

**The
Origins of
Trade Union
Power**

Henry Phelps Brown

The General Election of 1979 was the third in succession to be lost by a British Government whose policy had come into conflict with trade union power. The building of that power is one of the great economic and social changes of the last hundred years and this book singles out and reflects upon some of the turning points and the critical factors in the process by which British trade unions have attained their present position in the community.

From the early 1960s onwards there was an intensification in the problems of industrial relations — first the rise of the unofficial strike, then of the strike in the public sector aimed at disruption, the repudiation of the authority of the courts, and of the law enacted by Parliament. At times of high unemployment the influence which trade unions can exercise on the economy is reduced, but with half of all employees unionised, the underlying problem remains both for the economy and for the government. The aim throughout the book is to understand the present position better by seeing it as the outcome of an historical process in which many factors, some peculiar to the UK but others common to all industrial economies, have shaped the outcome.

The persistent problem of the relationship between trade unions and the law is examined as an issue of public policy and in some of its technical aspects. A notable feature is the light the book throws on the specifically British aspects by comparative studies of trade unionism in the USA, Canada, and Australia.

This book should be of interest to all students taking courses in industrial relations, political and social history, and management studies, as well as people in public life and industry who are concerned with trade unions.

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Henry Phelps Brown

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May 1982

HENRY PHELPS BROWN

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