

BOOK REVIEWS:

Barndt, Deborah 2002. *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail*. Aurora: Garamond Press, 255p.

In Deborah Barndt's *Tangled Routes: Women, Work, and Globalization on the Tomato Trail*, the author examines concepts old and new in an innovative, creative and thoroughly engaging manner by mixing a strong writing style with a series of contextualising photographs. The thought-provoking images included in this text are invaluable to the overall learning experience provided by the impressive multifaceted narrative. The combination of powerful real-life images and moving interviews thoughtfully obtained and diligently assembled from a group of women geographically separated by thousands of miles and two international borders effectively details the shared process of marginalisation that accompanies the evolution of global capital. It also shows how these women are inextricably linked by their roles in a process that serves to negate the importance of considerations of race and gender while threatening their livelihoods. These women openly share their stories of work and the effects of global processes and gender-based ideologies on their lives in an important and effective dialogue.

Barndt considered utilising a commodity other than the tomato for this work, but finally chose to develop the study around a food item. What we

eat shapes us physically, emotionally and culturally in a manner that is more compelling than most non-consumable items and this allows for a considerably more engaging analysis than other items might provide. By commodifying the tomato and following its path from point of origin to point of consumption, Barndt successfully sheds light on the depth of the effects of globalisation on women and their work in a manner that is both intellectually stimulating and emotionally descriptive. Perhaps more importantly, she is able to achieve this level of analysis without negating the importance of the historical underpinnings of these phenomena, or the problematic nature of these concepts for males in the work force.

Barndt is a widely published author and photographer as well as a social justice activist on an international scale. These attributes combined with her experience as an educator have led to the development of an excellent interdisciplinary text that is equally useful inside and outside the classroom. This text would be a valued resource in courses including women's studies, economics, political science, cultural studies, geography and environmental studies. It would also be especially useful to sub-fields of sociology including work, gender issues, family, culture, social inequality, social problems, race & ethnicity and methodology. Furthermore, this text is equally accessible to the 'novice' and the 'expert'. Utilising a style that is neither

condescending nor cliché, Barndt presents difficult concepts in an approach that is satisfying to both parties. Exposition is interwoven into the text in a manner that educates the 'novice' while contextualising the author's conceptual framework for the 'expert'.

While *Tangled Routes* can certainly be best described as a complementary text rather than a foundational tool for instruction, it is not merely a supplemental text. By contrast, many other works flounder in their attempt to humanise the issues so lucidly put forth by Barndt. The combination of case study analysis and photo essay provides the rich, thick data to which appropriately completed qualitative studies are best suited. Barndt is not only concerned with what her subjects know and have to share with us, but how and why they know it. This notion of a contextualising relationism allows for the construction of a truly meaningful and practical presentation that respects both reader and subject(s). Theoretically, the book is structured around a political conflict approach and often relies on commodity chain analysis. This straightforward approach to the issues at hand results in a text that is fully accessible without sacrificing its intellectual value and importance.

In the first two chapters, Barndt provides the reader with a conceptual and methodological framework and contextualises the upcoming chapters with some historical analysis. In chapters three, four, five and six, she presents the case studies that constitute the foundation, or in Barndt's own words, "the heart" of the text. More

specifically, chapter three details the hegemonic nature of cultural ideologies while chapter four outlines the contemporary trends of 'flexible' labour and the effects of technology on the modern workplace. Chapter five notes the importance of transit systems and infrastructure to globalisation in North America and offers insight into the phenomenon of migrant workers. Chapter six then introduces us to the idea of the "corporate tomato," a commodity produced almost exclusively for consumption in so-called first world nations at the expense of their third world counterparts. Chapters seven and eight describe forms of resistance that have grown out of the earlier discussed processes. Finally, Barndt briefly summarises the connections made during the course of her work assembling this text in an epilogue that is both affecting and pertinent while demonstrating the realism that makes this text so valuable. The text also features a useful and well thought out index.

Barndt became intimately familiar with her subjects and how ideas of gender, work and globalisation impact upon them separately and in concert to a remarkable depth. She was thereby able to effectively share that depth of analysis and knowledge with the reader. In a world of texts that are too quickly becoming superficial and/or inaccessible to a broad audience, this book stands head-and-shoulders above the crowd. It humanises considerations of culture, ideology, work, gender and economics that all too often neglect or negate the irreplaceable human elements.

