

Brantley's research on the Coors boycott coalition and individual activists is extensive and she makes a convincing case that "boycotts can be radical, transformative, and successful forms of political praxis" (p. 4). For readers unfamiliar with the history of boycotts and consumer activism, her case study could have been situated more broadly in the existing literature, particularly in terms of studies that have highlighted solidarity between workers and consumers. Indeed, the consumer is mostly absent from Brantley's study. Specialists may benefit from an elaboration on how the boycott interacts with other tactics that activists employ, such as the union label or other so-called buycott tactics. Though admittedly outside of the scope of her study one wonders how the two dominant breweries, Anheuser-Busch and Miller, and their unionized workers responded to and perhaps benefited from the Coors boycott. After all, boycotters likely desired a substitute for their Silver Bullets and surely a cold Bud or Miller High Life would have sufficed.

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Heartland Blues: Labor Rights in the Industrial Midwest *By Marc Dixon.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 192 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, notes. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-19-091703-6.

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Reviewed by Robert Bussel

In rapid succession between 2010 and 2015, state legislatures in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan either passed right-to-work laws or approved other limits on unions and the practice of collective bargaining. Although voters subsequently repealed Ohio's collective bargaining restrictions, these mostly successful efforts represented a stunning assault on union legitimacy in a region long perceived as a labor stronghold.

As Marc Dixon explains in *Heartland Blues*, these assaults were not of recent vintage. Rather, they represented new manifestations of political efforts to undermine unions that occurred even during labor's glory days in the decades immediately following World War II.

In examining labor's vulnerabilities during this period, Dixon aligns himself with scholars who have questioned the concept of a post-World War II "capital-labor accord" as an exaggeration of union power and an underestimation of ongoing corporate and political resistance.

To place the union movement's decline and the recent assaults against it in historical context, Dixon uses case studies of key events (two conflicts over right-to-work and one involving passage of landmark pro-worker legislation) in three midwestern states (Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin) "to help get the 1950s story right" (p. x). He draws on social movement theory to review the constellation of forces operating in these state-level contests: the extent of labor unity the machinations of business opponents and their political allies and labor's use of "inside" and "outside" strategies to advance its objectives.

In 1957, Indiana became the first northern industrialized state to pass a right-to-work law that made union membership a voluntary decision. Deep rifts between craft and industrial unions hampered labor's ability to mount effective opposition, and the national AFL-CIO provided limited assistance, resulting in a lackluster campaign featuring minimal rank-and-file involvement or mobilization of community allies. In contrast, a unified corporate effort capitalized on adverse public reaction to several violent strikes, deployed dissident union members to denounce their leaders as out of touch, and worked closely with conservative legislators to enact right-to-work in defiance of ten thousand unionists who protested at the state capitol.

A year later in Ohio, however, voters rejected a right-to-work ballot measure by a 2-to-1 margin. Dixon shows how this resounding labor victory reflected different dynamics from the debacle in Indiana. The Ohio labor movement put aside internal differences and benefited from advice and assistance provided by the national AFL-CIO. Unions relied on an "outside strategy" to mobilize a broad coalition of supporters from community-based organizations, accompanied by positive messaging that put proponents of right-to-work on the defensive. The larger companies advancing the initiative attracted limited enthusiasm from local businesses and encountered reluctance from many Republican leaders, who feared that advocacy of right-to-work would damage their election-year prospects. Most telling, as one business leader later lamented, "labor had the grassroots, the Chamber [of Commerce] had none," leading to a union victory that helped stall right-to-work's momentum (p. 77).

In Dixon's third case study, a successful effort to gain collective bargaining rights for public employees, Wisconsin unions used an "inside strategy" to secure passage of groundbreaking workers' rights legislation. Divisions among Republicans opened doors for labor activists to cultivate relationships and play an influential role in a resurgent Democratic Party that with growing union support had begun to win statewide offices. Although Wisconsin had its share of virulently anti-union companies and outbreaks of violent labor conflict, the business community and conservative Republicans failed to coalesce in support of right-to-

work, thereby creating political space for an affirmative labor initiative. Taking advantage of this political opportunity, in 1959 the Wisconsin Council of County and Municipal Employees won legislative approval of a limited public-sector bargaining law (the nation's first), a modest beginning that it later strengthened with Democratic support. However, Dixon observes, the new law failed to inspire similar legislation elsewhere in the Midwest, with the rise of public employee unionism a development that would take several decades to unfold.

In the years that followed, as Dixon describes, a "holding pattern" emerged in the Midwest where unions could, on occasion, expand labor rights but still struggled with old constraints including the elusiveness of labor unity, sustained business and political opposition, and difficulties in crafting messages that resonated with a broader public. As Dixon shrewdly notes, unions "needed a lot to go right in order to wield influence," and not much "went right" as an anti-union tide swept the Midwest during the past decade (p. 8).

Heartland Blues is a well-researched and persuasively argued book that provides a thoughtful framework for assessing the complex forces affecting labor's fortunes in a region long viewed as a cultural and political barometer of national norms and values. In further recognition of the heartland's prominent cultural status, there are a few areas of analysis where Dixon might have extended his analysis. Given union success in defeating right-to-work in 1958 and rescinding legislatively enacted restrictions on collective bargaining in 2011, it would be useful to learn more about "Ohio exceptionalism" in winning ballot measure fights to preserve labor rights. Additionally, he might have examined challenges to achieving labor unity not only at an institutional level but also among union membership by assessing how factors such as ethnicity, race, gender, and religion shaped working-class political attitudes and circumscribed labor's ability to translate "density into policy."

Dixon concludes on a hopeful note, encouraged by recent activism among teachers and low-wage workers that defines worker struggles as broader fights for social justice and attempts to "bargain for the common good." At the same time, he reminds us that there is "no magic bullet or single route for labor influence," offering a sobering reminder of the uphill struggle the union movement faces in creating opportunities that can shift the odds in its favor (p. 120).

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