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TRADE UNIONS IN RENEWAL

A Comparative Study

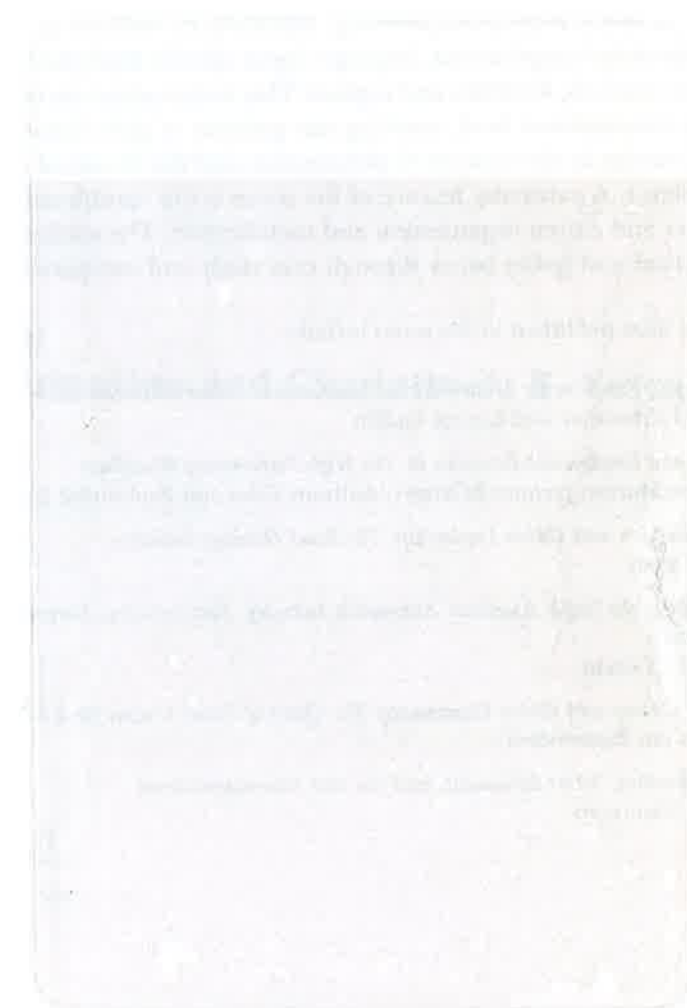
Edited by
**Peter Fairbrother and
Charlotte A. B. Yates**

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Employment and Work Relations in Context Series

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The aim of the *Employment and Work Relations in Context Series* is to address questions relating to the evolving patterns and politics of work, employment, management and industrial relations. There is a concern to trace out the ways in which wider policy-making, especially by national governments and transnational corporations, impinges upon specific workplaces, occupations, labour markets, localities and regions. This invites attention to developments at an international level, marking out patterns of globalization, state policy and practice in the context of globalization and the impact of these processes on labour. A particular feature of the series is the consideration of forms of worker and citizen organization and mobilization. The studies address major analytical and policy issues through case study and comparative research.

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The authors thank the Social Science and Humanities Research Council in Canada for financial support in the start-up of FUN.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ACTWU	Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union
AEEU	Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ASTMS	Association of Scientific, Technical and Manufacturing Staffs
ATEA	Australian Telecommunications Employees Association
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
ATPOA	Australian Telephone and Phonogram Officers' Association
AWIRS	Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey
AWU	Australian Workers Union
BCFL	British Columbia Federation of Labour
CALURA	Corporations and Labour Unions Return Act
CAW	Canadian Autoworkers Union
CEP	Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada
CEPU	Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union
CEWU	Communication and Energy Workers Union
CLBC	Canadian Labour and Business Centre
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CPSU	Community and Public Sector Union
CCSU	Council of Civil Service Unions
CSN	Confederation des syndicats nationaux
CTU	(New Zealand) Council of Trade Unions
CUT	Central Unica dos Trabalhadores
CWA	Communications Workers of America
CWU	Communication Workers Union
ECA	Employment Contracts Act
EETPU	Electrical, Electronic and Engineering Unions
FAT	Frente Autentico del Trabajo

