

Book Review

Kim Scipes (ed.) (2016) *Building Global Labor Solidarity in a Time of Accelerating Globalization*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

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This is a thought-provoking collection of articles on contemporary practices of labour solidarity across borders. Edited by Kim Scipes, the book is an outgrowth of the June 2014 issue of *Working USA* on the same theme. While there is some overlap between the two projects, it is not overwhelming and certainly does not detract from the originality and value of *Building Global Labor Solidarity in a Time of Accelerating Globalization*. Only one of the articles in the special journal issue (Michael Zweig's "Working for Global Justice in the New US Labor Movement") is reprinted in the book. Furthermore, only a couple of the sections of Scipes' theoretical chapter in the book borrow chunks of text from the abbreviated theoretical reflections he presented in the special issue.

Building Global Labor Solidarity in a Time of Accelerating Globalization consists of a preface, introduction and two chapters by Kim Scipes, the reprinted article by Michael Zweig, and five original chapters. What especially distinguishes the book from the special journal issue is Professor Scipes' expanded role; indeed, his contributions constitute over 30 per cent of the book. Although Scipes' writing is sometimes too self-referential for my taste, it is well-organised, accessible, clear, politically transparent and even entertaining. As a result, his contributions should singlehandedly broaden the appeal of the book to undergraduate students and labour activists. Of particular note is the final section of the introduction, which Professor Scipes wrote after being challenged by Haymarket Books to justify the inclusion of a chapter by Timothy Ryan which is entirely uncritical of the sort of labour solidarity practiced by the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center in Bangladesh. Scipes explains his editorial decision while inviting the reader to compare Ryan's piece to one published in the special journal issue (Rahman and Langford, 2014: full disclosure – yes, I am that co-author). The discussion effectively draws readers into the politics of studying labour solidarity and perhaps even accomplishes Scipes' aim of not leaving "readers with the opinion that I had gotten soft on the AFL-CIO's foreign operations" (p. 21).

The accessibility of the book is enhanced by the short discussions of key concepts like neo-liberal economics and the labour movement found in the introduction. The editor's political engagement is demonstrated when he argues that the importance of this collection goes beyond "encouraging ways to build global labor solidarity ... it also allows us to reflect on our own unions and to decide how we want to transform them to become a progressive social force in our own social order" (p. 16).

Scipes' ultimate goal in Chapter 1 is to fill a gap in the literature by "proposing a theory of global labor solidarity" (p. 23). In working towards this goal, he presents additional, accessible discussions of concepts like business unionism and imperialism. The ending to the chapter is anti-

climactic, however, because Scipes' "theoretical understanding" of global labour solidarity turns out to be merely an expanded conceptual definition, including the identification of nine types that differ according to the purpose of the solidarity action (pp. 45–47). Much theoretical work remains to be done since there is no attempt to specify the processes and conditions that promote global labour solidarity, when it is efficacious, when it has staying power and when it atrophies or collapses.

Katherine Nastovski's chapter analyses the "worker-to-worker" international labour solidarity organised in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s (pp. 50–51); it involved campaigns such as the struggle against South African apartheid, spearheaded by activists both inside and outside the labour movement. As an example of transformative solidarity, its strengths "lie in the way it draws from models of class struggle unionism, including its emphasis on building worker capacity and working-class power through the adoption of practices that enabled some workers to rethink their political practice" (p. 53). The chapter effectively outlines the counter-hegemonic practices that made this solidarity work transformative. It closes with a discussion of "three interrelated limitations". For instance, because of "the economistic reading of imperialism that was dominant in this period", activists did not give careful consideration to "hegemonic ideas and practices of racism and white supremacy" (pp. 70, 73).

