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*The Great Cowboy Strike: Bullets, Ballots and Class Conflicts in the American West*, by Mark A. Lause (2017) London and Brooklyn: Verso, 283 pages. ISBN: 978-1-78663-196-1

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on challenging them cannot have either of these at the outset, and consequently can only rely upon whatever specific market power it can obtain from patents. Since the patent system has been allowed to become primarily a vehicle for protecting chemical inventions, it is correspondingly ineffective for inventions in all other technologies."

The crowning blow to capitalism's economic efficacy lies in "The Fatal Capture of Money," the title of Chapter 4. Limited liability rights given to banks and other financial institutions creates incentives to take extraordinary risks. The ultimate result is a financial system that resembles a giant "Ponzi" scheme. The valueless deck of financial cards is bound to collapse when forces combine to collect invisible assets—to convert the intangible to tangible. The Great Depression and Great Recession result. Economic self-interest captures the system to its ultimate disadvantage. The public interest escapes notice. Private wealth dominates the political process, which further solidifies the distributional inequality of wealth. Wages stagnate and innovation falters far below the optimal. Advancement for the public good is a side-show.

The final chapter (Chapter 5: "Could Anything Have Saved It?") represents a noble attempt at normative prescription. Basically, the policy solutions to the inherent flaws of capitalism originate in changing property rights. First, it is important not to grant banks limited liability. Second, information and innovation protections need to be modified to limit their restrictive impacts, shifting the granting of such protections to fostering technology and not financialization. Government needs to promote public-based research and development that develops applicable technologies, modeled after efforts to develop small businesses. Reforms of government need to end the dependency of bureaucracies on private interests and erect a genuinely independent civil service motivated by public

good. The resulting growth of economic benefits could be used to distribute wealth more evenly through a *Citizens' Income* formula, which resembles President Nixon's 1969 *Family Assistance Plan*.

The "Epilogue: The Centre Could Not Hold" is a plausible doomsday forecast, which bespeaks the unlikelihood of any policy solutions emerging under the present system. Indeed, Kingston quotes Judge Richard Posner, who argues that: "The adjustments that will be needed, if the economy does not outgrow an increasing burden of debt, to maintain our economic position in the world, may be especially painful and difficult because of features in the American political scene that suggest that *the country may be becoming in important respects ungovernable*." Unfortunately, as Kingston concludes, "the U.S. Supreme Court has made things worse by lifting all restrictions on campaign funding by corporations [...]". If the political process is so intractably captured by private interests, then, there is arguably no escape from the tyranny of such rule, except another system. What that system might be, we are left to guess.

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**The Great Cowboy Strike:  
Bullets, Ballots and Class Conflicts  
in the American West**

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On 27 June 1967, in the midst of the counter revolution against the Civil Rights Struggle in America, H. Rap Brown said: "Violence is as American as cherry pie".<sup>1</sup> America conducted a revolution to free itself from rule across the Atlantic at the end of the Eighteenth Century. Its *Declaration of Independence* stated that: "All men are created equal", seemingly oblivious

to its use of persons seized from Africa as slaves. The American Civil War resulted in the killing of 750,000 Americans.<sup>2</sup> During the Nineteenth Century, there was what Mark Lause describes as the “ethnic cleansing” of indigenous peoples (p. x). To this, we can add the lynchings of African Americans after the ending of slavery, the Civil Rights Struggle and the killings associated with the more recent Black Lives Matter, the violence of labour struggles,<sup>3</sup> and the never-ending killings, now mass killings including school children, linked to America’s gun culture.

Hollywood has glorified cowboys and the West as simple morality stories between “good” and “evil”, in abstracting from what, in fact, happened during this era of bloodshed and murder. The point of Mark A. Lause’s *The Great Cowboy Strike: Bullets, Ballots and Class Conflicts in the American West* is to put an end to such abstractions and investigate the struggles for power and domination which occurred on the prairie. He demonstrates that violence was used by the rich and powerful to enhance their position and tame dissent against those who resisted their domination. Private armies were employed against small farmers and ranchers as well as cowboys who utilised strikes to seek improvements in their economic position.

The title of the book suggests a focus on strikes by cowboys. While Lause clearly explains the background to and events associated with a wave of strikes which occurred in the years 1883 to 1886, his work is really an account of radical politics, or the ferment of ideas, movements and political parties, in short what he refers to as Third Parties during the decades after the Civil War. His book reflects extensive research on events on the prairies and in the meeting places of those pursuing a radical agenda and those hell-bent on ensuring that this did not occur, and those “charged” with the responsibility of killing off those who got in the way of “progress.”

