

## Book Review

Luis Apau Gamarra and Alberto Gálvez Olaechea (eds) (2020) *Chimbote en la memoria. Las luchas de mayo de 1973 [Chimbote in Memory. The Struggles of May 1973]*. Lima: Fauno Ediciones, Escuela de Formación Política Praxis.

ISBN: 9789201584373. 159 pp. Paperback US\$10, S/30.

Carlos Portugal Mendoza and Alberto Gálvez Olaechea (eds) (2021) *Entre Guerras. Militancia y activismo sindical minero en las décadas 70 y 80 [Between Wars. Militancy and Mining Union Activism in the 70s and 80s]*. Fauno Ediciones, Escuela de Formación Política Praxis.

ISBN: unavailable . 271 pp. Paperback US\$10, S/40.

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Alberto Gálvez Olaechea has edited these two recent books on the history of the Peruvian labour movement. He was a militant of the radical left in the 1970s and a leader of the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement in the 1980s. He spent twenty-seven years in prison for subversive activities, and nowadays he tries to recover memories of the Peruvian radical left in the twentieth century. Similarly, the other editors have been active participants in the Peruvian trade union struggle. Luis Apau Gamarra was a union leader in Chimbote in the 1970s; he is currently a lawyer. Carlos Portugal Mendoza is an economist and was an advisor to the mining federation in the 1980s.

These books go back to union struggles developed in the 1970s and 1980s. *Chimbote en la memoria* focuses on the port of Chimbote in May 1973, and *Entre Guerras* on the mining sector in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1968 the military led a coup d'état seeking to promote leftist reforms from above. Over the next decade, two radical leftist groups began armed actions. The state responded with intense repression. Gathering the voices of workers and labour activists in this context is valuable, as in these decades Peruvian labour developed various strategies as young militants of the radical left moved to ports and mines.

*Chimbote en la memoria* is a rereading of a period of labour conflicts in Chimbote, a fishing port and metallurgical centre in northern Peru. This site experienced rapid demographic and economic growth after 1950, and in mid-1973 a fishermen's strike began, turning into a much larger labour mobilisation with the participation of the steelworkers' union. The protests were economically motivated, but they were also a dispute between the radical left and sectors that supported the military government.

The editors have divided the text into two parts. The first one contains testimonies from local and national figures who developed their political activism on the revolutionary left and supported

the organisation of the city's fishers' and steelworkers' unions. Some testimonies reflect on the relationship between political militancy and changes to union action. Eduardo Cáceres, a former political leader of a left-wing party, recalls the motivations that led him and many other activists to travel to Chimbote to articulate their personal projects with political activism. Generally, the testimonies convey the nostalgia of the protagonists for a past where personal projects, political militancy and union activism were articulated, apparently without contradictions. A valuable exception is the testimony of Teresa Muñoz, a feminist sociologist. She reflects on the difficulties of incorporating gender issues in a cultural and political environment marked by orthodox Marxism.

The book's second part reproduces the article "Chimbote: A Mass Revolutionary Experience", that Gálvez Olaechea wrote in 1974. It is a look at the radicalism of the left of that time. Following a Marxist-inspired scheme, the author describes the economic situation of Chimbote and develops an account of the conflicts that occurred, identifying the actors involved: militants of the radical left, communists, and labour unions loyal to the military government, among others. The author establishes the opposition between the extreme left and the government apparatus as the articulating axis of the political scene. Both sides disputed the control of the union organisations in Chimbote. The article presents a political evaluation of the events, condemning the repression and highlighting the differences between union cultures (one radical, the other pro-government). Political militants, union activists, local leaders and government officials appear on the scene, but the author's political analysis establishes a simplifying dichotomy. It is a political text that sought to explain the defeats to militancy while maintaining hope in a future victory.

*Entre Guerras* also brings together groups of workers and activists involved in mining unionism to recover their memories. Mining trade unionism has been a recurring object of study in the social sciences and an important political actor in Peru (Flores Galindo, 1974). The text is part of this tradition, seeking to give a voice to the actors themselves (Del Prado, 2010). The work begins with a prologue by Gerardo Rénique, which summarises the country's social and political history since the 1980s, explaining the different wars faced by mining unionism: on the one hand, those between the forces of order and the armed groups in the 1980s; on the other hand, the war that led to the application of neo-liberal reforms in the mining sector.

Then, the first part of the book presents twelve testimonies of union action. A common denominator in all of them is the partisan commitment of the radical left. As in the previous book, the key image is that of a significant moment of change and social upheaval. The military government promoted several social reforms, among which the agrarian reform stands out. However, union radicalism was also formed in other sectors, such as teachers, steelworkers and miners. The radical left disputed the representation of the mining unions with the militants of the Communist Party (which had a pro-Soviet tendency) who also supported the reformist military government, and the military government itself that sought to neutralise the radical groups.

The testimonies combine biographical aspects with the memory of different stances of mining unionism over the 1970s and 1980s. The authors, whose attention is directed at the 1970s, focus their memories on the trade union disputes between the ultra-left and the communists, with both groups claiming a "classist" identity, understood as an ideal type of union practice that included the articulation of salary demands within a class struggle framework. The testimonies focused on the 1980s refer to the miners' struggle that demanded sectoral collective bargaining. The "National Collective Bargaining" brought together the main sectoral demands raised by the Mining Federation. Then, the testimonies focus on the changes in the mining sector – the transition from the mining towns to the current "hotel" model – and collective action. Starting in the 1990s, union membership and strikes declined considerably. The authors explain these changes due to the neo-

liberal reforms, which involved the privatisation of extensive mining facilities, the incorporation of workers through subcontracting, and the establishment of atypical working schedules.

Finally, Alberto Gálvez presents the essay “Rise, Boom and Decline of the Struggles of the Mining Proletariat”, in which he summarises the book’s key ideas. He seeks to understand the loss of the vital link between leftist identity and union commitment. This change also meant a decline in union membership.

The testimonies and reflections collected by the two books reviewed here retrace and explain, from the perspective of the social actors, the protagonists’ decisions when political militancy was the centre of their personal activity. Union radicalism allowed workers to join union organisations, obtain salary increases and develop citizenship. However, after the 1980s, this radicalism disappeared when the neo-liberal reform period arrived. The technological, political and social changes in the mining industry have transformed the mining workers. The politicised vision of social reality now seems strange and nostalgic. The main contribution of both texts is to provide the academic community and trade union activists with a nostalgic but also critical memory, which recovers the biographies, dreams, feelings, contradictions and hopes of an essential group of trade unionists.

## References

Del Prado, J. (2010) *Los mineros de la Sierra Central y la masacre de Malpaso. En Jorge del Prado y los mineros de la Sierra Central. Testimonio sobre la masacre de Malpaso*. Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Perú.

Flores Galindo, A. (1974) *Los mineros de la Cerro de Pasco. 1900–1930*. Lima: PUCP.

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