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Book Review: Global anti-unionism. Nature, Dynamics, Trajectories and Outcomes

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‘Enron-isation of European debt’ (describing how Goldman Sachs obscured Italian and Greek debt in return for hefty fees) and, most of all, how the German strategy of competitive wage moderation in combination with the introduction of the single currency and free movement of capital worked to create a giant financial carousel, with banks recycling savings and trade surpluses from the core back to the periphery. In short, irresponsible borrowing was made possible by irresponsible lending. Similarly, the bailout of financially distressed countries was in reality nothing more than a bailout of creditors, i.e. the banking system of the euro area core and, behind it, Wall Street institutions (‘the creditors of the creditors’) themselves.

What about the solutions and the proposals for alternative economic policy? It is here that ‘The Battle for Europe’ unfortunately goes a bit off track. While the first 150 pages of the book keep the reader fascinated by accounts of how European integration has been systematically hijacked by a political elite whose faith in the benefits of an ‘unfettered free market’ is deep and unshakable despite the biggest crisis since the 1930s, the final chapter (‘Another Europe is possible’) sets out to describe the policies and strategies needed for ‘progressive forces’ to ‘re-take Europe’. Here, Thomas Fazi applies his same skills and talents to summarize pointedly the conservative hijacking of the European cause and their crisis-inspired response to the proposals put forward by the progressive side for alternative policies. This results in a somewhat discomfiting picture of a conservative Europe standing united behind a single idea (‘more market’), defending Europe against progressive forces armed with not one but many ideas and proposals, even though some of these proposals are possibly mutually exclusive or at least unclear (the proposal to have wages develop in line with productivity without making clear that this concerns nominal wage dynamics is an example of this).

In an implicit way, this also reveals the weakness of those wanting to re-take Europe from the ‘Masters of Austerity and Deregulation’. While the former are united in their criticism of the neo-liberal project that Europe has become, they stand divided and are unclear as to what the exact alternative should be. Nevertheless, even this revelation credits the author and his book, since putting one’s finger on a problem is the first step to solving it – i.e. by attempting to unify the views of the European left on the exact nature of what ‘Another Europe’ should look like (a possible suggestion for Thomas Fazi’s next contribution?).

Gregor Gall and Tony Dundon (eds)

Global anti-unionism. Nature, Dynamics, Trajectories and Outcomes, Palgrave Macmillan: Houndmills, 2013; 245 pp.: 9780230303348 (hbk)

Reviewed by: Kurt Vandaele, Senior Researcher, ETUI, Brussels

In mid-February 2014, a long organizing campaign by the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, with the support of Germany’s IG Metall, came to an end with a ballot on trade union recognition at the Chattanooga plant of Volkswagen in Tennessee.¹ The union lost this historic ballot by a vote of 712–626 against union representation, a prerequisite for installing a German-style works council. Although the US Volkswagen

1 See Elk M After historic UAW defeat at Tennessee Volkswagen plant, theories abound. Available at: http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/16300/after_uaw_defeat_at_volkswagen_in_tennessee_theories_abound. (Accessed 27 February 2014).

management exceptionally agreed to remain neutral in the union drive, anti-union activity by lower-level Volkswagen supervisors but also outside interference by right-wing politicians ‘warning’ of the consequences of a unionized plant, more than made up for it. The union defeat is probably not only the result of the virulent anti-union sentiment in the Deep South of the United States but, even so, the timely volume *Global anti-unionism*, edited by Gall and Dundon, offers an excellent introduction for anyone wanting to understand anti-unionism in the United States and other countries.

Aimed at academics rather than interested trade unionists, the book starts off with a short but well thought-out chapter defining anti-unionism, its (ideological) roots and changing dynamics. The book is then divided into two main parts. The three chapters in part one focus on anti-unionism from a historical perspective. Although it may seem inappropriate to judge a book on what is not in it, this part would have been the ideal place to analyse the dynamics within the finance-dominated accumulation regime (with its reliance on, for instance, private equity funds) and its consequences for managerial anti-unionism. The other, larger part of the volume collects eight chapters aiming to examine the different contemporary patterns of anti-unionism in a wide range of countries. Thus, developments within countries are identified to emphasize that anti-unionism is neither static nor uniform but must be understood in its spatio-temporal context; a transnational perspective on anti-unionism by, for instance, multinational corporations (and the degree of ‘country of origin’ effects) is largely not addressed. All chapters put forward a qualitative research design and a number of them rely not only on secondary sources, but union documents, interviews, survey data and historical time-series are also used.

