

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Place, Space and the New Labour Internationalisms edited by
Peter WATERMAN and Jane WILLS, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001,
300 pp., ISBN 0-631-22983-3.

Stuart Hodkinson

Volume 57, Number 4, Fall 2002

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/006911ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/006911ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hodkinson, S. (2002). Review of [*Place, Space and the New Labour Internationalisms* edited by Peter WATERMAN and Jane WILLS, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, 300 pp., ISBN 0-631-22983-3.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 57(4), 796–798. <https://doi.org/10.7202/006911ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 2002

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Malgré les évolutions récentes, comme le poids accru de la concurrence, la fin des frontières, la montée en puissance des actionnaires, entreprises et organisations demeurent bien des objets sociologiques. C'est le périmètre où s'affirme l'exercice effectif du contrôle et la régulation de l'activité. L'entreprise demeure une institution. L'histoire est là pour nous rappeler que l'entreprise que nous connaissons aujourd'hui n'est ni universelle, ni atemporelle, qu'elle a connu d'autres formes et d'autres caractéristiques, qu'elle est un espace des possibles ou d'autres solutions sont toujours faisables.

La prise en compte de la réalité technique a fini par transformer la vision du travail. De variable indépendante, la technique a été considérée dans son usage, voire comme objet d'appropriation, les ingénieurs et les techniciens sont devenus des objets d'étude, comme la notion de réseau. Le regard des sociologues s'est déplacé des rapports travail/techniques aux interrogations sur cette relation en l'élargissant aux métamorphoses actuelles des techniques.

Les conclusions du livre portent sur le travail des sociologues, les méthodes d'analyse des grands nombres et le devenir de la revue *Sociologie du travail*. Se rapprocher des sciences de la nature et analyser la fabrication des catégories d'analyse des grands nombres, des réseaux, permettrait d'enrichir le travail du sociologue. La revue a été capable d'évoluer dans des contextes changeants. La fidélité à cette histoire doit lui permettre de continuer.

Ce livre fait le tour des débats et des évolutions de la sociologie du travail dans ces quarante dernières années, vu à travers la Revue. Il y a manqué sans doute davantage de travaux de conceptualisation, ce que les auteurs admettent eux-mêmes, une insuffisance de comparaison internationale dans ce domaine des idées et un manque d'ouverture vers les autres disciplines que la sociologie. Reste que le livre fait très sérieusement le tour des principales questions et débats de sociologie, et c'est ce qu'on lui demandait.

PHILIPPE BERNOUX
CNRS, Université Lyon 2

Place, Space and the New Labour Internationalisms

edited by Peter WATERMAN and Jane WILLS, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, 300 pp., ISBN 0-631-22983-3.

In the last decade, academic and political obsession with the "globalization of business" has served to obscure an important and related development—the revival of the theory and practice of labour internationalism. A flurry of recent literature even suggests that the collapse of Communism in 1989 and the simultaneous acceleration of neo-liberal globalization have helped create a new era of labour internationalism characterized by genuine solidarity and effective co-operation in both old and new forms.

This edited collection by Waterman and Wills is a timely and insightful contribution to the debate. Its main aims are to critically investigate the "new labour

internationalisms," highlight new and controversial issues for global solidarity building and make "constructive proposals for the future." Featuring thirteen original chapters from mainly within and around the tradition(s) of Marxism, the book not only bridges the theoretical/empirical and academic/activist divides, but also the "North/South" divide as well, assembling contributors from across Asia, Europe and the Americas.

In part one, entitled "New Developments in Trade Union Internationalism," many authors openly question whether the traditional and still dominant form of labour internationalism—international trade unionism—is suited to what

Waterman calls a "globalize/networked/informative capitalism." Both Waterman and Kjeld Jakobsen (International officer of the Brazilian CUT) make similar if slightly simplistic critiques of the "official" head body of the international trade union movement, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). They accuse it of having resisted necessary reforms in relation to developing country representation and women, leaving the organization embedded in a bureaucratic, Northern-dominated, top-down, unrepresentative and debate-stifling structure.

Reinforcing this critique are positive examples of "new" modes of internationalism. Rob Lambert and Eddie Webster's somewhat uncritical insider account of the Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR)—a new network of democratic trade unions in Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and Latin America—reveals its championing of innovative positions such as alliance-building, forging new regional and global identities, the representation of *all* workers, and the exploitation of cyberspace technologies. Andrew Herod meanwhile highlights two different but equally effective U.S. trade union campaigns resisting corporate globalization at Ravenswood Aluminium Corporation and General Motors. On a more sobering note, Franco Barchiesi outlines the many difficulties that have confronted the South African Municipal Workers' attempts to mobilize international solidarity and make lasting and effective alliances with social movements in response to the privatization and restructuring of water services.

