

Globalization Under Fire

Mark Thomas

Volume 55, 2005

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11t55re03>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Thomas, M. (2005). Globalization Under Fire. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 55, 217–237.

Globalization Under Fire

Mark Thomas

David Bacon, *The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U.S./Mexico Border* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2004)

Jacques B. Gelinas, *Juggernaut Politics: Understanding Predatory Globalization* (London & New York: Zed Books 2003)

Ronaldo Munck, ed., *Labour and Globalisation: Results and Prospects* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2004)

James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, *System in Crisis: The Dynamics of Free Market Capitalism* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood 2003)

THE CONCEPT OF GLOBALIZATION has been used to signify many social, economic, political, and cultural processes that have unfolded within the global economy in recent decades. Broadly defined, the concept is associated with the spatial reorganization of social relations in ways that produce new forms of transnational connections and linkages.¹ In economic terms, these include the growing power of international financial institutions, rapid rates of technological change and technology transfer, the internationalization of systems of production, increases in the size, flow, and speed of foreign direct investment, the spread of wage labour relations across the globe, increased population mobility and urbanization, and new forms of cultural interpenetration and commodification.²

The concept of globalization is itself contested, as some scholars have noted that processes often associated with the term are not new. For example, David

¹Goran Therborn, "Introduction-From the Universal to the Global," *International Sociology*, 15, 2 (June 2000), 149-50.

²William Carroll and Meindert Fennema, "Is There a Transnational Business Community?" *International Sociology*, 17, 3 (September 2002), 393-419; James Mittleman, "The Dynamics of Globalization," in James Mittleman, ed., *Globalization: Critical Reflections* (London 1996), 1-19; Leo Panitch, "The State in a Changing World: Social-Democratizing Global Capitalism?" *Monthly Review*, 50, 5 (October 1998), 11-22.

Harvey argues that globalization itself dates back 500 years to the beginnings of Western European colonialist expansion, and that the internationalization of trade and commerce dates back even further.³ Nonetheless, while capitalism's need for a "spatial fix" has always been present within the system, Harvey also writes that the contemporary global political economy is characterized by a "geographical dispersal and fragmentation of production systems, divisions of labour, and specializations of tasks" in a manner not experienced in previous eras.⁴ The challenge then is to give meaning and specificity to the contemporary context.

The breadth of contemporary scholarship on globalization processes illustrates that there is no simple or single picture of what constitutes globalization. If there ever were simple notions of globalization — economic saviour versus economic juggernaut — those days are past as recent scholarship has sought to integrate complexity, diversity, agency, and critique into globalization narratives. Globalization is the power of transnational corporations and international financial institutions; the rule of free-trade regimes and the policies of neoliberal nation-states; a codeword for the "new imperialism;" the lives of workers and their families in border economies; the revolts of unemployed workers and indigenous peoples; the complex and contradictory challenges facing labour and social movements.

Globalization research raises many questions with respect to contemporary forms of power — economic, political, cultural — as well as strategies to challenge power and promote alternatives. To what extent do globalization processes produce global convergence, for example, towards economic insecurity? Do local conditions produce "varieties of globalization" at local levels? Are states overwhelmed by corporate power? To what extent do states shape the new global economy? With respect to questions of resistance, in what ways do globalization processes facilitate or constrain new opportunities for collective action? In the age of transnational corporate institutions, in what ways has social activism responded to this transnational context?

The complexities of processes of globalization and strategies of resistance are identified in four recent books — *The Children of NAFTA* by David Bacon, *Juggernaut Politics* by Jacques Gelinas, a collection of essays entitled *Labour and Globalization* edited by Ronaldo Munck, and *System in Crisis* by James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer. These texts present analyses of globalization that are at times intersecting and at times competing. Yet they share common interests in developing critiques of the economics and politics that disrupt so many lives and communities under the rubric of globalization. As well, all support the claim that there are alternatives to current manifestations of globalization. Reading the texts in relation to one another highlights that the experiences of globalization are as diverse as the

³David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Toronto 2000).

⁴Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, 63.

movements that have arisen in response with the hope of creating an alternative social order.

Jacques Gelineas constructs a broad, macro-level analysis of the processes, institutions, and ideologies of globalization. Gelineas, who has worked in Canada and South America, has held academic, government, and NGO positions, and has worked on popular education and community development issues. He is intent on not only understanding the dynamics of globalization, but also in exploring the question of alternatives. *Juggernaut Politics* begins with the acknowledgement that there is nothing new about international trade — a prominent feature of globalization. Gelineas quickly asserts, however, that “the global concentration of economic power prevailing over state and public interest does represent a world-historic change.” (3) The text thus highlights the connections between the institutions and policies that promote international trade (and the internationalization of production) and the alignment of a new system of corporate power at the global level.

The book is divided into two major sections. The first — “Understanding the Globalized World” — outlines the actors, policies, practices, and ideologies of globalization, while the second — “Reclaiming the Commons” — argues for a new, alternative social and economic order. In the first section, Gelineas constructs a brief timeline of world economic history and identifies the origins of globalization as lying in first, the establishment of the Bretton Woods financial institutions in the 1940s, and second, the financial deregulation that occurred with the end of the gold standard in the 1970s. Gelineas then defines the “age of globalization” as the time from the 1980s forward. To add meaning to this timeline, Gelineas constructs a multi-faceted definition of globalization — as a system, a process, an ideology, a mythology, and an alibi. As a system, globalization represents “the total control of the world by powerful supranational economic interests.” (20) The process of globalization refers to the “series of actions carried out” to achieve this system of economic power. Globalization as ideology, mythology, and alibi are connected to one another, referring to (respectively) neoliberal discourses that have been constructed to explain, rationalize, and justify the system of economic power, a mythological construction of the forces of free market capitalism as victorious (over communism and social democracy) and on the march towards unfettered and unlimited economic growth, and the use of these assumptions to free corporate actors from social, environmental, and moral responsibilities. Having defined globalization, Gelineas identifies transnational corporations, central bankers, and the organizations of global corporate leaders such as the Trilateral Commission, the U.S. Business Roundtable, and the Davos World Economic Forum as the masters of this system of economic power. From Gelineas’s perspective, these actors hold considerable power over other sites of power within the global system, including national governments. Gelineas does not relegate the role of national governments to a by-gone era, but situates senior politicians and bureaucrats, alongside executives of

