Virginia Doellgast, Nathan Lillie and Valeria Pulignano (eds) (2018), *Reconstructing Solidarity: Labour Unions, Precarious Work, and the Politics of Institutional Change in Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, £63.00, pp. 270, hbk.
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It is often said that trade unions no longer fight for social solidarity. With an ageing and declining membership base, they instead seem to defend the privileges of what are today considered to be established labour market 'insiders' at the expense of an increasingly numerous group of precarious labour market 'outsiders'. As a result, organized labour runs the risk of losing not

only economic power, but also moral credibility in its role as 'sword of justice'. *Reconstructing Solidarity* is so far the most comprehensive work that calls into question this prevailing narrative: trade unions do fight for precarious workers and thus social solidarity, but they can fail against corporate interests. This edited volume, in other words, tells a story of class conflict, not insider-outsider divides.

An important point of the book's theoretical outlook is to synthesize insights from comparative political economy (CPE) and critical sociology in the study of comparative employment relations. While CPE can help understand the institutional determinants of preference formation among trade unions, it suffers from what the editors refer to as "methodological nationalism"; that is, an excessive focus on nation states that misses the impact of EU legislation on the one hand, and firm- and sector-level dynamics on the other. This point is important in the sense that the struggles against precarity play out across national borders and thus require detailed attention to cross-border dynamics such as 'outsourcing' and posted work. By contrast, critical sociology provides insights into how differences in labour solidarity are shaped through complex micro processes, but its reliance on ethnographic accounts fails to provide parsimonious and generalizable findings. The editors thus argue that the focus of comparative employment relations on institutional change at the sector- and firm-levels – *contra* CPE – as well as on the role of institutional contexts in shaping agency – *contra* critical sociology – allows them to understand the causes of and responses to precarity.

The theoretical framework in Chapter 1 starts from the premise that trade unions cannot afford ignoring the plight of precarious workers, because they pose lower-cost competition to core workers and thus undermine labour's bargaining power. So what, then, are the conditions under which trade unions are successful in (re-)regulating precarious work? The editors outline two ideal types of union success versus failure. First, the 'virtuous circle' of union success refers to a positive feedback loop whereby trade unions can draw on (i) inclusive institutions that put constraints on employers' exit options in combination with (ii) inclusive worker solidarity that allows unions to curb precarity against employer opposition. Second, the 'vicious circle' of union failure describes a negative feedback loop in which trade unions suffer from (i) exclusive institutions that create loopholes for employers while (ii) exclusive worker solidarity deteriorates unions' capacity to resist. Subsequent empirical chapters illustrate the dynamics behind these causal drivers of success versus failure in detail.

The empirical chapters provide comparative case studies from nine different industries and fourteen countries on trade union strategies and their successes/failures in curbing precarity. The relevance of institutional inclusiveness in constraining exit options for employers to the benefit of precarious workers is demonstrated in studies of union success in Swedish municipalities (Chapter 2), Danish slaughterhouses (Chapter 3) and the Slovenian retail sector (Chapter 7). When exclusive institutions – i.e. weaker labour market and welfare state protections and/or lower collective bargaining coverage – prevail, the outcome has been negative for precarious workers, as illustrated in Hungarian municipalities (Chapter 2), German slaughterhouses (Chapter 3), and the Estonian retail sector (Chapter 7). The importance of inclusive worker solidarity becomes clear in studies of Belgian chemical and metal sectors (Chapter 5), the German and Italian metalworking sector sectors (Chapter 6), and the Estonian and, to a smaller extent, Polish retail sectors (Chapter 7).

It is interesting that grassroots mobilization (Chapter 4) and cooperation with civil society groups (Chapter 9) outside traditional union structures turn out to be necessary for the successful protection of precarious *migrant* workers. Biographic interview evidence from precarious and informal work sectors also suggest that inclusive worker solidarity is not only a function of union density rates, but also the active mobilization and incorporation of migrant

workers to overcome ethnic intra-labour divides (Chapter 10). The most pessimistic account on the fortunes of unions in reconstructing solidarity stems from findings on freelance musicians, whose individualistic professional identity impedes the organizing activities deemed necessary to constrain the exploitative behaviour of club owners and promoters (Chapter 8). For reasons of space, I can say much less than I would like to about the empirical chapters described above, but it suffices to point out that they are of high quality, written by specialists of the respective countries and sectors. The final chapter, written by Steven P. Wallas, provides a critical – but friendly – discussion of the volume’s theoretical model and its empirical illustrations. The editors must be commended for concluding the book with well-taken remarks from somebody outside the project.

While this volume is invaluable in highlighting the myriad ways trade unions fight for precarious workers, there are at least two critical points related to (i) the macro-level of state governments and (ii) the notion of “inclusive worker solidarity”. First, while the editors rightly point to the deficiencies of CPE’s primary focus on cross-national variation, they appear to do the opposite mistake of ignoring the state level altogether. This is problematic insofar as both explanatory variables of their model – “institutional inclusiveness” and “inclusive worker solidarity” – hinge, at least in part, on the willingness and ability of domestic governments to buttress union efforts through state policy. Governments can and do create precisely the institutional loopholes and intra-labour divides the volume identifies as the causes of union failure at the sector and firm level. The task would thus be to connect the different levels of class conflict within a common framework rather than dismissing the focus on state government altogether. Second, while the volume’s emphasis on contingency is certainly one of its strengths, the theoretical framework would have benefited from a clearer elaboration about the determinants of “inclusive worker solidarity” (pp. 13–16). It is clear that institutional inclusiveness helps incorporate precarious workers in trade union strategies, but what explains the emergence of inclusive worker solidarity when favourable institutional conditions are absent? While high levels of union density are important, the empirical chapters point to collaborations with civil society groups as another factor for success. It seems that in the absence of institutional and organizational inclusiveness, trade unions need support from organizations outside their rank-and-file (Chapter 9) and/or ideological legacies rooted in grassroots mobilization (Chapter 4). The empirical chapters thus provide at least useful indications about favourable conditions for inclusive worker solidarity, which are of great theoretical and practical import.

Reconstructing Solidarity is a volume of enduring relevance for political economy, industrial relations, and welfare state research. Written by specialists of comparative employment relations, it is a must-read for scholars interested in precarity and trade unions, and a should-read for those interested in inequality, labour markets, and institutional change. Precarity, we learn, is not a static feature of contemporary capitalism, but constantly shaped by political struggles – and the role of trade unions is fundamental to this story.

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