These moves proved disastrous for RCA. Ultimately the corporation was sold to GE, which in turn, “came through like a buzz saw,” as RCA’s next CEO put it, selling most of its divisions except NBC and those subsidiaries that produced for the military. The workers still em-
ployed by RCA in electronic manufacturing in the US were relieved when GE in turn sold the television plants to the French firm Thomson Consumer Electronics, yet few US workers benefited from the sale, Cowie explains (141–42).

Cowie is a very impressive scholar who, to a far greater extent than some labor historians, understands the limitations in the visions of the workers he admires and wishes to help. His reluctance to recognize capitalists’ failures is ironic, yet somehow characteristic of the late 1990s.

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Arthur B. Shostak, ed., *The CyberUnion Handbook: Transforming Labor through Computer Technology.* Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002. 359 pp. $64.95 cloth; $25.95 paper.

On the one hand Shostak uses the word “transformation” on his front cover. On the other, he quotes, on a flyleaf, the words of that personification of nineteenth- and twentieth-century business unionism, Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, 1886–1924. Gompers asked and answered his own question: “What does labor want? More.” This was a quantitative answer to what had earlier been, and today may again be, a qualitative question. So the question is raised, with respect to this book, as with his previous one (Shostak, 1999), whether Shostak wants faster unions or transformed unions.

This is an edited and commented collection of mostly short pieces, written primarily by American union officers/activists/specialists and divided into the following rubrics: (1) Surveying the field; (2) Getting started; (3) Email and list servers; (4) Websites; (5) Becoming a cyberunion; (6) Employing futuristics; (7) Innovations; (8) Services; (9) Honoring traditions; (10) Promoting democracy; (11) Promoting militancy; (12) Promoting organizing. There are preliminaries and conclusions. And then there are some fifty pages of appendices offering labor website reviews, an internet resource guide, an annotated bibliography, and an extensive index.

There is no doubt that this is the biggest and most detailed book in the field and that everyone involved seriously with inter/national labor computer communication should have one. Whether forty to fifty accumulated chapters amounts to a handbook rather than an anthology may be in question. But Shostak’s introductions to the book, to the parts, and to each chapter are clearly intended to provide a whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

Having recommended that readers buy this book, I now have to recommend how to read it. Not from front to back, because it is not an integrated overview, nor does it present an integrated argument or strategy; the contributions are often just four to five pages and mostly anecdotal. Possibly the book should be read by rubric title, if and as relevant to reader needs. Possibly, it could be approached by reading Shostak’s introductions. He has, indeed, done so
much work here that one wonders why he did not write a short book and put all
the illustrative material elsewhere! Readers could use Shostak like the hand-
book it claims to be and work from the extensive index. They will certainly be
able to make use of the appendices, though resources here are often predictable
and redundant, such as the many union “e-dresses” one can find on many labor
websites.

Strong on how-to and can-do, the book is weak on critique of hegemonic
practices/discourses and on any alternatives. The author thus handles “in-
formatization”—a capitalist revolution that is simultaneously an epochal tran-
formation—as if this were a change in the weather (though, as we know, weather
cracks are today themselves decreasingly natural). And he identifies with
the existing union organizations, including an American Federation of Labor–
Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) leadership now seriously run-
ning out of reformist puff. It is not that he has no democratic values (so, possi-
bly, did Gompers, alongside his racist and imperialist ones), nor that he is un-
aware of anti-democratic use of computers by employers and government. But
Shostak does seem to believe that the severely shrunken, customarily top-down,
and often corrupt American union organizations, once powered by this new
communications technology, can be “transformed.” There is here a serious case
for skepticism.

Let us consider the subsections under Honoring Traditions (history? val-
ues?); Democracy, Militancy, and Organizing. (Perhaps we should not expect too
much from someone who puts Karl Marx and Samuel Gompers on one line as
“alike,” as aiding internationalism [29].)

Shostak’s introduction to this part is less a summary of or commentary on
the following items than a series of worthy injunctions on how electronic media
might be used in recording and propagating both historical and contemporary
events and personages. (He also misses what has to be the international labor
history site, that of the Internationale Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis/
International Institute of Social History at http://www.iisg.nl). The following
pieces on training in internet use and on an independent labor media center are
nonetheless useful expositions. The second one, by LaborTech coordinator,
Steve Zeltzer, is one of the few that integrates the international into what is
largely a national (not to say parochial) collection.

In his introduction to the Democracy section, Shostak cites Lane Kirkland
(another AFL-CIO oligarch) but otherwise shows himself somewhat more at-
tached to the matter than Kirkland was. He favors chatrooms, even unmoder-
ated, as a space for rank-and-file members to express themselves. He favors
equal space for a “Loyal Opposition” (216) and, finally, when all else fails, he fa-
vors unofficial web sites and lists. The last is evidently a necessary recommen-
dation, given that space for feedback and discussion are notably limited in the
union sites reviewed in Chapter 46 (280–297).

Shostak’s option for democracy is powerfully reinforced and advanced in
the contribution by Matt Noyes, from the Association for Union Democracy.
This is a complex and insightful argument about the relation of democracy to
American unions and then of the internet to democracy. Noyes describes American unions, in passing, as customarily being one-party systems (239). Indeed, one gets from this contribution alone a good understanding of why they need “transformation.” Noyes also gets the space (18 pages) to develop a radical position that does not require any “own-trumpet-blowing.” His piece also belongs, it strikes me, to a quite different tradition of writing about computers and unions, one that would stand on the ground of radical democracy rather than within the parameters of American-unionism-as-we-know-it and that would thus considers the possibilities and limits of computerization.

The Militancy and Organizing sections again reveal Shostak’s awareness of their current shortcomings in the United State and of the capacity of computers for supporting strikes, for other protest activity, and for reaching both informatized and the nonunion or even antiunion workers (who can be the same). William Puete, in his contribution, states: “They say strikes aren’t what they used to be, but more to the point, strikes can’t be what they used to be in simpler times. . . . Half of the US work force regularly used a desktop or laptop computer at work as early as 1997, and the Internet is still recasting labor-management relations in fundamental ways” (252).

These two sections seem to me to get closer to where the bone is buried. While contributions may continue the somewhat frenetic upbeat tone of the editor, they address themselves to the matter at hand with a strong feeling for what is new at work, in public life, and even in the home. This sense of what is new, and an energetic engagement with it, is evident also in the Epilogue by Peter Lewis, webmaster of Workers Online, a sophisticated and effective Australian site. Lewis is clearly aware of the difference between an old-economy organization and a new-economy network. And he argues for unions to provide space for worker self-identification and organization rather than try to force cyberspace to conform to the institutional logic of the traditional union.

Having ploughed through this extensive work (and without even visiting the most interesting sites mentioned), I am still somewhat puzzled by its limitations. I think that these may have to do with its initial parameters (unionism, America) as much as with Shostak’s particular way of articulating these with cyberspace.

Unionism-as-we-know-it has to be understood as the means for self-defense and assertion of workers under the national-industrial phase of capitalism (a word absent from this pro-labor book, though not from the discourse of anti-labor capitalists). “National” implies that relations with other unions were literally inter-national rather than trans- or supra-national. Often it has also meant imperial or racial (search on the internet for these or related keywords, along with either Gompers or Kirkland). “Industrial” implies workers of mines, mills, and factories, customarily with decreasing articulation over time with the community, non-unionized workers, and women. Add to this the company and/or state corporatism, with unions primarily focused on bargaining (a market concept), often putting a subordinate “partnership” with employer and state or a political party before a democratic and egalitarian relationship with the rest of
society. Together, you have a nutshell specification of the extent and limits of the creature that needs, in Shostak’s title, to be transformed.

Mention within the book of community, social issue movements, even the anti-globalization movement is largely in terms of what unions can gain, or learn, from these—not in terms of any more organic articulation. But such an organic articulation is surely necessary if unions are to even defend workers under contemporary conditions. Thus, take the example of IndyMedia, an exemplar of cyberspatial networking, multimedia creativity, inspired by a global solidarity ethic and born in the United States. IndyMedia is coeval with the anti-globalization movement that created international awareness at the Battle of Seattle. It is multilingual, existing in Nigeria, Russia, and Argentina as well as in Philadelphia, Kalamazoo (kidding!), and Boston. Yet it receives here no more than one reference and then only as “independent media centers.” Now, go online and compare http://www.indymedia.org with http://www.aflcio.org or even with http://www.global-unions.org and weep. Or, even better, consider the challenge with which the former confronts the latter.

America. Or, to be less megalomaniac, the United States. This may be the birthplace of our globalized, informatized, financial and services capitalism. And there is no doubt that it is the belly of the globalized beast. But the privilege, or provocation, this might provide to reinventing the form of labor self-articulation has to be set off against the American sense of superiority and a consequent insularity that also affects unionism here. (I am not proposing, as alternative, the breast-beating syndrome in which anything non-, and especially anti-, American is definitionally superior.) The “international” enters this book but rarely and then almost solely in terms of what one might call North Atlantic Treaty Unionism (Korea, mentioned by Steve Zeltzer is an exception). International labor communication by computer has important North American roots. Mostly at the margins of the unions! But it has these equally in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, continental Europe, and elsewhere. So has critical reflection on the matter. Shostak’s evident lack of awareness about such means that his positive commitment to the problem under consideration remains to some extent parochial and simplistic.

After praising it with faint damns, I do nonetheless again recommend this book to the reader. It may not be state of the art, but it does reflect the state of play, and if the nuggets are not exposed to the naked eye, they are there none-theless.

Peter Waterman

Global Solidarity Dialogue, The Hague

Peter Miller, Producer and Director, The Internationale. New York: First Run/Icarus Films, 2000. 30 minutes. $225 VHS.

In this award-winning documentary, producer and director Peter Miller uses an impressive collection of film clips and interviews to illustrate the connections be-
tween emotion, social politics, and music in the song “The Internationale.” Miller traces the history of this song as a rallying point for workers, activists, socialists, and communists, from its beginnings in the Paris Commune in 1871, through the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, labor struggles in the United States, and Tiananmen Square, to its recent reworking and revival by British musician Billy Bragg. The power of this documentary is its focus on the potent solidarity and optimism that “The Internationale” has inspired in workers and activists around the globe. Due to its combination of musical and social history, in addition to its accessibility, this film has the potential to reach a variety of audiences. It is suitable for public television broadcast and as an educational resource either for the classroom or for an activist or labor meeting.

Peter Miller’s career as a filmmaker is impressive. He has worked as a co-producer with Ken Burns on several documentaries, including the recent ten-episode Jazz. Miller also supports film and video as a medium for social action and was a co-producer for Barbara Kopple’s documentary of the Hormel meatpacker’s strike.

In The Internationale, Miller has artfully constructed an informative and moving account of the social power of a musical work. The film effectively conveys the power of this song using interviews with a number of activists and scholars from around the world recounting their own experiences. An extensive array of historic film clips and stills give image to these experiences, from the rice fields of the Philippines, a kibbutz in Israel, and Lenin in Red Square to labor rallies in Manhattan’s Union Square. The long list of sources for this footage includes libraries and collections in the United States and abroad.

I was particularly impressed with the careful and painstaking editing of the film, especially when the interviewees each sing a line of “The Internationale” in their own language. Musical tempo and pitch are consistent from line to line, allowing for a seamless flow. While I found this example to be particularly pleasing, it is representative of the high quality of the entire film’s construction. Similarly, the film’s structure succeeds without any additional narrative voice-over; instead, the narrative of the film is created through the recollections and remarks of the diverse interviewees.

Because the technical aspects and the structure of this film were so beautifully crafted I was disappointed that it was only thirty minutes long. As such, my criticisms are paradoxically inspired by the film’s merit. For, while this film conveys both the emotion and the international flavor of “The Internationale’s” reception, it does not provide enough of an examination or interpretation of the song’s text or music. Although the song was constantly being played or sung during the course of the film, the English text was only presented once at the opening of the film. Throughout the film the song was often sung with each line of text in a different language. This was very effective in communicating the song’s international appeal and use, but it also became rather confusing. Clearly, the words of the song have a powerful significance in the meaning of the song and might have been repeated another time in English for those in the audience who do not have a prior familiarity with the text. Similarly, when Billy Bragg speaks
of changing the lyrics to make the song more relevant for the twenty-first century, I would have found it both helpful and interesting to have both the new and the old texts laid out together with the changes highlighted and explained. An analysis of the text and its permutations across time and place would also have contributed to a more complex understanding of the differences, as well as the similarities, among the many groups of people who have sung this song.

As a music historian, my second desire after viewing this film was for a more complex and detailed history of the song and its transmission. Although Pete Seeger recounts a portion of the background of the song’s creation by Eugene Pottier and Pierre Degeyter at the end of the nineteenth century, the film does not elaborate on the political origins of the song in the Paris Commune. Nor does filmmaker Miller attempt to create a complete history of “The Internationale,” choosing instead to focus on specific persons and experiences. As I expressed before, many of my criticisms of this film might have been satisfied if the film had been an hour or two in length instead of only thirty minutes. With a longer format, there would likely have been time for an exploration of the text and a more detailed history of the song. In effect, my disappointment at the film’s short length is less of a criticism and more of a compliment.

Perhaps the greatest importance of this documentary is its contribution to a renewal of interest in this historic song. Very few written sources on the history of “The Internationale” exist, and of those that do, almost none are in English. The film recounts the pejorative connotations of state communism that the song acquired when it was adopted as the official anthem of the Soviet Union. As a likely result, music and text for “The Internationale” are rarely printed in the many published collections of American folksongs or American work and labor songs produced after 1930. Instead, this song appears to be confined to collections of socialist songs, published most often by small, independent, and often radical presses. This dearth of accessible sources of and about “The Internationale,” in addition to the more deeply rooted decline of group and community singing in the United States, has contributed to this song’s relative obscurity in the American context, not to mention an ambivalence about its revival. Miller’s film attempts to bring this song into our present repertoire by reminding us about the song’s emotional and communal, not to mention political, power. The Internationale fills an important gap in American and world history by presenting a compelling account of the social history of this song, but it also encourages workers of today to continue the struggle against oppression, emboldened with a greater feeling of solidarity with other workers around the world, both past and present.

Anna Nekola
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Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001. 408 pp. $60.00 cloth; $22.00 paper.

If this book had halted after its opening chapter, an adjective like “elegant” would fit the resulting essay well. Those opening pages sketch with precision “the classic social movement agenda” developed since the 1960s, respectfully yet sharply identify important limitations of that agenda, and suggest some plausible theoretical tools for moving beyond those limits. Having themselves over those decades made so many contributions to the study of movements and related phenomena (the bibliography cites a half-dozen of their own previous books and could easily have contained more), the intrepid trio are now marking out some very interesting new trails.

The classic agenda saw movements as episodes in which actors of various sorts developed strategies and tactics that made the best of available resources, reacted to threats or seized opportunities they for the most part did not themselves create, and struggled to frame issues in ways that would energize supporters, attract allies, neutralize opponents, appeal to power holders, or justify their actions to themselves. Different elements of this agenda appealed variously to scholars committed to structuralist, culturalist, or rationalist modes of explanation who invested much energy debating whose mode of explanation was more fundamental. For those of a more structuralist bent, a good explanation would be one that would delineate the institutions that endowed various actors with differing interests. Culturalists tried to grasp prevailing values within which movement activists maneuvered to demonstrate the worthiness of their purposes and methods, and rationalists tried to show how actors endowed with particular interests would hit on particular strategies to defend and advance them.

Over the past few decades, scholars imbued with such notions and engaged in such debates have generated a vast, rich body of research that transformed and—not always the same thing—enormously advanced the study of movements. *Dynamics of Contention* is a brief for advancing beyond the limits of that last advance along several different fronts.

*Contentious politics.* Much of the thinking that has gone into the study of social movements applies about as well or as poorly to a considerably broader range of phenomena. Revolutions, ethnic mobilizations, democratizations, warfare, and no doubt much else besides also involve actors deploying available resources, responding to threat and opportunity, framing their actions to achieve desired effects and so forth. With only a very slightly abstract formulation, a great deal of the social movement theory developed in recent decades makes a lot of sense for a much broader range of contentious politics. It’s been easy enough for scholars to do a bit of concept stretching in borrowing ideas for the analysis of episodes that are not social movements *sensu stricto*. (I’ve done it.) It therefore makes a great deal of sense for scholars of such differently compartmentalized phenomena to learn from each others’ investigations, including the new investigations suggested by the limits of social movement theory. Spa-
tiotemporally this program suggests moving beyond the contemporary rich democracies that have been the sites for most social movement research, which invites investigation into what is and is not distinctive about political conflict in those settings.

**Dynamism.** Like the tango, contention is never a solo performance and it is the trajectories of interaction among multiple participants that are to be traced. Even if we had full accounts of the interests and strategic considerations of such participants, the dynamic interchanges among multiple actors are likely to make the trajectories of contention highly complex. But interests and actors are themselves not to be taken as fixed things. In conflictive interaction interests may be redefined. And in conflict new actors are born and old ones merge or vanish. Identities may be a product of conflict as much as a basis for it. The very claim that there is some solitary actor with defined interests becomes part of what is to be explained; so does much (or all?) of the social scientists’ classifications of conflicts into “revolutions,” “movements,” “ethnic mobilizations,” and the like, for these pigeonholes are themselves actors’ categories, deployed in social struggles, partly for strategic purposes and partly to try to get a comforting handle on a situation in flux.

**Theory.** The unfolding of complexly interactive contentious episodes is not likely to admit much by way of robust generalization at the level of categories of episodes (like “revolutions”). More promising is the search for smaller and simpler “mechanisms” that concatenate into somewhat more complex “processes” and very much more complex “episodes.” Rather than look for generalizations about big categories like contention or attempt to subdivide them into somewhat more uniform subvariants like social movements or revolutions about which perhaps some generalizations might be more likely to be discovered, theoretical advance will consist of identifying the building blocks, mechanisms like “cross class coalition formation” or “identity shift” out of which extended episodes are made. Revealing the kaleidoscopic possibilities of combination of such mechanisms, identifying clusters of such mechanisms that regularly concatenate, and looking for differences in the component mechanisms that presumably will explain the differences between the course of one contentious episode and the next is the way to go forward.