large corporations, as the “intermediaries” between the real holders of power and the masses. This system is supported by an ideological foundation that stems from sources from Adam Smith to Milton Friedman and that is promoted through media corporations. The impacts of this system include multiple and growing forms of social inequality within and between nations, mass poverty within the South, and serious threats to the world’s ecosystems.

Gelinas offers a very clear critique of the assertion that globalization is an inevitable process. Rather than presenting globalization as the “natural” expansion and unfolding of market forces, *Juggernaut Politics* highlights the fact that globalization is driven by specific actors using their economic and political power to pursue their interests. This perspective provides Gelinas a basis upon which to advocate for alternatives. *Juggernaut Politics* does not construct a direct path to a new social system, but instead maps out the challenges faced by communities in the North and South in the development of alternatives, and explores the potential of various actors including unions, the state, and civil society actors in advancing this process. Gelinas sees little hope for labour movements in the mobilization of opposition to globalization as, from his perspective, they have become too greatly integrated into existing power structures. In their place, Gelinas identifies civil society movements as a primary force for social change in the age of globalization and calls for a new grassroots democracy where the state is made responsive to the demands of civil society rather than corporate power. While the strength of this framework is that it presents a forceful picture of growing corporate power, its generalized and unified account of the global economy leaves the impression of globalization as a powerful force for economic, political, and social convergence. He does not delve into any specificity or explore possibilities for variation in terms of the impacts of this system at local and/or regional levels. The account also marginalizes the role of the state in its analysis of corporate power, and writes off labour movements fairly quickly, without exploring the possibility for organizational, political, and strategic change within unions. Competing perspectives on these various points are provided in the other texts.

One way to achieve greater specificity in the analysis of globalization is to explore the impacts of globalization processes in localized context. In *Children of NAFTA*, David Bacon seeks to explore the impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement on the lives of those who live and work in the US-Mexico border region. Free trade is commonly identified as a central condition of the globalized economy and much is known of the institutions and agreements that define free trade. Much less has been written about the down-to-earth effects of such policies. Understanding these localized dynamics is the goal of Bacon’s study.

David Bacon is a former union organizer turned journalist and photographer. He has written numerous articles for *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *Z*, *The American Prospect*, and *L.A. Weekly*. As a union organizer, Bacon worked for a number of major US unions, including the United Farm Workers, the United Electrical

Workers, and the International Moulders Union, and in campaigns that took him “from factories to fields and back.” (2) These organizing campaigns brought him face to face with Mexican farmworkers, immigrant workers in Silicon Valley’s electronics plants, African American and Mexican foundry workers, and immigrant Chinese women in San Francisco sweatshops. While these groups of workers were often vastly different along demographic lines, they commonly experienced work that was often undesirable, dirty, and difficult, in jobs that were at the bottom, invisible, and out of the limelight of the high technology, high finance stereotypes of the new global economy.

The Children of NAFTA examines the lives of workers and their families along the border, in their workplaces, and through their efforts to organize independent unions, all in the political and economic context of NAFTA’s first decade. The book is written in a journalistic style, complete with two dozen black and white photographs, creating a very accessible and moving portrait of workers’ lives in the border region. In focusing on the lives of workers along the border, Bacon demystifies the abstractions of globalization, showing that the global economy is “a day-to-day, hour-to-hour reality experienced by millions of people.” (3)

Bacon contends that by most accounts, the social history of the border region, and of its vast array of workers, has largely been ignored. Popular reports focus on high tech managers and engineers in Silicon Valley, or construct portraits of Mexican workers as economic victims, with little capacity or agency to shape their own destiny. In place of such accounts, Bacon seeks to uncover not just the working conditions of border workplaces, but also the wide-ranging social movements and activists that seek to challenge the exploitation engendered by NAFTA, and to produce a more secure social order for local inhabitants. In doing so, Bacon situates these movements in the context of NAFTA and globalization, as well as the long-standing historical struggles of workers in this region. Through this focus on social agency, Bacon constructs an account that not only takes the reader into the hearts and lives of the workers in the border region, but also more deeply into the power dynamics of economic globalization, the social forces that are driving its economic processes, and the challenges that lie ahead for those who wish to construct alternatives.

Children of NAFTA is largely an account of workers’ experiences based on Bacon’s interviews and observations. The book begins by examining the relocation of agricultural jobs — in one case, the growing and harvesting of grapes and green onions — from a unionized southern California labour force to northern Mexico, a shift that involved the use of child labour in order to achieve lower labour costs. After outlining a general framework for understanding the current and potential impacts of neoliberal policies at local and global levels, Bacon further develops his argument through several more case studies that include workers in plastics production, the auto industry, and in tomato and strawberry growing. While these cases all include discussions of workers’ resistance and activism, the focus is

placed on understanding the processes and impacts of free trade and global restructuring. Remaining chapters shift to understanding the dynamics of resistance, not only within each national context, but also in terms of the development of transnational and cross-border strategies. By highlighting the activities of Mexican workers in fighting for the recognition of independent unions, the linkages that are being formed between US and Mexican labour organizations, and the efforts of cross-border coalitions such as the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, Bacon brings home a central argument in the text — that corporate transnationalism and the neoliberal policies that support it are fostering transnational forms of resistance. The significance of such developments is twofold for Bacon — transnational strategies both hold the potential to revitalize the US labour movement, and may create the basis for a labour internationalism that is capable of challenging corporate globalization. The phrase “the children of NAFTA” thus refers not only to the child labourers referenced in the first case study, but also to the cross-border movements that have emerged as a response and challenge to NAFTA.

