

intuition, motivational ability, tireless organizing, and absorption of his intellectuals' positions" (p. 138).

The author also makes a significant contribution by locating Posadas's eccentricity in the broader context of the 1950s and 1960s, when both the possibility of nuclear apocalypse and interest in ufology and the space race were actually widespread. Gittlitz rightly points out that the peak of Posadas's political influence "overlapped with the more ardent period of the space race" (p. 10).

Both in the introduction and in the conclusion of his book, Gittlitz – whose first name, as with J. Posadas, remains a completely mystery to the reader – seems to suggest that there is something more than irony in the recent reappraisal of Posadism through memes and jokes, namely the appeal of apocalyptic perspectives in a time of crisis and climate catastrophe. Even if one is not willing to go that far, it is worth celebrating the idea that prompted the author to write a useful book that sheds light on the history of revolutionary ideas and movements in the twentieth century.

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GOLDFIELD, MICHAEL. *The Southern Key. Class, Race, and Radicalism in the 1930s and 1940s*. Oxford University Press, New York [etc.] 2020. ix, 416 pp. £32.99.

Michael Goldfield's new book, although thirty years or more in the making, is as timely as can be. It helps to explain why the United States fails to live up to basic human rights standards deemed normal in most of the Western capitalist world, especially as they relate to people of color and workers. American unions have suffered catastrophic setbacks since the 1960s, and *The Southern Key* explains why. The eleven former slaveholding states that seceded to form the southern Confederacy, and tangential southern states heavily influenced by Black labor exploitation and racism, remain the Achilles heel of the labor movement and also "the key" to America's failure. Failure of labor organizing in the South has undermined unions as a force in the US, created a political base for the anti-union Republican Party, and led many working-class voters into the ranks of the manipulative, racist, anti-labor, and pro-business politics of Donald Trump. The result today is readily seen both in the South and across the US: high rates of poverty, exceptional violence including police brutality, state-mandated executions and mass incarceration, and widespread educational, healthcare, and policy failures. Yet, a reactionary Republican Party and business can rely on both white middle-class and working-class votes to stay in power, while creating the worst racial-economic inequality in the Western world. Goldfield sees this failure rooted in the South, but not so much in southern white culture, as some current commentary suggests, as in the economic and political structures of power that rest on the failures of union and labor organizing. Hence, the fate of social justice in the United States "today as in the past lies in the ability of its workers to organize themselves collectively, especially across

racial, ethnic, and gender lines. The last great chance to do this occurred during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s.” (p. 8)

During his life as a scholar of numerous works, and before that as an organizer, Goldfield has asked probing questions about the possibilities of organizing for change at the grass roots. His research into this region and this time period makes it clear why changing the South has been and remains “the key” to either failure for social justice or for transforming the nation from a fortress of reaction to a place that might resemble principles of dedication to “life, liberty, and happiness” that the country supposedly is based upon. He draws on his many years of deep research into all manner of archives, remarkable mastery of the relevant secondary literature, matched with a sharp political economist and global point of view. Goldfield links the current catastrophe for labor in the South and in the US back to an analysis by W.E.B. DuBois, who, in his monumental research on Black Reconstruction after the Civil War, made the point that the failure of white workers to join with formerly enslaved workers for their common economic demands undermined the possibility of substantive change.

Goldfield is a gold mine for labor scholars. It is impossible to briefly sum up this encyclopedic book; rather, one has to wade into it, as Goldfield takes us into the weeds of debates within the Left, in inter-union conflicts, and deep dives into key industries: coal mining, steel, textiles, and wood. Goldfield goes back to the roots of each industry and each organizing situation in probing detail. He is keen on the possibility that the failures of southern labor organizing were not inevitable. His work is haunted by “what ifs?”. What if union leaders in the US had been more principled and radical? What if the era of the New Deal and World War II, in the crucial 1930s and 1940s, had turned the US in a more social democratic direction, instead of toward Cold War anti-communism that helped to wreck many unions after World War II? What if the Communist Party, which played an outsized role in organizing unions in that era, had not acted like “trained seals” for Stalin and the Soviet Union, and had not compromised with union leaders who bought into the Cold War and failed to challenge racism within labor’s ranks? Hence, he gives examples of failure but also counter examples of bi-racial union organizing that succeeded and brought into power more progressive political leaders in some states and cities. He reminds us that, in 1945, more than twenty-five per cent of the labor force in Alabama belonged to unions – a higher percentage of union workers than in any state today (p. 9). He highlights how unionization and working-class organizing sometimes succeeded against all odds, in certain industrial enclaves and in unions of the Left that successfully crossed racial barriers to gain a foothold.

These examples “indicate that militant, often interracial unionism was possible during our period, even in the states of the Deep South”. Unionization often changed the political calculus to give working people a better chance at a decent life and better elected leaders as well. Because of union strength, Louisiana once repealed the so-called right-to-work laws that have now been allowed by the US Supreme Court and plague even once heavily unionized states like Michigan. On the other hand, he documents in extensive detail how unions often failed and how the South regressed after a period of brief improvement for labor in the 1940s. This union failure has been “the key” to political failure for a progressive agenda over many years and affected politics at the national level. “My overriding thesis is that American politics today is understandable” and “largely derivative from the failures of interracial organizing in the South as a whole during the 1930s to 1950s” (p. 10).

