

## Chapter 1. Introduction

As the 21<sup>st</sup> century hurtles towards any number of social cliffs and crevasses, driven by sticky economic crisis, deepening inequality, pandemics and fossil fuels, those same motors have made authoritarianism one of the defining problems of the age, revving up the engines of right-wing social movements and states wrestling for control as they pass the pain downwards. This volume is concerned, in particular, with authoritarianism's inevitable attempts to target or co-opt labour and with how labour responds.

The chapters collected here emerged from and expanded a special series by Global Labour University (GLU) alumni and others, some of which were initially published, in shorter forms, on the *Global Labour Column* in preparation for the GLU conference in 2022.

There are three important gaps in this volume. One is any discussion of labour in revolutionary and counter-revolutionary situations such as Egypt and Sudan. Second is the question of organizing and its impossibility in low or high grade war zones, ranging from Ethiopia to Ukraine. The third is analyzing the battle with creeping authoritarianism in formally liberal democracies such as the USA. It is hoped that this volume may stimulate further contributions from such areas.

Neither is the volume globally comprehensive: rather it perches in specific countries and regional clusters, which happen to touch each of the cardinal points of the compass: eSwatini and Zimbabwe, Philippines and Myanmar, Hong Kong and China, Russia and Belarus, Turkey, and Brazil. This is partly because it has emerged from organic links amongst labour activists associated with the GLU.

None of this diminishes its importance and usefulness to labour everywhere. It not only provides history and background to understand authoritarianism in the specific countries covered, but also begins to theorise authoritarianism and resistance to it, as well as laying out specific ideas for international solidarity and some of the subtle debates emerging from that imperative. As such, it is a handbook for the present and the recent future for those of us struggling under existing authoritarian regimes and those of us in the so-called Free World.

Section one offers a number of conceptual lenses for analyzing authoritarianism and resistance to it. In chapter one, Verna Viajar considers populist authoritarianism in the Philippines during the pandemic through

Gramsci's concept of hegemonic crisis to cast light on the 'new forms of authoritarianism,' helpful not only for the Philippines but also to understand Trump, Bolsanaro and the like. Jana Silverman's chapter on Brazil lays out the political economy of how Bolsanaro displaced the Workers' Party. And Christopher Siu Tat Mung borrows the concept of anti-politics to frame the forcible dissolution of trade unions in Hong Kong in the face of the National Security Law.

In section two, Fundizwi Sikhondze describes the tribulations of trying to do research during a crack-down in eSwatini. Recognising those challenges is important for potential international allies who may wish for 'proper research' to back up their offers of solidarity; this chapter drives home that we cannot always expect formalism when deciding to support those organising in authoritarian situations.

Section three shows the convergence of economic inequality and crisis with politics, pushing labour into politics, with varied potentialities and pitfalls in Moreblessing Nyambara's history of unions after colonialism in Zimbabwe, while Başak Kocadost lays out the need for 'a political approach that connects with social movements, organizes together in these struggles, and is fed by these struggles' without understanding politics only in electoral terms.

Section four continues a theme introduced in Chapter 4, where labour laws are used to repress rather than protect workers. Fundizwi Sikhondze returns to tell us about the use of the Industrial Courts to suppress a public workers strike eSwatini, while Svetlana Kolganova shows the restrictive reality under formal freedom to unionise in Russia (before it invade Ukraine).

Section five continues the theme of organising labour without unions. Moreblessing Nyambara outlines how deindustrialisation in Zimbabwe, marked by a burgeoning informal sector, helped to undermine labour resistance. Kaye Liang and Elaine Sio-ieng Hui look at alternatives to unions where legal unions are coopted by the state in China, and Yuri Ravavoi discusses how unionists in exile can continue to organise.

Section six considers another defining feature of our age: the treatment of refugees. Can Kaya shows how the EU deal with Turkey about refugees makes that country 'not a part of the EU but its border,' with the EU willing to fund an authoritarian government in the interests of border security, which thus 'creates a flaw that authoritarian regimes can exploit' to 'legitimate a labour hell where millions of people make less than the minimum wage' and splits the camp of labour.

Finally, section seven turns to the all-important question of practical solidarity, sandwiched in a discussion about sanctions. Khaing Zar Aung

and Cecilia Brighi open the section to explain why people in Myanmar are calling for more sanctions against the military regime there. Lizaveta Merliak writes about the tools a union used to respond to arrests in Belarus, including the strengths and challenges of online campaigns. Ramon Certeza, Melisa Serrano and Verna Viajar return to the Philippines to describe the background to global and national campaigns against the murder of activists and repression of trade unions there. Finally, Frank Hoffer concludes the section and the book by arguing for the crucial need for international solidarity, but problematizes a self-interested solidarity only with the like-minded, and contends that sanctions, as a knee-jerk response, are not often appropriate or effective. He considers alternatives such as using trade policy to reward governments respecting human rights, and a targeted brain drain from repressive regimes.

This volume is a start, not an end, to the question of how to resist authoritarianism. We hope it will spark further discussion about the nature of authoritarianism, more sharing of what worked and what didn't in specific situations, and above all, more solidarity, within and across borders.

