BOOKS Review Section
edited by Andrew McCulloch and John Stirling

**G. Healy et al. (eds.)**

## The Future of Worker Representation

Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 328 pp.

ISBN 1-403-91759-0 (hbk) £49.50

**Reviewed by Alastair Rainnie**

I am writing this review in Victoria, south-east Australia, not long after more than a quarter of a million people took to the streets of major Australian cities to protest against some of the most vicious anti-union and anti-working-class laws to be proposed in an OECD country in recent years. Why did we bother if, as the more extreme globalisation theorists (and a lot of social-democratic politicians) would have us believe, unions are irrelevant in the modern world, and the state is rapidly being bypassed?

One reason for continued interest in and focus on unions—and one put forward by the editors of this book, in their introduction—is based on the collapse of trade union membership and the ensuing 'representation gap'. The rights of workers to participate in the governance of their workplaces are being frustrated by the decline in influence of their main representative institutions. There is, however, not much hand-wringing over the representation gap to be found in the pages of the *Financial Times* or the Australian *Financial Review*, reflecting capitalism's traditional concern with democracy. However, a focus on the representation gap alone is a limited and limiting view of the role and importance of unions, and in particular of workplace trade union organisation. A more challenging and fundamental view of the nature of working-class organisation and activity is possible.

Trade unions are institutions that work within and accommodate to the exigencies of capitalism; but they are also building blocks and training grounds, particularly at the workplace level, for struggle against capitalism itself. Because labour is and will remain the source of profit under capitalism, organisation in the workplace represents a fight at the heart of the beast.

Therefore, any book on the future of worker representation is important, and this one consists of twelve chapters drawing on research from the Economic and Social Research Council's Future of Work programme, as well as an introduction written by the editors. Eight chapters deal with unions and the prospects for union organisation and representation. The remaining chapters look at four alternative forms of non-union representation: statutory works councils, employment agencies, advocacy and advisory organisations and, finally, social-movement organisations. It should be stressed that the book deals only with the UK experience.

For Mathers et al. (2004: 12), current patterns of neoliberal restructuring open up civil society and present unions with a new set of strategic choices, particularly given the crisis of what they define as 'social democratic' forms of trade unionism:

> The challenge is thus to develop new methodologies that are able to grasp the reciprocal relationship between trade union power and the wider society following the crisis and decomposition of social democratic trade unionism.

So what does the book tell us about the current state of union workplace organisation and any new, emerging methodologies? It is a mixed picture. Chapter 2, by Jeff Hyman and colleagues, is pessimistic regarding the current and future unionisation prospects for software programmers—flag-bearers for the new economy. Despite not being anti-union, a strong individualistic orientation associated with a loose organisational structure and a strong market position for the programmers themselves, means that workers have few intractable problems to solve. If we look to mobilisation theory, then at this point the possibility of mobilisation falls at the first hurdle. When workers are dissatisfied, they tend to up sticks and move, since alternative employment is relatively abundant. Hyman et al. conclude that unions have made little attempt to connect with workers in this 'new economy', and that therefore the tendency for union density to decline looks set to continue. However, recent events in Australia suggest that this is not inevitable, and that all positions in the new economy will not remain as privileged as they are now forever. Employees at EDS (Electronic Data Systems) in Australia are rushing to join the white-collar union APESMA, not because of changes in the nature of the tasks that they undertake, but because huge losses on dodgy defence contracts in the US have translated into no pay-rises for three years in Australia. Old problems in the new economy.

