Note

1 Though this literature is vast, notable recent volumes on this subject include M. L. Louro et al. (eds.), The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives, Leiden 2020; C. J. Lee, Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives, Athens 2010; N. Mišković, H. Fischer-Tiné, and N. Boškovska Leimgruber (eds.), The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War: Delhi – Bandung – Belgrade, New York 2014.

Immanuel Ness: Organizing Insurgency: Workers Movements in the Global South, London: Pluto Press, 2021, 240 pp.

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How can working class gains obtained in struggle from employers be secured more permanently? How can capitalism be challenged successfully on a road towards a socialist future? In his book *Organizing Insurgency*, Immanuel Ness is clear in his answer. Workers require a more permanent organization, including a strong trade union and political party: "If workers form a strong revolutionary organizational force, that resistance will be sustained and far more successful" (p. 62). In other words, working class power is reflected in strong organization. According to Ness, "[c]lass struggle is inevitable, but working-class power requires the strength of organization of a union and political party to advance and consolidate its interests" (p. 100). In this review, I will highlight several key contributions of the volume, but also make some critical observations.

Ness's first significant contribution asserts the continuing importance of agrarian workers for capitalist accumulation on a global scale (pp. 18–19). Employed in highly precarious conditions by labour brokers, it is the super-exploitation of these workers, being paid less than what they would need to reconstitute themselves, that sustains corporate profits in global value chains (GVCs). Second, considering it is these workers' exploitation underpinning the global economy, it is, therefore, also these workers who are in the best position to challenge capitalism. As he explains, "[e]ven if commodities produced in the South are consumed in the South, profits are realized by multinational corporations and concentrated in financial centres of the North. Therefore, labour struggles in the imperialist North […] are of far less consequence" (p. 25). Hence, Ness provides a welcome corrective to Western-centric scholarship, which tends to prioritize the analysis of workers' struggles in the Global North to develop lessons for workers in the Global South. Following Ness, it is the workers in the Global North who should study and learn from class struggles in the Global South.

Third, Ness provides fascinating empirical insights into class struggles in primitive steel manufacturing in India, the production of agricultural commodities for export in the Philippines, as well as resistance to labour brokering in South Africa. As a result of capitalist competition, employers tend to invest in new technology in order to gain an advantage vis-à-vis their competitors through increases in productivity.

While this is the case in the capitalist core of the global economy, Ness reveals a different dynamic in the Wazipur stainless steel industry on the northern fringes of New Delhi in India. Here, rather than investing in new technology, employers in small companies rely on the super-exploitation of labour made possible by a large reserve army of workers. "The Wazirpur business model is to draw as much surplus value directly from the worker as possible", Ness writes, "rather than to invest in new equipment and worker training" (p. 85). The lack of health and safety is not a problem for employers because workers can easily be replaced. The chapter on the Philippines, moreover, demonstrates well the exploitation of rural workers on the island of Mindanao. Workers informally employed through labour contractors produce tropical fruits, which they cannot afford to buy for themselves, for consumers in the Global North (p. 110). The chapter on South Africa, in turn, discusses the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) and its break with the post-apartheid government, led by the African National Congress (ANC), as well as its fight against labour brokers and related precarious employment relations. It is especially NUMSA's experience that is highlighted as a successful example of establishing working class power through strong organization. Ness states, "NUMSA has fitfully built an opposition by immediately forming a coalition with the United Front (UF), a coalition of social movements throughout South Africa established by SAFTU [South African Federation of Trade Unions] in 2017 as a left federation of unions, and the main force in building the Socialist Revolutionary Workers Party (SRWP) as an independent force in 2019" (pp. 166–167).

Nevertheless, as interesting and important as this book is, there are several problems with Ness's analysis in my view. First, by drawing on Lenin's notion of labour aristocracy, he artificially builds up a large gap between workers in the Global North and Global South. Of course, workers around the world find themselves in rather different positions in the global political economy, and establishing relationships of transnational solidarity is extremely difficult. However, to argue that workers in the Global North are in highly privileged positions consciously benefitting from the super-exploitation of workers in the Global South is problematic. It is correct that workers in the Global North indirectly benefit from cheap commodities produced by workers in the Global South in conditions of super-exploitation. They can maintain a certain standard of living despite declining wage levels thanks to these cheap commodities. The main beneficiary of cheap commodities in the Global North is, however, capital. After all, cheap commodities from the Global South have facilitated the lowering of necessary labour costs, that is to say the part of the working day for which workers are being paid in order to reconstitute themselves, while increasing the surplus labour part of the working day and therefore the surplus value and ultimately profits in the Global North. In other words, it is capital's strategy of maximizing profits on a global scale that causes super-exploitation in the Global South, not workers' complicity with capital in the Global North. In fact, workers in the Global North too are increasingly faced with a situation of intensified exploi-

tation. Informal employment relations are proliferating, especially in the sectors of the "gig economy", inequality is widening, and poverty spreading. As the Joseph Rowntree Foundation states, for example, in its UK Poverty 2024 report, "more than 1 in 5 people in the UK (22%) were in poverty in 2021/22 – 14.4 million people".[1] Against the background of a cost-of-living crisis, the British charity Trussell Trust's "network distributed nearly 3m food parcels in 2022–23, its highest ever total and a year-on-year increase of 37%. More than a million children were living in households receiving the trust's food parcels".[2] This is not what a labour aristocracy looks like.

