Congdon only hints at the complex (and in this last case, truly Oedipal) ties between the two generations. These, along with the differences in their respective defining experience vis-à-vis communism might offer a clue to their very different stand on it. While the first generation encountered communism in its brief Hungarian incarnation as the utopian episode of the 1919 Republic of Councils, the second generation had come of age during the feverish post-war years of a new, democratic Hungary, followed by the Soviet-controlled communist takeover. And despite the anti-democratic nature of the new communist regime, they deeply identified with the large-scale social and cultural revolution it brought about, not to mention that they owed it their own ascendance to the political and academic elite. This may be the reason why all three representatives of the second generation remained committed to the idea of a democratic socialism.

In this book, as before, Lee Congdon displays a mastery of his subject, including the most arcane details of Hungarian political and intellectual history in the twentieth century. His insistence, however, that intellectuals worthy of that name are driven solely by the desire to find faith is curious, given the degree to which it limits the freedom of the intellectual historian to draw his own conclusions. It feels artificially drafted onto this multi-generational and multi-dimensional study whose rich biographical and intellectual details and loose ends alike provide much food for thought and will hopefully generate further debate.

Judith Szapor
University of Ottawa

[1] Lee Congdon, *Exile and Social Thought: Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria 1919-1933* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), xi.
[2] Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930-41* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 111.

Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (London: Verso, 2002).

Revolution in the Air is a first-rate contribution to the recent history of radicalism in the United States. Max Elbaum tells the story of the "new communist movement" and its role in the organized revolutionary left's climax and near-complete disintegration over the past thirty years. After its birth in the 1960s, the new communist movement reached its greatest density (numerical *and* intellectual, sad to say) in the 1970s, entered into profound crisis in the 1980s, and

disappeared from view in the 1990s. Elbaum identifies important lessons for contemporary oppositional activism in the collective history of the many thousands of revolutionaries who sought to create a mass socialist movement in the centres of advanced capitalism while drawing inspiration from Third World radical thought.

Filled with plausible observations, interesting insights, and organizational wisdom, *Revolution in the Air* helps fill a yawning gap in the literature on North American radicalism: the rise and fall of the 1970s far left. Its defense of revolutionary politics is a correction to a sixties literature otherwise focused exclusively on the romance of the early new left. Elbaum stands apart from many writers on the Students for a Democratic Society, including James Miller and Todd Gitlin, who pit a "good" participatory early 1960s against a "bad" revolutionary late 1960s. He capably articulates the logic of the revolutionary turn taken in the late 1960s and 1970s by the most conscious anti-war and anti-racist activists emerging out of student-centered radicalism.

Revolution in the Air supplies a strong narrative history of the "antirevisionist," Marxist-Leninist, more or less Maoist parties and activists. Virtually the only secondary source available on some of the groups that it covers, the book is invaluable for anyone seeking to trace their ideological trajectories and relative strengths and weaknesses. Subjects include the Progressive Labor Party (as forerunner) and Revolutionary Union (as pioneer), the *Guardian* newspaper, local collectives, and such rival national formations as the Communist Workers Party, the October League, the League of Revolutionary Struggle, and Line of March (last of which Elbaum helped lead).

Some omissions affect the coverage. Elbaum has a precise milieu in mind, but it is not clear why he de-emphasizes or excludes some revolutionary groups of the period, such as the Weathermen, the Black Liberation Army, or the Symbionese Liberation Army, which had comparable Marxist-Leninist politics but adopted strategies of terror. Even the "armed struggle" actions of the groups he does cover, such as the Revolutionary Union, are left untold. There is no coverage of the delicate topic of police infiltration and provocateurs. Some of the most cerebral groups of the movement, like the Sojourner Truth Organization, get little ink. Canadian readers may wish there were something on the Canadian Marxist-Leninist left, which was more coherent than the American Maoists at their peak, but the histories of the groups that Elbaum does cover tend to be presented straightforwardly and reliably.

Elbaum takes pride in *and* repudiates the particular form of revolutionary left he describes. Elbaum commends the movement for its uncompromising combating of racism and involvement of people of color, its principled opposition to imperialism, and its disciplined organization, with a "cadre" or round-the-clock activist membership committed to forging common thought and action. At the same time, he seeks to explain the many errors in thought and

action that came from adopting a Maoist-Stalinist model of Leninism: ideological dogmatism and sterility, the illusion of tiny groups being the vanguard, sectarian fratricide, voluntarism and ultraleftism, infighting and burnout. While Elbaum's combination of admiration and reprimand can be disconcerting, he on the whole succeeds in his dual project of substantiating the revolutionary socialist turn of the 1970s while drawing up a frank and useful list of the catastrophic errors of this section of the far left.