An equally pessimistic note is struck by Mick Marchington, Jill Rubery and Fang Lee Hooke, in a chapter dealing with union organisation in the rapidly emerging networked form of organisation. The authors argue that little work has been done on work and worker voice across organisational boundaries (although a lot of work was done in the UK regarding organising, TUPE [Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations] and 'compulsory competitive tendering'). Most union and employment research assumes that there is a simple and direct relationship between an employer and a worker; but outsourcing, privatisation, PPIs and

labour agencies, etc. all serve to muddy the picture. The outcome is that workers in these organisations are in a double bind, being less unionised than direct employees, and working for different employers. The challenge for unions is to find common ground among workers, particularly where employers are elusive and responsibility is diffused across multiple actors. However, I am writing during a week in which Heathrow was crippled by a strike of Asian female catering workers supported (illegally!) by baggage handlers working for a completely different organisation. All is not lost! Marchington et al. do point out that the idea that 'partnership' in these circumstances can provide mutual gains is simply Pollyanna-ish. Andy Danford and his Bristol-based colleagues are equally scathing in their examination of partnership in a supposedly 'high performance work system'. Finally, Marchington et al. argue that workplace organisation alone does not address the issue of where power lies in increasingly complex supply chains and business networks.

These relationships are further complicated by the relationship between unions and peripheral workers—a matter addressed by Ed Heery and colleagues. They argue that workers in non-standard forms of employment are in the most urgent need of union representation, but that the very presence of non-standard workers may be seen as a threat by existing trade union organisations. They argue that unions have four modes of response: exclusion, acceptance as subordinate, acceptance as equal and engagement. Their analysis of the responses of full-time union officers suggests that of the four forms of non-standard employment examined (part-time, full-time contractor, agency and freelance), officers were most accepting of part-timers and least accepting of agency staff (which seems to confirm the findings of Marchington et al.).

By now, characterising call centres as messengers of the new economy is pretty pointless. Analysis of the complexity of the call-centre phenomena and union organisation within it has developed well beyond the 'bright satanic factories' caricature. Peter Bain and his colleagues have been at the forefront of these developments. In a chapter here, they conclude that call-centre workers display a range of attitudinal and ideological characteristics that are necessary for collectivisation and unionisation. These are necessary, but not sufficient. What is also needed over time are behavioural, ideological and institutional constructs—supportive workmates, workplace reps, union resources, etc.—in order to establish credibility. Drawing on the lessons to be learnt from the 'organising' model, Bain and his colleagues conclude that the emergence of workplace leaders cultivated by the union holds the key to call-centre unionisation. The first real glimmers of hope appear.

Much of the debate about what has been variously described as union 'renewal', 'resilience' or 'revitalisation' has been somewhat simplistically reduced to a dichotomy between partnership and organising. Bain et al. make an important contribution by stressing the importance of workplace leadership, bringing echoes of a debate on the politics of workplace leaders and leadership.

Geraldine Healy et al., in another chapter with a more positive conclusion, argue first that the debate on union

renewal has been blind to questions of gender and ethnicity; and second, that renewal may emerge from the gendered and ethnicised manifestations of injustice in the workplace. This chapter, dealing with the experience of black and ethnic-minority female union activists, also stresses the importance of workplace leadership. Experience of racism and sexism and the difficulties in resolving these through both management and the union were a stimulus to activism, and a challenge to existing union structures. However, where there were no supportive networks, particu-larly the possibility of self-organising groups, then the alienating effects of racism and sexism could lead to resignation.

Finally, Jane Wills takes the question of renewal beyond the organising model and into the arena of social-movement or community unionism. Dealing with territory similar to that of Marchington et al., but with a more positive conclusion, Wills argues that subcontracting and outsourcing have made low-paid work even more inferior than usual, and further divided workers.

However, the experience of the East London Community Organisation (TELCO), an alliance of forty community organisations engaged principally with UNISON (as was), holds out some hope. Modelled loosely on US 'living wage' (*not* minimum wage) campaigns, TELCO brought power and organisation to marginalised workers who were believed to be difficult, if not impossible, to organise. The alliance took the argument about a living wage beyond the workplace and into new, community-based channels in which power could be applied. It was not an unmitigated success, in so far as the TGWU never got engaged; but it does demonstrate that unions' willingness to build long-term, sustainable alliances beyond short-term, single-issue concerns can reap rewards. This is not a substitute for workplace union organisation, but brings that organisation together with community-based groups in order to form new and positive alliances.