By way of demonstrating the power and the feasibility of their approach, the authors tackle no less than fifteen diverse episodes of contention and, while they’re at it, set off on the quest for recurrent mechanisms and processes and tentatively identify a few for us. The entire work constitutes an invitation for us to revisit our own contentious scholarly terrains, hunt down the mechanisms we find therein, and join the authors in adding to the inventory of contentious building blocks and to our understanding of their diverse combinations as well as identifying commonly recurrent patterns.

Any explanatory scheme that can manage to adapt itself to Italian unification, Swiss democratization, and the civil rights movement in the United States with apparently similar ease and that, moreover, does more than rearrange conventional simplifications (some rather unconventional things get said in the dis-
cussion of democratization, for example) is very likely to be tried out by other researchers. Our authorial trio has even conveniently managed to suggest some of the lines of future debate that are likely to emerge. I agree with their shrewd auto-critique and want to stress four of their own points.

First, in noting commonalities among promising explanatory strategies for diverse forms of contention, which takes us well beyond the classic agenda, the scope conditions of the entire enterprise become quite unclear. This is more a virtue than a vice since it is an invitation to further thinking about conditions under which contention takes these forms rather than those. National governments are actors in the authors’ chosen episodes and are perforce involved by virtue of their initial definition of contention. But the authors are eager to suggest that much of their argument would seem to apply at the local (and transnational?) levels as well and to contention that swirls around institutions other than governments. This latter very interesting suggestion may open a path to discovering the special features of contention that apply when at least one party has access to force, for example, or can make the kinds of legitimacy claims specific to governments.

Now I wonder if we can push the spirit of relaxation of conditions even further. It is by no means obvious to me which of their own propositions are dependent on contention being organized around clearly bounded institutions at all. Suppose some parties in conflict are of the view, and act on the view, that the locus of significant power is the human heart or the human mind and understand themselves to be in a struggle for hearts and minds, seeing legislative and administrative arenas as at best secondary theaters. One might wonder whether such actors are merely deluded and are insignificant unless states or other institutions are in fact involved. But I think—and suspect that the authors would not agree—that at least some of their conflictual mechanisms not only do not require the involvement of a state but do not require any sharply bounded institution as the location of that conflict. While this book’s theoretical spotlight shines on the realm of public politics and its visible mobilizations and identity claims, I suspect that (for example) an awful lot of “actor constitution” is taking place in the shadows where parents tell their children things denied in the official version and friends share jokes about the public arena away from the hearing of the cops.

Second, as one might expect authors who have made enormous empirical contributions to point out, one of the important tasks ahead must surely be the development of empirical benchmarks for the identification of episodes, not to mention for demonstrating the reality of mechanisms and their concatenations. Or else we can be assured that those who seek such things as “actor constitution” will be sure to find them, anywhere and everywhere, because we can often concoct some ad hoc definition that will accord with the facts we have on hand.

A third issue addresses the suggestion that conventionally distinguished forms of contention are made from the same mechanisms and processes, differently concatenated. The differences in trajectories between such apparently opposed historical paths as that leading to national fragmentation and national uni-
fication arise, for example, from varying combinations of essentially identical mechanisms and processes. I wonder, however, to what degree that essential identity isn’t simply a consequence of imprecision. “Brokerage,” the “linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites,” may be a recurrent mechanism all right and yet essentially identical only because we don’t get too precise. What kinds of sites being newly connected and in what ways may not only be different but conceivably have different consequences, not simply because in two different episodes brokerage concatenates with different second (or third, etc.) mechanisms. So the notion of identical mechanisms may need to be refined to “similar”, and the range of what is lumped together as similar may itself be part of what we need in order to account for different downstream paths.

Fourth, the exploration recognizes at a number of points that the conventional typology of contention—this is a social movement, that a revolution, this other an ethnic conflict—is itself part of the sense of reality of actors, part of what guides their actions, and therefore this is not simply the vocabulary of social scientists but of participants in political struggle. I think this a very important observation, and even, in some fields of scholarship, a potential tool for bringing sense out of nonsense. I would argue, for example, that part of what has bedeviled the search for generalizations about “revolutions” is that revolution is primarily an actor’s term and that the label of episodes as revolutions—or the denial of such a label—is entangled with legitimating some strategies and regimes and delegitimating others. In the language of Dynamics of Contention, the classification of episodes can readily be a form of “certification” or “decertification”.

Our authors go beyond accepting this as a methodological problem into embracing the labeling of contention as a fascinating aspect of contention worthy of investigation in its own right. they defer a full blown treatment of this theme to the future; all books have to end somewhere, and it’s nice to end with some sense of interesting other books someone should write. Yet it seems to me they haven’t taken this insight into all of their own analyses. The very interesting discussion of paths to democracy, using contrasting Swiss and Mexican cases, does not ask whether the participants in those episodes thought about “democracy” and what it is they thought democracy was or could be or should be (and whether that mattered to anything). More generally, it seems to me that Dynamics of Contention is a great deal stronger on showing how actor identities and even types of actor identity (like “nation”) are put together and with what consequences than on how episodes and types of episode (like “revolution” or “democratization”) are.

Both in what it has accomplished and in what it has left undone, this exciting book helps define a post-classical agenda. As for the best single adjective for the whole, “magisterial” might be about right.

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Berch Berberoglu, ed., *Labor and Capital in the Age of Globalization: The Labor Process and the Changing Nature of Work in the Global Economy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001. 231 pp. $72.00 cloth; $26.95 paper.

Peter Waterman, *Globalization, Social Movements and the New Internationalisms*. London: Continuum, 2001. 336 pp. $29.95 paper.

These two books look very different: the Berberoglu collection deals almost exclusively with work and workers in the United States’ economy (despite its subtitle), and the Waterman book deals mostly with labor internationalism. Yet they both highlight the conceptual and substantive issues that labor theorists and researchers have in coming to terms with the so-called age of globalization. This is all the more pertinent as both books are for the most part updates of previous publications. Berberoglu’s volume is a new edition of his well-received (in left circles at least) *The Labor Process and Control of Labor* (1991), and Waterman’s book is squarely based on his ongoing contributions to the *Working Papers* series of the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague.

Though no single contribution to Berberoglu’s volume stands out as a must-read, his own Introduction and all ten brief chapters serve as useful summaries (in some cases more) of Marxist-inspired current research and theorizing about labor and capital. Lembecke provides a concise sociology of knowledge on the discipline of labor studies in the United States, arguing convincingly that the labor process model that has dominated over the last few decades is being properly transcended by a class-capacities approach that is much better suited to cope with the exigencies of the age of globalization. Likewise, Gartman on changes in the American automobile industry, Prechel on the American steel industry, and Leggett on race and nationality issues among farm workers in California all combine sound judgment on relevant facts with a radical analysis of the changes being forced on these industries and their labor by transformations in the global economy.

Parker’s chapter on “contingent workers,” Fox on low wage labor in export processing zones (the only contribution that considers workers outside the United States in any detail), and Adler’s on gender and the labor process all complement the focus on traditional labor in traditional industries (neither of which have entirely disappeared) with a focus on some of the most important changes commonly associated with capitalist globalization, namely the end of the expectation of a job for life, the rise of the new international sexual division of labor, and the persistence of income and authority gaps between women and men (this last has some useful updated tables). Yaghmaian offers a fair summary of debates around regulation theory and internationalization of capital, and Bina and Davis a sober assessment of the prospects for an international labor movement (echoing issues of deskilling and re-skilling that occur in other chapters). The volume concludes with a survey by Katz-Fishman et al. of how the labor force has responded to the challenge of capitalist globalization, and although some might consider their belief in new forms of working-class struggle to be some-
what optimistic, as we shall see Waterman provides plenty of evidence that the
struggle continues, in many languages and communities.

As a collection of essays on the working class and capital in the United
States, therefore, this book has a good deal to commend it. However, it does not
engage sufficiently with either capitalist globalization outside the United
States nor the changing nature of the globalizing corporations (including media cor-
porations) or, crucially, the implications of these for the state in general or actu-
ral states, even the apparently all-powerful American one. In short, despite the
title of the book, the contributors do not appear to acknowledge that at least
some of the globalization literature does undermine old leftist notions about the
state–class relation. (The chapter on regulation theory, in particular, fails to rise
to this challenge, as does regulation theory itself.) Indeed, the facile view that
globalization is simply another name for neo-imperialism, with all its state-
centrist connotations, appears to underpin most of the arguments in the book.

In contrast, Waterman, who has been trying to break out of the state-
centrist box for some time, does engage with the globalization literature, albeit
at the very end of a longish book. The book is, it must be said, rather uneven, a
series of essays with uncertain logical connections rather than a coherent whole.
The three terms of the title—globalization, social movements, and new interna-
tionalisms—communicate a confusion between internationalism(s) and global-
ization that the book never entirely dispels. Nevertheless, several of the chap-
ters work as well-informed and committed analyses of the idea of new labor
internationalism and case studies of internationalisms, to which Waterman has
single-mindedly devoted most of his working life.

The three case studies constitute the substantive heart of the book: the Co-
ordinadora (Spanish dockers movement), labor internationalism in the Third
World, and the transformation of the women’s movement from an “international-
al” to a “global” phenomenon. These provide intensely interesting personal nar-
ratives supported with references to numerous obscure documents and events
that will be invaluable to some research students somewhere, sometime. Water-
man’s style, particularly in his case study chapters but also to some extent else-
where (particularly in the Introduction and in the Postscript), is extremely per-
sonal, even autobiographical, in parts. He explains that the rationale for this “is
one of theoretical or methodological principle,” deriving from the feminist atti-
dute to the personal and the political (9). Scholars may argue that there is an im-
portant difference between the feminist dictum that the personal is political and
the tendency to try to personalize theoretical arguments, and Waterman’s fail-
ure to distinguish the two often makes it easy not to take some of his arguments
very seriously, particularly those with his political opponents. He himself illus-
trates this (see, for example, pages 248 and 249). It is clear that the Internet pro-
motes such indulgences.

What are we to make of this sprawling work? While it is a good if selective
guide to the literatures on labor internationalism and globalization, (less so on
social movements), its failure to resolve the confusion between international-
zation (defined here as “Westernization” on page 199) and globalization (Marx-
ist inspired scholars will be surprised, to put it mildly, that Waterman subscribes to the Anthony Giddens-Manuel Castells version of globalization) is a fatal flaw in the book. Like the contributors to Berberoglu's volume, Waterman gives us ample food for thought on questions of labor, but gets little further on the central issue of how, if at all, globalization really differs from internationalization and what difference this makes for labor. If, as seems obvious to this reviewer, the answer lies in the relations between class and state and new transnational forms of capitalist class structure and practices, then it is urgent that labor theorists transcend their own state-centrism to cope with this.

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Bertell Ollman, *How to Take an Exam ( . . . ) and Remake the World.* Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2001. 191 pp. $48.99 cloth; $19.99 paper.

Bertell Ollman’s book is almost impossible to review, and this for at least two reasons. The first is that it’s a one-of-a-kind, so there is no book one can compare it with. The second is that he has already reviewed it himself, on page 180, rather favorably. The third is that he sent me a free copy, enclosing a review from *Z Magazine,* thus combining a bribe with yet another model interview (subspecies: favorable). The fourth is that the back-page “puffs,” evidently from some more of his fans, say it better, and more briefly, than I possibly could. Consider this from Savas Michael: “A wonderful combination of Oxford scholarship and clarity, Marxist insight, Jewish humor, and revolutionary pedagogy, i.e. Ollman at his best.”

Beat that if you can. I can’t. Finally, while I still have a continuing engagement with the Marxism, I have long given up on taking exams. For ten years after my first degree (more like third), I had a recurring nightmare of sitting a math exam (I was a terrible examinee and still cannot count) in Oxford’s notorious Exam Schools.

My reasons for not reviewing seem to have expanded in the writing—five and counting. But I do have a bone or two to pick with Bertell (we are old friends and bone pickers). And I have no problem in picking these here instead of reviewing his book. Or, perhaps, in the spirit of Bertell’s own book, I should claim: I am doing a review of his book, and the price to you is putting up with a little bone picking.

I had better first make clear this matter of the two-in-one. Ollman has combined a how-to-succeed book (for survival under capitalism) with a primer on capitalism, socialism, and Marxism (for its inevitable overthrow). He does this in a quite shamefully opportunist and explicit way (this is the in-your-face American bit that Michael forgot): students want to pass exams; he wants to teach them Marxism. He does this upfront—indeed on the cover—so no one can really complain that, wanting to learn about overthrowing capitalism, they were
tricked into finding out how to survive within it. The devious part of the deal is that Bertell has divided his book not into easy-tear-out halves but into successive paragraphs. Examinees of the world, beware! It is the indented paragraphs with the introductory symbols that are for you. Do not read the intervening ones, however startling or witty they might appear to be. Be aware that even his eminently sensible exam-passing bits are salted with disdain for an exam-centered educational system and peppered with Marxist interpretation thereof. Bertell Ollman has chutzpah. This is Yiddish for “cheek” or “brass nerve,” and Bertell has this (in another of his translated phrases) to the nth degree.

There may be a logic running through both the exam bits and the Marxism bits, but it does not spring to the eye. What You See Is What You Get: a series of one-paragraphers that reveal the wit and wisdom of Bertell Ollman. The Marx bits, or bites, take us on a series of short and memorable marches through capitalism, alienation (estrangement from one’s own products, oneself, from society, from nature), reification (the thingification of human or social beings and activities), fetishization (the projecting of human properties or capacities onto things), commodification (terrible), money (worse), imperialism (hey! enough already!). And then through the smiley face bits: Contradiction, the Dialectic, the Mass Working-Class Party, Revolution, Socialism, Communism. Communism?

In the country where the search for the Holy Grail has been long replaced by the accumulation of the Grubby Buck, none of this can be bad. Especially when communicated with wide learning, surprising quotation, relevant and repeatable gags, brilliant cartoons, paradox, and the subversion of authority. But if churlishness is inappropriate to table manners in polite society, it is something of a requirement for the dismissive reviewer. And, inspired by Bertell’s arguments for questioning authority, I want to be churlish about his Marxism.

What Bertell is offering us (meaning: should-be Revos, would-be MBAs, you and me) is a Political–Economic Marxism; something which may be necessary, but which I suggest is not sufficient to change the world. In the doctrine of political economy, there is a fundamental contradiction between the capitalist and working classes (the latter somewhat expanded by Bertell so as to include anyone who works for a wage or salary). Capitalism is actually dead or dying (121), and it is the working class (organized in a mass party of such and informed by Marxism/ Marxists) that has the interest and the potential power, in a culmination of revolutionary acts, to overthrow it for the good of all of us. We will then build Socialism through the democratization of everything and finally arrive at Communism, the overcoming of all the major destructive contradictions that have plagued humankind throughout history. (On the dawn hereof we male revolutionaries will—at last—fish in the morning, criticize Bertell in the afternoon, and breastfeed the baby in the evening.)

So far, so traditional. But, as we know, attempts at socialist revolution have only succeeded at the periphery of capitalism (and where that post-capitalist periphery had hegemony over core capitalist countries, as in parts of Central Europe). Where capitalism has been most developed, revolution, socialism and,
above all, communism are even less attractive to working people (rich, poor, old, new, overworked, underemployed, unionized, unorganized) than they were twenty-five or fifty years ago. Bertell makes effective use of some of Marx’s most powerful theoretical weapons (alienation, reification, fetishization) to suggest why a dead or dying capitalism might be able to make itself invisible to those it exploits and oppresses. What he does not consider is whether part of this invisibility might lie in the shortsightedness of the Marxist thinkers or their socialist followers.

Marxism, according to our author, is already there, waiting for the activists to adopt it and then spread it to working classes who have not yet connected up their felt grievances with the necessary understanding and an existing solution. As for Communist failings in the peripheral capitalist world, Bertell actually qualifies his already limited criticism by arguing that it improved the material conditions of its citizens, “something that the people of Eastern Europe are increasingly willing to admit” (151). Well, when I was there, the working classes of Eastern Europe were saying: “Under capitalism you have the exploitation of man by man; under socialism it’s the other way round.” Also: “Communism is probably alright but they should have tried it out on animals first.”

In dealing with the historical experience of Communism, Bertell moves from chutzpah to special pleading, suggested by a series of negative assertions (as in: it was not . . . ). Having lived under Communism, as a Communist, for a total of five years or so, first in the 1950s and then the 1960s, I would have thought that any sympathy contemporar y East Europeans might retain or re-gain for their “socialisms of underdevelopment” would represent a protest vote against the brutal capitalism with which Communism was replaced. On the basis of recent socialist analysis (Mandel, 2000, for one), I would further expect any such pro-Communism to be confined to the more backward parts of the more backward states, and to be short lived. My prediction, open to historical and empirical correction, is that a move from global capitalist reaction to global capitalist reform would wipe out such racist, nationalist, populist, or neo-liberal Communist Parties as currently have influence there. Or convert them into neo-Keynesian ones.

The favorite dictum of Marx is said to have been “doubt everything.” This has to mean “doubt Marxism” (a creed Marx was reluctant to be identified with) and “doubt me.” Ollman urges this necessary skepticism toward authority and doctrine on his readers, though not with respect to Marx, Marxism, or Marxists. Marx also said (following a passage in which he explains the collapse of “local communism” a half century or more before anyone even tried to even construct such!): “Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things” (Arthur, 1970: 56–57, original emphases. Quoted Waterman, 2001: 31).

Communism, in other words, is not a condition (or State?), nor an ideal in the head of either Bertell or myself. It appears to be something more like the contemporary international movement that is called, variously, the “global jus-
“anti-globalization,” or even “anti-capitalist” movement (currently attempting, courageously and imaginatively, to add to itself the necessary world peace movement). This movement is not something given notable space in Bertell’s account, possibly because it is a multi-class one, not much inspired by Marxism (though Marxists, of unknown class composition and varied consciousnesses, are present within it). A better-known quotation from Marx is “all things solid melt into air.” It comes from a paean of praise to capitalism in the Communist Manifesto. It is better known because it is also the title of a brilliant book by Marshall Berman, who also asked: Does this not also apply to the working class? To socialism? And to Marxism? (Berman, 1982: 104–105).

