Grundrisse, first published in 1939–1941, had found its way into a public library in New York; Grossmann, who lived there until 1948, never bothered to go and read it.

Political sympathies apart, Rick Kuhn's book will be more useful for historians interested in the history of the Jewish and Polish labour movement from 1900 to the 1920s than for social scientists or political economists interested in Henryk Grossmann's contribution to Marxist political economy. Whoever wants to learn more about that, whoever wants to get the best available insight into Grossmann's unpublished efforts to come to grips with the criticisms of his theory, will still have to read Scheele's book or wait for the publication of the Grossmann papers (which will be published in German, the language in which the bulk of them were written, in 2009).

Michael R. Krätke

Birke, Peter. Wilde Streiks im Wirtschaftswunder. Arbeitskämpfe, Gewerkschaften und soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik und Dänemark. Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/New York 2007. 376 pp. € 39.90; doi:10.1017/S0020859008003805

Currently, labour unions are under attack because they represent fewer employees than they used to. Also, the strike, the weapon *par excellence* of unions and employees, formerly known as workers, is regarded by some commentators as a relic of the past and destined to become extinct.

However, similar voices have been heard in earlier times. During the "Roaring '20s", political commentators and economists claimed that the struggle between capital and labour was about to end. The events of the 1930s and 1940s showed how fallacious that claim was, but that did not prevent researchers making the same mistake at the end of the 1950s. Again, a period of diminishing strike activity tempted students of labour relations to expect the strike to disappear. "The withering away of the strike" thesis was in fact first propounded by Ross and Hartman, who analysed declining strike activity over the period 1900–1956 across a range of countries, including India and Japan,[1] and it has since been repeated over and over again. While Ross and Hartman cautioned against extrapolating the trends they observed into the future, this is exactly what many writers on the subject have done.

Before scholars could digest all the research and the predictions their thesis gave rise to, workers throughout the Western world unexpectedly began to show a greater willingness to strike. Without warning, they struck on a massive scale and strike figures rose astronomically. "1968" has taken on an iconic aura, because 10 million workers throughout France, and especially in Paris, went on strike or occupied factories. Some of them even fought against the police, standing side by side with students in revolt. This revolt, the fortieth anniversary of which was marked this year, shook the world. The postwar period of reconstruction and sustained economic growth and optimism seemed to have come to an end.

It was not only a French affair. In many other countries, workers struck on a scale unprecedented since World War II. Italy had its "Hot Autumn" (*autunno caldo*) in 1969 and Germany saw the September strikes (*Die September-Streiks*) that same year. In many other countries, including the Netherlands, massive waves of strikes broke out. This inspired a new view of the development of the strike by researchers such as Barkin, Crouch, and Pizzorno. Italy and Germany in particular saw the emergence of a new trend in left-wing political discourse, *operaismo* [workerism]. Unlike most students of labour

1. Arthur M. Ross and Paul T. Hartman, *Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict* (London, 1960).

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whose interest up to that point had chiefly been in the history of organized labour, this new school emphasized the role played by what they called the "mass worker" in the class struggles of Western capitalism. These were the poorly educated workers, often women, young people or migrants, at the docks or on the assembly line. They were difficult to organize but very important in the international strike movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and they inspired many young students to solidarize with them. Even before *operaismo* was able really to vest itself in academia, the widespread global recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s caused massive unemployment and the "resurgence of labour quiescence". Students followed suit and lost their interest in the working class and its struggles.

The global victory of neo-liberalism and the fall of the Berlin Wall ushered in a new period in which the remaining students of labour relations refocused away from organized labour and class analysis and began instead to look at the individual motives informing why workers acted as they did. Their methodological individualism moved away from the economic and institutional approaches of earlier schools, and seemed consistent with the neoclassical and sociobiological approaches to analysing society whereby all developments in society can be ascribed to individual behaviour.

Not all scholars adopted this new fashion, of course. The Fernand Braudel Center in New York is a good example in this respect. Members of the centre continued with their old-fashioned search for strikes and other forms of labour unrest. They built up a large database of labour conflicts, which resulted *inter alia* in Beverly Silver's study *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870*, which appeared in 2003. Others too continue to publish on the great story of the class struggle.