There are fledgling indications of new patterns emerging at local and workplace levels—but they are patterns that require local leadership of an overtly political form that moves outside a concentration on the workplace alone, and is committed to a notion of social justice. It's a lot to hope for, but the coincidence of these fledgling patterns with the resurgent social movements on the anticapitalist front does hold out some hope.

**Reference**

Mathers, A., A. Danford & M.Upchurch (2004) 'Opening up civil society', paper presented to the Labour Movements in the Twenty-First Century conference, University of Sheffield, November.

**Michael Albert**

## Parecon: Life After Capitalism

Verso, 2004, 311 pp.

ISBN 1-84467-505-X (pbk) £9

**Reviewed by Lewis Higgins**

Participatory economics—or 'pare-con' for short—is a vision of life after capitalism favoured by many in the anticapitalist movement. Michael Albert, the author of this particular vision, helped to establish *Z Magazine* and its website (http://www.zmag.org), including its subsidiary page devoted to the idea of parecon (www.zmag.org/parecon), in which the issues raised by this book are debated.

Parecon's proponents oppose 'corporate globalisation', and argue for its replacement by 'equity, solidarity, diversity and self-management' (p. 2). For Albert, capitalism means 'private ownership of the means of production, market allocation, and corporate divisions of labour' (p. 8). Life after capitalism is said to combine 'social ownership, participatory planning allocation, council structure, balanced job complexes, remuneration for effort and sacrifice, and participatory self-management with no class differentiation' (p. 24). The council structure involves workplaces, neighbourhoods and 'facilitation boards', which coordinate planning.

So-called 'market socialism' is rejected because the market and class differentials would remain, as would buyers and sellers of labour power (capacity to work) (p. 79). In Albert's account, since class differentiation disappears in parecon, 'you cannot choose to hire wage slaves nor to sell yourself as a wage slave' (p. 160). Parecon permits workers to assess their own pay and conditions within their decision-making, by inputting their preferences via councils. It apportions income in accord with effort and 'does not force or even permit people to try to maximise profits, surplus, or even revenues' (p. 168). Notice, however, that Albert is specifically talking about prohibiting profit *maximisation*—not profits as such. Profits are acceptable; 'excessive' profits are not. In this proposed procedure, individuals and councils submit proposals for their own activities, receive new information including new indicative prices, and submit revised proposals until they reach a point of agreement.

This process is open-ended, and in Albert's book, a hypothetical example is discussed which reaches a seventh planning cycle—or as Albert calls it, 'planning iteration'. In reviews of this book, much has been made of the potential for bureaucracy in this procedure; but a more telling criticism would be of its unquestioning acceptance of the profit system. Wages cannot rise to the point that prevents profits being made; and a fall in profits will put a downward pressure on wages. This is called the class struggle.

'Parecon is basically an anarchistic economic vision' (p. 263), admits Albert, and it shows. As is so often the case on the Left, the difference between capitalism and post-capitalism as presented here is essentially political, not economic. As indicated by the title, the crucial factor is participatory planning. The capitalist economy would remain substantially the same in parecon—i.e. the accumulation of capital out of profits produced by the unpaid labour of the working class. Albert is to be applauded for encouraging others in the anticapitalist movement to think of life beyond capitalism, even if his own vision is not up to the task.

## Ellen Meiksins Wood
## Empire of Capital

Verso, 2003, xiii + 182 pp.

