

economic empire built first by the OGPU and later by the NKVD, have been utilized. In this sense Jakobson's book is outdated since it is based on data presented by Conquest, Dallin and Nicolaevsky which have been superseded.

Nevertheless, the book remains an important attempt to reconstruct the fundamental stages of the birth of the GULag, and, with Zemskov's and Khlevniuk's essays and the numerous publications of the "Memorial" association, it will be very useful in the study of the forced labour system in the USSR.

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**HONEY, MICHAEL K. Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights. Organizing Memphis Workers. [The Working Class in American History.] University of Illinois Press, Urbana [etc.] 1993. xiii, 364 pp. Ill. \$49.95. (Paper: \$17.95.)**

For historians interested in civil liberties, minority rights, and the struggle for political democracy, the American South offers a fascinating, and often horrifying, field of study. Dixie entered the twentieth century burdened by widespread poverty and an apartheid-like racial system. How could the system be made more equitable? Could working-class southerners organize to overcome their powerlessness and poverty? Michael K. Honey's outstanding book analyzes the efforts of southern workers to do just that. From his gripping introduction, in which black organizer Thomas Watkins is nearly killed and run out of town, through his nuanced discussion of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the post-World War II decade, Honey delivers a forceful and convincing narrative.

The book focuses on labor organization and the black freedom movement in Memphis, Tennessee, from the early twentieth century through the mid-1950s. A Mississippi River city, Memphis became an exaggerated – but tragically real – caricature of southern patterns of racial and class oppression. From the late 1920s through the 1940s, Memphis was under the thumb of Democrat Edward H. Crump's powerful political machine. Always business-friendly, and at turns progressive and brutal, "Crump's regime increasingly resembled a ruthless police state" (p. 61). In this setting, carefully described in Part I of the book, white workers did not see themselves as having common interests with black workers; indeed, white workers vigorously championed white supremacy, which ensured them slightly better jobs, wages, and social status than African Americans. But if poor whites benefited from economic segregation, Honey argues, they suffered from it as well. Racial discrimination undermined the potential for unified working-class protest and therefore allowed employers to impose low wages and oppressive working conditions across the board.

Honey's principal theme is immediately clear: racial subordination and anti-unionism went hand in hand, and a biracial working-class movement was the only hope for both organized labor and black freedom. Trade unionism and civil rights in Memphis would rise and fall together. Not surprisingly, they mostly fell. Their best chance, Honey insists, was the CIO and its campaign for biracial industrial unionism during the late 1930s and 1940s; more specifically, it was

the Communist wing of the CIO, which was almost alone in supporting a biracial movement.

For those attuned to southern labor history, Part II of Honey's narrative tells a familiar tale of working-class struggle and defeat during the 1930s. The New Deal inspired southern unionism, but it ultimately allowed corporate interests and regional anti-union regimes (such as Crump's) to prevail. The craft-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL) worked with business and government leaders to undermine the upstart CIO and any advances in the black freedom movement. The vast majority of white workers – AFL and CIO alike – would not abandon their racism. There were exceptions, to be sure, such as the riverfront strike of 1939, in which white riverboat hands and black dockworkers joined in an improbable, partly successful alliance. But by the end of the decade, industrial unionism had been bludgeoned, quite literally in many cases, by Crump's regime. Wielding power that no federal or state official would question, Crump and the local police assaulted the African American community as a means of terrorizing the CIO's most important constituency; and, in a mutually reinforcing move, Crump attacked the CIO as a means of upholding white supremacy.

The union organizers who stood up to Crump are the heroes of Honey's story. They are an inspiring lot: Thomas Watkins, who lived most of his life as part of America's very poor and yet emerged as a savvy union leader willing to risk his life for the movement; Red Davis, a poor white riverboat worker who embraced unionism, forsook his racism, and became a lifetime supporter of the Left; and George Bass, a northern CIO organizer who came to Memphis, insisted on biracial organizing, and repeatedly confronted the worst the police state had to offer. To read about such lives is to recall the indispensability of bravery – of sheer personal courage – in the struggle for human rights.

