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NAFTA and the Politics of Labor Transnationalism. By Tamara Kay. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 336 pp. ISBN 978-0521-76287-8, $81.65 (Cloth); ISBN 978-0-521-13295-4, $31.99 (Paperback).

In a recent book that offers a new take on labor unions and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Tamara Kay argues that although labor unions opposed NAFTA, perversely there was significant benefit for them, because NAFTA provided opportunities to build solidarity among U.S., Mexican, and Canadian unions. She gives us fascinating behind-the-scenes glimpses of the internal struggles that labor faced, and she chronicles the transition of labor's policy from being protectionist and antitrade to being internationalist and supportive of core labor rights.

The book's theoretical argument extends social movement literature on the concept of "institutional fields," which posits that the law creates "a complex repertoire of discursive strategies and symbolic frameworks that structure ongoing social intercourse and meaning-making activity among citizens" (p. 19). Kay hypothesizes that just as institutional fields have been used to analyze social movements within national boundaries, "international laws and legal mechanisms can have constitutive effects on transnational social movements by imbuing transnational actors with collective interests" (p. 19). By interviewing key actors in the three-nation struggle against NAFTA, she hoped to show the constitutive effects of both the phase of contestation around the passage of NAFTA and the phase of implementation of the NAFTA side agreement on labor.

Kay does not linger on institutional theory. Rather, she provides historical background on labor and transnationalism, gives us a primer on the structure of the NAFTA's side agreement on labor, and then allows her interviewees to describe how NAFTA encouraged transnational unity and how labor actors seized (or did not seize) opportunities for transnational organizing that NAFTA provided.

The greatest strength of the book is its interviews with key labor actors, especially in the United States but also in Mexico and Canada. From this trove of research, we get the inside story of the development of transnational labor solidarity: what motivated the unions, why and how they approached building relationships, what tensions existed, and how they overcame conflicts. For instance, we learn that the leftist Mexican union federation initially was skeptical of claims that the U.S. unionists had overcome decades of xenophobic prejudices and that at every juncture U.S. unions were held accountable for respect of Mexican workers. Regarding the campaign against Chapter 12 to prevent Mexican trucks on U.S. roads, Andy Banks of the Teamsters recalls, "for about two of the three days we got the shit beaten out of us for what we were doing about Mexican drivers. . . . We sat and took the beating, and said this is not what we're about. We're going to make some changes when we go back. We were able to get some retractions done" (p. 221). Though relationships were difficult to build, at least some unions have continued cross-border organizing many years after NAFTA. We learn from the union leaders' interviews that they came to view NAFTA as an arena to establish cross-border solidarity, both in the contestation phase and the later implementation phase. Therefore, Kay's hunch that institutional fields can apply to transnational settings seems to be validated.

Trade agreements exist in many parts of the world, but institutional fields do not always lead to significant labor collaboration. What then led to the success of union collaboration in the fight against NAFTA? Kay does not address this question directly, but some possible answers can be found in various parts of the book. For example, many of Kay's informants describe a change in political orientation of the NAFTA-era labor leaders in the United States: Jeff Hermanson of the AFL-CIO describes retirement of staff who adhered to Cold War politics as John Sweeney became president (p. 188), and Vicente Villamar says of the new Sweeney staff, "They are a new generation of Americans. . . . They feel for the Mexicans and want them to have respect. . . . I've seen a difference in the AFL-CIO" (p. 193). Another factor that contributed to strengthened union collaboration was unique implementation language in the complaint procedure of NAFTA's side agreement on labor. First suggested by Canadian trade unionists, the rules require that complaints be brought by a government of a country other than the one where the violation occurred. "If you had a problem in your country and you actually wanted to use this agreement to get leverage, you had to go to somebody in the other country, you couldn't file it yourself," said Steve Herzenberg, former assistant to chief NAFTA negotiator (p. 120). This forced unions to seek partners in other countries and

strengthened the cross-border unity that had been built in the earlier phase of the anti-NAFTA struggle. Both of these factors illustrate important mechanisms that could be used by agents to craft unity and develop power strategies within institutional fields.

In fact, the role of agency within institutional fields lies at the heart of what Kay intends us to take away from her book. Without considering agency, one might conclude that more trade agreement institutional fields should be created so that more transnational labor activity can take place. Kay stresses, however, that she does not mean that labor should support free trade agreements, but to the extent that free trade agreements provide institutional fields, she suggests that "how governance institutions are structured *matters* for activists and their ability to maneuver in ever-changing regional and global economies" (p. 25). Institutional fields create opportunities, but it is activist agents who seize the opportunities to make change.

Labor's fight against NAFTA was a watershed struggle that changed the terms of transnational labor unity. With core labor standards as the centerpiece, and tri-national union collaboration to fight, negotiate, and then test NAFTA's institutions, this experience set the stage not just for trade battles involving the World Trade Organization and other regional trade agreements but also for consumer campaigns involving codes of conduct in global supply chains and procurement policies. Many books and articles have been written about labor and NAFTA, and Kay's book sheds light on a significant aspect of this subject. It provides important lessons for labor strategists and policymakers alike.

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