

Nicola Pizzolato.

*Challenging Global Capitalism: Labor Migration, Radical Struggle, and Urban Change in Detroit and Turin.*

New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 268 pp. \$85.00

*Challenging Global Capitalism* was undoubtedly the best Transatlantic labor history book published last year. The book is invaluable on a number of levels. It is urban, comparative, and transnational, chronicling both the Motor City and *la città dell'auto* in the context of transatlantic transfers of technology, management techniques, and radical working-class strategies of resistance. On the most basic level, the book links the monumental struggles of autoworkers in Detroit and Turin from the late 1950s to the great student-worker upsurge of 1968 and the early 1970s strike waves. At a deeper level, it offers an excellent exposition of “Fordism” as it developed, shaped, expanded, and reshaped the automotive industry in conjunction with the broader political economy of the two locations, and, in turn, influenced urban change and social protest. Most interestingly, the book draws on the writings of Antonio Gramsci and the Johnson-Forest Tendency (mostly through Martin Glaberman) for theorization, using the revolutionaries’ own words to describe Fordist processes and working-class resistance on both sides of the Atlantic.

The majority of the book focuses on Detroit from 1967-1973 and Turin from 1969-1975. In these years it details both shop-floor and citywide workers struggles, as well as highlighting the growth of radical left organizations, struggles within unions, and the creation of new independent worker organizations. Sections of the book serve as an excellent English-language primer on the Fiat Strikes in the “Hot Autumn” of 1969 in Turin Italy. While histories are now being written in Italian and French (eg- Diégo and Marco Scavinós’ *La FIAT aux mains des ouvriers. L’automne chaud de 1969 à Turin*, 2005), there is a paucity of literature on the subject in English. The book also complements existing studies of Detroit in the period including Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin’s *Detroit I Do Mind Dying* and Heather Ann Thompson’s *Whose Detroit?* To these works it adds a stronger explanation of Fordism. Using a comparative and transatlantic perspective, and detailing transfers of technology and labor regimes the book provides a deeper-rooted materialist framework for the worker resistance.

One key argument in the book is that the experience of marginalization was a key stimulus to the worker upsurge of late 1960s and early 1970s in both Detroit and Turin. The labor regime of Fordism (and hereto all forms of capitalism) forces class composition and re-composition. In the decades predating the worker upsurges, African Americans from the black belt south and *Mezzogiorno* from Sicily, Calabria, Campania, and Puglia journeyed north, became embedded in a dual labor market, where they found jobs in the “competitive” (read precarious, low-wage) sector where they lacked the “political clout of the employees in the ‘monopoly’ sector of big corporations” (45). Marginal workers were attracted to industrial jobs, but benefitted least from the system of industrial relations. Rising expectations of the working class coupled with brutal exploitation laid the groundwork for worker uprisings. Older workers whose unions came from the last upsurge mounted a defensive struggle. Yet the method and scope of their struggle was limited to their tie to inflexible business unions, which had, by then, long abandoned shop-floor direct action. The newer workers were marginal, but were less integrated into the union bureaucracy, and were not as tethered to the Fordist system which they benefitted

less from. These workers self-consciously organized, drawing liberally from their own categories of experience, including race, ethnicity, and class.

Pizzolato argues that Fordism is a global phenomenon but one usually experienced by worker a local level. Capital has a global logic and individual capitalists and firms engage in alliances even when they are competitors. But auto manufacturers was not the only level which transatlantic alliances occurred. Unions, as well as the radical resisters of capitalism, built their own alliances. Various forms of collaboration between students and industrial workers built into a wider process of social mobilization with a character which Wallerstien and others have called “antisystemic” objectives. This class struggle was not only reactive but visionary; workers self-consciously pushed for reconfiguration of the work itself.

In the end, workers in Turin were able to build their militant strikes into stronger unions by leveraging the state welfare apparatus to ameliorate the worst impacts of deindustrialization and job loss of the 1980s. In the U.S., the militancy of 1968-1975 was unable to dislodge the Administration Caucus in the UAW. Capital flight hollowed out Detroit, leaving black workers trapped in the structural unemployment of a dilapidated inner city while white suburban workers had access to the more capital-intensive plants built in the suburbs.

The book has a few obvious flaws. It is uneven in both chapter lengths and its detailing of each level of transfer. The Preface is somewhat timely in that it references Occupy Wall Street and the movement of the squares, but the Series Editor in his Forward makes two unsubstantiated and empirically incorrect claims: “the volume is unique in that it makes a comparison...of two cities during the turbulent 1960s” and “labor history has not yet been a serious subject of study in the framework of transnational history.” Pizzolato omits the period of World War II, but additional analysis of the role of Fascist unions in Italy and the no strike clause in the US would have strengthened the book. Lastly, while the book follows the fate of the two city’s administrations and economies through the 1980s, it fails to chronicle workers and organizations of the left past middle 1970s.

*Challenging Global Capitalism* is nothing less than a worker-centered entangled history of late Fordism. It manages to include multiple levels of analysis: of capital (history of the transfer of technology, managerial method) of government (regulatory regimes and city planners), and the proletariat (circulation of workers’ ideas and struggles at the factories and city halls and within the unions and left organizations).

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A version of this review has been submitted to *Against the Current* magazine.