In the title to this non-review (sub-species: churlish), I suggest that, although Bertell’s book is wholly helpful in taking an exam, it only half helps to remake the world. Classical political–economic Marxism, I have suggested, is necessary but insufficient. It is, anyway, surely co-responsible for its own failures. (Or does it, like various fundamentalisms, have a self-issued license of infallibility, invulnerability and inevitability?) I could also have said that the book only remakes half the world. “Women” gets no index entry, and there are only two or three references to women or gender throughout (Rosa Luxemburg gets in because she was a Marxist, not a woman). Bertell is more generous with the environment, presumably because of its obvious relationship to the economy, more obvious at least to political economists. Bertell expounds political–economic Marxism as if it were co-terminous with social science or sociology, as if it were sufficient unto itself, and as if it therefore had no need to recognize, far less enter into a dialogue with, environmentalism or feminism. Would these be “petty-bourgeois ideologies”? Or, if held to by workers, “false consciousness”?

Capitalism is neither dead nor dying, though its capacity for provoking and imposing both is being demonstrated as I write (Bertell dispatched his book to me around September 7, 2001. I received it around September 12). One could consider this elsewhere little-noted death a rhetorical figure of speech had he not elsewhere developed the argument, presenting it to a conference of Chinese scholars, who may have been somewhat surprised, if not disappointed, to hear of this previously unannounced fatality (Ollman, 1999). Capitalism can only die to the extent that it is opposed and eventually surpassed (as a dominant social form) by a “real social movement” that, under contemporary capitalist conditions, would surely have to articulate (join and express) a wide range of discontents, interests, and identities in a radical–democratic alliance of movements (of which labor still needs to become a major one) and ideologies (of which Marxism, in its fifty-seven differing and mutually kneecapping varieties, may be another).

There is Marxist license for calling this new internationalist movement, or elements within it, “Communist,” though, bearing in mind the shit and blood with which Communism is historically covered, such a name might guarantee its rejection by people (including workers) who could otherwise be attracted by what it here refers to. Insisting on this historical name would seem guaranteed to ensure the splendid isolation of its proponents, and I sometimes wonder
whether this is not also the (un)conscious intention. Marxists also called themselves Social Democrats, a name also historically discredited, here more by its increasingly seamless articulation with neo-liberalism. I would have thought that “radical democracy” would do quite well, as an alternative, especially if defined so as to include the earlier-identified interests and identities that capitalism can no more (or less!) meet or satisfy than it can those of workers. And if such radical democracy demonstrated a capacity to criticize and renew itself, to abandon what is historically outdated by capitalist development, and to adapt to, and against, what is new. And, finally, if it learned to laugh at itself as well as at its opponents. To paraphrase Emma Goldman: “If I can’t laugh at it, I don’t want to take part in your revolution.”

Many years ago, in Oxford, I was the political–economic, class-determinist Communist, and Bertell was the unorthodox Marxist. I was doing a first diploma course while he was writing his Ph.D. I learnt from him as much as I know about alienation and its attendant spirits. He was, in fact if not in name, my teacher (though the bugger forgot to tell me how to take exams and thus avoid ten years of nightmares about them!). Somewhere along the road from 1961 to 2001 we must have occupied, at least briefly, a comparable position! Now Bertell actually refers to himself as a Communist (59), whereas I refer to myself as a Liberation Marxist (you know, trying to liberate Marxism from the Marxists, from Marx, from me, from whomsoever claims to embody it).

I nonetheless urge people, particularly teachers and students, to buy and read this book. And more particularly Chapter Nine where Bertell, both arguing for and demonstrating radical pedagogy, tells of a trap he lays for students, to get them to think for themselves rather than relying on authority (105–106). At the beginning of the course he gives them a nonsense lecture on Political Theory (he has his Oxford experience to draw on), after which they have to do a short paper. Ninety percent, he tells us, plump for authority rather than what their own knowledge and experience might tell them: “Later on, in correcting the work they do for the course, I am very attentive to the slightest sign that a student is thinking for him- or herself even to the point of giving higher grades to those who disagree with my arguments, assuming that they know them, than to those who simply repeat what I said (106).”

This is Bertell the libertarian. Well, I have done my best to follow your advice, Bertell. What grade do I get? And where do I stand on the chutzpah scale?

Peter Waterman

Global Solidarity Dialogue, The Hague

Bud Burkhard, French Marxism Between the Wars: Henri Lefebvre and the “Philosophies.” New York: Humanity Books, 2000. 285 pp. $58.00 cloth.

The Philosophies circle was the first group to present a coherent Hegelian Marxist–Leninism in France. Their approach to philosophy, urban and indus-
trial sociology, psychology, political economy, poetry, fiction, and literary criticism was akin to the far better known Frankfurt School. There were six key figures in the group who founded *La Revue Marxiste*, the apex of their mutual endeavors, in 1929: Georges Friedmann, Norbert Guterman, Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Morhange, Paul Nizan, and Georges Politzer. Bud Burkhard makes a major contribution by writing the first intellectual history of this *équipe*, discussing how these young men reconceptualized Marxism as a response to the *crise de l’esprit* that followed in the wake of World War One in France. Burkhard examines how they became Marxists and situates the cadre within the wider French and European intellectual and political currents between the wars. He addresses the postwar cultural crisis and its transformation in the 1930s, the formation and politicization of the *Philosophies* circle, the influence of German Idealism, the creation and dissipation of *La Revue Marxiste*, with focused chapters on Politzer, Friedmann, and Lefebvre, and an epilogue that outlines each intellectual’s activities from World War Two to the end of their lives.

As Paul Valéry, renowned poet and critic, indicated in his 1919 article, “La Crise de l’esprit,” the interwar period was characterized by a search for meaning, a drive for salvation, a need for new structures and unification, and its ultimate sensibility was *inquiétude* (disquiet, anxiety). Burkhard places the six major collaborators of the circle within this cultural malaise: all born around 1900, four of whom were secular Jews, and all of whom were disgusted by the world created by their fathers who denied the horrors of postwar daily life. New literary and philosophical talents who were seekers looking to replace the values and beliefs that died in the trenches, they met in the intellectual enclaves of Paris and collaborated to produce an avant-garde journal called *Philosophies*. Directed by Pierre Morhange, the first issue came out in March 1924 and juxtaposed poems, essays, and works of philosophy in a disorderly co-existence. The content was indicative of the chaos and perceived crisis of civilization experienced by what Gertrude Stein called the “lost generation.” Burkhard traces the shift from March 1924 to January 1926, which saw a transition from Morhange’s launching and direction of the journal *Philosophies* to the *Philosophies* circle, a shift from schoolboy critiques of avant-garde cultural currents, especially Surrealism, to a serious project to understand and transform the world guided by Lefebvre’s and Politzer’s philosophical articulation of self-definition through action as the answer to *inquiétude*. Concomitant with the ending of the short-lived but influential *Philosophies*, the circle became actively involved in politics, specifically in the context of supporting the Rif Rebellion in Morocco in 1925.

The period 1926–1928 was marked by “political commitment and a search for a method” (245) to found their praxis, evident in the new journal they started, *Esprit*:

Their search for universal values, for ethics and meaning, had led them into mysticism, the direct, immediate comprehension of Absolute knowledge. But this strictly cerebral exercise conflicted with the necessities of physical and social existence and with their desire to act in the world. They sought a more strictly philo-
This interval in search of an intellectual father-figure who could provide coherence to their quest led them to delve into German idealism, first in the works of Friedrich Schelling and later in those of G.F.W. Hegel. From there, it was a short step to link their growing interest in Marx to German idealism, although not empirically, because Marx’s early writings were as yet unknown. One of Burkhard’s contributions is to show that Hegel was already becoming an important jumping off point in the 1920s, as opposed to the conventional view that the Hegelian renaissance took place in the 1930s.

The central chapter, engaging enough to stand alone, concerns the success and failure of the equally short-lived third journal of the Philosophies circle, the Revue marxiste of 1929. This review marked an important moment in interwar French cultural and intellectual history not least because it published for the first time in France many of the core writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin that have been at the heart of the Marxist debates since, including Marx’s Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. In recounting its rise and fall, Burkhard rejects all conspiracy theories about the long arm of bolshevism or higher-ups in the Parti Communiste Francaise (PCF) seeking to crush the periodical, arguing instead that “the causes of the Revue marxiste affair lay primarily in the immediate situation and the history of the French Party. The crisis facing the French Communist Party in the late summer of 1929 was clearly acute” (121). Burkhard examines how the fate of the Revue marxiste and the PCF were intertwined by briefly, but acutely, explaining the origins of the PCF in the Congress of Tours and their subsequent ebb in support after 1928. This resulted from government repression and internal discord, including the purge of Trotskyists and ideological disputes within the party (that included the exclusion of the Surrealists) clearly reflected in struggles over L’humanité (the most important organ of the Party) between intellectuals concerned to broaden support and advocates of an extremist workerist position. In a surreal situation, ultimately the Revue marxiste stopped publishing because the funding for this Marxist theoretical venture was lost in a scheme to raise more revenue by gambling at the roulette tables in Monte Carlo! The PCF censure of the Philosophies circle over the Affair would establish the norms for the Party’s control over its intellectual members for a generation. The last journal that the Philosophies circle produced as a group was Avant-Porte, which Burkhard situates within the changing political and intellectual environment of the 1930s.

It was not only the four avant-garde journals that make the Philosophies circle important, but their role as publishers and translators, as well as their individual publications and academic careers that had a significant impact in a diverse number of fields and informed an era of theorists and militants. In lively prose, richly documented by reference to the small journals of the period, a large and diverse secondary literature, and personal interviews with some of the key
figures, Burkhard has shed light on a key group of interwar Marxists that until now remained obscure. We learn much not only about the Philosophies, but since he meticulously examines the contemporary response to their work in the periodicals of the period, about the major and minor journals of the time, and about the theoretical and political squabbles that fueled them.

This sometimes results in one of the shortcomings of the book, which reads at points like a catalog of critical responses to the Philosophies’ work. While Burkhard’s narration of the Philosophies’ itinerary is clear, his narrative dwells so immanently on their work that one closes the book without a clear sense of exactly where and how they fit within the wider intellectual field. In an approach reminiscent of the best of the previous generation of intellectual historians, the cultural context remains a background for Burkhard’s central preoccupation, which is the history of the ideas of the Philosophies circle. For example, I would have liked to learn more about the Jewishness of these authors, a concern that is alluded to in many moments in the book but never discussed. The skeleton that gives form to these intellectuals is not fleshed out by historicizing the world they sought to transform.

Nevertheless, Burkhard’s intellectual history has revived the early period of an équipe that left an enduring legacy forged out of their drive to respond to the cultural crisis that they and their generation faced. In finding the solution to their inquietude in Marxism, the acumen of the Philosophies was a decade ahead of the pack of French existential Marxists in post–World War Two France who would belatedly rediscover for themselves the German idealist origins of Marxist humanism. Burkhard is correct in concluding that their search and their solution has clear parallels and promises for our own need to respond to the crisis of meaning in our era of globalization, whose dead ends in religious fundamentalism and nationalism might be unlocked in creatively rethinking the openings entailed by Western Marxism, for “it cannot be doubted that they [the Philosophies] were asking the same questions so urgently needing to be answered today” (248).

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Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman, and John McIlroy, eds., British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics. 2 vols. Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing, 1999. Vol. 1, The Post-War Compromise, 1945–64. 347 pp; Vol. 2, The High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964–79. 403 pp. $59.95 [each volume] cloth.

These impressive companion volumes developed out of a conference organized by the editors at the University of Warwick in 1997. Drawing upon the expertise provided by distinguished contributors from industrial journalism and across the social sciences, the books comprise twenty-two essays which cover a wide range
and depth of topics concerning trade unionism, workplace and “official” trade union politics in Britain between the end of World War Two, and the advent of Margaret Thatcher to power in 1979.

They undoubtedly make a major contribution towards filling the many gaps in our knowledge and understanding of post-war trade unionism and politics. They also provoke many new questions and open up important areas of research. They make a convincing case for an integrated research agenda, revolving around the structure–culture dialogue and the broad vision of political economy, as opposed to the fractured, narrow, and limited representational stance of post-modernism. Scholarly, detailed and, perhaps most important of all, firmly anchoring their subject matter in its proper and complex historical context and affording due recognition and respect to the voices and actions of historical actors themselves, they also successfully avoid the major pitfalls of teleology, tendentiousness, and the “wisdom of hindsight.” As such, they effectively demolish many of the partisan myths, peddled by Thatcherites and the New Labourites alike, of the “bad old days” of pre-1979 union “power,” “irrationality,” and “irresponsibility.”

Particularly useful to the general reader and students are the editors’ two “surveys,” one in each volume, which provide an overview of the key developments in the respective periods, 1945–1964 and 1964–1979. These, along with the Introductions, nicely provide an integrative core and balance to the broad and diverse concerns of the other contributions. Personally, I found the essays by Ken Lunn, “Complex Encounters: Trade Unions, Immigration and Racism,” and Mike Savage, “Sociology, Class and Male Manual Work Cultures,” particularly impressive. They also signpost major new arenas of research in the fields of labor and race and class and culture. On the general level, there is no doubt that most tastes are well catered for. This is reflected in the wide range of the topics covered: trade unions and education (John McIlroy), immigration and racism (Ken Lunn), women (Chris Wrigley), male work cultures (Mike Savage), rank-and-file militancy (Dave Lyddon), the Labour Party (David Howell, Andrew Thorpe), the Conservative Party (Andrew Taylor), Trotskyists (John McIlroy), and Communists (Richard Stevens, John McIlroy), George Woodcock and union reform (Robert Taylor), the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the international labor movement (Anthony Carew), the role of industrial correspondents (Geoffrey Goodman), social democracy and anti-communism (John Kelley), case studies of trade unionism and workplace politics in engineering (Alan McKinlay and Joseph Melling, Nina Fishman), shipbuilding (John Foster and Charles Woolfson), transport (Nina Fishman), and the docks (Jim Phillips). In addition, the editors provide introductions to both volumes, while Eric Hobsbawm and Richard Hyman offer typically incisive and thought provoking “Afterwords.”

One might offer the gentle criticism that the worlds of black and Asian trade unionists, women workers, and “white collar” workers in general merit more attention than is afforded them by these volumes. Similarly, the effects of “globalization” upon trade unionism and industrial politics has become a sub-
ject of the utmost, perhaps overriding current importance. However, these are subject areas that can be more fully addressed in the future. Friendly criticism should not distract at all from the absolutely splendid job that the editors and contributors to these volumes have done. They have provided the reader with many good, and some excellent, examples of the range and diversity of work currently being undertaken in the field of trade union studies. They have reminded us of the crucial importance of history to such studies and, in turn, the key importance of trade unionism to both labor history in general and specifically to workers’ lives in the chosen periods of study.

In sum, these two very important volumes merit the widest possible readership and debate. They constitute essential reading for everyone interested in post-war changes and continuities in trade unionism and politics, both in Britain and beyond. They should be read by specialists and non-specialists alike. Further, they should be required reading for all those Tory, New Labour, and other politicians who have appropriated the trade unionist past in such highly selective and misleading ways.

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Jonathan Rose, The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. 544 pp. $39.95 cloth.

This is, quite simply, a remarkable book. By setting out evidence of the power of reading and thinking among people who worked against odds to do so, Rose has written a moving tribute to the inquisitive imperative lodged in human minds. Rose charts the efflorescence of an autodidact culture, which reached its summation in the decades around World War One. His interests, however, are wider than that story suggests. Other historians have chronicled heroic struggles against adversity in selected working-class autobiographies, but Rose instead trains his lens on the inner life generated by reading, documented in literally hundreds of accounts: alongside first-hand narratives, some of them familiar to labor historians, he has examined library and school records, surveys, and newspaper accounts of the same subject. His ambit extends beyond working-class people to include the printed and aural material they ingested, along with publishing history (including the history of Dent’s Everyman’s Library), musical culture, the transmission of sex education, adult education, and Ruskin College. This is a book about “culture” in the widest, Arnoldian sense, and it is triumphant in its breadth and achievement.

Rose is unhappy with most received wisdom produced by literary scholars regarding audience reception of texts and information. Beginning with the premise that working-class readers could think for themselves, he produces evidence of their discriminating consumption in the world of ideas. If impoverished circumstances mediated the particular reception that some books got, so did the
intellectual predisposition of the reader, and this, he argues, was a complex scaffolding constructed from previous encounters with the printed word. Rose makes provocative use of the literary concepts of inter-textuality (the effects of one text on another) and the reader’s “frame.” With limited access to books, the inexperienced reader might assume that all stories were “true” the way the Bible was “true.” The frame of fiction in relation to the printed page was an intellectual achievement, a sign of privilege, just as other sophisticated conceptual abilities were the result of education and cultivation. Rose’s discussion of this problem explains much besides the proclivities of the British working classes: the need for control of reading matter, for example, among religious fundamentalists and the fear aroused by the public display of particular works of art. Yet many readers grew beyond such a limited perspective to arrive at hard-won personal philosophies.

Working-class intellectuals understood that they “were” what they read, which is why they almost always paid painstaking tribute to the works responsible for their intellectual awakening. Authors became parents at a distance and books stood in as transitional objects in an arduous, often agonizing process of differentiating oneself from family members and communities. Rose’s eye for the telling passage allows us to peek into this intensely private undertaking, as reading served as a vehicle for character formation and a search for “singularity.” The hunger for an inner life made the hours after work come alive, and it also drove wedges between husbands and wives, and children and parents. Rose does not disguise the fact that the pleasures of the intellectual were more often the privilege of men than women, but he chooses not to underscore the divisions wrought by reading. Instead, we witness working-class readers working toward membership in a community of intellectuals—real, not imagined—that reached across centuries.

