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## Labor History

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### *Labor History* symposium: responses

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## ***Labor History* symposium: responses**

### **Was the United States exceptionally repressive?**

Even while discounting views normally associated with it, Robert Goldstein's article examining the political repression of the American labor movement in its formative years (c.1870–1914) sustains the 'myth of American exceptionalism'. Instead of a nation whose history has featured liberty, relative equality of opportunity, and dissent, Goldstein imagines one where the extraordinary repression of trade unionism has produced a singularly conservative labor movement.

How valid is Goldstein's 'American exceptionalism'? Has US history been marked by manifold instances of unusually severe labor repression? Has the American labor movement been singularly conservative? What sort of evidence does Goldstein amass to prove his claims? These questions find no ready answers in Goldstein's article or in his documentation. Admitting that his theories cannot be proven, he acknowledges that he lacks the quantitative data to prove his case, and comparative labor history remains too underdeveloped to provide an adequate scholarly base on which he could draw. A fuzzy chronology also makes it hard to answer Goldstein's questions. On the one hand, he asserts that the exceptional pattern of US labor history was set between 1870 and 1914, yet, when it suits his needs, he switches to the World War I years, the 1920s, the New Deal, or even the heyday of the cold war. I want to concentrate on the formative period of the modern labor movement in the United States, the years 1870–1914, and to allude to other historical moments only in passing.

Goldstein is certainly correct that good quantitative evidence concerning comparative national instances of labor repression is scarce. Still, one need only consult Goldstein's own book on political repression in nineteenth-century Europe to question his assertions about the exceptional character of union repression in the United States, c.1870–1914.<sup>1</sup> Much of the repression that Goldstein finds throughout nineteenth-century Europe exceeds the worst in the United States. Did European nations suddenly offer insurgents carrots rather than sticks after 1900 while the United States continued to club its trade unionists and 'subversives'? I think not. Even in Britain, perhaps the least repressive of European states, troops were used when the South Wales coal miners shut their industry down, Liverpool port and transport workers paralyzed the city's commerce, and Dublin unionists engaged in a general strike. The French threatened to conscript striking railroad workers and punish them for desertion, a capital crime, if they remained on strike. And Goldstein quotes contemporary German observers of the Wilhelmine Empire noting that '[w]orkers have the right to combine. But if they make use of it, they are punished. . . . The trade union is free, as free as an outlaw'.<sup>2</sup>

Robin Archer's recent book, *Why is there No Labor Party in the United States?*, may provide some answers in the comparison between the labor history of Australia and that of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Archer posits that the history of labor in Australia,

a land of unmatched material prosperity, pervasive demands for social equality, and the absence of a deferential citizenry, disproves the typical aspects of 'American exceptionalism'. Instead, Archer locates American exceptionalism in a singular pattern of state- and employer-subsidized repression suffered by workers and their unions. Repression caused powerful labor leaders, most notably Samuel Gompers, to fear that radicalism would result in the eradication of trade unionism and to oppose the creation of a Labor party or inclusive unionism such as made Australia's Labor party potent. In Australia, by contrast, the relative absence of state repression of unions prompted its labor leaders to build a movement of general all-trades unionism (a counterpart to the British 'new unionism') and to establish a Labor party that ultimately took state power. Archer makes a far better and stronger case for repression as a source of union weakness and conservatism in the United States than Goldstein does, and Archer, although a political scientist like Goldstein, engages in more substantial historical research on both sides of the Pacific. Yet, however admirable Archer's case is for 'American exceptionalism', he depends on the same sort of logical fallacies that befall Goldstein's hypothesis.

Let me now try to explore several of Goldstein's fallacies. First, he conflates labor violence and political repression. This fallacy dates back to his doctoral dissertation, a product of the 1970s when studies of violence became all the rage. Goldstein's dissertation, which he turned into his first book, appeared as part of that fad. In it, Goldstein laid out a lawyer's brief for the prosecution, searching through US history for repression. Lacking defense attorneys to question his evidence or build an alternative explanation, he constructed a convincing case.<sup>4</sup>

One can make a strong case for exceptional *violence* in American labor history, but the case for exceptional *repression* is a different matter. Goldstein and Archer approach the problem in the same way by citing spectacular cases of labor repression: the railroad strikes of 1877, Haymarket, Homestead, Pennsylvania and Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, 1892, the 1894 Pullman strike and boycott, the Colorado labor war of 1903–05, and the 1914 Ludlow massacre. But do such examples establish that American history has been marked by 'physically ferocious' and 'especially terrifying repression' of radical labor movements? Just as hard cases often lead to bad law, a focus on exceptional events may produce poor history.

Even labor violence, which, I will grant, has been a more common aspect of American labor history, has found its doubters. Goldstein speaks of the exceptional violence that marred the history of coalmining, but Price Fishback has questioned the extent of strike violence in soft coal, suggesting instead that in the unionized sector of the industry, by far the larger part between 1898 and 1924, accommodative industrial relations were the norm.<sup>5</sup>

For every instance of federal repression of labor between the 1880s and 1914, we can find instances of impartial or friendly intervention, and not just the example of Theodore Roosevelt and the 1902 anthracite strike mentioned by Goldstein. The violent labor upheavals of the late nineteenth century led to numerous congressional investigations and one major presidential industrial commission. After Pullman, Congress passed the Erdman Act in 1898 which legitimated unionism on the railroads and suggested federal mediation rather than repression in the event of strikes. In 1916, federal railroad legislation mandated eight hours daily labor for operating railroad employees in interstate commerce. And the 1926 Railway Labor

Act was a forerunner of the 1935 National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act. What one historian has labeled 'an age of industrial violence, 1910–15' led to the appointment of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, perhaps the most radical investigating commission in US history. Oh, yes, during World War I the federal government repressed the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) along with socialists, pacifists, and anti-war advocates. If one, however, examines the reports and recommendations of the federal investigators in the field during the war years, something Goldstein has not done, none recommended the repression and destruction of the IWW. Instead, Felix Frankfurter, the most active investigator, urged employers to preempt the IWW threat by recognizing and bargaining with non-IWW unions, improving working conditions, and instituting effective grievance procedures. The Secretary of Labor, himself a former official from the United Mine Workers, filled his department's mediation and conciliation service with former union officials, many from the United Mine Workers of America (UMW).<sup>6</sup>

