

start to think about how the declining nation states of the twenty-first century can deal with young people who find a “just cause” in fighting abroad.

Beatrice de Graaf

Department for History and Art History, Utrecht University
Drift 6, 3512 BS Utrecht
The Netherlands
E-mail: B.A.deGraaf@uu.nl
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KNOTTER, AD. *Transformations of Trade Unionism. Comparative and Transnational Perspectives on Workers Organizing in Europe and the United States, Eighteenth to Twenty-First Centuries.* [Work around the Globe: Historical Comparisons and Connections.] Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2018. 310 pp. Ill. € 29.95. (Open Access <http://www.open.org/search?keyword=9789463724715>).

The latest work by Ad Knotter covers over two centuries of trade union actions and organizing. The long-term perspective, conducive to detecting continuities, significant ruptures, and cyclical fluctuations, highlights the renewed interest in the history of international labour circulation, transfers, and connections.¹ This perspective is timely, as the successors of the old labour movement are struggling to restore basic solidarity and regain control, despite the rapid changes in labour societies that they had helped bring about in the North Atlantic, disrupted by the very globalization it instigated. In keeping with current ideas of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, to which the author contributes as a renowned specialist on labour history in the Dutch-German-Belgian context, the approach is decidedly transnational.

The work comprises seven articles, two of which were not previously published, and five of which were issued between 1993 and 2017. The broad chronological, occupational, and geographic coverage ranges from collective practices among shearers in Northwestern Europe in the eighteenth century to recent organizing among cleaning workers on both sides of the Atlantic. Throughout the case studies, transnational trends in the trade union movement are examined in light of the chief ambition of influencing labour markets. The author addresses this topic by focusing on practices distinct from the ideological and institutional considerations that have long prevailed. Although he does not actually disregard them, both the action repertoire and the tactics and strategies also entail structures and doctrines. This is confirmed by the role of the First International in training a generation of activists who experimented with unprecedented scales of solidarity and, later, the influence of social democracy on the rise of general and industrial trade unions. Knotter also seeks to define the sociology of the stakeholders, wage workers, and trade unionists in terms of production systems, skill levels, origins, ages, and, to a lesser degree, gender. All these data are

1. Another contribution on this subject is Nicolas Delalande, *La Lutte et l'Entraide. L'âge des solidarités ouvrières* (Paris, 2019); see also Ad Knotter's review of this book in *International Review of Social History*, 64:2 (2019), pp. 330–333.

necessary to understand the internal hierarchies of wage earners as advanced claims. From this perspective, clarifying the transformations brought about by the second industrialization stabilizing broad segments of the wage workers required by the huge mass of productive capital would have been helpful.

The author embarks on his exploration of shearers across the vast stretch between Aachen and Liège, adhering to an effective “proto-syndicalist” action repertory in the eighteenth century, which Knotter ultimately qualifies as “manufactural unionism”. Henceforth, the rigid collective discipline introduced by the textile labour elite safeguarded know-how, which they intended to remain scarce, and to optimize its use. Worker mobility contributes to this process, which involves political-administrative segmentation and facilitates dissemination of information and instructions. The social “insolence” of the shearers nonetheless raised an “awareness of place” inherent in locally anchoring the production system and the “confraternities” of workers.²

The cigar makers and then the diamond workers and glassmakers saw more and went further in the following centuries. Two of the three activities derived from colonial and semi-colonial globalization. Despite being situated in close proximity to French outlets, they originated from a long-term labour market, conducive to migration. Frequently hailing from urban, underprivileged or minority groups, the cigar makers and diamond workers were no less successful in controlling access to their occupation. In conjunction with the First International, cigar makers in both settings managed to ward off competition. Thanks especially to their concentration in Amsterdam, diamond workers managed to seal off access to their occupation. Mining new deposits of gemstones, however, compromised the status they had secured. The general union confederations of the 1880s overtook the craft unions, aiming to reduce tensions between the different specializations. Unable to reverse the outsourcing to Antwerp, general trade union confederations encouraged diamond workers in Belgium to organize but failed to restore the former working power. The plight of the glassmakers resembles that of the cigar makers, including the bonds they forged with their American counterparts, who, in some cases, came from Wallonia, bringing with them principles of labour organization. Without the technological revolution, the glassmakers excelled at controlling their labour market on both sides of the Atlantic. Several such initiatives, including establishing cooperatives, arose from the occupational trade unions run by a “labour aristocracy” that had a stake in “co-exploiting” the aids and apprentices it recruited and remunerated. Belated mechanization altered the composition of the workforce to the advantage of these aids and apprentices, who were now able to assert their claims via the general trade unions, at the head of which the elite had to justify its hegemony. Still, changes happened faster in the United States than in Belgium, where the regulating force of trade unions perpetuated the trades until after World War I, before yielding to industrial syndicalism.

This transition affected all the organizations in Amsterdam in the 1890s and resulted from a combination of factors: proletariat of the ports and garment industry joining the struggle and organizing; the reverberations of social-democratic ideas; and the arrival of massive numbers of workers attracted by the boom in local construction. The down-to-earth claims of the new working class eclipsed the ideals of associations of artisans. Their elitist syndicalism made way for organizations more attuned to the profile and the experience of the new,

2. Cf. R. Cazals, “En Languedoc lainier: Réflexion sur la conscience de place”, in P. Guillaume (ed.), *Les solidarités 2. Du terroir à l'État* (Bordeaux, 2002), pp. 231–311.

local working class. A new type of regulation was adopted to accommodate the expectations of a party of employers and authorities concerned about a serious “social question”: threats against the public order.

