

From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalisation

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Benjamin Shepard & Ronald Hayduk (eds.) *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalisation* Verso, 2002, xii + 429 pp. ISBN: 1-859-84356-5 (pbk) £15 ISBN: 1-859-84053-x (hbk) £45

This fascinating collection of short essays guides the reader through the growth of urban protest in 1990s USA. It spans the period from the emergence of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987 to the 'Battle of Seattle' in December 1999. In the foreword, Eric Rofes describes his need for a new resource with which to teach a New Social Movements university course and, he explains, this wealth of accounts and analyses of the new activism was the result. It fulfils its role admirably, and, as such, would make ideal reading for any teachers and students studying new social movements and the contemporary anti-globalisation/anticapitalist/global justice movement.

The volume is in five sections, with introductory and concluding essays by the editors. Part I is concerned with 'Global proclivities and the new social movements', linking labour, migrant and human-rights struggles, and exploring ties between local problems and global power relations. Part II is about 'Sex, social justice and the new queer community organising', which is described as a battle for sexual selfdetermination. Part III, entitled 'Public versus private spaces, battlegrounds and movements', describes the privatisation and commodification of urban public space. In Part IV, 'Media and the new social movements', the focus is on activists' use of media old and new, from attention-grabbing stunts to filming police activity. The last part is 'Race, poverty and world making', exploring new

alliances between ethnic minority and working-class struggles. Each section comprises an introduction followed by short essays by activists describing activities, protests and tactics, and by others discussing the theoretical background to, and wider understanding of, these activities.

The essays by organisers and activists offer accounts of personal motivation, of experience, of organisation and alliance-building, and of repertoires of action developed through experience, experiment and intention. They also offer eyewitness accounts of legal challenges and police responses to demonstrations and activities. As well as this, they reproduce many of the flyers and posters used by activists, and include photographs of events.

The more contextual, theoretical and analytical essays range across a wide variety of traditions, from new social movement theories through to queer theory, socialism, anarchism and contemporary ideas of global justice. If the book has a weakness, then this is probably it: what the reader gains is an all-too-brief survey of these theories, alongside a similarly all-too-brief discussion of their social context. Given the book's stated role and target readership, this is not, however, a serious flaw.

Furthermore, common themes are easy to find with which to link apparently diverse movements together, and the editors readily suggest the themes they take to be important.

In their introduction, for example, the editors claim that 'the new activism grows from and responds to four key factors-globalisation, shifting boundaries between public and private space, demographic change, and income inequality-all of which have transformed the landscape in which the new social movements operate' (p. 2). This transformed landscape is one of increasing mobility of capital, the concentration of wealth, and the transfer of wealth from public to private hands through privatisation.

Another theme that emerges from reading the collection is that of the dilemmas faced by many movements concerning their role, and the question of whether they are inside or outside the system. In the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) movement, Liz Highleyman argues that some see their movement as a single-issue lobby, while others see it as part of a wider, anticapitalist struggle (pp. 106-121).

This dilemma also exists for community activism, discussed in the final part of the collection. In the us context, Randy Stoecker highlights a tension between 'community development corporations' and traditional, grassroots, often radical, community organising.

The former pursue economic development by integrating communities into the mainstream economy, while the latter tries to build grassroots social movements with the objective of gaining more radical transformation in social conditions.

Tensions arise as 'people's need for a transformed economy providing a wealth of good jobs becomes replaced with training programs for people to compete within an extremely

limited good-job pool' (p. 381).

Another theme that emerges concerns the ways in which personal experience helps to make wider connections between individual concerns and the global economy. The activists often take the reader on a personal journey, highlighting, for example, the way becoming HIV positive raised awareness of social justice, corporate power and the relations between First and Third worlds. Eric Sawyer, for example, begins his contribution by saying that 'I have been living with HIV for a very long time. Twenty years have passed since ... I developed shingles, my first HIV related symptom' (p. 88).

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