One of Rose’s main contentions is that working class readers demonstrated an instinctual taste for the classics. This was as true for Thomas Cooper (b. 1805) as it was for Frank Goss (b. 1896) and Kathleen Betterton (b. 1913). Richard Hoggart observed the same preferences among adult students of the Thatcher years: “They are Arnoldians before they are anything else” (297). The canon of major (mostly British) authors, such as Shakespeare, Bunyan, Defoe, Dickens, and Ruskin, proved perennially inspirational. The list of beloved great books stops sometime around the arrival of Conrad, Woolf, and Joyce: modernists broke the rules of the game, or, in Rose’s telling phrase, they moved “the cultural goalposts” (394). Working-class readers didn’t like inscrutable texts, and modern authors seemed to know how to repay the compliment: writers like Forster portrayed bookish working-class people as hopelessly muddled and misguided. By the time of Howard’s End, the honeymoon of working-class intellectual life and current cultural elites was over.

Yet this marriage between high literary art and the disadvantaged was wholesome and productive. Reading was not just a pastime for working people; it was a way to self-betterment, not simply social mobility. The quest had a moral as well as an intellectual objective: Rose documents the sincerity with which
working people appealed to literature and philosophy for the building blocks of their identities and character. Some readers, like Frank Goss’s father, a piano maker and activist for the Marxist Social Democratic Federation, were voracious samplers of just about everything. Nevertheless, he read with a singular determination to improve his mind, and thus made a “hobby . . . purely from the mental excitement he gathered in the assimilation of knowledge, perhaps sometimes confused, sometimes not adequately digested but always broadening his outlook and developing his personality” (189). Others were specialists in one or two favorite authors, often Carlyle or Ruskin. They regularly astonished their middle-class contemporaries with the depth of their determination to learn. Many also became connoisseurs of classical orchestral music and opera, especially in Wales. Names given to children were a giveaway: “in one family,” reported a Welsh miner, “there was a Handel, Haydn, Elgar, Verdi, Joseph Parry, Caradog, Mendy (short for Mendelssohn), and an unforgettable Billy Bach, together with an only daughter Rossini (called Rosie for short)” (198). These were commitments of a deep nature, worthy of being called blood ties to culture.

The divorce that occurred at the advent of modernism reveals much about autodidacts. In “What Was Leonard Bast Really Like?”, one of the book’s best chapters, Rose shows working-class intellectuals at war against “art for art’s sake.” In the words of a checkweighman from a Northumberland mining village, born in 1868, “Art must justify itself by human service,” as “a vehicle for the purpose of educating, elevating, and ennobling human character.” Such sentiments, so clearly influenced by Ruskin, were common among the ranks of self-made members of the lower middle class long after the eminent Victorian was rather out of fashion. Ruskin’s place in the pantheon of heroes is nearly unrivaled, as a Beeston engineer (b. 1893) eloquently testified: “Ruskin began to implant in my mind the virtue of work, the need for a new standard of values, that man is a creative being, hammered in subsequently by the thoughts of Benedetto Croce, digested at Ruskin College” (406). One lab assistant copied out Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* by hand because he couldn’t afford to buy the book; two Yorkshire steel-workers were overheard discussing Ruskin on a bus in 1950. This devotion to a mixture of humanist and Victorian ethics showed working people striving to be humane. Can the same be said for so many of their more privileged contemporaries?

Was reading, then, the true opium of the masses in Britain? It is difficult to avoid this impression, given the tendency towards self-cultivation and rugged independence of many working-class intellectuals. Reading prompted “insurrections in the minds of workers” (9), which counted for a lot in such a peaceable kingdom in the nineteenth century. Might there have been more rebellion? In a chapter on “Alienation from Marxism,” Rose compares the political affiliations of English and continental intellectuals in order to examine the lack of revolutionary fervor within organized labor. In re-posing Ross McKibben’s question of why there was no Marxist party within the English working classes, Rose points to the intellectual and moral convictions of the great mass of supporters of the Labour Party. Instead of demonstrating disenchantment, detachment, and alien-
ation, Rose points out that most were passionately engaged with issues at the heart of a shared Victorian culture: they preferred the social ethics of Ruskin and the socialism of Morris to the scientific materialism of Engels or the abstruse philosophy of Marx himself. While McKibbin attributes much in Britain to the absence of leadership from a marginal bourgeois class of theoreticians, Rose underscores the widespread working class adherence to “Practical Christianity” of the sort that promoted “brotherhood,” intellectual autonomy, and good will; as Goss put it, “A mixture of Marx and the Sermon on the Mount” (300). “Where Marxists defined exploitation in purely economic terms, Labour socialists, brandishing their Everyman’s Library volumes, promised beauty in life, joy in work, a moral vision in politics.” They were all rather Foucauldian: “they proclaimed that knowledge (rather than ownership of the means of production) is power” (299). Perhaps, to paraphrase women workers of another era, they put roses ahead of bread.

Why did working-class intellectuals favor “the best that has been known and thought in the world”? Probably because they perpetually sought “how to deal with” their neighbors, as M. K. Ashby pointed out in explaining the universal popularity of Dickens. His novels, in her view, supplied the “technique” of the New Testament’s principle of forbearance (114). This is not what Marx would have preferred as a strategy born of so much reading. But Ruskin and Dickens bestowed an ineffable sense of dignity upon the humblest contributor to civil society. A canonical culture, suffused with an ethos of social harmony, enabled working-class intellectuals to glimpse truth, ponder beauty, and even venture into autobiographical writing. Through prodigious research and sensitive analysis, Jonathan Rose has presented us with their immortal remains.

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Tom Behan, Dario Fo: Revolutionary Theatre. London: Pluto Press, 2000. 170 pp. $19.95 paper.

The most recent sixty years of Italian history showcase many unusual features with regard to the development of the European Left. Italy’s resistance movement was the most powerful and radical antifascist opposition west of a line from the Adriatic to the Baltic Sea. Its postwar Communist Party (PCI) was the largest organization of its kind west of the Iron Curtain. And, in Italy too, the social movements generated in the course of “1968” produced a far left which was far more socially implanted and long lasting than anywhere else. Small wonder, then, that it was Italian society that literally “produced” the most widely acclaimed left-wing theater director, playwright, and actor in all of postwar Europe: Dario Fo.

Fo’s career, Behan never hesitates to remind the readers of his informative
and lively biography, closely parallels the rise and fall of radical social movements in the Italian state. It is of course living testimony to Fo’s artistic accomplishments that, in 1997, he was chosen to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. And Behan rightly underscores that “Fo was first and foremost a man of the theatre with left-wing ideas” (115) rather than a figure of the Left with artistic talents. Yet, given the heated political culture of the postwar Italian state, Fo’s theater productions are inextricably linked to left-wing politics. As a result, it is not surprising that Tom Behan’s biography of Dario Fo is, first and foremost, a political biography. As the reader will discover, Behan has produced a stimulating snapshot of Italian politics and left-wing culture, which begins to fill a gaping hole in English-language studies on the Italian state.

Less than a decade after embarking on his career in theater, Fo’s efforts already received remarkable acclaim. In the 1959–1960 theater season, one of Fo’s plays for the first of many times “earned the biggest takings in Italy” (12), and Fo, with his lifelong partner Franca Rame, soon produced shows for Italian television (RAI) as well. Fifteen million Italians watched the last sequence of their series entitled “Canzonissima,” which aired in late 1962. Yet this astounding popular success was not followed up by more television productions. In fact, for fifteen years thereafter, Fo and Rame were effectively barred from Italian television. What explains such a curious decision, seemingly at odds with the law of supply and demand? For, in addition, in the 1964–1965 theater season, Fo had become “the most performed living author in Europe” (21) and not just in the Italian state. A brief glance at the content of his plays immediately suggests the reason for this peculiar response by the high priests of Italian television culture. The Christian Democratic state and the seemingly almighty moralizing influence and blatantly conservative powers of the Catholic Church and the Vatican were standard topics for this consistently and refreshingly irreverent couple.

With the heating up of Italian political culture and the powerful upsurge of post–1968 social movements challenging the Italian state, Fo and Rame decided to break with the commercial theater circuit they had relied upon until then. Increasingly disenchanted with the fact that, in Franca Rame’s words, “we had become the minstrels of a fat and intelligent bourgeoisie” (22), they now began to rely on the cultural association (ARCI) closely linked to the PCI for their performance venues and publicity. The audience now became predominantly blue-collar workers, and the nature of performances dramatically changed. Always concerned to break down what Fo called “The Fourth Wall,” the invisible dividing line separating the audience from the events and the plot on the stage, Fo now placed increasing emphasis on “The Third Act,” the lively and heated exchange of opinion between the audience and the actors after the play’s formal end.

These occasions became the prime venue for the self-expression of audience members, most of whom had never before attended a theater production anywhere, let alone been comfortable at speaking up in public. But inspired by Fo’s depiction of real-life conflicts and uplifted by the possibility for meaningful
change engendered by the massive social movements affecting the Italian state, “the debates sometimes went on for longer than the show itself, finishing in the early hours of the morning” (29).

The promotion of self-emancipatory desires on the part of the largely working-class audience soon cast a spell over the continued cooperation between Fo’s theater troupe and the ARCI. Fo’s company soon was denied access to ARCI’s choice performance venues. Yet the ongoing upsurge of labor struggles and associated social movements frequently bypassing the PCI ensured that Fo’s theater would continue to find an audience, even if the venues once again underwent a dramatic change. With most case del popolo now off-limits, Fo’s troupe, The Commune, built up “an alternative theatrical circuit on a national level, and at its highest point the organization could count on eighty-five cultural centers or branches, with 700,000 members” (42). By the mid-1970s, performances within occupied factories had begun to become regular political and artistic events. The 1970s, then, was the decade when Dario Fo and Franca Rame became largely identified as the prime cultural representatives of the burgeoning Italian far left with its tens of thousands of active members and a far wider periphery of sympathizers.

Yet Fo had always kept a certain distance from overt party politics. Unlike Franca Rame, a member of the PCI until 1970, Dario Fo never joined a political party, and he managed to stay above the factional infighting characterizing the post-1968 Italian far left. Behan shows rather persuasively that Fo’s prime concern was always to keep his hand on the pulse of an ongoing social movement. From the late 1960s onwards Maoism, in all sorts of shades and variations, became a staple item of the ideological baggage of the Italian (and West European) far left, and Behan drops some insightful hints at the double function of Maoism in both Italian left-wing politics and Fo’s individual role in Italian politics and culture. While encouraging the long overdue break from the PCI bureaucracy and promoting radical grassroots struggles, “Maoism in Italy existed as a purely propulsive movement unable to explain setbacks and relatively uninterested in complicated political questions” (129). With the downturn of radical social movements beginning in the second half of the 1970s, the Maoist house of cards quickly collapsed and, with it, most of the organizations of the Italian far left.

Fo’s intuitive identification with this peculiarly First World phenomenon of Third Period Maoism provided him with easy access to the radicalized mass movement of those years and facilitated the cross-fertilization between artistic genius and audience participation exemplified by “The Third Act.” Without this symbiosis, Behan suggests, “he would, of necessity, have cut himself off from the mass movement and, therefore, would have felt less need to contribute to its struggles” (130). At the same time, the eventual implosion of First World Maoist dreams, coupled with the roll-back and decline of grassroots social movements, facilitated a process of political moderation, limited though it was, by both Rame and Fo.

The hopes and realities of a permanent theatrical circuit outside both bour-
geois theaters and the world of PCI culture czars faded with the disintegration of both worker struggles and the far left. In 1978 Fo was appointed to the post of artistic director of La Scala in Milan, the symbol par excellence of Italian mainstream theater. From the early 1980s onwards, his theater company began to perform in the commercial circuit once again. And “from the mid-1980s his ensemble pieces started to increasingly resemble the format of his pre–1968 period” (109). His minimalist productions of the post–1968 era, when Fo was oftentimes the sole performer and the stage set was (often dictated by force of circumstance) reduced to the bare essentials, now became a thing of the past. “Just as Fo has insisted that theatre is influenced by surrounding political ideas,” Behan thoughtfully concludes, “so too has his own theatre evolved according to changing political circumstances” (109).

“There can be no other actor in living memory who is capable of holding a crowd of thousands for hours in a variety of locations, with no props, costumes or supporting actors whatsoever” (1). But, despite having achieved Nobel Prize fame, the chances to watch his performances are limited, above all in the linguistically challenged English-speaking world. “There are, in fact, no videos of Fo available in the United Kingdom or North America” (1). Perhaps Tom Behan’s biography can begin to rectify this state of affairs. Given his pioneering effort, the discerning reader may easily forgive the author’s regular recourse to reductionist terminology, such as “bourgeois” or “revolutionary”, when a more fine-tuned analysis would have been an even more fitting tribute to Europe’s leading minstrel of the Left.

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Thomas J. Bassett, *The Peasant Cotton Revolution in West Africa: Côte d’Ivoire, 1880–1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 262 pp.

The waves of structural adjustment programs and democratic transitions that swept across Africa during the late 1980s and early 1990s have once again renewed interest in the role of ordinary people in the economic and political transformation of their country. Echoing the spirit of the classic revolutions of the West and most recently the great transformations in East and Central Europe, Thomas Bassett challenges contemporary discourses on African development that see the peasants as passive participants in the development process of their country. To the contrary, the peasants of Côte d’Ivoire proved to be independent partners, albeit oppressed, in the development of cotton in the country.

By tracing the history of cotton production in the northern region of Côte d’Ivoire, from 1880 to 1995, Bassett documents the underlying forms of conflict surrounding the production of cotton, the forms of resistance employed by the peasants, and the adjustment mechanisms adopted by the farmers to deal with the changing conditions within the villages and the country at large. The main
conflict centers on the relation between the peasants and the rulers, beginning with the African Emperors, to the colonial government, and finally to the post-colonial regime. The colonial government, which was eager to supply French industries with cheap cotton, consistently forced the peasants to cultivate more cotton. To boost cotton production, the colonial government supplied the peasants with high yielding cotton varieties and introduced forced labor. Later on, the colonial government tried to motivate the peasants to cultivate more cotton through partially free market mechanisms. The post-colonial state continued the policies of the colonial government with the notable difference being that the goal was no longer to supply French industries with cheap cotton, but to use the cotton revenue to promote the economic and social development of Côte d’Ivoire. The peasants also had to struggle with the European merchants and the companies (i.e. the French Company for the Development of Textile Fibres and the Ivorian Company for the Development of Textile Fibres) that monopolized the cotton trade during the colonial and post-colonial periods, respectively. Contrary to the interests of the peasants, who saw cotton production as a means of generating badly needed cash income, the European merchants and the enterprises tried to pay the cotton growers as little as they could. Bassett also reminds us that though the peasants have been united against their common oppressors, they also have had their own internal struggles. The most notable of these are the conflicts between men and women and between young men and village elders.

Notwithstanding the fact that the peasants often complied with forced labor and unwillingly sold their products at below market prices, they were also able to undermine the policies of the government, cut output, and systematically promote their own interests. The peasants refused to abandon the production of food crops. In fact, whenever cotton prices fell they quickly increased the production of food crops. They also resisted cotton varieties and cultivation technologies that were not compatible with the production of food crops. The peasants also took advantage of some of the contradictions that existed in the market and the application of government sponsored cotton programs. In particular, they sold their cotton to local Jula traders who paid higher prices. Furthermore, they diverted resources provided by the state for the cultivation of cotton to the production of food crops instead. They sabotaged the success of the collective cotton fields on which they were forced to work as well as the unfriendly cultivation techniques imposed on them. As the political landscape changed, they revolted and formed unions to promote their interest. By so doing, the government and entrepreneurs realized that cotton production could not be improved without incorporating the interests of the cotton growers. This is best exemplified by the introduction of subsidies and the establishment of the Côte d’Ivoire Price Stabilization Board in 1964, which protected cotton prices from the fluctuations of the world market. Though the peasants were still paid far below world market prices, the new system reduced their production cost, and at the same time protected them from price fluctuation. Once cotton became profitable for the farmers, they drastically increased their output. The cotton revolution fi-
nally occurred between 1964 and 1984. During this period, the area under cotton cultivation grew at the rate of seventeen percent per year and output increased at an average rate of more than four percent per year. Cotton seed production reached a record 212,070 tons in 1984, representing a forty-nine percent increase from the 1979 level.

While resisting the oppression associated with cotton production, the peasants creatively adjusted to the growing demands of cotton production. In particular, they had to deal with the problem of labor bottleneck during the beginning, middle, and end of the rainy season. To ease their excessive workload during these periods, cotton growers tried to mobilize additional labor from both within and outside of the household, manipulate the cultural calendar, and adopt labor saving techniques. Thus, contrary to the views that see the peasants as passive participants in the cotton revolution, Bassett argues that the success of the High Yielding Variety package was “contingent upon farmers’ flexibility in modifying their socio-cultural and agricultural practices. Specifically, the adoption of new technologies (ox-plows, herbicides), shifts in cropping patterns (increase in monocropping, decline in millet), flexible interpretations of culturally prescribed rest days and funeral periods, and new forms of labor mobilization involving both contestation (the tyolobélé revolt) and negotiation (increase in women’s work) have been central to the process of agricultural intensification” (143).

Throughout the book, Bassett consistently presents the peasants as rational producers who varied their production to suit their economic and social interest. By so doing, Bassett challenges us to rethink our perception of the peasants and strategies for promoting economic and social development in Africa. He not only presents a strong argument, but also supports it with a rich historical analysis, a detailed description of village life and a comprehensive set of data on the production of cotton in Côte d’Ivoire. Given the wide range of scholars and policy makers that have taken an interest in the economic development of Africa, Bassett’s book can bridge disciplinary boundaries. It can provide invaluable insights to geographers, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and political scientists working in the cloudy field of development. It seems to me that though the research centered only on the Korhogo region of northern Côte d’Ivoire, the issues raised in the study are directly tied to the international economic and political order. For me, this book raises fundamental questions about the link between the local and the global and its implications for the development of Africa.

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John Lear, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City*. Lincoln, NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 2001. 466 pp. $60.00 cloth; $29.95 paper.

