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**A Book Review of Solidarity Divided:
The Crisis In Organized Labor and A New Path Toward Social Justice,
by Bill Fletcher, Jr., and Fernando Gapasin
Color of Law
By David A. Love, JD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

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The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog

Whither labor movement?

Should labor unions concern themselves solely with the wages and benefits of their own dues-paying membership, or should they also care about the plight of the unemployed? Should labor focus merely on conditions of workers in the United States, or broaden their scope to address globalization and the international flows of capital? And what about building a movement for social, racial and economic justice? These are some of the fundamental questions posed in a new book called [Solidarity Divided: The Crisis In Organized Labor and A New Path Toward Social Justice](#) (University of

[California Press, 2008, 324 pp.](#)).

The authors of *Solidarity Divided* are Bill Fletcher, Jr., **BlackCommentator.com** Executive Editor and longtime activist, and Fernando Gapasin, Central Labor Council President and labor educator. Perhaps no two individuals are better equipped to provide a critique of labor's mistakes, and offer solutions for the future of the movement.

The troubling picture painted by Fletcher and Gapasin is of a labor movement that has been, as they articulate, "too pale, too stale, and too male" to address the everyday realities of working people and the poor. And the history of labor unions is one of missed opportunities and missteps, of acting too often as a cheerleader for predatory companies and policies and against the interests of labor, of allowing divide and conquer tactics to prevail at the expense of workers of color in the South and elsewhere, and of rubberstamping America's foreign policy and antidemocratic tendencies toward empire building.

Much to its credit, the book takes the reader through a history of labor struggles in the U.S., and shows how union leaders, frequently myopic and lacking in vision and an understanding of geopolitics and global economic forces, threw working people under the bus. Leftist leaders and ideologies were purged from the unions. With a strong anti-communist stance in many unions came an unquestioned support for capitalism as it is - rather than a new vision for the nation which champions the working class and demands social justice - and a not-so-tacit approval of America's military exploits abroad. White workers signed on to the exploitation of their Black and Brown counterparts, not realizing that a divided organized labor compromised their own bargaining power in the process.

The Right destroyed social movements in the U.S. with its assaults on civil rights and liberties, a war on a woman's right to choose and the war on drugs. Many union leaders identified with the policies of the Right and cozied up to its leaders. As they lived well and dined on sumptuous meals with the people in power, they did not realize that their unions were being destroyed as well.

Today, in a world of mortgage foreclosure mania, rising fuel costs, an eviscerated and decimated middle class, and the largest upward redistribution of wealth in history, a revitalized union movement is more crucial than ever. But are the unions up to the task? In order to remain relevant, the authors suggest, labor must move beyond the traditional construct of collective bargaining agreements, and become champions for socio-economic justice, racial and gender equality, environmental justice and immigrants' rights.

Under the new realities of this world, the traditional union tactics are rendered obsolete. The old constructs of labor organizing are wholly inadequate to address the now dominant form of global capitalism, a pernicious neoliberalism which places the U.S. at the top, lowers wages and eliminates other barriers to making profits, and responds to its critics by labeling them as terrorists and waging unilateral wars against them.

The authors note that the reorganization of global capitalism has turned the capitalist state into a neoliberal authoritarian state, one which privatizes everything and eliminates the public sphere, uses state violence to quell dissent, and maintains a quasi-permanent state of siege. The post 9-11 regime of torture, spying and manufactured bogeymen is a manifestation of this mentality, but so too is the government's callous response to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. And the failure to recognize and respond to these realities has placed unions on the sidelines. A new

solidarity movement must form coalitions with other social justice organizations across borders, engage in a true class-based struggle, and understand the links between the interests of multinational corporations and American foreign policy.

You must read *Solidarity Divided*. Fletcher and Gapasin provide a superior narrative of the road the labor movement has traveled, and chart the path it must now take for its own survival.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, David A. Love, JD, is a lawyer and journalist based in Philadelphia, and a contributor to the [Progressive Media Project](#), [McClatchy-Tribune News Service](#), [In These Times](#) and [Philadelphia Independent Media Center](#). He contributed to the book, [States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons](#) (St. Martin's Press, 2000). Love is a former Amnesty International UK spokesperson, organized the first national police brutality conference as a staff member with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and served as a law clerk to two Black federal judges. His blog is [davidalove.com](#). Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Love.

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