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Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement

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identity, and changes in the economic environment. McKay, Moore, and Wood conclude that “statutory and semi-voluntary recognition can be conceptualized in terms of mobilization theory (Kelly 1998) since it is generally the outcome of successful collective organization motivated by perceived injustice in the workplace, generating a shared group identity” (p. 114). Jordan and Bruno state that the “validity of [Kelly’s] emphasis on the balance of power between capital and labour, and union capacity to mobilise workers’ ‘collective interests’ into forms of oppositional action is borne out in our research” (p. 181). Tuckman and Whittall argue, “There was almost certainly some relationship with the economic context as well as a ‘cycle’ of involvement ... possibly also linked with ‘long-wave’ cycles in the economy as Kelly (1998) suggests” (p. 96).

These statements are undoubtedly valid. However, the book’s evidence does not neatly fit the theory, and several running themes in the book seem to contradict it. The most obvious seeming contradiction concerns the relationship between mobilization and union revitalization. Despite the rise of the organizing model and an increase in mobilization, union membership continues to decline, and bargaining coverage has failed to grow as fast as the number of overall jobs. Gall writes of “mobilization per se being necessary but not sufficient” (p. 133), and the book’s concluding chapter is full of dark, pessimistic turns of phrase. The problem is that, like most of the literature, this book discusses union revitalization and mobilization together. If there is no causal connection, an explanation is in order. Similarly, an institutionalist argument coexists uneasily with the mobilization argument. Gall writes in the conclusion, “Under capitalism, trade unionism and collective bargaining are highly dependent upon employer and state support for their existence and operation” (p. 235). This seems to contradict or complicate the argument from mobilization theory that unions derive their power from workers taking collective action in the workplace against injustice. Another problem has to do with the interests and identities of workers. Two of the cases involve an “us and them” different from what we would expect for a theory derived from Marxism. Holgate’s chapter shows that unions organize some workers around identities that have as much to do with ethnicity and race as with class or work. Tuckman and Whittall’s account of Rover raises a similar problem, since in their case the “them” against which British workers mobilize includes German trade unionists. With such a wide range of contradictory evidence and arguments, the book could have contained a debate over the causes,

effects, and definitions of mobilization. Instead, it warmly compliments the mobilization theory and avoids disagreement with it.

This book will be useful for scholars interested in British industrial relations. The chapters by Heery and Simms and by McKay, Moore, and Wood display interesting analyses of data on the intersection between the new legislation and union activity in the United Kingdom, and most of the case study chapters are valuable and interesting. The international chapters generate some potentially important hypotheses about the benefits and dangers of state support and the role of mobilization in the campaign process. For one group of readers, however—scholars committed to the development of mobilization theory—this book is not merely valuable, but essential.

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Rebuilding Labor: Organizing and Organizers in the New Union Movement. Edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss. Ithaca, N.Y., and London: ILR Press, 2004. 308 pp. ISBN 0-8014-4265-6, \$49.95 (cloth); 0-8014-8902-4, \$19.95 (paper).

Attempts to revive the trade union movement have attracted the attention of scholars worldwide in recent years, and this volume is a welcome addition to the burgeoning literature on union revitalization. Central to the project of revitalization, at least in the Anglophone world, has been increased commitment to organizing the unorganized, and *Rebuilding Labor* contains nine original studies of organizing in the United States. There are chapters that examine the incidence, form, and outcomes of new organizing initiatives, including a valuable piece by John DiNardo and David S. Lee that demonstrates that organizing does not cost workers their jobs—the difference in survival rates between matched unionized and non-unionized sites is precisely zero. There are also chapters that deal with organizers, examining their characteristics, motivations, and careers, as well as the reasons why some organizers stay in the labor movement and some—often after a depressingly short period of activism—leave. All of the chapters are of a high caliber, including an excellent review of the book’s themes by the editors.

