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## REVIEW ESSAY / NOTE CRITIQUE

# “A Seemingly Incongruous Alliance”: Trotskyists and Teamsters in 1934

**Alan Wald**

Bryan D. Palmer, *Revolutionary Teamsters: The Minneapolis Teamsters Strikes of 1934* (Leiden: Brill, 2013)

BRYAN PALMER'S EXUBERANT 300-page book immediately takes its place among the essential works about 1930s radicalism in the United States. *Revolutionary Teamsters* is no nostalgic chronicle of sepia-tinted events, much less a sentimental tryst with the revolutionary past. Using artful, stirring, and formidable research, Palmer puts pen to paper (or is it finger to keyboard?) with a moral urgency that vividly raises the political stakes in the field of labour studies. Even in the context of the author's own sizeable and distinguished Marxist *oeuvre* spanning thirty-five years, it shapes up as a standout through its pertinence to contemporary activism: “Minneapolis in 1934 matters because, in 2013, it has things to tell us, ways of showing that the tides of history, even in times that seem to flow against change, can be put on a different course.” (7) His sources are examined from every possible angle to produce a work radiant with the achievements of singular protagonists, men and women aflame with world-transforming convictions. We now have the richly detailed account that the militants of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) in Minneapolis deserve, as well as a brilliant rebuke to the forgetting of history.

A few pages into this meticulously crafted and captivating reconstruction of the events leading to the historic Minneapolis General Strike of the early Great Depression, the author observes that the Trotskyist/teamster bond crucial to the building of Local 574 is a “seemingly incongruous alliance.” (10) An activist himself, Palmer appreciates that models matter, particularly ones ill-treated by preceding scholars. The marvelously rendered tale that follows uses his capacious talents and exemplary evidentiary standards to

explain how this hitherto undervalued partnership “advanced the agenda of the working class and helped to establish 1934 as one of the unforgettable years of labour-upsurge in America.” (10) Twenty lively and fluent chapters provide extraordinary glimpses into each stage of the proletarian uprising that transformed the city and the union; a final two review and assess the political afterlife of Minneapolis Trotskyism up to the early 1940s.

Through the scrim of memory, the role of the Far Left in building industrial unions may be difficult to appraise in light of the present-day disorganized condition of the working class in the United States. Among much of the general public, Communism is little more than a boo word. Labour historians, however, are obliged by empirical evidence to provide more judicious treatments and there are some classics such as Bert Cochran’s *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions*.<sup>1</sup> Much less discernable is the Trotskyist presence in working-class history, usually restricted to the three Minneapolis strikes addressed by Palmer and subject to sustained attention only in a handful of book-length studies that remain (unfortunately) relatively marginal in the academic field: Charles R. Walker’s *American City*, Farrell Dobbs’ *Teamster Rebellion*, and Philip A. Korth’s *The Minneapolis Teamster Strike of 1934*.<sup>2</sup>

Regrettably, the Minneapolis events and their Trotskyist leadership receive no mention at all in the most prized books about American radicalism, Paul Buhle’s *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left* and Michael Kazin’s *Radical Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation*, or even Eli Zaretsky’s recent *Why America Needs a Left: A Historical Argument*.<sup>3</sup> One volume sympathetic to the Communist perspective, Fraser M. Ottanelli’s *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II*, actually mentions the strikes without using the dangerous T-word.<sup>4</sup> As Palmer suggests, the perception of Minneapolis as epitomizing an “incongruous alliance” is the effect of an eighty-year battle over inherited images of the radical legacy: “This book has a purposively mischievous title ... about people whom we now have difficulty imagining.” (2)

1. Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

2. Charles R. Walker, *American City: A Rank and File History of Minneapolis* (1937; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972); Philip A. Korth, *The Minneapolis Teamster Strike of 1934* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1995).

3. Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left*, (1987; revised Third Edition, London and New York: Verso, 2013); Michael Kazin, *Radical Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2011); Eli Zaretsky, *Why America Needs a Left: A Historical Argument* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012).

4. Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

Historians out of the long New Left romanticize the Communist movement, due to the undeniable heroism and antiracism of its rank and file. Contemporary liberals, and those farther to the Right, are variously anti-Communist but keen only to mine Trotskyism for ammunition exposing what they see as Stalinist perfidy. Each trend replicates the blind spots of their ancestors in the 1930s; neither has an investment in exploring the possibility of Far Left alternatives to what became the New Deal coalition and the Popular Front. As a result, the particularity of Trotskyist belief systems and identity locations remain generally outside the interpretive optic of the field. And then along comes Palmer.

The storm system of class struggle that he tracks settles over Minneapolis, where political tensions had simmered for years, and *Revolutionary Teamsters* shepherds a prodigious variety of events into a well-organized structure. The opening 28 pages present the reader with dazzling reproductions of murals, action photographs, group portraits, sheets from strike newspapers, and covers from pamphlets germane to the events. Then come sections with headings that colourfully echo titles of radical writings and historical episodes – “The Mass Strike” (addressing the 1934 upheavals in San Francisco and Toledo), “Uneven and Combined Development” (an analysis of the regional capitalism setting the context in Minneapolis), “Toward the July Days” (covering the period when Trotskyist leaders were brought in from the East), and “Standing Fast” (describing resistance during a time of intensified anti-Red hysteria).

In the initial four chapters, Palmer is at his best in terse, eloquently argued pages that elaborate the origins and scope of the book. He starts by studying the radar and scanning the horizon in search of political weather patterns through a discussion of the 1920s working class movement in Minnesota, the major class battles of the early 1930s, and the assembly of Trotskyist cadres (at this point organized as the Communist League of America or CLA) in the coal yards. Then, with events commencing in 1933, Palmer rushes out into the gale dragging the reader through fierce winds of morale-battering squalls to document the transformation of a once open-shop citadel, under the thumb of a bosses’ organization called “The Citizens Alliance,” into what would become a hotbed of CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) activity. The accomplishments of the Trotskyist cadres are best seen by alternating between a telescope and microscope, and Palmer employs both effectively in his reconstruction of crucial political events that can only be summarized here in outline form.

These comprise the initial efforts of former Communists-turned-Trotskyists V. R. (“Ray”) Dunne, his brothers Grant and Miles, and Carl Skoglund, to organize coal drivers into Teamster Local 544 (reported in the chapter “Trotskyists Among the Teamsters: Propagandistic Old Moles”). This effort met with victory in a winter 1933 strike, during which time they were joined by Farrell Dobbs (“January Thaw; February Cold Snap: the Coal-Yards on Strike”). The union then launched an outreach campaign, negotiated an alliance with organizations of farmers and the unemployed, and made preparations for bigger

actions by obtaining a facility for a strike headquarters, kitchen, and infirmary ("Unemployed Agitation and Strike Preparation" and "Rebel-Outpost: 1900 Chicago Avenue"). The militants also set up a Women's Auxiliary ("The Women's Auxiliary") led by Marvel Scholl (married to Farrell Dobbs) and Clara Dunne (married to Grant Dunne).

In May 1934 the market area of Minneapolis was shut down by the workers, resulting in sensational battles with police and private guards who were protecting strike breakers and scabs ("The *Tribune* Alley Plot and the Battle of Deputies Run"). With support from the American Federation of Labor's Central Labor Council and other unions, the teamsters fought back and drove the police, deputies, and members of the Citizens Alliance, out of the market area. This brought on a sequence of negotiations, including an intervention by Governor Floyd B. Olson, a member of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, that supposedly guaranteed union recognition, reinstatement of all strikers, and a seniority and non-discrimination clause for all workers ("May 1934: Settlement Secured; Victory Postponed.") But the employers proceeded to dismiss warehouse employees, and the strike was back into full swing in July. This produced a violent encounter on 20 July ("Bloody Friday"), in which two strikers were murdered and nearly seventy injured. On 26 July martial law was declared and Governor Olson ordered the national guard to seize the strike headquarters, throwing union leaders in a stockade ("Martial Law and the Red-Scare"). Yet the battle continued over the next month and came to a settlement that met the union's major demands ("Sudden and Unexpected Victory").