ISBN 1-84467-518-1 (pbk) £10
ISBN 1-85984-502-9 (hbk) £15

**Reviewed by Jonathan Joseph**

Against modish theories of empire, Wood's book takes us back to the basics of Marxism, while inviting us to ponder on today's form of imperialism. Wood's starting point, unlike those of the fashionable theories of empire and globalisation, is the class relation between capital and labour. Social life under capitalism is dominated by economic requirements. Capitalist imperialism is based on economic predominance rather than on direct political, military or judicial coercion. Yet capitalist appropriation does require the support of extra-economic factors, supplying, for example, the administrative and coercive resources that capital requires. The nation state remains the most reliable provider of these needs and guarantor of the conditions for capital accumulation. The more purely economic that empire has become, the more nation states have proliferated as conduits of capitalist imperatives. Imperial hegemony relies more than ever on an orderly system of nation states. The political form of globalisation, then, is neither a global state nor a decline of states, but a global system of states structured in relations of domination and subordination.

Returning our focus to capital, Wood argues that 'global capitalism is what it is not only because it is global but, above all, because it is capitalist' (p. 14). The well documented problems of globalisation—inequality, injustice, environmental crisis, etc.—are products of the systemic imperatives of capitalism—such things as competition, profit maximisation and accumulation. So 'Globalization, however much it has

intensified these imperatives, is their result rather than their cause' (p. 15).

Empire has always depended on extra-economic power, and was limited by these capacities. Trading empires like Venice were also dependent on military force. The Dutch empire was based on commercial imperialism and justified by Grotius's theory of the rights and wrongs of war—loved by international-relations scholars, but which in reality acts to justify self-preservation and self-interest. Finally, the British Empire represents the first instance of imperialism to be fully driven by the logic of capitalism. In order to explain this, we need to look at the particularities of capitalist development itself. Britain became the world power it did because of its productive agrarian capitalism and its emerging industrial proletariat.

The classical theories of imperialism of the early twentieth century looked at the systemic logic of capitalism operating in a non-capitalist environment, which it exploits through extra-economic force. These accounts, Wood notes, are illuminating about the age they describe: 'But we have yet to see a systematic theory of imperialism designed for a world in which all international relations are internal to capitalism and governed by capitalist imperatives' (p. 127). For this, we need to move forward to the end of the Second World War, and the emergence of the United States as the strongest economic and military power commanding a new imperialism based on economic imperatives, and administered through a system of multiple states. The US project is one of global economic supremacy backed by military hegemony; but this is economic hegemony without colonial rule. This situation presents us with a number of contradictions, many of which are opened up in today's discussions of globalisation.

Globalisation is not about free trade, but about the careful control of trading conditions in the interests of capital. We still do not have a truly integrated world economy; and indeed, globalisation is as much about preventing such integration as it is about encouraging it. Certainly, globalisation is not about levelling social conditions. States in the global system consciously act to prevent this. We also find strict state border controls to manage the movement of labour. While globalisation does involve (or justify) the state's withdrawing from its welfare functions, this is far from meaning the end of state regulation and power.

But this is no longer the age of imperial states and their colonial settlers. Our age is dominated by the imperatives of the market, manipulated by the dominant capitalist powers. Wood argues that under the new imperialism, military power is not concerned with conquering territory or defeating rivals. Yet paradoxically, this age has produced an unprecedented military power with extensive reach. The 'Boundless domination of a global economy, and of the multiple states that administer it, requires military action without end, in purpose or time' (p. 144).

This would seem to sum up the misadventures of the Bush administration quite nicely. But Wood's argument that the Bush Doctrine is little different from traditional US foreign policy does raise some questions. Wood claims that the Bush administration has, perhaps, taken US unilateralism to new extremes, but that there is nothing new in its objective to establish hegemony over a global system of states through massive military power. For Wood, it is

not so much US military doctrine that has changed as it is the conditions in which it must operate.

For me, there is something about the Bush administration—or the neoconservative agenda, anyway—that is different from past US foreign policy. It is not a case of the same old unilateralism, but a different sort of unilateralism. It is not the same old realist foreign policy—indeed, traditional realists in the US have gone on record as opposing the neocon foreign policy for not being realist enough in relation to US interests. Neoconservatism is more naively idealistic, focusing not just on US interests but also on 'American' values. In believing it a good idea to force these upon the world in order to make it a better place for all, this administration may end up undermining US interests. The neocons speak of themselves as 'new Wilsonians'. But these ideological delusions do not necessarily best serve the interests of the US administration, or of US capital, or of capitalism in general.

