Organizing Dissent: Unions, the State, and the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico.

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Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Jan., 1998), 342-344.

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Industrial and Labor Relations Review is currently published by Cornell University, School of Industrial & Labor Relations.

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union mergers. The increased prominence of union mergers in several countries prompted the present book, which is primarily concerned with the following questions: How and why do labor unions merge in hard times? What role do mergers play in the unions' strategies to deal with membership losses, management opposition, and hostile governments? Are there distinctive national profiles of union mergers?

To answer these questions Chaison examines merger trends in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. His data sources include official and unofficial sources of statistics, interviews with selected union officers, interviews with government officials, and discussions with some other researchers. The book comprises an introductory, scene-setting chapter, country-by-country substantive chapters, a concluding chapter, and five detailed statistical appendices for the countries concerned.

Arguably the most important insights emerging from the work concern the intensity and character of merger activity in the five countries. The order of treatment of the five countries reflects Chaison's view of how they rank in intensity of merger activity, with "heightened interest in the United States, the brink of a merger wave in Canada, the continuation of the merger tradition in Britain, ... quick and complex sequences of mergers for major structural reform in Australia, and [an] enormous merger wave induced by legislation in New Zealand" (p. 159). In addition, Chaison stresses (1) the difficulties of generalizing about the impact of mergers on members' interests and on union democracy; (2) the questionable validity of pro-merger advocates' assumption that small unions are always ineffective (and hence should be merged); (3) the inevitably limited degree of rationalization involved in mergers; and (4) the severe limitations of mergers as a union strategy for "hard times."

There are a number of positive things to say about this volume. First, it contains a great deal of useful statistical information and illustrative examples that will be of considerable value to any industrial relations teacher who wants to place the subject of union mergers in a comparative framework. Second, this is *not* a "token" comparative study; it involves much more than a long, detailed chapter on the researcher's own country, with a couple of short, superficial, "add on" chapters for other national systems. Chaison has done a very nice job of immersing himself in the details of and debates about the other systems' contextual changes. As a result,

he has produced a country-by-country treatment of his subject that is much more even and informed than are many relatively short comparative studies. In short, what he has set out to accomplish, he has accomplished well.

This being said, what he has produced is overwhelmingly a descriptive study whose results are intuitively appealing or, as some commentators might argue, fairly predictable in nature. In other words, one might want to argue that he has set his sights a little too low, by explicitly ruling out certain important and interesting questions from his examination. For instance, on page 1 he tells us, "My purpose is not to test a theory of union mergers or to report on the intricacies and intrigues of merger negotiations and postmerger accommodations." He justifies this decision on the grounds that such questions were covered in a previous publication. But I am sure I am not alone in wishing he had pushed a little further in this more analytical direction. For instance, he makes considerable play of the fact that "unions merge to avoid the high costs and low yields of traditional organizing" (p. 8). This is certainly an interesting perspective that could have been empirically developed via some relevant union case study analysis; for example, are the unions that are disproportionately involved in merger moves experiencing markedly below-average success in new organizing initiatives?

Still, criticism of a researcher for not examining the questions that the reviewer thinks should have been addressed can be valid only up to a point. I would therefore conclude by recommending *Union Mergers in Hard Times* to colleagues as a volume that very much achieves its stated aims, even if those aims are modest in scope.

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Organizing Dissent: Unions, the State, and the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico. By Maria Lorena Cook. University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1996. xvi, 359 pp. ISBN 0-271-01561-6, \$55.00 (cloth); 0-271-01560-8, \$19.95 (paper).

The powerful if often less-than-emancipatory role of organized labor within the Mexican political system has long puzzled observers north of the Rio Grande. Since the revolutionary era

(1910–40), trade unions have thrived in Mexico and become powerfully entrenched institutions that derive and exercise manifold powers from sources that transcend the direct employer/employee context. Yet for the most part, Mexico's trade unions and its highly politicized *sui generis* industrial relations system are simply caricatured in derogatory and moralistic terms as corrupt, undemocratic, and state-dominated. Far too few have sought to explain, as does Maria Cook in this admirable monograph, how working people's interests are fulfilled, betrayed, and contested through and within their trade union organizations.

Organizing Dissent is a masterful political and institutional study of the emergence, consolidation, and eventual (partial) victory of a rank-and-file insurgency in Mexico's largest union, the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE), between 1979 and 1989. The SNTE's rise to substantial national power since the 1930s could be seen as the story of the "formation and consolidation of a classic 'official' union, one that came to support the [Mexican] regime and was overseen by an oligarchic leadership." Yet Cook differs from those who would read this as evidence of "the unequivocal domination of the union by the state." For Cook, like Kevin Middlebrook, state/labor relations in modern Mexico are far better understood as a process of "bargaining and exchange," an "unstable equilibrium," in which internal union cleavages are crosscut with rivalries for power in the governmental, political, and labor spheres (pp. 59, 32).

The abrupt ousting of the SNTE's national leadership in 1972, with support from the new Left-tilting President of Mexico, Luis Echeverría, provided the immediate background to the dissident teachers' movement of the late 1970s (pp. 71–73). This 1972 "coup" marked the rise to power of Carlos Jonquitud Barrios, who was elected Secretary-General in 1974 and would hold power until 1989. Jonquitud consolidated his position by organizing a union faction, known as Vanguardia Revolucionaria (VR), during these buoyant years in which the number of teachers jumped markedly. (The number increased from 320,000 in 1970 to 528,825 by 1977; in 1960 it had stood at 147,000 [pp. 71, 75].)

As Jonquitud became entrenched in power, the VR became an increasingly tightly knit and intolerant power bloc that exercised decisive influence over teachers' daily lives through its embeddedness within the structures of the federal Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP).

