

COMMUNITY CHANGE

Book Review

McAlevy, Jane F 2016. *“No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age 1st Edition.”* New York: Oxford University Press

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Trade unions across countries are believed by many to be facing an existential crisis due to factors that many of us may not yet fully comprehend. Relentless fighting for decent jobs and fair wages for factory workers in developing countries, to the struggle of immigration reforms for immigrant workers in developed countries, greatly hinge on unions' credible existence. McAlevy thus makes an important and timely contribution with her systematic analysis of the rise and fall of trade unions, especially in the United States. The book provides thorough assessments drawn upon a mixed data inquiry using participant observations and semi-structured interviews with rank and file workers, civil society leaders, and members of local media organizations in addition to the writer's long-standing experience as a field organizer. McAlevy takes a far more critical stance toward the faltering trajectory of various progressive movements, which to some extent is informed by scholars' misinterpretations of why workplace fights are necessary.

McAlevy's hypothesis is threefold. First, she articulates that there is a significant shift from deep organizing (i.e members' high level of engagement, focuses on developing organic leaders, and undertakes strikes to disrupt production) to shallow mobilizing (i.e low level of participation, centralizes on finding pro-union activists, and no/few implementation of strikes). Second, there is a keen separation between labor and social movement. Lastly, she argues that gross inequality of power in the United States can only be challenged by organizing, rather than mobilizing or advocacy. Organizing means broadening the engagement among a mass of people who were never previously involved in a movement, and may consider themselves as non-activists. Advocacy, on the other hand, does not involve ordinary people and is mostly organized by professionals. McAlevy includes lawyers, pollsters, researchers, and communication firms in this group. Mobilizing is a substantial improvement from advocacy in terms of the quantity of participants who are engaged in the process, yet it remains similar in terms of group characteristics. The analysis of power structures, strategies, and the engagement among members of unions are always inextricably relevant to answering how a progressive movement can achieve its main goal: "the more people, the more power" (McAlevy 2016, 14). This book proposes ways to overcome such challenges through the analysis of

different sets of practices. Most importantly, it provides a clear call for a critical perspective that, despite unions' extraordinary pressures, we can defeat staggering workplace inequalities by embracing the original bottom-up organizing model – known as Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO)-era model—and strengthening the labor-community coalitions, even though “there are no shortcuts” (McAlevy 2016, 213) for any liberal movements.

McAlevy opens the book with an introduction to the discernable characteristics between the CIO organizing model versus the modern mobilizing model. Concisely tracing the idea that workers' agency is primary, hence, it is also their own lever of liberation, McAlevy describes the virtues of organizing which include organizing collective actions, achieving highly-collaborative approaches, and selecting truly organic leaders. Moreover, she argues that some events, such as World War II, the increasing division in the American left and Stalinism, and the market agglomeration and conglomeration, have been successfully warded off and significantly weaken the power of organizing. Taking an intersectionality perspective among socio-economics and politics, she emphasizes that the power to overcome challenges is in the community, and not the boardroom of corporate agencies. One particular strength of this book is the way McAlevy entwines the stories of numerous workers' movements across America (including the organizing actors) and locates them within the context of American politics.

The book is composed of seven chapters, each with the goal of analyzing the ways in which the shift from deep organizing to shallow advocacy and from collective bargaining into individual-based action contribute to the inefficacy of labor unions. In Chapter 3, *Nursing Home Unions: Class Snuggle vs. Class Struggle*, McAlevy is particularly supportive of the importance of the 1199NE advocacy method where “neutrality agreements are won by worker power and negotiated across the bargaining table” (McAlevy 2016, 88), meaning that no workers are left behind in the transparent and collaborative decision-making process. Most importantly, “a key to victory [...] is that the workers see *themselves* as the union” (McAlevy 2016, 89). In the fourth chapter, she discusses the building block for a resilient union by using the example of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) which effectively used the strike weapon despite grueling political attacks from internal and external unions. This chapter is essential in the sense that it rigorously illustrates a resurgence of the power exercise model experienced by CTU in collaboration with community members, and the extent to which other workers' unions in the country could effectively use this method. Despite the harsh political scrutiny from the government and intricate internal politics within CTU, teachers-parents-community collaborations in most of the strikes organized by the union were a great testament to the crucial role of broad. Although not all of the union's requisitions to the government were accomplished, CTU's organized strikes made history by achieving the outcomes favorable to teachers including a pay raise and the strip of merit pay system invoked by the Illinois state government.

In the fifth chapter, McAlevy describes the case of workers in Smithfield food processing factories where workers, who are mostly Latino and African American, were illegally fired and repeatedly defeated in their attempts to unionize. The author describes another facet of building the power of unionship where workers engage with faith leaders in the community after a series of failures. McAlevy builds a more personal connection to the reader by highlighting stories of several courageous individuals who were fired and

returned to the company to build a stronger workers coalition. McAlevey's main argument is that new and determined workers' leaders developed within and outside the factory walls can be accomplished when a union strategically engages with the broader community.

In Chapter 6, *Make the Road New York*, McAlevey describes the entity, Make the Road New York (MRNY). She claims MRNY as the largest nonunion membership organization with 15,000 dues-paying immigrant members and 155 full-time staff. Besides providing the organization's strategies in organizing, McAlevey describes three determinants for its significant victories in representing the rights of immigrants, the impoverished population, and underrepresented groups in the city. These include favorable political environment that makes New York a fertile ground for workers' unions, social democratic tradition rooted in its labor history, and a relatively immigrant-friendly political culture. As in the collective-democracy organization, MRNY adopts "a detailed and transparent decision-making process" (McAlevey 2016, 194) where decisions are drawn from members' consensus and the personal attributes of the individual are minimized. One fundamental question posed by McAlevey that is worth further analysis is whether this kind of advocacy model can sustainably produce positive outcomes if the unions it relies on get weaker.

In the remainder of this book, McAlevey highlights important conclusions. First, organizing (instead of mobilizing and advocacy) as an approach empowers workers to connect the dots between the critical employer-employee relationship, solidarity-affirming movement, and the larger system they attempt to challenge. Deep workers-communities organizing model "constructs a kind of solidarity that persists long after the employer's war and when done well" (McAlevey 2016, 202). Second, mobilizing is not a substitute for organizing. In other word a top-down research based negotiation cannot replace the efficacy of progressive movements through unionship. Third, the bottom-up organizing model is required to revive dying unions. McAlevey asserts that it "encourages and equips workers to resist the multifaceted assault on their interests inside and outside the workplace" (McAlevey 2016, 212).

This timely work should be required reading for trade unionists, members of collective-democracy organizations, and social justice and gender studies scholars. It is also an accessible resource for undergraduate and graduate students of public policy and government affairs who are interested in studying the impact of global political turmoil and conspicuous consumption habits toward the protection of workers' rights around the globe. Furthermore, McAlevey covers such an enormous amount of ground in trade union movements, it makes this publication a useful resource for comparative studies in labor movements using cases outside the United States.