While some might assert that Barndt oversimplifies the situation by reducing considerations of gender, work and globalisation to the 'mere' tomato, the author herself states this concern and reminds the reader that the tomato serves simply as a point of entry into the broader subject matter at hand. This is signified by the thoughtful title of the text. Barndt utilises this particular point of entry masterfully and pertinently. The tomato and its tumultuous journey from Mexico to Canada is successfully developed as a metaphor for society and economic reality in the 20th and 21st centuries and very lucidly provides for the consideration of the negotiation and collaboration of relationships including the interaction of factors related to economic, gender and work issues

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Burke, Bev, Jo Jo Geronimo, D'Arcy Martin, Barb Thomas and Carol Wall 2003. *Educating for Changing Unions*. Toronto: *Between the Lines*, 277p.

"Head, heart, feet" is an activity you may remember if you have been to a union educational. You draw a body outline on paper, then write down three things you got from the experience: a new idea, a feeling, and an action or skill you can use.

Here is my experience of *Educating for Changing Unions*. My head has a tickle trunk of new activities for workshops, my heart is full of enthusiasm, and my toes are already tapping to the beat of liberation

learning.

This book feels alive with ideas and hope. It was written by five of the most experienced and creative labour educators in Canada, each part of a broader network of activists who build power through learning. In 1991, three of the authors were part of the team that released *Educating for a Change*, a book that has gained so much use by adult educators that most copies are threadbare. While similar to its predecessor in look and perspective, this book focuses on education within unions, and it draws on rich experiences gained in the ensuing years.

That wisdom – expressed with humility and honesty – is a gift to novice educators like me as well as to seasoned activists like a co-worker who says "I'm thrilled to bits to have our own book!"

What is in the thriller? The first section describes the union educator's role and environment, the second offers tips and tools for the trade, and the third challenges us to develop infrastructure and strategies for lasting impact. All are woven together by six guiding threads or values: community, democracy, equity, class-consciousness, organisation building, and the greater social good.

Part I tackles the educator's role in the vibrant world of unions and the context of a globalising economy. Chapter one presents a daunting yet exciting job description for the union educator, framing those responsibilities within the six Chinese elements: earth, water, wood, fire, metal and air. The spiritual imagery sets the tone for chapter two, where the authors describe why educators need both "art and

heart” to deal with the paradoxes of union culture. The examples of how educators have tapped into undercurrents of workers’ power in even the most difficult situations are a vivid depiction of the beauty and beastliness of union work. The third chapter urges educators to see union education through a “global lens,” offering up some analytical and hands-on tools for international solidarity.

Many readers will flip right to Part II. It presents the “spiral model” of popular education for workshops, conferences, meetings, research, campaigns and other undertakings. In both chapter 6 and an appendix, the authors share more than 30 of their favourite education activities, using a handy reference format with step-by-step instructions and tips for adapting to different audiences and occasions. The craft of facilitation is presented with equal depth and grace.

Part III takes a step back to view the broader impact of education in the labour movement. While grounded in a progressive framework, the authors do not stop at theory. They give us specific methods for evaluating our programs, supporting worker educators, and planning strategically. With criteria and pointers so concrete, the vision of robust union education seems within reach. To help us sustain that vision, the authors conclude with wonderful ideas for nurturing our rebel spirits with humour, art, and play. Concluding one of many inspiring stories of a political nightmare turned dreamy, the authors urge us to keep a long-range outlook: “We love it when scary stories have happy endings (p. 225).”

The storytelling in this book makes it engaging. The authors speak from the heart and show courage by airing mistakes (both their own and those of their organisations). They encourage educators to take risks and push their own learning edge. For every story, there are reflective moments and tips on “things to avoid” as well as “what worked”. The tips alone will keep me on my toes for another ten years.

The down-to-earth tone and practical tips, expressed as they are without jargon or judgement, also welcomed me as a new educator. It does not feel cliquish or intimidating. This invitation is particularly important in an organisational culture which can be fairly insular and where “we get more perks for smart talking than careful listening” (p. 136).

