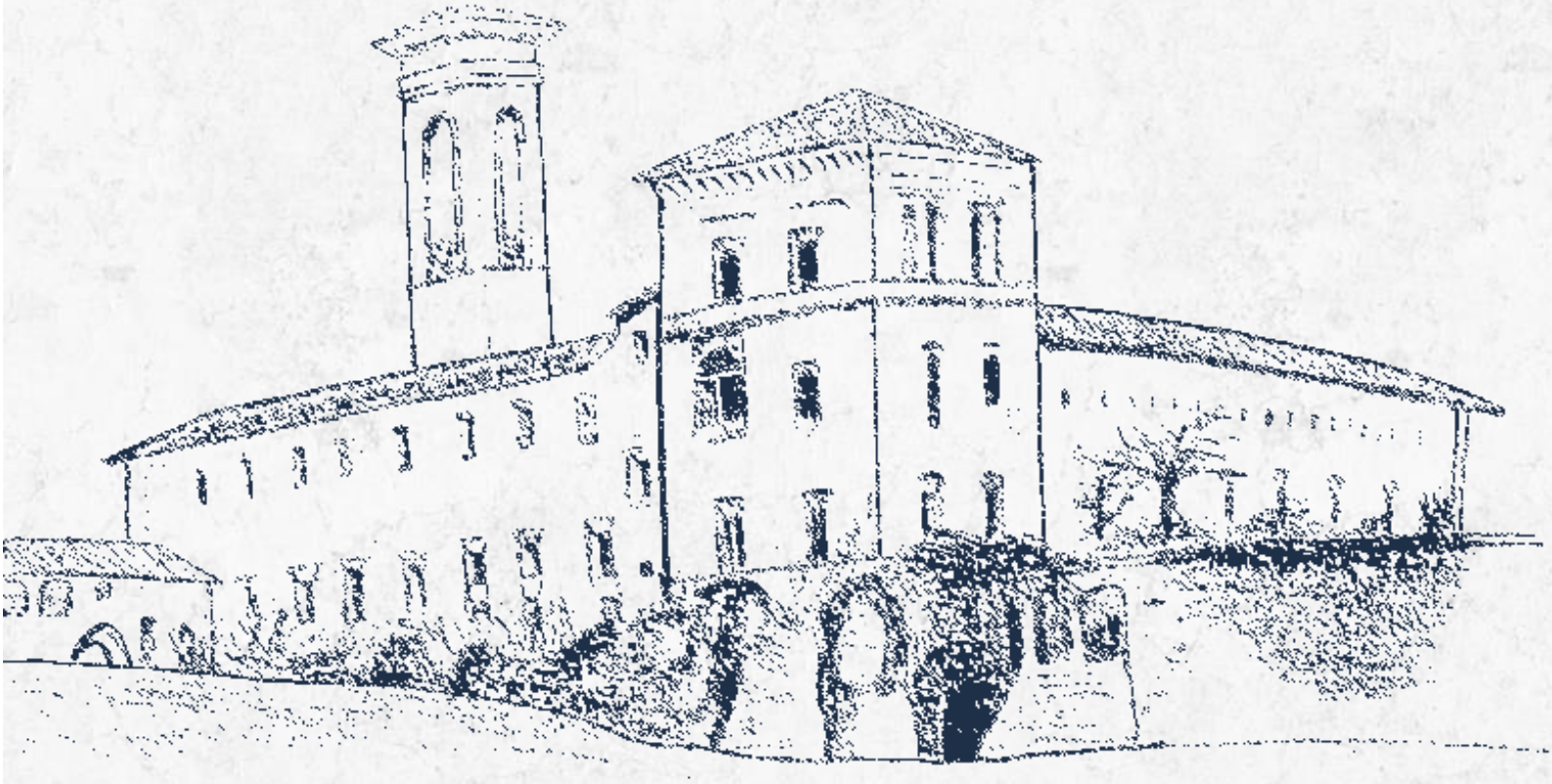
OPEN ACCESS
ISSN 2280-4056

E-Journal of International and Comparative

LABOUR STUDIES

Volume 7, No. 2, May - June 2018



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E-Journal of International and Comparative **LABOUR STUDIES**

ADAPT *International School of Higher Education in Labour and Industrial Relations*

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Online Publication of the ADAPT Series
Registration No. 1609, 11 November 2001, Court of Modena
www.adaptbulletin.eu

Reconstructing Solidarity: Labour Unions, Precarious Work, and the Politics of Institutional Change in Europe, edited by Virginia Doellgast, Nathan Lillie, and Valeria Pulignano. A Review.

