

potential, and pitfalls, of community unionism. In their contribution, for instance, Suzanne Mills and Tyler McCreary offer surprising and encouraging evidence of over three decades of union collaborations with Aboriginal organizations. Yet these collaborations, they observe, face significant obstacles, including unions' tendency to prioritize economic issues over social justice or anti-colonial struggles, and First Nations' own struggles for sovereignty, which can complicate or undermine their relationships with unions. In their chapter on migrant workers, unions and workers' centres, Aziz Choudry and Mark Thomas demonstrate that social unionism that links genuine grassroots mobilization at the local level with international solidarity networks and encourages workers' self-organization can help overcome some of the daunting challenges facing these vulnerable and marginalized workers, and at the same time, strengthen and energize the labour movement. Kendra Coulter's case study of union cooperation with anti-poverty organizations offers an important reminder that, when unions overcome their long-standing aversion to working to advance the interests of the poor, they stand not only to recover their moral compass, but by publicly opposing the backlash against the poor, they do what we hope unions will always do: unite us, as working people, in the creation of a better world for all.

This linking of community unionism and labour politics, and the multiple examples of broadly based solidarity in practice, moves the conversation well beyond the usual frame of labour in politics and in this way, the book makes an unexpected and innovative contribution to the growing literature on union renewal. The many case studies that illuminate praxis – theory embodied in action – make that contribution especially valuable. The collection as a whole is an important resource that I predict will be used by unionists, labour scholars, and students, and indeed, it should be recommended to anyone seeking insight into the world today.

Sharzer, Greg. 2012. *No Local: Why Small-Scale Alternatives Won't Change the World*. Winchester, UK: Zero Books. ISBN 978-1-84694-671-4. Paperback: 21.95 CAD. Pages: 178.

Reviewed by Charles Z. Levkoe
University of Toronto

It appears that the honeymoon with the locavore has come to an end, that is, if it ever began. Over the past decade, a renewed embrace of localism has been heralded as a way to engage in ethical consumption, build communities, strengthen economies, protect

the environment and, at times, transform society. Local food initiatives have been central to this trend, with an explosion of research studies, popular literature, documentary films, policies, community-based initiatives, entrepreneurial activities, and, of course, an abundance of new purchasing opportunities. In recent years, however, the popularity of local initiatives has come under intense scrutiny from both pro- and anti-capitalist critiques, and important questions have been raised about the validity of localist claims. Greg Sharzer's *No Local: Why Small Scale Alternatives Won't Change the World* joins this cadre of voices to bring a decidedly Marxist perspective to the ongoing debate.

No Local is a short but dense book, written in accessible prose and aimed at a wide range of readers. Its self-proclaimed task is to help proponents of localism realize the folly of their ways. The book's argument is that local initiatives - from urban agriculture and farmers' markets to alternative currencies and cooperatives - do little or nothing to change systemic inequalities. While Sharzer admits that some of these initiatives make slight improvements for a specific class of consumer (i.e. those that can afford the time and money required to participate), he attempts to show that these well-meaning alternatives are bound by the same economic rules as the large corporations they oppose. For example, a small, locally owned business may produce a niche product of superior quality, but its capacity to survive in a capitalist market is still dependent on externalizing costs, exploiting labour and destroying the environment. The take home message for localists is that individual choice, lifestyle activism, and micro-alternatives do not have the power to transform capitalism. While Sharzer's argument reinforces the importance of addressing the core problem of social and ecological injustice, *No Local* may be a missed opportunity to have a broader impact on movement building and social change efforts.

Moving beyond critiquing specific local initiatives, *No Local* attempts to take on the concept of localism as a whole. The challenge, however, is that Sharzer constructs his critique in meticulous detail without clearly defining his target. The result is a series of assumptions about a wide range of initiatives that lack an empirical foundation. Localism is presented as a concept that begins with a criticism of size but becomes a pessimistic and naïve utopian ideology embraced and fostered by the petite bourgeoisie. In constructing his adversary, Sharzer argues that the localist do-it-yourself attitude abandons the root causes of social and economic inequality and environmental degradation. Instead, proponents attempt to escape capitalist social relations by creating "pockets of equitable cooperation" (146), abandoning hope and awaiting social breakdown (i.e. climate change and peak oil). Far from contributing to any significant change, the individual choice and personal responsibility purported by localists serves to maintain the structures of inequality and oppression, accommodating and even facilitating neoliberalism. Sharzer argues that all local initiatives can be categorized as either directly challenging capitalism, and thus worthy of our efforts, or part of the problem. Thus, if localists understood the

internal drives of capitalism, they would cease to be localists and begin to engage in actual systemic transformation (i.e. collective resistance through democratic class struggle) that confronts and disrupts capitalist social relations.