Nearly all the industrial and urban states, north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers, pursued labor policies similar to those of the federal government, preferring reform plus mediation and conciliation to repression. Many federal and state judges sabotaged legislative and executive labor reform efforts, but by the early twentieth century, a different form of jurisprudence that accepted social reforms and trade unionism and that tolerated strikes had begun to emerge, if not dominate the bench.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, repression hardly explains what Goldstein deems the relatively low union density in the United States by 1914. Moreover, when it is placed in a proper context, I would question how low that density is. Goldstein compares a union density rate of 18 percent in Germany in 1910 with a 9 percent rate in the United States; and he claims that German density trailed that in the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and the Low Countries. Goldstein's density data prompt several caveats. How do we compare the size and scale of the United States with that of European nations? Geographically, the United States occupies more space than nearly all of Europe west of the Urals. If one includes France, Italy, Iberia, Eastern Europe, and the Tsarist Empire along with the high density nations that Goldstein cites, what would total union density be? The United States had higher union density (as well as stronger unions) than France, Italy, Iberia, and all nations east of Germany. And if we disaggregate union density in the United States and examine it in the core urban-industrial states – New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota – it matches or exceeds German levels and compares well with higher-density European nations. Goldstein plays a similar game in using Roger Fagge's comparative study of coalminer unionism in South Wales and West Virginia, the former heavily unionized, the latter nearly union-free, to prove the impotency of unionism in the United States.<sup>8</sup> But when union density in South Wales is compared with that in the Central Competitive Field, the differences disappear.

What of Goldstein's claim, endorsed by Robin Archer, that repression explains the conservatism of the American labor movement? Yes, we know that a voting majority engineered by Gompers at the 1894 AFL convention rejected a Labor-Populist party alliance and the nationalization of railroad and telegraph companies. We also know that the AFL repeatedly rejected socialist initiatives

proposed during its annual conventions between 1894 and 1914. Yet one third of the delegates at those conventions favored socialism, and socialists led a number of important AFL affiliates, including the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), the United Brewery Workers, the United Mine Workers, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), the International Association of Machinists, the United Cloth Hat and Millinery Workers, and, after 1914, the unaffiliated Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA). In such cities as Milwaukee, WI, Reading, PA, Bridgeport, CT, Barre, VT, Granite City, IL, Butte, MT, and many others, local socialist parties allied to central labor unions or dominant locals of international unions held political power. In Milwaukee and New York City, the union-socialist alliance was strong enough to elect candidates to congress – Victor Berger and Meyer London – and representatives to state and municipal offices and judgeships. On the eve of World War I, the American labor movement would not have appeared that much more conservative than its British, German, Scandinavian, and even Australian counterparts, and it would have seemed far more powerful than its counterparts in France, Italy, Iberia, and Eastern Europe.

All this, to be sure, changed after 1919, when socialism collapsed politically and trade unionism suffered a series of bitter defeats that substantially reduced union density. But Goldstein asserts that repression had already tamed unionism and whipped radicalism between 1870 and 1914. He may respond that I quibble only about timing, not results, and that wartime repression of the IWW and the Socialist Party of America (SPA), the suppression of the post-war strike wave, the 'red scare', and Republican political dominance in the 1920s explain the decline of socialism and trade unionism. I might counter, however, that conjunctural and structural factors carry more weight. The triumph of the Bolsheviks and their creation of the Third International (Comintern) bitterly divided the left. Prohibition decimated one socialist affiliate of the AFL and changing energy demand left a surplus of miners that weakened the UMW. The spread of run-away shops ravaged the ILGWU and the ACWA. Employers during the 1920s promised their employees what Liz Cohen has identified as a form of 'moral capitalism', the promise of steady employment, stable wages, improved working conditions, employee representation plans and grievance procedures (a form of voice at work), and pensions for loyal long-term employees – promises that were kept until the Great Depression struck. The Republicans offered unions conciliation and reform more often than repression. The Harding administration smashed the 1922 national railroad shopmen's strike, but the British government behaved as forcefully and repressively during the 1926 general strike. After the shopmen's strike, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad devised a new approach to industrial relations (the B&O Plan) that accorded trade unions recognition and employees a voice at work; and in 1926, Congress enacted the Railway Labor Act. Herbert Hoover, as Secretary of Commerce, perhaps the Republican official most involved in dealing with trade unionists, labored to produce agreements between the UMWA and coal operators in the unionized northern coal fields.<sup>9</sup>

In his haste to characterize the AFL as exceptionally conservative and to condemn public policy in the United States as singularly repressive, Goldstein errs. The relative absence of women and 'new immigrant' members does not prove that the AFL made no effort to organize them. Affiliates did most of the organizing, and in economic sectors where women and new immigrants were concentrated, the unions organized

them. The UMW and the WFM had substantial numbers of new immigrants, and the garment unions were overwhelmingly new immigrant and female in membership. The bookbinders' union was mostly female and the hotel and restaurant employees' union recruited waitresses and hotel housekeepers. Most AFL unions did not formally bar blacks from membership. Such exclusion as practiced by many unions, most notably the IAM and the building trades unions, was done informally. Other unions, especially the mine workers' union, the International Longshoremen's Association, the Teamsters, and the garment unions, actively recruited black workers.

After all Goldstein's huffing and puffing about the exceptionalism of American labor unions and their 'extraordinarily conservative orientation', he concludes that 'more research is called for'. More research is always welcome. I still prefer to believe, as I wrote more than thirty years ago in an essay comparing 'Big Bill' Haywood and Tom Mann, representatives of American and British labor radicalism, that the similarities between different national experiences remain as important as the differences or exceptions.<sup>10</sup> Or, as Aristide Zolberg, Goldstein's mentor, notes in his essay in *Working-Class Formation*, diverse national and comparative histories illustrate many exceptionalisms.<sup>11</sup>

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## Notes

1. Goldstein, *Political Repression*.
2. Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 24.
3. Ch. 5, 'Repression.'
4. Goldstein, *Political Repression*.
5. Fine, *Without the Blare of Trumpets*; Fishback, 'An Alternative View of Violence'.
6. For the Commission on Industrial Relations, see Stromquist, *Reinventing 'the People'*, 165–88, and Dubofsky, *State and Labor*, 54–5, 130–31, and *passim*; for the interplay between repression and reform during World War I, see Dubofsky, *State and Labor*, 61–76, and Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, Ch. 16.
7. Dubofsky, *State and Labor*, 85–6; Dubofsky, 'Federal Judiciary'.
8. Fagge, *Power, Culture and Conflict*.
9. Dubofsky, *State and Labor*, 84–102.
10. Dubofsky, 'Tom Mann and William D. Haywood'.
11. Zolberg, 'How Many Exceptionalisms?'