And who wouldn’t want to join this community, seeing how much fun we have? These educators appreciate the power of creativity and joy in social struggles. In a comment on the climate of “heaviness” and anger that suffuses union culture, the authors suggest using humour, even when “the troublemakers we are developing make trouble for us too” (p. 24). Our role, they write, is to “call on the rebel in workers, to work against the deadly seriousness of what we’re up against, and do it playfully” (p. 24).

The authors also dispel the popular social movement myth that joyful rebels with balanced lives aren’t true activists. Fighting for power exposes activists to bitter conflict, and social change educators lead people to discover “inner strengths” (p. 143) to sustain those battles. Staying balanced ourselves is

part of that responsibility. “Taking people’s pain seriously,” the authors suggest, “doesn’t mean being captured by it” (p. 25).

Union education is often dismissed as “touchy feely”, and educators have “uncertain authority” with participants, leaders and staff alike (p. 26). Popular education often gets boiled down to nifty ice breakers pasted onto conventional mini lectures and small group discussion. This book challenges us to practice social change education in its true sense of giving power to members. It also prompts unions to evaluate their work and to plan strategically, offering concrete steps for doing both. Just as education needs to be better integrated with research, policy development, organising, and campaigns, this book offers valuable tools for folks in those trades.

Anticipating this collective’s next project, I have a few questions bubbling up from my “head”:

- What should we consider when designing and facilitating educational events in bilingual settings?
- What conference or large plenary methods have proven effective?
- How do education challenges and strategies differ between unions, considering variables like public and private sector, degree of centralisation, geographic distribution, and diversity of membership?
- What are options for promoting and facilitating union education using the internet? Who’s blazing the trail, and what have they learned?

Union educators need a web-site where we share workshops and ideas, have space for mentoring, and build

community, much as *Educating for Changing Unions* does through print.

It would also be great to see more written about the paradoxes of our movement – for example, the homogenising pressure within the pursuit of solidarity or the deference to “experts” (usually staff) and the oppressor’s methods when we resist power-over.

More thrills await us as we take up the call to “abandon solid ground” (p. 20) in changing unions.

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Foner, Moe with Dan North 2002. *Not for Bread Alone: A Memoir* Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 142p.

I eagerly opened Moe Foner’s memoir, *Not for Bread Alone*, anticipating the story about the pioneer developer of union cultural programs and founder of the Bread and Roses cultural project of the New York City union of health and hospital workers, Local 1199. The excitement quickly turned to grief when the notes on the dust jacket reported Foner had died in early 2002, shortly after completing his memoirs with the aid of long-time colleague Dan North.

The forward by Ossie Davis, American actor, writer, producer, director and Foner’s long-time cultural collaborator, moved me to tears. In Davis’ words, the forward began as a prologue but became an obituary. It is a fond farewell to someone so deeply respected and enormously missed. Davis conjures up an image of himself, his wife, actress Ruby Dee and Foner

huddled together brainstorming the script of an original play to be performed for union members. A scene they played many times over the years as they developed plays dealing with events directly connected to the fight for civil rights and other struggles over time.

While Moe Foner is possibly best known for the cultural work he did with 1199, he was also an expert public relations strategist, brilliant at developing public sympathy and support for union causes. One of his strengths was his recognition of the importance of building broad community support for union struggles. In the first 1199 strike, he established public support for striking hospital workers before they had established the legal rights to collective bargaining. He skilfully gained support from racial and ethnic community newspapers as well as having the persistence to get support from mainstream newspaper editors. He reached out to develop understanding and community support among leaders of other movements for social change by arranging for Dr. Martin Luther King, Coretta Scott King and Malcolm X to speak to 1199 rallies.

Foner showed a lifelong commitment to social and economic justice, especially for workers of colour and low paid women workers who made up the majority of 1199's membership. In his earlier years working for 1199, he was fully committed to the civil rights movement, as well as to organising hospital workers in order to raise their wages, improve working conditions and hospital workers' rights. In his latter

years at 1199, well past the age most people retire, he worked full-time on the Bread and Roses cultural project of the union.

