

# Labor Studies

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# Labor Studies Journal

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[which] shifts the focus of poverty discussions from individual failure onto the social structures that produce inequity and deprivation, and calls for a reordering of society to provide justice, not just charity" (p. 154). Thus, Snarr simply and eloquently exposes the failure of neoliberalism and the fallacy of the "deserving poor," a divisive mischaracterization that fatally distracts from the need—and the possibility—for transformation or revolution.

Snarr notes that both religion and labor have histories laced with racism, sexism, and xenophobia which can neither be dismissed nor overcome through denial. The chapter on women's work in the movement names "The historically unhealthy alliance of sacrifice, service, and women . . ." (p. 103), which exposes the hypocrisy and futility of personal sacrifice and the unsustainability of working for a cause that ignites passions yet burns people out. These are important lessons for labor.

The major strength of this book lies not in the statistics, facts, and stories of living wage campaigns, all of which are well presented, thoroughly researched, and well worth the read. The strength, rather, lies in the connections made between ethical behavior, religious teachings, and empowerment as the foundation for meaningful and effective coalition building. By going even further to name the paradoxes of organizing which result in exploitation of activists rather than transformation of systems, Snarr acknowledges the contradictions created by human frailty, both individually and organizationally. Thus the book goes beyond the mantra of "Organize!" and the cry of "Solidarity!" to discuss what that means in actual campaigns for a living wage, while acknowledging the pitfalls that reduce the effectiveness of such campaigns.

The depth of analysis and reflection that Snarr employs and which she demands from her reader represents an exercise of the intellect and of the spirit. Organizing would be more effective if time were spent studying the contradictions, paradoxes and pitfalls, and, ultimately, the wisdom of Snarr's thoughts on ethics and religion in social movements.

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Ness, Immanuel, and Dario Azzellini (eds.). *Ours to Master and to Own: Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011. 443 pp. \$19.00 (paper).

**Reviewed by:** William A. Pelz, *Elgin Community College, Elgin, IL, USA*  
DOI: 10.1177/0160449X12468096

That workers work, managers manage, and owners profit is normally accepted as merely the way the world works. Could it ever be otherwise? This excellent book shows that things could be arranged differently and, at least for brief periods, have been. Starting with a concise and insightful introduction, *Ours to Master and to Own* puts forth a powerful case: that workers have shown the capacity for self-management of industry. Twenty-two stimulating essays detail case studies that provide support for this thesis.

Space does not allow even a brief appreciation of all the powerful contributions contained in this work that is organized into six sections documenting various examples of workers' control from the late nineteenth century until today. First, the reader is treated to a historical overview that nicely sets out the problems and possibilities of this subject. Next, a stimulating selection of essays looks at workers and revolution in the early twentieth century. The brilliant article by Ralf Hoffrogge on the revolutionary shop stewards in Germany, 1914–18, provides a sense of the possibilities that existed before the legal restrictions of the Weimar Republic demobilized (and repressed) radical workers who would later fall prey to Nazi barbarism.

Likewise, Andy Duncan brings to life the spirit of the common people in Spain during 1936–37 before Stalinist conservatism and fascist repression destroyed even the most basic aspects of workers' self-organization. The third section presents articles that detail the experience of workers' control under state socialism. The case studies of Yugoslavia and Poland illustrate that struggles for workers' control are not limited to only the traditionally capitalist nations. The next section shines light on little-known examples of workers' self-emancipation as part of anticolonial struggles in nations as diverse as Indonesia, Algeria, Argentina, and Portugal.

The capitalist reorganization of the global economy from the late 1960s until the 1980s provides the background for a burst of workers' factory takeovers. The contributions in this work range from studies of Great Britain and the United States to Italy and Canada. What all these workers' movements have in common is the determination of average employees to take direct control of their workplaces and establish reasonable conditions of their labor. Immanuel Ness's insightful article on the United States is unusually thought-provoking and an extremely useful contribution.

Last, this amazing collection concludes with a discussion of workers' revolts in the past twenty years. Examples ranging from West Bengal through Latin America—the experiences of Argentina, Venezuela, and Brazil—prove that struggles to master the means of production do not belong only to the distant historical past. This is a powerful reminder that earlier struggles are not relegated to the past but are part of an ongoing and unfolding process.

*Ours to Master and to Own* is a remarkable work that reminds us that history is not dead . . . it is not even past. It is an ongoing process whereby women and men choose not to accept the workplace or the world as it is. Those who teach labor studies would profit from adding this book that covers the often-forgotten history of workers' agency to their reading lists. This book is highly recommended.

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Budd, John. *The Thought of Work*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011. 246 pp. \$24.95 (paper).

**Reviewed by:** Charley Richardson, retired, UMass Lowell, Jamaica Plain, MA, USA  
DOI: 10.1177/0160449X12466829