Although International President Daniel Tobin expelled Trotskyist-led Local 544 from the IBT in the spring of 1935, the branch of the union was rechartered a year-and-a-half later. Ray Dunne, Dobbs, and their comrades continued to play a vanguard role in the IBT and Minnesota union movement, helping to lead the Central Labor Council of Minneapolis, negotiating the first area-wide contract for any union outside of rail, and especially through organizing over-the-road drivers throughout the Midwest. This influence ended in 1941, when leaders of Local 544 and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP, successor to the CLA) were indicted under the Smith Act and sentenced to federal prison, after which a trusteeship was instituted by Tobin ("After 1934: The Revenge of Uneven and Combined Development").

This is a lot of history to absorb. There is also the customary problem of creating the fiction of narrative order, in which the historian must explain how first this happened and then that happened, even when the varied data of life itself doesn't follow a red thread but seems nearer to the composition of a Jackson Pollock painting. *Revolutionary Teamsters* unavoidably has many descriptive passages in the mould of the following formula:

An auxiliary speaker received a rousing round of applause when she declared that the women would "fight side by side with the men to the finish." Herbert Capelis, a youth-leader of the Communist League of America from New York, in Minneapolis as a consequence of

his organizing efforts on behalf of the Dental Technicians' Council of America, thought the meeting was inspiring, and was struck by both its resolve and its militancy. [James P.] Cannon reported to *The Militant* that the spirit of solidarity in Minneapolis was rising to new heights, and that many trade-unionists gathered outside the Eagles Hall to hear the outcome of the strike vote. When, by a unanimous standing vote, the assembly endorsed job action, strike-talk quickly spread to other unions, among them organizations of building tradesmen, barbers, car-mechanics, retail-clerks, dental mechanics, upholsterers, street-railway workers, and other drivers in the transport sector. (145)

A book providing the inside story with such specificity can be overwhelming unless there are compelling through lines to act as magnets that hold the reader's attention. To some extent Palmer has these in his political priority of dramatizing lessons for future political action, along with impressive narrative skills that give us a visceral sense of the world of class warfare. He also knows where to provide a breather with an entertaining anecdote, such as the last-minute decision of East Coast CLA leaders James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman to attend a movie rather than a burlesque-show shortly before they were seized by detectives at the time martial law was declared: "What a narrow escape from being arrested in a burlesque show," Cannon later recalled, "I never would have lived it down, I am sure." (182)

With impassioned and assiduous attention, Palmer orchestrates his material into a lively and fluent chronicle of well-crafted short chapters (one is only four pages long) that can be digested in installments. They also serve as mini-classes on establishing dual leadership in a union, running flying picket squads, initiating a women's auxiliary, organizing a movement of the unemployed, and setting up a daily strike newspaper. One of the most sobering lessons concerns the difference between Communist and Trotskyist union policy at that time. The former held that the AFL unions were hopeless and that all-new revolutionary (Red or dual) unions were required. As articulated by Cannon, the Trotskyist view was that "the main direction of working class movement at the present time is into the conservative [AFL] unions" and that the more militant workers "will very probably break out of the formal bounds of the A. F. of L. and seek expression in a new trade union movement. But in order to influence such an eventuality the revolutionaries must connect themselves with the live process of the movement at every stage of its development." (13)

The Communists, whose ultraleft policy left them with, at the very best, a half-dozen members among the thousands of strikers, surely picked the wrong horse to flog in their scurrilous attacks upon the Minneapolis Trotskyists as "agents of the bosses" and "traitors." (119) A shared heritage in the Bolshevik revolution obviously imparted fratricidal intimacy to this wider ideological quarrel, epitomized by the hatchet-man role of Party leader William F. Dunne, yet another of the famous Dunne brothers and the closest ally of Cannon in the 1920s when both had been Communist followers of William Z. Foster. Seven years later the Communist Party was further disgraced when General Secretary Earl Browder gave evidence on behalf of the prosecution of the

Trotskyist and teamster leaders under the same Smith Act that would subsequently send the Communists themselves to prison. Such a blend of treachery and folly requires an entire suspension bridge to hold up the contemporary reader's disbelief. For decades after, Stalinist apologists would still be picking Trotskyist buckshot out of their hides for such sectarian stupidities.

