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REVIEWS

Plowman, David H. *Holding the line - compulsory arbitration and national employer coordination in Australia.* Sydney, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp.265. Price A$49.50.

In this volume, David Plowman has provided what must be regarded as the definitive study of the historical development of national employer coordination in Australia. His objective is to examine "the factors that .... led to employer associations forming coordinating machinery and the rationale for the particular form of combination used at different points in time" (Introduction, xiii).

There are 9 chapters in the work. Eight are dedicated to distinct historical periods, beginning with the rise of permanent employer associations in the 1890s and culminating with the advent of the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI) in the period between 1973 and 1988. The final chapter reviews the 5 models of employer coordination (mutual defence, federation, alliance, secretariat and confederation) that Plowman discerns in the historical data. Without doubt, the book provides a comprehensive record of events for employer bodies in Australia and a valuable reference for the Australian industrial relations specialist. By primarily tracing the history of the Australian Council of Employers Federations (ACEF) which merged with the Associated Chamber of Manufactures of Australia (ACMA) in 1977 to form the CAI, Plowman sets out to plug a major gap in Australian industrial relations history.

The nature of particular employer coordinating machinery over the period receives lengthy and meticulous treatment. It is, however, examined in the context of the economic and legislative developments of each era. The book begins with the observation that:

> Employers devote resources to, and submit to the authority of, their associations only out of necessity. Historically, the need to form a countervailing force against unions has necessitated employer cohesion. The nature and longevity of that cohesion has, in turn, been influenced by the nature of the union challenge and the ability of unions to sustain that challenge. Where employees, because of legal, financial or economic circumstances, have been able to form only ephemeral organisations, employer organisations have also tended to be transient. Where longer lasting and more effective unions have come into being the relevant employers have had to organise with greater effectiveness .... (p.1).

The book is written in a clear, direct manner. The chapter summaries are particularly helpful and the author has been careful to link thematic development between chapters. Faced with something like the detail of *War and peace*, Plowman has seen fit to provide a 2 page list of abbreviations at the outset which helps the reader to cope with the endless manufacturing of acronyms that occurs under Australian federalism. There is also a useful guide to the patronymic succession of employer coordinating bodies in the introduction.

From the point of view of the New Zealand reader, the light the book throws on the important historical developments in the Australian industrial relations context (such as the advent of the "New Protection" in the first decade of this century with its twin planks of the tariff and compulsory arbitration, the immense influence of Mr Justice Higgins' occupancy of the federal Arbitration bench with his vision of the "new province for law

and order", the battle in the 1920s and 1930s between the manufacturers and the other employer groups over the question of continued protection and the centralising development of "national test cases" over basic wages, hours, leave and equal pay) is much more intrinsically interesting than the organisational structures employer groups formed in response. The book contains immense detail which is of purely specialist interest in the Australian setting but in so doing does provide an insight into those features that are classically associated with Australian industrial relations: the high level of formalism, the intense and well-resourced political lobbying, the legal and political complications caused by the Constitution. When one tears away this fabric, however, the underpinning historical themes are the same as those of New Zealand's experience with compulsory arbitration and are simply stated: the attitudes of employers (and unions) to compulsory arbitration depend primarily on the economic context and the policy responses of governments to it; the parties adjust to the industrial relations institutions put in place by governments and seek to use them to achieve their own particular ends.

The book's objective is not to deal with what has become the critical theme in the contemporary industrial relations debate - the seizure by employers of the initiative in industrial relations reform in the light of the new economic and political reality. While the advent of the Business Council of Australia is noted, the book's objective is not to examine the new decentralism and the role of management strategy in individual enterprises. Academic work in Australia is now shifting to these concerns. Plowman's work has provided a detailed testament to a neglected aspect of the Australian tradition. While the motivations and strategies of employers will continue to grow as a fruitful area for debate and empiricism, it is unlikely that others will seek to reopen the issue of national employer coordinating machinery in the "classical" Australian system. The gap is plugged.