What is good about this book is its rejection of the catch-all category of 'globalisation' as something that directs the world at every level. Rather, international relations here are more specific: developing out of the social conditions of capital, but realised unevenly across the global system of local states. Likewise with 'imperialism', it is not a catch-all category that captures the way the world works in its entirety. Rather, there are specific forms of imperialism that express themselves in different ways across the system of states. So when Wood argues that imperial hegemony relies more than ever on orderly systems of nation states, we are entitled to ask, what is this single thing called 'imperial hegemony'? Likewise, it is argued here that global capital needs a closely regulated and predictable social, political and legal order. Fine: but what is 'global capital'? The analysis ultimately falls back on a number of categories that the thrust of the book's argument would tend to question.

Wood's own critique of globalisation theory points to the way the world is more stratified than this. At the most fundamental social level there is capital in general, and the imperatives of the capitalist system. This is not the same thing as global capital, however. Rather than global capital or 'imperial capital' or 'imperial hegemony', there are specific forms of capital and specific forms of imperialism.

For this reason, we can say that such things as the Bush Doctrine might be at odds with traditional foreign policy, and that foreign policy might be 'out of sync' with the interests of capital, which are themselves various and diverse. The analysis of this excellent little book points in this direction; but to fully explore these questions would be to lose the significant benefit of its conciseness.

**Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya**

## Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice

Merlin Press/University of Natal Press/Weaver Press, 2003, xx + 304 pp.
ISBN 0-850-36517-1(pbk) £15.95

**Reviewed by Luis M. Pozo**

'Zimbabwe' has been a familiar name in the press in recent years, due to the country's economic and financial meltdown and the seizure of white farmers' land by the veterans of the war of liberation, linked to the ruling Zanu-PF party. The two processes are not unconnected, as this book demonstrates. In it, Bond and Manyanya offer a political–economic analysis of Zimbabwe's history that seeks to uncover the linkages between financial and political phenomena. They place this history in the context of a broader logic—the logic of 'uneven development' in the periphery of world capitalism 'after a quarter-century of organic crisis and two decades of exposure to intensifying "globalisation"' (p. 113). Zimbabwe is now in crisis, for the resolution of which a process of social and economic change entailing 'deglobalisation' beyond nationalism and neoliberalism is necessary. The authors outline the historical context in Chapter 1, then devote Chapters 2–4 to the economic and political constraints and to those caused by globalisation, before turning, in Chapter 5, to political strategies. The book further includes four appendices containing informative statements from key political players, and an afterword covering the events surrounding the 2002 presidential election (which the ruling party won, again).

Two crucial questions lead the argument. Should Zimbabwe's economy become more or less dependent upon international trade and finance? And should the country's leaders repudiate the debt that has produced underdevelopment instead of development? As the evidence shows, the two periods of inward-oriented capital accumulation (1932–1941 and 1965–1974)—periods of 'decisive deglobalisation' (p. 23)—were the years of 'both fastest GDP growth and most coherent economic linkages' (p. 59), with the economy growing at nearly double-digit rates each year for a decade (p. 192). The economy prospered under, but in spite of, a brutal racist state which *impaired* growth by hindering mass consumption. When Zimbabwe was born as a nation state in 1980, in the midst of the neoliberal barrage against Third World economies led by the IMF and the World Bank, Robert Mugabe and the ruling Zanu-PF Party rejected debt repudiation, and embarked instead on a neoliberal path which, by the close of the century, had left the economy in tatters and the country worse off than three decades earlier. How could this have come about?