## Notes on contributor

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### The peculiarities of race and violence in US labor history

Blackie Myers, one of the more colorful organizers involved in the much-heralded 1930s campaign to bring the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)'s crusading style of industrial unionism into virtually every west coast port from Seattle to San Diego, once remarked that the alliance between mainstream activists and the communist left was based more on pragmatism than on ideology. In particular, according to Myers, the partnership provided the fledgling CIO with three crucial ingredients to organizing success: guns, funds, and automobiles.<sup>1</sup>

While a tad disingenuous – Myers, after all, was a lifelong radical – this statement captures a distinctive feature of the robust syndicalist current within American labor: its pervasive emphasis on the practical 'nuts and bolts' of workplace organizing, and a key characteristic of the trade union movement in the United States – the context of violence in which it is rooted. Robert Goldstein's article has much to say about these twin defining traits. His approach, as a comparative political scientist, offers historians of US labor the opportunity both to learn from another discipline and to escape the parochialism of their own field. Especially welcome is his careful overview of the vast European literature on the origins and trajectories of national labor movements. Every historian of labor's experience in America can benefit from this tour through an often-tangled body of work.

Yet Goldstein's contribution goes beyond sharing and ably synthesizing the research findings of others. Perhaps the most important aspect of 'Political Repression of the American Labor Movement' is that it addresses a challenge posed over a decade ago by the late George Fredrickson: Why, he asked, has recent writing in US labor history avoided the question of exceptionalism that cast such a long shadow over the field for most of the twentieth century? Fredrickson called for rigorous cross-national comparison in US labor history to shed light on precisely the topics that Goldstein seeks to understand in his essay: state repression of labor movements, political incorporation of trade unions, and the role of violence in shaping working-class politics and organization.<sup>2</sup>

This turn (or return) to the macro-social is a welcome one, but Goldstein must attend to some issues of definition if his comparative perspective is to develop into the sort of full-blown analysis that Fredrickson sought. The first of these concerns the term *repression* itself and its relation to the more specific phenomenon of repressive *violence*. These charged phrases need greater definition, including a discussion of their relationship to each other in specific historical contexts. Goldstein tends to slide rather too easily between these terms, sometimes even treating them as synonyms. But 'repression' is an extremely broad category, and Goldstein's narrowing of the term to 'political repression' in the article's title is not helpful, especially since he goes on to include forms of subjugation that clearly involve extra-political agency such as the use of private militias, Pinkertons, and labor spies (all of which play considerably more than bit roles in the history of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century US labor movement). There is more at stake here than semantics. If comparative analysis is to yield compelling results, the phenomena under review must, in each case, be as identical as possible.

Likewise, the definition of extreme repression – that which utilizes violent force to achieve its ends – needs to be sharpened. There is a world of difference between jailing trade union activists and killing them, between outlawing mass pickets and opening fire upon them. The distinction between violence as a tool in repression and as a context within which labor movements were forged is also critical, but it gets blurred here. It is generally accepted that remarkable levels of violence accompanied American labor struggles.<sup>3</sup> What needs clarification in Goldstein's treatment is the distinction between violence generated by the state and/or employers that was aimed at workers and their communities, on the one hand, and the largely retaliatory forms of physical aggression to which American workers frequently resorted on the other. Even cursory knowledge of the European experience can identify many counterparts even to such dramatic events in US labor history as the infamous Ludlow Massacre of 1914 or the Centralia outrage five years later. Goldstein's essay explicitly notes the 1901–04 'proletarian massacres' of the Italian *eccidi* and the Russian Lena Gold Mine Massacre of 1912 (which dwarfs the Ludlow incident). However, while the vicious wave of violence in Italy 'touched off protest strikes', there was simply no equivalent to the decision by American workers, when faced with bullets, to arm themselves and answer with firepower of their own.<sup>4</sup> There is no counterpart on the continent to the case of Homestead's steelworkers meeting Pinkertons with a storm of gunfire and forcing them to retreat up the Monongahela River in 1892, or the southern West Virginia coalminers mounting machine guns in the hills to beat back both strikebreakers and the local constabulary in 1919.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, Blackie Myers' observation that guns



were among the essential contributions of 'outside agitators' to the early CIO speaks more to a general milieu of violence rather than to a dynamic of repression.

Did this violent milieu contribute to the political repression of US labor? Perhaps, and sometimes. It certainly engendered an environment where that legitimated the use of force to control workers or even to subdue them. But at the same time, particularly in the era of militias and volunteer law enforcement, the ease with which working people turned to arms and their familiarity with their use evened the odds somewhat, ensuring that at least episodically they emerged as victors in confrontations with authority. Seen from this perspective, it is possible (contra Goldstein) to argue that rather than destroying labor radicalism, the pervasive and chronic violence surrounding such basic demands as the right to organize nourished and perpetuated it.<sup>6</sup>

Rigorous historical comparison, especially when involving multiple cases, is notoriously difficult to make. Goldstein manages both to retain a clear focus on the question of repression's impact upon the American labor movement and to draw upon an admirable range of European examples. This is consistent with what has been an influential, if not dominant, framework for comparative labor history for at least thirty years: juxtaposition of the American experience against that of Western Europe. These respective labor movements, after all, emerged at about the same time and drew upon similar political ideas, even if their trajectories were sufficiently different to allow scholars to glean interesting insights.<sup>7</sup>

Yet this framework flattens one of the most distinguishing features of class formation in the United States and obscures an important dynamic shaping the institutional development of every American labor organization, from the Knights of Labor to the CIO: the salience of racial and ethnic stratification. Significantly, a great deal of recent comparative work has shifted the focus away from Europe to other 'white settler' societies such as South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Argentina. Placed in this constellation of cases, the United States seems less distinctive and peculiar.<sup>8</sup> Goldstein's analysis might look rather different if looked at alongside these labor movements and their encounters with repression. Without discounting the European comparison, comparisons with other white settler societies highlight three otherwise muted features of the American experience.

The first, and perhaps most significant, feature that the American experience shares with other settler societies concerns the early establishment of a context of violence born out of the appropriation of land and resources from First Nations peoples and the establishment of unfree labor as a norm from the late sixteenth century onwards.<sup>9</sup> Seen from this perspective – and time frame – violent repression meted out to US workers, as well as their readiness to answer in kind, may have been rooted in a culture forged by the twin crucibles of the frontier and forced labor.

Second, it is clear that in the United States the violent end of the spectrum running from tolerance to repression was used more often against African Americans and immigrants than against 'native stock', unambiguously white workers. This feature also is underscored if we extend analysis back to (at least) the beginning of the nineteenth century, when shared republican definitions of citizenship encompassed large sections of the white working class and helped shield them from extreme forms of state-sponsored violence. Race structured repression in the United States in a way that had no parallel in the European cases Goldstein uses for comparison.

