

The chapters cover a wide range of countries and sectors. National case studies on Argentina, Turkey, Italy, the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, China, South Africa, and India are organized in three thematic parts: transport and logistics; education, call centres, cleaners, platform work, and gamers; manufacturing and mining. The contributions on Argentina, by Dario Bursztyjn, and on China, by Jenny Chan, have a strong historical character, covering respectively two centuries and four decades. Anna Curcio's chapter on Italian logistics workers offers very relevant insights into the dynamics of gender, migration, status, and race. Those interested in conducting a workers' inquiry themselves will be particularly attracted to the contributions on the United States, by Robert Ovetz, and on the United Kingdom, by the Notes From Below Project, for tested-on-the-ground models to replicate. Meanwhile, the chapter on India, by Lorenza Monaco, offers the most exhaustive reflections on experiences of conducting militant co-research.

Overall, the book is a welcome contribution for labour activists and for global labour historians, social historians, and sociologists of labour, either Marxists or non-Marxists. Although trade union power has been declining for years already, with traditional class thinking being relegated ever since, scholars worldwide are still far from agreeing on how to conceptually and theoretically approach the wide variety of recent workers' struggles. This book helps in this search by challenging dominant academic approaches and assumptions, offering critique that calls for a response from scholars. There is no doubt, however, that for the book to successfully help to map the next terrain of class struggle at the global level, two more steps are required. First, it is paramount that workers' inquiries become more common, and this depends on whether this research call is heeded. Second, an overarching analysis of the insights from the case studies is required, something that is not included in the present volume. For now, this edited volume contains a rich collection of new research on an urgent topic, from the perspective of workers worldwide.

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JAY, MARK and PHILIP CONKLIN. *A People's History of Detroit*. Duke University Press, Durham (NC) [etc.] 2020. xii, 306 pp. Ill. Maps. \$99.95. (Paper: \$26.95.)

Detroit's urban story never ceases to fascinate. In recent years, it has been the subject of books penned for a broad audience, including Mark Binelli's *The Last Days of Detroit* (2013) and Scott Martelle's *Detroit: A Biography* (2014), both authors being journalists; Herb Boyd's *Black Detroit: A People's History of Self-Determination* was published in 2017, the same year in which Kathryn Bigelow's controversial *Detroit* was released in cinema. *A People's History of Detroit* by Mark Jay and Philip Conklin is a useful addition.

I attribute this interest in the former "Motor City" to at least two factors: Detroit's story is an epic one, with stark contrasts, of success and reversal, despair and hope – a story both unique and symbolic of a wider socio-political process in the US; secondly, Detroit has

long been an epicentre of vibrant African-American political activism, which resonates well with the revival of such activism in the era of Black Lives Matter.

Both these aspects are central to the story told by Jay and Conklin, who are keen to approach it critically, moving beyond the clichés of “ruin porn” photographers of disused automotive factories and facile predictions of Detroit’s “revival” by city administrations keen to open to unaccountable investors. The guiding theme of the book is rather an attempt to understand the city’s history from a political and economic perspective, reading the known woes of the city, such as inequality, exclusion, and dispossession, against the broad canvas of American capitalism.

Like other recent literature, the narrative of the book covers in one chapter the “golden years” of Fordism, but is heavily skewed towards the 1960s and 1970s. These were the times in which the paradigm of Fordism fell apart, but that also saw innovative political movements, more or less influenced by the rise of Black Power, in a city that was rapidly transforming demographically. There is also an important segment of the book dedicated to the way neoliberalism has reshaped Detroit since the late 1970s, usually for the worse.

The story of Fordism’s rise and fall in the city would be familiar to readers who know the work of historians Thomas Sugrue and Nelson Lichtenstein; Jay and Conklin here distil the trajectory of an industrial development that in the 1930s consigned to organize labour means to exert pressure on wages, only to be quickly eroded in the post-war period as manufacturers reasserted full control on labour at the point of production. Jay and Conklin point out that “the strength of the labor movement and the obsolescence of the city’s industrial base formed the basis of Detroit’s deindustrialization after World War II” (p. 103). The two aspects were, however, linked, as automakers preferred to invest in new plants outside of the city where they found a less combative labour force and could experiment in new automated production processes that cut labour costs. The effects were political. Rising suburbanization increased worker conservatism. It affected both racial attitudes and labour militancy, giving way to a post-war generation of white workers who were less prone to push the union to the left and who supported residential segregation.

