

allein mit analoger Literaturrecherche und Quellenkritik nicht zustande gekommen wäre. Daten und die darin aufscheinenden Muster werden umfassend kontextualisiert und sorgfältig abwägend eingeordnet. Das große Argument des Buches, dass die Post als „gossamer network“, das staatlich befördert aber nicht zentral gelenkt wurde, eine äußerst passgerechte Infrastruktur der siedlerkolonialen Eroberung der westlichen USA von indigenen Nationen darstellte, wird plausibel nachgewiesen. In den stark von den Settler Colonial Studies beeinflussten Debatten von heute, die zentral auf Siedler und deren individuelle aggressive Selbstkonzepte fokussieren, ist die Zentrierung staatlicher Imperative zudem ein notwendiges Korrektiv.

Im Anschluss an Blevins Diskussion des „agency models“ würde man sich eine ausführlichere Auseinandersetzung mit den Anwendungsbereichen und den spezifischen Vorzügen und Dysfunktionalitäten, die aus dieser Delegation aus staatlicher Sicht erwachsen, wünschen. Korruption und Betrug werden zwar diskutiert, jedoch erscheint das Modell ganz überwiegend als effektives Instrument staatlicher Konsolidierung und Machtprojektion. An einer Stelle wird es gar einem „algorithm for solving the problems of US geography“ gleichgesetzt (S. 12). Dabei zeigt nicht zuletzt Blevins Buch, dass die Geschichte des Modells auch eine Geschichte der Abkehr der US-Regierung von dieser Art der Delegation ist. Auf dem Feld der staatlichen Gewalt, namentlich der Eroberung des Westens, ist diese Abkehr von der Delegation staatlicher Aufgaben sogar noch deutlich früher zu beobachten: Während bis in die 1850er Jahre noch Milizen Kriege gegen Indigene führten, die später vom Kon-

gress bezahlt wurden, übernahm seit der Zeit des Bürgerkriegs ganz überwiegend die zentral befehligte US-Armee diese Rolle. Worin bestand also die Stärke des „agency models“ – und was genau waren seine Widersprüche, Stärken und Schwächen? Welche Bereiche staatlicher Intervention wären zu unterscheiden?

Eine stärker international vergleichende Perspektive auf das „agency model“, die auch hierarchischere Modelle in anderen Siedlerkolonien miteinbezieht, wäre daher wünschenswert. Dank des ausgezeichneten Buches von Blevins und des von ihm veröffentlichten Datensatzes kann ein solcher Vergleich auf eine sehr gute Grundlage für die Geschichte der Post im US-amerikanischen Westen zurückgreifen.

Anmerkung:

1 <https://gossamernetwork.com>.

Holger Weiss: A Global Radical Waterfront: The International Propaganda Committee of Transport Workers and the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers, 1921–1937 (= Studies in Global Social History, 43), Leiden: Brill, 2021, 507 pp.

Reviewed by
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The latest book by Holger Weiss, a prominent practitioner of transnational and global labour history, ably deploys such methods. His focus is the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU, or Profintern)

and related organizations that sought to recruit maritime workers to communism between the two deadliest wars of the twentieth century. Specifically, he examines the International Propaganda Committee of Transport Workers (IPC-TW) in the late 1920s, International Seamen's Clubs and International Harbour Bureaus (related Communist Party initiatives), and International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISH) in the early 1930s. These groups and the Moscow-based RILU were offshoots of the Moscow-based Third Communist International (Comintern). No doubt, it can be confusing to keep these organizations straight – and dozens of others – which is why the book includes three pages of abbreviations.

These groups engaged in solidarity campaigns to support various maritime workers' strikes. They protested racism within maritime unions and actively worked to organize maritime workers who were Black or "coloured" (his term for those not from Africa or not of African descent). They also engaged in a great deal of propaganda against fascism, imperialism, and war.

A Global Radical Waterfront, however, uses an institutional history approach. In part, that is due to extant sources and the challenges involved in writing a global history of an organization with global aspirations. He examines materials from the Comintern and other Soviet archives in Moscow (with the help from a local intermediary) and from many other archives, especially in Scandinavia and Germany. Weiss demonstrates an impressive command of a vast secondary literature – in addition to the archival research – which, it must be highlighted, is in many languages. It is not a history of individual ports or branches, nor

is it biographical, though some communist leaders in the maritime sector feature prominently. For those who prefer their history "from below" – that is to say, from a social history approach – this book might be challenging because it operates at a level of abstraction that can be, at times, too abstract.

In the book's first part, Weiss explores the Comintern in the mid-to-late 1920s, after the Soviets and their allies failed to ignite a worldwide communist revolution. Maritime workers (sailors and stokers of many nationalities on commercial ships as well as dockers and stevedores in harbours) were a logical group for the Comintern to prioritize. Shipboard workers literally "sailed the seven seas", disseminating and gathering information as they organized across ports and borders. The first part of the book explores a litany of false starts and limited successes. Hamburg, Copenhagen, and Leningrad are discussed, as are Shanghai, Vladivostok, New York, Rotterdam, London, and other European ports.