However, the 1887 massacre of black sugar workers trying to join the Knights of Labor in Thibodaux, Louisiana or the infamous 1919 ‘shoot out’ of sharecroppers in Elaine, Arkansas would have been sadly familiar to Africans attempting to organize on South Africa’s Rand.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, it is well worth noting that the ‘formative period’ of the US labor movement as defined by Goldstein (1870–1914) coincided almost exactly with the high-water mark of Jim Crow in the US South. The violence of the sheriff’s posse, the vigilante group, and the lynch mob had a more respectable counterpart in the form of legal, constitutionally sanctioned political disfranchisement. Not only were black workers unable to use the political arena to safeguard their modest gains, but also tens of thousands of working-class whites saw their access to the ballot box circumscribed in this era. Although southern historians, commenting on the combination of a repressive labor regime and an illiberal politics, have popularized the notion of the ‘Prussian Road’ to capitalist development in the region, this phrase is more a rhetorical trope than an indication of sustained comparative analysis.<sup>11</sup> Western Europe may have produced autocratic responses to the rise of labor and socialism, but it saw little that resembled this distinctively southern style of class and racial domination.

Third, and finally, comparison with other white settler societies prompts us to consider the importance of the extractive and agricultural sectors of the American economy as key sites of labor movement activity – and repression. This consideration decenters the primacy of craft and industrial workers and the formation of their stable organizations in an analysis of US labor.<sup>12</sup> The consequences are telling. The definition of ‘labor’ broadens to include such signal social movements in the United States as Populism, the Greenback-Labor alliance, and the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. This social thickening makes Goldstein’s European comparisons problematic. It directs attention to the prominence of racial dynamics running through the American case, reveals a deep historical context of severe violence, and sketches an indigenous radical tradition whose vitality remains invisible to those looking intently at only the organized labor movement.

In their influential 1986 volume on comparative history, *Working Class Formation*, Ira Katznelson and Astride Zolberg urged practitioners to devote considerable care to the construction of their cases and the calibration of their units of analysis.<sup>13</sup> Following in their footsteps, Robert Goldstein has proven himself adept at tracing diverse institutional legacies and divergent political outcomes. Yet one wonders if he has too easily adopted a US-European framework that, while providing much food for thought, leaves Americanists with an interest in the global south hungering for more.

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## Notes

1. Milton, *Politics of US Labor*, iii.
2. Fredrickson, ‘From Exceptionalism to Variability’.
3. The best accessible treatment remains Adamic, *Dynamite*.

4. Murtaugh, *Italian Labor in Protest*.
5. For Homestead, see Krause, *Battle for Homestead*; for the West Virginia miners, see Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion*; see also John Sayles' filmic treatment of the miners' ready recourse to arms in his 1987 drama *Matewan*, as well as documentarian Barbara Kopple's 1976 handling of the same region sixty years on, *Harlan County USA*.
6. Melvyn Dubofsky captures something of this dialectic in his 'Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism'. Goldstein's argument that repression not only 'delayed' the emergence of a US labor movement but stunted radical currents within it is made with even greater gusto in his monograph *Political Repression in Modern America*.
7. See extended comments on this framework's tendency to valorize exceptionalist findings in Halpern and Morris, 'Persistence of Exceptionalism'.
8. The 'white settler' label owes much to the path-breaking work of Donald Denoon in *Settler Capitalism*. For South Africa and elaboration upon the point made here, see Alexander and Halpern, 'Comparing Race and Labour' and the articles that follow in the March 2004 *Journal of Southern African Studies*.
9. The literature is extensive and cannot be covered here. See, for instance, Lamar and Thompson, *Frontier in History*, and Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*. From a labor history perspective, see Rediker, 'Good Hands, Stout Heart'.
10. The best study of the Thibodaux incident remains Gould, 'The Strike of 1887'; for the Elaine 'riot', see Wayne, 'Low Villains and Wickedness'; for a wider look at the importance of violent repression in the Mississippi Delta, see Woodruff, *American Congo*.
11. The most thorough treatment of segregation and disfranchisement is Perman, *Struggle for Mastery*. Jonathan Wiener, building on the pioneering work of Barrington Moore, Jr., coined the phrase 'Prussian Road' in a now classic article, 'Class Structure and Economic Development in the American South'.
12. Extended discussion of the benefits of including agriculture in the study of labor is found in Halpern and Hahamovitch, 'Not a Sack of Potatoes'.
13. Katznelson and Zolberg, *Working-Class Formation*.

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### **Goldstein's repression: crude conceptualization, biased evidence, weak explanation**

The United States is the only democracy that developed without an effective socialist, social democratic or labor party. Until 2010 it was the only democracy without universal health care and it still lacks a decent system of welfare for those unable to provide for themselves. Economic inequality is greater than in other western societies. While incomes for the wealthiest one percent increased more than threefold over the past four decades, median family income has hardly budged.

There are plausible grounds for believing that these facts are causally linked. Political parties help to shape political cleavages; they provide a capacity for strategy on behalf of the groups they represent. The unwillingness or inability of labor to form an effective political party prior to 1914 took this country down a fork in a road that stretches to the present.<sup>1</sup>

The article by Robert Goldstein claims that repression shaped the American labor movement towards conservatism. The piece, like the 1978 book on which it is

based, is marred by its crude conceptualization of repression, its selective use of evidence, and its lack of attention to alternative explanations.

Goldstein's 1978 book claims that 'American social scientists have not seriously considered repression', that there is 'neglect of political repression', and that repression has been 'an important and neglected factor'. He tells us that 'social scientists have downplayed the importance of political repression, and no one has systematically studied and analyzed political repression's importance in American history . . . there is no single study of *all* [author's emphasis] the different periods and major groups affected by political repression'.<sup>2</sup> Now, three decades later, we hear that there is 'a lack of work in this area' and 'a paucity of scholarly work specifically focused on political repression'.

Individuals who have identified with radical political groups have frequently been subject to social and economic sanctions. Socialist radicalism has never been a popular cause in America. Labeled as extremist, undemocratic, and un-American, many adherents have suffered for their views. Their punishment has included ridicule and ostracism, loss of or failure to attain employment, physical abuse by vigilante groups and enraged mobs, and indictment and conviction on an assortment of criminal charges. Experience or awareness of such harassment must have discouraged some members and supporters, or perhaps more important, potential supporters, from acting on their beliefs.<sup>3</sup>

In writing these words, Lipset and I were referring to a history of discrimination and violence which has been documented by activists and scholars in dozens of books published over the past decade.<sup>4</sup> To assess the influence of repression, however, one must conceptualize it clearly, weigh its consequences comparatively, and pay close attention to additional factors. Goldstein does none of these things.