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Current approaches to collective bargaining. An ILO symposium on collective bargaining in industrialised market economy countries. Labour-Management Relations Series No.71, Geneva, International Labour Office, 1989. Price SF22.50.

The ILO is an excellent source of information about bargaining developments around the world. If the reader can cope with the tendency towards analytical conservatism in the authors and the frame of reference, there is much useful information to be gleaned from texts such as this. Based on a conference with representatives from 15 countries, the OECD, the EEC and the international trade union movement, the collection offers contributions from academics, civil servants and practitioners on current bargaining trends.

The trends are, of course, predictable. The background paper to the symposium notes 3 factors which account for the current evolution of industrial relations. Economic problems, technological change and the changing composition of the workforce have all contributed to the destabilisation of bargaining structures and the search for a new bargaining order. The ILO paper argues that several of the current pressures for change will not be reduced by the ending of economic crisis. In particular, it is argued that the current trend for union memberships to fall in many countries will be difficult to halt, especially given "the blurring" of white and blue collar employees, the growth in numbers of skilled technicians and the creation of "atypical" or "precarious" jobs. The ILO also notes, however, that in Sweden and Canada, for example, union membership has at worst remained stable, and even grown. The general pessimism of the ILO view of trade union membership is understandable, particularly when looking at the data from a New Zealand perspective, but as the ILO paper points out, the unions themselves are

aware of the dilemmas they face, and there is the potential for new union strategies to emerge in response to contemporary challenges.

The ILO also picks up the general debate around bargaining decentralisation and flexibility. The ILO view is that the trend towards enterprise bargaining is well established and likely to increase, with adverse consequences for traditional bargaining structures and institutions in Europe. The ILO is signalling its fears that too hasty a move to decentralised bargaining may destabilise bargaining environments and practices built up over generations. The implications of this argument are clear for New Zealand facing the anticipated rigours of labour market deregulation.

Flexibility is discussed in many of the papers in the collection. Three themes emerge from the text. Firstly, that flexibility is a universal aim in government and employer policies towards bargaining. Secondly, what constitutes flexibility differs from bargaining environment to bargaining environment. In some cases, enterprise bargaining is the key. In others, changes in pay and payment systems are the most important features. Thirdly, the tendency exists to see flexibility as a "universal panacea", though this tendency is much reduced in the late 1980s. This last point is important in the New Zealand environment. Without the whipping boy of the labour market and bargaining structure, policy makers would have to find some other explanation for their failure to improve the country's economic performance. Many New Zealand policy makers do not wish to be told that flexibility is simply a contemporary term for the sorts of change in the production process which have gone on for 2 centuries, or, for that matter, that most practitioners are perfectly happy with the degree of flexibility formally or informally available to them already.

I find one argument put forward the ILO to be difficult to fathom. In their overview of the contemporary industrial relations climate, signs are perceived which suggest "a greater cooperation between the social partners". The evidence to support this assertion rests on days of work lost to strikes and lockouts, the belief that the partners are more prone to cooperation to solve outstanding problems, the growth of numbers of profit-sharing schemes and initiatives such as "social peace" clauses in bargains. Clearly, this explanation will not do. We have to distinguish between new forms of bargaining in which adversarialism is rejected in favour of a more unitarist mode, bargaining in which economic vicissitudes have caused the employee parties to make contingent concessions, bargaining in which the role of the State has caused contingent accommodation between the parties and so on. The ILO view is predicated on their view of "partnership" and the processes by which this can be reinforced, but their analysis of the extension of partnership elides far too much to be helpful. I doubt if anyone would want to suggest a permanent decline in industrial conflict in the industrialised economies as a result of restructuring, flexibility and deregulation. When and if we see an upswing will be the time to assess the long-term effects of the 1970s and 1980s on the tenor of industrial relations.

In the second part of the text, articles deal with contemporary bargaining changes in Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, West Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, the UK and the USA. All are short and to the point. Some are less objective than others as in the case of the Unilever Employee Relations Adviser covering the UK, for example. They are potentially useful in comparative industrial relations classes, though none causes the earth to move. All in all, then, a standard, useful ILO text.