The theme of labour responses to globalization processes is further developed in *Labour and Globalization*, an edited collection by Ronaldo Munck. The text is a collection of papers that explore the challenges globalization creates for trade unions, and the ways in which unions and labour organizations are responding to these challenges at local, national, and transnational levels. The central premise of the text challenges the assertion that organized labour no longer has a role to play in the organization of collective action. Like *Children of NAFTA*, while the text acknowledges that processes of globalization have reshaped the economic and political conditions within which many nationally-based labour movements came of age, it does not seek to write off unions as the products of a bygone era. Rather, through a series of case studies focusing on organized labour in Western Europe, North America, South Africa, Australia, and at the international level, the contributing authors point to a wide variety of strategies that labour organizations are exploring and adopting as they seek to confront the myriad of economic, political, and social challenges of globalization.

Munck, a political sociologist at the University of Liverpool, who has written extensively on the topic of union responses to globalization, introduces the collection by revisiting the conceptual confusion that is often associated with the term globalization. Munck asserts that the concept can serve as an obstacle to scholarly clarity if there is no interrogation of commonly held assertions regarding globalization: that there is nothing new about it; that it is a “one-way, inexorable path towards economic integration and a global labour market;” (4) that labour movements are no longer relevant social movements. All of these assertions present, according to Munck, a misguided and superficial account of what globalization actually involves.

Munck outlines several key points that are needed to guide globalization research. In response to critiques that globalization is not new, due to longstanding

histories of international trade, migrations, and so on, Munck asserts that the contemporary period is characterized by a form of “time-space compression” not experienced in previous eras, and that this social phenomenon is creating new forms of interpenetration and interdependence at unprecedented levels. Rather than debate the “newness” or lack thereof of globalization, the challenge for globalization researchers, then, is to attempt to understand the specificity of the present conjuncture. Further, there is also a need to challenge assertions of the unity and totality of globalization processes. This account, according to Munck, is present within both liberal and critical scholarship, the former holding out globalization as the inevitable path towards progress and prosperity, the latter decrying globalization as a consolidation of the overarching powers of global capital. Instead of such singular accounts, we need to attune to the myriad of strategies, processes, and social relations that may be included within, and result from, what is generally described as globalization. These strategies, processes, and relations may take different forms with different outcomes depending upon the social context and the actors involved. They may be inconsistent and even contradictory. In other words, rather than one globalization process, there are many globalizations. From this perspective, globalization, then, is not simply a strategy for transnational corporations and neoliberal policymakers, but involves processes that create potential and opportunity for social movements, including labour movements. Rather than eliminating the capacity for social agency, globalization may construct a new terrain upon which social agency may be forged. (2)

The case studies in the text take up these dilemmas and opportunities by more closely exploring specific challenges and strategies in various national, local, and transnational contexts. Divided into three sections, the various papers examine what are described as the global, spatial, and social dimensions of the responses of organized labour to globalization processes. The first section outlines questions of strategy at a general and global level, and the overall context of globalization in terms of the challenges and opportunities confronting unions. In the second section, the spatial reorganization of economic and political institutions engendered through globalization processes is explored in relation to the potential for labour transnationalism, with case studies of economic integration within North America and Western Europe. The book concludes with a set of essays on the social dimensions of labour strategies, including discussions of the ways in which labour movements have both worked in coalition with other activist organizations, and have sought to incorporate a wide range of social issues into their own campaigns, thereby broadening the scope of traditional labour struggles. Overall, the text presents a balanced and varied analysis of challenges faced by unions, and some possible strategies for organized labour to move forward in this new context. Its greatest strength lies in the ways in which it highlights a common theme for all of the unions and labour organizations studied: the need for renewal, revitalization, and internationalism.

Finally, one of the most recent contributions to globalization scholarship has been from those who assert that globalization must be analyzed through the lens of imperialism. More specifically, and particularly in the context of the post-September 11 world, some globalization scholars have argued that US-led imperialism has been the dominant force in shaping the social organization of the global political economy. The contributions of the imperialism lens are not limited to understanding the post-9/11 context, however. As James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer suggest in *System in Crisis*, there has long been an imperialistic bent to many of the processes identified as globalization.

Petras and Veltmeyer, sociologists who have collaborated previously on texts that seek to understand globalization,⁵ insert two themes not clearly developed in the other texts covered in this review: first, that what is defined as globalization refers to processes that have been implemented in response to a systemic crisis of free market capitalism, and second that the processes we associate with globalization have been redefined by US imperialism in the post-9/11 context. They then construct an analysis of this context in a manner that in some key ways bridges the analytic lens of the three other texts. The focus is placed at the macro level of the global economy; yet they attempt to account for regional, national, and local specificities through several case studies of the localized effects of global economic forces. Further, where other texts tend to construct an analysis of the South that either fails to capture any detail and specificity (Gelinas), or tend to examine the South in relation to the North through the lens of trans/inter-nationalism (Bacon, Munck), Petras and Veltmeyer focus directly on the South, specifically Latin and South America. Finally, while they are attuned to the emergence of new movements of resistance in the current conjuncture, they also identify a key role for workers' movements in the construction of resistance. Like the other authors covered by this review, they remain convinced that there are alternatives to globalization, and seek to uncover those alternatives and the ways in which they may be constructed through an examination of strategies of resistance.

