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Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experiences,

edited by Pradeep KUMAR and Christopher SCHENK, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006, 336 pp., ISBN 1-55193-058-7.

The editors of this prescient collection situate this book within the global and domestic context. While union renewal has been a topic of debate for some time in many other industrialized countries, the subject has been slow to develop in Canada because domestic unions have not endured the same kind of attrition as unions outside of the country. With this in mind, the collection sets out to deliver a pioneering gathering of works on union renewal in Canada.

Its target audience includes union activists, students of labour studies and “more generally for those who have an interest in unions and their positive role in social and economic change.”

An immediate impression is set by the way in which the editors have separated this subject into topics. With this framework, readers can access this collection on a thematic basis. The first section provides an overview of union renewal literature and an academic perspective on the topic. The editors’ own first chapter stands out as a superb summary. Other contributions endeavour to set a framework for union renewal. Charlotte Yates’ article provides a good example as she focuses on the need for unions to make an effort to include the workplace experiences of women. This strikes at one of the essences of this work: initiating inclusive efforts which are part of the reinvigoration of Canadian unions. The chapter by Pradeep Kumar and Gregor Murray adds to the dialogue including the notion that union change occurs within a political context: “where change is made for change’s sake because those governing the organization have to be seen to be doing something and the risk of not making these changes when other organizations make them is too great, even if the consequences of these changes remain open to debate.”

Overall, this first section establishes a much-needed structure for the remainder of the contributions by highlighting some key themes and concerns. These guides put the ensuing chapters into a context which best allows the diverse target audience to engage this material.

Part II contains seven case studies, two about public sector unions (the British Columbia Government and Service Employees Union and the Canadian Union of Public Employees) and the remainder deal with private sector organizations (the Canadian Auto Workers Union, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, UNITE-HERE Local 75, and the United Steelworkers Union). These studies represent the “core” of the text. While not necessarily a large sample, there are enough examples to accomplish the goal of providing a resource for renewal. It should be noted that these contributions are written by members of the above unions. And so, there is an element of positive characterization of the different projects outlined in this section. This is not to diminish the content of this section. Rather, it reinforces the point that the collection, in its entirety, is an effort to initiate dialogue as well as to provide some examples of recent renewal schemes. Here the skill with which Part I sets a structure for the collection emerges: attempts at rejuvenation are more successful when they are tailored to the circumstances and experiences of the particular workplace and the individuals who populate it.

The remaining two sections build on the case studies. Part III looks at different campaigns and organizing methods while Part IV deals with education and leadership programs. These two parts provide a more situation-specific context for the audience.

Part III focuses primarily on the notion of union-community alliances. For example, there is an overview of the Workers' Action Centre in Toronto and the Canadian Postal Workers Union's Workers Organizing and Resource Centre in Winnipeg. As well, an outline of the Steelworkers' efforts to organize a call centre in Sudbury, Ontario. An intriguing addition to this section is Natalie Mehra's look at the Ontario Health Coalition's campaign to defend public Medicare. Mehra stresses how this campaign transcended different distinctions – private and public sector unions; union members and the public. The unifying force was the implications for social and economic equality if Medicare was dismantled.

Part IV is dedicated to two critical appraisals of institutional efforts by British Columbia Federation of Labour and the Canadian Auto Workers. John Weir finds the BC Organizing Institute of the BC Federation of Labour has been successful, especially in regards to benefiting smaller organizations. This point is important as if the Institute was assessed merely by new member/certification numbers, then it would not be called a success. Still, Weir notes a key

benefit from this effort is its "impact on the culture of organizing." In the final article for this collection, Johanna Weststar (based on survey research and interviews) lauds the effort of the CAW with its Paid Education Leave (PEL) program, which is described as "a leadership training course" which focuses on, among other skills, encouraging critical analysis skills in leadership and promoting equity. Although Weststar notes that there are missed opportunities, such as the lack of outlets for graduates of the program to apply their new-found skills as well as the applicability of the courses to participants' own workplaces, she adds that it is encouraging the CAW has, since her report to them, endeavoured to address some of the concerns she has highlighted.

The editors write of their hope that this collection will stimulate "much-needed debate." And so, the contributions in this collection are framed more as points of discussion than guidelines for union renewal. This is timely collection offers a good variety of information in one source, thereby positioning itself as an important text in labour studies.

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Labour Left Out: Canada's Failure to Protect and Promote Collective Bargaining as a Human Right,

by Roy J. ADAMS, Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2005, 152 pp., ISBN 0-88627-469-9.

In this book, Adams presents a compelling case for collective bargaining as a human right to which all working people are entitled, whether through certification by labour relations boards across Canada or through free negotiations with an employer, without the assistance of a certified bargaining agent. Survey evidence indicates that while nearly all Canadian workers would like some form of independent collective representation, many are not comfortable with the process set in

motion by government certification. As Adams points out, "... there is no legal barrier to employees in uncertified units forming associations" but "Over time, the norms surrounding the certification process have come to obscure the existence of alternatives."

For a long time, free collective bargaining has been the formal policy of the federal government and most jurisdictions in Canada, but conventions have fallen in place that discourage workers from exercising their rights. The country