

Dan La Botz. *Made in Indonesia: Indonesian Workers Since Soeharto*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Southend Press, 2001. 395 pages.

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This book offers a sympathetic account of the trials and travails of Indonesia's industrial workers. It is the latest edition in a slowly growing body of work—including so-far-unpublished PhD theses—dealing with this field. This is an interesting development in itself, given the paucity of such works only five or seven years ago.

Several of these works—e.g. theses by Douglas Kammen (Cornell) and Bama Athreya (Michigan)—have been analytically sophisticated, while simultaneously displaying an unabashed personal commitment to the plight of the Indonesian worker. This book by Dan LaBotz, displays at least the same level of commitment, but less of the deep knowledge of Indonesian history, politics, and society. This is hardly surprising, however. The author is not an Indonesia specialist—his previous works have been on labor-related issues in Mexico.

The book will be especially useful for those requiring a relatively straightforward introduction to Indonesia. It provides a fairly comprehensive overview of how the organization of social and political life under the New Order had an impact on the right to organize. It also provides some welcome information on how the fall of Suharto has provided some new opportunities for labor organizers, though of course there is still a long way to go insofar as successful labor struggles are concerned.

The main strength of the book is that it contains a great deal of interesting interview material with key figures in the labor movement. Apart from the longer sections on such labor leaders as Dita Sari (of the radical FNPBI) and Muchtar Pakpahan (of the more social-democratic-oriented SBSI), there are also interviews with leaders of other, more moderate, organizations. In addition, there is also substantial material on the small, youthful, left-wing, People's Democratic Party (PRD), which has consciously developed labor links. The book also shows the intimate connection between labor activism and activism in other spheres, for example, within some sections of the student and NGO movements.

The author, thus, clearly did a lot of the necessary legwork to produce a book such as this. It is evident that he was successful in gaining access to and winning the confidence of many of the personalities that appear in the work.

The main weakness of the book is that it does not provide new insights into, by now, such well-traversed issues as labor exploitation and constraints on labor rights. Those better initiated into Indonesian politics and society in general, and labor issues specifically, will look at large sections of the book as offering only useful summaries, rather than much new analysis. Nevertheless, this is hardly surprising, as the author's intended audience is mainly the activist, rather than academic, community (xxi).

Unfortunately, the fact that the author is a relative newcomer to Indonesia is glaringly revealed in places. For example, the sometimes ultra-nationalist PNI is described as a "liberal" party (p. 158), and former Minister of Manpower, Fahmi Idris, is given the appellation "Minister of Justice" (p. 22). LaBotz also rather casually seems to accept the old Sukarno slogan that Indonesia was colonized for 350 years as fact

(p. 42), rather than an integral part of the myth-making that was part of the forming of the Indonesian nation.

The numerous excerpts from interview material, though useful in introducing colorful characters and frequently illuminating in other ways, are also rather too “neatly” presented. It is unlikely that many of the interviewees spoke in the perfect English that is conveyed in the text. If the excerpts were instead translated from Indonesian—which they probably were—it seems that they were also heavily edited to reduce the effect of disjointed thoughts. While this makes it easier on the reader, some of the sense of authenticity that such interviews bring inevitably gets lost.

In spite of the slowly growing number of studies on Indonesian workers, the fact that labor remains more or less a marginal subject in the study of contemporary Indonesia is indisputable. Conventional topics, like the military, remain more appealing to most scholars, and new topics like parliaments, political gangsters, and decentralization are understandably the focus of the energies of many Indonesia specialists, given the recent developments in the country. Thus, in spite of the shortcomings mentioned above, this book is a useful contribution. Moreover, readers whose political sympathies lie with Indonesian workers will find the point of view presented by the author to be especially pleasing.