As implied in the book title, for Petras and Veltmeyer global capitalism is a system in crisis. They employ an analytic framework that situates 20th (and 21st) century capitalism within a dynamic of conjunctural crises followed by responses that seek to inject stability into the system. The first such conjuncture was the crisis of the pre-World War II years of the Great Depression, which was followed by Keynesian reforms that created the context for the Fordist/Keynesian postwar era. The stability of this period had reached its peak by the late 1960s, reaching the point of a new crisis by the early 1970s. The period from the 1970s to the present day has been defined by economic and political strategies designed to respond to this crisis, including attacks on organized labour, technological restructuring, the emergence of "post-Fordist" production, structural adjustment policies, and market deregula-

⁵See James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century* (New York 2001).

tion. These are all conditions commonly associated with processes of globalization. However, Petras and Veltmeyer enter the conceptual debate by claiming that this term — globalization — does not accurately describe what is happening within this crisis-prone system. Rather, they state that the concept of imperialism provides a more direct lens through which to focus on the actors, stakes, and the “dynamic forces being released in the struggles of supporters and opponents of the capitalist system at its present conjuncture.” (viii)

Following an organizational approach similar to that taken by Gelinas, the authors seek to first outline the conditions of this imperialist context, and second to identify forces for change and alternatives to the current order. The book begins by outlining the terms of crisis, which Petras and Veltmeyer define in not only economic terms, but also from social, ecological, and intellectual perspectives. While the economic dimensions of the crisis include faltering economies in the advanced industrialized world, and unmanageable external debts in the South, the social dimensions include growing inequalities in wealth and income, both within and between nations, as well as growing levels of unemployment and poverty. The strains placed on natural resources and the environment by the capitalist economic system are creating a simultaneous ecological crisis. Petras and Veltmeyer also discuss what they define as an “intellectual crisis” in this conjuncture, which is signified by a lack of intellectual or theoretical responses capable of providing strategies for moving beyond the current impasse. According to the authors, this intellectual crisis affects both liberal development theorists, who tend to prioritize a humanized variant of capitalism, as well as those on the Left who have taken up theoretical positions that shift attention away from class power and the role of the state. This intellectual crisis is of great significance to Petras and Veltmeyer, as it shapes the potential to advance political strategies of resistance.

In response to the intellectual crisis, Petras and Veltmeyer attempt to advance a method of analysis that seeks to identify the conditions and outcomes of globalization/imperialism so as to inform struggles that may challenge its power base. This analysis begins by identifying the conditions of globalization through the frame of US-led imperialism. Beginning with a focus on military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, the authors argue that these particular initiatives are only a part of a larger strategy to re-establish American economic dominance and political hegemony in a global context, a strategy that is currently legitimized through the War Against Terror. The imperialist lens is not only applied to the Middle East, but also to US initiatives in the Americas, which include both Washington’s substantial aid to military and paramilitary forces in Columbia to combat organizations such as the FARC and ELN, and efforts to extend free trade across the entire North and South American region. Shifting their lens to the environment, the analysis of the conditions of systemic crisis includes a case study of the collapse of the cod fishery in the North Atlantic. This dimension of the crisis is not directly connected with the imperialism framework advanced in earlier chapters. Yet, it is argued forcefully that

processes of global capitalism place an immense strain on natural resources, a strain that may have disastrous consequences for local communities that rely on those resources for a source of employment, and larger populations that rely on the resources for sustenance. The text then shifts to questions of resistance and alternatives, as remaining chapters explore various movements that have emerged in response to the processes of globalization/imperialism. As with the chapter on the cod fisheries, an analysis of post-9/11 US imperialism, which is a key analytical point in the early chapters of the book, is not centrally integrated into the discussion of resistance. Nonetheless, the authors effectively illustrate that the economic, political, and military power involved in the spread of globalization/imperialism, is indeed being met with a wide range of oppositional movements, South and North.

All four texts raise key questions regarding extent of corporate power, the role of nation-states, the implications for resistance, and the possibilities for alternatives — questions that are central to debates over the character of contemporary globalization. To further explore the contributions these texts make to the globalization debates, each of these themes is examined in more detail below.

Transnational Corporations and Global Restructuring

Globalization is commonly identified with growing corporate power and each of the texts provide a rich presentation of the various manifestations of this process. *Juggernaut Politics* clearly illustrates the many faces of corporate power of the contemporary global economy. Transnational corporations (TNCs) — those that have developed globalized production networks — “deep integration” — (17) are key actors in this system. Corporate giants such as Wal-Mart, Exxon Mobil, General Motors, British Petroleum, and Ford Motor typify the model with corporate sales that vastly outstrip the GDPs of many industrialized nation-states. Wal-Mart, for example, has annual sales that surpass the GDP of over 160 countries, and the combined GDP of the 49 least-developed countries. The top 1000 TNCs own assets of \$41 trillion, or “over 80 percent of the world’s developed resources, production equipment, and debts.” (Gelinas, 58) Working in conjunction with international financial institutions, and through associations (the Trilateral Commission) and forums (Davos), TNCs and their corporate leaders display “a convergence of shared interests” in the pursuit of profit, power, and control in the global economy. (Gelinas, 63)

The impacts of this system of corporate power on employment and labour markets have been the subject of a growing body of scholarly research. Specifically, these forms of corporate power have been attributed with creating a downward pressure on working conditions in both the North and the South, thereby exacerbating trends of structural inequality within and between nations.

