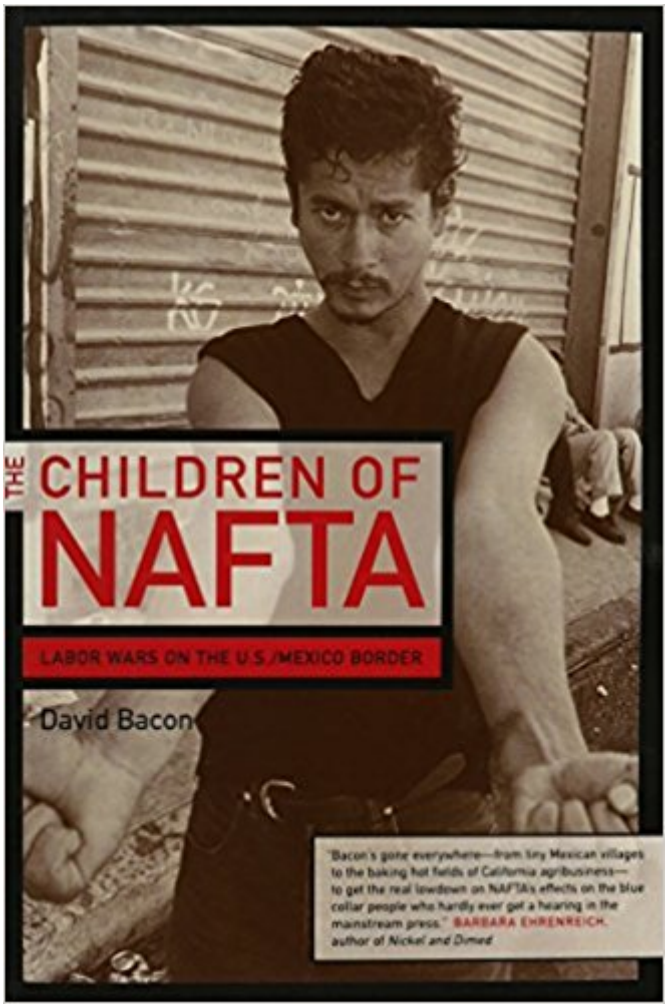
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The Children Of NAFTA: Labor Wars On The U.S./Mexico Border



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Synopsis

Food, televisions, computer equipment, plumbing supplies, clothing. Much of the material foundation of our everyday lives is produced along the U.S./Mexico border in a world largely hidden from our view. Based on gripping firsthand accounts, this book investigates the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement on those who labor in the agricultural fields and maquiladora factories on the border. Journalist David Bacon paints a powerful portrait of poverty, repression, and struggle, offering a devastating critique of NAFTA in the most pointed and in-depth examination of border workers published to date.Unlike journalists who have made brief excursions into strawberry fields and maquiladoras, Bacon has more than a decade's experience reporting on the ground at the border, and he has developed sustained relationships with scores of workers and organizers who have entrusted him with their stories. He describes harsh conditions of child labor in the Mexicali Valley, the deplorable housing outside factories in cities such as Tijuana, and corporate retaliation faced by union organizers. He finds that, despite the promises of its backers, NAFTA has locked in a harsh neoliberal economic policy that has swept away laws and protections that Mexican workers had established over decades. More than a showcase for NAFTA's victims, this book traces the emergence of a new social consciousness, telling how workers in Mexico, the United States, and Canada are now beginning to join together in a powerful new strategy of cross-border organizing as they search for economic and social justice.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Normally rare firsthand accounts from Mexican workers make up most of this examination of labor struggles in the fields and factories along the U.S.-Mexican border in the 10 years since the signing of NAFTA. Bacon, an associate editor with Pacific News Service and a regular contributor to the Nation, provides exhaustive, meticulous retellings of intimidation, violence and voter fraud that reveal a pattern of corporate and government collusion to squash laborers' attempts to organize independent unions. Such tactics are nothing new in Mexican politics, but Bacon argues they have a new significance post-NAFTA: enforcing the government's neoliberal policy of suppressing wages in order to attract foreign investment. While Bacon offers little in terms of substantiating this claim, the testimony of the workers is powerful and compelling (as are Bacon's 24 b&w photos), and the chunks of Mexican labor history Bacon presents along the way are clear and accessible, making this an invaluable book for anyone interested in the human mechanics of globalization. Ironically, despite rampant suppression of workers' organizations, Bacon finds an unintended success of NAFTA in burgeoning ties between U.S. and Mexican workers, in preparation for a large-scale fight for workers' rights that "will take place on the floors of the maquila plants." Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ã¢â ¬Å“[BaconÃ¢â ¬â„¢s] books . . . are sharp, analytical, and urgent.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Utne 2009-11-25)

Fast delivery! As dsscribed!

