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Kyle Burke. *Revolutionaries for the Right: Anticommunist Internationalism and Paramilitary Warfare in the Cold War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-4696-4073-0 (hardcover, \$35.00).

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Reviewed by **Seth Offenbach**, Bronx Community College

The Anti-Communist International

Fred Schwarz, a right-wing anti-Communist activist in 1957, understood the international Communist movement as something to be feared and defeated. According to testimony given by Schwarz to Congress, “To negotiate true peace with people who are utterly dedicated to the concept of the historical inevitability of class war and their victory is impossible. To think that we can do it is to indicate a failure to understand communism so completely that it approaches mental illness.”¹ Schwarz was clear that the Communists were duplicitous and must be stopped by means necessary and that the West could not negotiate with them since Soviet Union wanted nothing short of total world domination. Schwarz’s worldview is a good starting point for understanding the argument underpinning Kyle Burke’s *Revolutionaries for the Right*. Burke walks his readers through the middle and late years of the Cold War, pointing out historical breadcrumbs to make arguments which have not previously been made by historians. He states that “Most historians do not think of conservatives and rightists—whether in the Americas, Asia, Africa, or Europe—as internationalists, let alone revolutionaries fighting wars of national liberation” (8). Burke argues that these historians are wrong. *Revolutionaries for the Right*, argues that because conservatives in the 1950s and 1960s believed they could not negotiate with Communists, they began a long and steady process of organizing a violent, international, anti-Communist effort which culminated in military support for several revolutions in the Global South in the mid-1980s.

Revolutionaries for the Right introduces historians to the idea that there was a right-wing “anticommunist international” (a term which Burke created for this book) which fought against the Communist International

¹ Fred Schwarz, “Will You Be Free to Celebrate Christmas in the Future?” 29 May 1957, <http://blogs.brown.edu/hallhoag/files/2013/12/Allen-Bradley.png>

(Comintern) throughout the latter years of the Cold War. This anti-Communist International was primarily funded by private donations coming from corporations and citizens, primarily in the United States. The seeds for the anti-Communist International began in the 1950s with intellectual support from mainstream conservative figures such as William F. Buckley, Marvin Liebman, and Clarence Manion. This international movement grew throughout the Cold War and by the 1980s it sprouted the infamous Iran-Contra scandal which seriously damaged the administration of President Ronald Reagan. Burke is the first historian to make the argument that conservative anti-Communism from the 1950s related directly to the anti-Communist wars in the 1980s, including the one in Nicaragua which ensnared Reagan with the Iran-Contra scandal.

Burke's book is both revolutionary and contradictory at the same time. At its best, it does an outstanding job of demonstrating how right-wing Americans worked to expand anti-Communist violence throughout the world. Chapters 4, 5, and 6, which are easily the book's best, demonstrate how many individuals with the CIA and Department of Defense (DoD) left their jobs in the late 1970s because they no longer wished to work for the U.S. government. These individuals were disturbed by the United States' failure in Vietnam, where they believed the U.S. could have won the war if leftist agitation had not interfered. They were further disillusioned by the 1975 Church Committee hearings which investigated wrongdoing and abuse of power by U.S. intelligence agencies and which they believed painted a narrative of U.S. immorality. They openly opposed President Jimmy Carter's focus on human rights. Those who did not quit their jobs due to the above reasons were fired when Stansfield Turner became director of the CIA and began a controversial downsizing program on behalf of Carter. Many of these anti-Communists who left the CIA and DoD, as described by Burke, believed that it was their duty to stall the post-Vietnam decline of the United States. Thus, they went into the private sector to help fight Communists internationally. Burke does a good job of demonstrating that many of these former government workers had close connections with mainstream right-wing political groups in the United States.

Beginning in the late 1970s and through the mid-1980s, these right-wingers helped the U.S. to fight wars in Angola, Namibia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and more. They also worked to coordinate arms sales to the Mujahedin in Afghanistan. Burke does an excellent job of demonstrating that many different anti-Communist groups worldwide had relationships with one-another. He also demonstrates how mainstream U.S. conservatives gave intellectual cover to various anti-Communist military actions. One of the main actors whom Burke follows in chapters 5 and 6 is retired Major General John Singlaub. Burke documents Singlaub's ascension to the presidency of the World Anti-Communist League (WACL) in 1983 and how Singlaub used WACL to aid anti-Communist rebels throughout the Global South. This time period, in the mid-1980s, "marked the high point of the anticommunist international" (156). But Singlaub was not just some former-CIA and DoD anti-Communist. Burke proves that Singlaub had a close working relationship with the mainstream Conservative Caucus, the American Security Council, and the American Conservative Union. At the same time, other mainstream conservative groups like the American Enterprise Institute, Accuracy in Media, and the Conservative Political Action Conference were all involved in advocating for various anti-Communist international leaders and groups. The anti-Communist International was even involved in lobbying Congress, via the law firm managed by Paul Manafort. Burke beautifully describes this period from 1979 through 1986 as one in which conservative leaders in the United States took Fred Schwarz's warnings about Communism seriously and decided that violence, via the anti-Communist International, was the best means of defending the world from Communist advances.

By connecting the various right-wing anti-Communist movements in one book, and showing how they attempted to coordinate and aid one another, Burke changes the historical view of the right and the

worldwide anti-Communist movement during the final years of the Cold War. In addition, Burke offers a powerful counter-narrative to the historiography focusing on human rights in the latter years of the Cold War. While many individuals, both in and out of governments, focused on promoting human rights through various transnational connections, at the same time members of the anti-Communist International promoted violent, fascist, and unsavory anti-Communist characters.