The second half of the book examines "New Issues for Labour Internationalism." Several chapters cover trade union and NGO strategies towards MNCs and the international trade regime. In an often contradictory analysis using evidence from Indian domestic politics, Rohini Hensman examines the

controversial ICFTU campaign to link workers' rights to trade agreements under the World Trade Organization (WTO). She accuses trade union and NGO opponents of linkage of economic nationalism before supporting their concerns over allowing the WTO to enforce workers rights' given its entire agenda serves to destroy them. Lance Compa's optimistic analysis of the North American Free Trade Agreement's (NAFTA) labour side-accord (NAALC) is also somewhat questionable. Although recognizing NAALC's weak and limited scope, Compa sees it as a "viable new arena for creative transnational action" because its oversight mechanism encourages trade unions and NGOs to work together across borders to highlight abuses by governments and corporations and publicly shame them into redress. The evidence he finds to support this is, however, very thin.

On a similar theme, Angela Hale and Linda Shaw of Women Working Worldwide have serious reservations about the efficacy of voluntary Corporate Codes of Conduct (CCC) for creating "ethical trade" in the global garment industry. This is partly because the Western corporate signatories to the codes are the very companies demanding cheaper imports of goods and creating unfavourable conditions for such CCCs to work; and also due to the complete uninvolved and consideration of the actual mainly female, informal workers on the end of the sub-contracting chain, in the devising of CCCs, rendering them top-down, ungended mechanisms. Although the chapter doesn't adequately deal with the gender dimension, this is compensated for by Dan Gallin's more substantive analysis that follows of informal sector employment and the particular position of women workers within. Gallin's central argument is that unions must recognize the drastic need to organize workers in the informal sector, not least because it is vital to their very survival.

Two more chapters focus on European issues. In a provocative piece, Richard Hyman argues that politically-led market liberalization combines with the growing power and mobility of European MNCs to create deregulatory "regime competition" across the different national industrial relations systems of the European Union (EU) to the serious disadvantage of trade union power and workers' rights. In response, he believes European labour representatives should waste less time and fewer resources pursuing "social dialogue" with employers, and more time creating networks of communication within and between trade unions across the continent to mobilize both workers and popular European-wide ideas for bottom-up social change. The feasibility of worker-worker networking is then empirically examined by Jane Wills in relation to European Works Councils (EWCs), which are legally required for a management information and consultation with employees in certain-sized companies based in at least two member states of the EU. Wills finds that instead of helping trade unionists to develop their own pan-European horizontal networks, the main beneficiaries of EWCs have thus far been corporate management.

The final chapters deal with two particularly problematic issues for organized labour: gender and immigration. Melissa Wright's outstanding analysis of "*femicidio*" or "femicide"—the mythical cultural representation of certain women as "worthless"—in Mexico, charts the rise of a grassroots women's movement in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua challenging elite and popular apathy towards the rape, torture and murder of hundreds of women. Contrary to tradi-

tional attitudes, Wright sees this issue as directly relevant to the organizing of workers in Mexican export-processing zones and U.S. union solidarity activities because struggling against the social cheapening of women is intimately related to union efforts to strengthen the value of workers.

Bringing the collection to a close, Bruce Nissen and Guillermo Grenier investigate the extent to which the recent "pro-immigrant turn" in the leadership of the U.S. union movement is reflected at the local union level in the heavily immigrant Miami, Florida area. Overall, they find that attitudes to and opportunities for black and Hispanic workers have improved in their four case unions over time, but obstacles and prejudices still exist. Although cautiously optimistic, the authors nevertheless show the difficult task facing solidarity building between workers of different countries, colour, race and culture.

In general, Waterman and Wills have produced a book of fundamental relevance in the post-Seattle age, offering powerful, perceptive insights on the past, present and future of labour internationalism. The only major shortcomings are a far too brief introductory chapter by the editors that doesn't adequately set out the historical and political context of the "new labour internationalisms," and the absence of a concluding chapter bringing the different arguments and examples together in a more general analysis with an eye to their future implications. All in all, though, a fantastic resource.

STUART HODKINSON
University of Leeds