

Book Review

The Pursuit of Alternatives: Stories of Peoples' Economic and Political Struggles Around the World by Melisa R. Serrano, Edlira Xhafa (Eds.)

The book, *The Pursuit of Alternatives*, features real-life stories of workers running a multi-million company; of abandoned workers occupying an abandoned factory; of women resisting exclusion from the fruits of “development” in their communities; of market vendors collectively providing health care for each other; of homeless communities finding spaces in unlikely places, and five other stories of resistance and struggles of empowerment in the process of transforming working peoples’ lives away from the “capitalist canon”. Serrano and Xhafa argue that there are pockets of movements and processes all over the world defying the capitalist tenets of individualism, free market and profit for the few owners of the means of production. These non-capitalist processes are striving towards “becoming alternatives” by building political-economic and socio-cultural alternatives in the forms of solidarity economy, collective ownership of the means of production, and alternative social relations of production.

Perhaps it would be redundant to say that this book is timely in this grave moment of global economic crisis, or what economists would describe as the “epic recession”. But indeed, this book came out at an opportune moment when the tides are shifting in uncertain directions as the neoliberal capitalist doctrine unravels once again in its most devastating form in the financial markets. This book reminds us that the capitalist system engenders more inequalities of epic proportions in the form of hunger for more than 800 million people around the world while the top 1% of the people and multinational companies have wealth larger than some least developed countries. We are reminded as well that the fruits of the free market do not trickle down but instead chains the many into abject poverty. And that the capitalist mode of social relations of production breeds unequal power relations of domination and exploitation.

The 10 case studies of “emancipatory moments” in the book take the reader to Brazil, Canada, the Philippines, the Niger Delta, South Korea and Colombia involving trade unionists, market vendors, women in the communities, labor activists, progressive left activists and residents in small communities. Majority of the case studies are on-going, many exists for many years now such as the worker-run factory in Flasko and *Frente de Luta por Moradia* (Front for Housing Struggle) in Brazil; and the Inuvik Community Greenhouse and the Alternative Anti-Poverty Organizing of OCAP in Canada. Not all experiments of non-capitalist initiatives though in the book are successful processes while a couple initiatives, the Busan Workers’ Cooperative in South Korea and the Greater Toronto Workers’ Assembly in Canada have just began, which in itself a major achievement.

The case studies show the sober uprising of the dispossessed, the disadvantaged and the excluded under the capitalist market imperatives. As the crisis of capitalism unfolds at this political and economic juncture, would the lessons from these “emancipatory moments” become the bearers of alternatives to the capitalist order? As Cox (1999) foresees the contestation of ideas within civil society wherein a “bottom-up” process of transformation, it will be “led by those strata of the population which are disadvantaged and deprived under the capitalist order who build a counterhegemony that aspires to acquire sufficient acceptance among the population so as to displace the erstwhile hegemonic order.”¹

Serrano and Xhafa, both alumni of the Global Labour University and accomplished authors of many other books on labor and political economy, exhibit great courage and foresight in initiating this book. They are joined ably by the case study writers majority are also alumni of the Global Labour University, namely Lyggia Sabbag Fares, Daniel Hawkins, Bulend Karadag, Clair Siobhan Ruppert, Kim Mijeoung, Patricia Chong, Ramon Certeza (with Rosa Mercado, co-writer), Babatunde Ayelabola, Rob Butz, Laura Roberts and Euan Gibb.

This book is successful in presenting real-life struggles for empowerment, resistance to capitalist doctrines and provides the necessary impetus for a conversation among social movements and the larger civil society on possible alternatives to the current social, political and economic order.

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¹ Cox, Robert W. 1999. *Civil Society at the Turn of the Millennium: Prospects for an Alternative World Order*. Review of International Studies, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), pp. 3-28. Cambridge University Press. Available online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097573>.