

Dorothy J Solinger, *States' gains, labor's losses: China, France and Mexico choose global liaisons, 1980–2000*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 2009; 245 pp., ISBN: 9780801447778

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One of the most significant shifts in the global political economy over recent decades has been the emergence of large regional economic blocs, whether in the form of free trade regions or with more developed forms of institutional and political integration. In this book Dorothy Solinger explores the experience of large states, once models of worker-friendly autonomous economic development, which have increasingly pursued global connections and deeper integration into these regional economic blocs. Through a comparative analysis of China, France and Mexico, Solinger examines how states have sought to navigate between economic pressures towards globalization and domestic political pressures to provide some degree of welfare for workers. In each of these cases, Solinger finds that workers have lost out in this battle. States have chosen the global economy largely at the expense of workers as workers' share of national income has declined and welfare spending has come under increased pressure, precisely when it is needed most.

Solinger argues that in each of these cases, in their own specific ways, states were historically allied with labour against the world economy. In the era prior to the 1970s and particularly the 1980s, each of the countries pursued a policy that was in important respects protected from international economic pressure. Each of the three states analysed is large and has historically pursued what are generally called 'statist' economic policies, relying on 'dirigiste' management of the national economy to reconcile growth and welfare. In each case, for a variety of reasons and in response to emerging economic pressures on nationalist development strategies, states have gradually embraced global forces over the interests of workers. These gradual shifts have been cemented by the rise of supra-national economic organizations, which have institutionally, politically, and often legally, cemented these gains of the world economy and global capital over workers.

This process, although it has taken different forms in each country, had operated in a broadly similar manner across each of the three countries. Each entered a supranational economic organization in response to a crisis, or what they perceived to be a crisis – whether that was of debt or growth or, most fundamentally for each, a scarcity of capital. Their choices, where they existed, appeared to be between stagnation and global integration and the international political influences on their choices were considerable. In each country, 'leaders operated in coinciding contexts with congruent coping strategies' (p. 122). Integration into the WTO, EU and NAFTA involved submission to what were new rules of the game, rules that brought increases in unemployment and the disadvantaging of workers.

However, Solinger argues that there are significant divergences between the three countries. Significant civic unrest brought concessions in China, sporadic discontent brought only modest concessions in France and Mexican unions and civil society offered only modest resistance. Solinger finds that neither the extent of the crisis nor the regime type or alignment of ruling parties explained these outcomes. Nor is it a matter of the institutional strength of the labour movement. In fact, she argues that it was where unions were weakest – but also most weakly incorporated into state regimes – that resistance was strongest, and produced the most concessions. Conceptually, this points to the importance of investigating not only the degree

of labour movement activity but also the meaning of 'union' itself and the kinds of action that unions typically undertake. In the terminology of contemporary US scholarship on labour movements, where business unionism was weakest, social movement unionism was able to flourish.

There are many innovative features in Solinger's analysis. She provides striking accounts of similarities in the economic and political trajectories of three countries that, while all large and 'statist' economies, are from radically different parts of the world and have dramatically different political systems. The comparison of similar trajectories across economies at different levels of economic development and with very different histories of democratization provides a striking reminder of the power of global forces. Furthermore, there is important information here on the patterns of regional economic integration across different parts of the world. The combination of a comparative analysis of both similarities and divergences represent an important attempt to come to terms with the interaction of global pressures and domestic political forces.

However, this attempt is not as successful as it might be. Throughout the analysis the book did not provide a sense of what a realistic counterfactual trajectory might be within the global political economy. Was there an economic alternative for these economies, other than the apparent choices of stagnation or integration? After all, each had its own resources, partly rooted in its statist history and strong legitimation with workers. Was this yielding to global forces an evitable process or could nations have opted out of economic integration? More importantly perhaps, could they have organized their connections to the global economy differently? The strength of a comparative analysis in showing similarities among these countries is somewhat undermined by the focus on three countries which all made what might be considered relatively similar transitions that were in many respects unsuccessful forms of globalization, at least from the perspective of workers.

This raises another question. While the title refers to 'labour's losses' the analysis is largely, although not exclusively, of the working classes. It may be, and indeed is likely, that some segments of labour benefited from this integration into the global economy. It would have been very useful to hear more about the classes – in particular, the middle classes – that benefited from this transition. What was their relation to the state and crucially to the working classes? How did their development and interests shape the triangle between state, workers and global economy?

The comparative analysis refers to cases that, while from dramatically different geographical locations and development histories, are all large statist economies. The findings from this book, for example, diverge in many respects from the findings of research into small open economies that have managed to combine social democracy with economic internationalization. Indeed, the experience of the 2000s has suggested that the Nordic economies, for example, have found new ways to reconcile international economic integration and high levels of social protection and social investment – not least through a strategic orientation to regional economic integration such as the European Union. Is there a long-term potential in international economic unions to provide a form of governance or a structure for that form of governance that might ultimately secure labour rights? As Charles Tilly suggested, the fortunes of labour have always been closely tied to the strengthening of the State.

Solinger has therefore provided a valuable analysis, even if it is one whose implications are only partially developed. The innovative comparative analysis is to be commended and its implications for some of the broader questions in comparative political economy are worthy of sustained debate and further investigation. Solinger's book provides a valuable addition to that debate and to comparative investigation on these issues.