These are boom times for social histories of Mexico City’s working people. Within the past decade, nearly a dozen major studies have appeared in the United States and Mexico exploring the nineteenth- and twentieth-century worlds of artisans, workers, prostitutes, and other members of the urban “dangerous classes.” This new generation of scholarship has moved the study of Mexican working people’s history away from its timeworn emphasis on the official politics of labor unions and the concomitant institutional analysis of inter-union alliances, schisms, and pact making with the state. Instead, the recent work has begun to sketch in a portrait of the everyday lives, political struggles, and cultural perspectives of the unionized and nonunionized popular classes in Mexico’s capital. John Lear’s history of Mexico City’s working people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represents a major contribution to this literature, thanks in part to its chronological breadth and ambitious scope.

*Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens* investigates the social history of the labor movements that appeared just prior to the outbreak of the Mexican revolution in 1910 and briefly became a major presence in the capital. Ultimately, however, these largely independent labor movements proved impossible to sustain once the revolution had run its course. The book’s most concentrated analysis centers on the skilled workers who made up the nominally anarchist Casa del Obrero Mundial (the Casa), or House of the World Worker. Historians have recognized for decades that the Casa was the strongest and most politically active labor federation of the revolutionary era, and its controversial political stance has generated a substantial historiography. Lear’s book provides one of the keenest analyses to date, since it provides a thorough background of the social and geographic development of the working class in the decades prior to the Casa’s appearance. But the book also discusses working people that have received far less attention from historians (in part because they did not belong to the Casa), including casual laborers and unskilled workers, working-class women, artisans, and others. Weaving in and out of this social history is a detailed analysis of the labor policies of the old-regime dictatorship and of the various political leaders who controlled Mexico City between the 1880s and 1920.

The book opens with the geography of nineteenth-century Mexico City. Lear argues that the city’s increasing size and industrialization led to the deskillling of artisans and an increasing segregation of classes, a process that had already become pronounced by the 1880s. This geographic reorganization had several effects, but one of the foremost was to bring working people together in geographic and social terms. Thus, workers already had an established what Lear describes as a set of “working-class cultures” by 1910, when the reformist revolutionary Francisco I. Madero overturned the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and removed most of the legal impediments to unionization. Lear shows that working-class cultures, combined with paternalist and often times Catholic-
inspired mutualism that took root during the Díaz dictatorship, set the stage for the more militant form of popular-class politics of the revolutionary era. Workers’ increasing radicalism was reflected in a number of minor labor actions in the dictatorship’s final days and made its strongest appearance when labor leaders led protests against Díaz in 1910. By the following year, skilled workers had organized a number of unions in the capital and organized a (largely ineffectual) political party.

In 1912, skilled workers founded the Casa del Obrero Mundial, which functioned as the primary political voice of organized labor for the rest of the decade. Unions soon intervened in the workplace and in the political process to a degree that would have been unthinkable in the old regime. When yet another wave of revolutionary warfare hit the nation in 1914, some of the leading members of revolutionary leader Venustiano Carranza’s Constitutionalist faction recognized that forging an alliance with the Casa and the workers it represented could render substantial political advantages. Lear provides a detailed analysis of the February 1915 pact between the Casa and the Constitutionalisitcs, arguing that the Casa leadership resorted to “strong-arm” parliamentary tactics to get rank and file to consent to the agreement (278). But this is just one portion of the book’s broader history of the union’s activities from its founding until 1916, when Carranza, outraged over the general strike in July and August of that year and opposed to class-based politics in general, turned on his erstwhile allies and ordered the Casa disbanded. Nonunionized working people also receive considerable attention. Most notably, Lear gives a detailed picture of women’s class-based mobilization during the revolution and places special emphasis on their participation in riots against scarcity and currency devaluations in 1914 and 1915.

Lear eschews direct discussions of social theory or extended reflections on the cultural mechanisms through which class consciousness developed among Mexico City workers. Nevertheless, he does take a page out of social histories of the nineteenth century to investigate the role of “popular liberalism” within workers’ worldview during the Díaz dictatorship. Like other analysts of popular liberalism, Lear asserts that the popular classes appropriated and domesticated liberal ideologies in order to assert their own rights as citizens of the political nation. Thus, when the revolution came to Mexico City in 1911, working people’s existing senses of political entitlement combined with a nascent politics of class which was most visible in labor leaders’ more-or-less autonomous efforts at political organization and, equally importantly, with their increasingly sophisticated critique of the bourgeoisie. This amalgamation of popular liberalism and working-class militancy planted the seeds of the more confrontational form of labor solidarity that underlay the creation of the Casa and was most fully revealed in the failed general strike of 1916.

Still, the precise form in which popular liberalism and working-class cultures were articulated remains unclear. This is unfortunate because, as Lear points out, workers’ sense of allegiance to the revolution, and hence their sense of a legitimate claim to influence the regime that the revolution produced, had become an important feature of working class politics as early as 1915. Yet a
fuller examination of the precise relationship between working people’s sense of revolutionary entitlement and their budding class consciousness would no doubt shed some much-needed light on the formation of the corporatist form of union politics that characterized most of twentieth-century Mexico. Despite the final chapter, which casts a glance at the officially sanctioned union movement that appeared in the late 1910s, readers get little real indication of what happened to organized labor after 1916. Nor do we receive an indication of how the revolutionary experience might have influenced labor unions’ subsequent and increasingly cozy (some might say incestuous) relationship with the official parties of the revolution that held power from 1929 until 2000.

Of course, the book makes no pretense to encompass the whole of the twentieth century, nor for that matter does it concentrate on the organized labor movement alone. To look ahead at the later trajectory of the state-led labor movement in this sense lies well outside its thematic and chronological scope. In fact, it is to Lear’s immense credit that he does not indulge the temptation of depicting working-class society and politics of the 1900s and 1910s as a simple precursor to the statist labor politics that were to come. Instead, he has produced a broad and engaging social history of working peoples’ lives and political participation during a pivotal moment in Mexican history, one that will become a fundamental text for historians of the Mexican revolution and those interested in popular classes of what has become one of the world’s largest cities.

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Daniel James, Doña Maria’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. 316 pp. $54.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

Maria de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, as told to her daughter Daisy Rubiera Castillo, Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. 182 pp. $45.95 cloth; $16.05 paper.

“Me./Just me. Willful/woman. As much have I of life/as I asked for.” These are the words of Cuban writer Georgina Herrera (quoted in Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century, 141). They are words that have as much to do with a female meatpacking worker in Peronist Argentina, as they do with a poor black woman in twentieth-century Cuba. They are words that describe well the lives of Maria and Reyita, the narrators of their own histories in Daniel James’ Doña Maria’s Story: Life History, Memory and Political Identity and Maria de los Reyes Castillo Bueno’s Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century, as told to her daughter Daisy Rubiera Castillo.

These two books are powerful oral histories of two Latin American working women. The former chronicles the life of Maria, a labor activist and devoted Peron supporter in Argentina during the 1940s. Her narrative concentrates on her most active years as a meatpacking worker and union delegate in Beris-
so, a working-class town that grew up around Argentina’s meatpacking industry. The book is part testimony and part analysis by Daniel James, a scholar of Latin American labor history. *Reyita* centers on the life of an Afro-Cuban woman. It begins with her grandmother’s capture in West Africa and enslavement in Cuba, proceeds chronologically and ends with her current life in Cuba as a great-grandmother. The book begins with a prologue by Elizabeth Dore, another Latin Americanist, who provides the only analysis of Reyita’s life story.

There are many reasons why either one of these books should be read by those interested in working-class history, Latin America, and/or gender. They are both oral testimonies, a methodology that gives voice to those silenced in traditional historical texts. They are thick with description of working-class communities, work, and political activity in early Peronist Argentina and twentieth-century Cuba. They are about women, an underrepresented group of historical players. There are many more reasons why both of these books should be read. As I will show, the two books tackle two very different communities, forms of work, and types of political engagement that make richer our knowledge of labor history in Latin America.

Like the working-class community of Berisso, Doña Maria’s story is that of the European immigrant, the labor union activist, the faithful Peronist, and the meatpacking worker. Reyita’s story, in turn, is one of Cuba’s Afro-Cuban population, physically displaced from Africa, politically disenfranchised, and poor if resourceful. But Maria and Reyita are not simply members of a larger working class. They are women, and their place within this class is gendered, albeit in very different ways. Maria of Berisso is Doña Maria Roldan. Maria de los Reyes Castillo Bueno is simply Reyita. Always poor and always black, she is never Doña Maria. The contrasts across the two texts suggest how race, national history, and economic structure intersect with gender to produce varied experiences among this region’s working-class women.

Doña Maria’s testimony provides fascinating details of work in Argentina’s meatpacking plants and the union activities therein during the 1940s. Reyita’s life story provides similar historical insight into the strategies that poor black women used in twentieth-century Cuba. She “marries white,” participates in informal economic activities, and shares meals with neighbors. Meatpacking factory work enjoys more emphasis in conventional models of work than Reyita’s sideline economic ventures. That said, Maria’s participation in formal, organized factory work is equally invisible in the historical record as the sideline economic activities rooted in Reyita’s home. Thus, the reach of these two testimonies is far and wide in terms of making visible women’s work.

Like most workers in Berisso, Maria is a devout Peronist. A key event around which her narrative revolves is October 17, 1945, when Argentine workers descended on Plaza de Mayo to demand the release of Juan Peron. In contrast, Reyita finds little room as a black woman to engage in mainstream politics. After slavery and the massacre of members of Cuba’s first black political party in 1912, Reyita refashions her political engagement to include such activities as community assistance and helping out with clandestine revolutionary po-
political parties. Here, again, the two testimonies contrast in their forms of political engagement: Doña Maria’s more typical brand of politics (e.g. labor rallies and political parties) and Reyita’s “anti-politics,” to use Dore’s term, (e.g. hosting meetings and surviving war-related food shortages). As such, the two books present a wide spectrum of how politics translate on the ground for Latin American women.

The empirical information on community, work, and politics that can be gleaned from these texts is important. But it is not all these texts offer. Both James and Dore point out that as a source of historically accurate information, oral history is always problematic. The process of remembering entails empirical errors, and the production of testimonies by narrator and author/editor leads to its own distortions. Instead of viewing oral testimony as either fact or fiction, say James and Dore, we might think of it as a form of storytelling. Stories are part objective and part subjective, which means that we have much to learn from the very memory distortions that make oral testimonies so problematic in terms of historical accuracy.

The production of each of these testimonies is distinct. Daniel James, whom Doña Maria refers to as “professor” or “Daniel,” interjects questions and clarifications throughout her testimony. Their narrative conversation is often a respectful tug-of-war, as when Maria chides: “You’ll just have to accept it, Daniel, that is the people” (90). The production of Reyita is more opaque in that the book consists solely of Reyita’s testimony. Although her daughter, Daisy Rubiera, the text’s editor, is silent throughout the text, we know she is present from the intimate “you” that Reyita uses in addressing her: “Why do you make me talk about this?” (138). These differences produce very different texts. James does not focus on Doña Maria’s identity as an evangelical Baptist, despite the fact that her religion is important to her political identity. At the same time, Reyita lacks the analysis that Doña Maria’s Story exhibits and which James argues is crucial since testimonies never “read” critically on their own. In a sense, the two texts combined reveal all that is problematic and illuminating about the production of oral testimonies.

The narrative structure of testimonies is also important in that it shows how the narrator makes sense of their life. Doña Maria’s testimony is largely structured by her commitment to political activism, but within the boundaries of the good wife and mother central to the “prototypical Peronist woman’s life script” (217). She transgresses this script, however, in describing herself as a bold woman, fully engaged in the public sphere, and a militant meatpacking worker. Reyita’s narrative structure, in contrast, is a social mobility story whereby she dedicates herself to improving the lives of her family. Like Maria, Reyita transgresses her script. Although submissive to her husband, she builds an economically and politically independent life from him. Both women’s identities are complex and full of tensions that reflect how working women both submit to and resist the dominant roles of their day.

If the narratives that Doña María and Reyita tell are contradictory, they are also painful. For Maria, this pain centers on unfulfilled personal ambition and dis-
illusionment with Peronism. She resolves her pain by couching it in a story of political pitfalls. Reyita also has her darker story, which revolves around her lack of romantic fulfillment in her relationship with her husband. This disillusionment is a painful admission in a life meaningful due to its self-sacrificing nature: “I sacrificed everything as a woman to be just a mother” (142). In the case of Doña Maria’s Story, Maria’s pain relies on analysis to surface. In Reyita, it is a pain that speaks through her silence: “Forgive me, but let me keep it to myself” (168).

These testimonies help us reconstruct women’s working-class history in ways that are unachievable using traditional historical sources. Moreover, they embody all that is subjective, contradictory, and painful about this history. But perhaps the most important thing that these texts do is to insert women as historical agents, submissive to and defiant of economic inequality, traditional gender roles, and racial prejudice. Out of this tension, their lives are constructed and their histories remembered as willful women. As much have they of life as they asked for.

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Yvette Richards, Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000. 336 pp. $29.95. cloth.

Ever so often there are individuals who, if they have the good fortune to live long enough, can be witnesses to and participants in major historical passages. Such is the case of the ninety-three year old (at the time of this writing) African American labor activist and pan-Africanist, Maida Springer. If Springer’s name is not well known outside those circles, Yevette Richards’s most informative biography will go a long way toward rectifying the oversight.

As Richards capably relates, Springer came of age politically in the Harlem of Marcus Garvey. In her mid-twenties, she became active, also in New York, in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union—then in its heyday. Her union achievements and connections made it possible for her to become the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organization’s (AFL-CIO) point person in Africa during the 1950s continuing up to 1966, an historic moment in the transition from colonial rule to post-independent Africa and a crucial time for the fledgling labor movement on the continent. In particular countries her impact “as an advisor to the young labor movements” (247) was consequential and as Rashidi Kawawa, then Tanganyika vice-president and one-time leader of the country’s trade union movement, testified in a letter sent to her in 1964: “I hope whoever writes the Trade Union and Political history of Tanganyika will never forget to include your name—for it won’t be complete without mentioning the very vital part you played” (253). In the second half of the 1980s, Springer argued that the beginning of the end of apartheid in South Africa and the end of the Cold War required the AFL-CIO to refashion its stance toward labor in Africa.
Almost two-thirds of Richards's book focuses on Springer's international activities, particularly her work in Africa. To the extent that Richards seeks to connect with the literature about the AFL-CIO, Springer's employer, she writes: “Current scholarship . . . which essentially dismisses AFL-CIO activism in Africa as interventionist and in collusion with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), fosters a narrow reading of international labor relations during the Cold War” (9). What Richards purports to do is to overcome that “narrow reading” and provide the details for a more “complex view” of the organization’s activities in Africa through the experiences of Springer. To this end, Richards poses four research questions: “[First is] what impact Springer’s race, gender, nationality, and AFL affiliation had on her experiences within the American labor movement and how these factors influenced her relationships with African labor leaders, ICFTU [International Confederation of Free Trade Unions] leaders, and colonial government officials. Second is how her activism in Africa changes our understanding of the conflicts over international labor policy within the AFL-CIO and between the AFL-CIO and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC). The third question concerns Springer’s role in the fiercely contested pan-African labor struggles over the nonalignment issue and the nation-building policies of independent African nations. [T]he fourth question has to do with the way Springer negotiated her work within the ideological and structural parameters of the AFL-CIO’s ‘foreign policy’” (3–4).

The strength of Richards’s book is exactly the detailed answers she provides for these four questions, as well as other valuable information. Her willingness to go into previously untapped archival sources is most rewarding. This may be the best source in print for looking at AFL-CIO maneuverings in Africa during the Cold War. The organization’s use of material perks, especially, scholarships, to entice future African trade unionists to side with Washington in the Cold War is most revealing. The role of Springer’s main contact, the notorious Jay Lovestone, former communist, uncompromising anti-communist Cold Warrior and CIA operative—as it would later be revealed and unbeknownst, apparently, to Springer—in formulating the federation’s Africa policies is also instructive. For those of us who have long been interested in explaining the limitations of Africa’s labor movement in the transition to independence and shortly afterwards, Richards’s findings are invaluable. Beyond Africa there are interesting tidbits. Springers’s role in helping the women’s section of the Turkish trade union movement in getting off the ground is fascinating and worth pursuing, as is, the collaboration between the AFL-CIO and Israel’s Histadrut in the early years of independent Africa.

For all of its exhaustive research, however, Richards’s book is strikingly short on analysis. There is, surprisingly, no concluding chapter that would help the reader to assess the significance of Springer’s rich career or understand why she did what she did. By the end it is apparent that her pan-Africanist visions were not realized. “When asked what she considered to be her success in Africa, Springer responded, ‘I don’t think I was ever satisfied with anything. Whatever you envision, you came up short of the mark’” (233). The best that Richards can
say is that her “most lasting legacy is that she was a pioneer in the process of orienting the AFL-CIO to pay more attention to Africa and helping to open the door for more people of color in the United States and elsewhere to become involved in international affairs and in turn influence policy” (282).

Since these words were written, the two most important posts in the United States’ foreign policy-making apparatus came into the hands of “people of color.” Are Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice the kind of individuals Richards has in mind? At times she seems to echo Springer or appears to be her apologist. There are certainly brief hints of a more sober assessment in the penultimate and last chapters. Springer’s experiences, the reader is told, reveals, “the contradictions of a black woman working on behalf of a white male dominated labor federation. If Springer harbors any disillusionment over how she was treated or the way world events unfolded, she chooses not to reveal it. As she has said, loyalty to the cause is more important than the price the individual pays” (282–283).

An analytical conclusion would begin with Springer’s political trajectory. If there is a core, it is that of pan-Africanism, something she acquired quite early in the Garvey years of Harlem. Then she became a loyal trade unionist under the influence of Lovestone and his aide Charles Zimmerman. That she rejected the overtures of the Communist Party is also telling. At this point, an analysis would require a discussion of the Stalinization of the Communist Party and how this impacted Lovestone and the other major influence on her, A. Philip Randolph. The latter and pan-Africanism may have inoculated her against Stalinist overtures but they did not equip her in dealing with the logic of Lovestone’s anti-communism. Though she appears not to have shared his single-minded anti-communist obsession she was willing to appeal to it whenever she thought it advanced her pan-Africanist agenda. This, in turn, blinded her to the reality of American imperialism elsewhere in the world and, therefore, disarmed her for the same kind of policies that Washington would later carry out in Africa. Also, pan-Africanism, or certainly the variety that Springer embraced, made no space for class analysis and, therefore, an understanding of the incipient class formation under way in the Africa she worked in, and which she helped to enable. As Richards admits, “[s]ome of her former labor colleagues became government officials and participated in the government’s suppression of trade union demands” (248).