Weiss begins the second part of the book in 1928, a turning point in the global communist movement. Lenin had died in 1924, followed by the vicious infighting in the Soviet Union that culminated with Trotsky being expelled and Stalin gaining power. The Comintern general secretary Bukharin popularized the term "Third Period", meaning the communists anticipated a growing anti-colonial, revolutionary movement around the world as, supposedly, worldwide capitalism started to collapse, thereby creating space for working-class movements to re-emerge. In terms of organizing workers, that meant the communists castigated trade unions and social democratic parties for being "social fascists". This also meant

that, rather than “boring from within”, mainstream unions – “dual unions” controlled by communists – should be formed to pull workers into the fold. The leaders of the IPC-TW embraced this vision, which Weiss refers to as “Class-Against-Class”. That meant communist organizers strove to convince maritime workers to join communist unions and that existing maritime unions should reaffiliate with the ISH, that is to say abandon their existing unions and international trade secretariat, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF). Weiss pays particular attention to efforts to organize colonial seamen in Europe. Notably, communists from some European colonies were particularly vocal about the RILU’s failure to address the colonial question as well as its failing to organize colonial maritime workers in unions and anti-imperial activities. Weiss agrees with that critique: “The attempt to organise black seamen and harbour workers [...] in England [and elsewhere] never materialised” (p. 323).

In the third part of the book, Weiss examines the ISH, which replaced the IPC-TW in 1930. While the ISH aspired to organize worldwide, ultimately none of the European or US sections successfully organized among Black and other maritime workers of colour – nor did they seem to try very hard, despite an ideological “desire”. There was almost no success in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. What little influence the ISH possessed was confined to some European port cities. For reasons left unclear, Soviet maritime workers and unions remained separate from the ISH.

Given the book’s breadth and depth, it can be hard to assess the historical impact, but after nearly 500 pages, there seems to be

only one conclusion: the communists failed to achieve any of their goals for maritime workers. For instance, Weiss writes about the ISH in 1931: “Hardly anywhere is there any systematic work of the formation of revolutionary trade union groups and committees on the ships” (p. 262). Later, “[b]y 1934, it was evident for all that the ISH (illegal) Secretariat had ceased to be a global player (if it ever had been one)” (p. 428).

Indeed, in the end, Weiss’s views become crystal clear: the “Third Period”, the “Class-Against-Class” phase, failed. Weiss demonstrates how the ISH was subject to the Soviets’ realpolitik foreign policy, which was neither anti-fascist nor anti-colonial in the early 1930s. The Soviets did not condemn the Japanese invasion of Manchuria or the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Nor did the Soviets, at first, condemn the persecution of German communists in the new Nazi regime. Stalin repeatedly put Soviet interests above proletarian international solidarity.

Weiss begins his “postscript” (conclusion) by provocatively asking: “Was everything in vain? Was the quest of the communists to radicalise maritime transport workers a project that was doomed to fail from the beginning?” (p. 451). That might also beg the question about the value of a book on this topic, but that would be mistaken.

Weiss correctly notes that his book fills a void: “the narrative of the political struggle within the maritime transport workers and the radicalisation of the maritime transport workers during the interwar period is (mostly) absent in the public presentation of the national maritime unions and usually only forms a footnote in the self-representation of the national unions” (p. 451). Moreover, the communists’ principled stances against colonialism, racism, and

xenophobia are significant. Weiss does not mention, however, that other socialist organizations and unions also advocated such ideals. For instance, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) did so since its inception in 1905.

Only after the Soviets realized the mortal threat of Nazi Germany and fascism did they pivot to the Popular Front. But that made the ISH and RILU obsolete, though they were already “dead”, as Weiss demonstrates.

For (maritime transport) workers, the Popular Front meant that the communists should shift (back) to mainstream unions. Subsequently, as is widely known, unions and other social movements around the world benefited from the energy and commitment of communist activists. In turn, communist parties experienced far greater growth and influence during the Popular Front era. But that is another book.

People interested in communist, labour, and maritime history – before the Popular Front – will appreciate this book. So will those who read global and transnational history.

**Jeronim Perović: Rohstoffmacht
Russland. Eine globale Energiege-
schichte, Köln: Böhlau, 2022, 260 S.**

Rezensiert von
Falk Flade, Frankfurt/Oder

In seiner Monografie „Rohstoffmacht Russland“ beschäftigt sich Jeronim Perović, Leiter des Center for Eastern European Studies sowie Titularprofessor für Osteuropäische Geschichte an der Universität Zürich, mit einem Thema, das aufgrund aktueller Ereignisse auf großes Interesse stoßen dürfte. Der Autor möchte die langfristigen Entwicklungslinien der russischen Energiegeschichte nachzeichnen und so zu einem besseren Verständnis der heutigen Situation beitragen. Allerdings endet der Betrachtungszeitraum im Herbst 2021, weshalb die jüngsten Entwicklungen seit dem russischen Überfall auf die Ukraine im Februar 2022 nicht berücksichtigt werden. Obwohl dies möglicherweise für eine gewisse Enttäuschung bei einigen Lesern führen wird, bietet das Buch doch einen konzisen Überblick über die Rolle Russlands als Exportmacht und erklärt, weshalb es gerade im Kalten Krieg trotz ideologischer und politischer Gegensätze zu jenen weitreichenden energetischen Verflechtungen kommen konnte, die die Beziehungen zwischen Russland und Europa noch bis vor Kurzem prägten. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit widmet der Autor der russischen Wahrnehmung des eigenen Landes als Rohstoffmacht. Er geht der Frage nach, wie relevante Entschei-