### Crude conceptualization

In his 1978 book, Goldstein defines political repression as '*[g]overnment action* [my italics] which grossly discriminates against persons or organizations . . .' This is in line with an extensive literature that conceptualizes political repression as (a) repression of civil rights, including the rights of association and expression; (b) repression of the right of workers to combine in the labor market; and (c) repression of citizenship, including the right to vote.<sup>5</sup> However, Goldstein now broadens the concept to encompass both government *inaction* in the face of private efforts to suppress unions and *non-government* (e.g. employer) action to suppress unions. He defends this conceptual slippage by claiming that 'whether state or private bodies violated organizational freedom, the effect was the same'. Even if this were true, it would not justify conceptual conflation. But it is demonstrably not true. Laws that allow governments to imprison or execute their opponents are not equivalent to acts of private violence, and opposition movements respond differently. Confounding employer suppression and government repression biases comparison and clouds explanation. Goldstein's comparison of the United States and Germany is a case in point.

### Biased evidence

The principal empirical claim in Goldstein's article is that political repression in the United States was as severe as that in Germany in the period 1870 to 1914.

Germany was an authoritarian regime in which the government was responsible to the Kaiser, not the Reichstag. The Kaiser could call a state of emergency and impose martial law, was head of the civil service and armed forces, and had the final word in 'interpreting' the constitution. Constitutional constraints were superficial. The Reichstag, though elected on male suffrage, had little effective power.

The Second Reich's anti-socialist laws were drawn up in the shadow of an abortive rebellion in neighboring France in the spring of 1871. While a German army sat outside Paris, French government troops arrested, and executed, more than 20,000 workers and their allies, including a generation of union and socialist leaders. The anti-socialist laws in Germany were less deadly, but their intent was to eliminate the leading unions and the political movement of which they were part. August Bebel proclaimed that his movement had never engaged in violence, but to no avail. In the event that the legislation was rejected, Bismarck was prepared to dissolve the Reichstag and engineer a *Staatsstreich* (putsch) that would emasculate the already weak constitutional constraints on the Kaiser's authority.

Organizations that promulgated views against the government were outlawed, their meetings, processions, and demonstrations were banned and their publications confiscated. The government's *index expurgatorius* listed 1200 titles; 80 newspapers were banned, thousands of unionists and socialists were tried, 900 were exiled, and 1500 were imprisoned. A 'minor state of siege' – martial law – was imposed in several cities, including Berlin, Leipzig and Hamburg. The Minister of the Interior responsible for the application of the law expressed the hope that socialism would 'be wiped from the face of the earth'. Socialist leaders could continue to sit in the Reichstag, though several were put on trial.

Unionists and socialists went underground to form a subculture of semi-organized resistance and socialist support grew. Repression, short of extermination, raises the costs of resistance, but increases the sense of grievance. The anti-socialist laws were not renewed in 1890, but unionists and socialists continued to be treated as the 'enemy within'. Several *Bundesstaaten* (regional governments) curbed workers' votes by introducing curial systems. The right of association was severely constrained. Labor unions were banned from political alignments and could be dissolved if they associated with a political party. Only in 1916, during World War I, were German unions accorded the status of legal bargaining agents. The Second Reich, dominated by Prussia, was a profoundly authoritarian regime whose leaders regarded socialism as a mortal threat. The ruling class was divided among softliners in the south and hardliners in Prussia, but the latter dominated the courts, the civil service and the army, and counted the Kaiser as one of their own. One of the reasons that Carl Legien, head of the Free Union movement, gave for opposing the general strike is that this would provide the Prussian authorities with a pretext for massive bloody repression.

It is worth noting that the number of fatalities, enumerated by Goldstein, is a poor measure of repression. Fatalities may be low in a regime that is able to suppress political opposition. Industrial conflict in the United States was intense, open, dispersed, and often spontaneous. The federal government had little control over state or local coercion and employers sought to mobilize local police, country deputies, or state militias to protect strikebreakers. The parties to the conflict were decentralized. National associations of employers were weak; unions were fragmented by occupation. Firearms were uncommonly accessible.

One need not downplay the extent of political repression in the United States to believe that it was not nearly as severe as in Germany between 1870 and 1914. In Germany, repression was built into the structure of the regime, and most workers' organizations responded by demanding fundamental political change. The political rights, formal and real, of American workers were much greater than those of German workers. The group that was most subject to violence – negroes – comprised a minority, and this served to divide, rather than unite, labor as a class. While laws in the Second Reich were imposed top-down by the regime, those in the United States sometimes reflected worker pressures. Labor unions were legally permitted to fund and support political parties; the policies of governments were at least partly responsive to political competition among candidates in elections. Unions in the American Federation of Labor were militant in confronting employers. Strike rates in the United States were relatively high. American unions were tough, resourceful and determined, as were their members. But they did not form a durable labor or socialist party.

### Weak explanation

To understand why, one must do what Goldstein does not, and that is set out a multi-causal explanation. In *Political Repression in Modern America*, Goldstein warns the reader that '[t]his book does not attempt to give a balanced account of modern American history; it is a history and analysis of political repression, so naturally it stresses events relevant to this subject'. However, without providing a balanced account, it is not possible to estimate the relative weight of repression compared with alternative factors. Goldstein wishes to claim a greater causal role for repression, but never explains how existing explanations are invalid. Instead, he repeatedly admits that his emphasis on just one factor 'does not mean that political repression *alone* [author's emphasis] explains these aspects'.<sup>6</sup> His current essay 'seeks to focus . . . on the role of repression in shaping emerging labor movements, without in any way suggesting that other factors have not also played major roles'.

Goldstein's interpretation of American labor history through the lens of a single factor, repression, leads him to impose motivations on those, like Gompers, who do not share his preconceptions. Goldstein claims that repression 'haunted' Samuel Gompers into 'a fear of radicalism'. The evidence Goldstein summons for this claim is indirect and biased. Over the course of his life, Gompers himself presented a battery of reasons for his opposition to labor representation – but he never referred to his brief imprisonment or the violent opposition of employers to unions as reasons for opposing independent labor representation. Gompers was a tough man who did not shy away from the struggle for better working conditions for unionists—but his conception of his constituency was but a subset of the American working class. He fought for legislation to restrict immigration, to enforce safety standards, and much else besides, but he believed that unions could achieve more by bargaining with employers and supporting one of the major parties than they could by supporting a third party.

To probe the validity of alternative explanations, one needs to examine the United States across time and compare states and localities within the United States, and the United States with other countries, including especially the

English-speaking democracies. Balanced, multivariate analysis suggests that several variables have played a role. Craft unions, which in the early 1900s accounted for around two thirds of AFL members – a large proportion compared with other industrialized societies – conceived of their mission as the defense of skilled workers.<sup>7</sup> Mass immigration from eastern and southern Europe in the decades around the turn of the century reinforced the distinction between native unionized workers and non-unionized immigrants. The American working class was religiously, as well as ethnically, diverse. Several unions were led by Irish Catholics who rejected socialism on religious and cultural, as well as political, grounds. For their part, socialists failed to reconcile their desire for an inclusive working-class movement with a penchant for ideological correctness. While some influential socialists, including Victor Berger, Morris Hillquit, and Frank Hayes, collaborated with non-socialist unions, they were never able to bring the party with them. They were opposed by those, like Eugene Debs, who rejected the AFL outright and who thought it was better to have a Marxist party than an inclusive labor party.

