

the book's final section. I had always thought of the Reagan years as a time of unambiguous triumph for US capitalists, but the reality is that some capitalists won while others lost, including the once-powerful bloc represented by NAM. While they certainly have it far better than the working-class, capitalists too live with the reality that, to paraphrase Marx, people make history but not in circumstances of their own choosing.

Readers of *Labour/Le Travail* may balk at some elements of Delton's account. For instance, she claims that the *Taft-Hartley Act of 1947*, widely loathed by the labour movement and labour scholars, provided a framework in which both management and unions benefitted. This view seems hard to sustain given work on the law's contribution to the US labour movement's decline by scholars like Christopher Tomlins and Charley Romney. Despite this disagreement, the book merits a careful reading – or really, because of this disagreement. While I was unconvinced by this one facet of her argument, revisiting apparent certainties is edifying.

While her relatively empathetic treatment of NAM officials will not be entirely comfortable reading for some more class-partisan readers of *Labour/Le Travail*, understanding employers, their organizations, and their attempts to shape policy in their favour is important for anyone who cares about the future of the labour movement and the working class. Delton helps readers know NAM from the inside, as a result of a detailed investigation into what NAM's members and officers thought they were doing in response to changing social circumstances. One element that comes through loudly is that NAM, despite all of its conservatism, never sought to keep the world exactly as it was but rather continued to pursue making economic policy and labour relations more in step with what

the organization thought contemporary capitalism needed. Conservatives can be a source of dynamism, albeit in an anti-worker direction. In addition to telling us a great deal about some of the labour movement's opponents, NAM's story provides a window onto a great deal of the history of capitalism in the US over more than a hundred years. Anyone concerned with the course of US economic policy and global capitalism over the 20th century will learn a great deal from Delton's high-quality book.

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Mike Richardson, *Tremors of Discontent: My Life in Print 1970-1988* (Bristol: Bristol Radical History Group, 2021)

IT IS A SURPRISE, in a way, that the succession of "angry young men" British novels, some with notable film adaptations, did not open the way for a richer, sustained literature of personal recollection. Or perhaps it is simply the case that writing from the working class itself remains rare, or when written, turns out to be about despair and personal collapse, with socialist ideals (if any) invisible.

At any rate, *Tremors of Discontent* is a tremendous book. Mike Richardson has a fabulous memory of his personal life and a lot to say about the class struggle. None of it is preachy or away from his own experience, and what he learns in the media of the time. Born in 1947, he can relay most of 40 years with precision and in fine, straightforward prose. No grandiosity.

It is useful, for me and perhaps other readers, to take a small byroad here and reflect on another new book, *Acceptable Men: Life in the Largest Steel Mill in the World*, by Noel Ignatiev. This author is a hard-bitten faction fighter in the US left, and the book is closer to other accounts

in past decades of someone who has for political reasons chosen to “go down” to the proletariat. It is a very well-written, realistic account of his experiences in the Gary, Indiana, setting – an increasingly black city with huge mills on their way to shutdown. He writes as much about friendships as about the struggles at the point of production. But the reader, like the writer, knows where this is going to end: at Harvard.

Mike Richardson, by contrast to Ignatiev, did not have Communist intellectuals for parents and did not grow up surrounded by classic literature. After being effectively thrown out of the industry at the end of the book, he gains a doctorate, becomes a lecturer and researcher, and launches books and pamphlets from Bristol, near his old neighborhoods. In his own way, he has never quite left home.

Not that “home” was ever an uncomplicated place. His parents managed to get the family into a remarkable estate, one of those planned to become “garden cities” for the British working class, this one on the fringes of Bristol. There, unbeknownst to his parents, a renter abused him sexually, which surely helps explain a few of his early brushes with the police. He gets his first job at a department store, and here, I think, the remarkable writing sets in. The intensity of memory carries over, with other life events (education, marriage, children), into the Robinson Wax Paper Company in 1970. He offers photos of the shop inside and out, as he describes in detail how he first got involved with unionism, as he learns the complicated procedures of printing and waxing.

