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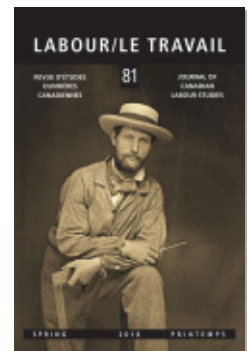
Unfree Labour? Struggles of Migrant and Immigrant Workers in Canada eds. by Aziz Choudry and Adrian A. Smith (review)

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Labour / Le Travail, Issue 81, Spring 2018, pp. 269-271 (Review)

Published by The Canadian Committee on Labour History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/llt.2018.0011>



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clear-headed assessment of the possibilities and limits of constitutional labour rights.

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**Aziz Choudry and Adrian A. Smith, eds.,
*Unfree Labour? Struggles of Migrant and
Immigrant Workers in Canada* (Oakland:
PM Press 2016)**

MIGRANT LABOUR has arisen as one of the most significant yet misunderstood issues of our age. The growth of migrant worker programs spark heated debate about exploitation, wage suppression, and foreign workers “taking” jobs from citizens. Amid all the protestations, one perspective is often overlooked – that of the migrant workers themselves.

The edited collection *Unfree Labour?* attempts to address this oversight. Inspired, in part, by a workshop at the Montreal Immigrant Workers Centre that brought together migrant worker advocates and like-minded academics working in the field, the book is intended to incorporate activist and scholarly perspectives for the purpose of drawing attention to the experiences of migrant workers in Canada. The originality of the book, say the editors in their introduction, “derives from its grounding in activist and organizing experiences, its cross-Canada scope, and the interdisciplinary scholarly perspectives that it assembles.” (2) Seventeen authors contribute to ten chapters with a roughly equal mix of scholarly and activist focus.

The central argument of the book, and its organizing conceptual framework, is that migrant worker programs, through imposition of restricted and limited citizenship status, construct a contemporary form of unfree labour compelled by the

state which creates intensified “hyperexploitation.” (8) This unfree labour is, of course, a highly racialized and gendered form of labour compulsion.

The academic chapters seek to place migrant labour in its historical and structural contexts, drawing links to the changing nature of capitalism and the rise of neoliberalism in North America. The contributors are careful to avoid painting migrant workers as a homogenous entity devoid of agency. Chapters look individually at the different streams of Canada’s migrant worker programs, including the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP), the Caregiver Program (formerly the Live-in Caregiver Program – LICP), and the low-skill stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). This separation allows the authors to explore in detail the dynamics of each program.

In turn, the activist chapters explore the dimensions of working with migrant workers and discuss emerging models of organizing within their communities. Many raise significant questions about the labour movement’s relationship both with migrant workers and with the organizing approaches adopted by advocates.

The chapters are somewhat uneven both in scope and level of inquiry. While this is to be expected in an edited collection, at times I struggled to see how certain chapters related to the central thesis. The chapter by Deena Ladd and Sonia Singh on the organizing models of the Toronto Workers’ Action Centre is a useful look into building a movement among marginalized workers but seemed only tangentially connected to migrant labour in Canada. Similarly, Abigail Bakan’s chapter comparing the LICP to federal employment equity policies is an intriguing line of theoretical analysis but seems to lose sight of the very thing the book is trying to accomplish, surfacing the lived experiences of migrant workers.

There are also some original and valuable insights found in the book. Geraldina Polanco's examination of migrant workers at Tim Horton's reveals both the under-reported stories of these workers and the complex (and troubling) realities of the globalizing of the fast food industry. Adriana Paz Ramirez and Jennifer Jihye Chun do an excellent job of drawing out parallels between the struggles of the Canadian Farmworkers' Union in the 1980s with the more contemporary British Columbia Chapter of Justicia for Migrant Workers.

The book is at its best when it places migrant workers centre stage. Like when Joey Calugay and his co-authors introduce us to Louis, a Filipino who escaped military death squads and now works as a machinist in Québec. Or Neil, who came to Canada to work at Tim Horton's with the hope of becoming a permanent resident and bringing his family only to be used and lied to by his employer. He returned to the Philippines with little to show for his efforts. These are difficult stories to read but they bring humanity to the issue and serve as a reminder to the privileged few of the Global North that we must not be complacent.

The book also does the important work of highlighting that migrant workers are not passive; they struggle and resist. Their forms of resistance sometimes are unfamiliar to those of us in North America. Their actions can be veiled and subtle, reflecting their vulnerable position, but they resist nonetheless.

