

General Vaidya by their endearing nicknames, “Sukha” and “Jinda” [155, 191, 201, 208]), but she also parrots many of their views, particularly in regard to Sikh history. She claims, for example, that “the lives of many of the major figures in Sikh [in the Sikh tradition] are not shadowy legends but matters of historical record.” (74) This simply is not true. Contemporary historical records of the Gurus or of those traditionally considered Sikh martyrs, which Mahmood implies exist, do not. One can argue, moreover, that she makes this claim herself. Chapter Two presents a very typical popular reading of Sikh history and the role of martyrdom and militancy within that history. Only in the penultimate chapter — and this as an aside in her critique (237) of Harjot Oberoi’s award winning *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (1994) — are we finally told that this presentation is hagiography rather than critical history.

This critique demonstrates most clearly her complicity in the agenda of her interlocutors. Indeed, she attributes to Oberoi’s book a subversive nature which it does not possess by any stretch of the imagination. Oberoi’s book does not undermine Khalistani “resistive” identity. Rather it demonstrates how Sikh religious identity was socially constructed, particularly in the late nineteenth century. Especially unfair is the way that Mahmood assigns to Oberoi a sinister design in the preparation of his book:

The congruence between Oberoi’s vision and that of Brahmanic Hinduism is inescapable for non-Hindu readers [read, Khalistani Sikhs] though unremarked by the author. (239)

Here we hear the familiar echoes of the “Brahmanic conspiracy” which threatens to destroy corporate Sikh identity, a theory which dates back at least to the late nineteenth century and has been especially bandied around since Operation Bluestar in 1984.

It is a pity that this account is so partial, and lacks so much concrete detail, for there is a great need for a thorough and sober account of Khalistani militancy. For this, however, one must get beyond the romance of heroic resistance and provide enough contextualization to demonstrate how horrific and tragic these events were — and continue to be — for all involved.

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David Palmer, *Organizing the Shipyards: Union Strategy in Three Northeast Ports, 1933-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

David Palmer’s *Organizing the Shipyards* offers a richly textured historical account of union organizing in the U.S. shipbuilding industry spanning the pivotal years of the Great Depression through World War II. At first glance this

carefully documented story might appear as merely another link in the already long chain of case studies devoted to worker self-organization — an approach that, in focusing on union-building efforts at the point of production, has been largely discredited by the “new” social history’s more expansive, less economic field of vision. But this casual reading, for the most part, would be wrong. While the main themes as well as much of the substance of this study are rooted in the institutional labour history of old, Palmer extends this paradigm in new directions: first, by deploying an implicitly comparative framework to understand the varying success of unionization in three major Northeast shipyards; and secondly, by highlighting the role of union strategy in each organizing campaign.

The presentation is divided into three parts; each devoted to a different shipyard. Part 1 narrates the story of New York Ship located on the Delaware River in Philadelphia, site of the first real victory for the fledgling Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America (IUMSWA). Success did not come easy at New York Ship. What finally turned the tide was a combination of managerial miscues, labour’s strength in the surrounding areas, openings for unions under the New Deal, and the emergence of a fresh and youthful leadership drawn from the rank and file and representing a broad coalition of socialists, social democrats and conventional trade unionists. It was their energizing vision of progressive, industrial unionism that found a receptive audience both in the shipyards and among their allies within the Roosevelt administration, thus setting in motion a powerful combination of forces that yielded the industry’s first union contract in 1934.

Victory at New York Ship paved the way for organizing Federal Shipbuilding in Kearny, New Jersey, the subject of Part 2. A rapidly expanding and mostly sympathetic work force, growing tensions with management, a physical layout of the yard that was conducive to organizing, and a weak company “union” all contributed to the break through at Federal. But, as Palmer argues in this case and others, “favorable conditions alone did not create a union movement.” The key to victory was developing a strategy, rooted in the experience of the rank and file, that capitalized on their capacity for localized militancy while recognizing the union’s growing need for centralized coordination of collective action. As in so many other instances across a range of industries, the centralizing tendency at Federal won out over direct action, a consequence largely of the perceived threat to the IUMSWA’s aging leadership, whose centrally-directed strategic plans and growing reliance on the Democratic Party led them to become dependent upon a bureaucratic, top down — rather than a democratic, bottom up — mode of exercising power.