Every scholarly work has its glitches. My own private scoring system gives Palmer the highest marks for his enviable mastery of the political landscape. Strikes are complex, with some aspects positively Byzantine due to side-switching and underhanded subterfuges. But Palmer explains it all clearly, explicating the participants and their positions; he proves himself a marvelous writer for this genre, gripping and evocative while also scrupulously scholarly. (It also helps that his excellent footnotes are immediately accessible on the bottom of each page.) *Revolutionary Teamsters* captures the excitement of a mass movement finding its voice and feeling its potential.

The grades are a little lower when it comes to providing vivid portraits and psychological insight. Not all of us can have Isaac Deutscher's unique ability to make his protagonists come alive, and Palmer chooses to sketch much of his large cast of characters with expert rapidity but minimum concreteness. Too often the identifications of participants are so informal or quirky that the reader may not be able to evaluate which ones were truly significant or just bit players, or even remember who was who: "Albert Glotzer, closely aligned with Max Shachtman in what was something of a factional hothouse" (42); Sam Gordon, "a young Cannon protégé" (43); Carlos Hudson, "a Minneapolis Trotskyist of some journalistic aptitude"; "Herbert Solow, "the experienced and talented journalist" (139). (The index has a separate entry for "Harry Strang," which is actually a pseudonym for Solow.) The poet and journalist James Rorty (father of philosopher Richard Rorty) is quoted a number of times but never identified. Surely an activist of such standing in the Trotskyist movement as attorney Albert Goldman should receive a fuller gloss than "recently recruited to the League from the Communist Party." (139)

The most solid portraits are of the five or six male political leaders, effectively drawn from earlier accounts by journalists. It is clear that these proletarian revolutionists were no Yegeny Bazarovs out of a Turgenev novel, and that the magnificent Ray Dunne, the most vividly described, was not exactly a puppy-hugger. But even here the biographies are more suggestive than textured, and it is hard to catch people's ages and basic facts about their personal life. Of Ray Dunne's domestic situation, we are told only that "he married and raised a family which included, from time to time, a number of adopted children." (44) Grant Dunne was married to a Clara Holmes, central in the Women's Auxiliary, but her birth year and all other biographical information are missing. (Her dates are 1898–1986.) Of Miles Dunne, apart from mention of his aspiration to be a professional actor, the role of the personal is even more obscure. (His dates are 1895–1958, and his grave in the Fort Snelling



National Cemetery indicates that he served as a corporal in World War I and was married to a woman named Jewell Flaherty, 1901–1986.)

For those interested in the qualities that make up “leadership,” a key category in this book, the matter of biography is more than decoration. The political strategy formulated by successful strike militants is not reached by abstract processes and algorithms deduced from sentences in Marxist political documents; decisions in the heat of battle flow from deeply rooted elements in the political leader’s personality, angle of vision, speech habits, interactions with people, physical health, and ways of dealing with the world. In accounting for a leader’s choices and activities, deliberated or intuitive, even his or her relations with romantic partners and family members may find resonance. Biography and psychology, while never entirely knowable, inflect one’s political ideology in a social context to produce “leadership,” which is one reason why political currents and factions are often named after an individual who has left an indelible personal imprint. Human dimensions, while often difficult to parse, always play a crucial role even in what appear to be stream-lined, panoramic class struggle epics.

In *Revolutionary Teamsters*, one is looking at political lives that mattered, so it would be nice to know more about the “movement culture” of the Trotskyists in Minneapolis. What kinds of books were read and discussed, ideas debated, racial and ethnic attitudes expressed, and gender relations practised? Shared ideas about issues such as those addressed in Trotsky’s “Results and Prospects” surely have an adhesive nature in a group, but the ties that bind are just as frequently common, practical, and physical things.<sup>5</sup> These strands of connective tissue need to be made more visible to assist in turning all the names-in-passing and various events from an onslaught of data to arresting patterns that add depth and complexity. Ultimately *Revolutionary Teamsters* expounds a story that isn’t invested as much in the humanity of its characters as I think is necessary to build a bridge to the generation Palmer aspires to reach.