By the middle of the 1970s, he is reading the publications of the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP), best known in Trotskyist jargon as the followers of Gerry Healey. Mike is just as influenced by *Days of Hope*, Ken Loach’s documentary of the industrial struggle, 1916–26,

broadcast by the BBC and scripted in part by another Trotskyist veteran, Jim Allen. In an early moment of doubt, Richardson found himself “bemused” by a Trotsky-quoting lecturer in Bristol, hanging in as he met people expelled from the WRP in factional maneuvers that made little sense. He appreciated a journalistically close account of striking firefighters in the party daily but instinctively understood that claims of advancing socialist consciousness did not describe the urgent struggle for wage parity with industrial workers. His doubts grew as he was warned against the “subjective” thinking of doubting party dogma.

In the real world, repeated crises in Callaghan’s Lab-Lib coalition government led to a national election and a very unreal effort to contest offices on behalf of the WRP, which was actually an attempt at mass recruitment of new members. The smashing Tory victory might have ended illusions but succeeded in pushing Richardson further into class struggle, unionism, and chess, where he competed in tournaments, true to his autodidact character. Only in the UK, perhaps, would a worker join a famous actress (Vanessa Redgrave) in a WRP turn-about, sensibly calling for reforms, in this case, the creation of community councils in every city, rather than for revolution. Only in the UK would he need to oppose his wife’s dream of buying their council house, an option thanks to Margaret Thatcher’s predatory initiative, and give in to practicality.

Readers, including this reader, will find the details of his union struggles both fascinating and impossible to explain in a review. In the occasional photo from the time, he is the curly and long-haired chap with the big smile: a charming socialist. By 1983, one senses that he had already begun to find part of himself elsewhere. He is taking courses at the Open University, even as he dreams (with

so many others) that the miners' strike could become a general strike.

The solidarity efforts become steadily more intense, but the Irish Republican Army (IRA) plants a bomb at the Brighton Hotel where Margret Thatcher is staying, and the Iron Lady manages to turn public opinion against the so-called revolutionary danger. Meanwhile, the Labour Party and union officials ruled out any wider industrial action. Soon, the great coal miners' struggle ends in bitter defeat, among the worst in British working-class history.

Richardson throws himself into the desperate backstairs defence of miners jailed for solidarity actions. Meanwhile, a scandal around Gerry Healey's assault upon women in the party brings an end to Healey's prestige and, in the not-very-long run, to the WRP generally. Meanwhile, he is on the way to getting sacked for shop steward activity, with precious little support from the leadership of the union he had spent years building.

In 1988, he stopped fighting for his job. Going to college, he worked at Bristol United Press in a "causal," hard, and dirty printing job. It was his last outside of the classroom.

He could see closely, like few others, what Marxist sociologist Harry Braverman and Marxist historian David Montgomery, among others, had written about the theory and practice of labour's degradation within the production process itself. One chief purpose of this book is to explain how much has been lost in job dignity and labour solidarity and to educate readers for future struggles. "The past can jolt a new awareness" (178), he says: the very point of a noble effort.

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Alan Hall, *The Subjectivities and Politics of Occupational Risk: Mines, Farms and Auto-Factories* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2021)

AS ANYONE WHO has studied the regulation and management of work health and safety will know, over the past fifty years, there has been an international trend, especially evident in advanced market economies in Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (as well as at global levels, such as in the Conventions of the International Labour Organization), in which principle and process-based regulation has replaced more traditional prescriptive forms and prompted the development of systematic approaches to managing health and safety risks at work. A significant element of the regulatory reforms that helped establish this international trend were measures advocating widespread adoption of arrangements to consult with workers and their representatives on making and delivering the arrangements to manage risks to their health and safety. These changes originated in the 1970s (or even earlier if it is accepted that Scandinavian practice was a strong influence) in a period in which organized labour had reached the peak of its power and influence. However, they have been operationalised during a time in which the power and influence of labour have been in sharp decline and in which neoliberalism has given rise to a very different dominant discourse on the governance of work than that imagined by many of the architects of the regulatory reforms. This discourse extends to the management of the risks to the health and safety of workers and has had a strong influence on the operation of the regulatory reforms in the decades since their introduction.

The reforms have, from their origins, prompted a body of research literature on health and safety management and on