The editors, G Gall and T Dundon, define anti-unionism broadly as ‘a conscious, deliberate decision to undermine and erode hypothetical, potential and actual workplace collective unionisation and union organisation’ (p. 1). Importantly, they consider anti-unionism not only as the outcome of employers’ observable behaviour and strategies (that is, the first dimension of power) or of employers shaping the (collective bargaining) agenda for potential anti-union practices and actions (that is, the second dimension of power). The editors go beyond the first and second dimensions of power with regard to anti-unionism. In order to understand managerial intentions in this respect they make clear that employers’ ‘ideological-mind-set’ is important and is historically and structurally deeply rooted in the ‘power relationship embedded in the wage–effort exchange in the capitalist employment relationship’ (p. 3). Because governments and state agencies legitimize this employment relationship and managerial authority, the state apparatus, as Gall and Dundon continue, at the very least underpins the ideological defence of anti-unionism and sometimes clearly affects its patterns. However, this implicit Gramscian perspective is not emphatic; there is, for instance, no analysis of the neoliberal discourse used by employers’ organizations. Thus, most chapters focus rather on actual managerial behaviour and anti-union strategies – in other words, the first and second dimension of power. The only real exception is the somewhat idiosyncratic chapter by G Friedman.

In his essay-like contribution Friedman puts Richard Ely centre-stage, a virtually forgotten early American institutional economist and founder of the American Economic Association in 1885. By doing so, Friedman illustrates the shift in thinking about trade unions in economics, from their benevolent treatment in institutionalist economics, in which they are considered one of the necessary ‘countervailing powers’ in relation to giant business corporations, to the contempt and hostility expressed in the ahistorical discipline of neoclassical economics. Furthermore, indicating the importance of the anti-union practices in the United States, the country is represented by two other chapters. J Logan offers a mainly descriptive but very insightful account of the multi-million dollar anti-union industry in the United States since the 1950s. In particular he focuses on some

historically important external professional union avoidance ‘consultants’, the growth of anti-union law firms and the increasing use of internal union avoidance specialists by large non-union firms because ‘remaining union-free [is] a continuous process’ (p. 32). Some high-profile campaigns illustrate the sophisticated tactics and strategies used to counter union organizing, although his chapter lacks a systematic historical comparison. Unlike Logan’s chapter, K Moody focuses not solely on managerial union avoidance and their aggressively anti-union approach but, by also bringing workers’ militancy into the account, provides a more dynamic history, leaving some room for optimism about the future. By way of an aside, it is unclear why the editors did not put Moody’s chapter in the first part on historical approaches as he starts his analysis in the 1940s.

Other English-speaking countries are well represented in the book, focusing on either the state or employers’ behaviour and strategies. R Cooper and B Ellem examine the Australian decade of fervent neoliberalism when conservative governments (1996–2007) promoted an anti-union legislative and policy regime to undermine collective bargaining and diminish trade unions’ capacity to organize and represent workers. In their chapter on Ireland, N Cullinane and colleagues focus on one explicit union avoidance strategy, namely ‘double-breasting’, in other words, ‘those instances where an employer recognizes a union at an older plant, while developing a non-union voice regime at another, newer, one’ (p. 121). Based on case studies of two multinationals, each having multiple sites across the Emerald Isle, they basically argue that ‘institutions matter’ in understanding the practice of ‘double-breasting’. G Gall also analyses a – not yet widespread – anti-union strategy in Britain. Interpreting data for 1998–2012 on the nature and extent of dismissals and suspensions of lay union representatives for their workplace union activities, he detects an increased scope for such victimization in the public sector, largely due to marketization. Furthermore, A McKinlay paints a historical organizational account of employer associations active in the chemical and engineering industries. He makes the point that they found a new purpose and strategy after the demise of multi-employer bargaining in the private sector in Britain built around consultancy services to individual firms. Although his elaborated chapter is interesting in its own right, its inclusion in this volume is less clear-cut because the author is perhaps too focused on internal organizational developments within employers’ associations, touching only loosely on anti-unionism. Contrary to McKinlay, multi-employer bargaining is also regarded as a response variable in the exploratory study by M Behrens and H Dribbusch. Besides analysing employers’ strategies to circumvent collective bargaining in Germany, they also look at the growing involvement of law firms or consultants in obstructing the establishment of works councils. Finally, three countries outside the advanced capitalist world are represented: Colombia (analysed by D Blackburn and M Puerto), where half of all union assassinations worldwide take place, Indonesia (studied by C Rowley and KS Bae) and South Korea (examined by M Ford). Primarily informative, these chapters mainly bear witness to extraordinary or virulent anti-union employer behaviour, putting it in the historical-political context of those countries.