What does the collection as a whole tell us about new union organizing in the United States? One theme that emerges is the tension inherent in what might be described as “managed activism.” The reform wing of U.S. labor wants to recreate trade unionism as a social movement, and the style of organizing it advocates is mobilizing, seeking to draw workers into activist-led campaigns. Campaigns themselves, however, are often initiated in accordance with a union strategic plan, led by paid organizers, and financed by diverting resources from existing members, which in turn implies centralizing union decision-making. Although the gap between democracy and direction is narrowed by training paid organizers in a developmental leadership style that focuses on identifying, nurturing, and supporting workplace activists, it is never completely closed. In an insightful ethnographic account of a union campaign in the hospitality industry, Teresa Sharpe reports a member declaring in an intentionally monotonic voice, “OK, we’ll tell you what you want to hear,” in response to repeated coaxing by the paid organizer to identify a particular tactic.

A second theme that emerges is coalition-building between unions and new social movements. Here again, tensions are apparent. Building coalitions is central to the reformers’ agenda for two reasons: the low-wage workers who frequently are the target of organizing need community mobilization and political support because they lack positional power in the labor market; and contact with newer movements can revive tired trade unionism by transferring a new repertoire of action and encouraging the adoption of broader goals relevant to a more diverse work force. There are positive accounts of successful coalition-building in the book, most notably in Preston Rudy’s chapter on the Justice for Janitors campaigns in San Jose and Sacramento. But the process is often difficult. The chapters on organizers all describe cases of activists from new movements who were attracted to the “social justice” agenda of the new labor movement but found it difficult to adapt to the distinctive culture of trade unionism. In a fascinating study of union careers in California, Marshall Ganz, Kim Voss, Teresa Sharpe, Carl Somers, and George Strauss demonstrate that staying power was a feature of “union-builders” whose primary identification from the outset lay with the union movement. “Social reformers” and “community leaders” attracted from outside often faded away, and those among them who survived often did so by changing their own personal project, becoming “union builders” themselves.

A third substantive theme is that of union failure

and the disappointing record of the new labor movement, despite its dynamism, in its efforts to secure a decisive turnaround in union fortunes. The collection is not a work of pessimism. Chapters record notable successes, and underpinning the whole book is a voluntarist appreciation of union potential, a belief that union strategy matters and that, notwithstanding difficult circumstances, the right strategy can push the movement to revitalization. Nevertheless, the fact of continuing decline is inescapable and has prompted the split in the AFL-CIO in the period since the book was written. The explanation of failure favored by most of the book’s contributors echoes that of Andy Stern and his allies in pointing inside the labor movement. Kate Bronfenbrenner and Robert Hickey present findings indicating that there is a “bundle” of effective organizing practices akin to the high performance practices of employers, but that these are used in only a minority of organizing campaigns. In another chapter, Steven H. Lopez argues that the legacy of business unionism acts as a drag on union organizing, while studies of the Organizing Institute (Daisy Rooks) and Union Summer program (Lesley Bunnage and Judith Stepan-Norris) point to failings of management in unions that needlessly alienated committed young activists. The book’s message is that unions can revive, but too frequently they suffer from poor leadership, dysfunctional structure, and ineffective methods.

In addition to the knowledge it conveys, *Rebuilding Labor* provides insight into the condition of industrial relations scholarship in the United States. Outside the United States, American research is stereotypically regarded as economics-led, quantitative, and relatively conservative in its normative orientation, focused on the effective regulation of conflict and conducted by researchers who are emotionally distant from the object of study. This book turns all of these stereotypical elements upside down. A theoretical pluralism is much in evidence, with contributors drawing on economics but also sociology and management theory; perhaps the dominant theoretical frame is drawn from the study of social movements and contentious politics. There is also methodological pluralism. The chapters by Bronfenbrenner and Hickey and by DiNardo and Lee analyze secondary data sets using quantitative methods, but other chapters draw on interviews, observation, and other, softer methods. They point to a possible revival of ethnography in U.S. industrial relations research. Many of the researchers, moreover, are activists themselves, whose scholarly work has grown from working for the labor movement. The passion in this book belies the rather dry image

of American scholarship that exists in other parts of the world.