Springer’s trade union consciousness may have also been consequential. Like the British TUC, she and the organization she represented, the AFL-CIO, promoted an apolitical brand of trade unionism and therefore helped to educate a generation of African trade unionists in the ways of American trade unionism with all of its weaknesses, not the least of which is its failure to pursue independent working class political action. This may have been, contrary to what Richards advances, her most lasting and, therefore, tragic legacy.

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Michael Miller Topp, *Those Without a Country: The Political Culture of Italian American Syndicalists*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. 352 pp. $63.95 cloth; $22.95 paper.

Michael Miller Topp’s *Those Without a Country* details the history of a generation of Italian–American syndicalists—leftists who advocated “revolution achieved through increasingly confrontational strikes waged by militant unions” (1) from the turn of the century to the late-1920s trial and execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Drawing primarily on left-wing Italian-language newspapers, some Italian state archival materials, and a range of secondary sources in Italian and English, Topp focuses on several themes: the transnational nature of Italian-American syndicalists’ ideas, institutions, and strategies; the complex interplay between syndicalists’ masculinist, working-class, and Italian identities; and the significance this admittedly small number of syndicalists had on immigrant communities in the United States, on foreign policy in Italy, and on the Left in both.

Topp’s story comes in two parts. The first charts the rise and fall of the Federazione Socialista Italiana (FSI) between the early twentieth century and World War One. He focuses on the FSI’s early years as it became “by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century . . . the dominant force on the Italian American Left”; its opposition to Italy’s war in Libya in 1911–1912; its crucial support for the Lawrence Strike in 1912; and its intense internecine battles over Italy’s decision to enter World War One in 1915. Throughout, Topp argues, the FSI was a transnational community that shaped, and was shaped by, a fluid mixture of class, ethnic, and gendered ideologies and identities. At its height, the FSI managed this mixture to its advantage, gaining some visibility and, most important, playing a significant role in Italian immigrant communities, Italian foreign policy debates, and larger Left movements on both sides of the Atlantic. However, when World War One forced a reconfiguration of this mixture, increasingly bitter and divisive debates about syndicalism, internationalism, and masculinity shattered the FSI.

The book’s second part examines Italian–American syndicalists (and the Italian–American Left more generally) in the wake of this shattering. Topp shows how even after the World War One debates, the rise of fascism, and the Red Scare syndicalists responded creatively to new political situations in the United States and Italy. For instance, in the face of intensifying anti-radicalism and rising anti-immigrant racialism in America, syndicalists joined more moderate organizations like the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and called for the Americanization of Italian immigrants. Similarly, with the rise of fascism in Italy in 1922, Italian–American leftists (syndicalists among them) tried to bridge sectarian divides, forming coalitions like the Italian Chamber of Labor and the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America. Neither of these groups lasted very long, but, had they never existed, argues Topp, “the voice of Mussolini’s followers would have gone uncontested in the Italian American community in the crucial first years of his reign . . . [and] the American public would have been alerted to the fascist menace far later than it was” (255). In the con-
clusion, Topp discusses the Sacco and Vanzetti trial as both the apex and end of a generation of Italian–American radicalism.

_Those Without a Country_ raised some questions for me. First, and most broadly, I wondered about Topp’s near exclusive focus on Italian–American syndicalism’s formal leaders (e.g., editors of newspapers, union heads, rally speakers), particularly given the salutary move in recent social movement historiography toward bottom-up perspectives and methodologies. The downside to Topp’s approach is perhaps most evident in his limited treatment of Italian–American women radicals, who, according to the work of scholars like Ardis Cameron, Donna Gabaccia, Jennifer Guglielmo, and others, were pivotal to grassroots left-wing politics throughout the Americas and Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Topp’s failure to examine this is unfortunate given his stated desire to “recapture some of the complexity of the labor movement in the Progressive Era” (21) and to recover a part of Italian–American radicalism that has been “all but lost to history.” Indeed, more attention to women radicals—who may not have been the formal leaders of strikes or the regularly featured writers in the newspapers, but who were crucial activists nonetheless—would have brought even more complexity to his portrait of the Italian–American Left and recovered the most “lost” part of its history.

Second, I had questions about a few of Topp’s key arguments. For example, although Topp aims to show syndicalists’ significant impact on Italian–American communities, he struggles, in my view, to demonstrate the point, because he often failed to consult key sources beyond the radicals themselves (e.g., mainstream Italian-language newspapers, the papers of _prominenti_, and the albeit rare oral histories of Italian immigrants). Similarly, although I appreciated his novel and often sophisticated examination of syndicalism’s gender politics and ideologies, his argument on syndicalists’ “pervasive masculinist ethos” was, with the exception of Chapter 4 on World War One, not always well substantiated: in the pre-World War One chapters a few examples each; in the later chapters hardly any mention at all.

These questions aside, _Those Without a Country_ still has many strengths. It is clearly written, researched in two languages and on two continents, and adds to our understanding of the Italian–American Left, especially its impact on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the IWW’s embrace of syndicalist ideas. His argument about the constant interplay of class and ethnic politics and identities (directed at some New Left scholars’ recent attempts to dismiss the “identity politics” of the 1960s by comparing it to earlier, supposedly more “universalist” class-based movements) is well-taken. The book’s biggest asset, in my view, is its transnational perspective. Topp demonstrates in impressive detail how Progressive Era ideas, people, strategies, institutions, and memories constantly moved back and forth between the United States, Italy, and other parts of the globe. In the process, he shows how crucial it is to place “America’s” history of labor, radicalism, and social movements in an international context.

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Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905–1930*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001. 288 pp. $34.95, cloth.

Greg Hall’s probing study of migrant agricultural workers in the Far West and Great Plains of the early twentieth century sheds important light on a neglected but important contingent of labor radicals who joined and sustained the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Although we most often associate the IWW with logging and lumbering, mining, and marine transportation, Hall explains how a distinctive work culture united tens of thousands of migrant farm workers from the wheat fields of Kansas to the fruit and vegetable orchards of Washington and California. Despite intense state repression of the IWW during World War One, these harvest wobblies of the Agricultural Workers’ Industrial Union (AWIU) led a resurgence of the IWW in the 1920s before internal divisions within the IWW and critical changes in the worklife culture and technology of agriculture led to the ultimate demise of the industrial union among migrant farm workers.

Hall opens the book with an important chapter that describes the distinctive work culture of migrant agricultural labor. The demand for seasonal, migrant labor in the West grew out of the shift to an industrial form of agriculture. In the Plains, farmers turned to single-crop production of wheat to meet the expanding domestic and international markets for grain. In Washington and California, farmers maintained a more diversified agriculture, but government-sponsored irrigation and the implementation of refrigeration and canning made it possible to adopt industrial agriculture to supply a growing urban demand for fruits and vegetables. Although these farms relied extensively on mechanization, these new technologies did not eliminate the need for hand labor. Instead, as Hall explains, mechanization actually increased the demand for temporary, unskilled wage hands at harvest time while reducing farmers’ reliance on year-round farmhands who traditionally worked as apprentice farmers aspiring to eventual farm ownership. In all three regions, young, single, and unskilled migrant farm hands shared common experiences. Most had to search for work on their own because the United States never developed a coordinated labor supply system that permitted migrants to travel to needed areas by rail at reduced fares as in Canada. To get to work sites, migrants had to hop freight trains (always a dangerous proposition) and ride the rails, following the harvest season from south to north. Once they arrived at a work site, migrants found inadequate lodging and bathing facilities and had to settle in makeshift camps called jungles for the length of a job. Work was strenuous, intensely supervised, and poorly compensated.

Despite these similarities, Hall carefully delineates important differences in the work cultures of the three regions he studies. A work culture of social homogeneity (nearly all were white men) and mobility characterized the Great Plains. California farmers employed more immigrant workers, particularly Asians and Mexicans, whom they could hire for less pay because these men had
fewer alternative employment opportunities outside of agriculture than white workers. The threat of deportation compelled immigrant workers to rely more heavily on their employer than whites, who were freer to leave poor working conditions and travel over greater distances in search of work. Thus, in California, seasonal workers shared a class position, but they experienced little of the class unity of their counterparts on the Great Plains. In Washington, industrial farmers employed more family and community laborers who lived locally, creating a division between home guards and migrants that “diluted a common worklife culture” (47). The Wobbly appeal would succeed most among those seasonal agricultural workers who shared not just class experiences but a common work culture.

The bulk of the book concerns the various organizing efforts by the Wobblies in these regions. Hall informs his readers of the various organizing strategies that the IWW employed to attract migrant agricultural laborers and details many of the debates and conflicts among organizers. Early on organizers divided over whether to adopt an inclusive approach that appealed to all agricultural workers regardless of race, ethnicity, and gender or to employ an exclusive approach that appealed to the unique culture of the single, white, male migrant. Other problems hindered the development of an organizing strategy. Tensions between advocates of soapbox organizing and job-site organizing, wasting scarce resources on trying to secure the release of political prisoners rather than on organizing workers, and internal divisions between centralists and decentralists all hampered the emergence of a coherent strategy. Eventually, the Agricultural Workers Organization (AWO), which was later re-organized as the AWIU, emerged. The union, by placing an emphasis on organizing workers and building membership, quickly became one of the largest branches of the IWW. Though the AWO established a presence among migrant farm workers in all three regions, the union and its successor were most successful at drawing in the white male migrants of the Great Plains that would ultimately undermine its appeal among the more diverse work force of the Far West.

Hall explains how harvest wobblies, through a commitment to political education, the development of an extensive communication network, and cultural appeals to the footloose, masculine, rebel worker of the Great Plains, created a union that was effectively controlled by the rank-and-file. These strengths enabled it to persevere through attempts at legal repression during World War One and lead a resurgence of the IWW in the 1920s. The resurgence proved short-lived, however. Violence and arrests continued to threaten Wobbly migrants. Changes in grain-harvesting in the 1920s also reduced farmers’ dependence on temporary labor. But perhaps most fundamental to the union’s demise, according to Hall, were critical changes in the work culture of migrant farm hands. By the mid-1920s, many migrants opted to travel by automobile rather than train. The sociability of riding the rails had always aided membership drives, and a union card could also help a migrant secure safe passage on a freight train. Cars also enabled migrants to avoid the jungle camps, another key site for Wobbly organizing. Migrants that traveled by car were less susceptible to vagrancy viola-
tions, had greater flexibility in finding employment, and were, because of the expense of a car, more conservative with their money. The automobile eroded the unique work culture that the Wobblies once appealed to so successfully. As that culture disappeared, so too did the AWIU.

Although the book tells an important story and makes a number of well-reasoned and insightful arguments, it suffers the weaknesses of an overly institutional history. Hall relies mostly on IWW sources (newspapers, pamphlets, convention minutes and proceedings) and so we learn a lot about internal debates among Wobbly activists but not enough about the textures and complexities of migrant workers’ lives and existence. Too often, Hall relies on Wobbly portrayals of the migrants rather than crafting his own portrait and understanding of these men from other sources. I gained no more than a general sense of who these men were and what their motivations and aspirations may have been. Moreover, a narrow focus on the institution of the IWW prevents Hall from using his case to confront and probe larger questions about the American West, radicalism, the rise of industrial agriculture, and race and ethnicity in the American work force. Thus my criticisms are less to do with the analysis and argument and more with the organization and framing. These complaints aside, the book should receive the attention of scholars and students working in the fields of labor, western, and rural and agricultural history.

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William Millikan, A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor, 1903–1947. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001. 526 pp. $34.95 cloth.

While there are many histories of unions in the United States, there are relatively few studies of employer associations and their role in industrial relations. Howell John Harris’s recent study of the Metal Manufacturers Association of Philadelphia, Bloodless Victories: The Rise and Fall of the Open Shop in the Philadelphia Metal Trades, 1890–1940 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), stresses the importance of values in shaping employer behavior. William Millikan’s meticulous history of the Minneapolis Citizens Alliance likewise demonstrates the importance of ideas as well as interests in business approaches toward industrial relations. The Minneapolis employers, however, embraced a tougher brand of anti-unionism than Harris found in Philadelphia.

If historians have heard of the Minneapolis Citizens Alliance at all, it is usually for its monumental clash with the Trotskyite-led Teamsters local that transformed industrial and class relations in the city in the mid-1930s. The most intense moment of conflict came on May 22, 1934, when 500 deputized, anti-union cadre, organized and led by the Citizens Alliance, got routed by the Teamsters
in a massive street battle that left a director of the employers group dead and opened the way for the unionization of the trucking and warehouse industries in the upper Midwest. But as Millikan shows in great detail, this widely publicized defeat came only after three decades during which Minneapolis businessmen, through extensive, often secret organization, kept their city virtually union-free and checked the radical movements that gave the region a distinctive political character.

The Citizens Alliance grew out of an effort by Minneapolis machine shop owners, early in the twentieth century, to keep their industry union-free. A trio of young businessmen, who had started their own machinery manufacturing concerns, imparted to the Alliance and its various satellites a fierce devotion to the open shop and a genius for organization. But the clout of the Alliance came from the support it won from the banking and flour milling industries, which dominated the local economy.

The Citizen's Alliance masterminded a multi-layered approach to fighting unions. When an industry faced a strike, the business group supplied strike-breakers, spies, strategists, lawyers, publicists, money, and, when needed, backbone. To maintain favorable labor market conditions, the group promoted public vocational training as an alternative to union apprenticeship programs. Though that effort had only limited success, the private, tuition-free Dunwoody Institute, funded by a milling executive's bequest, trained young workers for industries in which the Alliance was conducting open-shop campaigns. Meanwhile, a network of local and statewide business groups with links to the Alliance lobbied for pro-business labor legislation and fought unions and radical groups in the electoral arena.

It took an ongoing Alliance campaign of persuasion and threat, aimed at wavering businessmen, to maintain class solidarity and counter short-term calculations that might lead businesses to entertain accommodations with organized labor. The Alliance insisted that businesses totally spurn organized labor, for example by refusing to even enter discussions with unions during strikes. Struck companies that broke ranks by signing union contracts found themselves facing boycotts by other businesses and saw their lines of credit dry up.

Millikan provides eye-opening detail on the extent of anti-democratic thinking that informed the behavior of leading Minneapolis businessmen. Two fascinating chapters tell the story of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, a business-led group, set up during World War One, which constituted an unelected state within the state, complete with its own military arm, the Home Guards. The Commission effectively defied federal wartime labor policy in defeating union organizing efforts and a major streetcar strike. To do so, the Commission, operating under the cloak of government legitimacy, launched a widespread program of repression directed against the Industrial Workers of the World, the Socialists, and the Non-Partisan League. Its operatives incited violence, flooded the state with propaganda, and encouraged local law enforcement officials to act against unionists and radicals.
Even after the war, the Alliance and its way of thinking exerted anti-democratic influence within the structures of government. Millikan gives numerous examples of judicial action that used strained logic, in contempt of legislative language, to justify anti-labor injunctions. To provide needed physical force, business leaders effectively controlled the Minnesota National Guard, to the extent that during the 1934 Teamsters strike Governor Floyd Olson, elected on the Farmer–Labor ticket, had to maneuver carefully to assert his control over its actions.

The rise of the Farmer–Labor party and the New Deal deprived the Citizens Alliance of the broad governmental backing it had come to take for granted. Underestimating the threat of the Teamsters, who matched the Alliance in their ferocity of belief and predilection for martial action, the anti-union elite found itself defeated in the streets and politically neutralized. Yet for two more years, the Alliance maintained its commitment to the open shop, besting unions in several violent strikes. Finally, when a local American Federation of Labor (AFL) union shut down Minneapolis milling operations amid a Teamsters strike against wholesale grocers, the national milling companies, led by General Mills, agreed to union recognition. After three years of all-out class war, the Alliance’s most powerful backers finally acquiesced to business realism.

Forced to regroup, the Alliance reconstituted itself as Associated Industries of Minneapolis. While rhetorically accepting the legitimacy of collective bargaining, Associated Industries moved to check union power, primarily in the political arena. In 1938, extensive business support helped moderate Republican Harold Stassen capture the governorship from the Farmer–Labor party. The following year the legislature passed a labor relations law that limited union rights and provided for a mandatory cooling-off period before strikes or lockouts. Then, in 1947, the state banned secondary boycotts and organizational and jurisdictional picketing. The two Minnesota laws provided models for the Taft–Hartley Act.

Millikan has done historians a service in providing an unusually detailed account of the nuts-and-bolts of anti-unionism: who coordinated particular anti-union efforts, how much they cost, who paid, and how private and government agencies interacted. This very level of detail, however, will discourage all but the most dedicated readers, so will the lack of portraiture of the key business actors. Millikan provides great insight into the organizational webs of the business community, but little sense of the personality, sensibility, or culture of business as a class.

In his admiration for the capabilities, if not the goals, of the Citizen Alliance, Millikan leaves the reader in the dark about how unionism and radicalism managed to persist in the Twin Cities. The Socialists, and then the Farm–Laborites, had considerable success at electing local and state officials, while unionism never fully disappeared from the local scene, even at the height of the Alliance’s power.

Sometimes, in its devotion to the study of workers, American labor history has the sound of one hand clapping. Millikan gives us the sound of the other
hand. It is a sound of extreme anti-unionism and attacks on popular democracy, both as practical policy and true belief. Its notes ring through the history of twentieth-century America.

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Sven Beckert, The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 492 pp. $35.00 cloth; $22.00 paper.