Knotter quickly proceeds to this third stakeholder, closely involved in the “nationalization” of trade union movements, contemporaneous to the second industrialization and the inception of the welfare state, the most advanced stage, in our opinion, of the nation state. It was obvious for the unions of Limburg miners, who came under the influence of their powerful German counterparts, upon the emergence of a cross-border labour market in their industry. The schisms instigated by World War I were perpetuated, when the Dutch state established them as a condition of association with the management of new social funds. As a result, the Christian trade union confederation severed ties with the German organization and lapsed into a Germanophobia to set itself apart from its socialist competitor. This change in protection for the jobless benefits was another decisive state intervention, given that the trade union coffers, which were quickly turned into strike funds, arose from the system enabling workers to control the labour market, despite the results failing to meet expectations. At the end of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, classifying unemployment as a “problem of industry” led local and national public authorities to intervene by opening labour exchanges, allocating subsidies, and setting up mandatory insurance funds. Incorporated into the welfare state, these measures entailed rules that, at times, conflicted with trade union standards and prerogatives. While the Ghent system – in no way related to the union-employer co-determination incorrectly mentioned by the author – and its Scandinavian versions left them ample latitude, the situation in Great Britain was different. Everywhere, the measures adopted contributed to institutionalizing the trade unions and reinforcing the distinction between “good” and “bad” jobless.

The final chapter addresses precarious work and globalization in the present day. The struggles of these workers, most of them women, reveal that trade unions are capable of adapting their action repertoire without renouncing their essential objectives. This chapter underscores the conditions, starting with the choice of a transnational strategy explicitly inspired by the victorious struggle of the janitors in North America. The success of mobilizing the “precarariat,” relegated to the margins of ordinary wage-earners and often comprised of migrants, who in some cases lack residence or work permits, depends on their visibility.

Decades of research have yielded a panorama revealing how well the author knows his subject. This is confirmed by the vast bibliography comprising nearly 700 titles, the sole shortcoming being the dearth of French publications. Impressive and convincing, the demonstration withstands the inconveniences of inevitable repetition and excessively lengthy elaborations, at the risk of fragmentation, in some chapters. Still, that is not the essence. If Knotter averts any advice to the trade unions, his analyses will interest only labour historians. The present labour-related changes affect the very core of trade union movements, even though the rise of self-employment is destroying the historical landmarks and accomplishments of wage workers in favour of restoring piecework and subcontracting. This is not covered in the book. Nevertheless, studying the past and present of transnational unionism raises the question of what is possible for the future. Other connections are suggested, such as the support and cooperation outlined during the struggles of cleaning workers. More generally, the rise and dissemination of feminists, environmental activists, and consumers in the workplace may incite harmful rivalries or may be conducive to clashes and convergences by reinserting operational aspects in the broader issues

of dominance and human emancipation, a perspective no less alien to the trade union movement. But that is another story.

Michel Pigenet

Centre d'Histoire sociale des mondes contemporains (UMR 8058)
 Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
 9 rue Malher 75004 Paris, France
 E-mail: Michel.Pigenet@univ-paris1.fr
 doi:10.1017/S0020859019000622

DE GRAAF, JAN. *Socialism across the Iron Curtain. Socialist Parties in East and West and the Reconstruction of Europe after 1945*. [New Studies in European History.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2019. xii, 320 pp. £75.00. (E-book: \$84.00.)

WOLOCH, ISSER. *The Postwar Moment. Progressive Forces in Britain, France, and the United States after World War II*. Yale University Press, New Haven (CT) [etc.] 2019. xxii, 515 pp. Ill. \$40.00.

The historian Geoff Eley has identified post-war periods as moments of exceptional potential. The disruptions attendant on major war create opportunities for recasting the dominant order at home and abroad as the forces underpinning the status quo emerge weakened and as actors become capable of imagining futures hitherto inconceivable. For Eley, such moments are also short-lived: older habits, familiar frameworks, and vested interests quickly combine to close windows of opportunity.¹

Eley's model is pertinent to the two books under review, for both deal with the years after World War II. The two books have other things in common: both examine political forces on the left, socialist (or social democratic) parties for Jan de Graaf and "progressives" for Isser Woloch; both seek to explain why some countries witnessed more progressive reforms than others; and, last but not least, both adopt an explicitly comparative approach.

Of the two books, De Graaf's is the most rigorously comparative, with each chapter carefully examining the positions of the Czech, French, Italian, and Polish socialist (non-communist) parties. The results, hammered home repeatedly, are striking: the Polish and Italian parties and the Czech and French parties had more in common with each other than an East–West conceptual map would lead one to expect. In emphasizing these two groupings, De Graaf seeks to challenge several historiographical tendencies. One is the Western centrism of most histories of European socialism, which, he rightly notes, all too often neglect Eastern Europe. Another tendency is to draw sharp lines between the socialist parties in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe after 1945 from those in Western, Northern, and Southern Europe. A final tendency – and perhaps the most relevant in terms of Eley's model – is to view European socialism as irredeemably reformist with socialist parties embracing the American-led Western alliance abroad and versions of market capitalism at home.

1. Geoff Eley, "Europe after 1945", *History Workshop Journal*, 65 (2008), pp. 207–208.