

do this together or have a meeting and before we knew it, it was midnight. I would rush to catch the last train, and when I arrived home and got to bed it was about 1.30 am. I would then be woken up again at 5.30 the next morning. I continued this life for several years. But it was not only me, numerous young people lived this life with a passion, and did so happily (p. 89).

Somehow amid all this, the leading Club members also engaged in serious study of socialist literature, even though possession of the books they were reading would have meant arrest. All this activity took place under that threat – and worse. When state repression intensified, it was only a matter of time before the Club leaders were picked up by the police: Sugiura, Shibata and others were arrested in 1942, tortured and imprisoned until the end of the war. Only the Women's Section of the Club continued in the midst of severe repression. It was Shibata who suggested they think again when they consulted him about disbanding, pointing out that the low status of women in Japan could be used to their advantage, as 'even when they are active, they are not noticed at all' (p. 107).

The work of the Club was often unglamorous and seemingly unimportant, but it saved from eradication the thread that linked the previous era, of more open struggle, with the struggles that would take off when the war ended. As soon as the war finished, and despite the best efforts of the Allied occupying forces, democratic movements including the Council of Industrial Unions flourished. Club members were ready. The overwhelming determination to keep union traditions alive during the period of militarism bore fruit very early in the post-war period and many Club members were at the centre of this activity. Union membership in late 1945 was 600,000; by June 1948, it was 6.7 million. The 1946 May Day demonstration attracted 2 million workers nationwide.


The book concludes with a 2016 interview conducted by Broadbent with Sugiura himself, then 102 years old. It was only in January 2021, aged 106, that Sugiura's remarkable life of over 90 years of political activism ended. The publication in English of his memoir is a fine tribute to one who did not give in to the storm.

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*Workers' Inquiry and Global Class Struggle* is described by its authors as 'workers' inquiries in the global class composition'. This volume contributes to a current resurgence of interest in workers' inquiries. Likewise, class composition (and decomposition) is making a comeback in academic publishing after decades of relegation to Autonomist (near) obscurity.

Thematically, the book is organised into three parts along industry lines: transport and logistics; education, call centres, cleaners, platform work, and games; and manufacturing and mining. Each of the nine chapters focuses on countries across the globe that, according to the authors, represent around 70% of the global population. The introduction serves as the theoretical and methodological outliner of the book.

We welcome this publication as a collection of case studies that make a valued addition to the academic field of global labour studies. But regrettably, we suggest that this volume suffers from many conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and even linguistic weaknesses. Here is why.

The introduction starts with the grandiloquent claims that 'the rationale for capital's assault [on the working class] has been almost entirely unexamined' (p. 1). Therefore, this book comes to amplify 'a growing body of work by workers and scholars' that aims to 'unleash a new cycle of global class struggle'. The authors declare that they are taking up the call (and follow in the footsteps) of 'the independent working-class scholar' Ed Emery to carry out inquiries around the world, namely, 'no politics without inquiry' (pp. 2–3). This is a phrase that echoes the famous proclamation by Mao Zedong: 'No investigation, no right to speak' (Quentin and Baggins, 2000). Alas, the rich history of workers' inquiries around the globe and throughout the centuries seems to elude the editors of this tome. It is erroneously claimed that workers' inquiries were 'virtually forgotten ever since Marx published his original call ... until they were unearthed simultaneously' in the early post-war years in the United States and later in the 60s in France and Italy (p. 3).

Furthermore, it appears that studies about the labour movement, workers' struggles, self-organised workers' movements, etc. are conflated with workers' inquiries. From that viewpoint, pretty much anything that takes a sympathetic view towards working-class people and studies their conditions, struggles, efforts to establish a trade union, or strike activity, etc., can be labelled as a 'workers' inquiry'. Consequently, some linguistic neologisms are invented: 'workers' inquiry *from below* when [such studies] are conducted by workers themselves, and *from above* when conducted by academic and independent scholars' (p. 5). Thus, this book is advocated as a workers' inquiry 'from above'.

This is a remarkable claim and one that we advise is profoundly mistaken, going against two fundamental methodological requirements for a workers' inquiry. The first requirement is the existence of some form of a questionnaire (in the most traditional praxis of a workers' inquiry) for information to be systematically collected, or a list of topics to be investigated, allowing self-expression beyond a formal questionnaire (as pioneered by French Maoists), or at least collecting and presenting worker's *own*, individual narratives and personal experiences (in the most broadly constructed tradition of a workers' inquiry).

That implies the second requirement: establishing a physical, actual and real connection between the subject and objects of research. Simply put, a workers' inquiry involves, on the one hand, the militant armed with questionnaires (or topics to be

investigated, or notebooks for workers' narratives to be written down) and on the other, the workers who interact with the militant in complex ways and over long periods (i.e. the investigator does not drop in for a few days to conduct some interviews, as it is sadly common practice in academic research).

