

system”) purports to be a substitute. But Smith shows health and safety committees (even in Ontario, where workers have the legal right to caucus on their own) have been rendered virtually impotent by their diabolical bipartism.

The right to refuse also has proven itself not the tiger employers once feared and fought but a mere pussycat. Studies of actual work refusals and the government investigations that follow show a tendency by the inspectorate to rule against the refusers if the situation is deemed normal for the industry and if the workers or the union are deemed to be troublemakers.

Sass makes the outrageous claim that he is no longer a proponent of the three rights. According to Smith, this is like “the Pope saying he’s got doubts about the Trinity.” But what Sass is saying is that worker health and safety rights have been submerged by the cacophony of rights that proliferate in North American society.

“The short answer,” writes Smith, “is that, far more than most people would care to admit, the real workplace health and safety decisions are made on the basis of how much safety we can afford. Workers’ health is still for sale...Workplace health and safety committee members are well aware of the fact that no one will treat them like heroes if their proposals lead to job losses or a plant shutdown.”

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**Black, Errol and Jim Silver 2001.**  
***Building a Better World: An Introduction to Trade Unionism in Canada.* Halifax: Fernwood Books, 189p.**

*Building A Better World: An Introduction to Trade Unionism in Canada* is what other texts are not – it is unabashedly pro-union. Although the book is even-handed, it does not pretend to be non-partisan. The first two chapters set the stage for some interesting arguments developed later on in the book. For example, chapter one poses a question about why trade unions resort to extra-parliamentary politics and coalition-building. This question is addressed quite thoughtfully in chapter five. Chapter two introduces the differences between social unionism and business unionism. And, again, chapter five expands on these important distinctions.

There are two strands to this book. One strand examines the structure, the role and the history of trade unions. This part is done in a workman-like style that gives information and helpful definitions to readers new to the world of unions. The history section is brief yet still touches on contemporary issues that affect labour such as Alternative Budgets and Free Trade. Though the historical section was informative, much of it could be found in depth in other sources.

Of the two strands – the structure and history versus the politics of trade unions – it is the latter which is the more interesting. Authors Errol Black and Jim Silver have managed to remind readers about longstanding debates and even to pick at some scabs that have marred

relations between unions and political movements in this country. For example, a key debate started as far back as the Winnipeg General Strike. One of its leaders (also an Labour MP) JS Woodsworth, was denounced by many in the union movement for being a mere social democrat because he was against the formation of a *labour* party centred on the working class and trade unionists. Woodsworth also opposed the Communist Party and the thousands of Canadian trade unionists who belonged. Those with his point of view endured. After World War II, the CCF (forerunner of the NDP) threw the UE and IWA, Communist-dominated and militant unions, out of their organization. Decades later, the NDP backed by US-based union affiliates like the Steelworkers and Autoworkers, ejected the Waffle, the left-wing group pro-Canadian independence group within the party. These were far more than turf battles. *Building a Better World* demonstrates the often uneasy alliance between political organizations and the trade union movement.

Of course much of *Building a Better World* is about the history of the trade union movement in Canada and the roles unions play in bettering society. Though these sections were also informative, much of it could also be found in depth in other sources.

The biggest problem with the book was the lack of a consistent feminist perspective. While women's contributions to the union movement were cited, there could have been more about unions' historic reluctance to include women or their fights for broader social issues such as equity and

health and safety. Another problem was the lack of any type of index at the back.

The main strengths of the book are that it is well written and, for a paperback, well designed. Though there are no photos, there are nicely shaded sidebars on many pages that highlight particular points of view. *Building a Better World* does not have the *gravitas* of a typical textbook, but it is a readable and good compilation of major issues and arguments in the Canadian labour scene. The book is a welcome addition for those teachers or students of labour studies.

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