those bodies of knowledge and translates them into policies, *The Aquatic Frontier* makes its most valuable contributions.

A Dialectic of Conspiracy

Cohen, Michael Mark. *The Conspiracy of Capital: Law, Violence, and American Popular Radicalism in the Age of Monopoly*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2019. xvii + 336 pp. $32.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-62534-401-4.

Timothy Messer-Kruse

Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA

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When Richard Hofstadter described what he termed a "paranoid style" in American politics in 1965, he added a psychological spin to an analysis well-grounded in rhetorical culture. Given American political culture's long penchant for unmoored conspiratorial thinking, the temptation to pathologize such rhetoric has been an unfortunate temptation to many scholars. However, in *The Conspiracy of Capital*, Michael Mark Cohen brilliantly avoids this pitfall and examines the conspiracy rhetoric of the American Left as part of an interlocking system of political thinking that enmeshed both radicals and corporate conservatives.

Adapting some of Frederic Jameson's narrative theory, Cohen reframes the frequent assertions of American radicals that shadowy groups of capitalists, cops, and labor spies plotted against the people, as part of a "dialectic of conspiracy," acting and reacting to apologists for corporate interests and the state whose own views and rhetoric evolve within this dynamic system. Jameson pointed out that conspiracy theories were how the poor and disenfranchised mapped and thereby made sense of the unseen forces governing them, though usually falsely. Cohen posits that this same process operated at both ends of the socioeconomic ladder; capitalists were no less likely to attempt to cognitively map the masses, to make sense of the social movements that sprang up organically out of the working class through visions of dark conspiracies and plots.

Cohen frames his study with a novel periodization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, what some historians have come to call the "long nineteenth century." He refers to this span of time as that of the "Haymarket generation." This label serves to connect the anarchist bombing and trial in Chicago of 1886 to the rise and crushing of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the organization of a communist popular front in the 1930s. Between these bookends, Cohen ably analyzes the contours and dynamics of a dialectic of conspiracy rhetoric that spun into powerful worldviews fueled by the periodic unmasking of actual conspiracies on both sides.

Cohen argues that conspiracy thinking proliferated after the Civil War as the state expanded and moved to win a monopoly over the legal and acceptable use of physical force. State power was successfully intruded into private conflicts between labor and capital through the conspiracy doctrine that served to criminalize collective actions that were legally untouchable when individual.

Indeed, among the many useful insights Cohen achieves in this vividly written book is revealing just how important and instrumental conspiracy rhetoric was to the building of the Old Left. Cohen focuses on the so-called Haymarket Generation, those radicals and labor activists who witnessed the growth of the repressive powers of the state, first in the iconic Haymarket prosecution and later in the conspiracy prosecutions of the leaders of the Western Federation of Miners and some branches of the American Federation of Labor, and when ultimately it smashed the IWW.

Cohen profiles Clarence Darrow and details many of the labor conspiracy prosecutions he fought. Darrow is interesting here not merely for his heroic efforts in taking on clients who were, in some cases, lost causes, but because in doing so he developed a keen insight into the nature of conspiracy law and its political meanings. Darrow's speeches and writings argued for a mirror equivalency between those actions of labor now criminalized by the court's permissive employment of the conspiracy doctrine and the everyday, normal, and accepted operation of corporate boardrooms across the nation. During the Pullman Strike of 1894, Darrow dramatically flipped the script and called for prosecution of the railroad owners' association as a conspiracy in restraint of trade.

Many of these narratives, such as the Frank Steunenberg murder case, the prosecution of Tom Mooney, and the McNamara bombing case, are familiar: Cohen provides new insights into them not by uncovering new facts, but by highlighting these cases' discursive elements, tracing the contours of what he terms the "dialectics of conspiracy." Both radicals and conservatives by this time had come to conceive of the other as operating in the murky realm of conspiracy. For conservatives, such conspiratorial imaginings served to justify their repressive violence while for radicals, conspiracy thinking was a "radical cognitive mapping" of the "unknowable totality" of their world.

Cohen shows how radical conspiracy ideas helped enliven the turn-of-the-century Left by feeding a hunger for knowledge of the workings of the ever-consolidating corporate economy. The 1911 prosecution of John and James McNamara, leaders of the American Federation of Labor's steel erectors union, partly because it provoked an avalanche of popular conspiracy theories implicating an unholy alliance of big business and government, brought the AFL into its closest cooperation with the Socialist Party and the renegade labor leader Eugene Debs. At the same time, a few Left publications, most notably the *Appeal to Reason*, published in the unlikely journalistic center of Gerard, Kansas, grew to be read by millions on the strength of its scoops revealing corporate scheming with governments and private spy agencies. After Woodrow Wilson inadvertently coined the term "invisible government," it was gleefully wielded by the IWW, especially as actual boardroom conspiracies to plant bombs were uncovered during the Lawrence "Bread and Roses" Strike of 1912.

While conspiracy thinking may have helped boom radicalism during the "Age of Monopoly," Cohen does not believe it works the same way in our current age of social media. Rather, he gloomily points out, conspiracy thinking today leads to social paralysis rather than organization and action.