Kaitlyin Stevens [1]

There is no doubt that the ramifications of the economic crisis are still rippling across Europe. Perhaps one of its most profound legacies that continues to pose a problem, however, is the rise in precarious workers, who are employed in jobs characterized by low pay, short-term employment and general instability (p.1). According to *Reconstructing Solidarity: Labour Unions, Precarious Work, and the Politics of Institutional Change in Europe,* "these jobs are widely viewed as either symptoms or causes of rising inequality, poverty, and reduced economic and social mobility" (p. 1), all of which have been results of the recession as well as the austerity measures used to mitigate it – except that these measures, in fact, only exacerbated these issues (p. 42). Furthermore, jobs of this nature are disproportionately held by migrant workers, both from the European Union and beyond it, as the EU allows for workers to move across borders and the recent immigration crisis has seen an influx of non-European workers to boot (p. 188). What these migrant workers have in common, regardless of their origins, is that they are particularly susceptible to precarious employment, and more pressingly, as this book points out, they are less likely to be included in solidarity strategies led by the unions of the host country.

Success among unions rely heavily on solidarity – not only solidarity among native-born workers, but *all* workers. Segregation or exclusion can negatively impact worker protection, contrary to the very intent of these labour unions, because "[w]here core workers do not show solidarity with vulnerable workers,

[1] ADAPT Intern, Arcadia University (USA).

they often undermine their own bargaining power through creating lower-cost competition" (p. 1). As the title of this book suggests, this solidarity merely needs a "reconstruction" of sorts – one that takes into account the socioeconomic changes that affect the current workforce – so that unions can once again be the strength and voice of the working class. Edited by Virginia Doellgast, Nathan Lillie, and Valeria Pulignano, the authors in this anthology examine successes and failures of solidarity movements across multiple job sectors, including retail, logistics, freelance musicians, and the slaughterhouse industry. The book deftly handles a variety of industries and how they approach the persistent issue of precarious employment, thereby constructing a comparison that allows the readers to view this topic with a broad, international perspective that keeps in mind the differences in how each sector and each country operates. In this way, the impact of inclusive union solidarity vs. the impact of excluding precarious or migrant workers becomes astoundingly clear.

For some cases, it is simply a matter of solidarity that requires reconstruction, such as with Danish Crown – a meat-processing company from Denmark – and its locations in Germany. Solidarity is strong at the national level in Denmark and includes migrants in its bargaining, meaning that employees of Danish Crown there were less susceptible to exploitation than they were in Germany (pp. 69-71). With this contrast, one can gauge how by not segregation, unions can facilitate the exploitation of their own workers, as well as how international companies will use these discrepancies to their advantage. Sometimes it is unions that are unable to acknowledge the necessity of this reconstruction that create obstacles. For instance, traditional unions in the logistics sector in Italy – a sector which has not had a long history of unionization – do not encompass migrants and have not adapted their tactics to the current social climate. Yet where these rigidly-structured unions failed in this regard, grassroot unions in Italy proved to be more flexible in strategy and mobilization, and this has actually helped them in collective bargaining, since this allows these groups to be more inclusive (pp. 95-99).

As a whole, this book is an excellent analysis of solidarity movements and how they have altered their strategies in order to adapt to the threat of segregation. Segregation is harmful to the goals of any union because without the proper means of protection, precarious workers will be unlikely to oppose unsafe or unfair conditions – and if there are workers who are willing to put up with whatever conditions the employer provides, then they will not feel pressured to abide by the demands of the other employees. With industries becoming increasingly multicultural in the wake of globalization, ensuring that unification remains a major facet in collective bargaining efforts becomes more vital than ever. Moreover, this book provides examples for how unions who have yet to

adapt their strategies can achieve this reconstruction by illustrating the progress of groups who have succeeded by embracing the rights of every employee, regardless of their origin; contrarily, it demonstrates how failing to be inclusive results in losses for all employees, not only those engaged in precarious work. For without unions that are comprehensive and nondiscriminatory in terms of solidarity, precarious workers continue to suffer in industries that seeks to capitalize on the insecurity of their positions.

Adapt International Network

ADAPT is a non-profit organisation founded in 2000 by Prof. Marco Biagi with the aim of promoting studies and research in the field of labour law and industrial relations from an international and comparative perspective. Our purpose is to encourage and implement a new approach to academic research, by establishing ongoing relationships with other universities and advanced studies institutes, and promoting academic and scientific exchange programmes with enterprises, institutions, foundations and associations. In collaboration with the Centre for International and Comparative Studies on Law, Economics, Environment and Work, (DEAL) the Marco Biagi Department of Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, ADAPT set up the International School of Higher Education in Labour and Industrial Relations, a centre of excellence which is accredited at an international level for research, study and postgraduate programmes in the area of industrial and labour relations. Further information at *www.adapt.it*.

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