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Changing Prospects for Trade Unionism: Comparisons between Six Countries edited by Peter FAIRBROTHER and Gerard GRIFFIN, London, New York: Continuum, 2002, 263 pp., ISBN: 0-8264-5811-4.

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l'emprise encore forte de la domination anglo-saxonne que révèlent notamment les différentes bibliographies nationales, cet objectif a toujours statut d'idéal régulateur. Et bien c'est l'un des mérites

majeurs de cet ouvrage que de nous aider à tendre un peu plus en direction de ce dernier.

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Changing Prospects for Trade Unionism: Comparisons between Six Countries

edited by Peter FAIRBROTHER and Gerard GRIFFIN, London, New York: Continuum, 2002, 263 pp., ISBN: 0-8264-5811-4.

This collection of essays on six English-speaking countries, Australia, Britain, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the USA, provides perceptive views of the labour movements in these countries as they are struggling to survive in a time of "profound change." As the editors say, the book outlines and analyzes "how trade unions have responded to the problems confronting them" in very challenging times. Overall, the conclusions of both the chapter authors and the editors are quite pessimistic as to the future of these labour movements.

The method of this book is to have one or two experts on each country analyze that country's experience along a set of common general dimensions. There is no express agreed-upon theoretical framework, but only a set of general topics to which each chapter speaks. This has the advantage of permitting rich descriptions of the national realities, but the disadvantage of leaving one without any basis for generalizing beyond these countries.

The concluding chapter written by the editors well summarizes the findings of the various chapters. On the crucial question of union membership, we see that there was a decline in union density in the 1980s and 1990s in all of these countries. The most dramatic drops were in those countries that had relied upon the state for their strength—Australia and New Zealand. While the picture remains gloomy in Australia, the election of a friendly government in

New Zealand and its repeal of draconian neo-liberal labour laws give some grounds for hope. Although the decline in Britain and the U.S. is levelling out, the U.S. density, below 14 per cent, "remains abysmal." Canada and Ireland have done better than their fellows. Membership in all six countries has come to be concentrated in the public sector and in fewer unions, and the proportion of women has increased.

Across all of these countries, individual unions have pursued growth by two means – union mergers and organizing. The recruitment of new members has assumed a new prominence in the core values of unions, as labour movements in other countries have followed the U.S. lead in moving toward becoming "organizing organizations" instead of service organizations. This involves the more active involvement of the rank-and-file in the life of the union.

As to their relation to the state, labour movements in most of these countries (with the exception of Ireland and New Zealand) have learned a hard lesson. This is that the election of labour-friendly governments does not necessarily lead to significant changes within the law in their favour. The "third way" centre-left politicians are not inclined to give vigorous support to their union constituents. Even they are captives of neo-liberal ideas, however poorly these ideas seem to be working out in practice in the world economy.

Strategies that are currently being pursued in the various countries include, in addition to the creation of organizing organizations, offering a wide range of non-work related services and forming alliances with other groups interested in social change. The editors are, I believe, too dismissive of these strategies, particularly those having to do with working cooperatively with environmental, civil rights, and anti-globalization organizations.

In their conclusions, the editors raise the crucial question of whether unions are "powerless to control their own destiny." The editors recognize that the labour movements in all of these countries have been highly proactive in experimenting with new strategies. They believe that among those strategies, organizing new members is the most promising. However, they believe that the prospects in the short and medium-term are rather bleak, but perhaps brighter in the long-term.

Each of the chapters consists of an interesting and thorough analysis of the context of trade unionism, its relation to the state and political parties, union membership, union structure and governance, union strategies, the state of the unions, and the future of unions, in the particular country. In Australia, the most powerful reality is the Workplace Relations Act of 1996 and its predecessor, the Industrial Relations Reform Act of 1993 (enacted by a Labour government). These statutes demolished the old industrial relations Award system under which the unions had prospered, and replaced it with a new system under which they have nearly perished. Australian unions are struggling for their survival.

In Britain, although the short-term future is said to look bleak, there may be real potential in developing a new unionism based on the workplace. This may come about in the form of a unionism in which the national level, rather

than controlling the work of the local level, provides it with resources and facilitates.