Denied union backing, the American Socialist party never became a mass party. Its membership peaked at 120,000 in 1912, less than one fifteenth the size of the membership of the British Labour party in the same year. The party remained a party of activists and intellectuals, unalloyed by a large blue-collar base. This fatally determined the party's policy on intervention in World War I. Socialist leaders in Europe and beyond were traumatized by the prospect of war in the years before 1914, but once the war began, they were pressed by unionists to give their support to the war effort. In the United States the AFL participated in the war effort, but this did not constrain the American Socialist party. Nathan Fine, writing in 1928, observed that the party's decision to oppose US entrance in the war was 'due primarily to the fact that unlike the parties of Europe the Socialist Party of the United States . . . was not a mass movement'. According to Fine, the party's 'absence of control over the trade unions with their bread-and-butter demands, its lack of political strongholds and a large organization to conserve, all this made the American party primarily a party of propaganda and education'.<sup>8</sup>

Every country is exceptional in certain respects. What is worthy of note is that American workers never established a durable labor or socialist party, nor were they able to take over one of the major parties. This has had profound consequences for American society and politics. Goldstein provides a detailed account of repressive events, but he ignores or rejects the basic tenets of social scientific inference in assessing their influence.

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## Notes

1. This argument is set out chapter 8 of Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*.
2. Goldstein, *Political Repression*, x, xiii, 547, xv.
3. Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 239ff.



4. 'The study of state repressive behavior is rapidly emerging as an area of inquiry in its own right' (King, 'Exploring the Ameliorating Effects of Democracy', 217).
5. Marks et al., 'Radicalism or Reformism', distinguishes among types of political repression in arguing that a Marxian ontology provides a plausible explanation of socialist strategy in the United States and beyond.
6. Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 547.
7. This argument is set out in Marks, *Unions in Politics*.
8. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 302, 307.

### Notes on contributor

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### Response

Many thanks to professors Halpern, Dubofsky and Marks for taking the trouble to comment upon my article. I am especially grateful to Professor Halpern for his kind words and useful suggestions, but, as a firm believer in the First Amendment and the importance of vigorous scholarly debate, I also welcome the more critical commentaries of professors Dubofsky and Marks (and will, where appropriate, vigorously respond). I can, of course, respond only to major points rather than to each and every statement of the three commentators.

With regard to my definition of 'political repression', I deliberately included *both* violent and non-violent forms of 'gross' governmental discrimination based on perceived political belief, as well as *both* active and passive forms of such discrimination, thus encompassing not only direct government action but also toleration of private militias, detectives and labor spies who violated fundamental freedoms. I agree with Halpern and Marks that these types of repression/discrimination are not identical, that they exhibit gradations and that such distinctions are usefully noted. But I think it is terribly misleading to maintain that *discriminatory* government-tolerated 'private' violations of fundamental freedoms (based on the perceived political views of the victims) do not constitute political repression, just as it would be bizarre to ignore government toleration of lynching and 'private' discrimination in any meaningful history of 'official' American racism. (Marks himself lumps together, without caveat, 'ridicule and ostracism, loss of or failure to obtain employment, physical abuse by vigilante groups, and indictment and conviction on an assortment of criminal charges' as forms of 'social and economic sanctions' suffered by American political radicals 'for their views'.)

Halpern may have overlooked some rough equivalents to the American workers' uprisings he mentions – for example, among Lyon and Silesian weavers (1831, 1834 and 1844), Sicilian and Romanian peasants (1860s, 1890s and 1907), Italian proletarians in Milan (1898) and much of central Italy (1914), and mixed labor-general uprisings across Europe (1848), in Russia (1905) and in Barcelona (1909).<sup>1</sup> I agree with him that severe repression can foster radicalization as well as demobilization. Particularly harsh socio-economic conditions combined with incompetent government (as in Spain and Russia) often provoked radicalization, while American repression, applied more skillfully and selectively under less horrendous conditions, largely wiped out radical unions such as the IWW, the ARU and the CP, while intimidating more moderate and less exploited AFL craft workers.

Halpern's suggestion to include additional 'white settler' countries in my comparisons is most insightful and has led me to read more Australian, New Zealand and Canadian labor history (also thus responding to Marks' suggestion that I study 'especially the English-speaking democracies', although I see no reason why non-English-speaking labor movements should be less worthy of study or respond differently to repression or toleration). Notwithstanding some instances of severe anti-labor repression, these three countries were evidently far more tolerant of early union movements than was the United States. Thus, Professor Robin Archer has concluded that, compared with Australia, labor repression was 'far greater in the United States', whether measured 'nationwide, citywide, or based on the worst local incidents', by 'the number of armed forces per striker, the kind of armed forces deployed, or their impact in terms of arrests and deaths', or in terms of 'judicial repression', and that 'American political institutions appear distinctive, not because of the precocious commitment to democracy that they embodied, but, rather, because of the extensive use of state repression'. Archer adds that because American repression was 'far more severe', Australian unions which endured such hostility were 'defeated' while American unions were 'destroyed'.<sup>2</sup> In another study of the United States and Australia, Aurora Bosch concludes that the AFL developed its 'business union' orientation largely in response to post-Haymarket repression, that

the United States witnessed the most severe post-World War I reaction in the 'western world', and that during the pre-World War I period an American business-government coalition 'mounted the fiercest repression of a workers' movement in the western world'.<sup>3</sup> Professor Neville Kirk reaches similar conclusions in his 2003 study of pre-1914 Australia, America and Britain, declaring that Australia 'created a context which was highly conducive to organized labor's advancement', while American 'judicial anti-unionism' was 'more rampant and successful than in Britain', as were the 'high and *often successful* levels of anti-union violence and repression' enforced by American 'employers and the state machinery' [emphasis in original].<sup>4</sup>

Comparative studies for New Zealand and Canada suggest similar conclusions. Although New Zealand labor suffered calamitous defeats in 1890 maritime strikes, the government subsequently enacted considerable pro-labor legislation, and by 1914 exactly *one* worker had been killed during strikes there.<sup>5</sup> Numerous Canadian studies clearly suggest a less repressive atmosphere than in the United States. Between 1867 and 1914, over 300 strike-related deaths occurred in the United States, compared with only four in Canada (only one of which came at the hands of soldiers). Comparing British Columbia and Washington state, Carlos Schwantes notes that Canadians could discuss socialism freely without arousing the 'all-silencing cry of treason' regularly heard south of the border. Even Lipset, in his most focused study of comparative American and Canadian labor, refers to the 'Canadian federal government's more supportive views towards unions' during the pre-World War I period.<sup>6</sup>

