

11-1-2011

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Recommended Citation

Kranz, Susanne Ph.D. (2011) "Rohini Hensman. *Workers, Unions, and Global Capitalism: Lessons from India*. Columbia University Press. 2011.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 3: No. 1, Article 21.

DOI: 10.62608/2158-0669.1081

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol3/iss1/21>

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Rohini Hensman. *Workers, Unions, and Global Capitalism: Lessons from India*. Columbia University Press. 2011.

Rohini Hensman, writer, researcher and activist based in India has published widely on numerous topics including women's and labor rights, minorities, unionism and many more. Hensman's *Workers, Unions, and Global Capitalism: Lessons from India* embarks on a differently approached discussion of globalization and its impact on workers and labor movements. Globalization has obtained a harmful reputation and tends to be blindly blamed for developments from increasing unemployment, decline of working conditions, sexual harassment, and fewer workers' rights. Hensman's main argument as mentioned in the preface of this volume is "that deglobalization was neither possible nor desirable but that the dominant neoliberal model of globalization was both unjust and unsustainable" (ix). As a part of the labor movement in Bombay Hensman contributes first-hand experiences to *Workers, Unions, and Global Capitalism* which makes this a valuable resource for labor historians, South Asianists, economists as well as political scientists and activists. She substantiates her argument with interviews of workers, publications of various unions and legal documents.

Globalization has turned into a synonym for "inequality and oppression" (p. 1), nevertheless, the author argues that deglobalization would further weaken and deteriorate the position of workers on a global scale. In addition, she calls on local and international labor movements and global solidarity in order to prevent global crises like in 2008. Workers and only workers with their movements and unions are the ones who are capable of providing lasting changes within the framework of this globalized world. During her work as part of the Union Research Group in Bombay she and the laborers the group worked with realized the interdependence between them and the consumers as well as the similarities of their lived experiences with that of workers across the globe. The idea is "to formulate a global strategy for labor" and to think "globally even when acting locally" (p. 3). According to Hensman, "the central argument of this book, then, is that globalization itself cannot be reversed any more than the industrial revolution could have been reversed, but the *politics* of globalization constitutes terrain that can and must be contested by workers and unions if the world economy is to emerge from deep crisis. Therefore a global strategy for labor would require that workers not oppose globalization but fight for their own politics, a politics based on global solidarity and democracy, to shape the process" (p. 4).

Hensman draws on the Indian labor and union movements as a positive and negative example for other countries especially since India represents a unique model of union history and a very fragmented labor market. India has one of the highest if not the highest rate of informal workers, most of which are not registered for employment; therefore are not granted legal contracts and protection of workers' rights despite a large variety of trade unions. To strengthen her argument Hensman emphasizes that the labor movement in India and its problems existed long before the onset of globalization. In her first chapter Hensman explains her research methodology: "The book is an account of emancipatory action research" which is based on the author's assessment that there is a "need for a deeper and more extensive critical enquiry into the practice of this movement, one taking into account changes in the overall context resulting from globalization" (p. 9). Hensman investigates two kinds of workers and the impact of globalization on both; informal and formal workers.

Chapter two attempts a definition of globalization and concludes that globalization is a new phase in the development of capitalism. Hensman approaches globalization from different angles, like globalization as capitalism, globalization as imperialism and globalization as neoliberalism, and comes to the conclusion that globalization is "an emerging phase of capitalism" (p. 62), and that a global economy existed long before discussions on globalization became fashionable and the idea of globalization scapegoat. In India, the right

and the left oppose globalization despite the fact that they perceive the concept from different viewpoints. Chapter three highlights the four sources of the global crisis of 2008. Hensman discusses the impact of neoliberal policies, financial-market deregulation, the U.S. currency and very importantly excessive military spending (p. 63) and how these aspects affected different countries and laborers. She concludes that “globalization was not the cause of the crisis; on the contrary, it offers a crucially important means of overcoming the crisis by making it possible to clear away the toxic legacy of a period dominated by militaristic imperialism and nationalism” (p. 85).

In chapter four the author explores the trade union movement in India as compared to the rest of the world. Hensman “argues that globalization reduces the power of individual states to protect labor rights but creates the conditions for member states of the WTO to protect workers’ rights collectively” (p. 7). In addition, she explains that labor rights or the denial of labor rights in India were based on state ideology preceding globalization. Hensman discusses different forms of labor organizations, for instance, workers’ unions, workers’ cooperatives and other elements of the movement like strike committees and gender-based organizations (p. 94), and compares the trade union movements in India, and Bombay in particular, with other parts of the world. She concludes the chapter with the notion that “workers need to take steps to revitalize their movements and organizations, and that too needs to be done in solidarity with workers in other countries” (p. 114).

Chapter five emphasizes the importance of trade union democracy and similar to the following chapters examines ways in which the international labor movement can improve working conditions. In this chapter the exemplary role of India presents itself very clearly. Union democracy signifies the tool to improve workers’ conditions and places a remarkable amount of power in the hands of the labor movement. Chapter six discusses all facets of informal employment that existed in India well before the arrival of globalization and the spread of informal employment around the world. Hensman supports her argument with statistical background, as far as this is possible in the informal sector, and case studies like the garment industry in Bombay and the often discussed aspect of child labor, all of which undermine state democracy and union democracy at the same time.

Chapter seven draws attention to working women and reproductive labor. Hensman argues that “it goes along with a notion of the working class that ignored the work done in the house and with a notion of class struggle that marginalizes working-class women and children and fails to challenge the gender division of labor and relations of domination and subordination between men and women” (p. 22). Competition between men and women further hinder workers’ solidarity on a national and therefore international scale. Hensman summarizes “as in the case of union democracy, this is an issue that unions have to tackle if they are to gain the power they need to confront the challenges of globalization and the economic crisis” (p. 243). Chapter eight underlines employment creation and welfare programs from the Indian and an international perspective. Hensman mentions several employment creating schemes like microcredit schemes and producer cooperatives and welfare related aspects of food security, healthcare, retirement benefits and housing. In chapter nine, she talks about international strategies to prevent and/or convert the negative effects of globalization in order to improve living and working conditions of workers around the world. The idea of international solidarity is taken up again in this part and increased emphasis is placed on the fact that workers in the Third and the First World suffer from dilapidated working and living conditions making solidarity more indispensable than ever. Hensman demonstrates on the example of Bombay the forms of international solidarity and how the laborers and unions worked with and for international cooperation.

Chapter ten serves as conclusion and summary and accentuates again the need for a global approach of workers and labor movements to tackle globalization. Hensman’s hope for this book was “that this analysis of global labor from the perspective of a crucially important

section of it will contribute to a better understanding of globalization, and especially to a realization that workers can and do play a role in shaping the process. [...] realizing this potential depends on the ability of workers throughout the world to build bonds of solidarity across existing divisions and elaborate a strategy synthesizing the interests of all sections of the global labor force” (p. 8). Throughout *Workers, Unions, and Global Capitalism* the author relies heavily on Marx and his ideas of workers and union movements without putting Marx into the context of his time, nevertheless she manages to relate Marx’s theories to the contemporary world and its problems including globalization. She proves her theses with a well-structured and argued methodology and clean organization of the content of this volume. Her own experience adds authenticity to this long needed discussion and definition of globalization and the actual impact of globalization on workers around the world.

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