Does the American million-dollar business of anti-unionism consider the European Union as the 51st state of the United States when it comes to increasing profits? In the German chapter the authors conclude that employers’ anti-union strategies are ‘very difficult to assess and remain a challenge for future research’ (p. 99). Uncertainty about the quantitative dimensions of the anti-union behaviour of employers would presumably also apply to other non-English speaking European countries. However, beyond anecdotal evidence and case studies on multinational corporations little is known systematically about the scope and extent of anti-unionism and its historical development in those countries. Not only does this lack of knowledge, especially on anti-unionism in countries in central and eastern Europe, call out for follow-up research (with better defined common research questions). Such a new volume would also be welcome for taking into

account the ‘supranational’ character of anti-unionism, given the neoliberal ‘interventionism’ of the European Commission and others in national collective bargaining to promote the decollectivization of employment relations. Indeed, the panoply of strategies and tactics of anti-unionism mentioned in *Global anti-unionism* sounds, sadly, all too familiar now in the European Union, especially in those countries severely affected by the financial crisis and the Great Recession. For this reason alone this is a very welcome and inspirational volume for future research. But above all, rather deviating from the prevailing union focus in the union revitalization literature, *Global anti-unionism* puts the emphasis once again on the employers’ side but also on the state, thereby enabling us to understand trade unions’ (shrinking) room to manoeuvre.

Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick and Richard Hyman

Trade Unions in Western Europe – Hard Times, Hard Choices, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013; 272 pp.: 9780199644414

Reviewed by: Gian Primo Cella, University of Milan

The study of industrial relations and the European trade union movement owes a major debt to Richard Hyman and to his steadfast cognitive endeavours in this field. The *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, founded by Hyman and edited by him for the past 20 years in a spirit of ‘enlightened absolutism’, stands as a remarkable testimony to his commitment to the furtherance of such studies, and the journal has by now established its position as the most important arena for the pursuit of an advanced understanding of European industrial relations. On this occasion, flanked by a well-qualified co-author, he supplies us with a useful and important contribution on the European trade unions that constitutes, in numerous respects, a complement to his *Understanding European Trade Unionism* (2001), a work closely attuned to the need for an accurate and comprehensible exposition of trade unions’ underlying rationales and ‘ideologies’. This earlier book undoubtedly represented, for a decade at least, compulsory reading for anyone wishing to gain an up-to-date understanding of the subject at a time when interest in it was on the wane after a period of appeal and fascination during the previous decades. The authors of the book we are reviewing today, while perfectly aware of the decline in interest, seem confident that the trade unions still constitute important subjects for scientific analysis for at least three reasons: they supply, for employees, an important channel for collective voice; they constitute a form of counter-vailing power to the socio-economic dominance of capital; they are, at least potentially, a ‘sword of justice’ (to use Allan Flanders’ famous image) (p. VII). However, the authors fail to give the requisite degree of emphasis to the trade unions’ importance in the configuration and operation of pluralist democracies – or ‘poliarchies’, should we prefer to use the term coined by Dahl and Lindblom back in 1953 – and this failure, as we shall see, represents a limitation of their analysis.

‘Hard times, hard choices; but strategic initiative is still possible’, state the authors, expressing their key message in a nutshell at the outset. This is the message that, as a true *Leitmotiv*, recurs constantly throughout their densely argued and complex journey to take in the wide-ranging components of the overall European picture, a journey undertaken not only in order to describe the problems but also to seek, and virtually to advocate, some possible strategic ways out of the crisis and of overcoming some of the difficulties encountered *en route*. In their ‘mapping of the terrain’ over which they travel in their reconstruction of the trade union status quo, the authors identify a network consisting of four types of relationship in which European trade unions participate: relations with their members; relations with employers; relations with governments; relations with