

BOOK REVIEW

Unions and the City: Negotiating Urban Change, Edited by Ian Thomas MacDonald, New York: Cornell University Press, 2017, \$44.95 CAD Paper. ISBN: 9781501706820. Pages: 1-248.

Reviewed by Duncan MacLellan¹

Ian MacDonald's introduction contextualizes the struggles unions are experiencing across North America but views "...cities and suburbs as great laboratories of labour renewal" (p.1). The eight chapters that comprise the core of this book examine the social, political, and economic contributions of selected unions in New York and Toronto. These two cities share similar histories but also sufficient dissimilarities, which is helpful to understand the impact of these labour unions. The four sectors (film, hospitality, green energy, and child care) enrich our knowledge of unions at the urban and suburban levels.

The authors comprise a team of United States and Canadian experts that span a wealth of scholarly labour studies. The subject matter of this book will appeal to a wide audience of readers, because the themes address the intersection of labour with the hospitable city, the creative city, the sustainable city, and the caring city. The book's structure enables readers to focus on one or more of the themes. This volume arrives at a time of complex Canadian and American trade issues, and this work reminds us that many unions are struggling to maintain what they have worked tirelessly to achieve for their members and to stop the erosion of these hard fought employee gains. As MacDonald notes. "[t]he place of unions in urban politics has received scant attention until relatively recently" (p13). This edited volume demonstrates that unions have become sites that incorporate important employment concerns but also endeavor to educate their members about the growing complexity of social, economic, and political issues in urban and suburban settings that will affect the role unions play in the 21st century.

The two chapters that comprise the "Hospitable City", examine the impact of developers in New York and Toronto wanting to rezone property, more specifically in New York's hotel sector and in Toronto's gaming sector. In the New York case, unions are determined to ensure new hotels constructed in East Midtown continue to offer fair wage and benefits to employees. In the Toronto case, the push to construct a casino is supported by unions from across the spectrum because of the potential jobs created; however, unions are pitted against one another in the fight to ensure casino workers are unionized. The successful strategy in New York relies on compromises that emerge from previous encounters. The Toronto chapter demonstrates the existence of a fragmented labour environment that results in an unsuccessful casino proposal.

Labour and the Creative City offers case studies of film production in New York and defending studio space in Toronto. The New York case relates to which unions are to receive the distribution film and television tax incentives. In Toronto, the case revolves around labour's role in opposing a large-scale redevelopment proposal to replace the Toronto Film Studio with a Walmart-led retail mall. The New York case leads to tensions emerging over the need to use public

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funds to support an already profitable industry, combined with a clear lack of diversity in the film industry. Recognizing both of these issues leads to an examination of how to address these concerns more constructively. Toronto's final decision not to rezone the property under contention, thereby protects important media production jobs at this site.

The two green-energy themed chapters identify the challenges and tensions that emerge in relation to dealing with environmental policy, environmental justice, and the sustainability of green jobs. Growing concerns with the impact of climate change becomes the basis for selected labour and community groups to join forces to support viable green jobs. These two chapters provide important insights to help unions to continue to build coalitions across different interests. The scale of environmental problems will likely become more pressing in the coming decades, thereby providing opportunities for different interests to work together to create a more environmentally sustainable future.

The final two case studies focus on labour, specifically child care. The issue of child care has a long record of many unfulfilled promises for parents, guardians, and child care workers. Defining the situation as a 'care crisis' (p.167) is an accurate description. The persistent presence of neo-liberal policies in New York and Toronto undermines the ability of unions to support high quality child care services and to represent the pressing employment needs of child care workers. The ongoing ability of child care sector unions to reach across to community groups and apply their combined pressure will demonstrate how important these issue are to building a society that aims to benefit its citizens more broadly.

This important collection investigates the critical policy contributions urban and suburban unions can play to help improve the quality of life for present and future unionized workers in New York and Toronto. As cities continue to grow in size and become more complex places to govern effectively, the need for unions to continue to broaden their relationships to include community groups and build strategic allies, will become more important. The scholars who contributed to this volume provide an important blueprint for expanding the role of unions to help promote urban policy that includes a strong focus on social justice in these settings and beyond.