

Book Review

Work and Occupations

0(0) 1–3

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Vosko, L. F. (2019). *Disrupting Deportability: Transnational Workers Organize*. ILR Press. 173 pp. \$26.95 (paper).

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DOI: 10.1177/0730888421997899

Disrupting Deportability is about the immense challenges of counteracting the precarity of migrant workers via intergovernmental agreements, national labor law, and unions. It examines Mexican nationals laboring under Canada's Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) who organized with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) at Sidhu in British Colombia. The case can be seen as a most favorable scenario for workers owing to Canada's migration management approach (4, 21) and first contract arbitration provisions (61). Despite these protections, however, the core of this book demonstrates how workers nevertheless remained subject to three "modalities of deportability": termination, blacklisting, and attrition (38–41).

A key contribution of the book is that it uncovers, in Chapter 3, how Mexican officials and consulate workers facilitated blacklisting. Mexico has an interest in pleasing employers since it relies on remittances, and so Mexican officials monitored labor activity and blocked union supporters from returning to Canada. The Mexican state circumvented the protections of Canadian labor law and the union contract, thereby bolstering workers' vulnerabilities and deportability.

Also important is the book's account of how workers are targets of both overt and more covert forms of retaliation. In addition to termination and blacklisting, the study explores in Chapter 4 the comparatively subtle operation of attrition. Reducing or eliminating the

bargaining unit is a classic anti-union move, and it is helpful to see how it operates in the context of migrant worker organizing. In particular, companies can switch to employing non-SAWP migrants laboring under a highly deregulated migrant labor stream in addition to non-union workers at other companies (including SAWP workers) and Canadian citizens (84–7). What all of this means is that deportability is *not* disrupted for the workers in this study. The book's title is more about the author's policy suggestions in the conclusion.

Indications of how best to disrupt deportability, however, can arguably be found in discussions of the bargaining unit. The union at Sidhu first attempted wall-to-wall organizing but ultimately pursued the opposite route, carving out a small unit of SAWP workers only. This made it easy for the employer to erode the bargaining unit by hiring other kinds of workers, amounting to the long-standing divide and conquer strategy. While any organizer on the ground understands the massive constraints on these strategic decisions in any battle against global capitalism, the SAWP-only bargaining unit proved in the end to be a weakness (108). When one considers the immense union energy spent pursuing this strategy via the Labor Relations Board, as thoroughly documented in Chapter 2, the outcome seems all the more tragic (50–60).

The book treats a second case at Floralia. Here the workers did have a bargaining unit of all employees which was eroded via attrition (85), and so at first glance this might call into question a wall-to-wall approach. However, in this case the union ultimately pursued an even wider bargaining unit in response to Floralia's use of workers from a related non-union company—and they had some success with this strategy (99–106). Taken together, the implication of the two cases is that workers have more power when unions seek a broader community of interest.

On the one hand, these cases could be construed as somewhat particular because there are so few seasonal agricultural workers laboring under collective bargaining agreements and because of the small number of workers in these campaigns (10,790). But as something of a deviant case analysis they are instructive of the challenges and possibilities for organizing migrant labor. Additionally, the struggles of these workers clearly bear on the question of precarity more generally. Their fight was about job security, and they secured contract provisions for seniority and just cause (61). These 'old fashioned' provisions of traditional contracts stand out for their acute relevance to all sorts of precarious workers today. Also relevant is the question: Can the labor

movement leverage power by organizing segments of precarious workers in isolation from workers with more power and stable employment?

An implication of the analysis is that precarious labor is better situated when workers organize more broadly. This could be wall-to-wall, employer-wide, industry-wide, or community-wide. The Sidhu story can be seen as a cautionary tale about organizing migrant workers only, and peeling off their interests as separate. The study leaves us with the pressing question: How can citizens and migrants organize together? If the union had succeeded in its original plan for a wall-to-wall bargaining unit, how might things have played out differently? Perhaps deportation can only be stopped when citizen-workers refuse to let their migrant co-workers be deported, with threats of job actions and strikes. The labor story here, as always, is one of solidarity.

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