When New York’s World Trade Center was destroyed on September 11, 2001, the reverberations of the attack highlighted the city’s enormous importance to the nation’s economic, political, cultural, and social life. How New York City came to function as both the symbolic and actual “capitol” of American capital is a story that has been researched and written about from many different angles. Good history always contains one or both of two elements: either a corrective to accepted historical knowledge or the filling of a void in the historical record. Sven Beckert attempts both elements and succeeds. Beckert fills the historical void with a comprehensive analysis of the formation of a diverse urban merchant and industrial sector into a class, the bourgeoisie of the title. His goal is to provide “an adequate study of the political attitudes of northern industrialists” (11). He provides his corrective by showing how this class coalesced around social and cultural issues, avoiding a purely economic explanation. While steering clear of American exceptionalism, Beckert illustrates what is unique in New York’s bourgeois class formation and explains its vital role in the history of the city and of the nation.

Beckert, currently Dunwalk Professor of History at Harvard University, opens his work with a description of a ball hosted by New York socialites Bradley and Cornelia Martin in 1897. The ball, occurring at the tail end of a severe national economic crisis, is an elaborate and ostentatious display of wealth and social power. Beckert uses the costume party, and its attendant publicity, to introduce the notion of a new financial and social elite, assured of its position, yet worried enough about the social upheaval caused by disparities of wealth to post armed guards and nail the lower windows of the Waldorf-Astoria hotel shut. How and why this prominent display of wealth and power became socially acceptable, and why it would potentially elicit violent reaction, is the story Beckert tells. In the process he weaves several historical trajectories within the context of the rise of the new bourgeois class: the shift from merchant to industrial wealth, the development of New York’s FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate) industry, and the shift from artisan to industrial worker among New York’s laboring classes.

Beckert utilizes a class formation approach and is unabashed in his defense
of the value and utility of class analysis in historical inquiry. But while most recent works of urban history concern micro-studies of segments of the working and “middle” classes, Beckert’s work is a sweeping study of the development of New York’s financial elite into a cohesive (although always fractious) class, acting in defense of its own self-interest. While he points out that the “formation of the bourgeoisie as a class . . . was neither necessary or irreversible” (12) and historically contingent, he also shows why and how the bourgeois class emerged as the potent force in New York’s political and social world, emphasizing contingency and change, structure, and agency. While many studies of class formation focus on the effects of elite political economy in the making of a working class, Beckert illustrates here how shifting economic and political trends concerning the working-class effect the formation of New York’s elite as a class.

The book is divided chronologically, with an introduction to New York’s antebellum economic and social world through a view of the city’s mercantile elite. The author concentrates much of the book’s focus on the Civil War and its aftermath and follows the development of the bourgeoisie through the major economic events of the post-war nineteenth century. Although his focus is concentrated on political economy, one of the strengths of the work is the interweaving of social and cultural history into the story, with particular attention paid to the formation of alliances centered on the construction of social and cultural institutions. What Beckert is describing here is not a static class of financial elites reinforcing their established positions, but the historical process of change over time, the linking of micro-social events and trends to large-scale social processes.

Beckert illustrates the dominance of antebellum merchants in New York, and the city’s rise to economic pre-eminence, as well as the subsequent shift to industrial and FIRE power through an examination of individual New Yorkers who were the major players in the respective fields. By using a variety of primary sources, with a heavy reliance on tax records, Beckert charts the rise of the industrial sector, the declining importance of the old-guard mercantile elite, and the connection of this trend to political and social alliances forming around the issues of free labor, anti-slavery, and the rise of the railroad economy. His major claim is that the new economy that emerged from the post-war and railroad periods worked to form a new financial elite, more open to public displays of wealth and more removed from the laboring classes. The new dominance of manufacturing also changed the nature of New York’s laboring classes, speeding the formation of an industrial proletariat against which bourgeois New Yorker’s formed their new alliances, both economic and social.

The analysis of industrialization and the proletarianization of the laboring classes and its subsequent effect on New York’s bourgeoisie are perhaps Beckert’s most dexterous intellectual feat. While old money merchants and new money industrialists could clash on many important political and social issues, what unites them in Beckert’s telling, is fear of the “dangerous” classes of urban workers, particularly the immigrant groups of the late century. Here competition among the capitalist strata is mitigated by the need for cooperation in sustain-
ing an orderly accumulation of profits, a cooperation whose result is the forma-
tion of a bourgeoisie linked by not only economic interests, but by social and cul-
tural commonalities similar to those extant in European society.

Of interest methodologically is Beckert’s use of the term “bourgeoisie.” He
defends its usage by pointing to the inadequacy of terms such as middle class,
upper class, industrial class, plutocracy, and others to describe the particular ag-
glomeration of economic, political and social interests that formed the basis of
bourgeois society in nineteenth-century New York. Whether this defines a uni-
fied class interest is a question for further debate. Beckert draws on Hobs-
bawmian definitions (informed by Marxist materialism and the cultural empha-
sis of Gramsci and Bourdieu) in attempting to isolate a bourgeoisie, including
in this group merchants, industrialists, bankers and rentiers who “invested capital,
employed wage workers, did not work for wages themselves and did not work
manually” (12). In seeking the keys to class formation in this bourgeoisie, Beck-
ert shows how “in Weberian terms . . . a class based on shared market interests
turned into a status group” (11, 347). While the use of the term bourgeoisie is al-
ways imprecise and troublesome, Beckert’s defense of its use is adequate.

There are some omissions in Beckert’s narrative, and certain trajectories
that are not followed in adequate detail. There is little discussion of the deploy-
ment of physical force (the lack of mention of the police riots of 1857 is one such
omission) in solidifying and protecting class interests. Beckert also alludes to the
cultural spaces of bourgeois distinction (the bourgeois interior, marriage, rais-
ing children) but actual analysis of these spaces is largely confined to a single
chapter, “The Culture of Capital.” By deploying this brief and largely inade-
quate cultural analysis, Beckert seems to want to create a comprehensive histo-
ry of late nineteenth century upper-class New York, an ambitious undertaking
that falls short, but just barely. He also fails to address the relationship of New
York’s bourgeoisie to the rest of the nation. But these criticisms are dwarfed by
the overall comprehensiveness of the work.

Of the many strengths of this work is the restoration to American history
of the importance of the Civil War as a nineteenth-century watershed. Popular
history has turned study of this major event into a tale of battles and generals,
soldiers and armaments. Beckert’s work, along with other recent scholarship, re-
stores the political, social and cultural displacements of the war to their rightful
place as a turning point in American history. Likewise, Beckert emphasizes the
primacy of class analysis in what is essentially a history of American industrial-
ization as seen through the lens of the industrial elite. But this industrial elite
does not exist and is not formed in a vacuum. It’s existence and formation are
the result of a contested process of historical contingency and struggle. By high-
lighting the importance of the formation of New York’s bourgeoisie in Ameri-
can history, Beckert fills in an important gap in historical literature and raises
many new questions for historians of class, labor, and economic and social his-
tory to ponder. This is not a popular history, but a work intended for a scholar-
ly audience. It is a work I would recommend for all interested in the develop-
ment of American political, social and cultural history and should be required reading for scholars of class formation.

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Cheri Register, *Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2000. 288 pp. $24.05 cloth; $13.00 paper.

Reading Cheri Register’s *Packinghouse Daughter: A Memoir* was like a homecoming for me. I too am a Ph.D. daughter of the working-class, perpetually caught between loyalties and values forged in a union family and a middle-class adult life in which more individualistic pursuits both compel and confuse me. Like Register, I find objectivity on questions of union struggles difficult, if not impossible. But Register’s intentions, and the resulting literary and historical delight of a memoir, are far more interesting than objectivity. As she observes in the opening essay of her autobiography, “I find that I still experience the world as a working-class kid away from home. I walk the line between a feisty fidelity to the people of my childhood and a refined repugnance for the work they had to do” (8). The old labor anthem “Which Side Are You On?” echoes throughout her searching, poignant, and compelling reflections on working-class values, labor, and history from the perspective of a postwar working-class daughter.

Register places a labor struggle in 1959 in her hometown of Albert Lea, Minnesota, at the center of her own memoir, while also acknowledging how, as a fourteen-year-old girl at the time, she was both enmeshed in and on the sidelines of this event. While Register elucidates long-standing working-class values, she also takes the reader on an almost postmodern journey in which angles of historical vision continually shift in fascinating ways. Particularly in her retelling of the strike, Register juxtaposes family lore, oral history, and painstaking archival research. She self-consciously alternates between passionate faith and meticulous testing of historical evidence. In so doing, she continually reminds us of her uneasy place in history: “I have chosen the documentary, collective memoir as my vehicle because it allows for more voices than just my own . . . Even my own voice is split, alternating between childhood recollection and adult reflection” (19–20).

There are, in fact, two central dramas to this memoir. One is provided by the historical recasting of the strike itself, and the other by Register’s personal, intellectual, and political journey, fueled by wrenching questions about class, loyalty, and history’s silences. The book merits an important place in labor history on the basis of the first drama alone. The 1950s, often portrayed in both memoir and history texts as a culturally bland and political quiescent decade, comes alive in Register’s riveting account of a strike that polarized a small community. Register reclaims the postwar working class as something other than the product of “embourgeoisement,” white bread, and tract housing. And she re-
claims labor’s “mainstream.” “Our family’s hero was not the songbird with the wild fantasies but the plodding draft-horse, organizing, negotiating, attention riveted on the point-by-point compromise” (101–102). Essentially, Register uses the voices of strike participants to situate labor activism in American traditions of democratic protest and sophisticated organization, traditions nurtured over generations as well as across social movements, such as the interconnected labor and civil rights movements. In a chapter entitled “Faith in the Face of Reality,” she expands on the perspective of a strike participant to succinctly summarize labor history: “It is never really a question of victory or defeat. All victories are potential defeats, as the opposition devises fresh strategies to undo them. The one constant is that there are always realities to face, the usual injustices and unsettling new ones.” But, “If ever compassion replaces greed as a human motive, fairness will prevail. . . . Labor unions, in victory and defeat, help keep that vision alive” (230–231).

The second, skillfully integrated thread of the memoir is Register’s personal story of union faith, class confusion and alienation, and ultimately affirmation and belonging. In a culture that obscures class, the understanding Register seeks necessarily arrives through prodigious and passionate historical inquiry. Register’s book was written “to honor the people who raised” her, which she does graciously, generously, and still honestly (22). Yet as a transitional figure who is neither working-class union man (the center people of the strike story) nor middle-class educated woman, her frequent out-of-placeness and disconnect in both working-class familial and middle-class situations contrasts sharply with the apparently more rare moments of connection. The book in fact begins with evidence of the distance between herself and her father that seems to have characterized her undergraduate years. The opening essay details her search for a “blue work-shirt” to match the radical style of the University of Chicago. The search is punctuated by her father’s offering of a blood-stained one from the packing-house. All this is a lead-in to her explanation of a perpetual identity crisis intimately felt by many daughters and, probably in different ways, sons of working-class families: “Everything I saw was refracted through a bloodstain that would not allow simplicity. I often felt as though I was invisible and watching from the sidelines as privileged white suburban kids playacted at being less fortunate than they were . . . ” (9–10). The sidelines view was sometimes an embittering one. Few people are comfortable in invisibility.

Connection comes at moments of historical continuity, such as when Register attends a concert at a Twin Cities union hall dedicated to labor songs: “We, the audience, had been invited to witness a proud display of shared values and renewed hopes, and we were welcome to sing along. I sang in full voice” (112). Connection comes, too, in the “pages of history” uncovered in archives (at one point Register describes a box of historical documents as “radiating like a shrine of holy relics”), in the scrapbook of one packinghouse woman who meticulously documented the strike as it happened, in the discovery of Register’s great-grandfather’s labor journalism writing, and in searching oral history interviews with strike participants ranging from Register’s father to the former governor of Minnesota (260).
It is in fact the historical quest itself that empowers and liberates Register. Still, I was left with a nagging question about why people from union families who straddle the boundary between working class and middle class can be so passionately aware of their values, and yet find so few settings of affirmation and belonging. It seems to me that the pathos of Register’s memoir is an echo of a broader pattern in which the working class too often is silenced by history, by a contemptuous popular culture, and even by itself. “The labor songs I never learned to sing still stir me to tears and incite me to an anger that has no clear object. . . . Often, I glare at the stomping, cheering audience, whooping in scornful glee at the singer’s lampoon of the boss’s greed. ‘What do you know?’ I want to demand. Sometimes I just look away in shame, silenced by a gnawing suspicion that if these songs truly represent working-class culture, then what I have lived is not the real thing” (104).

In the end, Register’s memoir is nothing if not “the real thing”: an assertion of real, hard-won, worthy values and allegiances, a real history in which dignity is restored to working-class families of the postwar era, and a genuine chronicle of self discovery without a hint of self aggrandizement. The place of working-class women in recent history seems to require endless repositioning and rethinking. In fact, gender identity is one complicated area that Register seems to struggle to illuminate. For example, her mother’s contribution to the forging of her values is less clear than that of her union member father. Still, Register offers a guide for all of us in the new terrain of educated women from the working class “leaving home,” in an era when labor’s struggles are habitually misunderstood and easily forgotten. As Register shows, history provides knotted, gnarly, and frustrating and complex roots. There are no easy answers to the question, “Which side are you on?” But no one has asked the question with more honesty, literary skill, and historical vision than Cheri Register.

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John Pencavel, Worker Participation: Lessons From the Worker Co-Ops of the Pacific Northwest. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002. $29.95 cloth; $12.95 paper.

John Pencavel demonstrates that co-ops are generally more productive than traditional capitalist workplaces. Pencavel, an economist, exhaustively analyzes twenty years’ worth of data for approximately forty cooperative and capitalist plywood mills that represent the bulk of plywood production in the Pacific Northwest. Plywood proves an ideal laboratory for examining the comparative efficiency of worker co-ops and capitalist firms for three reasons. First, co-ops and capitalist firms have co-existed side by side in this industry for several decades. Second, the pace of technological innovation has remained relatively constant such that neither type of firm has enjoyed an advantage over the oth-
er. Third, the volatility of plywood prices makes it possible to compare the distinct ways in which co-ops and capitalist firms respond to price shocks. After proving the superior efficiency of the co-ops, however, Pencavel argues not for their growth and proliferation but rather for capitalist firms to adopt watered-down forms of “worker participation” in the interests of their own profit.

Pencavel re-examines the oft-made argument that co-ops respond perversely to market signals. According to Pencavel’s research, the plywood co-ops generally set their production priorities with the goal of maximizing net income per worker–owner, which does lead them to respond differently from capitalist firms to market signals. When output (plywood) prices increase, co-ops raise wages, not employment levels, whereas capitalist firms raise employment levels, not wages. When output prices decrease, co-ops cut back on wages, not employment levels and hours, while capitalist firms cut back on employment levels and hours, not wages. Co-op workers’ yearly earnings, therefore, vary with plywood prices, while their employment remains relatively stable (53–62).

Based on these observations, Pencavel advances the provocative hypothesis that co-op workers are more risk-tolerant than workers in the capitalist plywood mills. Co-op workers’ yearly earnings and a large portion of their savings, which they invest in shares, are necessarily linked to the same co-op enterprise. In this way, the fate of both their wages and their savings rises and falls with the fate of their co-op, which is, in turn, at the mercy of wildly fluctuating plywood prices. At the same time, co-op workers are willing to endure higher accident rates than their counterparts at capitalist firms in order to maximize their share of the profits. Being both owners and workers, their “owner” side trumps their “worker” side in this case. Pencavel suggests that co-ops and capitalist firms might just appeal to different types of people: the more risk-tolerant are attracted to the co-ops, while the more risk-averse are attracted to the capitalist firms. Pencavel’s hypothesis is plausible; however, it needs to be grounded in the particular historical and political context in which these workers make this choice. Without interviews and oral histories, Pencavel fails to identify any of the other factors, besides “rational” economic choice, that might influence their decision-making.

Pencavel argues that homogeneity among a co-op’s workforce—in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and skill—tends to contribute to a sense of egalitarianism, making democratic decision-making more likely to succeed. He argues that the plywood co-ops have been successful because of workers’ shared “social capital,” which Pencavel deems analogous to other economic inputs. He uses the term to signify the “aspects of the social structure, such as trust, networks, and conventions, that encourage sharing and coordination for mutual advantage” (76).

The problem with this argument is that Pencavel takes “social capital” in the Pacific Northwest for granted, divorcing it completely from its historical and political context. What is the nature of this “social capital” and where does this sense of solidarity come from? It likely comes in large part from the density of working-class organization in the co-op workers’ communities. Its roots may even lie in the well-documented early twentieth-century organizing efforts of the
American Federation of Labor, the Industrial Workers of the World, the Socialist Party, and politically mobilized farmers in this region. Since he places his analysis outside of history, there is no way for the reader to ponder these potential connections. These possibilities, moreover, would not square with his later assertion that the association between co-ops and the Left has “operated against” them by generating “suspicion and hostility toward the co-op idea.”

Pencavel identifies two strands of the co-op tradition. One sees co-ops simply as “groups of self-employed individuals who pool their efforts in an egalitarian manner” with an emphasis on “individual liberty and freedom from government”; the other sees them as “schools of socialism” and as “a weapon in the struggle against capitalism.” Pencavel wants to applaud the “matter-of-fact business values” of the former tradition and disown the latter. He fails to prove, however, that the former has more “social capital” and that it is therefore more viable. It seems just as likely that the opposite is true (88–89).

Pencavel fails to make a crucial distinction between workers’ “participation” and workers’ “control,” missing the main non-economic benefits to the co-ops he examines. He asserts that, “The political argument for worker co-ops and worker participation will be more difficult to maintain if co-ops are shown to be inefficient and wasteful production units or if they are run not by the broad mass of workers but by a small, privileged elite” (8). However, he never details nor defines the “political argument,” nor is he committed to it. Though he never outright opposes workers’ control and cooperation, he does not support it either. The majority of his concrete proposals involve the co-optation of the lessons of cooperation into the management practices of traditional capitalist firms.