Marks and Dubofsky both expend considerable space criticizing my book *Political Repression in Modern America*, requiring a brief response. Marks accurately summarizes the central justification for my book, but neglects to mention that both scholarly and popular reviews agree that it was and remains the most comprehensive account of its subject; thus, in the fall 1981 issue of *Labor History*, eminent civil liberties historian Paul Murphy assessed my 'political repression' definition as 'careful' and my methodology as 'noteworthy', and concluded that my account provided 'greater detail' than ever previously available, thus making it an 'invaluable' resource for 'any student seeking documentation on a wide range of repressive activities since the 1870s'; similarly, leading labor historian Jerold Auerbach, in the April 1979 issue of *Progressive* magazine, termed my book the 'most comprehensive study we have of [American] political repression' and 'its precarious status in our society', constituting the 'full historical record for the modern era'. I am indebted to Dubofsky for his landmark IWW study, *We Shall Be All*, originally published in 1969, which significantly inspired my subsequent scholarly 'huffing and puffing'. Fortunately, his book, no doubt written while breathing easily, avoided the 'guilt by temporal association' which Dubofsky suggests contaminated scholarship published during the 1970s, although perhaps it was subsequently infected by 'guilt by common publishers', as, like mine, it was subsequently republished by the University of Illinois Press.

Many of Dubofsky's points about my current article are equally irrelevant. My article made *overall countrywide* comparisons of anti-labor political repression, so it is hardly relevant to note that (as in Europe) there were variations of levels of repression (and union approaches) *within the United States* by geography and industry, as well as periodic pro-labor American governmental interventions

(and even less relevant that some World War I governmental field studies on the IWW were sympathetic, as the end result was massive federal repression!). Moreover, his examples are often misleading: he discusses railroad workers (mostly after 1914) at length, but matters were far different for longshoremen and for coal, steel, textile, lumber, agricultural and metal-mining workers; he lists Pennsylvania as relatively tolerant, yet it was notorious for ferocious anti-labor repression, especially in the Central Competitive (Coal) Field to which he refers.<sup>7</sup> His suggestion that, in general, northeastern states preferred 'reform plus mediation and conciliation to repression' receives little support in a 2009 article by Lipold and Isaac which documents that the almost 1100 strike-related deaths in the United States between 1870 and 1940 (fully 50% higher than the widely accepted figure earlier reported by Taft and Ross, and overwhelmingly at the hands of government and corporate agents) were distributed almost equally in the northeast, midwest, west and south. (Marks downplays the significance of labor fatalities, one of the few largely indisputable quantitative indicators of comparative repression, yet in a 2009 co-authored article he claims to quantify the comparative impact of repression on early American and European socialist parties on the basis of a truly bizarre analytical statistical scheme in turn rooted in often inaccurate data and alleged 'measures' such as the 'elapsed number of years between the legal recognition of freedom of association' and two seemingly randomly picked 'time points', incorporating the 'assumption that the marginal effect of an additional year declines as the number of years increases'.)<sup>8</sup> Far more relevant here than measures of fatalities in attaining a meaningful comparative perspective are the many types of American *repression* (not just *violence*) that Dubofsky and Marks omit in their comments, including the massive use of labor injunctions, state militia, federal troops, company towns, and private militia detectives and labor spies. And neither explains how governmental repression or toleration could have, by general consensus, shaped the evolution of early European labor while the massive levels of American repression, at least inferentially, somehow failed to have had a similar impact.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to those mentioned in my article, several other scholars (who are, to be blunt, often clearly far more familiar with modern American labor history than Marks and more knowledgeable about European labor history than Dubofsky) support my interpretation. Thus, UCLA sociologist Michael Mann, in an enormously informed study (which cites both myself and Dubofsky) of early European and American labor, concludes that 'what is strikingly exceptional or extreme about the United States in this period was its level of industrial violence and paramilitary repression'. He adds:

... most writers celebrating exceptionalism do not even mention this, or – even worse – they actually claim that America had little violence.... Violence, like legal repression [i.e. judicial injunctions], was concentrated against strikes led by socialists and against attempts to form big industrial unions which united skilled and unskilled workers.... Workers initially showed solidarity, but they had no ultimate answer to employers determined to drive out unions with massed scabs, Pinkerton men, and state troopers and to keep them out with blacklists and industrial espionage. Ultimately, employers could detach many craft workers from class solidarity and repress the rest. This was the clearest American extremism of the period – one that has been appallingly repressed in American political and academic memories.<sup>10</sup>

In a similarly well-informed piece, Mann's UCLA colleague Sanford Jacoby concludes that the truly exceptional aspect of American labor history is the intensity of employers' opposition to unions, backed by 'exceedingly hostile' courts, governmental tolerance of private armies and detectives of a 'magnitude' unknown in Europe, and the regime's willingness 'to a much greater extent than in Europe' to 'put the state's repressive apparatus', such as federal troops and state militia, 'at the disposal of employers'. Jacoby concludes that such developments shaped the AFL's business unionism orientation as well as the 'absence in the United States of a sizable radical labor movement' since whenever a radical labor organization gained strength it was 'cut short by a potent combination of private and governmental repression . . . . Although labor exceptionalists attribute this to various unique characteristics of the American working class, not nearly enough weight has been given to the effects of repression.'<sup>11</sup> David Vogel similarly concludes that, 'for most of the history of capitalism', large American corporations 'effectively enjoyed a monopoly' of 'political and institutional power without parallel in the capitalist world', while Lipold and Isaac note that 'the US was apparently a more deadly arena for strikes than other Western nations' and that the American labor movement was therefore 'forged in a relatively more lethal climate' than elsewhere, supporting arguments that 'heavy repression of labor was part of what made America an unusual' and 'deviant case, at least among other Western democratic industrial nations'.<sup>12</sup>

The fundamental criticisms which Marks levels are that I repeatedly engage in 'selective' and 'biased' evidence and that I fail to pay 'attention to alternative explanations'. Concerning the latter point, my article (together with earlier writings, as Marks concedes) states more than once that I do not claim that political repression *alone* explains the exceptionally weak and conservative nature of the mainstream American labor movement; rather, my key point is that the impact of political repression has been grossly underplayed by other historians of American labor (notably including Dubofsky and Marks here and Marks and Lipset elsewhere). Plenty of other scholars have made the case for non-repressive factors being, at least inferentially, virtually the entire explanation for the weak and conservative nature of American labor; my argument is that the role of repression has been grossly underplayed and that this is especially evident when analyzed in a comparative European perspective. That seems quite enough to argue in one journal article seeking to focus 'laser like' on this issue, and I see no need to repeat alternative arguments which dominate the existing literature.

