

From the vantage point of 2021 or 2022, the threat to democracy itself is much starker than it was in 2019. Some of the chapters offer suggestions about the role of workers and their unions in preserving (or even improving) democracy. Presciently, Nancy MacLean contends that “Democracy itself must become a key focus of work and reform – and that the public must be alerted to the profound danger it is in. And not just from Donald Trump, as so many seem to imagine” (29). It is no surprise that MacLean’s deeply researched expertise in the decades long dark money agenda allows her both to predict and explain the attacks on democracy and the election process. Emphasizing this threat, Jennifer Klein argues that “at a time when the deficits in political and economic democracy grow deeper and more entwined, unions will have to elevate freedom of association and freedom of assembly to generate new forms of democratic participation throughout our polity” (223). The essential role that unions will need to play in preserving and reclaiming democracy is critical, and the authors here foreshadow the responses that this threat requires.

Overall, *Labor in the Age of Trump* is not only about the age of Trump but the age of Trumpism. The chapters create a portrait not of a single moment or four-year period but of a trajectory, perhaps accelerated but not disrupted by the election of Trump. As such, the challenges, opportunities, and ongoing crises described in the volume retain their relevance far beyond the Trump era.

## ORCID iD

Rebecca Kolins Givan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3543-6432>

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Ford, M. (2019). *From Migrant to Worker: Global Unions and Temporary Labor Migration in Asia*. ILR Press: Cornell Ithaca and London. 195 pp. \$49.95 (hardcover).

**Reviewed by:** Gabriella Alberti , Leeds University Business School  
DOI: 10.1177/07308884211040784

Michele Ford’s *From migrant to worker* is an essential read to all those interested in the debate on migrant labor in industrial relations (IR), not only because it provides a comprehensive account of union action on migration

spanning a vast region, but also because it focuses on a historical conundrum for the labor movement: whether or not to organize temporary migrant workers and what positions to take towards state managed-migration policies.

This book provides a refreshing view on the challenges and opportunities to organize migrant workers in under-explored regions. Reviewing the actions of local and international unions and NGOs across seven countries in Asia (Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand), Ford identifies the relative strength of IR in each national context, the nature of the migration regime, and whether unions “fight for the rights” of migrants *as workers* as key factors influencing migrant capacity to join the labor movement.

Through a fine-grained analysis of multiple cases based on documentary research and interviews, Ford effectively shows how the intervention and financial support of external actors such as Global Union Federations (GUFs) have helped in moving along the positions of unions in countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and South Korea. In contrast in Japan and Taiwan mostly local NGOs set the agenda for migrant rights independently from mainstream unions. Thanks to the influence of the international labor movement, Thai unions have fought successfully for the collective bargaining of migrants in 2005, but progress has still been hindered by the greater influx of irregular migrants in tandem with low freedom of association. In Hong Kong, the activism of civil society has been particularly beneficial in facilitating the reception of international union activities, where domestic workers organizing efforts and their ability to influence migration reform demonstrates that organizing informal migrants through “separate but affiliated structures” actually strengthens the political voice of the labor movement (150).

Through many other instructive examples Ford shows how the specific features of the Asian context, characterized by restrictive immigration policies, temporary immigration schemes, and the historical hostility of trade unions towards migration critically shape outcomes. The main finding is that *by moving the focus from migration status to migrants’ position in the labor market* local NGOs are more likely to succeed in organizing migrant workers. On their side, local trade unions are more likely to move to less exclusionary policies in those countries where GUFs have been most active, showing the importance of transnational collaboration to shift away from inward looking approaches. This argumentation is thought-provoking when compared to debates in the West, where in contrast IR research highlighted unions’ failures to organize migrants workers because of their blindness towards migrant intersectional forms of oppression (Alberti et al., 2013). The problem in Asia has been the opposite: “there, foreign workers have been


seen first and foremost as migrants—whose presence disrupts the local labor market and harms the local labor force—rather than as part of a global collectivity of workers” (2).

Despite this call for a universalist approach to migrants as workers the ongoing relevance of “separate organizing” in the context of Asia’s weaker IR may be one that allows the reader to grasp the specific challenges faced by Asian unions and also to draw comparative lessons for union renewal in the field of migration. The creation of “migrant-only unions—with or without the support of a mainstream union” (9) resembles the new forms of migrant self-organization emerging in the UK in response to established unions’ inability to include precarious migrants (Alberti & Però, 2018). Ford’s critical discussion about separate organizing also highlights the endurance of the “union dilemma” between the special and equal treatment model (Marino et al., 2017). Ford is positive that NGOs and faith groups play a leading role in representing migrant interests (153) but the grassroots organizing of migrants is obscured by greater attention to institutional dynamics of unions and NGOs.

The few shortcomings of this book indeed constitutes grounds to further the debate on migration among both academics and practitioners. The author acknowledges the strengths but also the limitations for temporary migrants to “embrace their identity as workers” (3). And yet, by insisting that these transient guests ultimately need to fully access the national IR system to enjoy the rights and protections afforded to their fellow citizen-workers, Ford risks taking for granted the source of such labor rights and entitlements. An imaginative approach that decouples the length of status and residence of migrant workers from employment and social protections, and perhaps more attention to the ways in which migrants organize outside institutional frameworks, would provide a further exploration of the opportunities to improve their working lives independently from their worker status. Precisely the notion of labor citizenship as the one and only channel to access rights for workers, historically entangled with ideologies of *race and nation* (Lundemark, 2020), may contribute to the persisting barriers to migrant integration into unions East and West.

Ford’s comprehensive and in-depth account of unions and temporary migration in Asia is a rich and refreshing read for anyone interested in developing an agenda towards more inclusive unions and community-labor coalitions supporting mobile workers. By decentering the IR gaze away from the West, this is a critical contribution to improve the conditions of all workers across borders and move beyond residual forms of nationalism in the labor movement.

**ORCID iD**

Gabriella Alberti  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5673-6568>

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