One of them is Peter Birke, who wrote the volume being reviewed here. Being a Dane, he might have been inspired by the prevailing high average level of strike activity in Denmark, which contrasts markedly with levels in most other highly developed countries, where strike activity plummeted after the wave of strikes in 1968. In his study, Birke compares developments in Germany, where he works at the University of Hamburg, with those in Denmark. The main themes of his book are how 1968 fits into the "long 1960s" and what role was played by wildcat strikes in the correlation between labour conflict and the new social movements. One of Birke's first problems is that of definition. What exactly is a wildcat strike? If strikes are not forbidden by statute, the only wildcat strikes are those called by workers themselves in defiance of labour unions as the sole representatives of workers' interests in society. When workers call a wildcat strike, they do so against the will of the union, or at least by ignoring the union. This does not mean that the strike is "spontaneous", since a wildcat strike, too, often needs preparation by a group of workers. Birke uses a rather broad and fluid definition, one which also incorporates go-slows and factory meetings.

It is a commonplace in research on strikes that official data are inadequate and that these inadequacies make international comparisons rather difficult. Birke encountered that problem too, since the methods used by Germany and Denmark to collect data differ, not only from those recommended by the ILO but also from one another. Germany's Statistische Bundesamt counts only those conflicts with at least 10 participants and which lead to the loss of at least 100 working days, while the number of conflicts is not published. The Danish also exclude conflicts resulting in the loss of fewer than 100 working days, but the figures do include days lost by non-strikers temporarily forced out of work. Danmarks Statistik does publish data on the number of conflicts and does not set a minimum for the number of strikers involved.

The principal problem, however, is that wildcat strikes in particular are neglected in the official statistics. In Germany, for example, between 40 and 90 per cent of all strikers are actually excluded from the statistics (p. 39), which means that these statistics are an unreliable source for research on wildcat strikes. Birke has done a great of work to unearth information in archives and magazines on wildcat strikes which had disappeared from our

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collective memory and also been neglected in the historiography. The invisibility of many wildcat strikes can also be explained by the behaviour of the strikers themselves though. Because wildcat strikes are semi-legal, it is in the interests of participants not to draw too much attention to themselves from the public and the police. Strikers have often discovered that discreet strikes can secure better results than highly publicized ones.

Birke's study is the first overall study of wildcat strikes during the years 1950–1973. Perhaps this is the result of an illusion caused by the emphasis on the student character of the 1968 revolt. Students of the post-1968 labour movement were easily tempted to regard the student movement as the moving force behind the workers' movement because 1968 preceded most strike waves, and especially the wildcat strikes. "Deshalb konnte die Illusion entstehen, dass dieser [the wildcat strike] nicht existiert habe, bevor man ihn in Augenschein genommen hatte" (p. 215). This really was an illusion, and perhaps it also reflects an intellectual arrogance, for wildcat strikes also occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. The main reason, however, why wildcat strikes have not been studied seriously before now is that they did not fit into the Fordist system of labour relations. Wildcat strikes are, by their very nature, decentralized and inconsistent with the view of a centralized working class negotiating through national unions.

The composition of the working class changed considerably during the 1960s, and so too did the nature of its struggles. Workers had to adapt to the new situation in which growing numbers of women and migrants became an integral part of the working class. Those newcomers worked in worse conditions than the "old" workers and had to fight their way in. This is exactly what they did, which partly explains the growth of wildcat strikes as a proportion of all strikes. For their part, the "old" members of the working class (male, educated, and established) used the wildcat strike to protest against the far-reaching incorporation of the unions into the institutions of labour relations. The wildcat strike was not, then, a result of the student movement influencing the workers' movement, but a way for workers to cope with changing labour relations. Birke argues that the influence of the new social movements on the labour movement was in fact only minor.

These general comments about Birke's study ignore the differences between the two countries studied. Those are major, but just as striking are the similarities. In rather different institutional settings, the result in both cases was a wave of strikes in 1969. This phenomenon, which was also manifest in many other countries, can probably only be explained in terms of the international development of the capitalist world system. Birke's book is a fine contribution to the study of the international restructuring of the working class, a restructuring that is still in progress and which is inspiring new strike forms. The author sees some of those new forms emerging in contemporary Germany, and he is surely not then one of those who believe the strike may soon be extinct.

Sjaak van der Velden

1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977. Ed. by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharlot. Palgrave Macmillan Transnational History. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke [etc.] 2008. viii, 344 pp. £16.99; doi:10.1017/S0020859008003817

Anniversaries of major international events bring an inevitable proliferation of publications on the subject. The phenomenon is remarkably observable every decade after crucial dates in recent history, such as 1968 and 1989 (as will undoubtedly be the case in 2011), not encompassing a single event but an impressive series of them. *1968 in Europe* is one of the numerous books published this year about the international protest mobilization that

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