Revolution in the Air charts strategic and tactical debates on the left as they interact with external national and international events, from the May events in France and Mao's Cultural Revolution to Khmer Rouge butchery and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The author's descriptive ability to situate different factional positions in relation to one another is considerable, comparing to Kirkpatrick Sale's classic *SDS* (1973). Elbaum is also excellent on ideology and doctrine. He is superb on Lenin and Leninism, their draw for radical activists and their possible dangers. The book contributes in the process to a rethinking of the theory and practice of socialist revolution.

The book is strongly multiracial in focus, especially concerning African Americans and, to a lesser extent, Asian American, Puerto Rican, and other radicals of color. However, Elbaum does not often explain how such activists came to be attracted to their specific politics or what campaigns or activities they mounted. Elbaum does articulate successfully that anti-racism is central for socialist strategy in the United States, that radicals should support independent movements of people of color, and that the left should at the same time place high importance on developing multiracial socialist organizations. In this and other ways, Elbaum writes with a conscious eye toward how to better generate a revolutionary movement the next time around.

The major deficiency in the book is its lack of specificity about the involvement of its subject groups in trade unions and the labor movement in the 1970s. In a provocative, interesting passage, Elbaum holds a "weak class anchor" accountable for much of the failings of the movement – that is, he argues, the movement failed in part because a wider working-class radicalization did not materialize in the 1970s. Ironically, however, his book does not tell us what the groups of the new communist movement *actually did* in factories, offices, and unions. The protagonists talked loudly about the "proletariat," a term otherworldly to American workers. But what kinds of workplaces did they go into? Did they work as leftists within existing unions or create "red" dual unions? Did they concentrate on selling their papers or build rank-and-file caucuses? Did they cooperate with other tendencies in the factories or excoriate them? What was their attitude toward union officials, toward running for office? What kind of political resolutions did they motivate? Did they try to provoke wildcat strikes, or not? Were they open, selectively open, or closed about their communist affiliation? Did the labor approaches of the different sects change over time

as they came up against the reality of the workplace? What did they have to show for their efforts?

In this way, the title seems apt in a sense other than intended. *Revolution in the Air* describes people who envisioned themselves as the vanguard of a proletarian revolution but who were ungrounded in basic matters of labor organization and strategy. A paragraph on divisions over the Ed Sadlowski reform campaign in the Steelworkers shows that the October League opposed Sadlowski for absurd reasons, and there is a bit about early Revolutionary Union strike support. Nothing adds up to a coherent picture. Related areas of theory and practice remain hazy. Many of the groups under Elbaum's scrutiny sent former students into working-class jobs and communities, a process known as colonization or industrialization, but *Revolution in the Air* provides no conclusions. Likewise, Elbaum expresses favor for "cross-class" alliances, including within the Democratic Party, but he does not synthesize such statements very well with his lasting opposition to social democracy or his basic affinity for the working class and oppressed. For Elbaum, race is decisive; he seems unwilling to combine that outlook with *consistent* commitment to class independence in politics.

Elbaum reveals very little about individual actors or the quality of internal group life. His citations tend to be published items – not internal documents, interviews, or correspondence with other participants in the movement. As a result, the groups' relations with one another, as well as their ideas and actions, seem a little disembodied from the actual participants. Bob Avakian, mentioned several times, is never identified as the son of a prominent Bay Area judge; nothing at all is said about his character or history. Little or no background is provided about Mike Klonsky, Carl Davidson, Nelson Peery, General Baker, or Lynn Wells. Al Szymanski is mentioned several times; his suicide is not. Elbaum says in his conclusion that he refrained from treatments of individuals because of ongoing anti-radical prejudices in the society, but this reticence leaves the reader's curiosity unsatisfied and halts the history short of a full reckoning. Any historian who was not an insider like Elbaum would have seen personal background as an absolutely indispensable aspect of the history.

Elbaum supplies little data, though it must be very hard to obtain, on the composition of the groups in question. Were they drawn primarily from ruling-class families, as Avakian was, or middle-class families? Did they have much success in recruiting and retaining working-class members? Were the organizations of people of color formed by students, or did they emerge out of community struggles? Perhaps the kind of extreme proletarian fundamentalism to which the movement was prone, its workerism, had special psychological appeal for rebellious (particularly male) youth from highly privileged homes, like Avakian. One senses an arc, with greatest family privilege concentrated in the Weatherman and least in some of the Chicano formations. These are speculations; they could only be explored if more data on the composition of the spe-

cific groupings were available.