The Canadian chapter is one of the most hopeful. This is primarily because of the innovativeness of Canadian unionism in recognizing the needs of special groups such as women, establishing investment funds, and advocating training. There is also their ability to obtain favourable legislation, such as provincial first contract arbitration. As the author states, "the very process of working towards such renewal, particularly through membership participation and the emergence of new union projects, may well lead to a qualitative breakthrough."

The cases of Ireland and New Zealand are very special. In Ireland, the unions have more than a decade of experience with centralized tripartite bargaining. They have remained strong, unlike the other trade union movements. Although there are more reasons for optimism in Ireland than elsewhere, Irish unions are not immune from international pressures, or from the union avoidance machinations of U.S. multinationals operating in Ireland. New Zealand, which went from being the one of the most regulated economies in the world to being one of the least, is now going through another period of change. With the repeal of the neo-liberal legal structure, it remains to be seen whether the New Zealand unions can recover all or part of their former strength.

In the United States, anyone who looks at the numbers on union membership and density is hard pressed to be optimistic. Yet, perhaps to an even greater extent than in Canada, there is innovation taking place. The notion of unions as "organizing organizations" was invented in the U.S. Joining with others interested in progressive causes is a strategy that has been used widely and effectively. Radical proposals such as unions operating without majority

status, regional associations on an occupational basis, and offering services to individual workers, are all being tried or considered. As the author of this chapter concludes, union renewal may require the creation of new organizations such as the CIO that changed the landscape in the 1930s.

This interesting and highly useful volume is filled with interesting information and ideas. Not only does it set out the facts about trade unions in these six countries, it also provides thoughtful analysis and some very penetrating insights. It is also quite balanced in its conclusions. However, like other recent works on this topic, its conclusions are perhaps overly pessimistic.

I believe that it is possible to build a more positive view upon the Canadian chapter's noting of the potential for new ideas and forms arising from the many innovations of unions, and on the United States chapter's observation that it is

necessary for different organizations to be born. Both innovations and the birth of new (or renewed) organizations are taking place in the United States and other countries. I would argue that the AFL-CIO itself is a new organization with new leadership and a new vision. The many U.S. worker rights organizations, such as the Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment, represent something new and promising. Quite importantly, organizations advocating and managing worker ownership have sprung up in both Europe and the U.S. The potential for worker collective power based on ownership of shares in their firm, and on the power of workers' capital in investment and pension funds, is something that has only begun to be fully realized, and is supported by leaders of the British TUC and the AFL-CIO. So, as in Pandora's box, there is still hope.

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Du train à vapeur au TGV : sociologie du travail d'organisation

par Gilbert de TERSSAC et Karine LALANDE, Paris : PUF, 2002, 240 p., ISBN : 2-13052-661-6.

Comme le souligne fort à propos Jean-Daniel Reynaud dans sa préface à l'ouvrage, « si surprenant que cela puisse paraître, il n'y a pas, en dehors des travaux purement techniques, un très grand nombre d'études, et surtout d'études historiques, qui examinent de près l'organisation du travail et de l'entreprise ». Le volume de De Terssac et Lalande fait exception à la règle et vient combler ce vide, puisqu'il suit l'organisation du travail à la SNCF (Société nationale des chemins de fer de France) sur une longue période. Au delà de l'histoire du transport ferroviaire, il permet surtout de se demander ce qu'est l'organisation, et comment fonctionne le travail d'organisation de l'ensemble des ressources et des personnels qui contribuent à faire fonctionner la SNCF.

L'ouvrage est un travail magistral d'analyse, une analyse très fouillée qui

permet de mettre en évidence le système de production des règles dans l'organisation, les fondements cognitifs des règles, mais aussi de voir et de comprendre comment émerge l'innovation ou « l'invention organisationnelle » dans un tel contexte.

En ce qui concerne l'innovation, les auteurs montrent comment un petit groupe tente de résoudre un problème nouveau, rejetant les règles établies, mais devant aussi faire avec le scepticisme, l'indifférence, voire l'opposition de l'ensemble des salariés. Ils illustrent bien la logique de la découverte et de l'innovation, qui passe de l'observation à l'action, qui repose sur une multitude d'initiatives variées, parfois isolées, parfois coordonnées, et qui fait intervenir divers niveaux hiérarchiques.

Les auteurs illustrent aussi la dynamique du partage des connaissances. Ils