Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to the Present. By ROBERT JUSTIN GOLDSTEIN. (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1978. Pp. xxii, 682. $22.50.)

Robert Justin Goldstein's massive work is nothing more nor less than a near comprehensive canvass of major acts of political repression in the United States from 1870 to the present. Defining political repression as "government action which grossly discriminates against persons or organizations viewed as presenting a fundamental challenge to existing power relationships or key governmental policies, because of their political beliefs," Goldstein argues that political repression has "contributed significantly" to the failure of the U.S. trade union movement to achieve substantial political power before the 1930s; the destruction of radical labor organizations and radical political movements in the U.S.; and the "self-censorship which Americans have imposed upon their own exercise of basic political freedoms."

Goldstein does not reject all explanatory force in the usual accounts of America's exceptional lack of socialism, but wishes to note, "The consensus school has overlooked an additional factor which has also been highly important in undermining radical dissent in the U.S.: the role of political authorities in repeatedly subjecting radical dissenters to severe penalties and harassment not faced by other, less 'objectionable,' persons, i.e. political repression."

This relatively modest thesis is supported in painstaking detail, virtually all of which (with the notable exception of Goldstein's penultimate chapter on Vietnam War Era 1965-75 repression) is culled from established, scholarly, secondary sources. It is a long, shameful history of ordinary working people, radicals, and dissenting liberals being subjected to physical assault, denial of the freedoms of speech and assembly, political deportation, loss of job, discriminatory arrest, police surveillance, illegal burglary, wiretapping, interception of mail, preventive detention, and a range of other violations of basic civil liberties. If nothing else, it is clear from Goldstein's study that the use of unconstitutional and common criminal means to curb dissent and crush significant opposition movements has not been a matter of periodic *bouleversements* in an otherwise fully tolerant polity, but a near continuous practice since the U.S. entered its developed industrial stage after the close of the Civil War. As such, the work is a useful first step in under-

standing what is still a commonly unremarked aspect of American political life.

The usefulness of Goldstein's history is limited, however, by the weakness of his explanatory apparatus and the lack of comparative data on repression in other capitalist democracies. Goldstein's explanation of the general level of political repression at any particular point consists of identifying five variables—the attitude of policy-makers toward political dissidents, levels of strain or tension in the society, levels of dissent, the presence of suitable scapegoats for reprisal, and opposition to repression by key elites—a change in which is generally associated with a change in the general level of repression. Little attempt is made to give these variables more than a common language meaning, let alone provide quantitative indicators of their presence, demonstrate their relative strength in a time series, or fit them into current state theory. The absence of comparative data vitiates the argument in relation to debates on American exceptionalism.

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