

City, Space and Trade Unionism: The Spatiality of Labour in the Metal Industry

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City, Space and Trade Unionism: The Spatiality of Labour in the Metal Industry

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As labour scholars increasingly grapple with challenges posed by digitalisation, precarious employment, and the geographical dispersion of work, *City, Space and Trade Unionism* offers a timely exploration of how trade unionism is evolving in these increasingly fragmented conditions. Rather than treating unions as relics of a bygone industrial era, Roca reframes them as spatial actors capable of adaptation and renewal. The book focuses on the relationship between the workplace and the city, arguing that revitalising trade unionism requires fundamentally rethinking the spatial dimensions of collective action, particularly the connections between unions, communities, and urban space. Anchored in the Bay of Cádiz in southern Spain, a region with a legacy of industrial militancy and deindustrialisation, the book provides both an interesting local case study and a conceptual toolkit for reimagining labour activism in an era shaped by outsourcing, union fragmentation, and economic restructuring.

Roca draws on a rich theoretical lineage, most notably Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space and David Harvey's notion of spatial fixes, to demonstrate that class conflict is not bound to the factory floor but rather unfolds across multiple urban and territorial spaces. The book pays particular attention to Herod's 'geography of labour' concept, which emphasises workers' role as agents who shape the urban and industrial landscapes. With case studies ranging from shipyard closures to anti-austerity street protests, the book maps how working-class actors actively reshape their environments through resistance, occupation and solidarity practices.

In this book, Roca examines the intersection of space, labour, and class struggle in the Bay of Cádiz, demonstrating how urban environments both shape and are shaped by working-class resistance. Tracing this relationship from the late Franco era to today, he illustrates how industrial decline, union activism, and cultural expression have transformed the geography of class struggle. The book focuses on three key dimensions: the historical entanglement of shipyard labour and urban development, the cultural politics of resistance embodied in traditions like the Cádiz Carnival, and the contemporary shifts in labour organising that prioritise neighbourhood mobilisation over workplace-centric action. Through this framework, the authors reveal how workers and communities have adapted their strategies in response to deindustrialisation, neoliberal restructuring, and new forms of precarity. Rather than treating class struggle as a static or purely economic phenomenon, the book highlights its spatial and cultural

dimensions, showing how satire, memory, and territorial solidarity sustain resistance across generations. The final chapters bring these themes into the present, analysing innovative union tactics, such as the 2021 metalworkers' strike, and the broader implications of labour's 'territorial turn' for contemporary mobilisation. Drawing on labour geography, urban theory, and extensive empirical research, the book offers a compelling account of how working-class communities navigate and contest the shifting landscapes of capitalism.

One of Roca's strengths is his sense of narrative, which blends theoretical sophistication with empirical clarity. Well illustrated with photographs, testimonies, and cultural examples, the book captures the distinctiveness of Cádiz as both a physical and symbolic space of resistance. The region's socio-economic context, marked by shipyard closures, austerity, and EU-driven restructuring, is explained with care and detail, making the case accessible to readers unfamiliar with Spanish labour history.

Another standout feature is the exploration of cultural resistance. The chapter on Carnival demonstrates how political critique, social memory and solidarity are encoded in public rituals and songs, giving the working class not only a voice but a repertoire of symbolic tools with which to contest their marginalisation. This cultural lens deepens the spatial analysis by showing how class consciousness is not only produced through struggle but also through shared cultural performance.

The book also explores internal divisions within the labour movement, contrasting mainstream unions' preference for negotiation with grassroots groups' emphasis on direct action and community organising. Case studies, such as the Airbus plant protests and the 2021 metal strike, highlight both the strength and fragility of working-class agency under neoliberal pressures.

Nevertheless, the book is not without its limitations. While the book acknowledges the importance of social reproduction, its empirical focus remains largely concentrated on male-dominated and public spaces. Women's roles in the reproduction of labour power, such as those in the home, are acknowledged only peripherally. Given the book's strong spatial framework, there may have been further scope to explore how urban struggles over housing, welfare, and everyday life intersect with labour politics, particularly through the perspective of the household. A deeper engagement with feminist theories of social reproduction, such as those developed by Silvia Federici or Nancy Fraser, could have added an additional layer of insight into the gendered dimensions of spatial resistance.

This gender gap also reflects a broader issue in spatial labour analysis: the tendency to centre visible, confrontational struggles while underplaying quieter, everyday forms of resistance, often carried out by women, in homes, service sectors, or peripheral neighbourhoods. Though Roca discusses community organising and cultural labour in

some detail, these remain secondary to the dramatic narratives of street protests and strikes. Including a more intersectional perspective, one that acknowledges gender, race, and migration experiences, could have further enhanced the book's relevance to the complexities of contemporary labour struggles.

Despite these limitations, *City, Space and Trade Unionism* is an illuminating contribution to the study of labour and space. It challenges deterministic accounts of union decline by showing how workers continue to resist, adapt, and reimagine their political agency. The book's theoretical ambition, ethnographic depth and regional specificity make it an essential reading for scholars in labour studies, urban sociology, geography and beyond.

In connecting labour struggles to the urban fabric and cultural life of the Bay of Cádiz, the book reminds us that 'the history of the factory and the future of the city are thus so intertwined that they cannot be understood without each other' (p. 6), and that the spaces in which workers live, protest and imagine alternatives remain central to the future of trade unionism.