For this, ILR Press has surely to be congratulated. *Rebuilding Labor* is one of a series of engaged, provocative, and insightful studies on U.S. labor and employment relations that have been published in recent years. Together they comprise a valuable resource for researchers and progressive reformers not just in the United States, but worldwide.

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Labor and Employment Law

The Law of the Labour Market: Industrialization, Employment, and Legal Evolution. By Simon Deakin and Frank Wilkinson. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. viii, 380 pp. ISBN 0-19-815281-7.

This volume is a compendium of many books. While its ostensible objective is to examine changes in employment contract law in contemporary Great Britain, the authors describe the histories of labor market institutions since Elizabeth I; give an account of the rise and demise of trade unionism and the welfare state; trace changes in labor market participation of women and part-time workers; and provide an interpretation of liberal economic theory from Robert Malthus to F. A. Hayek. To round things off, they conclude with a set of policy proposals that they refer to as Neo-Fabian. They submit that tighter labor standards are not incompatible with higher levels of productivity. With admirable skill, the authors forge the wide-ranging elements of this book into a cohesive, if not always seamless whole. The product is not an easy read, but it is certainly profitable.

The eclectic nature of the volume and its multiple and overlapping themes and directions stem from the authors' methodology. Preferring an evolutionary non-linear line of attack, the authors hold to the idea that understanding employment contract law requires a dual approach that combines knowledge of the progress of judicial decisions with a perspective on the role of law as a social institution. In their emphasis on contingency, open-endedness, and punctuated equilibria, the authors would appear to favor the social institution perspective. Their main conclusion is that modern contract law came late to Great Britain because concepts of status

that predated the industrial revolution persisted and were preserved well into the twentieth century. The modern employment contract was the product of collective bargaining and the welfare state, which invested the parties with reciprocal obligations. The timing issue is important because economists and political scientists routinely assert that well-defined property and exchange laws based on common law and dating from the Glorious Revolution were the cornerstone of long-term growth in Britain, as well as, by extension, in the United States and the Dominions. Deakin and Wilkinson challenge and successfully undermine this simple view of British law.

The first of the three long chapters that comprise this book describes the pervasive effects of state legislation on the employment relation. Beginning with the first Master and Servant Act (1743), status (unequal bargaining power) was enshrined in the employment relation. The second chapter contains a history of the Poor Law, which, despite its many mutations, consistently acted as carrot and stick in the employment relation for 500 years. It set a floor to workers' earnings but put the onus of unemployment on individuals, thereby weakening their bargaining position. Although the Poor Law was taken off the books in 1948, reports of its death were exaggerated. There are traces of it in Tony Blair's emphasis on individual responsibility—or activation policy—in the 1990s. In the third major chapter, the authors contend that collective bargaining beginning in the late nineteenth century shaped a new set of rights and obligations for groups of workers, pushing aside the master and servant model. Certain of these rights were extended to all workers with the creation of the modern welfare state. Initially, universality did not apply to women and part-timers, and after the postwar settlement new legislation, or its absence, redefined the employment bargain.

True to their evolutionary model, the authors observe in the concluding section that aspects of the Old Poor Law, in particular the Speenhamland system (an early nineteenth-century relief program specifically for poverty abatement in rural Britain), can serve as guiding principles in the establishment of a new set of labor rules that empower all types of workers in the modern labor market. Here they rely on the work of Amartya Sen and, in particular, Sen's concept of "capabilities": putative rights are meaningful only to the extent that the citizen (or worker) has been provided with the wherewithal to exercise it. The current British system has proved costly. Protective rules that give guarantees to full-time workers and part-time workers, skilled and unskilled, and native and