
BOOK NOTES

C. Sheil (Ed)

The State of Industrial Relations

H.V. Evatt Foundation, Sydney, 2008, 104 pp., \$24.95 plus \$5 postage. Available from the Evatt Foundation at Trades Hall, 4 Goulburn St. Sydney, 2000.

The *WorkChoices* legislation was one of the most distinctive policy commitments of the Howard government. The Your Rights at Work campaign was a key element in its defeat. As Chris Sheil notes in his introduction to this volume, the campaign gained much impact from use of TV advertisements – such as the fraught woman, trying to balance shift work and childcare, being threatened by her boss over the phone. Critical analyses of *WorkChoices* by industrial relations researchers and political economists also provided important ammunition to the struggle: these included the special *WhoseChoices?* issue of the *Journal of Australian Political Economy* (December 2005), a special issue of the *Economic and Labour Relations Review* (2006), David Peetz's book *Brave New Workplace* (2006) and a special issue of the Evatt Foundation's *State of the States* that emphasised 'the State of Industrial Relations'. It is hard to recall any other process in which the contribution of Australian political economy and industrial relations researchers was so closely linked to effective activism – and political success.

The new volume from the Evatt Foundation originated with invitations to contributors to its earlier volume to revisit their analyses in the light of subsequent developments – before and since the general election. In some cases, alternative contributors needed to be found; and other articles were added to give the volume contemporary relevance – such as Julia Gillard's view on 'Forward with Fairness', ACTU President Jeff Lawrence's thoughts on what 'A New Settlement' should comprise, and Chris White's continuing concerns about how the right to strike has been undermined. Some other useful chapters deal with the future of federalism in the industrial relations system; the 'mysterious' role that notions of productivity play in industrial relations; the assault on

collective bargaining; the Howard Government's 'fairness' test that was 'too little too late'; gender inequalities; and the adverse consequences of *WorkChoices* for children and young people in the workforce. Chris Shiel's introduction sets the scene, with its evocation of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's views on the age-old preference by the owners of capital for individual contracts rather than collective bargaining – *plus ça change*.

Kathie Muir

Worth Fighting For: Inside the 'Your rights at Work' Campaign

UNSW Press, Sydney, 256 pp, \$34.95

This is the detailed story of the 'Your Rights at Work' campaign. It looks at how the unions got mobilised, how the campaign developed, the role of the media and the influence on the election that saw the Howard government removed from office. The author sets the campaign in context by looking at the general state of the union movement when *WorkChoices* was introduced and at the role of media-driven politics. It also looks at how the YRaW campaign reconnected workplace issues to broader concerns about contemporary life, including economic security and work-life balance. The story is told in an engaging way, complete with photos demonstrations of rallies, street-stalls and stills from YRaW television advertisements. There's lots of lessons here about balancing industrial, educational and electoral elements in campaigning for political economic change. The big question that remains, of course, is 'where to now?' As the ACTU prepares for an advertising campaign criticising the Rudd government's IR policies, it is clear that the struggle is far from over ...

Tom Bramble

Trade Unionism in Australia: a History from Flood to Ebb Tide

Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2008, 293 pp.

Tom Bramble's new book provides an account of Australian trade unionism since the second world war. The period from 1945 to 1967 is dealt with fairly briefly, and then more detail is given to the periods 1968-74 ('the flood tide'), 1974-83 ('the stand-off') and 1983-2007 (the