There is no such thing as a workers' inquiry 'from above', 'from below' or 'from outside' or 'from afar' or any other spacial neologism that may be thought up to justify lack of that indispensable, direct, comradely, person-to-person interaction. Even publications where the militant investigator is placed at the (proverbial) 'factory gate', 'listening to workers' and writing down the findings, do not satisfy the basic methodological requirements of a workers' inquiry, we submit. And worse, when the investigator relies on secondary sources (as many chapters in this book do), the outcome is completely removed from both the spirit as well as the typical methodology of a workers' inquiry.

Part 1, chapter one, includes an exhaustive historical review of the Argentinian trackers' union. Prominent in this analysis is the function of collective bargaining agreements and how the law acts as a weapon in the hands of the government and employers. Further, the emphasis is placed on the role of trade union leadership and specifically on the potential significance of a charismatic trade union leader.

Chapter 2 continues with the Turkish transport workers union, which was successful in signing collective bargaining agreements with some major multinational companies, such as UPS and DHL. Field research here involved interviews with the union's leadership. The chapter employs the 'power resources approach' that focuses on the structural and associational power resources that unions and the working class, in general, have at their disposal, and on the ways that these were utilised, in this instance, for revitalising the union.

Chapter 3 focuses on the logistics sector in Italy between 2011 and 2014 with field research (interviews with workers) taking place in July 2014. Here, race and gender are becoming central elements of the analysis and the chapter describes in detail how the logistics industry in Italy is heavily segregated along lines of immigration status, race, ethnicity, and gender. This chapter would have been one of the most prominent in this volume (by virtue of the research effort to engage with real workers and account openly for gender and race), if it was not for the mistranslation of the company form *Società Cooperativa a Responsabilità Limitata* as a 'cooperative' (which in English means a company owned by workers), instead of the accurate 'conglomerate'. Thus, the chapter starts with the perplexing declaration that it will 'reflect on the experience of militant co-research in the Italian cooperative logistics sector' and specifically 'on the micro struggle of logistics workers at the Italian cooperative Mr Job' (pp. 90–91) (The bewilderment of how it could be possible for workers to launch such a militant struggle against their 'cooperative' drove us to investigate the accurate legal company status of 'Mr Job' and its appropriate translation into English).

In Part 2, chapter 4, slightly unconventionally, takes up the threat of a strike – rather than the effects of a strike or processes transpiring during a strike – as the backdrop for examining (with the prospect of reviving) working-class struggles in the United States. Here, the focus is on the California State University system and the threat of a strike by the California Faculty Association in 2016. The author claims that 'there is little knowledge

and much confusion about strike threats ... Analyses of strike threats are virtually non-existent in labour studies and on the left' (p. 106). However, we suggest this is incorrect. Since the publication of the classic study by Kerr and Siegel (1954) on the 'the inter-industry propensity to strike', the *propensity* to strike (individually, collectively, attitudinally, during contract negotiations, etc.) has been exhaustively researched and published by the US industrial relations academe. Hundreds of academic papers have been written and significant research effort has been devoted to this topic (as well as on the relating subject of an individual's *propensity* to join a trade union) over many decades, of which, unfortunately, the authors appear unaware.

Chapter 5 begins with the declaration that it 'will analyse the class recomposition of the Mexican multitude' (p. 148). In that multitude, the authors include teachers, which are the subject matter here. The first part of this chapter examines the concept of the multitude from the Autonomist Marxist perspective. Next, there is an extensive description of the Mexican educational system and a lengthy review of the problems, pressures and even direct and deadly violence that teachers have been subjected to. The level of analysis here remains at a broad level: largely the state's oppression and violence against teachers versus their ability to resist and formulate their counter-struggle. The teacher's union is offered as 'a competitive example of an urban and rural working-class – the cognitarian and proletarian singularities of the multitude – who are able to articulate their struggles locally, nationally and globally to thwart the most violent efforts of an authoritarian state' (p. 170). Nonetheless, and in contrast with the spirit of a workers' inquiry, there seems to be no reported direct contact with teachers to carry out this investigation.

Chapter 6 is written by a group of academics reflecting on conditions and struggles in a very broad and diverse range of industries in the UK including higher education, food delivery and transportation, service work in restaurants and bars, the tech industry and video games and housing. Even though the authors refer to the 'productivity paradox' post-2008 (long hours and low productivity), they nonetheless seem unaware of the fundamental contradiction that the UK, as well as several other advanced capitalist economies, exhibited for some years before the onset of the epidemic. Full employment and increased consumption coexisted with decreased (and staying permanently low) real wages, where large numbers of people were kept in permanent precariousness. In the US, the UK and other developed economies, and unlike previous eras (such as the post-war boom years), full employment was not matched by increased earnings and improved prosperity across social classes; we were experiencing the paradoxical situation – *contra to all economic theories* – of near-full employment but with stagnating or decreasing wages alongside debt-fuelled consumption, widening social disparities, and increasing relative poverty.

Further, in part 3, chapter 7 examines the challenges and opportunities of worker organising in China. The chapter starts by describing attempts to organise independent unions amidst the pro-democracy student movement and its aftermath, following the brutal crackdown in Spring 1989. Further, it contains extensive historiography of state and employer attacks against workers attempting to organise independent trade unions as well as struggling to control democratically existing ones.