To be sure, if you like steely-eyed Bolsheviks – and who doesn’t like steely-eyed Bolsheviks? – this is the book for you. Even the fascinating group of Native American Indian participants, who are mentioned mostly in a footnote (264), are little more than square-jawed and broad-shouldered: “A 1934 strike veteran, Trotskyist, and Sioux Nation member, [Ray] Rainbolt, who had experience as a First World-War soldier, drilled the [Union Defense] Guard and oversaw target-shooting practice.... Rainbolt and the UDG assembled in public to thwart gatherings of the [fascist] Silver Shirts.” (228) But Palmer’s pantheon is overwhelmingly a boys club, fine examples of *Homo Proletarianicus*, a rare species of Real Men. Inasmuch the radical feminism of the late 20th century reinvented Marxism for many scholars as a gender-alert form of historical

5. Leon Trotsky, *Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* (New York: Pathfinder, 1969).



inquiry, the lack of women in this volume is pretty painful, with some thin sketches of activists mostly confined to six pages on “The Women’s Auxiliary” (Chapter Seven).

Part of the difficulty, regarding women as well as racial minorities, is no doubt a miserably scant paper trail. To unearth the world of women of the Old Left, scholars have had to dig long and hard to come up with documents, family letters, and sources for interviews among descendants that reveal new facts. For the lives of many women activists, we may never even know the extent of our own ignorance. Yet the detective-like task of excavating considerably beyond the perfunctory places must be recognized as one’s research priority, too, and more attentiveness to this area is not to expect the impossible from the volume under review. Using precisely the variety of sources cited above, Elizabeth Raasch-Gilman published a fascinating biographical and political study of two very significant women activists of the Minneapolis Trotskyists, Grace Holmes Carlson and Dorothy Holmes Schultz, in the Fall 1999 issue of *Minnesota History*.<sup>6</sup> (This essay is not cited by Palmer in his otherwise excellent bibliography, although he lists other items from the same journal). More, conceivably a lot more, could have been found to help us learn about the principal leaders of the Women’s Auxiliary. Two of the three daughters of Marvell Scholl Dobbs, of whom we are told almost nothing (her dates are 1908?–1984), are still alive. The oldest, Carol Dobbs DeBerry, a teenager during many of the events described, died only in December 2010. Clara Dunne’s dates can be located (1898–1958), and she was survived by four sons, Clair, Jack, Richard, and Russell.

With the Grant/Clara branch of the Dunne family, another issue arises to underscore a lack of three-dimensionality in the narrative. Palmer mentions fleetingly that Grant, who suffered from depression apparently connected with shell shock in World War I, committed suicide in 1941 because “he could not face the combined prospects of world-war and the incessant attacks [culminating in the impending Smith Act trial] on the kind of trade unionism he had contributed so much to building.” (246) Psychoanalysis at long-distance is not recommended; on the other hand, the compound causes of suicide are too widely debated for one to attribute them so confidently and absolutely to capitalism’s international war and state repression. The circumstances of Grant’s demise as reported in the press at the time were acutely heartrending in a way that magnified the pain and horror for those closest to him; Clara and the eleven-year-old Russell were present in the house when Grant shot himself. At the least one might pause and reflect that the Minneapolis Trotskyists were Titanic in certain respects, but also vulnerably human – our size.

A legend of steely-eyed Bolsheviks, following the principled politics of a revolutionary program, is a formula ready-made for sect and cult building.

6. Elizabeth Raasch-Gilman, “Sisterhood in the Revolution: The Holmes Sisters and the Socialist Workers’ Party,” *Minnesota History*, 56, no. 7 (1999): 358–375.

Not only can the thorns of life wound deeply, which surely was the case with the Grant and Clara Dunne family and probably others; but the story of the US Left also includes some lost souls and those with thwarted dreams, along with more than a few whose self-identification with the “objective interests” of the revolution led to arrogance and a range of very bad behaviours. The scholar who wishes his or her narrative to escape myth and become part of history must pick and choose which humanizing moments are effective and appropriate to bring to the fore. This balance was recently achieved by James Lorence’s *Palomino: Clinton Jencks and Mexican-American Unionism in the American Southwest*, which tells a story that brings honour to its protagonist despite (or maybe because of) the revelation of personal flaws.<sup>7</sup> The shielding of such areas in Palmer’s book may raise doubts about the price paid for an over-fixation on “principled” leaders and “revolutionary” line (definitions of which vary); this is often accompanied by a paternalistic fear that ambiguity, complexity, and the “personal” will undermine the political resolve of those one seeks to influence. But a Marxism for the 21st century must candidly explain, not shrewdly rearrange, the full history that came before.

