

Ahmed White, *Under the Iron Heel: The Wobblies and the Capitalist War on Radical Workers* (Oakland: University of California Press 2022)

INVOKING JACK LONDON'S dystopian novel, *The Iron Heel* (1908), Ahmed White offers his readers a blistering denunciation of the "bourgeois vigilantism" and state repression brought to bear to destroy the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the first three decades of the 20th century. To put it another way, "to understand what became of the IWW requires that one confront repression on these terms [horrific brutality], appreciate its vast scale and comprehensive reach, and see how in wrecking lives it also wrecked the union." (7) The narrative follows the chronological history of the IWW from its founding in 1905 through the bloody trials and tribulations of its pre-war glory days, the grotesque state repression of the shortened US war years, and closes with the continuous and intensified vengeance of the Red Scare and Palmer Raids. The author, a legal historian at the University of Colorado Boulder, uses innovative sources to depict the savagery and brutality of "how capital in a capitalist world is bound to rule." His extensive use of Federal and State Penitentiary and Prison Records, all levels of court records, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) papers is the most creative and detailed account of such repressive efforts to date. His command of the extensive secondary literature on the state and regional level also adds to the impressive detail he brings to little-studied states and resource industries throughout the Midwest, Southwest, and Pacific Northwest, while not ignoring the South or California. Here, in his accounts of Wobbly organizing in the wheat fields of the Great Plains, the fruit and vegetable farms of California, the lumber woods of Oregon, the hard rock and coal mines

of Arizona and Minnesota, and the oil fields of Oklahoma, the author captures well the threat the IWW posed to capital. Always more of a social movement than simply a union, the Wobblies' continuous refusal to bow before the joint forces of capital and the state brought a new set of legal, semi-legal, and blatantly illegal repressive responses.

On the legal side, an array of state criminal syndicalism laws and a new federal Espionage Act (1917) followed by a new Sedition Act (1918), which accompanied US entry into World War I, were passed and then utilized to smash dissent and eliminate resistance to capital and the war effort. Semi-legal efforts included the use of federal troops and state national guard units, while illegal actions included vigilante beatings, shootings, killings, expulsions from cities, towns, and states, coercion of witnesses, purchased false testimony from professional witnesses, perjury, rigged juries, and more. The list is virtually endless and leaves the reader gasping at the detailed evidence of business and state bloody repression against American workers. The author could have provided an even more compelling account with some minimum quantification of his criminal syndicalism materials. While they would remain incomplete owing to the nature of the surviving historical records, such tabular data would have made it far easier for readers to track the development of arrests, prosecutions, and convictions on a state and industrial level over time.

In a 1971 classic *Labor History* review essay concerning the IWW, William Preston turned the tables on Melvyn Dubofsky's major history of the Wobblies and sarcastically asked, "Shall this be all?" Much as there is to admire in White's *Under the Iron Heel*, this reviewer found himself posing a similar query. The depiction of repression here is so complete and the powers exercised by

capital so total that little room remains for resistance that is seemingly not predestined to brutal failure. This argument is far removed from the extraordinary agency exercised by the hundreds of thousands of workers across the US who fought in IWW struggles in these years. In a concluding chapter that provides a brief overview of subsequent US labour history and especially of labour law developments, the author finds little positive in the industrial union victories of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) or in the judicial free speech victories won under the Warren Court, even in those authored by William O. Douglas, who referenced the IWW experience.

While this reviewer has no illusions about contemporary capitalist and state repression, the current state of the labour movement, or liberal solutions to class conflict, White's view is so totalizing of capitalist power that it simply leaves no room for working-class struggle. Even in London's *The Iron Heel*, although it does take three centuries, the "Oligarchy," the triumphant embodiment of capital, is finally defeated (after two failed revolutions, eerily like the later repression of the IWW), "The Revolution" succeeds, and establishes "The Brotherhood of Man," a socialist utopia.

GREGORY S. KEALEY

University of New Brunswick

Michael Chanan, *From Printing to Streaming: Cultural Production Under Capitalism* (London and Las Vegas: Pluto Press 2022)

THE PRECARIOUSNESS of work in the cultural industries became explicit during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Artists across a variety of creative sectors were forced to pause or rethink their craft, many becoming reliant on funding or financial support to help endure

the turmoil. However, the issues facing creative workers that make earning a sustainable living difficult were present well before the pandemic, and this is an important point underlined by Michael Chanan in the book, *From Printing to Streaming: Cultural Production Under Capitalism*.

Grounded in Marxist theory and its offshoots (including, importantly, the notion that the arts were marginal to the accumulation of capital at the time of Marx's writing), *From Printing to Streaming* asks questions about the essence and practice of creativity and cultural production after the advent of mass media and beyond. More broadly, the book traces the histories of media technologies, like print, photography, sound recording, and film, to show how "each medium manifests its own idiosyncrasies as a commodity, corresponding to what Walter Benjamin called its technical structure, and therefore manoeuvres the market in its own manner; but also the ways in which, at the same time, cultural production defies commodification or escapes from it to fulfill its social functions." (xiii–xiv) The book draws on earlier academic writing on trade unionism and the British film industry, music and the history of recording, studies of documentary, and Latin American cinema to ask: How are art and commerce both linked together and distinct from one another as we move through historical and technological changes?

As it reaches its conclusion, *From Printing to Streaming* offers a pronounced emphasis on the tension between capitalism and art through cultural production, particularly in the shift from analogue formats to our contemporary digital era. The book's flow resists a linear approach and instead moves back and forth and sideways, meaning that as we learn about the ways new media technologies shaped cultural production, we revisit