Chapter 8 focuses on the mining industry struggles in South Africa and provides an extensive account of trade union history in the mining sector of this country. It focuses on self-organisation efforts and the formation of worker committees that arose during struggles in the period from 2009 to 2013. But as is the case with other chapters in this volume, analysis remains at a macro level, through secondary sources, without directly engaging with individual workers, as it should be expected from a workers' inquiry.

Finally, the subject of chapter 9 is car workers in India. It starts with an extensive (and disproportionate) review of workers' inquiries, which unhistorically are attributed entirely to the workerist tradition in Italy. Nonetheless, there is some interesting discussion on methodological issues that includes a snippet on the research ethics of the workers' inquiry methodology; a topic that has been largely bypassed in the literature (that typically favours the political aspect of inquiries over methodological attributes of research). Further, this chapter examines workers struggles around the Maruti-Suzuki strikes in 2011–2012. In sharp contrast to other chapters in this volume, here a conscientious and diligent effort has been made to remain faithful to the workers' inquiry tradition. Rounds of face-to-face and in-depth interviews, focus groups and follow-up meetings were conducted, and questionnaires were circulated. This is by far the only chapter that not only truly deserves the designation of a workers' inquiry, but it is also to be commended for the sheer boldness of the researcher – 'a white, foreign woman in a male-dominated industrial area' during periods of heightened tension and curfews (p. 249).

Overall, the impression that this edited volume leaves us with is that it attempts to twist the centuries-long and global tradition of workers' inquiry and its commonly accepted methodology, to fit it into a pre-existing collection of dispersed case studies that describe conditions of employment, unionisation efforts, class struggle and management tactics across several and unconvincingly connected industries and countries. Moreover, we must note that both workers' inquiry and class composition are concepts that are inextricably linked to a revolutionary, radical Marxism. They have been used by insurgents and agitators, for revolutionary purposes and with the clear objective of overthrowing capitalism. Using these concepts to describe processes that culminate in collective bargaining agreements, or for explaining shifts in balances of power within trade unions, or between bureaucratic trade unions and government departments, is a falsification of revolutionary praxis.

Further, the authors adopt an Americano-Eurocentric approach: trade unions engaging in struggles with employers where the main objective is the signing of a collective bargaining agreement, under the watchful (enabling or often hostile) eye of governments that legislate labour laws and regulate their enforcement. But all these concepts can be challenging in developing country contexts where laws are often unenforceable, collective bargaining may be in an embryonic state and where much of the workforce (typically around 80–90% in Asia and Africa) is employed in the informal sector.

Finally, this is not a book – as claimed – written by 'workers' for workers, but rather is a book written by (mostly) academics using conventional academic research methods, to be read by fellow academics. Consequently, research focuses on mainstream academic industrial relations issues: unionisation efforts, the functions of trade unions and their engagement in collective bargaining processes, employer resistance and government

intervention and the role of (charismatic) trade union leadership. Only sporadically we could detect what the workers say about themselves (and not through trade union leaders or other intermediaries), and what they want, feel, expect, and agonise about; the core of the issues that a workers' inquiry is meant to bring to the forefront. Thus, we are left with what feels like a betrayal of not only the workers' inquiry accepted methodology but also its spirit: *learning* from what the subalterns have to say, and not patronising them 'from above'.

This leads directly to a broader epistemological issue of academic labour relations research, that this book inadvertently (but thankfully) cues us to its existence. Simply put, we are still epistemologically stuck in a centuries-old paradigm which dictates that 'serious' academics observe 'from above' and outside (or may even wear their casual clothing and borrow a hard-hat to interview workers for a few days), but they don't get their hands 'dirty'; that's what the proletariat does ....

This is the partition that activists, intellectuals, feminists and revolutionaries strove to tear down by choosing to 'proletarianise' and getting jobs in factories and workplaces, in several countries, from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards. Inspired by revolutionary Marxist ideals, this movement – known as *établissement* in France, *fabrikintervention* in Germany, *industrial concentration* in the US (to name but a few countries) – still has a strong legacy nowadays in Germany (*Wildcat Group*), the UK (*Angry Workers of the World*) and China. In contrast to academics, other activists, etc. who attempt to 'organise', 'guide', 'instigate', 'lead' or 'study' workers 'from above' and outside, these radicals chose to *join in*; they became workers themselves, endured the same conditions and lived through the same experiences as employees in workplaces that were dangerous-to-life and laced with racism, xenophobia, misogyny and discrimination. In recent years, a growing body of literature (especially in the US and France) looks at these movements in their own regional and national contexts. We suggest that future research in workers' inquiries and militant investigations needs to pay close attention to these unique endeavours in the history of the labour movement, in comparative and cross-national analyses.

The broader objective should be to build a new pathway for the study of labour relations, where worker self-inquiry is a compelling methodology for understanding workplace reality.

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