ABBREVIATIONS

FCA	Fonds pour la formations de chercheurs et d'aide à la recherche
FDA	Association of First Division Civil Servants
FIMEE	Federation of Industrial Manufacturing and Engineering Employees
FinSec	Financial Sector Union
FTE	full-time equivalent
GMB	General, Municipal and Boilermakers Union
H&HU	Hotel and Hospital Unions
HERE	Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPMS	Institution of Professional Managers and Specialists
ISTC	Iron and Steel Trades Confederation
ITF	International Transport Federation
IU	International Union
KFAT	National Union of Knitwear, Footwear and Apparel Trades
LHMWU	Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union
MPO	Management and Professional Officers Union
MSF	Manufacturing Science and Finance
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Area
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NDC	Network Design and Construction
NLRA	National Labour Relations Act
NLRB	National Labour Relations Board
NSW	New South Wales
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NZ	New Zealand
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCS	Public and Commercial Services Union
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PMG	Post Master Generals Department
PSA	Public Service Association
SFWU	Service and Food Workers Union
SHOT	Shareholders of Telstra
SIEU	Service Employees International Union
SLA	service level agreement

ABBREVIATIONS

SPA	scheduled paid absence
SPUR	Special Projects Union Representative
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
STE	Society of Telecom Executives
SWU	Service Workers Union
T&S Group	Technical and Services Group, Communications Division, Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union
TASS	Technical and Supervisory Staffs
TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TINA	there is no alternative
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TUTA	Trade Union Training Australia Inc.
UAW	United Auto Workers
UE	United Electrical Workers
UFBWU	United Food and Beverage Workers Union
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers
UFW	United Farm Workers
UK	United Kingdom
UNISON	British public service union
UNITE	Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees
USA	United States of America
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
USWA	United Steelworkers of America
STE	Society of Telecom Executives (Connect – The Union for Professional Communications)
WOC	workplace organizing committee
WTO	World Trade Organization

HUW BEYNON

Evans singles out three forms that he considers worthy of careful consideration:

- *Transnational advocacy networks.* These are particularly effective in relation to the environment and to women's rights. They involve attempts to transmit information transnationally and to regulate the behaviour of the powerful through the invocation of norms. Evans sees this to have been particularly effective in north-east Brazil (women's rights) and in relation to the lives of the rubber tappers. These networks facilitate the spread of information which can then be used as a weapon; they also enable a process of 'venue shifting' to take place – where injustices in one place are raised and pressurized in another.
- *Purchasing power and consumer boycotts.* Information on the working conditions of Nike's labour force in Indonesia and Vietnam produced a major crisis for the corporation. By the end of 1997–8 fiscal year its earnings had dropped to half of the previous year's and its stock value had fallen by 40 per cent. Researchers indicated that direct labour costs accounted for no more than 2 per cent of the price of a \$100 shoe. Nike's vulnerability derived from the fact that its sales related to the image and the brand.
- *United world workers.* One of the side agreements of NAFTA allowed trade unions in each of the three participating countries to file complaints based on labour rights violations. This has led to interesting and important collaboration between the official trade unions (one involving 50 separate unions) of Canada, the USA and Mexico, in ways that might not have been predicted. It also provided the basis for a shift in the thinking of some Northern Unions – seeing the Mexicans as collaborators in struggle rather than 'job thieves'. Similar possibilities exist with the WTO's insistence on rejecting 'core labour standards' (Evans, 2000: 231–7).

Each one of these areas commends an inversion of the rule: think globally act locally. They suggest that there is much to be gained by *acting globally*. The underlying principle rests on the possibility of establishing worldwide norms that can apply to relationships in the formal and informal economy. This might not be easy; especially in a world made up of very different religious beliefs and cultural practices. As Massey puts it: 'In a situation of social and cultural variation and economic inequality, can any abstract set of rules be adequate?' (Massey, 2000: 19). She asks poignantly in relation to the new rules of free trade:

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For years, unions in Anglo-American countries have suffered stagnant or declining memberships. They have experienced diminishing political and economic influence and many are going through crises in the representation of members. During the 1990s a number of unions and labour federations began to debate these problems, and as a result have experimented with a host of new ideas and practices aimed at rebuilding memberships and restoring their political and economic strength.

Trade Unions in Renewal brings together a series of studies of union renewal from five different countries – the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Canada. Although unions in the five countries have all been influenced by recent debates surrounding the organizing model, several unions and the five national federations have charted their own course of renewal. These range from internal union democratization and membership mobilization to new partnership models with employers and governments.

The contributors to this volume are among the leading researchers and commentators on trade unionism in their countries. The introduction offers a rare comparative analysis of convergence and divergence in union renewal strategies across these five countries, while the separate chapters offer a penetrating, critical analysis of union renewal strategies and pose some difficult questions about the likely success of unions as they try to regroup.

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