

'ebb tide'). The Accord gets strong criticism because it required restraint of workers' wages and rejection of militant union activity in favour of 'top down' deals negotiated between the ACTU officials and the leaders of the Federal ALP government. It is regarded as paving the way for, and leaving workers exposed to, the explicitly anti-union policies of the Howard government. As Bramble writes (on p180), 'after years of declining membership, the atrophying of grassroots activism and a lack of willingness by the union leaders to fight for workers' rights, the unions were now vulnerable to a full-blown attack by the incoming Howard government'.

Later in the book there is criticism of the trades union leadership during the struggle against *WorkChoices* and of the current stance of the Rudd government. Bramble says (on p249): 'The Accord may be dead, and with no prospect of disinterment, but senior union leaders are determined to pursue the same political agenda that had such disastrous consequences for unions in the 1980s and 1990s'. The author's underlying assumption is that there is ongoing potential rank and file militancy, but that this is not harnessed, indeed is usually thwarted, by union leaderships. So he concludes (on p251): 'The current union leaders are not likely to countenance the kinds of struggles needed to rebuild trade unions, and the organised left is weaker than at any time since the late 19th century.' His optimism for the future, if that is what it is, hinges on 'consolidating a sizeable socialist organisation and rebuilding the networks of militants' (p252).

Pete Thomas and Greg Mallory

The Coalminers of Queensland: a Narrative History of the Queensland Colliery Employees Union: volume 2: the Pete Thomas Essays
CFMEU, Brisbane, 2007, 476 pp

Here is a very 'grounded' (and sometimes under the ground) look at what unions and unionists actually do. It is based on a series of articles written by Pete Thomas, a former journalist for *Tribune* and the Miners' journal *Common Cause*, and subsequently re-worked for publication by Greg Mallory. In one sense it is an official history, having the *impramatur* of the union, but it is also full of anecdotes about industrial conflicts, the development of the Queensland coalfields and the role that particular

branches and individuals played in struggles for workers' rights. Struggles against the US-based multinational Utah are a central theme, not surprisingly, given the very hard line industrial relations policies adopted by that company during its period of dominance over the coal mining industry.

The many illustrations in the book – and the journalistic style of Pete Thomas – give it a distinctively personal character. The contribution of women, both in supportive womens' auxiliaries and in leadership positions, gets recognition in this story of an otherwise overwhelmingly male workforce. Attention is given throughout to the role played by particular union activists and officials during struggles over the miners' wages and living conditions. The book as a whole is a celebration of organised labour in a tough and hazardous industry that has been a major revenue-earner for the Australian economy.

Jim Stanford

Economics for Everyone: A Short Guide to the Economics of Capitalism

Fernwood Publishing, Nova Scotia, Canada, 350 pp., \$42

This is the book that, for many years, people in the labour movement have been saying should be written. It explains the characteristics of modern capitalism in language that is readily accessible to workers and members of the general public who have not had a formal education in economics. The style is informal and conversational, the arguments readily intelligible. Remarkably though, there is little feeling of 'talking down'. Indeed, some very sophisticated aspects of the economy are addressed, including money and banking, fiscal and monetary policies, the distribution of income ('dividing the pie'), the causes of recessions, stock markets and financialisation. Emphasis is placed on how the economy depends on social relationships, not just technical relationships, leading to change over time. Concurrently, economics – as a means of understanding how the economy works – is shown to be inherently subjective, value-laden and political.

The author, who is an economist working for the Canadian auto workers union, has written an excellent resource for activists. It is a serious but