The SNTE's ever more prominent role in mobilizing electoral support for the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) also helped to catapult an increasing number of its leaders into top governmental positions (Jonquitud served as governor of the state of San Luis Potosí from 1979 to 1985).

Yet Cook demonstrates that there were serious state-union tensions even at the high point of the honeymoon between the SNTE, the SEP, and the PRI. Jonquitud's ambitions and the extent of the union's influence within the SEP generated significant government opposition that would surface with the selection of a new Mexican president in 1976. Eager to clip the union's wings, the SEP now moved to decentralize educational policy in an attack on union prerogatives. Cook shows convincingly how this conflict provided the political opening for both the rekindling of older factional disputes and the emergence of the distinctly New Left rank-and-file opposition movement whose trajectory and internal dynamics are the focus of this book.

Organizing Dissent offers a clear comparative treatment of the various regional movements that formed the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE) in 1979. Methodologically rigorous, Cook advances a strong but carefully specified argument that integrates the local, regional, and national stories into a single analytical framework. In successive chapters, she explores how opposition emerged in six states, achieved victories in two, and survived over the long haul. Chapter 7 explores how a massive rank-and-file mobilization in 1989 contributed to the overthrow of Jonquitud, a process that unfolded during the first year of yet another new Mexican President, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The final chapter offers an overall assessment of the CNTE and discusses the implications of her findings for the study of Mexican politics and for the further refinement of social movement theory (a topic also covered with aplomb in Chapter 2).

Cook's many accomplishments can best be appreciated in comparison with Joe Foweraker's sketchier *Popular Mobilization in Mexico: The Teachers' Movement, 1977–1987* (1993). Unlike Foweraker, Cook does not present the CNTE as the story of one state writ large, and Cook is authoritative where Foweraker was uncertain or, at best, suggestive: she explains national political and union dynamics as well as regional variation, successfully periodizes the movement, and explains its ebb and flow through the years. Equally important, Cook never allows her sym-

pathies for the CNTE to cloud her admirably balanced judgment, and thus avoids the temptation of adopting the CNTE's discourse as her own. Nor does she eschew what Foweraker referred to disdainfully as "the intricacies of the academic debates [on social movements] in all their gothic splendor" (Foweraker, p. 171).

The heart of *Organizing Dissent* is Cook's attempt to systematize the strategic and tactical lessons to be learned from the experience of the teachers' opposition. Throughout, Cook pays close attention to the political calculus, both internal and external, that shaped the movement's cycles of mobilization and protest while refusing to separate analysis from above and from below. Cook is also refreshingly straightforward about the logic of what one might call the CNTE's "anti-anti-statist stance." In striking contrast to the prescriptions of (the now-not-so) "new social movement theory" from the North Atlantic world, the CNTE pursued a class-based strategy of "legalizing our strength" through the occupation of institutional space within the union (pp. 123, 28). Far from idealizing movement autonomy and independence, Cook demonstrates how and why the dissidents' successful practice was characterized by this shrewd "use of legality and of state 'allies'" in their conflicts with the national SNTE (p. 171).

Yet Cook does more than merely explain the grievances that spark protest, the "political opportunity structure" that accompanies their emergence, or their strategic options. Above all, she seeks to explain "the persistence of social movements," which requires that movement organization itself must be treated "as a problematic phenomenon." In other words, we need to study the "kind of organization" that is characteristic of a given movement as well as the organizational forms, participatory styles, and movement practices chosen by insurgent leaders. In doing so, movement leaders are granted "the capacity for strategic thinking and action within the parameters defined by their environments" (p. 46). Thus Cook strikes a welcome balance between a determinist structural perspective and the naive advocacy of unlimited human agency.

Cook's analysis of the meaning and importance of "democracy" within the CNTE is not based on taking the movement's discourse at face value; rather, she shows how such practices were functional for movement survival within an authoritarian context (p. 58). Nor is she blind to the presence of the undemocratic even within this predominantly "democratic" movement. And finally, she never under-estimates

the deep internal tensions and factional havoc that can stem from the determination to maintain a style and discourse of grass roots-oriented democratic practice (democracy from the bottom up) while participating in formal institutional structures of representation and aggregation of interests (a theme in Margaret Keck, *The Workers' Party and Democratization in Brazil*, 1992).

All in all, Cook's superb book will be of wide interest to students of Mexican politics as well as social movement theory. *Organizing Dissent* joins a number of exciting recent studies of Latin American trade unionism—among them, James P. Brennan's *The Labor Wars in Córdoba, 1955–1976*, Deborah Levenson Estrada's *Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954–1985*, and Biorn Maybury-Lewis's *The Politics of the Possible: The Brazilian Rural Workers' Trade Union Movement, 1964–1985*—that demonstrate the striking level of sophistication and maturity that has been reached in Latin American labor studies over the past decade.

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Between Bargaining and Politics: An Introduction to European Labor Relations. By Hans Slomp. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1996. 165 pp. ISBN 0-275-95608-3, \$55.00.

This slim volume by Hans Slomp provides simply the best introduction to European labor relations that I have seen. It is a common truism that "it is harder to write short than to write long." By that measure, this author has accomplished something quite remarkable: he has summarized the key features, history, and major contemporary developments of labor relations—at all levels, from the workplace to national politics—for all of Europe. This is a clear, easily understood, factually and analytically accurate book that I would highly recommend for beginning student and advanced specialist alike.

To a significant extent, this book is descriptive, making no particular claim to advance our theoretical understanding. Yet drawing on the best available sources of expertise, such as the work of Colin Crouch, Peter Katzenstein, and Wolfgang Streeck, as well as his own obviously thorough knowledge of the subject matter, the author not only provides first-rate summaries of what is known, but highlights (and takes sides