

ested in Asian American studies, women's studies, sociology, anthropology, and international development.

Workers after Workers' States: Labor and Politics in Postcommunist Eastern Europe. Edited by Stephen Crowley and David Ost. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001. Pp. ix+241. \$75.00 (cloth); \$26.95 (paper).

József Böröcz
Rutgers University

Recent history reduced Eastern European labor from being a collective actor of some political and economic weight under state socialism to little more than a factor of production under capitalism. This resulted in the near-total inability of the working class to influence outcomes of the transformation and produced an immense sense of social displacement and personal malaise among working men and women in the eastern half of Europe. One aspect of labor's decreasing significance has been the remarkable weakness of unions as they appeared on the new, pluralistic political terrain. The volume under review presents 10 parallel, country-by-country minihistories of the transformations of some basic organizational features of trade union politics and worker representation in the post-state socialist part of Europe.

Contrary to the promise made on its back cover, this is not a comparative book. As the introduction points out, the editors "deliberately chose not to engage in a comparative study" (p. 9) because they disapprove of that trend in sociological work on post-state socialism that sets up poorly informed, hasty, and decontextualized comparisons, only to produce premature and misguided conclusions. The sympathetic reader finds her or himself asking for more: for engagement with previous work, pointing out specific weaknesses.

Instead, the editors call for the construction of a common knowledge base—the basic idea of "area studies"—about institutional change in Eastern European labor politics since 1989. The resulting volume thus reads as a report from an interesting fact-finding conference. The authors include a fine assortment of North American and Eastern European scholars, many of whom are also union activists. True to its promise, the book is very rich in valid descriptive detail, particularly with respect to issues concerning processes of pluralization in union politics; confusions in levels, mechanisms, and objectives in demand making; the flight of intellectuals from the unions; the drops in unionization rates; and the links between union and party politics in the post-state socialist political context. The studies treat their empirical object with a perceptiveness and respect that is rare in work on Eastern Europe, especially in English.

It is surprising, however, given the book's title, to notice the absence

of class analysis, beyond the recurrent use of the very term “labor” whose meaning alternates between “union(s)” and “worker(s)” — a rather unfortunate imprecision. The volume reflects a moderate view of unions as organizations whose task does not extend beyond increasing the material rewards of workers, mainly in individual consumption. Collective consumption — a key to understanding working-class life and the unions’ complex relations to that politically much-thematized class location under state socialism as well as in the Western European social welfare model, the implicit comparative norm for the volume — is thus by and large absent. Also left out is any idea of class politics that question capitalism as the best of all possible modes of production.

The book apprehends union weakness through such “indicators” (p. 4) as the disappearance of membership, especially in the private sector, the authoritarian styles of company management, the waning of collective bargaining, the dropping number and decreasing impact of strikes, the lopsided and unreliable nature of political alliances, weak union impact on public policy, and, hardly surprising knowing all of the above, the deteriorating material well-being of workers (pp. 4, 220). Among the wide range of possible explanations the work offers for this phenomenon, the editors dismiss all exogenous effects in a single paragraph (p. 228). The ferocity with which ownership of and control over some of the economies of the former Soviet bloc has been passed over to the multinational corporations, and the degree to which effective control over economic and social policies has been taken away from the local polity is not important, they argue, for two reasons: “Not all new global institutions are against labor” (p. 228), and in comparison to other countries with similar external pressures, “the response from Eastern European labor movements has been muted” (p. 228). So, because “the point in Eastern Europe is not so much that labor has been *weakened* since 1989 . . . but that it has been *created* as a weak actor” (p. 228, emphasis in original), they conclude that reasons for its weakness are to be found internally. This appears to this reviewer as a major non sequitur.

It is of course correct to point out, as the volume does repeatedly, that the force of free market ideologies is truly astonishing in Eastern and Central Europe, and that this provides a direct explanation for union weakness. That is an indictment of the ideological practices of the local cultural and political elites and a warning regarding the inability of most of the region’s cultures to produce effective, non-extreme right resistance to such effects.

That cultural explanation, however, remains rather incomplete unless we take into account two global factors. Those anticollectivist ideologies emerged in a global climate of neoliberal ideological hegemony and in a political context in which the region’s formerly state socialist economies were privatized wholesale, to a large extent through foreign direct investment (FDI), benefiting mainly the most powerful large and midsize multinational corporations headquartered in the European Union. This

transformation has resulted in the rapid peripheralization of Europe's post-state socialist economies, suggesting that well-contextualized, explicit comparisons with other (semi)peripheral parts of the world might yield some interesting additional insights about the causes for the current weakness of Eastern European labor.

This informative volume provides a valuable snapshot of the last 10 years of union politics in Eastern Europe. It offers a sound basis for further debates on union weakness and very suitable material for graduate courses in economic sociology, labor studies, and comparative politics, union or otherwise.

States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State. Edited by Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001. Pp. viii+423. \$64.95 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).

Jyoti Puri
Simmons College

The state may be “back in,” but *States of Imagination* is an effective reminder of why it is well worth rereading this ground. This book offers ethnographies of states across a number of postcolonial contexts, which, given the inattention to theorizing about the state outside of European settings, is a point of no little significance. The importance of this collection for theories on the state lies in its emphasis on questioning the myths of coherence and sovereignty of the state, in its skepticism toward easy distinctions—such as European and Third World states, state and society, modernity and tradition, or liberal and authoritarian states—and on unravelling postcolonial states as sites for political and cultural struggles (see especially articles by Mitchell Dean, Thomas Hansen, David Nugent, Finn Stepputat, and Fiona Wilson).

In their coauthored introduction, editors Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat position their approach between Gramsci's insights on the inherently politically fraught and violent nature of the state and Foucault's attention to the disciplinary and dispersed strategies of power and governance. The result, according to them, is a “denaturalized” (p. 3) and disaggregated understanding of how states are understood. Across the essays, the postcolonial state is seen as defragmented, with porous rather than impermeable boundaries, vexed by inconsistencies and contradictions, unstable, continually recreated symbolically, and invested with considerable but not unmitigated power. The editors view the state in terms of its symbolic functions, meaning the reiteration of state as the locus of governance and authoritative power, and its practical functions, including the assertion of territorial sovereignty, gathering and controlling knowledge of the population, and development and management of the national