Pencavel endorses co-ops because they lead to higher productivity. Since co-op workers are also owners and managers, they largely enforce their own production goals and monitor each other, requiring fewer supervisors. At the same time, they encourage better work performance, which allows them to use their raw material inputs more efficiently. In other words, co-ops make workers work harder. Pencavel uses this insight to argue that capitalist firms, in the interests of higher productivity and profit, should build into their management structures incentives for workers to cooperate. In co-opting the “co-op idea,” he promotes what Kim Moody and others have called the “Saturnization” of capitalist firms. Suggesting that collective bargaining is dead, Pencavel advocates the dismantling of the National Labor Relations Act and calls for the return of company unions and other forms of labor–management collaboration (86).

While workers may want more of a voice on the shop-floor, company unions are not the answer. As much as Pencavel would like to minimize the inherent conflict between management and labor in traditional capitalist firms, it is still in management’s interests to minimize labor costs by capturing the workers’ knowledge and expertise and adopting new modes of production that eliminate those workers. As Moody argues in *Workers in a Lean World*, the labor–management “team” approach may well be a new incarnation of Taylorism for the twenty-first century. Real workers’ control, in which workers do not merely help manage themselves but also command every aspect of their collective en-
terprise, is qualitatively different from workplace participation schemes in which production goals and priorities are still set from above.

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Michel Cordillot, *La Sociale en Amérique. Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement social francophone aux États-Unis, 1848–1922*. Paris: Editions de l’Atelier, 1997. 437 pp. 42.69 € paper.

All who are interested in such diverse topics as the history of immigration to the United States, the diffusion of socialist and anarchist ideas, and the international labor movement will rejoice at the publication of Michel Cordillot’s superb biographical dictionary. It makes visible social actors who have been totally ignored by scholars until recently and reveals the existence of a significant francophone social movement in the United States. It also revises and enlarges our knowledge of utopian communities, socialist and anarchist movements, illuminating especially the linkages that developed between the old and the New World. The book begins with a brief, detailed, and stimulating introduction that suggests new ways to study migration, the processes of integration, and the formation of political organizations among expatriates. Aside from tracing the history of individual lives and francophone groups, Cordillot’s approach gives special priority to the constant interaction of individuals and collective organizations rather than focusing primarily on ideology, political platforms, and organizational structures.

Earlier work by Hubert Perrier’s on socialism in the United States and Ronald Creagh and Rene Bianco on French-speaking anarchists, as well as Michel Cordillot’s own previous studies of Blanqui’s followers in New York has allowed us to follow the role of French activists in the First International’s (IWA) sections in the United States. But *La Sociale en Amérique* now provides us with the biographies of a thousand militants and sympathizers. (One should add that the author has collected an additional 3500 who are not included in the text.) Through these lives we can trace individual political trajectories and map the geography of French activism (Charleroi and MacDonald in the Pennsylvania mines; Spring Valley in those of Illinois, Carona in Kansas, the textile factories of New England, etc.). Among these activists we find both some real characters (e.g. Jean Brault, Edouard David, Marie Hulick) and some who were really influential (e.g. Victor Drury, Lucien Sanial, Louis Goaziou). The dictionary also allows us to examine more clearly successive generations: the revolutionaries of 1848, the followers of Cabet and Fourier, the Communards, and later on the socialists, syndicalists, and trade unionists of the early twentieth century. Another discovery is the presence of French workers, especially in New England textiles, in the International Workers of the World (IWW). The francophone movement, in brief, was constantly renewed with new groups appearing on the scene: some
ephemeral, others more lasting, some like *Les Affames* (The Starved) or *Les Indomptables* (The Untamables) or *Les Niveleurs* (The Levellers) with picturesque names. Equally impressive is the proliferation of newspapers of all tendencies. Only a few examples can be mentioned: in New York, *Le Bulletin de l’Union Republicaine de Langue Francaise*, *Le Libertaire*, *Le Revendicateur* and *Le Socialiste*; in Pennsylvania, *Le Reveil des Mineurs* and *La Torpille* (The Torpedo); in New Orleans, *l’Equite*, *La Commune*, and *l’Union des Travailleurs*, which had exceptional longevity, appearing from 1901–1916. Cordillot’s work on the immigrant press complements the equally admirable studies of Dirk Hoerder and his research team at the University of Bremen.

The composition and dimensions of this *peuple militant*, invisible up till now, becomes fully apparent: its geography, the diversity of its trades and occupations, lengths of stay in the United States and repatriation. All of this makes possible detailed comparisons with other immigrant groups. As for the diffusion of socialist and anarchist ideas, one finds here valuable data on the role of mediators, the character and content of contemporary debates, and the many links between American and European movements. Political practices are detailed (demonstrations, meetings, fund-raising, etc.) so are cultural ones (newspapers, libraries, theater groups, banquets, burials, and socialist baptisms, etc.). We also grasp the symbolic importance of commemorative events: July 14th, the Revolution of 1848, the Commune (March 18th), and the Hanging of the Chicago Martyrs. Enduring forms of solidarity are also evident in the collection of donations for Communard widows and orphans, for the liberation of the Lawrence strike leaders Ettor and Giovanitti in 1912, and for the victims of the Courrieres mining disaster. Finally, also noteworthy is the great diversity of organizational forms: from utopian communities, agricultural colonies, cooperatives, trade union clubs, masonic lodges, and mutual help associations to armed self-defense militias. In short, this is a remarkable and fascinating work that should suggest many new paths of research to younger scholars. Their future explorations would be the best homage that can be paid to this Franco-American movement whose character and significance Michel Cordillot has done so much to reconstruct.

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Cecelia Bucki, *Bridgeport’s Socialist New Deal, 1915–36*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001. 300 pp. $35.00 cloth.

Janet Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. 271 pp. $45.00 cloth; $16.95 paper.

What impact did the New Deal have at the local level? In these two volumes from the University of Illinois Press series, “The Working Class in American
History,” historians Janet Irons and Cecelia Bucki use the vehicle of the case study to present detailed answers to this question. In so doing, each scholar makes a valuable contribution to our understandings of social and political change in the era of Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR). Looking at parts of the South (textile mill towns in North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and eastern Tennessee), Irons explores how white textile workers responded to changes in labor relations under the New Deal, a response that culminated in the failed 1934 general textile strike. In her study of Bridgeport, Connecticut, Bucki provides a sophisticated urban history, situating workers, ethnicity, class, and the economy firmly within a larger narrative of organized labor’s quest for political power.

For white workers in the South’s textile industry, Irons argues that the 1933 passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) marked a crucial turning point in their work lives. The NIRA’s section 7(a), with its guarantee of collective bargaining, unleashed a wave of labor organizing. While textile workers had negotiated with mill owners since the 1880s, both formally and informally, they now had a chance to reverse the owners’s longstanding desire to employ fewer workers and run the mills for longer periods of time: the dreaded “stretch-out.” Irons, drawing on the work of anthropologist James Scott, details the history of battles over “customary rights” for control of the rhythms and conditions of work. Workers and mill owners developed a quasi-mutualistic relationship, uneasily balancing business’s need for stability with workers’s desires for autonomy.

The heart of Irons’s study draws on her impressive work in National Recovery Administration (NRA) records. The NRA enacted codes governing competition, suspending the nation’s antitrust laws to end “cutthroat” pricing and creating boards to supervise labor relations. While the NRA code-writing and enforcement process quickly became dominated by the largest players in each industry, as Louis Galambos, Ellis Hawley, and Robert Himmelberg have shown, Irons gives us the other side of this story. Mining the NRA’s collection of letters from workers to the Cotton Textile Industry National Industrial Relations Board, Irons chronicles with care and subtlety how the NRA looked from the vantage points of the workers. They were faced with a political structure that promised collective bargaining but relied upon a bureaucracy that too often ignored their complaints. Frustrated, textile workers answered the call of union leaders for a general strike to “test” the capacity of the New Deal to live up to its aspirations. Three turbulent weeks after the strike began, though, the United Textile Workers (UTW) called it off, responding to the assurances of FDR and others that a new labor relations board would address their complaints. Their grievances were not addressed, however. Many of the workers who struck were blacklisted by the mill owners, who continued to implement the stretch-out.

While Irons’s tight focus on textile workers and the fate of their strike succeeds in restoring their voices and this event to the historical record—an impressive feat—this focus does have consequences for her treatment of the strike’s political context. To her credit, Irons is explicit about her decision to
structure her work around the strike’s causes and consequences. However, Irons might have investigated in greater detail the steps behind FDR’s decision to appoint John Winant, a former New Hampshire governor, to lead an investigation into the strike. Winant’s report was employed by FDR and Labor Secretary Frances Perkins to persuade the UTW to call off the strike. While Irons does briefly treat this important episode, her analysis of the experiences of the textile workers is more sure handed than her treatment of public policy. While Irons’s concern with rescuing the agency of working people from the condescension of posterity is impressive, it should be noted that she does not deal with the dynamics of the workplace itself, nor with the lives of workers at home within their communities. More attention to the social environment surrounding the mills might have led to a richer assessment of the remarkable community solidarity created during the strike. Finally, the focus on the local level leads to the occasionally odd misstep. David Dubinsky, for example, is described as an example of “the traditional AFL posture of voluntarism” (121), circa 1934, without any mention that scarcely a year later he would join with John L. Lewis and others to found the Committee for Industrial Organization.

While the New Deal provoked textile workers in the South to organize themselves via labor unions and to strike unsuccessfully, workers in Bridgeport responded to the New Deal by organizing at the ballot box, as Cecelia Bucki demonstrates in her well-researched history of Bridgeport, the self-proclaimed “Industrial Capitol of Connecticut” (101). There, Bridgeport’s Socialist Party (SP) relied upon the city’s many ethnic organizations to build a broad base of support, drawing much of its membership and leadership from American Federation of Labor (AFL) building trades locals. Led by slate roofer and AFL leader Jasper McLevy, the SP became a political force, with McLevy winning the mayor’s office in 1933 and the SP taking twelve of the city council’s sixteen seats. Not simply protest candidates with an inchoate platform, McLevy and the SP ran for office making an explicit case that they were best suited to attend to Bridgeport’s budget, allocate the tax burden, and maintain local government services in an efficient fashion.

Once in power, McLevy and the SP had to deal with a powerful business community. One of the many strengths of Bucki’s study is her ability to integrate Bridgeport’s economic and business history into her account of the SP’s rise to power. With an economy built in part by the industrial demands of World War One, by the Great Depression Bridgeport was home to such firms as General Electric, Remington Arms, the Singer Manufacturing Company, and Stanley Works. After taking charge of city government, the SP had to grapple with the influence these firms held. McLevy tried to accommodate elements of the business community he perceived as non-partisan, allowing men like Singer executive George Eames to remain on various governmental boards (169). Charges from some socialists that he was too moderate did not hurt him politically; McLevy was resoundingly reelected in 1935 and served twelve consecutive terms as mayor, leaving office in 1957. Throughout her study, the depth and range of Bucki’s research often dazzles. She is aware of Bridgeport’s status as an outlier.
in the American political experience and marshals her evidence to speak to historiographic debates with an elegant touch.

The strengths of these rewarding books also reflect their limitations. While each one demonstrates the power of a well-designed case study to unpack local events and explicate how changes in the federal government resonated on the ground, both have some trouble moving from the particular to the general. As local studies, these works inevitably cannot dwell on how difficult it was (and is) to create national state capacities that can reshape society. Indeed, it took the New Dealers most of the 1930s to simply begin remaking the nation's labor and financial markets, forge a new electoral coalition, and establish the principle that intervention by the federal government could be used to benefit people directly. Though neither book directly considers these points from a national perspective, they both implicitly support this conclusion. These books are also awkwardly bound by their periodization. While each study stakes out important claims for understanding the New Deal era, neither one actually delves that deeply into the period: one year, in the case of Irons; three for Bucki. To be sure, both speculate about longer-run implications for their locales, but it would have been interesting to see these scholars carry their analyses further along in time. On balance, these two studies contribute as much to our understanding of the conditions preceding the political and labor activism of the 1930s—what Steve Fraser has called the “dress rehearsal for the New Deal”—as to our understanding of the New Deal itself. These criticisms, however, should not detract from the real achievements that Irons and Bucki have made in providing us with a vivid and significant picture of how different localities began to respond to the political sea change initiated in 1933.

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Nelson Lichtenstein, State of the Union: A Century of American Labor. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. 347 pp. $29.95 cloth.

Nelson Lichtenstein is one of the most influential historians of the twentieth-century labor movement in the United States. In his most recent book, he examines the labor movement’s current difficulties and prospects, bringing to bear on the discussion both his impressive historical knowledge and his own engagement in current efforts to reinvigorate the movement and to rebuild alliances between the unions and intellectuals. The book is not an analysis of the dynamics of workers’ struggles or even an institutional study of the labor movement, but rather a close examination of the declining importance of the “labor question” (as it was commonly called a century ago) in the intellectual and political life of the United States since the end of the 1930s.

Moreover, despite the promise of its title, the book offers little more than a tip of the hat to the Progressive Era or to the world revolutionary upheavals
that followed World War One. Its point of departure is the resurgence and reform of American trade unionism in the context of the New Deal’s quest to stimulate economic recovery by augmenting mass purchasing power and to guarantee employees “the right to organize and bargain . . . free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers” (25). Lichtenstein argues that New Deal relief and reform measures generated not a sense of public dependency on the state, but rather an active sense of citizenship, in sharp contrast to critiques of “faceless bureaucrats” voiced first from the Right during 1940s and then from the New Left in the 1960s, and ultimately with decisive impact from the New Right in our own times.

Although Lichtenstein attributes the unprecedented income growth between 1940 and 1973 and the advent of job security and employee benefits for workers outside of union ranks, as well as within them, to the continuous rise of union membership (outside of the South), to pattern bargaining, and to “the government’s ultra-Keynesian mobilization program” (56), he rejects the idea that labor, management, and the state had achieved a social compact after 1945. Pointing to the relentless struggle over “managerial prerogatives,” to strike activity from the mid-1940s to the early 1970s at levels “higher than at any time, before or since” (136) (curiously, the period from 1916–1922 has been somehow omitted from this calculation; see P. K. Edwards, Strikes in the United States, 1881–1974. New York, 1981), to fierce and endemic battles against unionization and pattern bargaining beyond the boundaries of oligopolistic industries with strong unions, and to a steady procession of factories away from urban union strongholds, he insists that their relations with corporate America never appeared “agreeable or stable” to union activists (99).

Labor’s post-war defeats in Congress decisively shaped the postwar labor movement. The 1947 Taft–Hartley Act placed tight legal curbs on workers’ solidarity, favored firm-centered bargaining (which by the 1980s had bequeathed the country 175,000 different collective bargaining agreements and huge union administrative staffs), and effectively fenced the labor movement out of domains where it was not already established. The law’s exclusion of supervisory employees from bargaining units was in time to confront clerical workers’ unions with jurisdictional nightmares and encourage employers to compel supervisors to serve as the first line of defense against unions. Simultaneously, the demise of the Wagner–Murray–Dingell bill, which would have expanded social security and included universal health insurance, affixed the rapidly expanding domain of health care and pension benefits to workers’ places of employment.

Although the legislative accomplishments of the New Deal continued to define national and northern state politics until the late 1970s, prominent intellectuals of both liberal and left-wing backgrounds no longer linked their aspirations for social reform to what C. Wright Mills called labor’s “new men of power.” In the country’s printed word and academic lectures, the ghost of Max Weber was evoked to explain the “industrial pluralism” and the “organizational revolution” that had subordinated the market to social regulation by “organization men,” while consumption had replaced production as the social and moral focus
of social life. Lichtenstein’s insightful discussion of the variants of this intellectual framework embraced by both 1950s liberals and then by 1960s New Leftists is a high point of the book.

The 1957–1958 McClellan Committee hearings on union racketeering loom especially large in this analysis, because they generated doubts about the very legitimacy of the union movement throughout the population. There is, however, an ironic quality to this portion of the story, which deserves closer attention. John F. Kennedy rose to the Presidency through the role of his brother Robert as the committee’s aggressive general counsel and his own sponsorship of the Landrum–Griffen bill, which enshrined the objective proclaimed half a century earlier by the Open Shop Drive: to rescue workers’ from domination by union leaders. Unions dropped Kennedy’s name from their denunciations of the bill abruptly, after he won the Democratic nomination. Yet it was President Kennedy who, in return for American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) support during his campaign, issued Executive Order 10988 opening the way to a surge of organizing and bargaining by public employees, and, following their example, clerical workers and academics, thus reshaping the demographic characteristics and social roots of the union movement itself by the end of the century.

Moreover, the new union constituencies were profoundly inspired by the achievements of the civil rights and feminist movements. Despite Kennedy’s indebtedness to the southern wing of his party for his nomination and election, persistent civil disobedience by African Americans breathed new life into the Congressional struggle for civil rights legislation, which had been stymied since 1945 and forced the President to declare his support. A new social agenda, considered a revitalized New Deal by some observers, shaped the legislation of the ensuing fifteen years, but, writes Lichtenstein, “the summer of 1963 may well be taken as the moment when the discourse of American liberalism shifted decisively out of the New Deal–labor orbit and into a world in which the racial divide colored all politics” (191–192).

The discussion of the new “rights consciousness,” which this legislation brought to the workplace and to all American life, while union influence continued to decline, court rulings narrowed the range of permissible rank-and-file action, and pattern bargaining was dismantled, is the most compelling section of State of the Union. During the decades since enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Congress and the courts have legitimized a vast new body of individual claims based on discrimination, work hazards, disabilities, pregnancy, and pensions. While unfair labor practice charges under the National Labor Relations Act bring workers minimal reparation at best, suits brought under the amended Civil Rights Act can yield large compensatory damages. In response companies have publicized their “diversity” policies and created large Human Resources departments, though they also now often require individual arbitration contracts as a condition of employment. Business lobbyists lament that government regulations haunt them at every turn.

Government policies to improve the social wage are conspicuously absent
from this version of individual rights, as is collective empowerment, which is indispensable to both the effective defense of the individual and a democratic polity. *State of the Union* appropriately concludes with an examination of ways in which the union inspiration might merge with the new rights consciousness and with forms of organizing that do not conform to the Wagner Act’s bargaining unit model. He finds in Los Angeles an amalgam of established and innovative styles of collective action. They remind us that a labor movement is more than a trade union movement.

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