My carping about mostly secondary and methodological matters should not distract from the groundbreaking research Palmer’s book contains. Even episodes about which one has heard before are now told better; the specialist may know what is coming in the summer of 1934 or 1941 but will still witness it all in a state of suspense. And Palmer makes the compelling case that Minneapolis, rather than being similar to the other famous strikes of 1934 (a view he attributes to Bert Cochran, but one also promoted by Sidney Lens in *The Labor Wars*), is actually quite distinct.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the Trotskyist revolutionaries were organic to the industry, more resolute in their preparations for battle, and more adept at negotiating. What is also new in Palmer’s book, with its emphasis on the specific Trotskyist leadership of the strikes and subsequent union activity, is a much enhanced concentration on the involvement of Trotskyist founder James P. Cannon. *Revolutionary Teamsters*, in fact, originated as a chapter of Palmer’s prize-winning biography-in-progress of Cannon, the first volume of which appeared in 2007 as *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928*.<sup>9</sup>

Since the Minneapolis story is a Trotskyist’s wet dream, it may come as a surprise that Palmer is hardly uncritical. His disapprovals, however, are all from the Left, and mostly fall on the shoulders of Farrell Dobbs for being unable to mount a revolutionary critique of the Farmer-Labor Party and tending to

7. James J. Lorence, *Palomino: Clinton Jencks and the Mexican-American Unionism in the American Southwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

8. Sidney Lens, *The Labor Wars: From the Molly Maguires to the Sitdowns* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973).

9. Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

rely unduly on Governor Floyd Olson. Palmer holds that the Minneapolis comrades, due to their initial success, actually broke with the very nurturing ideas of their movement that four years later would be expanded into the “Transitional Program” serving as the basis of Trotsky’s Fourth International when it was founded in 1938.<sup>10</sup> Although Palmer thankfully refuses to strike the pose of the veteran Leninist advising the young’uns, he is unyielding in his criticism of the Minneapolis Trotskyists for a tendency toward adaptation, and he has a strong 1940 quote from Trotsky himself to back this up (236–7).

Palmer, like everyone else, has his political biases, but I find that these play a small role in the broad-spectrum conclusions of the book. The Minneapolis teamsters probably couldn’t have won without a disciplined leadership, serious organization, political clarity, and cadres highly experienced in the industry. Moving forward to 2013, where Palmer’s sights are ultimately set, one sees aspiring revolutionaries able to compel the world’s attention and sympathy through actions such as the Occupy movement, and to risk life and limb in defiance of authority in places such as Egypt. But these admirable young activists have neither the organizational nor strategic ability to assume and exercise power. Personally, I don’t know whether what occurred in the 1930s was a preview to the main feature, due for wide release any day now, or simply preparatory to a number of different futures. The Angel of History is notoriously capricious; social change follows no libretto and can be a painfully slow process.

On the other hand, *Revolutionary Teamsters* gives the lie to the belief in an inherent ineffectuality of Trotskyism, and shows the importance of its heritage as disproportionate to the movement’s small size. Yet I am not claiming that Palmer’s book closes off the topic. Fresh material can always come to light that modifies perceptions. There is also the possibility of applying new methods to a topic that can challenge valuable old sources; micro-history, for example, takes small mysteries about a person (Marvell Scholl?) as a means to exploring the culture, blending with or modifying the grand narratives. And this is not even to mention that the world situation shifts and the past is always worth another look as new generations see things differently. Still, what we have in *Revolutionary Teamsters* should prove inspirational for a future political history, in life as well as books. Ray Dunne and his comrades worked for the overthrow of the established order in season and out, and their legacy reminds one that the ideals of labour radicalism express an ambition for which a lifetime’s energy might rightly be spent. While there are those who may ultimately judge the outcome of 1934 only a productive failure, Bryan Palmer has assured that the Minneapolis teamsters still provide a heroic example – even from the grave.

10. Leon Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and Tasks of the Fourth International* (1938; New York: Pathfinder, 1977).