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Mobsters, Unions, and Feds: The Mafia and the American Labor Movement

James B. Jacobs*

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lesser known co-defendants. Green's version of the evolving relationship among trade unionists, socialists, and anarchists resembles Avrigh's, and it is less substantial in its treatment of anarchism as a system of belief and action. Much the same may be said about Green's portrait of how bravely the four condemned anarchists faced the hangman, and also of the protest movement that spread nationally and internationally to spare the condemned from the noose, culminating in Governor John Peter Altgeld's pardon of the three surviving anarchists. Where Green surpasses Avrigh and offers his readers fresh knowledge is in his description of Chicago's history before 1886 and in his setting of Haymarket within a broader sweep of Chicago and national labor history that incorporates the 1877 railroad strikes and the ensuing mass urban violence, the 1885–86 railroad strikes, the "great labor upheaval" of 1885–86, the Homestead Lockout of 1892, and the Pullman Strike and Boycott of 1894.

Not all readers, however, may be pleased with Green's analysis of the larger setting within which Haymarket occurred and its place within the broader flow of national and world history. Green's sympathies lie with the eight condemned anarchists, whom he values as true martyrs to labor's cause, and whose ideas he believes resonated among the great mass of Chicago's workers, especially its immigrant component. His city and his nation are split between a great mass of exploited working people and their dependents and a wealthy elite of capitalists who used the police, the militia, the army, and the courts to keep the masses in their proper places. His Chicago resembles the city described in Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, his Albert Parsons parallels London's Ernest Everhardt, and Green's Marshall Field, Gustavus Swift, and George Pullman match London's "masters of capital." The Chicago described by Richard Schneirov and other recent students of the city's politics and workers was a more complex social and economic context in which a large stratum of the respectable middle class and a small stratum of the rich sympathized with mistreated workers and cooperated with "respectable" trade unionists to promote reform. Likely, over a broader span of time than during a few, brief explosive moments, far more workers in Chicago and the nation responded to the appeal of those trade unionists associated with the A. F. of L. than to the message of such anarchists as Parsons and Spies.

A final and perhaps fatal flaw lies at the heart of Green's version of the past. We may all agree that the eight Chicago anarchists were convicted of a crime that they never committed and that four of them went to their deaths unjustly, a

verdict that Avrigh reached more than 20 years ago. Yet the innocence of the Haymarket Eight does not acquit Sacco and Vanzetti, as Green suggests in his epilogue, of the crime for which they were tried, convicted, and executed some forty years later. As Avrigh proved in his own history of Sacco and Vanzetti, they belonged to a sect of Italian anarchists who believed in violent deeds, assassinations as well as bank robberies, all in the interest of liberation, and they were quite capable of committing the robbery and murders for which they were condemned to death (*Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background*, Princeton University Press, 1991). They may have been condemned for "their beliefs as much as their actions," as Green writes (p. 307), but their beliefs encompassed robbery and murder. Parsons, Spies, et al. did not throw the bomb at Haymarket, nor did they participate in a conspiracy to do so, but they did play with dynamite, and those who do so, as the old saying goes, suffer the consequences. Green would have been wiser to stress the interpretation of Haymarket offered by one of the martyrs' close acquaintances and himself a labor radical, George Schilling. "I do not believe that the time will ever come when the judgment of an enlightened world will say that their [the anarchists] methods were wise or correct," Schilling wrote to Lucy Parsons. "They worshipped at the shrine of force; wrote it and preached it; until finally they were overpowered by their own Gods and slain in their own temple" (p. 288).

Despite my reservations about aspects of *Death in the Haymarket*, it is now the book to acquire and to read for those who seek to discover what happened in Chicago on the evening of May 4, 1886, as well as its larger meaning for U.S. history. It is also the book to assign to undergraduates, because Green has produced a narrative more dramatic, more accessible, and more crisply written than Avrigh's splendid scholarly study.

Melvyn Dubofsky

Distinguished Professor of
History and Sociology Emeritus
Binghamton University, SUNY

Mobsters, Unions, and Feds: The Mafia and the American Labor Movement. By James B. Jacobs. New York: New York University Press, 2006. 320 pp. ISBN 0-8147-4273-4, \$32.95 (cloth).

In this book James B. Jacobs offers a history of the federal government's efforts to curb labor racketeering. The heart of his text focuses on the results achieved by employing civil RICO suits

to weed out organized crime from unions long mired in corruption. The Justice Department has mounted twenty such efforts since 1982, and Jacobs's book is the first to provide a comprehensive assessment of this controversial tactic. He tackles this ambitious project with a combination of detailed research, clear writing, and judicious consideration, all of which have been a hallmark of his previous texts on corruption and organized crime. The result is a must read for anyone interested in the problem of union corruption and what to do about it.