Marks' allegation that my evidentiary arguments are biased and selective strikes me as bizarrely inapt, as he repeatedly relies upon precisely such tactics in his published writings, here and elsewhere. (To give two brief examples from his other writings: in his comparative account of American and European labor, *Unions in Politics*, and in a co-authored 2009 article, he cites my 1983 book, *Political Repression in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, to support his argument, yet never cites or mentions my far more well-known American book published five years earlier; and in his 2009 article (which has many other factual errors) he inaccurately alleges that *American* labor gained the legal right of combination in 1842 and thus received earlier protection than almost all European workers (subsequently basing 'statistical' measures substantially on this claim), while informed comparative labor historians overwhelmingly conclude the reverse, as meaningful protection for fundamental

American labor rights dates only from the 1930s, decades after similar action in most European countries.<sup>13</sup>)

In his commentary, Marks quotes one sentence from the voluminous writings of himself and Lipset to suggest that they have acknowledged the role of political repression in shaping American radicalism, but this sentence is entirely unrepresentative of their fundamental position, which is entirely typical of the 'exceptionalist' and 'consensus' schools. Moreover, Marks' contention that the 'principal empirical claim' of my contribution here is that American political repression was 'as severe as that in Germany in the period 1870 to 1914' is simply absurd. I spend only two paragraphs out of a lengthy article specifically on Germany, although I do explicitly discuss the 1878–1890 German 'anti-socialist laws' as an example of severe repression (noting that they 'led to the immediate dissolution of almost all unions'), while pointing out that while significant German labor repression also continued after 1890, it was not equally harsh throughout the 1870–1914 period, as Marks inaccurately implies. Mark probably emphasizes Germany in his commentary because, as he demonstrates with such inaccurate comments as his suggestion on page 75 of *Unions in Politics* that American, British and Scandinavian levels of labor repression were similarly mild, he is simply not well informed about general European labor repression (or, for that matter, about American labor repression).

But even on Germany he is, in my view, simply wrong in claiming that American labor repression was 'not nearly as severe' on an *overall* basis between 1870 and 1914. It is certainly true that American *political* rights, include the suffrage, were more (if by no means entirely) protected than in Germany, but the issue here is labor rights. Moreover, while Marks suggests that American governments were more politically responsive to labor interests compared with Germany, almost all European governments, including Germany under Bismarck, initiated social welfare programs like health and unemployment insurance decades before they were adopted (or in the case of health insurance, even seriously debated) in the United States.

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## Notes

1. For studies, see Bezucha, *Lyon Uprising*; Riall, *Sicily and the Unification of Italy*; Tilly, *Politics and Class*; and Ullman, *Tragic Week*.
2. Archer, *Why is There No Labor Party*; Archer, 'Does Repression Help', 195, 199, 208.
3. Bosch, 'Why is There No Labor Party', 55, 65–66, 69. See also Cross, 'Labour in Settler-State Democracies'.
4. Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins*, 22, 34, 100. See his earlier *Labour and Society in Britain and the USA*. Similarly, the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* concludes that American employers were able to employ 'Pinkerton detectives, company spies, and state and federal militia to defeat strikes and destroy existing unions' with 'much greater impunity' than their British counterparts, that American labor 'secured the kind of full legal recognition that British unions' had gained by World War I only 20 years later, and that the post-World War I red scare witnessed 'greater success as well as greater virulence' in the United States than in Britain and helps explain the 'greater ideological

- moderation of the American compared with the British labor movement in the 1920s' (498, 518, 529, 532).
5. Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, 34. I also consulted Bennett, 'Rats and Revolutionaries'; Fry, *Common Cause*; Anderson and Quinlan, 'Changing Role of the State'; and Markey, 'Australia' and Olssen, 'New Zealand'.
  6. Yarmie, 'Employers and Exceptionalism', 607; Schwantes, *Radical Heritage*; Lipset and Meltz, *Paradox of American Unionism*, 36. There are innumerable studies of Canadian labor, often in comparison with American labor, and all, at the least implicitly, support this conclusion; see, for example, Jamieson, *Industrial Relations in Canada*. In a comparative study encompassing Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, Erik Olssen ('The Case of the Socialist Party that Failed', 429, 437–38) ascribes the weakness of American labor and socialism before the New Deal above all to the AFL's failure to organize blacks, immigrants and the unskilled (contra Dubofsky), while noting that one key reason for this was the unmatched power of American capitalists, including their comparatively unrivaled ability to obtain judicial injunctions, to 'easily call on the armed power of the government' and to maintain 'extraordinary' conditions of 'industrial feudalism' in such regions as West Virginia and Pennsylvania steel towns. He notes with regard to the latter that 'it is hard to find in any other English-speaking country a comparable situation with its legacy of violence and ruthless corporate power'.
  7. On Pennsylvania, see, among many sources, Jones, 'American Cossacks'; Howard, *Forgotten Radicals*.
  8. Lipold and Isaac, 'Striking Deaths'. They note that American fatality rates were twice those in France and that only one British worker has been killed since 1911, compared with about 300 between 1920 and 1940 in the United States (168) (Marx, Mbaye and Kim, 'Radicalism or Reformism').
  9. Although lacking in comparative context, my general argument about the extraordinary nature of American labor repression is additionally supported in numerous accounts not previously cited, such as Fusfeld, 'Government and the Suppression of Radical Labor'; Norwood, *Strike-breaking and Intimidation*; and Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases*.
  10. Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, 644, 646–47.
  11. Jacoby, 'American Exceptionalism', 182–3, 186.
  12. Vogel, 'Why Businessmen Distrust their State', 63; Lipold and Isaac, 'Striking Deaths', 205.
  13. Marks, Mbaye and Kim 'Radicalism or Reformism', 622, 626. The article does not actually give any source for his bizarre claim that American 'freedom of [labor] combination' dates to 1842, but it can only be based on the Massachusetts Supreme Court holding in *Commonwealth v. Hunt* striking down an illegal conspiracy charge based on union organizing activities, a ruling that standard labor histories such as Nicholson, in *Labor's Story in the United States*, all point out was followed by a hundred years in which 'union-led strikes would continue to be broken by court injunctions holding them to be illegal actions' (75–6). To give an example of another egregious error in this article, the fact that tsarist Russia had *no* legislative elections before 1905 somehow escapes the attention of all three co-authors, as they claim that the Russian middle class was enfranchised in 1900 and that 'in 1905 the franchise was broadened'.

### Notes on contributor

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