

STEPHAN FENDER, *The Global Perspective of Urban Labor in Mexico City, 1910-1929: El mundo al revés*. New York: Routledge, 2020.

Based on the title of Stephan Fender's book, I thought the work would highlight certain events or persons in Mexico and connect them to the global perspectives both on and of the international labor movement. I was pleasantly surprised to realize that the book is rooted in an analysis of hundreds of labor-centered newspaper articles and images published in Mexico during the period outlined in the book's title. For those of us who have read these types of newspapers, which are quite common in many regions of Mexico, the book is a welcome addition to our historiographical appreciation of these newspapers' importance. Fender not only demonstrates how they are relevant in terms of the politics and public positioning of the new revolutionary state, labor union leaders, political elites, and party leaders, but also how they generated deep connections, through social and class identities, between workers in Mexico and those in countries around the world. The book argues that Mexican workers became connected to international workers' identities through the information, perspectives, and stories published in these periodicals in a variety of ways that range from shared notions of martyrs of the labor movement, to patterns of consumption, to public aspirations to celebrations and meanings of May Day, to name a few examples.

As Fender describes in the Introduction, "the formation of this global consciousness included the creation of an identity based in part of a global movement, the appropriation of historical elements from the global narrative, a distinct outward perspective, as well as self-reflection onto one's own position, agency, and objectives within the larger framework (...) For this [the book] uses publications by workers themselves in order to trace the internal debates and mechanisms of the labor movement as well as to determine the influence of both local circumstances and of the global discourse" (8-9). What does become clear in his analysis, however, is that these workers' voices themselves, while highlighted in some ways by the publications, are not predominant among the voices featured in the periodicals. Rather, we hear the perspectives of editors, union officials, foreign journalists, and political leaders. Our historical understandings of the political, social, and global contexts of the lives of Mexican workers are nonetheless informed by this analysis of the images and information which they consumed daily in these published periodicals.

The book consists of four substantial argument-based chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion. Fender sets up the world of the Mexican worker quite well in the first chapter following the introduction. In that chapter, "The World of Urban Labor," he does a very good job providing an overview of not

only the physical environment of workers, as they lived and labored in working class and poor neighborhoods of the capital, but also cultural issues around consumption, leisure time, popular amusements, and public aspirations. In this chapter he explains how the book is based on 57 different labor newspapers, 52 of which were published in the federal district (35). Some of the overview of the history of labor organization in Mexico, including the important distinctions between the Casa del Obrero Mundial, the CROM, and later the CGT, certainly could have been more clearly outlined either in this chapter or the introduction. By grounding his study in this broad overview of workers' everyday realities, Fender makes a compelling argument for how newspapers represented a vital mechanism for the mobilization, organization, and education of workers. Fender demonstrates how these newspapers also served as a key conduit for advertisers to promote and sell their goods and aspirations to the Mexican consumer worker. The book includes detailed ad campaigns for specific industries such as beer and tobacco, detailing the various nationalist versus international dynamics of some of these campaigns.

The next chapters of the book center on Fender's argument about the internationalization of Mexican workers in terms of their aspirations, outward perspectives, and the various meanings attached to their mobilizations within the context of the international worker mobilizations of the 1910s and 1920s. The republication of international articles and news items in these labor-newspapers in Mexico provides evidentiary basis for the question of the global perspective presented throughout the book. Workers were certainly exposed to these global events, revolutions, political trials, and popular mobilizations, such as the Russian Revolution, trials of labor martyrs Sacco and Vanzetti in the U.S., and Pan-American labor efforts. Some of the most compelling evidence presented is the publication of political caricatures and the republication of incisive political cartoons from other parts of the world in Mexican periodicals. Fender includes many such examples in the book. He argues that Mexican workers, through everyday consumption of the ideas, images, and stories told in these newspapers, became embedded in the perspectives and identities of the international labor movement. The power of these political images to convey even to an illiterate audience the plight of exploitation shared by workers around the world does support his arguments.

Throughout several chapters, but most centrally in Chapter 3 "The Outward Perspective," Fender details how certain revolutionary leaders and various union leaders and officials attempted to justify the stances of their political parties and unions vis-à-vis the Mexican workers by highlighting international events in these periodicals. In many ways this chapter is overly convoluted as it aims to include many different examples across time. Again, more framing of the

historical context would have been welcome here. The chapter does explain, though, the intentional efforts made by the editors to connect the plight of Mexican workers to this global context in a way that strategically suggested how workers should interpret the Mexican labor situation.

One of the most compelling chapters, Chapter 4, titled “Elements of Identity,” details how the labor movement in Mexico connected to international labor movements through the use of symbols, political writers and their ideas, commemoration days for heroes and martyrs, and the celebration of holidays. Fender includes a substantial analysis of the relevance of May Day that is quite insightful in terms of explaining connections among workers across various regions of Mexico and also across various countries of the globe. The last chapter titled “A Question of Belonging” centers on a discussion of the nationalist ideology that undergirded the creation of many revolutionary and post-revolutionary worker unions in Mexico, in contrast to an internationalist labor identity and ideology. Again, Fender suggests that the practical and strategic stances of the publishers of the newspapers had a strong role in shaping the ways that different elements of worker identity and mobilizations were positioned vis-à-vis this national unity approach or a global labor approach.

What are the contributions of this book? I will use Fender’s own words here. He writes “...there is no grand unifying process of globalization; rather, a permanent interplay exists between power relations on the local and global levels, leading to the creation of very distinct perceptions of the latter (...). One core contribution of this book to the ongoing scholarly debate is to propose a pattern (recognition, interpretation, utilization) between the lines of which the process of global entanglement can be dissected. It has been shown in depth how this pattern existed in the case of the Mexican labor movement and how it influenced the identity construction and political and social practices of the capital city’s working class in the years 1910 to 1929. Its global affiliations and discursive intertwinement with the powerful narrative of the global labor movement ultimately allowed Mexican labor to emerge as one of the winners out of the revolutionary turmoil, despite its relative reluctance to participate in actual armed struggle” (197-198). In terms of these ultimate conclusions and contributions about the global perspective of urban labor in Mexico, I find the book interesting, compelling, and broadly applicable.

**Christina M. Jiménez**

*University of Colorado, Colorado Springs*

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