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El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia

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cross-border collective action in response to multinational business mergers, how extensive a contribution will this be to the democratization of the EU? With a penetration rate of about 26% across the EU in 2003 (Jelle Visser, "Union Membership Statistics in 24 Countries," *Monthly Labor Review*, Jan. 2006, p. 45), even if organized labor consistently pursues Euro-democratizing strategies of the sort that Erne describes, the impact may be diluted by competition from the highly publicized national retrenchment strategies of protestors or electorates who say "no" to Europe in national referenda.

Nevertheless, if we take the book's discussion of labor's role in closing the democratic deficit less as prediction and more as a glimpse of how a growing and pluralistic network of civic actors might eventually change the nature of the EU, Erne does provide a useful corrective to one of the dominant positions in the democratic deficit debate. In that view, a *demos* (people) is a prerequisite to democracy (or rule by the demos); therefore the EU cannot be democratized unless (or until) there is a European *demos*. As Erne summarizes it, in that view "the EU cannot be democratized because there is no European society as such, no European public sphere, no European identity, and no European *demos*" (p. 1). So while the EU may have successfully created a common market, democratization is hindered by the fact that it has done less to create a common community of citizens.

Moving beyond a narrow cultural understanding of the *demos* and the pessimistic view that "there is no realistic prospect for remedying the EU democratic deficit" (p. 1), Erne examines the ways that socioeconomic factors (the creation of a single market, a common currency, and so on) actually play a role in constituting a European civil society—in spite of persistent national cultural differences. This is a valuable contribution to the democratic deficit debate, even for EU scholars with no particular interest in the strategies of organized labor.

On the other hand, for scholars interested in organized labor, who may have no particular interest in the democratic deficit debate, Erne's core contribution, and one for which he provides strong empirical evidence, is that unions not only are affected by European integration, but also affect future EU developments through their actions. Whether or not unions can help close the democratic deficit, Erne provides readers with a timely and useful analysis of the ways that economic integration is changing the power resources of organized labor in Europe, the types of strategies unions have developed in response, and the role

that labor (together with other actors) may play in shaping the political development of the EU down the road.

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El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia. By Sian Lazar. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008. x, 328 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-4129-1, \$84.95 (cloth); 978-0-8223-4154-3, \$23.95 (paper).

Two decades of neoliberal restructuring in Latin America have transformed the state, the nature of capital accumulation, and the working class. During the "lost decades" of the 1980s and 1990s, governments cut public spending and privatized the state-owned enterprises that dominated the economy, dismissing hundreds of thousands of workers. In many of the poorer countries, such as Bolivia, private sector investment failed to pick up the slack. The majority of new jobs were created in the informal sector. While the presence of the informal sector has a direct relationship with declining union density in many countries of Latin America, it does not mean that workers are no longer organized. Rather, as anthropologist Sian Lazar documents in her book, *El Alto, Rebel City*, different forms of working-class organization, such as associations of informal workers, have become increasingly important in the new economy.

El Alto, Bolivia, a large, poor suburb perched on a high plain of 14,000 feet that borders the capital city of La Paz, illustrates well the changing dynamics of working-class organization in Latin America. First, Bolivia presents a fascinating case study of historical contrasts between the past and present, since the popular struggle was once led by independent, militant miners' unions, which took a heavy blow in the mid-1980s when the government closed the state-owned mines, laying off over two-thirds of the work force. Former miners scattered all over the country in search of a livelihood, many of them moving their families to readily available and affordable residential land in new settlements, such as El Alto, on the outskirts of big cities. Second, as a result of rapid urban expansion due to rural-urban migration, El Alto is considered Bolivia's most "informal city."

Today, as Lazar explains, most of the economically active population of El Alto are self-employed

and therefore not in a position to join conventional workplace-based unions. As the author argues, however, “while one sector of the working class was indeed defeated” by the neoliberal onslaught of the 1980s,

the destruction was not as complete as feared by the most pessimistic. What has happened is that new kinds of trade union structures have emerged ... especially those of the peasants and informal sector workers in the cities. (p. 252)

Workers are no longer concentrated in large workplaces such as mines and factories, but are geographically dispersed in different work sites. Men and women of all ages work as vendors in market stalls, laborers in small workshops (which are often subcontracted by formal enterprises), casual laborers in the construction and building trades (mostly men), and domestic servants in upper- and middle-class people’s homes (mostly women).

The first part of the book introduces the residents of Rosas Pampa, a neighborhood in El Alto in which Lazar conducted extensive fieldwork between 1997 and 2004. The author describes not only their economic lives and physical living conditions but also the citizenship norms they have developed, their sense of identity, and their collective consciousness. The second part examines the relationship between the local state and citizens, focusing on a case study of fish vendors affiliated with the Federation of Street Traders of El Alto. As Lazar explains, the privatization agenda of the municipal government creates conflict with trade unions, but the relationship between them is mutually dependent since “the state needs the unions to regulate economic activity, and the unions need the state to confer legitimacy” (p. 207).

Lazar offers a useful corrective to the false dichotomy between the “trade union form” and the “communitarian form.” Some Bolivian intellectuals view these as distinct cultural traditions, with the trade union model being a western imposition and the communitarian model an “authentic” political expression (p. 174). While such a distinction may accurately describe the history of trade unionism in some indigenous communities in northern Potosí, Lazar argues that it is not true in the northern *altiplano* region (where El Alto is located), where “[indigenous] communities tended to appropriate the trade union form in a kind of political syncretism.” Indeed, as has been noted by other scholars, such as Sinclair Thomson and Forrest Hylton in *Revolutionary Horizons* (Verso, 2007), the left-indigenous party that is currently in power is another example of the powerful political

organizations that are based on a mixture of such traditions.

The book provides very thick descriptions of the day-to-day life of the leaders of informal trade unions in contemporary El Alto, but it suffers from a historical myopia that leads the author to make some exaggerated claims. Lazar suggests, for example, that organizations of street traders are “new” (p. 252). The ample literature on the rich history of trade unionism in Bolivia suggests otherwise. If anything, informal workers’ organizations are less powerful today than they were in the early part of the twentieth century, when anarchist organizations such as the Federation of Women Workers, which grouped together domestic workers, market vendors, and cooks, held sway. (See, for example, Ineke Dibbits’s 1986 work, *Polleras libertarias: Federación obrera femenina, 1927–1964*.) Nonetheless, *El Alto, Rebel City* will be of interest to readers seeking to learn more about the internal dynamics of workers’ organizations in the informal economy.

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Research Methods and Information Sources

Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition. Volume Two: Work and Welfare. Edited by Susan Carter, Scott Gartner, Michael Haines, Alan Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 934, xiv pp. ISBN 0-521-58540-6, \$825 (for the entire five-volume set, hardbound).

The Millennial Edition of *Historical Statistics of the United States* has been long in the making, but it is well worth the wait. This is the fourth edition of *Historical Statistics*, the previous three having been published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. The latest “Bicentennial” edition, published in 1975, included 1,200 pages in two volumes, with about 200 pages devoted to work and welfare. The Millennial edition includes five volumes, with volume 2 (934 pages) devoted entirely to work and welfare. This review will discuss only volume 2, although many readers of the *ILR Review* also will be interested in the other volumes, covering Population (volume 1), Economic Structure and Performance (volume 3), Economic Sectors