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Wrongfully Neglected

Patrick Chura, *Michael Gold: The People's Writer* (SUNY Press, 2020)

In the pantheon of 1930s revolutionary writers, Michael Gold has lingered on historic fault lines. A close associate of Hemingway, O'Neill, Hughes, St. Vincent Millay, Dos Passos, Parker, Wright, and Sandburg, Gold was blighted by decades of enduring discord from within, and rabid anti-communism from without his circle. Even with the novel *Jews without Money* (1932) as a bestseller, Gold's own story has been painfully disappeared.

Writers on the Left have looked to the breadth of Mike Gold's mission: novelist, poet, playwright, journalist, *Daily Worker* columnist, *New Masses* editor, champion cultural organizer, and inspiring public speaker. Odd, that with equal amounts of literary adoration and sensational derision noted over decades, Gold's biography would arrive at this late juncture. But given the quality in Patrick Chura's *Michael Gold: The People's Writer*, the wait was worth every year.

Chura, an English professor at the University of Akron, offers a visceral gaze into Gold's life and work, starting from the early years of poverty in his family's nearly airless flat infested with lice and crushing dysphoria. Born Itzok Granich in 1894, Gold faced long hours of childhood labor. An excerpt of one of his earliest writings stated, "The streets of the East Side were dark with grey; wet gloom; the boats of the harbor cried constantly, like great bewildered gulls, like deep booming voices of calamity . . .". Much later, Gold would write of his formative years: "The sky above the airshafts was all my sky; and the voices of the tenement neighbors in the airshaft were the voices of all my world. There, in my suffering youth, I feverishly sought God and found Man."

Chura also brings alive Gold's radicalization as a teen, early publication in *The Masses*, membership in the Provincetown Players and the New Playwrights. But Gold's 'creative writing' was obvious in his reportage, too. This biography also reveals lesser-known literature including previously lost articles, verse, and 1929 collection *120 Million*, and interactions with Gild, Forster, Meyerhold, and Mayakovsky.

Though deeply committed to the Communist Party, Gold's rebellion rejected the discipline of Party officials. His struggle with bureaucracy was matched by the attacks he launched on

progressive writers who'd apparently strayed from the mission. This combination—and a constant rain of blows from the Right—established opposition that exceeded a lifetime.

Gold maintained a busy literary schedule, and his 'Change the World' column thrived through 1966. He died a year later, after more than a half-century of cultural work. Always one to analyze Marxian, Gold wrote near the end of his life of the McCarthy terrors, citing on manifold levels: "the lined faces which had seen the trouble and white hair as the result of sleepless nights We had lost all our youth."

