

Book Review

Richard Croucher and Elizabeth Cotton (2009) *Global Unions, Global Business: Global Union Federations and International Business*. London: Middlesex University Press. ISBN: 978-1904750628

REVIEWED BY *Ronaldo Munck, Dublin City University*

On the face of it *Global Unions, Global Business* is a study of the role of the Global Union Federations (GUFs) in international employment relations. It certainly delivers a closely observed insider based account of the opportunities and constraints faced by the GUFs in the era of high globalization. However, given its scope and the experience of the authors it goes much further to provide an ambitious and grounded answer to the question of what is to be done by labour to answer the challenges posed by globalization.

The general field of labour and globalization is by now quite well populated with a plethora of texts emerging since 2000 in particular. This is a problematic that goes back at least to the 1970's with the then current debates around the new international division of labour and the challenge posed by the then emerging multinational corporations. At its simplest, the new global capitalism was meant to call forth a new global labour internationalism. In practice, the attempts to create multinational bargaining structures along traditional trade union lines did not prosper and, anyway, the global neoliberal offensive put labour on the defensive for the next fifteen years or fifty. Croucher and Cotton pick in the late 1990's/early 2000's after a useful introductory section on the history of international trade unionism.

The International Trade Secretariats have, of course, a long-standing and important role in the history of the global labor movement based on occupational roles then national identities of workers. Thus it was no surprise then that the ITSs (later to be renamed Global Union Federations) were to play a key role in the more unified international trade union movement which emerged in the 1990's. The singular contribution of this text is a close and detailed analysis of the governance and resources of the GUFs. One key conclusion is that the internationals had been victims of their own success in terms of recruiting affiliates where influence remains limited. An effective and well resourced internationalist strategy is seen to rest on a small group of unions in the wealthier countries making a political choice to commit a higher percentage of their income to international work.

On the question of international collective bargaining the authors are cautious. They argue that 'it seems more important to help trade unionists to operate both technically and politically within multinationals than attempt to create agreements they cannot use' (68). Their stress is much more on the importance of networking mainly at an inter-union level but also more widely. A major – and perhaps unique – emphasis is placed on the importance of education, too often taken for granted by labour strategists.

International union renewal will need to play much greater attention to education and research work, not least because of the democratizing effect it has within unions.

Finally I would mention the emphasis the authors place on the regional dimension which they, correctly in my view, posit as a neglected yet increasingly important level of activity between the national and the inter-national. *Global Unions, Global Business* is a fine book; it will provide a solid basis for a new wave of theoretically informed yet empirically robust research for transformation in global labour studies.

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