Part 3 turns to the campaign waged at Fore River shipyards, a subsidiary of Bethlehem Shipbuilding, located in Quincy, Massachusetts. Unionists at Fore River faced not only a well entrenched company “union,” a weak local labour movement, and a ruthlessly determined management, but also an

increasingly hostile climate of anti-Semitism and intense red-baiting. Outside union organizers, many of them Jewish and/or on the left, were helpless against such odds. It was only after the IUMSWA's seasoned leaders, under pressure from activists within the yard, turned the campaign increasingly over to the rank and file that momentum began shifting toward the union, which went on to score a stunning victory in 1944 over the rival company "union."

The Fore River victory proved to be the high-water mark of shipyard unionism. One year later, the IUMSWA, once the sixth largest CIO union with over 200,000 members, was barely limping along with around 75,000 followers. Continued hemorrhaging during the Cold War weakened the union even more, forcing it to merge with the Machinists in 1986.

Palmer draws some important strategic lessons from the IUMSWA's dramatic rise and fall. In a compelling final chapter, he singles out those "factors of primary importance ... for organizing strategy": proceeding in stages from local to national arenas; cultivating indigenous leadership; developing organizers who can "read" and respond to local conditions; tailoring tactics to fit the particular needs of each campaign; exploiting management's weaknesses; and promoting a view of unionism beyond simply "more, more, more" bread and butter. Where these conditions were not followed or — as at Fore River — followed belatedly, victory came later and the union was less durable.

It is undeniable that strategy, if it is to be effective, must be sensitive to time and place. Sadly, American labour history is replete with numerous counter examples, where "correct lines" and "national campaigns" — imposed from on high by leaders far removed from local conditions — have led to setbacks and outright failure. Palmer has certainly made his case for the advantages of what he terms "the rank and file strategy." Still, his analysis of mobilizing dynamics could go much deeper, beneath the observation that strategy works best when it is localized to probing the relationship more generally between tactics and conditions. Put simply, privileging the local does not in itself offer much guidance for either scholars or organizers. The key question still remains: which particular tactics work best under what specific conditions? Palmer's "rank and file strategy" offers some clues along the way but his study falls short of developing anything like a systematic answer.

At the same time, Palmer has produced a very informative and eminently readable account that is based on a judicious blend of original oral histories and primary archival materials. If the comparison across cases is not as analytically deep as some might like, the attention paid to strategic factors is a welcome reminder that unions do not simply sprout up out of the industrial soil, however fertile it may be, like so many wild mushrooms. Favourable conditions are never enough. Unions must be organized, consciously so, by men and women who each in their own ways calculates the relations of force on both sides, inventories the resources at their disposal, canvasses their fellow

workers, and then chooses from the available repertoires of collective action the one plan of attack that seems at that moment most promising. The ability to choose, and choose wisely, is not a given, just as it is never easy to know when the time is right to move on, discard the old and develop fresh strategies and innovative tactics to confront new and changing conditions. In its focus on the significance of leadership strategy, *Organizing the Shipyards* offers an original and powerful demonstration that strategy does in fact matter, often greatly. It is an important lesson, especially timely as the contemporary American labour movement seeks out new ways of organizing as a means of reinventing itself for the twenty-first century.

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Peter Oliver, *"Terror to Evil-Doers": Prisons and Punishments in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, for the Osgoode Society, 1998).

Peter Oliver's *Terror to Evil-Doers* deals with a favourite subject of social historians, the nineteenth-century transformation of punishment through the growth of imprisonment; but it is not a work of social history. As Oliver himself notes in his introduction, he does not attempt a general history of punishment in nineteenth-century Ontario, concentrating instead on carceral policies and, more particularly, on prison administration. He thus largely leaves aside the social history of crime, of punishment, even of imprisonment itself (spending little time, for example, on daily life in prisons). He also leaves aside that other focus of social historians, juvenile imprisonment, though he does address the imprisonment of other specific groups such as women. Overall, rather than a social history of imprisonment, the book is best described as a straightforward administrative history of prisons, though considerably enriched by Oliver's occasional forays into the nature of crime, criminal justice, social welfare policy, provincial politics, and central-local relations. Two introductory chapters sketch out the characteristics of Upper Canadian criminal justice, concentrating on punishment and on the local gaols; the core of the book, seven chapters in all, deals with the establishment and operation of the Kingston penitentiary, essentially from the 1830s to the 1860s; three further chapters return to non-penitentiary imprisonment, seeing the gaols through to the end of the nineteenth century along with the newer intermediate prisons; a final chapter briefly considers prisoners' aid societies.

Despite its close focus on administration and policy, the book nonetheless holds the promise of an important contribution to scholarship. Apart from juveniles, it covers the full range of criminal imprisonment, thus taking a more