Migrant workers' non-traditional forms of resistance are hard for the labour movement to recognize and respect, the contributors often point out. It is a point labour activists (and researchers of the labour movement) should heed. The labour movement has been an uneasy and inconsistent ally of migrant workers and has never found a way to build long-term

relationships with their communities and advocates. The book's contributors do not shy away from discussing how this has damaged migrants' view of unions but also how it has driven them to create new forms of organizing. Their critique of the labour movement is legitimate and unions could learn much from these activists.

The book is the victim of the rapidly changing landscape of migrant labour policy. Even though it is only just over a year old, already events have rendered many of the details out of date. Some chapters discuss at length program rules that no longer exist and there are repeated references to defunct policies such as paying migrant workers 15 per cent less than Canadians. This is not the authors' fault but it bears mentioning so that readers are forewarned.

Unfree Labour? aims to be a mix of theory and praxis and it achieves this. The academic chapters present more as either introductory overviews of migrant worker programs or selected slices of insights. Other volumes, such as Patti Tamara Lenard and Christine Straehle's *Legislated Inequality* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), offer a more thorough examination of migrant worker programs and other authors have plowed the same fields this book sows. The concept of unfree labour is useful but not groundbreaking. It and other related concepts having been applied elsewhere.

However, if we look at the book as an intermingling of activism and theory, *Unfree Labour?* is much more successful. It is an excellent case study of how research can contribute to real world change and how academics can (and need to) be a part of the struggle to make change happen. Being a reminder that scholarship needs to be a positive force for change is the biggest contribution this

book makes. And for that reason alone people should read it.

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Walter Hildebrandt, *Documentaries: Poems* (Edmonton: NeWest Press 2016)

WALTER HILDEBRANDT'S latest and eighth collection of poetry, *Documentaries*, focuses on an investigation of history, whether recent or more distant history, by exposing its fault lines, more specifically those moments when oppression is met with resistance and something new is created. It is there in "dissensus" and "disjunction," we learn in the collection's first poem, "Illegal Combinations: Glasgow 1787," that the poet finds the presence of "another history." (13) The disruption of the ordered past thus enables new alignments in that history to be perceived, and new ways of thinking and acting to be engaged by this knowledge. (13) This process of recording these other histories, such as that of the Glasgow of 1787 or the Winnipeg of 1919, and of understanding our present moment in those contexts becomes the subject of Hildebrandt's book.

There are seven poems in *Documentaries*, five of the long form variety and two shorter ones. It would be possible to call the entire work a long poem, considering the documentary approach common to each individual piece and a narrating voice that remains consistent throughout the collection as it shifts between present and past. The form of the writing, as well, with the short, broken line of projective verse connects each poem with the next, not that such formal coherence is necessary. The author could, if he were so inclined, continue to add to this collection in much the same way that Robert Kroestch did when he

turned his long poem project *Field Notes* into a life work that spanned decades. Hildebrandt is following Kroestch in this respect by showing that the work of reading the past with an eye on the present is never complete. There are many perspectives and many obstacles to be found in this undertaking. In the collection's second poem, "Let Them Eat Grass / The Dakota Wars 1862," for example, we hear the speaker struggling to come to terms with the extent of the American betrayal of the Dakota. "Treaties / had been / the hope for both," he says, until "the ground moved / the rules changed," and coexistence on the land is transformed into violence and genocide. There are "so many windows / onto these events . . . hard to see it all at once." (26) The poet relies on documenting this history as a response to the amnesia that often keeps the past safely hidden and forgotten: "removals / legislated violence / humiliations / marginalization / loss of homelands / windows / onto this complex / history / documentaries." (34)

The works within *Documentaries* lie very much within the tradition of the Canadian long poem of the past century or more, a poetry that has characteristically made history its subject. Examples of such work might include Dorothy Livesay's *Call My People Home* (1950), a treatment of the Japanese-Canadian internment; Armand Garnet Ruffo's *Grey Owl* (1996), a deconstruction of the life of Archie Belaney, an Englishman who posed famously as an Ojibwa; or Andrew Suknaski's *Wood Mountain Poems* (1976), an examination of Southwest Saskatchewan history that gives voice to Indigenous and settler experience. Hildebrandt's poetry turns decidedly toward the political, which places his work in good company with the work of poets such as Livesay. In fact, Hildebrandt may have been recalling Livesay's *The*