

**The Class Strikes Back:
Self-Organised Workers' Struggles in the Twenty-First Century**

Dario Azzellini and Michael G. Kraft, eds.

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Half a century from its heyday in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, workers' autonomy—grassroots collective action independent from unions as a central organizing strategy for political change—has shown signs of resurgence after the crisis of 2008 and as a consequence of the neoliberal restructuring of the economy. This is the thesis of *The Class Strikes Back*, a collection that bridges the global North and the global South, edited by Dario Azzellini and Michael G. Kraft, and now republished as a paperback in the Historical Materialism Book Series.

The book will be useful and accessible to activists as well as scholars. It brings together a wide spectrum of case studies focused on direct action, horizontal forms of decision-making, independent unionism, and anticapitalist and antiauthoritarian struggles originating from shop-floor grievances. The thirteen chapters span Turkey to Indonesia, the United States to Italy, and the United Kingdom to South Africa. Many contributors, including Broumas (Greece), Dinler (Turkey), Olaya (Colombia), Wigand (Germany), and Azzellini combine, or have combined at some point, a scholarly role with an activist one. The volume acts as a loudspeaker for workers' perspective, one that is not often picked up by mainstream media or is downplayed in academic accounts of industrial relations.

In addition to bringing a “bottom-up” perspective to labor militancy, such a collection questions implicitly, and sometimes openly, the hegemonic narrative of the decline of working-class politics. The neoliberal consensus is that working-class politics is dead, gone down the drain with the last vestiges of Fordism and the rise of knowledge workers, the gig economy, and the ongoing AI revolution.

But are we looking in the right places for working-class activism? This volume forces us to pay attention to contemporary workers' and working-class communities' self-activity in three ways. First, this volume provides accounts of workers in traditional sectors who challenge bureaucratic or corrupt forms of unionism that fail to represent the needs of the rank and file. For instance, Kumar and Samaddar reconstruct the story of automobile workers in India's Suzuki Maruti factory and steel workers in Wazipur, who battled to register independent unions. Unlike such struggles during Fordism, these cases occur in workplaces where the difference between formal and informal employment is blurred because factories employ workers with different contractual arrangements, including permanent, contract, and apprentice labor. “Traditional” unionism has been ill equipped to respond to neoliberal forms of labor restructuring, and here the authors convincingly suggest that a surge in rank-and-file activism is the organizational remedy to unionize in this new context.

Second, the book shows workers' self-organization on the shop floor addressing questions of social and economic justice beyond the workplace. This is the case in chapters about Colombia, South Africa, Egypt, and Indonesia, where workers' struggle occurs in contexts with a long history of political repression newly intersecting with effects of neoliberalism. In these cases, workers' self-activity resulted in emancipatory projects that had the potential to have ripple effects beyond the workplace. As Felix Hauf points out in the chapter on radical unionism in Indonesia, attempts at workers' control of factories, which involved experiments in job rotation, communal kitchens, and the establishment of transnational networks of like-minded groups, are evidence of a counterhegemonic political imaginary bred not in theory, but in action. In Egypt, workers' self-organization had momentous consequences that led to epochal regime changes.

Third, the volume includes reporting and critical reflection on instances of self-management and worker control. These range from short-lived factory occupations, to workers taking over factories from absent or fraudulent employers, to cooperatives where decision-making is distributed. In her chapter on Turkey, Demet Dinler uses ethnography as well as an insider perspective to investigate the emergence of networks and brokerage systems that organize workers in the informal sector, including waste pickers and other casualized workers. By mapping the different layers of such systems, Dinler clarifies the hybrid mechanisms by which workers can protect and advance their interests, pointing to the resourcefulness, imagination, and emotional connection in the representation of workers. In offering an account of a factory (Kazova, in Istanbul) where workers have taken over production in the face of insolvent employers, this chapter links to chapters on Greece, Indonesia, the United States, and Venezuela. Throughout the book, the accounts of such experiments demonstrate the resilience and commitment of workers in times of crisis and the viability of self-management. However, the recovery of factories is fraught with risks, as workers grapple with the organizational, legal, and financial hurdles to operating a recovered workplace in a discouraging legal and economic system. As in the case of Kazova or Vio.Me (in Greece), the production of recovered factories can also spur alternative distribution networks, which strengthen the solidarity economy but hamper long-term financial viability when they do not intersect with mainstream distribution. Where forms of workers' control are encouraged by the state, such as in Venezuela (as covered by Azzelini), workers ironically still battled centralized power and vertical decision-making that undermined such initiatives.

Legal harassment is common in these cases as well as state and private violence against workers who engage in alternative forms of organization. This is most evident in the accounts of labor struggles in South Africa and Colombia, where direct action and direct democracy has proved fatal. Most accounts, however, demonstrate how the anticapitalist bent of workers' "autonomy" (in the many facets of this terms) is taken as a critical threat to the current political economic system.

One might wish for an analytical conclusion, much beyond what the introduction offers, to bring together the intersecting discourses and insights the chapters bring to the fore. The question of the political and theoretical impact of such struggles, most of which have since succumbed to the forces of reaction, needs further exploration. It is for the reader to distill the repertoire of ideas and "counter-hegemonic projects" (244) that such experiences have in common and how they could foster enduring processes of social

transformation. At the same time, by offering a wealth of examples of workers' autonomy in times of neoliberalism, ranging from manufacturing to logistics, and with an emphasis on migrants and the precariat, this volume rekindles faith in the transformative power of collective mobilization and worker solidarity in the twenty-first century.

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American Labour's Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945–1970

Anthony Carew

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The rise of the new labor history in the late twentieth century, with its “bottom up” approach to working-class history, led to a relative neglect of subjects such as US labor’s political relationships with the American state. More recently, transnational labor historians have sought to transcend the state and focus on relationships among workers and unions across national boundaries. Despite these dominant trends in the field, an increasingly rich, albeit too often marginalized, historiography has developed at the borders of labor and US foreign policy history that suggests the significant ways in which trade union leaders helped shape, and were, in turn, shaped by, the Cold War. Although some of the themes in Anthony Carew’s new book will seem familiar to specialists, his meticulous archival research makes this volume the most definitive study to date on the international activities of AFL and CIO leaders, and their working relationship with the CIA, during the early Cold War.

Carew begins his study in 1945 and emphasizes that the CIO and the AFL developed competing international agendas at the end of World War II. CIO leaders worked with the British Trade Union Committee and Soviet trade union leaders to found the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1945. Many hoped this new international would bridge the divide between the communist and noncommunist worlds and give labor more bargaining power in postwar reconstruction plans. AFL leaders, however, bitterly opposed their plans, and created a Free Trade Union Committee (FTUC) to launch their own independent initiatives in Europe and to discourage noncommunist European unions from joining the WFTU.

Carew offers fascinating biographical portraits of the two men who dominated the FTUC during the early Cold War: Jay Lovestone, its executive director in New York, and Irving Brown, its field representative in Europe. Lovestone, a former communist, solicited and used funding primarily from the labor movement to fund early FTUC activities. In the late 1940s, however, funding from the newly created CIA became