One of the major points made by Lause is that these events in the West have been generally ignored by American historians. He rejects the supposition that radical ideas emerged in the East with baggage brought to America by immigrants in the latter decades of the Nineteenth Century. He maintains that they were “homegrown,” a response to the repression experienced by those who found themselves dominated by ruling elites from the East or in England.

Cowboys were invariably successful in their strike endeavours in either resisting cuts to or obtaining increases in their pay. The bosses were unable to find an alternative workforce to perform the arduous tasks associated with four or fifth month, sixteen hour a day cattle runs. But those cowboys who were involved with strikes were not offered jobs after the run, were blacklisted and, if they sought to establish their own cattle herds, were accused of being ‘rustlers’ and became targets for hired killers.

Lause devotes a number of chapters to how violence was employed against political opponents or those who challenged the powerful. He examines how a bombing was used by Republicans to frame an opponent prior to an election in Coffeyville, Kansas. He also documents how a judge in Woodsdale had his bodyguard kill a political opponent on the doorsteps of the court house in Woodsdale, Kansas in front of witnesses; the assailant was never charged. He provides another example of where locals sought to bring to justice persons who had killed four unarmed men. Their prosecution was overturned by the US Supreme Court on the basis that no court had the jurisdiction to make such a prosecution.<sup>4</sup> Lause, whose writing has a nice sardonic touch, comments: “That a Gilded Age Republican high court could place something as basic as the prohibition of murder beyond the responsibility of government has delightfully anarchist implications” (p. 213).

In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner delivered a speech on the role of the frontier

in American history. He maintained that American democracy “gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier” (p. 246).<sup>5</sup> Lause demonstrates the disjuncture between this claim and the reality of what happened on the frontier. As new frontiers were found, powerful elites used violence to slap down those who resisted their attempts to dominate and control economic and political life. His major conclusion is: “The use of violence became inseparable from an inversion of the responsibility for its employment. Exaggeration of actual or misinformation about violence aimed at whites by Indians, insurgent political movements against the armed minions of the state, or strikers against employers became an issue only because it justified violent repression. What the mythology celebrated as ‘law and order’ or ‘civilization’ required brutal feuds and range wars, which treated as ‘savage’ any serious movement of workers or radical criticisms of capitalism” (p. 249).

Lause forces us to rethink the West and the role it has played in American history. It was in the West that American employers learnt the arts of taking on and corraling cowboys, uppity farmers and ranchers that got in their way, and Third parties and thinkers outside the mainstream who sought to challenge their hegemony. Lessons learnt on the prairie were adopted by owners of railways and mines in the West, and then by steel, car makers, manufactures and others in the East with the increasing industrialization of America. In the South, violence was used to keep African Americans and do-gooders under control and naturally morphed into retaliation against the struggle for Civil Rights. Mark A. Lause concludes his account with the clarion call for the essential role of historical scholarship: “The past is not buried simply by the sedimentation of passing time, but also by the desire to entomb a living history beneath iconic and lifeless statuary. Ultimately, though, without excavating the past,

no rational or coherent future can be likely” (p. 269).

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#### **Notes**

- 1 YouTube, Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown) “Violence is as American as Cherry Pie”, Accessed 1 April 2018.
- 2 BBC News, “Who, What, Why: How many soldiers died in the US Civil War?”, 4 April 2012.
- 3 For an excellent study from the New Deal Era, see Ahmed White (2016) *The Last Great Strike: Little Steel, the CIO and the Struggle for Labor Rights in New Deal America*, Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- 4 *Cook v United States*, 138 US 157 (1891).
- 5 Frederick Jackson Taylor (1921) *The Frontier in American History*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, p. 293.

#### **Le stress au travail, un enjeu de santé**

**Par Patrick Légeron (2015) Paris : Odile Jacob, 393 pages. ISBN : 978-2-7381-3268-0.**

Cet ouvrage s’inscrit dans une réflexion amorcée — et toujours en cours — sur la montée inquiétante du stress au travail en France. Bien qu’entamée plus tardivement que dans les pays d’Europe du Nord, cette réflexion a donné lieu, depuis 2008, à la publication d’une dizaine de rapports. De manière générale, la souffrance au travail a pris une place prépondérante dans les préoccupations du Ministère du Travail. Pourtant, malgré l’avancée des recherches et les différentes initiatives mises en place, ce problème de santé publique demeure en croissance. À la suite de son premier livre paru en 2001, Légeron revient, dans cet ouvrage, sur les avancées survenues au cours des deux dernières décennies. De plus, il y décortique le concept de « stress » au travail et s’attarde à comprendre les raisons de sa croissance fulgurante. Son analyse se décline en cinq parties.