Assuming we accept Sharzer's prefiguration, his binary classification of pro-market (i.e. the belief in a fair and ethical capitalism) and anti-market (i.e. the critique of capitalism) "localists" groups together a wide diversity of people and initiatives while ignoring their differences. For example, it is true that some urban agriculture initiatives are led by profit seeking entrepreneurs or otherwise exemplify the localist ideology that Sharzer targets. But many more initiatives are initiated by neighbourhood residents and activists (from across classes) as a way to empower individuals, build collective consciousness and develop capacity for broader action. Thus, it is not clear that there is one localist movement with a common ideology. A number of writers have wrestled with these issues as part of a critical dialogue around the politics of scale (e.g. Swyngedouw 1997; Dupuis and Goodman 2005). Failing to identify the nuanced realities of the case studies results in constructing a "straw man" argument with which many localists will have trouble relating.

In the book's final chapter, we are promised that our newfound knowledge of the inner workings of capitalism will lead us in the right direction. Sharzer provides hints at his vision for a different kind of society with brief mention of ideas such as democratic social planning, workers running society themselves, and socialism. Only then is the local "no longer outside, beyond an alternative to capitalism but a site of struggle against it" (141). But Sharzer ignores the way that many local initiatives are already building coalitions and networks at regional, national and global levels and collectively developing more nuanced critiques of social, economic and political systems. For example, Canada's People's Food Policy Project recently brought together thousands of individuals and local initiatives to collaboratively propose and prioritize a food policy platform based on the concept of food sovereignty – where food systems are controlled by those who produce and consume food as opposed to corporate interests and global financial institutions and food is understood to be the foundation for healthy lives, communities and eco-systems. These kinds of linkages between local initiatives and collective movements illustrate how people and ideas can connect across scales, and also to more radical political agendas. *No Local* spends little time addressing the ways that local initiatives may be an entry point for engaging individuals in broader collective struggles and the effects of trans-local networking on movement building.

Sharzer is extremely well versed in his subject matter and his writing style is clear and straightforward. However, *No Local* reads like a theoretical debate between a particular reading of Marx and an abstracted ideology of "localism" constructed through a selection of specific writers (i.e. Barbara Kingsolver, Bill McKibben, Carlo Petrini, E.F. Schumacher). Sharzer spends far too much time summarizing Marx and too little time

applying his ideas to the empirical evidence. *No Local's* strongest contribution to both the theory and practice of social change is through its, unfortunately limited, engagement with the case studies. Through *No Local*, Sharzer reminds us to think carefully about the unintended consequences of our efforts at the local level, but in the process risks making invisible the actual and existing complexity of local initiatives.

References

DuPuis, E. Melanie, and David Goodman. 2005. "Should We Go 'Home' to Eat? Toward a Reflexive Politics of Localism." *Journal of Rural Studies*. Vol. 21, No. 3.

Swyngedouw, Erik. 1997. "Neither Global Nor Local: 'Glocalization' and the Politics of Scale." In Kevin R. Cox, ed. *Spaces of Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local*. New York: Guildford Press.

Choudry, Aziz; Jill Hanley and Eric Shragge, eds. 2012. *Organize! Building from the Local for Global Justice*. Toronto and Oakland: Between the Lines and PM Press. ISBN 978-1-77113-004-2. Paperback: 24.95 CAD. Pages: 313.

Reviewed by Ian Hussey
York University

This exciting new edited volume contains over twenty essays on building power, mass movements and critical analysis around working-class, anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist struggles. The chapters are written in accessible language by a wide array of activists, organizers, lawyers, artists and academics, and draw lessons from struggles in Canada, the United States, Palestine, and Aotearoa/New Zealand in an effort to link local organizing work with global struggles and transnational activist networks and to place these struggles in historical context. From art and activism for Palestine to immigrant workers' community-based labour organizing to organizing in support of Indigenous Peoples to the struggles of queer people of colour and of the psychiatric survivor movement, this book contains critical commentary on many of the most pressing and creative struggles happening today. The authors are not, however, simply cheerleading their various causes; rather, they illuminate and engage with the tensions, limits, problems and gains of a wide range of organizing practices and contexts.