Struggle and hope. That's what I thought of this May the 1st of 2006, when seemingly millions of people across the US, mainly Latinos, rallied to support so-called illegal immigrants. These immigrants have literally spent a long time struggling both in the nations they came from and here in the US as business people get rich from their labor. But that day there was hope. In this day of globalization where corporations have the ultimate freedom to cross borders at will in the search for higher and higher profits, while workers cannot without becoming "illegals", it was a day that seemed to signify that "Si, se peude!" They stood up to a government punishing its own people trying to escape a poverty created by the economic policies created by that very government.What exactly is going on at the US-Mexican border? It seems so far away to me, but in a town I grew up near, you can see the backlash and blame on immigrants for US citizens losing jobs to what is really that fault of neo-liberal attacks like NAFTA. In Hazleton, PA (about 45 minutes from my native Carbondale), some of the most draconian laws against immigrants ever passed sailed through

recently. But it all comes back to the border. It turns out that Mexican immigrants are not so docile after all,and that they, just like any people who have been wronged over and over, will stand up for themselves. David Bacon, a labor journalist who works for the Nation, illustrates this well in "The Children of NAFTA: Labor Wars on the U. S./Mexico Border".Bacon looks at what exactly is happening on the border. He starts by exploring the grape pickers of Southern California. Most had come to the US to seek higher wages than they could have possibly gotten in Mexico. But after NAFTA (North American Free Trade Association), the companies at which they had won better wages after decades of fights with the Caesar Chavez's United Farm Workers (UFW), many suddenly found that they lost these jobs as they moved to Mexico's Mexicali Valley where they could pay those workers as much as a third less than the mainly Mexican immigrants in the US. In the Mexicali Valley, farmworkers (who often bring their children to the fields since there is no affordable school or daycare) could barely afford to pay their bills or get groceries, leading to many families sharing homes in order to pool their resources.Along this same border has risen the infamous Maquiladora (duty-free and union-free factories) industry, which is now a global term but originated as a term for clothing manufacturers along the US-Mexico border. These have swelled since NAFTA, and one of the allures is that it is very hard to form an independent union in Mexico. However, Bacon illustrates that over the past decade of NAFTA Mexico, several independent unions have arisen in the face of a hostile ruling PRI, and then PAN, governments. At the same time, US unions have begun to pull away from their former cold-war, anti-communist sentiment and have slowly recognized that American workers and Mexican workers both lose because of NAFTA and that they must work together in order to survive, The UE, (United Electrical), an independent union, sent the first support to the new independent unions and conducted co-campaigns on the border to organize Maquiladoras into unions to demand better conditions and wages. Interestingly enough, it also began the question of shifting their tactics, since while US unions usually pressure companies until they can win or get some of their goals, Mexican unions usually see the government as their main enemy since the Mexican government maintains industry control over wages and will often not let companies raise wages if it will effect an entire industry (another reason US companies like moving to Mexico).Some of the stuff in this book honestly was shocking how far 1st world companies would go to crush 3rd world workers. There are countless stories in "Children of NAFTA" of brutal beatings of union organizers. They (factory managers) shipped in temps in many stories to vote for the company government-sanctioned union in factory-wide elections, which too seemed many times to galvanize Maquiladora workers against the management. Black-lists, revenge wage-reductions, and brutal attacks on factory workers' pro-union demonstrations almost

made reading it unbearable. However, as the labor organizers learned to deal with NAFTA, the one thing I came away from is that the only hope that we human beings fighting for a better future for our children have is that we can never turn our backs on anyone in a struggle. If global corporations can be everywhere, labor unions must be too. While we engage in these struggles locally, our minds must think globally, as the phrase goes.

If you are looking for a biased account of the human tragedy that is Mexican labor, this might be the book for you.If you are looking for a analysis of what is happening and WHY. You may be disappointed.David Bacon clearly wishes that he was the Saul Alinsky of Mexico. If you don't know who Saul Alinsky is, you may have just found your next reading subject.It's not that its poorly written. It is just not impressive in any way. If you can't get enough of Mexico or if you need something to read between globalization protests, you will love it. But its hard to just jump in with an open mind and not be disappointed.

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