In the nations of the North, processes of corporate downsizing and corporate transnationalism, combined with the expansion of service sector employment, have led to dramatic changes within labour markets. Saskia Sassen argues that three pro-

cesses of “economic and spatial organization” are central to this economic context: the “expansion and consolidation of producer services and corporate headquarters into the economic core of ... highly developed economies”; the “downgrading” of a broad range of manufacturing sectors, where downgrading refers to a method of adoption to increased global competition, rather than an elimination of industrial employment; and the “informalization” of a wide range of economic activities, where informalization involves escaping the regulatory mechanisms of the formal economy as a competitive strategy.⁶ Downgrading and informalization have coincided with the emergence of more flexible, casualized, and precarious forms of employment, particularly in the secondary labour market of the service sector.⁷ The decline in manufacturing employment has also been associated with declining rates of unionization in many advanced capitalist economies. Overall, increasing levels of capital mobility, international economic competition, and the ideology of globally-induced competitive pressures have directly and indirectly facilitated precariousness and informalization of employment, as well as economic insecurity and poverty.

These impacts are well described by Bacon in his analysis of the ways in which NAFTA contributed to job insecurity and job loss in the US by facilitating corporate relocation to Mexico in a wide range of industries, including the production of plastics, electronics, garments, and automobile parts. This is not only a question of job loss, as Bacon illustrates, but also of job quality, as unionized jobs in the US are replaced with more precarious forms of employment, or companies are able to force concession bargaining that reduces union wage rates and increases work hours. Bacon argues that cross-border mobility is not simply limited to corporations, however, as in response to continuing poverty within Mexico, migration to the US continues apace with Mexican migrants taking on the role of earlier immigrant groups (for example, Eastern Europeans) in occupations such as meat-processing. Overall, the dynamics reshaping labour markets in the North become clear through Bacon’s case studies that illustrate the multi-faceted impacts of the free trade agreement on the US labour market. The focus of the book is on the US-Mexico border region and thus the impacts of NAFTA on Canada are only briefly mentioned. (47) Given the integrated nature of North American production chains, for example in automotive production, and the role of Mexican workers in Canadian agriculture (which predates NAFTA but is certainly a key element of the transnational character of production Bacon explores), some integration of the impacts on the Canadian la-

⁶Saskia Sassen, “Deconstructing Labor Demand in Today’s Advanced Economies: Implications for Low-Wage Employment,” in Frank Munger, ed., *Laboring Below the Line: The New Ethnography of Poverty, Low-Wage Work, and Survival in the Global Economy* (New York 2002), 75.

⁷Dave Broad, *Hollow Work, Hollow Society? Globalization and the Casual Labour Problem in Canada* (Halifax 2000).

bour market into the analysis could have further demonstrated the truly transnational character of free trade.

Corporate transnationalism has of course had profound effects in the global South, as well. The expansion of export-processing zones, subcontracting relationships, and the prevalence of sweatshop labour are widely associated with the processes of globalization described above.⁸ Export-processing zones, subcontracting practices, homeworking, and sweatshop labour facilitate largely unregulated, labour-intensive production at minimal wages, thereby ensuring low labour costs in the South (and simultaneously creating downward pressure on wages in the North). Workers' efforts to organize unions are generally met with violent resistance.⁹ These production relations have intensified existing patterns of gendered inequality, as workers in these production areas are often women.¹⁰ Under these conditions, labour standards are, at best, under-regulated, and, at worst, non-existent.

Denial of workers' democratic rights is a common feature within the South. As illustrated in *Children of NAFTA*, one of the most pronounced expressions of this is demonstrated in the extreme repression faced by workers attempting to organize independent unions. While individual campaigns such as those undertaken by workers at the Han Young Hyundai plant in Tijuana, or those at the Duro Bag factory, drew international attention, the intimidation and violence directed against union supporters, the corrupt voting practices unquestioned by the state, and the complicity of Mexico's official labour organization, the CTM, are common experiences for Mexican workers in the border region seeking to establish independent representation.

System in Crisis documents the effects of these processes within Central and South America more broadly, identifying mass unemployment, growing levels of social inequality, and a lack of much-needed local control over economic production as common outcomes. Petras and Veltmeyer use the case of the economic and political crisis within Argentina to explore the impacts of globalization within a national economy. Argentina's crisis is characterized by a banking system that has collapsed, mass unemployment, and over half of the population living below the poverty line. This crisis is attributed directly to capital flight and two decades of neoliberal policy experimentation, a process driven by the structural adjustment policies of the IMF. Petras and Veltmeyer argue that while there are particularities to the Argentinian context, the crisis within Argentina may be emulated in other national contexts through the spread of neoliberal policies. The example of Argentina's fate is significant not only for the way in which it draws attention to the forms

⁸Andrew Ross, ed., *No Sweat: Fashion, Free Trade, and the Rights of Garment Workers* (London and New York 1997); Ellen Rosen, *Making Sweatshops: The Globalization of the U.S. Apparel Industry* (Berkeley 2002).

⁹International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), *Building Workers' Human Rights into the Global Trading System* (Brussels 1999).

¹⁰Kathryn Ward, *Women Workers and Global Restructuring* (Ithaca 1990).

of inequalities within the South engendered by globalization processes, but also because it raises the key question of the political dimensions of power within the global economy.

The Role of the State

In addition to the effects of corporate power discussed above, some scholars have argued that states are losing the capacity to regulate economic activities due to the growth of corporate transnationalism and the rise of international financial institutions. In other words, corporate power has been claimed to have reduced the power of the nation-state.¹¹

Gelinas's conceptualization of corporate power closely approximates this line of thinking. He situates transnational corporations at the pinnacle of power in the global hierarchy, well positioned above the state, and with the capacity to control the state. TNCs "stand beyond or above the nation-state" with the capacity to defy borders and transcend state powers. (16) Gelinas asserts TNCs are "global giants capable of pushing governments around." (56) Central bankers and international financial institutions (for example, the IMF) also operate above the state system, wielding "decisive influence over governments." (59) This analysis of globalization provides political actors within the state with key roles in the broader system of corporate power — as intermediaries — but in roles that are clearly subordinate to the corporate masters. Gelinas acknowledges that high-level politicians have important roles in the corporate domination of the global economy, but as "attentive servants, surrendering voluntarily to the very forces they are supposed to control." (90)

This vision of subordinate or weakened states has been challenged by many globalization researchers, however. In terms of the general globalization literature, it has been demonstrated that nation-states continue to play key roles in shaping many of the processes of globalization, and in continuing to provide the political conditions necessary for capital accumulation.¹² Rather than place states in a subordinate position to TNCs, attention needs to be given to the ways in which states support corporate power and facilitate the spread of globalization, particularly through neoliberal policy strategies.

