

Craig Heron — *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 2nd ed. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1996. Pp. xix, 202.

There are few works that attempt to provide an introductory overview of the history of the working class or the labour movement in the Canadian state. For that reason alone, this revised edition of Craig Heron's book (first edition 1989) is to be welcomed. In under 200 pages, *The Canadian Labour Movement* surveys the history of unions and, to a lesser extent, working-class political organizations from the early stages of the development of a working class to the middle of the 1990s. Its first three chapters deal with the response of craftworkers to capitalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, the union upsurge of the first two decades of the next century culminating in the wave of struggle between 1917 and 1920, the Great Depression, the wartime expansion of the union movement, and the historic postwar compromise that established the basic shape of organized labour in the second half of the twentieth century. Chapter 4 covers the union militancy and growth that lasted from the mid-1960s until Canadian capital and the state launched an assault in the mid-1970s that continues to the present day, which is the subject of the fifth chapter. Chapter 6 discusses labour's response and a number of related themes, including English Canadian nationalism and the unions, developments in Quebec, and the more prominent role of women and workers of colour in the movement. A short final chapter offers a sketch of "A New Agenda for Labour".

Heron surveys a century and a half of organized workers' responses to Canadian capitalism in a clear and accessible fashion. The book is informed by the many fine studies in Canadian working-class history written over the past two decades, a good number of which appear in the expanded and reorganized bibliography of this second edition, which also adds a glossary of labour centrals. As a work for undergraduate students and a non-academic general readership, the accomplishment that *The Canadian Labour Movement* represents should be acknowledged. The integration of material on labour processes, one of Heron's areas of specialization, into the historical narrative is a particular strength not often found in works of this kind. So is the attempt to write the history of the labour movement in an inclusive manner by ensuring the presence of gender, nationality, and ethnicity throughout. Among the changes in this edition is the addition of more discussion of gender and of workers in Quebec. Other new material touches on features of working-class life and the union movement in contemporary Canada.

As this book is neither an "institutionalist" history of Canadian unions, like Desmond Morton's *Working People*, nor an attempt to write the history of the making and remaking of the working class, like Bryan Palmer's *Working-Class Experience*, it is likely to appear to some social historians (as well as labour historians of a more conservative bent) as inherently problematic. Its scope is indeed deliberately limited to the section of the working class organized into unions. However, *The Canadian Labour Movement* is not a narrow study of labour bureaucracies laced with personalities and occasional bouts of conflict between workers and employers. Heron attempts to incorporate some elements of working-class life beyond the workplace, the unions, and labour politics into an account that must

inevitably centre on these three spheres. Within the constraints of the work, he achieves a measure of success. The limitations of this kind of book are an interesting issue for discussion amongst those concerned with writing working-class history.

One point on which the book may be questioned is its treatment of the relationship between English Canada and Quebec as it pertains to the labour movement. It is not that francophone workers are invisible in this study: sections of two chapters are devoted to the highly politicized worker insurgency in Quebec in the 1970s and Quebec labour in recent years, while conflict between French Canadian and British immigrant labour, resistance in Quebec to conscription during the First World War, and the changing nature of Catholic unionism are also mentioned. Rather, what is missing is some assessment of the significance for the labour movement of its development within a state that was bi-national before Confederation, which enshrined Quebec's subordinate place in what S. B. Ryerson dubbed an "unequal union".

The new material dealing with the 1990s touches on many of the most important features of the current period. Yet the evaluation that "In the face of overwhelming odds, Canadian unionists have protected their interests as aggressively as conditions allowed" (p. 153) is questionable. What has prevented more effective labour resistance to the implementation of capital's agenda by governments and private and public sector employers? To be sure, the bureaucratized labour movement consolidated during the postwar economic boom and described by Heron could not be changed overnight. Moreover, the decomposition in the postwar years of the layers of radical workers that once formed the basis of the Marxist, syndicalist, and parliamentary socialist left is a rarely appreciated phenomenon that has yet to receive an adequate historical study.

As Heron's book generally recognizes, however, political agency is a vital dimension of social history at its best. The strategy of labour and social movement alliances promoted by left-wing union leaders today does not challenge management's right to reorganize the workplace. It thus reproduces some of the conditions which encourage, in Heron's words, "most workers [to] still view their unions as distant, though vital, service organizations" (p. 163). The continuity of what is known as social unionism with the pro-industrial legality of the "bureaucratic form of industrial unionism" (p. 57) of the United Mine Workers and Amalgamated Clothing Workers in the 1920s — which Heron controversially suggests was the antecedent of the mass production unionism of the 1930s — is greater than is usually supposed.

*The Canadian Labour Movement* is the only book to offer a brief, readable introduction to its subject drawing on the wealth of recent scholarship on Canadian working-class history. Not without its weaknesses, this edition improves on the original and is bound to enjoy a wide readership, particularly in the field of labour studies.

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