
BOOK REVIEWS

Jackson, Andrew. 2005. *Work and Labour in Canada: Critical Issues*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press. 252 pages, incl. illustrations.

It is a rare occasion when someone who is not a full-time undergraduate instructor writes a book for the classroom. Students benefit from the perspective and expertise of researchers working in non-university settings and often the work is written in an accessible format for a broad audience. Such is the case with *Work and Labour in Canada: Critical Issues*, Andrew Jackson's readable account of Canada's contemporary workforce. As National Director, Social and Economic Policy, at the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the author has a deep understanding of the most important issues facing people as they struggle to make a living in a global economy

Jackson, trained as an economist, confronts the reader with endless facts and figures largely drawn from Statistics Canada surveys but limits his extensive use of the data to descriptive statistics. Clear writing and effective use of tables and charts further reveals his familiarity and comfort with numbers.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is its scope. In four sections Jackson covers an impressive range of challenges facing working people. The stage is set with an introductory discussion of why work is still important to most people in terms of how they reproduce themselves materially. The emphasis is on the growing polarization of Canada's job market as a growing number of insecure and low paid jobs offset any gains made by high paying wage employment. The discussion of the role that training plays in reducing the number of working poor and the lack of employer and state investment in skills upgrading is important in the context of the knowledge economy. The chapter on health in the workplace is especially relevant given the number of new industrial diseases and stress related health issues that seem to be placing an especially hard burden on women workers.

The next section on inequality and difference in the workplace is also comprehensive. Jackson is careful to address gender issues throughout the text, but does dedicate a chapter to the recent gains and losses women have experienced in the workplace. The chapter on other equity seeking groups in the workplace (i.e., immigrants, people of colour, people with disabilities, aboriginal groups) is central to many of the present debates around work and labour in Canada. Through the use of statistical sources, Jackson provides a rigorous account of gaps between different groups making linkages to racist hiring

practices and the failure of the state to recognize the credentials of foreign trained professionals. An interesting chapter on retirees, a group often left out of discussions of the workplace, addresses the current debates around mandatory retirement and the limits of the current pension regime.

The third section of the book on the contemporary labour movement failed to meet my heightened expectations. Jackson highlights the positive impact unions have on employee earnings, workplace conditions, democratic values and universal social programs and dismantles the myths that unions hinder productivity and act as inflationary agents. The author does not, however, address some basic issues such as the contradictions of union seniority protections that are of direct relevance to many equity seeking groups, especially young workers. While the chapter on the future of unionism in Canada emphasises the state's recent role in restricting unionism, Jackson fails to provide any in depth analysis of how the structure of unions themselves may be limiting their success. Perhaps it is unfair to expect a CLC insider to focus on how Canada's relatively weak central labour bodies limit the labour movement or how union jurisdictional disputes negatively impact organizing, but someone with substantial experience in labour organizations is positioned to explore these issues.

A further problem that confronts Jackson in his section on unions as well as in other parts of the book is the specific national 'scale' of his work. Admittedly, the book is on work and labour in Canada but there are important (if not endless) regional differences within the national labour market. In his discussion of union density, the author does recognize the provincial differences in the number of unionized workers (table 9.1, p.170) but much more could be done to illuminate the complexities of such a regionally diverse workforce. Similarly, intermetropolitan comparisons are abandoned after the first chapter and there is very little comparison between rural and urban workers. Given that the data in the book will require updating in any case, perhaps the author will consider expanding discussions of how Quebecers work differently than Albertans in future editions.

The limited regional comparisons seem strange given Jackson's readiness to engage with international comparative studies. In the final chapters on globalization and alternative economic models, Jackson challenges the North American integrationists who demand Canada adopt a neo-liberal labour market policy that fosters flexibility. Instead, the author presents a strong case that there are alternatives and the Canada can be more economically viable if it pursues the interventionist labour market policies of some European nations (e.g., Denmark) that support workers and families. It is in these final chapters that Jackson's progressive imagination shines.

Work and Labour in Canada is a comprehensive and welcome interpretation by one of Canada's foremost policy analysts and we can only hope that it finds

its way into the university classroom. Extra effort has been invested in enhancing the book as a teaching text with introductory chapter summaries and boxed inserts of short case studies (e.g., reprints of newspaper articles). The questions for critical discussion, recommended reading, and internet sources annotated at the end of each chapter are added features. While the work is grounded in a Schumpeterian view of Canada's economy, it is not theory laden. Nowhere will you find a chapter outlining the holy trinity of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber that is found in many introductory texts on work. Instead, Jackson has purposefully written an accessible, empirically focussed book that instructors, students and labour activists interested in the challenges people working in Canada face will greatly appreciate.

Steven Tufts
Department of Geography,
Trent University,
Peterborough, Canada