The picture of the subordinate state is also called into question by the three other texts under review. In *Labour and Globalization*, Munck articulates a general criticism of scholars who disregard the role of the state in the era of globalization, suggesting that states have continuing, though transformed, significance in the

¹¹ For a summary of this general argument see Leo Panitch, "Rethinking the Role of the State in an Era of Globalization," in James Mittleman, ed., *Globalization: Critical Reflections*, 83-113.

¹² Michael Mann, "Has Globalization Ended the Rise of the Nation-State?" *Review of International Political Economy*, 4, 3 (Autumn 1997) 472-96; Saskia Sassen, "Territory and Territoriality in the Global Economy," *International Sociology*, 15, 2 (June 2000), 372-93.

global economy. This is particularly so, Munck asserts, for workers in the South, whose lives are shaped through relations of neo-colonialism and imperialism, relations which are shaped through the nation-state system. Bacon's analysis of free trade provides a more direct illustration of the connections between the state and corporate power. The free trade agreement was promoted, negotiated, and implemented by neoliberal policy makers. Suggesting that these policymakers are simply pawns of corporate interests ignores the complexities of the relationship between capital and (in this case the US, Mexican, and Canadian) states. Further, it ignores the variety of ways in which specific manifestations of globalization processes are implemented in local and national contexts — for example through political agreements like NAFTA that facilitate corporate strategies, and through the state-organized repression of workers attempting to organize independent unions in the maquiladora region. The point is that neoliberal states may have interests that are tied to those of the TNCs, and thus may act in conjunction with, rather than under the direction of, TNCs.

The recent scholarship that has associated globalization with new forms of imperialism provides perhaps the clearest example of the significance of the power of the state. This work highlights not only the role of the state in general, but of the American state in particular. Gelinas hints at this perspective when he connects the power of the US government and military to the global system of corporate power. He argues that the US is the only state that is not overpowered by globalization, describing it as “the capital of globalization.” (75) Further, US political leaders are identified as working in mutual support with TNCs in promoting and advancing globalization. This is presented as a qualifier to the general claims that globalization supersedes the power of nation-states. Yet an analysis qualified by American exceptionalism fails to offer a clear theory of the role of the state in general, or the American state in particular, in the expansion and reproduction of global capitalism. Petras and Veltmeyer offer a more direct analysis of globalization as US imperialism. While the imperialist lens does not run clearly through the text from beginning to end, the authors highlight the role of American foreign policies — these days defined by the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive invasions — as a driving force in the re-organization of the global political economy. The US state is clearly not acting solely as a servant of TNCs (even those that may benefit economically from the War on Terror), but rather is exercising considerable political and military power that intersects with the corporate power of US transnationals.

The overall significance of this debate, whether considered through the lens of imperialism or globalization more generally, is that it highlights the continuing significance of the role of the state in shaping the political conditions necessary for the expansion of capitalism at global, national, and local levels. And it is a reminder that powerful states may also exist in the era of powerful TNCs.

Globalization and Resistance

The globalization of production, the corporate power of TNCs, and the role of neoliberal states in supporting and promoting globalization processes pose serious challenges for workers and communities attempting to defend jobs and improve their lives. The theme of resistance to globalization from workers, their organizations, and other civil society groups, runs through all four texts, and raises another key debate in relation to the concept of globalization.

One approach to the question of resistance in the era of globalization posits that the geographic expansion of manufacturing production into the South, along with the emergence of “post-Fordist” or “post-industrial” forms of production in the North, has weakened labour movements to the point where they are no longer capable of constituting a force for social change.¹³ Of the four texts in question, *Juggernaut Politics* most closely follows this form of analysis. Like Bacon, Gelinas sees the construction of new movements of resistance as stemming from globalization processes. Unlike Bacon, however, while considering the role of various actors in promoting alternatives to corporate globalization, Gelinas dismisses the role of trade unions, claiming that unions are both “too integrated into the system to challenge it” and that unions have been too weakened and disoriented by globalization. (190) Instead, Gelinas suggests that a wide variety of new civil society movements have emerged as the key challengers of globalization. As examples of civil society movements that have taken up the challenge of globalization, Gelinas discusses NGOs, faith-based organizations, student unions, co-operatives, and a wide range of social justice groups that also include trade unions. This analysis points to the breadth of organizational resistance that has emerged in response to globalization processes, and suggests that pressure for alternatives will come from a plurality of sites.

While Gelinas acknowledges that there is awareness within labour movements of the need to change, and does include unions in the range of civil society actors that organize resistance, the analysis of unions is somewhat contradictory, as neither the ways in which unions may break from previous moulds, nor the capacities that may result from new strategies, are explored. In comparison, for both Bacon and Munck, strategies for union revitalization are key to constructing movements of resistance against globalization. Case studies within *Children of NAFTA* and *Labour and Globalization* provide numerous examples of ways in which unions and labour organizations are seeking out ways to reorient themselves to the challenges

¹³ Within social movement research, this assumption prompted the emergence of New Social Movement Theory, which focused on identity-based, rather than class-based, movements. See André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Postindustrial Socialism* (London 1982); Alain Touraine, *Return of the Actor: Social Theory in Postindustrial Society* (Minneapolis 1988). For a summary and critique of this perspective, see William Carroll, ed., *Organizing Dissent: Contemporary Social Movements in Theory and Practice* (Toronto 1997).

of the global economy. These include strategies to construct grassroots democracy within unions, to forge coalitions with other social justice organizations, and to advance the movement towards labour internationalism.

