C. Wright Mills, *The New Men of Power: America's Labor Leaders*, Introduction by Nelson Lichtenstein (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

In recent years, sections of the US intelligentsia have taken more interest in the union movement than has been the case for quite some time. Under the leadership of the "New Voice" slate elected in 1995, the AFL-CIO has charted a course that seeks to expand the ranks of the unions through aggressive organizing while trying to convince US business to take the "high road" and boost competitiveness through cooperation with labour. Distancing itself from long-held Cold War international policies, the AFL-CIO has also reached out to university students and faculty in search of allies and committed young staffers. The "blue-green" alliance of unions and environmentalists in the global justice movement so prominent after the Seattle protests of 1999 further increased support for labour in progressive circles. While there has been no change in the Canadian Labour Congress analogous to that in the AFL-CIO, union involvement in global justice protests has had some similar effects in Canada. Thus a new paperback edition of the classic 1948 study *The New Men of Power* by the radical sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916-1962) with an introduction by prominent US labour historian Nelson Lichtenstein must have seemed a smart publishing move, especially before the change in political climate after 11 September, 2001.

The New Men of Power was researched and written in an historical moment whose vantage point may be hard for some contemporary readers to grasp. US unions had grown enormously after finally succeeding in organizing large numbers of less-skilled workers in mass production industries and elsewhere. The forward march of the unions had not yet been decisively shown to be contained by bureaucratic conservatism and Cold War politics. The launch of a labour party did not appear outlandish. A major economic crisis seemed possible; the long post-war expansion was still ahead. Mills, then working at the Bureau of Applied Social Research attached to Columbia University, also moved in the world of New York's anti-Stalinist left. Here he was influenced by the "Third Camp" socialists whose best-known figure was Max Shachtman. At this time, Mills had not yet distanced himself from working-class socialist politics.

The subject of *The New Men of Power* is the US union officialdom. Unlike the subsequent generation of work in US labour sociology, Mills was not interested in conducting research to help make industrial relations more harmonious. Rather, Mills set out to study top union leaders because of their key political role: "What the US does, or fails to do, may be the key to what will happen in the world. What the labor leader does, or fails to do, may be the key

to what will happen in the US" (3). Mills argues that the "the main drift" of US society is towards a political economy characterized by labour-management cooperation under the regulation of an increasingly undemocratic state preparing for war and integrating unions and other organizations into its apparatus. When the next slump hits, the politically-passive majority of the population will become active and look to the competing ideological currents that Mills dubs "political publics" and discusses in the book's first chapter. "Who will catch the people when the system fails them?" (28) is the burning question. Mills fears that those he calls the "sophisticated conservatives" are best prepared to triumph in the coming crisis, and that they will accelerate the "main drift," using the union officialdom to control workers at home while waging war abroad. Union leaders are strategically important because the unions are the only organizations which could bring about an alternative progressive and democratic resolution to the crisis.

This perspective is presented in the book's early pages and concluding chapters. In between, the bulk of *The New Men of Power* describes and analyses US union leaders, drawing on empirical social research, including three sets of questionnaires mailed to over one thousand AFL and CIO leaders in 1946. These chapters outline the basic shape of the two labour federations of the day, focussing on their leaders, whose social origins and views on various issues are examined. From this research emerges a picture of "responsible" leaders going along with the "main drift" and guided more by expediency than with the liberal politics they most often espouse. Doubting the ability of such a group to rise to the demands of the coming crisis, Mills concludes that "union-made intellectuals" offer "the only guarantee of the union of power and ideas" (287) that he deems necessary.

As Lichtenstein's useful introduction suggests, Mills's account of US economics and politics has obvious weaknesses. These do not, however, deprive the book of relevance to contemporary readers. Unlike most academic social science today, radical or not, *The New Men of Power* is written in a clear, engaging style and does not hesitate to deal directly with political dilemmas and propose strategy. Its insights about the union officialdom, while less innovative now than when they originally appeared, have lost none of their force. Mills's observations about radical activists evolving into conservative officials and his description of the officialdom as standing between employers and workers and "operating as a shock absorber for both" (224) have been repeatedly confirmed during the rank and file upsurge in the US and Canada between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s and the subsequent quarter-century offensive by employers and state power against labour.

That said, Mills's Weberian account of the union officialdom as one of several formal bureaucratic hierarchies of modern society is theoretically inade-

quate. It does not provide an adequate explanation of how union officials come to exist within class relations as a social layer with distinct interests. Nor does it capture how bureaucracy in the working-class movement involves the relations between members and officials. This is not unrelated to the book's weakness in terms of working-class history, especially in light of its enormous advances first sparked by New Left scholarship. *The New Men of Power* only mention African-Americans and women in passing in a handful of places, with no sense of the significance of racism and sexism for class formation and politics in the US. Mills's suggestion of the importance of worker intellectuals is correct. Unfortunately, it is plain that the heirs of the leaders he studied in the mid-1940s have not helped develop the kind of worker intellectuals needed to deal with the crisis wrought by decades of bureaucratic business unionism, and this book provides no clues about how they can be fostered.

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Robert Seguin, *Around Quitting Time: Work and Middle-Class Fantasy in American Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

Robert Seguin, in common with many visitors to the United States, is both fascinated and disturbed by the absence of any substantial discourse on class conflict. For a country that has experienced such violent labour struggles and visibly exhibits so much disparity in wealth and opportunity this absence has proved to be a constant puzzle. Seguin, in *Around Quitting Time*, examines the role and concept of the middle class in perpetuating and explaining this lack of class discourse. In the United States almost anybody from an assembly line worker to a wealthy stockbroker can make a legitimate claim to be middle class. Seguin identifies this ubiquity of middle classnessness as ironically and inextricably entwined within the American belief in a classless society. The novels under study here, by Theodore Dreiser, Willa Cather, Nathanael West, John Barth and Ernest Hemmingway, in various ways dramatise and engage with the development of what he terms a "middle class imaginary" from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s.

This middle class imaginary is produced between the real material conditions of life and the realm of ideas and cultural discourse. This space is significant in that it creates a particular identity – the middle class – which *appears* to have a real anchor in the material conditions, but which is in fact ideologically driven and only a partial reflection of real conditions: