

BOOK REVIEWS

Ours to Master and to Own. Workers' Control from the Commune to the Present. Ed. by Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini. Haymarket Books, Chicago, Ill. 2011. x, 443 pp. \$19.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859014000194

This collective work, dedicated to the history and present situation of workers' control and self-management, gathers contributions from twenty-three authors, including the two editors: Immanuel Ness, professor at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, and Dario Azzellini, assistant professor at Johannes Kepler University in Linz (Austria). The contributors – academics in the majority, but also independent researchers and activists – come from Europe, Asia, and North and South America. That this is a “global” project is confirmed by the geographic diversity of the case studies: western Europe (UK, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and more), eastern Europe (Poland and Yugoslavia), Russia, North America (the US and Canada), Algeria, India, Indonesia, and Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela). Chronologically, the case studies cover experiences over about a century, beginning with the German Revolutionary Shop Stewards during World War I and stretching to Argentina's recovered factories and Venezuela under Hugo Chavez. (Despite the title, the Paris Commune only receives a few remarks in a very general introductory chapter.) The work aims to be thoroughly pluri-disciplinary, calling on political scientists (the most highly represented discipline, including the two editors), historians, economists, sociologists, industrial relations specialists, and management experts. However, in a collection focused primarily on history, it is worth noting that historians are clearly in the minority. I will return to this point later on.

According to Ness and Azzellini, this book project began with renewed curiosity in forms of direct action by workers, factory occupations, workers' committees and self-management. This renewed interest is attributable to contemporary political events involving these issues and, in a world dominated by neoliberalism and financial capitalism, to the re-emergence of radical forms of action that are outside the institutional framework. The authors' clearly avowed aim is twofold: first, to advance knowledge, and, second, to thereby give workers and activists a tool, in straightforward language, allowing them to measure better the historical importance of workers' control and the transformational power it holds, without neglecting the obstacles and constraints that it has faced.

Apart from the first four chapters (more general and theoretical in scope), the other contributions examine particular experiences in workers' control within a given time and space. These eighteen chapters are organized chronologically and thematically: early twentieth-century revolutions (from World War I to the Spanish Civil War, including the Bolshevik Revolution and the Turin factory councils); the period of state socialism (Yugoslavia and Poland until the fall of communism); post-1945 democratic and anti-colonial struggles (post-colonial Java and Algeria, Portugal during the Carnation Revolution, and Argentina in 1973); the 1970s and 1980s in Western countries undergoing the “restructuring” of capitalism (factory occupations and workers' control in the UK, the US, and British Columbia, Italy's “Hot Autumn” and factory councils), the revival of workers' control in the southern countries over the past few decades (recovered factories in Argentina and Brazil, workers' control experiences during the “Bolivarian Revolution”, as well as in west Bengal, the Indian state governed by a Communist Party until 2011).

One cannot find fault with the editors for failing to include different experiences that one would expect to find in a book on this theme, from Hungary in 1919 or 1956, to

Chile's Popular Unity, Czechoslovakia during the Prague Spring, or France after 1968. The editors explain in the introduction that this book makes no claim to being exhaustive, but was conceived as merely a first step. *Ours to Master and to Own* – the title is borrowed from the famous union anthem *Solidarity Forever*: “It is ours not to slave in, but to master and to own” – is part of a much more ambitious programme. This first volume, translated into German and soon into Spanish, should quickly be followed by a second and probably a third. Other studies and documents are already available on the multilingual website workerscontrol.net, which builds on the project and is part of the same process. So the most obvious gaps are likely to be filled soon, one way or another.

Yet the book raises questions of a different nature. As I have said, it aims to be both scientific and militant. The two are not incompatible per se. Knowledge can be a weapon for social struggle. However, academic historians may be critical of some expressions in the introduction, such as when the editors proclaim their objective: “We were impelled to assemble a wide range of international examples to demonstrate that not only are workers’ control and socialist democracy possible, as the chapters of this book suggest, but they also serve as a remedy to the human misery produced by the rapacious capitalist pursuit of profits and productivity through exploiting the working class and the poor” (p. 4). Likewise, greater nuance and historicity is needed in the Manichean opposition between “rank-and-file workers” with their “natural” tendency for direct action, democratic control, and collective management, on the one hand, and the “bureaucracy” of “traditional” left-wing political parties and unions, on the other hand. Thus, the recent study by young French sociologist Maxime Quijoux¹ of two “recovered” factories in Argentina shows how self-management is not always an expression of workers’ “natural” revolutionary tendencies, but often a last resort to save their jobs and rescue a company that they feel deeply attached to.

Nor is it certain that political cultures or doctrines as disparate as those enumerated by Ness and Azzellini (“council communism, Trotskyism, anarcho-syndicalism, Italian *operaismo*”), historically in disagreement on the question of the revolutionary party or the state, can all be classified together as a “minority current” within the labor movement, which, since Marx’s *Civil War in France*, is said to have “always viewed workers’ control and councils as the base of a self-determined society” (p. 2). Likewise, stating that recent upheavals in the organization of production have made the classic workers’-council model inapplicable, while affirming with conviction that workers will invent new organizational ways adapted to today’s challenges “as history has shown” (p. 7), is more a belief – albeit a perfectly respectable one – than an historical analysis.

The authors’ activist stance shines through explicitly in several chapters. Some of the essays, especially in the first section, are very ideological; this is the case for the texts by Donny Gluckstein and Sheila Cohen. Several chapters emphasize the need for companies managed by workers to adopt a “socialist” approach as protection from the danger of “reformism” or submitting to a market rationale. However, the chapters rarely raise the question of the limits to workers’ participation, the gradual concentration of responsibilities in the hands of a minority of elected representatives, or the declining interest among the majority – which sociologist Albert Meister observed in both capitalist cooperatives and self-managed companies in Yugoslavia.² Other chapters, such as the one on the Spanish Revolution, do not hesitate to give retrospective judgments on what strategies could or should have been implemented to avoid defeat. The interpretative matrices used most frequently may neglect the actual importance of currents that

1. Maxime Quijoux, *Néolibéralisme et autogestion. L'expérience argentine* (Paris, 2011).

2. Albert Meister, *Socialisme et autogestion. L'expérience yougoslave* (Paris, 1964); *idem, La participation dans les associations* (Paris, 1974).

originated outside the revolutionary workers' movement. Thus, beginning in the 1960s, left-wing Catholics, notably in Europe and Latin America, played a key role in formulating and spreading self-management ideas and practices.

Despite these limitations, this book has genuine scientific value. First and foremost, it presents historical experiences that had been forgotten until recent research cast new light on them, such as Ralf Hoffrogge's thesis on Richard Müller and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards movement in Germany. Next, it gives substantial emphasis to the contemporary realities of southern countries, thus demonstrating the timeliness of the topic and its geographic shift. In some cases, it proposes a very useful and up-to-date account of themes that were previously the subject of an abundant literature of varying quality, such as Yugoslav self-management, which Goran Musić clearly presents from its ambiguous beginnings until its disappearance. Lastly, the bibliography at the end of each of these short chapters is useful not only for the references it gives the reader, but also for the uncharted territories it reveals, reflecting historians' regrettable lack of interest in these topics since the 1980s. This book's publication is also an invitation for new generations of historians to return to the old questions of workers' control and self-management – but with a different perspective from previous historians, looking at new questions, new methods, and new sources.

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AHLQUIST, JOHN S. and MARGARET LEVI. *In the Interest of Others. Organizations and Social Activism*. Princeton University Press, Princeton [etc.] 2013. xvi, 315 pp. Maps. \$95.00; £65.00. (Paper: \$29.95; £19.95.) doi:10.1017/S0020859014000200

John S. Ahlquist and Margaret Levi seek to explain, using political science theories and methods, why some unions act in overtly political ways – beyond their members' immediate economic interests – and why other unions do not. They also suggest the applicability of their research to other sorts of organizations (think churches), hence the book's abstract title. Specifically, they examine four unions in the transport sector in two Anglo-Saxon countries though, ultimately, most of their evidence and analysis concern the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), which represents dockworkers along the US Pacific Coast and in Hawaii. While the terminology, arguments, and quantitative methods might make for a hard slog for many historians – present company included – the book is worth a close read for those wanting to understand why some unions engage in political activism and why other unions that have the potential to do so do not.

To explore this provocative topic, Ahlquist and Levi analyze two “social movement unions” with long histories of militancy on behalf of social justice causes and two “business unions” in the transportation industry that rarely, if ever, engage in such actions. To determine whether these issues are not simply a product of a single country, an Australian union also is investigated; indeed, Australia's Waterside Workers' Federation