

erary culture was determined not only by novelists and poets, but also by journalistic gatekeepers who had their own complicated relationships with the Communist Party and the various publications that circled its orbit. Wald is certainly correct to do this, and accentuating the function of criticism in shaping the literary left might also describe the unique mantle Wald has assumed as a scholar who has himself played a vital role in both restoring and interpreting the conflicting meanings and messy biographies of twentieth-century radical literature. His copious research and generous reach beyond the canon of writers and narrow periodization of the cultural left has opened radical scholarship to a wildly divergent set of personalities and perspectives. There is much here that will likely precipitate serious scholarly debate. As with those fearless leftists who built a twentieth century literary movement during the darkest years of the Cold War, Wald reminds scholars that keeping radical ideas in circulation might be worth the risk.

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**Jennifer Luff, *Commonsense Anticommunism: Labor and Civil Liberties Between the Wars* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).**

Jennifer Luff's book documents and interprets the key role played by labour conservatives in launching and perpetuating twentieth-century red scares in the United States. Her exhaustive archival work documents collaboration between labour conservatives and the big business dominated National Civic Federation, as well as local, state and federal governments (and especially the Federal Bureau of Investigation) in many behind the scenes efforts to crush labour's left. Her account sets a high standard of research and has important implications for how we understand the purge of Communists and much of the left from the U.S. labour movement after World War II. It reflects an interpretive consensus among many researchers since the opening of files of state secrets in the former Soviet Union that must be appreciated but also questioned and challenged.

Most brilliantly, Luff documents the role of American Federation of Labor (AFL) leaders, from Samuel Gompers to William Green and beyond, in obsessively opposing all forms of radicalism within the American labour movement. The AFL's predominantly craft-oriented unionists, nearly all of them white men, adopted "labor conservatism" and fought pragmatically for the bread and butter interests of white, male union members in their crafts, while opposing the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), communists, socialists, anarchists, Trotskyists, and assorted syndicalists seeking to abolish capitalism. During World War I, Gompers and the AFL rabidly supported government repression of anti-

imperialists and war opponents. Luff writes, “Anti-radicalism was bred in the bones of the AFL, and anti-communism grew organically out of AFL leaders’ ideological opposition to socialism and syndicalism” (5). Luff makes these efforts very clear, but in this writer’s opinion could do more to also highlight how the AFL excluded immigrants, people of color, and women in order to control skilled labor markets and keep unions conservative and white.

Despite the AFL’s record of rabid anti-radicalism and disregard for civil liberties, Luff finds that in the 1920s labour conservatives veered away from indiscriminate repression to adopt “commonsense anticommunism.” After witnessing the dire destruction of the right to organize wrought by the U.S. Justice Department’s Palmer Raids and the post-war red scare, the AFL continued to target and purge labour radicals from its ranks but also bridled at continuing to hand over repressive power to the state. This was a logical position to take at a time when Republican Party anti-unionists ran the federal government and employer Open Shop campaigns pushed unions into a steep decline. Commonsense dictated that AFL leaders stop giving the state further means for its own destruction. This did not, however, alter their fundamental political and ideological conservatism.

Luff provides a sophisticated, well-documented analysis of how labour conservatism continued to evolve. In a period of potential social revolution in the 1930s, AFL conservatives returned to a more rabid form of anti-radicalism, even opposing much of the New Deal’s labor reforms as well as the rise of industrial unionism. The AFL specialized in ferreting out labour leftists and led the way to enacting state anti-communist laws and police investigations; they even became accomplices to the various incarnations of the scurrilous U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities. Luff documents a shocking degree of mean-spirited, manipulative, self-centered anti-radicalism within the AFL, one that continued to include collaboration with business leaders and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. She contrasts this to the FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover’s insistence that the red scare stay within the law, but her judgment that “Hoover’s rectitude helped protect radical workers from AFL-instigated repression” (6) seems far-fetched. No one was protecting radical workers in the U.S.

Luff’s account is innovative, exhaustive, and compelling, but she gives subtle credence to the AFL’s anti-communism, concluding that the revelations of the former Soviet archives to some degree “vindicate” labour conservatives in their paranoid view of Communists and leftists (4). In her view, post-1960s revisionist historians (including myself) who have critiqued the ill effects of the red scare and documented the important role of Communists in fighting racism have “rehabilitated the reputation of American Communists” and “sanitized the CP.” She cites “Soviet control of the American Communist Party” and CP espionage cases to typify Communists as people who worked with “Soviet handlers” (5, 217). These, of course, are the very charges leveled by both liberal and con-

servative anti-Communists (even including A. Philip Randolph) during the red scare after World War II. She does not necessarily adopt these views, but nor does she challenge the language or perspective of anti-communism. As a result, she seems to return to an older version of history that sees Communist or supposed Communist labour organizers mainly as the pawn of a foreign power.

There is plenty to criticize about the CP. But missing in this book, in my view, is a qualification of the anti-Communist critique as it applied on the ground to labor activists. Jack O'Dell, one of these organizers, says that none of the African Americans he met who joined the CP did so to support Stalin. The people I interviewed talked about labour and civil rights and changing the South. Some in labour's left were Communist Party members but many more simply identified themselves as militant progressives. Anti-communism attacked all of them and poisoned the political atmosphere in the labour movement. Her documentation of the perfidious practices of many AFL leaders speaks for itself (see her treatment of what they did in Pennsylvania, for example). That is not the case with her characterizations of Communists and supposed Communists within the CIO, which require explanation. What historians have learned from the workers and organizers on labour's left do not appear to balance out or inform this account.

She does clearly acknowledge in her conclusion that the consequences of commonsense anti-communism proved dire. AFL-CIO support for the Cold War rationalized a host of horrors: genocidal death squads used against Indian peasants in Guatemala and anti-labour juntas throughout Latin America, purges of labour organizers in Europe, and bloody repression in Southeast Asia and Africa. Many activists today view the era in which the CIO purged eleven unions with nearly a million members as the AFL and CIO together raided their membership as a moment in which the unions turned away from organizing the unorganized and building social movements. The purge of labour's left also undermined social movements in the 1960s, which remained largely devoid of links to the working class. And the legacy of anti-radicalism still prevails today, even as "communism" has practically disappeared and unions are a shell of their former selves.

Still, despite the obvious and terrible effects of anti-communism, I often found Luff's otherwise marvelous book to be complacent or perhaps merely fatalistic about "commonsense anti-communism." The purge of the Left provided a bridge between the more conservative craft and more liberal industrial union leaders, who joined the AFL and CIO together in 1955. She concludes, "A general unanimity prevailed within both the AFL and CIO leadership: Communism was incompatible with unionism and the only question was how to stamp out the remnants of Communist influence within the federation." In her view, "as things turned out, it is hard to imagine an alternate course of events" (220). Yet, in reading the history of the vibrant labour and social movements of