

Book Review

Global Decisions, Local Collisions: Urban Life in the New World Order

**By David Ranney
Temple University Press, 2002**

David Ranney's new book, *Global Decisions, Local Collisions: Urban Life in the New World Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002) is an analytic reflection of the author's engagement with and his critique of global capitalism. There is much in this book that is autobiographical, from which the author draws some important conclusions. Ranney's methodology is a synthesis of two approaches, one analytical based on a career of research, and the other based on years of observation and experience as an organizer. He combines these methods to develop insightful reflections on the impacts of globalization, the emergence of a new world order, and the struggles facing workers here and elsewhere. The author's approach is unique among globalization scholars in that his engagement with labor groups and activist organizations provides an epistemic depth that purely academic work cannot easily touch.

The "new world order" is a phrase coined by former President George H. Bush. I suspect that what both Bush Presidents want is a global society that benefits U.S. interests. Ranney traces the development of the new world order since the mid-1970s, and militarily from the Gulf War to the Clinton Presidency and the U.S. intervention in Bosnia. Today, the younger Bush extends this to the Middle East by way of Afghanistan and Iraq, to secure U.S. interests in oil and to preserve Israel's security. Ranney argues that the new world order is more than just economic, for it has features that are political, social, and militaristic. It is an integrated system, or an attempt to be such, and its main goal is to enhance the power and privilege of the chief beneficiaries. A sideshow is the extent to which the new world order justifies its position as a struggle against terrorism, even as it attempts to polarize, minimize, marginalize and blame those who challenge the hegemony of the current economic, social and political arrangements.

For Ranney, corporate structures were well on their way to the new world order in the 1970s. The global era forced fundamental changes in the institutions that “manage” the new order, namely the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. The clandestine loss of industrial and manufacturing jobs in Chicago, including the closing of steel mill plants on the south side, are consequences of new world order policies already in motion. In the early 1980s, these events seemed to catch workers in the U.S. and elsewhere off guard. The optimism that things could change for the better was naïve.

Previously, workers knew that they were good, highly skilled, and many were well paid (some earned \$18.00 an hour and beyond). Meanwhile, corporations began moving their production operations to the sunbelt (where labor was unorganized) and to developing world contexts such as the Maquiladora region of Mexico, where there were few environmental laws and little human or worker rights laws. The new world order did not count the social costs. It rested on an ideology that valued individual choice and corporate freedom more than the environment preservation or health care for workers. It assumed that the neoliberal ideology was in the country’s best interests, and that corporate interests were best served if there was minimal government regulation or public interference. The hallmarks of neoliberalism included individualism, deregulation, a mobility of capital and firms without restraint or accountability, and the wholesale collapse of manufacturing. NAFTA and the institutional infrastructure legitimized the new social contract. Other features of the new world order include the co modification of work, goods, services, and with this the assumption that the environment has only an exchange value, replacing a working concept of use value. Space too is commodities in this system and it can be exchanged for any other space, third world or otherwise, despite cultural differences or geographical particularities.

Ranney argues that workers did not really understand the new economic reality, nor did they appreciate the fact that their experience, and the structures that supported them, were in flux. For the author, a new individual is needed, not the radical individual of the American west, but the social individual, or perhaps the “world social individual” of Karl Marx’s hope. Individuals have their meaning in connection with each other, not in isolation from each other. Yet, the new reality is that change rather than stability is the natural state of the world, and is perhaps the only “constant” in the world capitalist economic system. Unfortunately, most workers assumed that their jobs were secure, and the system that brought prosperity to so many in the post-World War

II years in America would last forever. Ranney reasons that the economy and trans-national businesses globalized before the worker's movement knew what happened.

For Ranney, not only is the social individual needed, but any dissent to the new world order must recognize that ordinary people matter and have ultimate value. For him, it is social existence that determines consciousness. However, the problem is that few workers have the time to reflect on the meaning of their existence in this manner. Many of us are fed the ideology of the dominant paradigm, and made to feel it is un-American to question it. Perhaps the greatest cost of the new world order is not economic, but the loss of democracy, and specifically conditions favorable to the democratic process and civic participation. The new world order has been constructed without due process and without an informed consent by the "public."

If identity is socially constructed, including markets, we are left wondering how we can stop the train, especially if the runaway economy is as unsustainable as the author argues. The transference to the new world order has exploded, with little fanfare. In the process, savings accounts based on predictable interest rates have been replaced by volatile speculation in stocks and bonds. The older Bretton Woods system has been replaced, as has the former Fordist economy. Polarization between decision-makers in the money world, and with workers who are confined to the living world (Korten) has led to serious inequality. Ranney traces how this has evolved in Chicago in terms of public housing, politics and in struggles for a living wage. He believes that global social action groups need to find ways to connect with local struggles that are more real to ordinary people. He also believes that local activists need to appreciate how global forces are at work on the local level.

Ranney upholds the importance of community organizing, and is committed to the development of a social movement that transcends national boundaries. He doesn't believe that the new world order is inevitable, but it will reign supreme—unless labor, women's, environmental, religious activists and the descendents of the Civil Rights movement learn how to work together again. The significance of this book for globalization readers and activists is that the author does a superb job of linking the forces unleashed in a global world to struggles or collisions that one finds locally. The author's career is unique in that his perspective combines the insights of an academic with the instincts of one who has been engaged on the front line as a labor organizer and critic of global economic policy.

By Clinton Stockwell, Ph.D.

Clinton Stockwell is the Executive Director of Chicago Semester, an off campus program for college students that recently received the award, "Program of the Year" for 2002 from the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE). He is also an adjunct professor at North Park University (MACD Program) in community development.

David Ranney is Professor Emeritus-Urban Planning & Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and is Associate Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington D.C. He is author of three books and numerous articles on such issues as globalization, employment, labor and community organization and city planning.

*For more information contact Temple University Press 1-800-621-8476
or visit the website at www.temple.edu/tempress. ISBN number is 1-59213-0011*