

# Free book review on solidarity divided - book review

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Fletcher, Bill, and Fernando Gapasin. *Solidarity divided: the crisis in organized labor and a new path toward social justice*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

In Bill Fletcher's book *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice*, the authors delve into the intricacies of the US labor trade union movement. Today, the struggle for labor and union rights is ongoing and extremely complex; the authors examine the various issues that are causing the complexity and advocate for a greater sense of social justice. The purpose for writing this book is to win the war for social justice through reexamining and reevaluating the labor movement itself, as well as the ideologies and structures surrounding it.

In the book, the authors describe a split in the AFL-CIO union of Pittsburgh between one union and the rest of the federation. While they rejoined the union, the authors argue that the debates leading to the split was not based on real differences, and there was no need to split in the first place. From this example, the authors make it clear that simply organizing workers into a union will not solve the problems that need to be addressed. According to them, many unions are formed without a real idea of what they want to accomplish - this leads them to wander aimlessly without purpose, not really representing their workers or the ideal they are supposed to advocate.

The authors state that " the United States has never had a true labor movement, only a segmented struggle of workers" 1. The union culture is so established and so ingrained in American workers that it is difficult, if not impossible to derail. This is unfortunate, because the culture itself favors

strict segmentation that mostly favors their own type of worker. Most unions are leftist, pragmatist, or traditionalist; while the unions will argue that they are meant to advocate for all workers, in reality they just advocate for their own. There are leftist leaders that actually dedicate themselves to this goal, but they are few and far between.

In order to fix these problems, Fletcher and Gapasin advocate for social unionism; they want to see individual labor unions as representative of a bigger social movement, which works politically to see to the needs of all workers. As it stands now, most unions simply look after their members; this is counterproductive to a greater net effect on labor laws in this country. Fletcher and Gapasin place a very large emphasis on leftism as the solution to many of the labor movement's problems, but there a relative lack of analysis regarding where ideologies like theirs originate, and what causes many leftists to change into pragmatists.

One subject that Fletcher and Gapasin examine deeply is the topic of globalization. In today's expanding world, unions must learn more about what drives globalization in order to keep their jobs, and to maintain greater change. They also link the current difficulties labor unions are experiencing to a cumulative increase in authoritarianism present in the American spirit. Ever since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been tremendous resistance to social movements, leading to the authoritarianism present in the " war on drugs." This need for control escalated after 9/11, leading the elite within the United States to take a more unilateral approach to neoliberal issues like

worker's rights<sup>2</sup>. Increased conservatism, essentially, is blamed for the lack of progress US labor unions have experienced in the past few decades.

The overall thesis of Fletcher and Gapasin's book is that there is no real perception in the US labor movement of class struggles, and that the labor movement failed as a social movement. Instead of providing greater equality for a larger number of individuals, it merely represented the members of these labor forces. In that respect, these initiatives are not particularly effective either. According to them, the union framework requires a total overhaul in order to have a greater sense of solidarity and advocacy for its members.

In order to achieve this framework, " social/political blocs" must be created within the working class, which can exact social justice and organize entire cities " rather than simply organizing workplaces (or industries)" <sup>3</sup>. This extends the fight for social rights beyond just the members of the union, but for all citizens as well. Central labor councils (CLCs) are denoted as the primary means for building these blocs, as they have roots in working class communities, giving them the means for both union and social justice advocacy. Overall, the labor movement must be the concept that is politically advanced, not just labor unions. In this book, Fletcher and Gapasin advocate for a radical leftist change in the nature of labor union organization, bringing in a much more united front to accomplish real social change and advocacy.

## **Works Cited**

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