Much like the latter half of the book, chapters 1, 2, and 3 complicate our historical understanding of the early years of the conservative movement. These chapters begin in the 1950s and focus on the role of the U.S. right in shaping the worldwide anti-Communist struggle. Here Burke's main actor is conservative fundraiser and activist Marvin Liebman. Burke does a better job than most previous accounts of highlighting Liebman's role in the shaping of the conservative movement. He examines the trips taken by conservatives, most prominently Liebman but others as well, to various international anti-Communist conferences such as the meetings of the Asian People's Anti-Communist League (APACL). These conferences have not received much attention in the secondary literature. Through an analysis of various conferences and letters, Burke demonstrates that the U.S. right saw a clear connection between anti-Communist activities in Cuba, Congo, and Vietnam in the early 1960s; this is a topic which few historians have touched on.² Exploring how the right viewed the connection between these three countries requires more historical examination and Burke leads the way here.

Burke's argument that the U.S. conservative movement was internationalist and revolutionary in the 1950s and 1960s is unique and important to the historical scholarship. Still, one can question some of Burke's findings from this period. Most seriously, in several places Burke describes international groups and organizations which either dissolved within a year of their founding or lost U.S. conservative support rather quickly. For instance, does Liebman's relationship to the World Anti-Communist Congress for Liberty and Freedom matter if it dissolved in less than one year? Or how much does the Freedom Corp, a conservative program meant to counter the U.S. government's Peace Corp, matter as a historical anecdote if, in the words of Burke, it was "an expensive charade" (42)? Too often, in the eyes of this reviewer, the book offered interesting side tales about organizations like the Freedom Corp and World Anti-Communist Congress for Liberty and Freedom which seemed to have little or no relevance even during their short lives. The discussions of these organizations distract from Burke's otherwise formidable arguments.

Burke's description of the U.S. right's relationship to WACL is also quite interesting and complicated, though open to criticism. As Burke argues, the group was founded in 1967, but did not begin to receive U.S. support until 1971. But by 1975, Americans had left the organization, including WACL's (American) president Fred Schlafly, because it had too many "neo-Nazi, ex-Nazi, fascist, [and] neo-fascist" members (60). "In private correspondence to one another, the Americans struggled to explain how things had gotten so bad so quickly" (62). In this period from 1971-75, Burke tracks the growth period of relationship between the U.S. right to the burgeoning anti-Communist International while acknowledging that these U.S. conservatives found their international colleagues reprehensible and that the U.S. right eventually abandoned the anti-Communist International. In light of this, Burke could have done more to prove that the U.S. right really was in fact "fighting wars of national liberation" (8) in the early 1970s. Burke's analysis of the U.S. rights' relationship to WACL is certainly fascinating, but it leaves room for further analysis.

² I examine this connection, which Burke expands upon, in Seth Offenbach, *The Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War: The Other Side of Vietnam*, (New York: Routledge, 2019).

Even when the U.S. right was fighting international anti-Communist wars, there is a serious question of how much the historiography should highlight the international aspect of the right. For instance, Burke spends nearly ten pages discussing U.S. paramilitary adventures in Southern Africa only to conclude that “U.S. mercenaries had at best marginal impacts on the wars in Rhodesia and Angola” (116). Such statements appear to undermine Burke’s broader argument that U.S. conservatives saw themselves in a “global context” (5). Had these individuals been part of a truly internationalist and revolutionary movement, then it seems likely they would have had a greater impact and their records would be more regularly discussed in the historiography. Still, Burke has undertaken a valuable task in posing these questions and examining the connections between anti-Communist organizations in the U.S. and the Global South. This is a complicated topic and Burke propels the historical discussion to new and more interesting places.

Burke deserves much praise for both his historical insights and his work ethic. The book’s bibliography includes, by my count, approximately 400 secondary books, book chapters, and articles. His list of primary sources is similarly impressive. That he was able to devote 108 pages to his end notes and bibliography is a testament to both his research and to the University of North Carolina Press’s commitment to helping other scholars parse Burke’s research. The notes and bibliography alone make this book a worthy purchase.

Burke’s work also opens many avenues for further scholarship. I look forward to seeing how future scholars receive his claim that the right was both international and revolutionary from the 1960s through the 1980s. More scholarship on WACL is certainly necessary in order for scholars to truly appreciate the international nature of the Cold War struggles. And it would be fascinating to see how Burke’s anti-Communist International relates to the Communist International, how the two sides fed off one another and adopted each other’s strategies. Burke also notes that there was a gendered and ‘manly’ aspect to the anti-Communist International; other studies should examine this point more closely and thoroughly.

Revolutionaries for the Right offers an international interpretation of the U.S. conservative movement and shows how various right-wing anti-Communist movements at times tried to coordinate throughout the Cold War. Burke brings to light several historical events, organizations, and characters which are rarely acknowledged in the greater historiography of either U.S. conservatism or international anti-Communism. In bringing those two historiographies together, Burke offers much new material on the role of private U.S. citizens in shaping the international fight against Communism. He exposes the role of private funding and paramilitary troops in making the Cold War deadlier. And he does this in a well-written and organized book. To do all of this in only 217 pages worth of text is impressive. This book is recommended reading for anyone interested in the role of U.S. conservatives during the Cold War.

Seth Offenbach is an Associate Professor in the History Department at Bronx Community College, which is part of the City University of New York system. His book, *The Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War: The Other Side of Vietnam*, was published by Routledge in 2019.

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