Part III of the book explores the World War II and postwar periods, which have been largely ignored by southern historians. The war sparked an industrial surge in Memphis, as well as a severe labor shortage, a new wave of worker militancy, and an unprecedented degree of federal-government intervention favorable to organized labor. The result was an advance in unionization undreamed of during the 1930s. Union membership soared among both black and white workers and in both the AFL and CIO. But in the end union successes in Memphis proved fragile. Racial conflicts within the factories continued during the war; black workers benefited least from the boom, and white workers sought to keep it that way. Increasingly, too, as the radical and liberal wings of the CIO grew further apart, the issue of racial equality became entwined in this internal power struggle. More problematic still, the CIO's divisions became inextricable from the larger political battles and rising anti-radicalism of the federal government. State power upheld union rights during the war, but there was no guarantee it would continue to do so after the war.

The CIO aggressively sought to protect and extend its gains in the South during the late 1940s, but it met with limited success. The left wing of the CIO endorsed a biracial labor movement, and for fleeting moments during the late 1940s such unity seemed possible. But by the end of the 1940s, the Red Scare had crushed the white radicals and, to a large degree, their black allies. While this was partly due to state antagonism (especially the Taft-Hartley Act), it was also due to decision in the CIO's national office. "Operation Dixie", for example,

was the CIO's all-important campaign to organize the postwar South. Funded by northern unions which realized the liability of a low-wage, non-union region to the south, Operation Dixie foundered from the start. It might have benefited from an aggressive biracial campaign that made use of the best radical organizers of the 1930s, but because CIO officials in the late 1940s were trying to avoid any taint of radicalism, they put a group of anticommunists and white supremacists in charge of the southern campaign. This strategy alienated the most loyal southern constituency (the African Americans) and excluded the South's best organizers (the Communists). As Operation Dixie collapsed and the Cold War intensified, hopes for a biracial union movement in the South faded.

Ironically, the United States Supreme Court's historic decision against school segregation in 1954 only made matters worse for biracialism. This advance for black civil rights united whites along class lines in a frenzied campaign to uphold white supremacy. Thereafter, the black freedom movement moved away from organized labor and toward the black churches; its leadership shifted from poor workers and to middle-class ministers and teachers. In the mid-1960s, the middle-class freedom movement succeeded in securing basic civil and political rights for blacks. For working-class blacks, however, economic problems remained unsolved. Martin Luther King, Jr, among others, recognized this. When he came to Memphis in 1968 to support a sanitation-workers' strike, he was taking a stand against black poverty, much as Thomas Watkins had thirty years earlier. Watkins, at least, escaped Memphis alive.

The shortcomings of Honey's work are too few to mar his expertly crafted book. Although he has adopted an older, institutional approach, his work is far from lifeless. Social historians may question why he tells us so little about working-class life and culture in Memphis. But perhaps we learn enough: Memphis was the sort of town where blacks and poor whites could get arrested for breathing. If Honey is vulnerable to criticism, it is in his turning the story into a morality play pitting the forces of light against the forces of darkness. The danger lies not in vilifying Crump; he earned what he gets. Rather, the problem arises from placing all workers into predetermined niches. There were "workers" (always pro-union), there were incoming rural folk, sometimes "scabs" (who did not know enough yet to be pro-union), and there were "thugs" (always hired by the companies or Crump's police force). Surely, though, some working people chose not to support unionization for their own economic, ideological, or personal reasons. Honey's rich description actually presents a complex socio-economic and political picture, but perhaps the larger implications of that complexity could have been played out more.

No one, however, should ignore this book. In chapter after chapter, Honey addresses critical issues and builds insightful arguments. For some time now historians have recognized that the chronological boundaries of southern labor history must be pushed forward, past the usual ending point of the 1930s, and that the story of the black civil rights movement must be pushed back beyond the usual starting point of the 1950s. Honey does both, and the result is a singularly informative work that broadens our understanding of labor, race, human rights, and the state. For that, and for much more, we are in his debt. Some readers might find his enthusiastic faith in the Left unrealistic while others applaud it. But in either case, this book's empirically grounded narrative and its commitment to socially relevant history flies in the face of the misology and

ultra-relativism of the postmodernists. Honey has a story to tell about lives that mattered, and one senses that he is willing to put that story on the line against any competing interpretations. There will be challengers, no doubt, but given the high quality of this book, they are in for a tough fight.

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