Jacobs sets the stage for his assessment of civil RICO by first offering a series of background chapters that provide an overview of the problem of union corruption and previous efforts to solve it. In these chapters he gives his readers an insightful primer on why some unions have chronic problems with corruption. By the 1930s these same corruption-prone unions increasingly came under the control of organized crime, specifically the Italian American Mafia, or as the Federal Bureau of Investigation prefers to call it, *La Cosa Nostra*. Jacobs describes the various ways in which mobsters seized control of unions and the profit-making potential that such control offered them. He draws on the findings of the President's Commission on Organized Crime (1983–86) and a study by New York State's Organized Crime Task Force (1990) to provide a series of specific examples of unions and industries plagued by labor racketeering.

His purpose in providing such a range of examples is, as he puts it, "to establish that the problem [of labor racketeering] is widespread, deep, persistent, and significant" (p. 41). This may not be a popular position to hold for many in the labor movement, but Jacobs's text makes it a hard conclusion to deny. This is not, however, an anti-union exposé—far from it. The author's point is not that such corruption validates opposition to organized labor, but rather that it has hamstrung the union movement and helped to keep it from achieving its goals. Jacobs asks his readers to consider the long-term impact of organized crime's ability to dominate some unions: "What might America look like today if at least part of the American labor movement had not been hijacked by labor racketeers?" (p. 21). It is a useful question to consider. It also raises the related question of what could be done to free organized labor from this perennial problem. For Jacobs the answer lies in dramatic federal intervention via civil RICO trusteeships.

In support of that view, he describes the long history of mostly unsuccessful efforts to deal with labor racketeering. He depicts organized labor

itself, in the persons of such national leaders as Samuel Gompers, George Meany, and Lane Kirkland, as largely complacent. "The mainstream American labor movement," Jacobs concludes, "has mostly denied or minimized organized crime's influence over labor" (p. 76). Rank-and-file efforts have emerged, but as Jacobs notes, union dissidents face almost insurmountable odds. Mobbed up union leaders employ physical and economic intimidation to keep most of their membership cowed, and insurgencies remain mostly small and ineffectual.

While the state has long recognized a need to combat labor racketeering, the record here too, for most of the twentieth century, was one of failure. A series of Congressional investigations, culminating in the McClellan Committee (1957–59), publicized the mob's penetration of portions of the labor movement. As a result, new laws, such as the Hobbs Act (1946), the Taft-Hartley Act (1947), and the Landrum-Griffin Act (1959), extended federal jurisdiction to various aspects of labor racketeering. Some criminal convictions followed, but they did little to curb the problem in any substantial way. No sooner was one corrupt union official put in jail than the mob was able to resume control by working with that official's successor.

The situation changed dramatically in the 1980s. The FBI and the Department of Justice mounted a major offensive against organized crime, the product, Jacobs claims, of a spontaneous movement by government prosecutors and bureau agents "affronted by the machinations of a notorious crime syndicate" (p. 123). Federal law enforcement scored impressive courtroom victories that led to the imprisonment of the boss of every Mafia family in the country by the end of the 1980s. It was also during this new campaign that the U.S. Attorney's Offices unlimbered a powerful new weapon, civil RICO, a subsection of the 1970 RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act specifically designed to get at the problem of labor racketeering.

Jacobs offers at once the most complete and the most lucid explanation of civil RICO available to date. He describes in detail the mechanics of how prosecutors go about filing a suit against a mobbed up union under this law. Should the government win its suit, Jacobs explains the types of relief a judge might grant in his ruling. This relief almost always includes court orders that ban organized crime figures from having any further dealings with the union or its officialdom. It usually also involves some form of court-supervised trusteeship, and here, as Jacobs explains, judges and prosecutors have a great deal of leeway regard-

ing the kind of intervention they will seek over a union's affairs.

In the book's concluding—and also its most important—section Jacobs considers the potential that civil RICO offers for providing a real solution to the problem of labor racketeering. He does this by surveying the record of government-imposed trusteeships over the past two decades.

The book's most detailed examination is of the two cases that might be considered civil RICO's greatest success and its most disappointing failure. The government trusteeship over Teamsters Local 560 lasted from 1986 to 1999; by its conclusion the Genovese Family's control over the local, which dated back to the 1950s, had come to an end. A new generation of local union leaders emerged with no ties to organized crime and with a strong commitment to serving the needs of the membership. A much shorter trusteeship over the New York District Council of the Carpenters Union enjoyed no such successes. A court settlement reached in 1994 led to a more limited form of government supervision over the district council. Subsequent criminal indictments in 2000 and 2002 indicated that mobsters continued to work with

key officials in the New York Carpenters Union. As Jacobs concludes, "The goal of the 1994 RICO suit—purging organized crime's influence from the [Carpenters'] district council—has clearly not been achieved" (p. 201).

The author's point, and in effect the book's thesis, is that "although civil RICO has been the most important law enforcement strategy in attacking labor racketeering, it has fallen seriously short of its full potential" (p. 259). Jacobs offers an analysis of why that is, focusing on the factors that explain why some trusteeships have been more successful than others. The closing chapter uses that analysis to provide a prescription for future government use of civil RICO. The result is a model of policy analysis. Jacobs gives us the best study to date of this controversial government reform effort. It is an effort, Jacobs notes, that has consumed significant resources and has great potential, but has been largely overlooked by scholars.

David Witwer

Professor of History
Lycoming College