Moreover, Ness's claim about the importance of a strong organization to secure lasting gains is not confirmed by his own examples. The way the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) trade union organized precarious agricultural workers in Mindanao and supported their struggles against the labour contractor system is impressive, no doubt. Nonetheless, as he also reports, large corporations countered these efforts by selling direct ownership of production facilities while maintaining control over the supply chain of commodities (pp. 138–142). Informal employment relations persist. Equally, NUMSA's struggle against the labour broking system in South Africa was at best only partially successful. A constitutional court ruling in July 2018 did ban temporary workers contracts beyond three months. Nevertheless, the large steel corporation ArcelorMittal fought back and gained concessions. As Ness concludes, "to preserve strategic industries that are integrated into the global supply chain, the government and union had to concede to the demands of the MNC [multinational corporation]. In this way, the long struggle of workers and union to end labour broking in South Africa was successful in changing the neoliberal policies of the government but multinational capital extracted gains by compelling states and workers to ensure the expansion of profits and accumulation" (p. 179). What is missing in Ness's analysis is a more systematic analysis of the capitalist structuring conditions within which agency takes place, thereby comprehending more clearly the imbalance in power resources between transnational capital and national labour movements. At times, he does recognize the structural power of transnational capital: "The rise of global supply chains gives MNCs and large contractors the flexibility to shift production to other enterprises in order to prevent job actions and strikes" (p. 63). But he does not follow up on this insight in understanding the limits of actions even by well organized labour movements. Ness is correct when he asserts that "it is far more likely that the working classes may achieve long-term gains through struggles in a single country rather than across states" (pp. 184–185). Nevertheless, he does not comprehend that this inevitable national focus is a weakness in today's global economy of GVCs dominated by large transnational corporations.

Finally, Ness's analysis is rather worker and production focused, overlooking how patriarchal and racist forms of oppression are deeply interwoven with the exploitation of wage labour in production, being ultimately as equally important for sustaining capitalist accumulation. He argues that unions, without a transformative and revolutionary ideology and links with a political party, would be in danger of transitioning "into

sectoral, geographic, racial, ethnic, and identity formations, dispensing with class solidarity" (p. 60), thereby increasing the danger of a fragmenting opposition to capitalism around identity struggles. Ness overlooks, however, the potential of linking struggles over pay and working conditions with struggles for gender equality and racial justice. And it is these broader alliances – of trade unions working together with feminist groups, environmental campaign groups, and social movements, amongst others – that are ultimately a potentially more powerful way of resisting capitalist exploitation. Organization is, of course, important, but strong organizations often emerge out of struggles when activists start recognizing their common interests. It is in moments of struggle that relations of solidarity between workers and different movements from around the world can be forged, potentially able to challenge capitalism more forcefully.

My disagreements with Ness's conceptual analysis should not, however, distract from the book's crucial insights and significant contributions to our existing knowledge. It is ultimately also through critical engagements with praxis-based analyses of this type that strategies of resistance can be advanced further. I strongly recommend this book for reading!

Notes

1 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024) *UK Poverty* 2024; available at https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2024-the-essential-guide-to-understanding-poverty-in-the-uk (accessed 9 March 2024).

2 *The Guardian* (2023) "UK food bank charity reports record take-up amid cost of living crisis" (26 April); available at https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/apr/26/uk-food-bank-charity-reports-record-take-up-amid-cost-of-living-crisis (accessed 9 March 2024).

Dietmar Müller: Bodeneigentum und Nation. Rumänien, Jugoslawien und Polen im europäischen Vergleich 1918–1948, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020, 479 S.

Rezensiert von
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Die „Rehabilitierung des Privateigentums" im Zuge der politischen Wende von 1989 stellte die agrarisch geprägten Regionen des östlichen Europa vor bedeutende Herausforderungen – schließlich war Bodeneigentum bereits nach dem Zerfall der großen Imperien zu Anfang des Jahrhunderts, so Müller, ein „erstrangiges Mittel der Staats- und Nationsbildung" (S. 7f.). Naturgemäß war Bodeneigentumspolitik mit Bevölkerungspolitik eng verknüpft. In seinem Erkenntnisinteresse konzentriert sich der Autor deshalb auf die Genese und Aufrechterhaltung von Eigentumsregimen, besonders im Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Minderheiten und Titularnation samt ihren jeweiligen Erwartungen an landwirtschaftliche Reformbemühungen. Rumänien, Jugoslawien und Polen seien dabei besonders durch die schiere personelle wie ländliche Größe ihrer Agrarsektoren überaus repräsentativ für Entwicklungen in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa. Neben ergänzenden Archivrecherchen in Rumänien liegt der Arbeit ein umfangreicher Korpus an publizierten Quellen und wissenschaftlicher Literatur zugrunde, der Stand und Desiderata der Forschung widerspiegelt. Dabei hinterfragt Müller solch wertende Narra-