Even within the long-term structural conditions of Detroit’s capitalism, the 1967 civil disturbances proved a turning point in the history of the city, in a complex way that Jay and Conklin help us to understand. This is perhaps the most detailed part of the book, where the authors reconstruct the tapestry of radical political activism that provided the backdrop for the disturbances, which evolved further in its wake. The semantic polarization that emerged in those days of July 1967 between those who talked about “riot” and those who said it was a “rebellion” became even more intense in the following years, as radicalism entered the factories and affected the city’s electoral contests. The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which comprised several radical workers’ groups, emerged in 1968 in the Chrysler plants, and at the same time other workplaces attracted the attention of both national and international leftists. The temporary success of the League was a sign of the failures of both conservatives and liberals to understand the causes of the rebellion, which were not only about racism or race relations, but also about class, and the material conditions of black Detroiters, both workers and unemployed. If the political-economic context is crucial to understand the riot, I found unsubstantiated the claim that it was the “organizing efforts that helped to catalyze the riot” (p. 131, see also p. 156). In fact, at the time it was law enforcement that blamed the radicals for starting the riot or tried to pin it on them; radicals were actually caught off guard by the unrest, as were the liberals. In any case, the rebellion opened a sizable political opportunity for the radicals and brought many black Detroiters to their ranks. The years until 1974 were characterized by a lively movement that attempted to

develop an emancipatory political programme for black Detroiters, and one that was increasingly open to interracial collaboration. However, this was never realized, both because of the shifting economic fortunes of the city, which made the working class more vulnerable, and because of the radicals' own penchant for centralized leadership and dogmatic ideologies, which meant that they did not have organizational resilience in the long term.

Jay and Conklin embed the study of the past in the political reality of the present moment. In this they echo the approach of Grace Lee Boggs, whose political activism in the city encompassed two generations of Detroiters. Towards the end of her life, she declared, "when you look out and all you see is vacant lots, when all you see is devastation [...] do you look at it as a curse, or do you look at it as a possibility, as having potential?" (p. 227). Ravaged by austerity measures post-2008, by cycles of dispossession and investment, by gentrification as well as by grassroots movement of solidarity, this book puts forward a history of Detroit that does not fit in any familiar media narrative but that, in its complexity, is shown as a microcosm for processes of transformation that have hit a vast segment of urban America. In the past few decades, Detroit has been the playground for experiments in neoliberal development, but, precisely for this reason, the book subtly suggests that it also contains, as Boggs declared, an untapped, revolutionary potential.

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CLIVER, ROBERT. *Red Silk. Class, Gender, and Revolution in China's Yangzi Delta Silk Industry*. Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge (MA) 2020. xv, 436 pp. \$75.00; £60.95.

Robert Cliver's *Red Silk* offers a meticulous exploration of labor relations in a major Chinese industry during the early years of the People's Republic. Cliver's subject is the mechanized silk industry (manual silk weaving, still common in the mid-twentieth century, is excluded) in the Yangzi Delta, i.e. Shanghai and its hinterland, in the first eight years of the PRC. The narrative is structured around a comparison of the two constituent parts of the industry: steam filatures, where raw silk is reeled off cocoons and twisted into threads, and weaving shops producing textiles from silk or rayon threads. Filatures were concentrated in and around the town of Wuxi, were relatively large (with a typical workforce of 500 to 1,000 workers), and employed almost exclusively women. Weaving shops came in a variety of sizes but were mostly small, concentrated in Shanghai, and mostly staffed by male workers. Different production structures came with different management styles and workplace cultures. In Shanghai, owners and workers shared a common artisanal culture, workers tended to be unionized, and communist unions maintained a foothold even during Nationalist rule and the Japanese occupation. Labor relations in the Wuxi filatures were much harsher: managers controlled their workforce through fines and arbitrary rules, and male supervisors had almost unlimited power to humiliate and abuse women workers. Left-leaning unions never managed to penetrate the "feudal" relations of the filatures, which were dominated by sworn