



Live Working or Die Fighting: How The Working Class Went Global

Paul Mason

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A Chinese woman pushes her way to the front of a hiring queue outside a factory in Shenzhen....

A Bolivian miner, without light or ventilation, crawls deep inside a deserted mine...

A group of Somali cleaners files into an investment bank in London's Canary Wharf...

Globalisation has created a whole new working class - and they are reliving stories that were first played out a century ago.

In *Live Working or Die Fighting*, Paul Mason tells the story of this new working class alongside the epic history of the global labour movement, from its formation in the factories of the 1800s to its near destruction by fascism in the 1930s. Along the way he provides a 'Who Do You Think You Are?' for the anti-globalisation movement, uncovering startling parallels between the issues that confronted the original anti-capitalists and those who have taken to the streets in Seattle, Genoa and beyond.

Blending exhilarating historical narrative with reportage from today's front line, he links the lives of 19th-century factory girls with the lives of teenagers in a giant Chinese mobile phone factory; he tells the story of how mass trade unions were born in London's Docklands - and how they're being reinvented by the migrant cleaners in skyscrapers that stand on the very same spot.

The stories come to life through the voices of remarkable individuals: child labourers in Dickensian England, visionary women on Parisian barricades, gun-toting railway strikers in America's wild west, and beer-swilling German metalworkers who tried to stop World War One. It is a story of urban slums, self-help co-operatives, choirs and brass bands, free love and self-education by candlelight. And, as the author shows, in the developing industrial economies of the world it is still with us.

Live Working or Die Fighting celebrates a common history of defiance, idealism and self-sacrifice, one as alive and active today as it was two hundred years ago. It is a unique and inspirational book.

Live Working or Die Fighting: How The Working Class Went Global Details

Date : Published April 5th 2007 by Harvill Secker

ISBN : 9780436206153

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Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : History, Politics, Nonfiction, Economics

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From Reader Review Live Working or Die Fighting: How The Working Class Went Global for online ebook

Kyle Garrison says

An excellent micro-history of the working class.

Terry Clague says

"My idea of socialism is no state monopoly. There should be stress on the subjectivity of the human being. You need good material conditions, a high level of culture, much freedom and friendship. And it won't come today or tomorrow. It's a long and winding road." Marek Edelman, Bund activist, quoted on p.241 of this book.

Martin Southwood says

Citing examples from all around the world, both historical and contemporary, this text is like a rallying cry demonstrating quite convincingly that despite various modes of oppression people always find a way to join together and fight against their exploitation and for a fairer society. Mason shows that with globalization, organized working class struggle has also transcended local national boundaries.

Sean Fernyhough says

Paul Mason's book sets modern day stories of trade union struggles in the developing world against those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The parallels pull the reader up short: these are the conditions of production experienced by people who make the goods we buy.

Don't believe the economists. These goods aren't cheap because investment capital has sought out low wage economies to efficiently allocate resources and improve people's lives. These goods are cheap because of the vigorous control of the length of the working day, intensity of the production process as well as no regard for health and safety.

In China today workers are maimed without compensation, work without employment contracts for 12 hours a day without a break and are subjected to violence. And as the conditions of production manufacture cheap garments, computer components and plastic flowers so they also make the conditions in which the workers live. In Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries workers provided their own libraries, theatres, choirs and gymnasiums as well as the bread and butter needs of creches and cremations. In today's Bolivia tin miners strike for 55 extra teaching posts to be created in local schools. In Gangxia West the working class slum tenements pulsate with life in the evening, despite the 12 hour working days.

Mason is happy to let the stories, and the characters in them, speak for themselves. He eschews theorising

and is content to gently lead the reader to agree with his observations: that the working class movements are more successful when led by the working class and the struggles across time and geographical space have has much to do with gaining dignity as improving material conditions of life.

What strikes me as a contrast in the stories is the internationalism of working class movements in previous conflicts: something that seems absent today, modern communication technology notwithstanding. In his afterword Mason refers to the globalisation of the messages of NGOs and environmental movements, but where is our age's Tom Mann? The following quote from the opening chapter may tell us,

"The Chinese industrial workforce is now the biggest in the world. In the years since Tiananmen Square managemnt styles have been draconian in the knowledge that every act of resistance can be labelled as a "threat to social order" and severely punished. Shenzhen's workers are to global capitalism what Manchester's workers were 200 years ago. What they do next will shape the century."