The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) is a central example in *Children of NAFTA*. The CJM is a coalition of unions, churches, community groups, lawyers, and lobbyists that formed to challenge the wide-ranging negative social impacts of neoliberal trade policies on the border region. The CJM combines lobbying and letter-writing campaigns with direct support for workers' organizing efforts on the ground. The approach of the CJM reflects a strategy sometimes termed "social movement unionism," or the integration of social justice concerns and coalition strategies into labour movements in an attempt to broaden the scope of union activities. In *Labour and Globalization*, Munck cautions against the promotion of social movement unionism as a panacea for all of organized labour's challenges. Nonetheless, case studies of coalition strategies to promote international codes of conduct in the garment industry (by Linda Shaw), and to combat child labour (by Michael Lavalette and Steve Cunningham) provide key examples of the incorporation of broader social justice principles into the activism of organized labour. In a general discussion of union strategies in *Labour and Globalization*, Richard Hyman suggests that a rejuvenation of organized labour's role in struggles for social justice is paramount in meeting the challenges of the current context. (19-33)

The CJM is indicative of another key process — the development of transnational practices that link workers and their organizations across borders.¹⁴ Recent social movement scholarship has documented a wide range of transnational networks of activists, social movements, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that organize around a variety of economic, political, social justice, and human rights issues, and that challenge class versus identity-based conceptions of collective action.¹⁵ Bacon argues that these strategies are the key to success in labour revitalization as they reflect the transnational nature of production and politics, and provide the means to broaden and diversify practices of resistance. As the CJM's membership base is Mexican, American, and Canadian, it provides a prime example of the recognition of the need to follow the transnational structure of production in forging resistance to corporate power. The challenges of labour transnationalism are also explored in *Labour and Globalization* through case studies that include two of the major economic regions in the global economy — the European Union and the North American Free Trade Area. Focussing on the European Union, Jane Willis argues that the European Works Councils provide the capacity for Euro-

¹⁴Leslie Sklair defines transnational practices as practices "that cross state boundaries but do not necessarily originate with state agencies or actors." Leslie Sklair, "Social Movements for Global Capitalism: The Transnational Capitalist Class in Action," *Review of International Political Economy*, 4, 3 (Autumn 1997), 520.

¹⁵For an example see Valentine Moghadam, "Transnational Feminist Networks: Collective Action in an Era of Globalization," *International Sociology* 15, 1 (March 2000), 57-85.

pean-wide labour networks, but that European unions have been unable to translate this potential into a mechanism to foster European-wide trade union activism and consciousness. (85-104) Within the NAFTA region, John French argues that there is a need for a labour transnationalism that, to be truly effective, must be sensitive to the particular interests of different groups of workers (for example, those within different nation-states), while simultaneously seeking to identify common issues that could provide a transnational platform for action. (149-65)

Of the challenges faced by labour movements, it is perhaps internationalism that is the most daunting. Discussions of internationalism tend to focus on international organizations such as the ICFTU, the International Trade Secretariats, and the ILO. Concerns are often raised that such organizations have little bearing on workers' struggles on the ground. In assessing internationalization strategies, Munck argues that it is important to avoid binary understandings of activism, for example, a dichotomous analysis between rank-and-file actions and those at the level of union officials (national or international). Analyses must seek to capture the dynamics of struggle at multiple levels in efforts to promote labour internationalism. These issues are taken up in a well-detailed case study comparison of the strategies used by dockworkers in Liverpool and Australia, which provides insight into the implications of two different forms of labour internationalism: an internationalism that built global solidarity through global actions (Liverpool), and a bottom-up strategy that began with traditional workplace action that was bolstered by international support (Australia). According to Jane Kennedy and Michael Lavalette, the success of Australian dockworkers in defending their jobs lay in localized working-class and community-based organizing that led to mass picketing and the shutting down of the docks, while the emphasis on international actions undertaken in the Liverpool dockworkers' global solidarity campaign, while inspirational, failed to pressure the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company to change its course. Kennedy and Lavalette use the case to make the argument that localized activism is still needed to challenge the globalizing tendencies of contemporary capitalism. (206-26)

Nevertheless, a central point made by Gelinas — that globalization produces a diversity of sites and sources of resistance — should not be downplayed. The context of globalization points not only to the internationalization of capital and corporate interests, but also creates the potential for the emergence of transnational forms of organizing amongst a wide variety of communities and organizations. Petras and Veltmeyer further this discussion by examining the efforts of a wide range of resistance movements, including those of peasants and indigenous peoples in Central and South America, unemployed workers in Argentina, and the Anti-Globalization Movement within the North. While they too see civil society as a key site of resistance, their perspective differs from that of Gelinas. First, having included the state within their analysis of imperialism, the state is integrated into the scope of activism. Second, they see the formation of independent workers' movements — such

as the unemployed workers' movement in Argentina and its efforts to take back factories — working in conjunction with other groups as a key dynamic in promoting change. As the diverse effects of global capitalism penetrate into workplaces large and small, communities urban and rural, and environments North and South, resistance emerges in diverse and intersecting forms, in all of these various sites.

Alternative Futures

While there are some debates among the texts, there is unity in the rejection of the assertion that globalization — in its current forms — is inevitable and unalterable. There is also unity in the commitment of the various authors to understanding the current social order in an attempt to promote social change. This raises the question of alternatives. What strategies might be implemented to construct an alternative to the current forms of globalization and neoliberalism? The question is not, as it is sometimes misleadingly posed, “globalization or not,” but rather, “what kind of globalization.”