While Elbaum is very candid about the movement's errors, some of his criticism could be even more extensive. Elbaum now rejects single-party rule and command-style economies. However, he continues to refer to the Soviet Union and China as "socialist countries" or "socialist states," casting some doubt on the consistency of his new understanding of socialism. Elbaum emphasizes the democratic appeal of Leninism (which certainly was real, since democratic centralism, properly practiced, can provide a discipline for leadership as well as ranks) so much that he underplays the way in which Stalinism gained steam not because it was democratic but because its hardline talk and authority appealed after the semi-anarchism of the campus left. And while he is very clear about the tragedy of rigid hierarchical structures in small revolutionary groups, Elbaum is not as clear about secretiveness as a method ostensibly to prevent infiltration and exposure. There is no evidence that clandestine revolutionary groups have been any more effective in preventing governmental surveillance of their activities. There is much evidence that such practices inhibit democratic functioning, alienate contacts, and foster creepy and manipulative behavior.

Finally, while Elbaum evinces understanding that Trotsky was a dissenting revolutionary and not a fascist wrecker, while he upholds Leninism (of a specific kind) and criticizes Stalinism and Maoism, and while he is committed to a pluralist politics of the left and a vision of socialism that includes multiple parties and freedom of expression, his book is entirely unreliable in its characterizations of revolutionary socialist organizations of the anti-Stalinist or "socialism from below" variety of the same period, such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and International Socialists (IS). These disappointing flaws apparently stem more from a result of lingering historical prejudice combined with lack of knowledge and sustained contact, rather than malice.

Elbaum would have been advised to cast these pages of his book, which draw a highly negative balance sheet on "Trotskyism," as a reprise of *what Maoist activists thought* of the IS and SWP rather than leave the distinct impression that the characterizations were accurate and astute. In actuality, the IS and SWP were saying in the 1970s what it took Elbaum and his fellow Marxist-Leninists two more decades to understand. They did not call the Cultural Revolution's great purge "liberation," imagine a Marxist paradise in Pol Pot's Cambodia, or champion the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. The anti-Stalinist groups' criticisms of bureaucratic regimes in the Soviet Union, China, Eastern Europe, and Vietnam from the standpoint of revolutionary internationalism and socialist democracy have worn much, much better over time than the various new communist movement enthusiasms. Furthermore, the labor strategy developed by the IS in institutions like *Labor Notes* and Teamsters for a Democratic Union has lent much more concrete support to rank-and-file workers' movements than the "proletarian" forces at the center of Elbaum's narrative.

Setting aside tired old canards against the main alternative current to the "anti-revisionists" would have allowed for the more useful and interesting observation that these groups, despite their better analysis and political outlook, also suffered from many of the same tragic distortions of theory and practice that affected Elbaum's trend.

Despite its flaws, this is one of those very rare books that contains so many interesting reflections, explores the unknown underbrush of political history with such meticulousness, that it simply cannot be adequately conveyed in a short review. Max Elbaum's *Revolution in the Air* is radical history at its best – an informative, strongly argued treatment of a neglected strand of the American revolutionary socialist left. It proves that the growth and implosion of the new communist movement holds many lessons, both good and bad, for a new generation of anti-capitalists coming to terms with familiar problems of globalism and war.

Christopher Phelps
Ohio State University

Randy Martin, *On Your Marx: Relinking Socialism and the Left* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Randy Martin's *On Your Marx: Relinking Socialism and the Left* will be received by some readers as a late contribution to a genre of academic studies on the fate of Marxism in the postcommunist world, studies which enumerate a standard set of challenges to the relevance of Marxism today – the rise of "new" social movements, the fall of the USSR, the decline of the "traditional" Left in advanced industrial states, and the emergence of poststructuralism – only to insist, in view of the theoretical or political inadequacies of some or all of the above, that Marxism is needed today more than ever. What now appears problematic about such studies is less the predictability of their conclusions than the impossibly broad range of phenomena that they seek to address. A wide swath of social, political, and philosophical trends are too often assimilated to one another or otherwise treated summarily, at too general a level of analysis to produce much more than an affirmation of entrenched positions. The same is true, certainly, of parallel postmodernist tracts in which Marxism itself serves as the bogey.

On Your Marx is presented as precisely this kind of postcommunist peroration, from its punning title and pop art cover (featuring an off-center lithograph of Marx irreverently overlaid with hipster sunshades) to Martin's argument, which addresses questions surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union, the theoretical challenge of postmodernism, and the political ambivalence of identity