

SEIDMAN, GAY W. *Manufacturing Militance. Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970–1985.* University of California Press, Berkeley [etc.] 1994. x, 361 pp. \$45.00. (Paper: \$15.00.)

This well-argued and well-documented book is a comparative study of the growth of militant unionism in two “newly industrialized” countries. Whatever the obvious historical, political or other differences between Brazil and South Africa, both saw during the 1970s and 1980s the rise of quite similar forms of what the author calls a “social-movement unionism”, i.e. a worker’s movement aiming to raise the living standards of the working class as a whole and not only of specific professional groups.

Modernization theories dealing with developing countries predicted that with industrialization, unions would gradually “mature”. Drawing on assumptions about labour trajectories from Europe and North America, these theories tended to view “normal” unionism as economic and likely to remain within the framework of employer-employee relations. Faced with the reality of political unionism – which did in fact, emerge in many developing countries – modernization theories (e.g. Huntington) nevertheless tended to view non-economic unions as “aberrations”.

Against this sort of conventional wisdom, the author shows that, in newly industrialized countries such as Brazil and South Africa, the authoritarian strategies of capitalist accumulation have favoured the rise of unusually militant forms of unionism. In both countries, labour movements grew to encompass broad demands for social inclusion and citizenship, articulating economic, social and political struggles that went well beyond the factory gates.

In both cases the labour movement relied on community support and in turn provided crucial support for community campaigns, reflecting the emergence of what can only be called class consciousness in poor neighbourhoods. According to the author, this consciousness was the direct outcome of factory-based mobilization, which then spread to community groups. Designed to support private capital accumulation, state policies in South Africa (apartheid) and Brazil (military dictatorship) underscored the links between workplace and communities. In this context, politicized unionism became inevitable, and the broad discourse of class relations provided a framework in which community residents could understand their situation.

The main shortcoming of this book is its title: it seems to suggest that militant unionism is somehow “manufactured” by economic conditions. The following passage explicitly develops such a viewpoint: “Michael Burawoy has argued that production processes in advanced societies have tended to manufacture broad consent to existing social and workplace relations [. . .] Instead of creating consensus and compliance, authoritarian industrialization patterns – at least of the sort illustrated by South Africa and Brazil in the 70’s – may inadvertently manufacture new sources of militance” (p. 12). This kind of argument gives the wrong impression that emancipatory activity can be “manufactured” in the same way as passive consent. Happily enough, this impression is corrected when the author emphasizes that “the politics of production, both inside and outside the labor process, may create new possibilities for broad labor movements seeking to challenge existing distributions of power and wealth”: the social and political agency of the historical subjects is acknowledged.

By its bold assertion of the central importance of *class* – as against the more fashionable trends in social science – this book is an important contribution to the understanding of social struggles in industrializing countries.

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