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Working for Justice: The L.A. Model of Organizing and Advocacy Edited by Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom and Victor Narro, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010, 296 pp., ISBN 978-0-8014-4858-4.

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loss “was a win of sorts,” however, as it was the first time the mayor had used the veto in 17 years in his position, aldermen hostile to the issues subsequently, lost their seats, and a campaign to raise the minimum wage in Illinois was successful. So while the campaign did not achieve its immediate objective, the political climate was shifted and a strong coalition was further strengthened.

In this and the other case studies, Tattersall vigorously explores the complexities of success –and failure – and the nature of strategic choice for unions in the twentieth century. Unions are not – and cannot be – discrete actors, she argues; in a context of a more hostile or indifferent climate, building coalitions will increase union power and build social legitimacy. But it is mutual power enhancement – between unions and other organizations – that is the most lasting and successful strategy; paradoxically, to gain power, unions must share it.

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Working for Justice: The L.A. Model of Organizing and Advocacy

Edited by Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom and Victor Narro, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010, 296 pp., ISBN 978-0-8014-4858-4.

This book consists of case studies of worker/immigrant organizing efforts (with organizing defined very broadly) in the Los Angeles area. Some of the efforts documented are by worker centers, others by ethnic or occupation based associations, others by established trade unions. The general object of the campaigns is to improve the lot of low-wage workers through some combination of tactics. The editors of the book argue that the interaction and learning that has taken place between organizations beginning from different perspectives has produced a more or less “distinctive L.A. model of economic justice organizing and advocacy.”

The book’s senior editor (although she would probably deny it) is Ruth Milkman, who at the time when most of the research was

being carried out was a professor of sociology at UCLA and now holds a similar position at the City University of New York. Her co-editors are Joshua Bloom, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at UCLA at the time the book was being prepared who before returning to graduate school had spent nearly a decade as an organizer, and Victor Narro, a lawyer who has made a career of working in various capacities for a variety of community organizations. Several of the chapter authors are graduate students, others are activists/scholars.

The methodology chosen to produce the book was deliberately collaborative and interactive between the authors, the editors and members of the groups being studied. Bloom refers to it as “organic public sociology.” In addition to the frequent feedback and interchange between those centrally involved, a miniconference was held at UCLA in 2008 and three prominent experts were invited to provide their input: Dan Clawson from the University of Massachusetts, Janice Fine (author of the seminal book on Workers’ Centers) from Rutgers University and Nik Theodore from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

According to Milkman what is distinction about the “L.A. model of organizing and advocacy” is that it is a product of “mimetic isomorphism,” or “the process through which organizations facing similar environmental challenges and uncertainties imitate other successful organizations.” What has come out of the process, it is argued, is that both workers’ centers and unions doing low wage and/or immigrant organizing in the L.A. area typically make use of some combination of the following elements:

- strategic research on organizing targets to identify vulnerabilities and to extract politically valuable information;
- grassroots organizing focused on low-wage workers and leadership development efforts to empower those workers;
- legal initiatives, including filing claims with government regulatory agencies as well as lawsuits on behalf of low-wage

workers subjected to illegal employment practices;

- building alliances with key actors in the local community—ranging from consumers to faith-based groups to ethnic and political leaders and organizations—to gain material and moral leverage over employers and government officials;
- producing compelling narratives that include the stories and voices of low-wage workers themselves, and framing claims in the moral language of social justice;
- using such narratives to stage ‘public dramas’ to attract media attention;
- shaming employers into making concessions; and
- generating public pressure on lawmakers to win passage of legislative and regulatory reforms.”

Since many of these techniques have been used across the United States and in Canada in the past few decades I do not find the argument that a unique L.A. Model has been uncovered all that convincing. But that is really not all that important. What this book provides is an interesting set of eleven case studies that add to our knowledge of a burgeoning, multi-faceted phenomenon that is welling up as traditional union organizing declines. That new development needs to be documented and this volume helps to get that job done.

Roy Adams
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Les identités au travail : analyses et controverses

Coordonné par Jean-Yves Causer, Jean-Pierre Durand et William Gasparini, Paris : Octares, Collection « Le travail en débats », 2009, 333 p., ISBN 978-2-915346-71-8; ISSN 1771-9046.

Voici un ouvrage collectif produit suite aux deuxièmes Journées d'études du réseau thématique 25 (Travail, Organisation, Emplois) de l'Association française de sociologie, résolument inscrit dans la tradition sociologique

française des travaux sur les identités professionnelles. Pour Renaud Sainsaulieu qui fut, comme le rappellent en introduction William Gasparini et Jean-Yves Causer, « l'un des premiers à travailler en profondeur le lien entre l'individuel et le collectif à l'aide des notions d'identité et de culture », l'identité au travail désigne des « modèles culturels » ou des « logiques d'acteurs en organisation » mais dont les effets culturels dépassent la seule sphère du travail.

La question centrale, à laquelle tentent de répondre les quelque 35 contributions réunies dans l'ouvrage, pourrait être résumée comme suit : quel est l'impact des transformations du capitalisme (nouvelles formes de travail, montée des activités de service, individualisation de la relation d'emploi, perte d'influence du syndicalisme) et des structures contemporaines d'organisation du travail (nouvelles formes de management visant à impliquer et à mobiliser les salariés, coopération, polyvalence), sur les identités au travail ? La plupart des auteurs abordent la question à partir d'enquêtes de terrain, trop nombreuses pour qu'il soit possible de les résumer ici. Elles sont organisées autour de six sections, précédées chacune d'une introduction : c'est avant tout de ces textes introductifs, précieux pour comprendre la logique des contributions et les matières sur lesquelles elles entrent en débat, dont la présente recension rend compte.

La première partie, plus théorique, est introduite par François Aballéa. Elle s'intéresse à l'impact des identités sur les relations au travail et réciproquement, à l'incidence de la nature des relations au travail sur la construction des identités. Selon l'auteur, la question centrale posée par cette articulation est celle des rapports (en tension) entre la stratégie des collectifs de salariés pour promouvoir ou défendre leur identité singulière et la stratégie de l'entreprise pour homogénéiser ces identités dans une culture commune. Aballéa identifie ensuite cinq cas de figure, qui renvoient à des situations traitées dans des textes subséquents : dans le premier de ces cas, l'entreprise entretient et