I got to know Foner during this period, when, in his late seventies, he still enjoyed coming to work every day full of enthusiasm and ideas for new projects. At the time, he was excited about the latest Bread and Roses project, *Women of Hope*, a poster series and educational package about African-American women leaders. It included beautiful posters of women who had made significant contributions to their fields. Also included were teaching guides providing information on each woman and how to use this material in a classroom. Foner was excited about the number of schools that ordered the packages and that the posters were to be enlarged for bus stop displays. There was tremendous interest in expanding the *Women of Hope* series to include posters and teaching guides on Latina and American Indian women.

Foner joined the labour movement in 1947 as the Education Director for Local 1250, one of New York's many department store unions at the time. He had been politically active for many years before that, growing up in a political family in the midst of the depression. As a young adult he was on the Left and like many of his friends he joined the Young Communist League around 1935 and became politically active on many issues. Unemployment, rising fascism, and public lynching in the South were compelling issues for Foner and many other young people. He describes his earliest political views: "We were young and optimistic. We

were sure the world was moving toward a more just society, a socialist society...We followed the San Francisco general strike in 1934, and the founding of the CIO and the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935. We applauded the rapid organising of the auto, steel and other basic industries in the late 1930s. We felt we were part of a world wide movement for social change, and we were willing to work hard to make it happen" (p. 16).

After five years with the department store union, the local merged with another and Foner was made responsible for education, social, and cultural programs. While there, he started a Saturday evening nightclub with free guest performers like Zero Mostel and Harry Belafonte. They also had a Saturday children's program that featured Pete Seeger and Woodie Guthrie. While this sounds like a great union job, I doubt that any union in Canada or the United States has a position like it today. Foner, now living in midst of New York's entertainment scene for over a decade, was able to involve leading artists move union life beyond bulletins, leaflets, labour history, and union education classes.

In 1952 he joined the staff of 1199. It was then the 5000 member Retail Drug Employees Union Local 1199. Over the next 50 years that Foner worked with the local, it grew to 210000 members employed in a broad range of health and human services. Proud of the solid union principles 1199 was built upon, he emphasises that the early history of 1199 stressed solidarity among all kinds of members across racial and ethnic lines. For example, in 1937 the largely Jewish

pharmacists who comprised 1199's members campaigned successfully for a Black pharmacist to be hired in Harlem.

Another key principle for the early 1199 was its support for industrial unionism. The union actively pursued an industrial organisation strategy rejecting the craft mentality of the American Federation of Labour and supported the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1935. Foner explains: "In a drugstore this means getting the pharmacists, drug clerks, stockmen, soda men and cosmeticians to think 'all for one, and one for all.' Trying to build this kind of attitude became especially important when the union was faced with this highly diverse and stratified hospital industry." Local 1199 continues to practice a 'wall-wall' organising strategy today.

Foner was also proud of the 1199's traditions of militancy, social justice and member participation linked to internal democracy. "Through the last seventy years, the leadership of 1199 was prepared to walk through fire to get what was just and right for workers," he recounts. "Nobody dreamed four decades ago that we could organise hospital workers...I'm proud that I worked in a union where the president said to me, 'Yes, spend as much time as you can to develop a labor focus on the Vietnam War,' and that he said the same thing about the civil rights movement, disarmament, and other broad issues" (p. 130).

The book also describes the many ups and downs of 1199 over the years – from the heady but difficult days as 1199 organised hospital workers across

the United States to the period of "the busted Stradivarius", Foner's description of the internal problems and "civil war" that 1199 went through in the early eighties when Doris Turner succeeded retired founding president, Leon Davis. His poor relations with Turner lead to his retirement from the union in 1983. Foner provides an insiders account of the events that lead to Turner's downfall in 1986 as he supported the work of the internal Save Our Union campaign and forged a close relationship with current 1199 president Dennis Rivera.

Not for Bread Alone is a great book for those who enjoy learning labour history through well-written personal narratives. Local 1199 is perhaps one of the most interesting unions in the United States. As well, Foner provides insights and advice on everything from the principles of militant, democratic unionism, to what is involved in good union communications and successful union cultural programs. Throughout he emphasises the importance of union membership participation in everything from organising to union cultural productions. It is an inspiring contribution to North American labour history.

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