The nationalist camp was an alliance of 'a politically ambitious petty-bourgeois leadership, a dependent and desperate proletariat and a brutally exploited ... peasantry' (p. 25). After national liberation, the bourgeois leadership abandoned the masses, became a ruling class and gained concessions from local and foreign capital. A lower-middle class was built through bureaucracy, corruption and patronage. A *comprador* faction of sell-outs emerged and coalesced within and around the finance ministry, the reserve bank and para-statal firms, property and stock-market speculation, IMF, World Bank and USAID policies, and very high levels of foreign debt. This, visible in the late-1980s, was to be reinforced in the 1990s by the implementation of the (in)famous Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs), themselves accompanied by massive and untenable increases in new foreign debt. The national regulatory apparatus built during the 1920s, and consolidated during the 1965–1979 UDI [Unilateral Declaration of Independence] regime of Ian Smith, was destroyed. ESAP policies in the period 1991–1997 failed miserably in crucial respects (pp. 30–37), especially in fostering economic growth and wellbeing for the masses, and set the stage for the 1997 crisis and subsequent turmoil.

The hopes and aspirations of the colonial masses were dashed. How did they react? Unlike the patronised and isolated peasantry, the trade unions reawakened in 1997 'from a deep post-independence slumber to demand socio-economic and political reform' (p. 37), launching the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. Mugabe and the Zanu-PF government responded to this threat ('essentially from the political Left', p. 40) by talking Left and acting Right: by reviving the dormant leftist rhetoric, allegedly purporting to restore 'socialism', and announcing a definitive land resettlement that set the stage for subsequent land invasions by the war veterans. The truth is that these measures created more problems than solutions, and that even before the adoption of ESAP, 'a close analysis of post-independence Zimbabwe reveals a pragmatic and indeed conservative policy as far as monetary and financial strategies are concerned' (Touche, quoted on p. 60). The opposition MDC, in turn, although based on the trade unions (the ZCTU, which is critical of nationalism—it became 'an end in itself instead of a means to an end', according to General Secretary Tsavangirai, quoted on p. 90), depends heavily on bourgeois financing and support. It is 'a cross-class alliance [of] organised labour, the ... petit bourgeoisie, church based critics, students, some ... business liberals and ... activists' (p. 74). Its economic strategy is, however, as neoliberal as they come, and as such 'inconsistent with either democracy or change' (p. 68). The strategy is called 'ESARP' (Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Programme)—a slightly different version of ESAP (pp. 99–103). There is some concern 'that with such a multi-class project the MDC [will] end up like the Movement for Multiparty Democracy in Zambia. There, trade unionist Frederic Chiluba won the 1991 election against veteran nationalist Kenneth Kaunda with a multi-class alliance, and quickly applied neo-liberal economic policy with even worse results than his predecessor' (p. 90). Here, there is 'a simple problem of *compradorism*'. Eddie Cross, the

mastermind behind ESARP, is 'the leading post-independence representative of a relatively patriotic white settler bourgeoisie' (p. 96), mixing a highly conservative approach to economics and a populist politics reminiscent of, and heir of, the racist–populist regime of the UDI.

The way forward out of this mess? A break with neoliberalism and the embracing of rights-based, eco-feminist, humanist and socialist development strategies involving the repudiation of the inherited, Mugabe-era foreign debt; the restoration of price controls and foreign-exchange controls; the expansion and redirection of basic-needs state subsidies; growing state ownership and workers' control of bankrupt private firms; and other progressive policies (pp. 187-8). Progressives must 'convince' society in general, and middle-class MDC leaders in particular (p. 187), of the desirability and feasibility of that programme. I very much doubt that the authors' strategy of a broadly-based mobilisation of 'civil society', aimed at 'convincing' certain key constituencies, will ultimately prove any more successful than it already has done in the face of increasing state–ruling-party repression and heightened 'talk Left, act Right' politics, and the willingness of bourgeois allies to resist being 'convinced' of throwing away their class privileges. But if they can be persuaded, I am sure that this impressively researched, well and engagingly written, highly-recommended book will be an important step in that direction.