International labour standards are often proposed as a partial solution to downward pressures on working conditions. While there are examples of labour standards clauses being negotiated into multinational free trade agreements, such as the North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation (NAALC), a side agreement to the North American Free Trade Agreement, the weaknesses of this approach are clearly highlighted by Bacon in an analysis of the impacts of the NAALC in protecting Mexican workers' right to unionize. Despite including trade union rights within its scope of protections, the agreement contains no effective enforcement mechanism. Thus, for workers such as those at Duro Bag, and many others, filing complaints under the NAALC did little to promote independent workplace representation. Approaching the labour standards question from a slightly different perspective, in *Labour and Globalization*, Robert O'Brien suggests that debates over international labour standards are complicated by legacies of imperialism that include and implicate Western labour organizations and NGOs. (52-70) Rather than offer an alternative policy solution, O'Brien focuses on the need to revitalize labour organizations themselves as a solution to the deterioration of working conditions. Like Kennedy and Lavalette, O'Brien advocates the forging of transnational links that begin with localized forms of activism. Like Munck, he rejects a separation of rank-and-file activism from official union structures: “local activism can inform and guide bureaucratic activity while the internationals will have considerably more support when undertaking global campaigns.” (67) Ultimately, neither *Children of NAFTA* nor *Labour and Globalization* offer maps for a future social order. But both see revitalized labour movements, built from localized activism, and working in conjunction with community groups and across borders as the key to transforming the current path of globalization.

Broader visions of social transformation are presented in *Juggernaut Politics* and *System in Crisis*. Central to Gelinás' alternative to global corporate power is his endorsement of the principles of a "social economy," which involves the reclaiming of the economy by civil society in order to reorient it towards "people's aspirations, fundamental rights, and needs." (203) Examples of alternative economic practices that could promote these goals include co-operative and community-based production, "third sector" or non-profit producer and service organizations, and local exchange systems. But this strategy raises a dilemma: while the principles clearly constitute an alternative that prioritizes human need and social good, does this model hold the capacity to truly alter globalization, or will it be co-opted? The long-term co-existence of such social formations is questionable. Nonetheless, the goal of establishing economic practices that promote democratic participation and prioritize egalitarian outcomes provides a signpost for movements seeking alternatives.

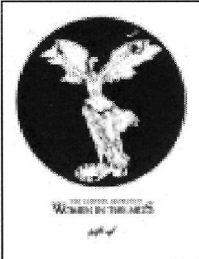
Petras and Veltmeyer are proponents of a revolutionary politics, calling for a "more human, socialist form of development" as an alternative to "neoliberalism, capitalism and imperialism." (xi) Early in the text, they engage in a critique of electoral politics that points to the long-term limitations of a strategy that places its hopes on political parties ultimately embedded within the current social order. The power of progressive social movements lies in the ability to mobilize in the streets, pressure political leaders, disrupt the economy, and "confront summit meetings of the imperial powers." (129) Transformation will come from pressure resulting from the combination of struggles emanating from the anti-globalization movement, revitalized labour movements, unemployed workers, and indigenous peoples, North and South. The political vision is inspiring. However, the means through which to unite such a diverse range of struggles and movements is less clear. It may be that localized movements may produce localized victories, thereby reducing pressures for system-wide transformation. Despite broad goals of social and economic justice, there are many tensions and debates within the Anti-Globalization Movement, a point that the authors clearly acknowledge, which may limit the capacities for movement coordination. Further, the overall analysis is heavily reliant on the notion of crisis — that the capitalist system holds an inherent tendency towards crisis, that it will produce its own demise. What is to say that the contradictions of globalization may not produce a new resolution, once again shifting the entire terrain of struggle?

While defining alternatives in theoretical terms ultimately raises more questions than answers, what is abundantly clear from these texts is that the phrase "there is no alternative" has little credence. There are many alternatives. The question is to what extent the many possible alternatives can successfully challenge globalization/imperialism in its current forms. By prompting critical analyses of contemporary processes of globalization, their impacts, and the diversity of resis-

tance movements that have arisen in response, these four books provide many insights into one of the most pressing concerns of the early years of the 21st century.

Libraries & Culture

EDITOR: Donald G. Davis, Jr., University of Texas at Austin



"Feature articles, which are refereed, are well written and usually very interesting. Anyone with an interest in the history and social context of books and libraries will enjoy this publication."

— **Magazines for Libraries 2002**

CURRENT CONTENTS INCLUDE:

"To Make the People of South Africa Proud of Their Membership of the Great British Empire:" Home Reading Unions in South Africa, 1900-1914
Archie L. Dick

Daniel Alexander Payne Murrey (1852-1925): Forgotten Librarian/
Bibliographer/Historian
Billie E. Walker

"She Speaks as One Having Authority:" Mary E. Downey's Use of
Libraries as a Means to Public Power
Suzanne M. Stauffer

Classification and Definition of a Discipline: The Dewey
Decimal Classification and Home Economics
Anne M. Fields and Tschera Harkness

The Genesis of the Modern Academic Library in China:
Western Influences and the Chinese Response
Jing Liao

Single copy rates: Individual \$17, Institution \$28,
Canada/Mexico, add \$5; other foreign, add \$6.50 (airmail).

Yearly subscription rates: Individual \$40, Institution \$88, Student/Retired \$24,
Canada/Mexico, add \$20; other foreign, add \$26 (airmail)

University of Texas Press Journals, Box 7819, Austin, Texas 78713-7819
Phone # 512-232-7621, Fax # 512-232-7178, journals@uts.cc.utexas.edu