Tom says

Full of excellent characters this book compares historic struggles with modern worker struggles - an finds there is a lot in common.

For me there were two highlights. Firstly the discussion of how globalisation left the British working class with no sense of meaning in a country where geographically fixed production gave way to a service based economy.

And secondly the insight into the US left. I wouldn't never have thought the US had such and illustrious labour movement.

Tiarnan O says

Interesting approach to labour history, combining contemporary reportage from labour struggles around the globe with similar examples from history. Includes chapters on syndicalism, the sit-down strikes of the 1930s, the role of the labour movement in the Chinese revolution, the Jewish Bund, and contemporary takes on struggles in Nigeria, Bolivia, the new Chinese working class of the SEZs, etc. While I might disagree with some of the emphases and conclusions Mason draws (for example, the centrality of NGOs to the new global labour movement), this is a must-read book for any student of labour history or radical politics.

Jim Rimmer says

This is a marvellous book which ought to be compulsory reading, not only for those with an interest but for all who are able to read.

Mason matches contemporary reportage with chronological and historical narrative. It is one of the great sadnesses of the working class movement that it's stirring internationalist stories have been diminished by an undue emphasis on systems and determinants. The impacts of this loss continue to be felt amongst both

industrialised and industrialising countries.

If you think you know the labour movement I guarantee you'll learn something new and important here. If it's all new, this is great place to start.

Chad says

I stopped smoking pot. As a result I started reading like a fiend. This was the first in a long line of books that got me on the road to reclaiming my mind.

A great read this book details some of the more important points of labor history on Earth and connects it to current labor issues happening globally in the present day.

Labor has always seemed to have an unwritten history which we all take for granted. This book got me started in my pursuit to learn more about the very important role labor has had in shaping our (US) democracy and helping to level the playing field.

The present day history stuff is great and inspiring! I just wish there were more examples of labor struggles within the US. Most of the present day stuff was in developing countries and that's great, we need to focus on that for sure. But it makes me wonder are we as a labor movement not needing attention? Labor has been on the ropes since that piece of shit Reagan was in office. I'd love to read a book about labor's recent history in the US.

Gareth says

a great tour of how modern labour movements and their activities can be related to historical occurrences of similar responses to similar problems. gives u a real breadth of examples of ways that the multitude can confront those who attempt to control power through historical structures.

Dan Sharber says

i love this book. the beauty and humanity of the 'micro-story' of the history of the labor movement is brilliantly described by mason - clearly a very talented writer. if you are a student of labor history it is likely you are familiar with almost all of the macro events described but the individual actors are often glossed over in official histories; likewise the parallels with recent labor history are often not drawn. this book does a good job with both and is a must read for anyone who values the romantic vision and selfless action of the starry eyed dreamers and hot-headed radicals who through commitment and good fortune tried to make into being that better world we all dream of.

Steve says

Found it a bit too detailed.I may well pick it up again.

Nick Gerrard says

This is a great book, with detailed historical re-telling of important working class struggles from around the world and how they are relevant to struggles happening today. Should be studied in schools so people get an idea of the working classes important history.

Jimmy Mchugh says

Paul Mason seems to have become a conspicuous character during the years of the "Great Recession", bringing empathetic and erudite commentary on protest movements from across the globe. Given the "neutral" (aka routinely liberal) political agenda of the BBC and haughty conceit of the other presenters (i.e. Paxman, Robinson, Flanders), Mason has always appeared amiable and genuinely insightful.

Hence I began reading this book in a favorable disposition to the author. Thankfully this was rewarded by what is an engaging and well-researched account of working class movements interlaced with accounts of contemporary labour struggles from across the world.

Though the relationship between the contemporary events and the past is not always strikingly evident, the general attempt to bear relevance on some of the struggles of capital vs labour of the past onto the present is admirable. The book certainly plugged gaps in my own historical knowledge such as the origins of the German SPD and the Chinese Civil War, and the book concludes with a highly affecting account of Mason's own origins from working class routes in the North West of England. Highly recommended as a short alternative if you don't want to slog through Eric Hobsbawm's more lengthy accounts!

Stuart Watkins says

Whatever happened to the working class? Is there an alternative to a life of endless work, subservience and tedium? Read this excellent book and find out.

Chris Hall says

Brilliant reading, and encouraging