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Friedman, Stevan *Building tomorrow today: African workers in trade unions 1970-1984*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987. Price R21.

The specialist seeking detailed information about the growth of South Africa's independent unions after the 1973 watershed has been admirably catered for, particularly by the South African Labour Bulletin. Over the years SALB has provided a comprehensive mixture of analytical and factual coverage which guides the observer through a maze of legislation, union activity, political inclinations and management strategies. Stevan Friedman's book complements the work of SALB by providing a readable, accessible and detailed chronological account of many of the events and personalities which have dominated independent union life in the last 15 years or so.

It is a difficult book to label neatly. It is not a theoretical piece, riven by clashing interpretations of state, class and consciousness. Similarly, it does not offer a structured in-depth analysis of either state policy or management strategy over the 1970-1984 period. Instead, Friedman's adoption of a chronological approach leads him to tell a story into which are insinuated analytical insights, illustrative anecdotes, fly-on-the-wall accounts of key events, and innumerable facts. The telling of the story in terms which transcend the journalistic is the strong point in favour of the book. There is no substitute yet available in book form for the wealth of material gathered between these covers. In 16 chapters, we are led from 1973s pre-history, briefly and adequately described, through the upsurge of 1973-74, the downturn of 1976 and after, to the period of major expansion of independent unions after 1980. The reader is necessarily bombarded with a plethora of initials as new organisations are formed, and existing unions divide and re-form. Keeping track of organisations and individuals across chapter boundaries is good fun, as are the little asides - for example, what were the reasons for Xolani Kota's abrupt and unexplained exit from SAAWU officialdom, noted on p.220? Will it remain, like Sherlock Holmes and the case of the *Giant rat of Sumatra*, an intriguing mystery hereafter? Another anecdote captures one aspect of the book's style well. On p.95 we are informed that a strategy which would "change the direction of African unionism" (the demand for recognition agreements US-style) arose out of a casual cocktail party conversation between a union activist and an American diplomat. It would appear, perhaps surprisingly to an observer familiar with any comparative industrial relations material, that the idea of recognition agreements had not surfaced in South Africa before, and that COSATU and the rest of the independent unions owe a deal of thanks to this unwitting benefactor.

There is a stylistic point about the book which I occasionally found irritating. After each substantive chapter, already stuffed with data, Friedman offers a section of notes. Though the notes are in themselves often very interesting, and, indeed, sometimes contain more analytical meat than the chapter, they are not referenced to the chapter's text in any way. Consequently, the reader sometimes experiences the sensation of reading 2 texts in the 1 set of covers, and spends fixated minutes trying to match the note to the main text. A properly organised bibliography should have been provided too.

That grouse aside, the substantive material is well written. A real strength of the book lies in the general detachment displayed by the author when dealing with the thorny issues which have divided unions in the past. The arguments about general versus industrial unions and the registration debate are dealt with even-handedly, maybe because they lie in the past and the main protagonists are generally reconciled to contemporary realities. Anyone sympathetic to black consciousness arguments might question the balance of coverage between the FOSATU tradition and the CUSA and AZAPO/AZACTU alternatives, but such a view would be ungenerous to the author. A positive aspect of the book is Chapter 15 dealing, albeit briefly, with "forgotten" workers in the so-called homelands, the rural sector and in domestic labour.

Many readers will concentrate on the later chapters, particularly that which confronts the difficult question of unions and politics (Chapter 14). Friedman counterposes the

union-based and defended "politics of mandate and negotiation" against the "politics of .... the rifle and petrol bomb" which grew up in the mid 1980s in the townships (p.453-54). His fear is that the former will be transcended by the latter, and, in the process, "the last hope of a democratic future" will fail. The reader sympathises with an author producing under the political constraints and real threats to personal safety which exist in South Africa. Underlaying these last "coded" comments is the complex and ultimately paramount question to be faced by the independent unions - what will be their relationship with the wider forces for change which will challenge the apartheid state in the coming years? The neophyte in South Africa union affairs is helped by Friedman to understand the fundamental contribution made by the independent unions to a democratic tradition which offers hope to the dispossessed masses. His account of the November 1984 stayaway, though brief, charts the mixed fortunes of the independent union tradition as it became involved in community action on a wide scale, fortunes which today are still as contradictory.

