

## BOOK REVIEW

*American Labour's Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945–1970*, by Anthony Carew (Edmonton, AB: Athabasca U.P., 2018; pp. xviii + 510. \$49.99).

Tony Carew has been working on US labour unions' Cold War activities ever since his pioneering monograph *Labour Under the Marshall Plan* (1987). Through a variety of subsequent essays, he then expanded his range to encompass other regions and moments of labour's international conflicts, and he delved deeper into his key actors' backgrounds, motivations and foibles. In the process, he gained unrivalled mastery of many, often obscure, archival sources and collected an impressive range of oral interviews. Long recognised as the undisputed authority on the subject, he now has systematised his refined knowledge in a comprehensive reconstruction that reaches up to the era of *détente*, thus embracing the entire cycle of rising, consolidating and then waning Cold War antagonism in the trade union domain.

This book is the most complete, nuanced, thoughtful overview of US labour's own Cold War. It explores its subject in chronological fashion and includes virtually every relevant area and topic. Its main emphasis, and its most precious contribution, is on four broad themes that Carew discusses in depth, and that structure the text. The first is the key role played by the American Federation of Labor in precipitating the post-war realignment of international labour, with the schism of the World Federation of Trade Unions and the creation of a Euro-American anti-Communist labour front coalesced in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. This is a well-known story, but Carew provides a rich, nuanced synthesis, and deals most skilfully with the critical issue of roots and motivations. He eschews any simplistic, top-down approach focused solely on governmental actions to highlight instead the labour leaders' own reasons for fuelling Cold War antagonism, rooted in traditional labour animosities, deeply diverging views of democracy and sovereignty, radically different notions of workers' representation.

This opens up the second theme—the complex relationship between US labour leaders and the government agencies entrusted with the waging of the Cold War. While fully acknowledging the AFL officials' role as conduits of US secret funds, with all the inherently conditioning power of such an intimate relationship with the State Department and the CIA, Carew insightfully navigates their ideological mind-set, their sharp understanding of labour politics and psychological warfare among workers and unionists, their epistemological advantage in assessing their adversaries' Leninist logic. They were simply more prepared and more perceptive than their governmental counterparts. Thus, what we see is a mutual dependency rather than a hierarchical subordination, and a deeper understanding of transnational elements in the waging of the Cold War.

Largely successful in Western Europe's reconstruction, efforts at building a Western-oriented labour front were far more problematic in other continents, where anti-colonial issues were more central and complex than Cold War

battle lines. The globalising thrust of US labour's Cold War activism is the third major theme of the book. Initially inclined to stress discontinuity with empire in order to gain influence with anti-colonial actors, US trade unionists soon found themselves trapped in their own Cold War fundamentalism that privileged containment over neutralism and Western alignment over nationalism. Mixed in with a large dose of racist condescension towards their Asian and African interlocutors, this led them to embrace the Western logic of top-down modernisation, which usually entailed a business-oriented (and often anti-democratic) ethos with little room for trade union growth. Decolonisation, in short, proved far too complex a problem for the rigid Cold War dichotomy which US labour had embraced.

'Third World' issues constantly complicated and rekindled the struggle for influence between American and European labour organisations within ICFTU. This is the fourth key thread that Carew follows most attentively. Initially comprising a deep-seated Anglo-American tension about modes of governance, internal influence and the overall thrust of ICFTU's anti-Communist stance, their rivalry gradually expanded as global engagements brought forward different attitudes to decolonisation. Besides, the AFL-CIO recurrently played a double game, trying to influence and steer ICFTU activities while often setting up its own autonomous ones, especially in Latin America. ICFTU internal life was thus riven with frictions, conflicts and mistrust that seriously hampered the confederation's efficacy and influence. Eventually, the deep rift about the centrality of anti-Communism in international labour politics became unsustainable. By the late 1960s, a strategic conflict opened up around notions of coexistence, if not *détente*, with Socialist countries, of dialogue across the Iron Curtain and, more crucially, of union co-operation across the divisions which had hardened in 1948. Whereas the AFL-CIO remained adamant in its unnegotiable anti-Communism, the Europeans pulled together in establishing the European Trade Union Confederation. In 1969, the AFL-CIO abandoned the confederation and an entire phase in ICFTU history ended.

Rooted in the post-war marriage of convenience between social-democratic and liberal-capitalist views for the sake of Western Europe's democratic stabilisation, the anti-Communist labour coalition could wage Cold War battles against Communist trade unionism in the European context of embedded liberalism, redistributive public policies and structured collective bargaining. However, it could not live up to its ambition of propagating in the global South a 'free' trade unionism that was fundamentally Western in outlook and inherently embedded in the political economy of advanced capitalist countries. Nor could it paper over its increasingly dissonant conceptions of anti-Communism as the Cold War gave way to *détente*.

American labour's international role grew increasingly more detached from the international coalition it had decisively contributed to shape, and more organically linked with the US agenda of hegemonic projection. Of this complex story at the intersection of international politics and transnational labour interactions, Anthony Carew has written the most authoritative account.

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