Goldfield offers a splendid review of a story we southern labor historians know well, as he works through many of the archives and characters we too have studied, but with sharp insights and observations that we may have forgotten or never thought about. He is searing

in his blunt treatment of labor leaders within the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), in the 1930s and especially in the post-World War II era. I particularly enjoyed Goldfield's blunt assessment of white labor leaders who so misled the CIO's "Operation Dixie" organizing campaign after the war. Its director, Vann Bittner, "was not only a conservative, virulent anti-communist, but authoritarian, racially insensitive, unimaginative, dull and boring, to say the least" (p. 305). That campaign largely ignored African American and women organizers and work forces, misunderstood where "structural power" existed for unions in certain industries, woefully embarking on the difficult task of organizing the largely white textile industry while almost ignoring Black workers eager to organize in wood working, cotton compress, and other extractive industries, and cutting itself off from the New Deal oriented labor and civil rights forces building in the South. "Operation Dixie's narrow approach of rejecting rather than soliciting the broadest range of allies was arrogant, ill-informed, and shortsighted", he writes. In sum, it could "be seen as a primer on how not to organize" (p. 330).

CIO leaders went in a right-wing direction, undermining union "associational" power by abandoning other social movements in the name of anti-communism. What this meant in practice is that the labor movement in the South did not develop ties with the burgeoning civil rights movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s, undermining the unions themselves but also limiting the scope of the Black freedom movement to overturning segregation laws and laws prohibiting Black people from voting, while falling short of the kind of economic improvements that Martin Luther King, Jr., A. Phillip Randolph, and other Black leaders sought. He spreads the blame for this to Phil Murray, the United Steelworker's Union president who also became president of the CIO, leading its post-war purge of people and unions suspected of being in or influenced by the Communist Party, causing a loss of nearly a million members, including some of the most militant and skilled organizers of the American labor movement. He also pinpoints failures of the Left, particularly the Communist Party, which he characterizes as "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde". On one hand, he gives examples of communists undertaking some of the most important organizing and serving as the "Inheritor of the Mantles of US Radicalism", especially when it came to fighting for Black equality in and outside of the labor movement. On the other, he excoriates party leaders for selling out to the right wing of the CIO (including Murray, who it supported), for its sectarian attacks on socialists and Trotskyites and even its support for government suppression of the Socialist Workers Party, for allowing top bureaucrats of the Party to ignore, suppress, and mislead the rank and file, and for blindly supporting Stalin and the Soviet Union. Goldfield draws heavily on Trotskyite James Cannon's analysis, and adopts his conclusion that "the fundamental cause of the CP's demise [...] was its moral bankruptcy, a characteristic that became more and more apparent to militant workers as well as to liberal and leftist critics" (p. 365).

Although I enjoyed his blunt assessments, which seem mostly correct to me, I question his seemingly overarching belief that "if only union leaders and organizers and particularly Leftists had acted and thought differently, the South could have been organized and changed the whole direction of America's political history for the last fifty years or more". I interviewed many of CIO organizers, Black and white, of this era. Communist labor organizers like Red Davis or Ed McCrea in Tennessee or Karl Korstad in North Carolina also criticized the failures of both the Communist Party and union leadership, and they largely disregarded those at the top of the organizing pyramid. They found that real possibilities for change happened on the ground, in industries and communities where Black workers like Clarence Coe, Leroy Boyd, or George Holloway in Memphis were open to radicalism but only if

it produced results. Even revolutionaries in the southern labor movement recognized that capitalism was here to stay after the early 1930s, and fought like hell to get even the smallest pragmatic advances for workers. Throughout the book, Goldfield seems to feel that it could have all been different “if only” workers and their union leaders had taken the right path. At times, he seems to think the working class could have been a revolutionary force with different leadership, something that seems unlikely. He also argues “against the preoccupation with laws, legal frameworks, and the agency of the state” (p. viii), and downplays the importance of government protections for the right to organize and for due process and fairness at the workplace. He places a refreshing emphasis on working-class agency as he takes us back into the efforts of mine workers, wood workers, steel workers, longshoremen, and others in the South, who often organized themselves. But he downplays, it seems to me, the tremendous power of repression and repressive labor laws in America. The tragedy of southern labor organizing, to me, goes back to the overwhelming power of the police, of government, vigilantes, courts, prisons brought to bear to crush working people and their unions. The US has the most violent anti-labor history in the Western world, with a plethora of daunting examples of how repressive and anti-union corporations and the state have forced southern workers into a box where they are damned if they do – getting fired, beaten, or, even worse, for unionizing – and damned if they don’t – not resisting and falling into the trap of pessimism and failure to exercise their agency to change the situation. And some of them becoming hopeless and hapless and even voting for Donald Trump.

Understanding and dealing with “the Southern key” remains central to which way the US will go. Will the US become, or is it already, a stagnant backwater of racial and economic inequality and injustice, contaminated by right-wing politics that teaches people to fight each other and shields corporate and political power from working-class agency? Or will grass-roots movements once again build up a head of steam and challenge racial capitalism at the workplace and the ballot box? Goldfield offers both hopeful and frightening signs of where things may go in the future, but how we get to a better place in the US remains unknown. For all those who care, Goldfield’s book is essential, as he takes us on a deeply rewarding journey toward understanding the past in order to shape the future.

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LINKHOEVA, TATIANA. *Revolution Goes East. Imperial Japan and Soviet Communism.* [Studies of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University.] Cornell University Press, Ithaca (NY) [etc.] 2020. x, 281 pp. \$27.95. Open Access.

With its ninety-eight-year history and approximately 280,000 members, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) is Japan’s oldest political party and the largest communist party among developed capitalist countries. Research on Japanese left-wing social movements