Jenny Jungehülsing's chapter uses two case studies of cross-border solidarity work by US unions to explore how union members' personal ties to another country can help to overcome two "obstacles to international solidarity: the lack of a felt solidarity and the limited commitment to international work" (p. 84). The two cases reveal contrasting bases for a commitment to solidarity work. For the Salvadoran immigrants who were members of the Los Angeles janitorial division of United Service Workers West (a local of the Services Employees International Union, SEIU), "it was informed by their political convictions" (and specifically their loyalties to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front). For the Mexican immigrants who were members of Steelworkers locals in Chicago and Northwest Indiana, on the other hand, "it was the personal and emotional bonds to their own or their parents' country of origin" (pp. 91–92). The chapter presents a superb example of how "communication on equal terms" in international solidarity work can be facilitated by transnational migrants who are familiar with the cultural nuances of both sides of a relationship (p. 99).

While the preceding two chapters concentrate on worker-to-worker international solidarity work, Bruno Dobrusin's contribution looks at the potential for a "global justice and solidarity movement" to re-emerge in Latin America (p. 104). Specifically, he asks whether the campaign to defeat the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which involved the continentalising of local alliances including trade unions, "can be repeated today, in a context of advancing extractive-resource exploitation with phenomenal environmental, social, and political consequences for the continent, implemented under majority centre-left governments" (pp. 105–106). Dobrusin works with an expanded notion of trade unions' participation in global solidarity – not only must unions align with each other across borders, they must connect to territorial organisations in each society since non-union workers in the large informal economy have strong territorial identities (pp. 104–105). In deciding whether to join the movement against an extractive economy geared to the export of primary products, trade unions face two dilemmas: "unions are a central component of the structures supporting left administrations; and the environmental discussion places labor in a defensive mode, due to the presence of strong unions in the so-called dirty industries" (p. 107). For Dobrusin, global labour solidarity in an expanded form is a strategic necessity in the fight to shift to a sustainable

model of development.

The next two chapters are a change of pace. Timothy Ryan is the Asia Regional Program Director for the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center. His analysis of worker solidarity in Bangladesh is based on personal experiences. For instance, Ryan reflects on the resistance of many businesses and governments in the Global South to calls for greater respect for worker rights by organising his observations in terms of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's "five stages of grief" (denial, rage, bargaining, depression and acceptance). This is an unconventional but captivating writing technique. Ryan's personal observations include, "I have never seen a government get to [the stage of acceptance] in a serious way and sustain it" (p. 137). Given his job, it is perhaps unsurprising that Ryan is more of a cheerleader than a critic when it comes to evaluating the AFL-CIO's work in Bangladesh over the years. To take one example, while he asserts that the AFL-CIO "assisted in the formation of the cornerstone of the modern union movement in the garment industry, the BIGUF [Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation]" (p. 131), there is no consideration of the criticism, frequently voiced by Bangladesh labour experts and union leaders, that the Solidarity Center cultivates clientelistic relations with the organisations it has initiated in the country (Rahman and Langford, 2014: 183).

Kim Scipes' chapter on the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) Labor Centre of the Philippines is a reprint of a 2014 journal article that restated findings from research he did between 1986 and 1994. The "genuine trade unionism" promoted and practised by the KMU is certainly worthy of continued attention. Nevertheless, readers would have been well served by a review of the academic literature on the KMU that has appeared in the last two decades (e.g.: Weekley, 2001; Schiavone, 2007).

David Bacon's "Building a Culture of Solidarity Across the US–Mexico Border" is an accessible survey of a wide range of developments, and raises a number of provocative issues, such as problems in building solidarity between very different types of unions (p. 161). Of particular interest is the recent "strategic partnership" between the United Farm Workers and Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales, an organisation active in both the United States and Mexico (p. 170). The themes highlighted in Bacon's chapter tie in nicely with those raised by Jungehülsing and Dobrusin.

The collection ends with a chapter that combines analysis with strong political advocacy. Michael Zweig argues, "The time is ripe to look again at the dead end the [US] labor movement came to in foreign affairs and reconstitute a consistently positive relationship with workers around the world" (p. 183). In making his case, Zweig highlights the successful solidarity work of US Labor Against the War, such as a tour by six Iraqi union leaders of twenty-six cities in 2005 (p. 187). He believes that "grappling to create a new labor foreign policy that promotes global justice" will be a springboard for the discussions leading to "the reorientation of the labor movement as a whole" (p. 197). This is another example of the transformative labour solidarity that is at the heart of this volume.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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