

Book Review

Hughes, Steve and Haworth, Nigel (2010) *The International Labour Organisation (ILO): Coming in from the Cold*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 0415353831

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The ILO is significant for two reasons. The first concerns the operation and accomplishments of the institution itself while the second involves what the ILO tells us about the operation and power struggles taking place in the broader global economy. Hughes and Haworth have provided a concise, accessible and informed guide to both of these aspects.

The book is part of an extensive Global Institutions series (http://www.routledge.com/books/series/GI/page_1/) published by Routledge which had over 70 contributions as of early 2013. As such, the book is designed to reach two communities: people interested in international organizations and those coming from labour studies. The text is accessible and clearly written, but perhaps too brief to do the topic sufficient justice.

Hughes and Haworth's primary argument is that the ILO has been able to survive for the past 90+ years due to strategic leadership, an ability to reposition itself to address the challenges of its times and the work of highly technical staff providing policy relevant advice (p. 103). The argument is initially advanced through a brief history of the institution and a discussion of its structure. However, most of the book focuses on developments from 1994-2009. These include discussion of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights, the Social Clause, Decent Work, Fair Globalization and the 2007 global economic crisis.

A striking aspect of the book is the emphasis the authors put on executive leadership. In particular, former Director Generals Michel Hansenne and Juan Somavia come in for considerable attention and lavish praise. There is, of course, a history of focusing on the executive leadership of the ILO in the academic literature (Cox 1969). In this case both DGs are portrayed as visionary leaders able to grasp the challenges of their time to lead the ILO into new and fruitful directions. Alongside this positive portrayal of the DGs the authors engage with and largely dismiss the critique by Standing (2008) and others that faults the ILO's downgrading of its standard setting role.

An alternative master theme would have been to focus on the unique aspect of the ILO as institution – its tripartite governing structure. The text rightly notes that the granting of formal voting rights to different constituencies within states is a distinctive element of the ILO, standing in stark contrast to other international economic institutions. The implications of this for the institution and as a possible model or challenge to other institutions could be fruitfully developed. At various stages the book also raises issues about

the politics of the employer and worker's groups, as well as critiques of their representativeness. It is less clear what significance these issues have for the operation of the institution.

Hughes and Haworth argue that the ILO has responded to the challenges of market fundamentalism and globalization by moving beyond a traditional focus on standard setting. This has been done by focusing on core labour standards and attempting to position the ILO so that it can influence broader debates about social protection and working conditions. The argument is supported well in the discussion about the Social Clause, Fundamental Declaration and the Decent Work agenda. If there is a gap in the text, it is in examining the ILO's role with the World Bank and the IMF. These institutions have been at the forefront of advocating market fundamentalism and labour's struggle for decent working conditions has prominently featured the Bretton Woods pair. They do get a mention in the text, but greater detail on the ILO's engagement and competition with the Fund and the Bank would be valuable.

Although it has only been three years since publication, an updated (and if possible expanded!) version would be extremely useful and welcome. In 2012 the ILO elected the former General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (Guy Ryder) as its new Director General. Given Hughes and Haworth's focus on executive leadership it would be interesting to hear their views on the implications of this appointment for the institution. Recently, the idea of a Social Protection Floor has also become an important element of the ILO's strategy and could usefully be examined. The book was completed in the wake of the first phase of the global financial crisis. The authors expressed optimism that the ILO would become more central to global economic governance through a closer relationship with the G-20 and governments pledged to respond to employment issues. The view from 2013 suggests more caution about the role the ILO will play as Western states remain in thrall to doctrines of austerity (Blyth 2013).

The authors point out that in the wake of the global financial crisis the ILO accepted an invitation to the head table of international economic organizations and in exchange accepted a division of labour in which other institutions worked on the financial issues while the ILO confined its concerns to employment and social protection issues. From an institutional perspective it seems like a reasonable strategy. However, from a labour rights perspective, it may be short sighted to cede the issue of financial management and regulation since this structures the framework in which worker rights are realized or denied.

REFERENCES

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