The positive aspects of this book far outweigh the stylistic criticisms noted above. It fills an important gap in the South African literature and will be read with interest by both expert and newcomer alike. As always, a book dealing with contemporary events stands to be out of date by the time it reaches the reader, and the success of this treatment of the 1970-84 period should stimulate Friedman and Ravan to update his book at a suitable time in the future.

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Munck, Ronaldo *The new international labour studies: An introduction*, London, Zed Books, 1988. Price not stated.

This book presents itself as an introduction to "the new international labour studies", but nowhere is a proper and convincing definition or justification of this academic field to be found. It is said to stand in opposition to the older disciplines of industrial relations, trade union studies and labour history and to transcend boundaries among studies of both advanced and peripheral capitalist and socialist societies. It is also a politically engaged enterprise, aiming at nothing less than the transformation of an exploitative, wasteful, racist and patriarchal world order. The field definition remains elusive.

Definitional problems aside, the book is actually an introduction to labour studies in the third world. It contains an interpretation, critique and review of literature that is unique in the field with chapters devoted to labour in the world system, employment patterns, the labour process, the working classes, trade unions, labour relations, industrial democracy, labour and the State and the international dimension. The chapters are short, analytic and succinct, often too fragmentary, leaving the reader hungry for further information and development.

It is not clear whether a comprehensive survey of the literature is intended, for the interpretation of the subject is Marxist. Munck says he wishes to go beyond Marxist fundamentalism with its emphasis on production and exploitation to give equal importance to forms of oppression like gender, race and damage to the environment, but there is little exemplification of these forms and the book remains above all an excellent Marxist primer to labour studies. To many this approach may appear archaic and dogmatic - indeed the exposition tends to be schematic - but I found it gratifying to discover Marxist survivors in third world labour studies at a time when they have virtually disappeared from more mainstream western studies.

Is this survival due to the marginality of third world labour studies in the academy? In any event, it is one of the merits of this book to demonstrate the labour in the third world is no longer peripheral to the world economy. The industrial workforce is an

increasing proportion of the active population ranging from 13 percent in low-income to 28 percent in middle-income countries. These countries have seen the growth of an industrial working class with the relocation of textile and electronic industries, the expansion of home-market manufacturing and global assembly along with widespread Taylorisation. This modern working class is linked in turn with the large informal sector consisting of artisans, sub-contractors and traders, petty producers and distributors, forming larger working-class solidarities. The importance of the labour movement may be seen in rates of unionisation that are in the case of Latin America comparable to those in western Europe. These labour movements, moreover, have a rich experience with forms of collective bargaining and industrial democracy, including many interesting experiments with worker control.

Munck defines the specificity of third world labour studies in the Leninist terms of combined and uneven development which sees the imbrication of archaic methods, petty production and small-scale enterprise with modern industry, the interplay of class with national issues, and the politicised nature of trade unionism. One might question whether these features are indeed unique to the third world. They were certainly present in western societies at earlier stages of development and in some ways still play a part in them. Unfortunately, there is no analysis of labour problems in western societies for comparative purposes nor much discussion - which is even more surprising for a survey with an internationalist perspective - of links between industrial capitalism in advanced and third world countries.

The "new" labour studies are critically engaged in the class struggle and Munck still believes in the transformative potential of labour in the third world. The working class there, he concludes, is neither a labour aristocracy nor a revolutionary vanguard; much depends on the unifying policies of the labour movement. But there is no real reflection on the failure of socialism in Africa or Latin America, let alone China, the success of which ultimately depends upon events in the west, and only the pious hope that a more culturalist or social movement orientation to socialism ("no working-class liberation without female liberation") will work where Marxist fundamentalism has failed.

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