

## REVIEWS

Hansen, C., S. Jackson, and D. Miller *The closed shop* Gower, Aldershot, 1982, pp. x and 264. Price: \$26.50.

The authors of this book note (p.95) that "the closed shop (is) a political football to be kicked with the greatest possible vigour". While this comment is made in the United Kingdom context, it has nevertheless a much wider application. This book explains the rules and practice of this particular game of football in three countries; the book is subtitled "A comparative study in public policy and trade union security in Britain, the USA and West Germany".

The description of the book as a comparative study is somewhat misleading as the great bulk of the text is taken up with separate descriptions of union security in each of the three countries. The short introductory and concluding chapters make little attempt to draw the separate studies together and the introduction in particular concentrates on a description of and the various arguments for and against the closed shop system.

The major general conclusion reached by the authors is that certain groups are closed-shop prone and that, regardless of the law, these groups will tend to enforce some form of closed shop either formally or informally. The particular groups identified by the authors are craftsmen, casual labour, community based labour and the professions. The last group however is less likely to be troubled by legislative intervention and there are few compulsory ballots on union membership within the medical or legal professions! The organisation of the other groups in the three countries does however seem to support the authors' conclusion.

The major value of this book is that it brings together three useful studies of the closed shop in countries with quite different systems. The three separate countries are discussed in terms of the legal controls on the closed shop, the statistics of union coverage and penetration and actual practice. The discussion of actual practice is probably the most interesting in that it offers useful examples of how the law can be avoided in practice and highlights the point that is often made, although not explicitly by the authors, that the law is often an ineffective method of controlling industrial relations where custom and practice are at variance with the law.

The New Zealand reader with some time on his or her hands will find this book a useful summary of the closed shop in other industrial relations systems and although its direct relevance is not great, there are several chapters of topical interest including those on exemption for religious objectors and a discussion of recent events in the United Kingdom including the recent decision of the European Commission of Human Rights on freedom of association.

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Dabscheck, B. and J. Niland *Industrial relations in Australia* Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1981, pp. 360. Price: \$13.95.

Although conciliation and arbitration is the cornerstone of industrial relations in Australia and New Zealand, the two countries' systems are quite different in practice. The most striking difference, of course, is that Australia, being a federation of six states, has six state systems and a Federal system. Different institutions and procedures have developed in each state and the Federal system. Most interesting though from a New Zealand viewpoint is that all seven Australian systems combine the conciliation and arbitration functions. Conciliation commissioners, if unable to get agreement between the parties arbitrate the outstanding issues. Other interesting aspects for the New Zealand observer are: the legalism of the Australian system; the consequent narrow legal interpretation of what constitutes an "industry"; the fact that federal awards bind only those employers who are party to it (i.e. no blanket coverage); the exclusion of preference clauses from Federal awards; the necessity of ambit claims; the ACTU's role in dispute settlement; Australia's experience with wage indexation and the union deregistration procedures which are more formal in Australia involving a Full Bench of the Federal Commission.

*Industrial relations in Australia* deals with these aspects and many more. The book is intended to be an introductory text for Australian undergraduates. It will serve this purpose well. It is nicely laid out, with key terms in bold type, principal references in footnotes and extensive bibliographies for each chapter. Because it is aimed at undergraduates it includes chapters on industrial relations theory, theories of the labour movement, conflict theory and theories of management. These topics are presented as potted summaries of the major writers and it is disappointing that there is not much attempt at evaluating the competing theories nor integrating them into the chapters which describe the Australian system. An example is the inclusion in the chapter "Labour movement theories" of a section on "Selected Australian Catholic writers". Including this section was a worthwhile idea. However, it is just too brief to help us understand why these writers' influence caused "the Australian unions, and in turn the ALP", to become "a battleground of warring factions which eventually culminated in the traumatic and emotionally charged split of the ALP in 1955" (p.93).

More than 200 pages are devoted to the Australian industrial relations system. It is to these, that non-Australian readers will turn. And they will not be disappointed. The material is well presented and, apart from a little unnecessary repetition, hard to fault.

The substantial body of research upon which the authors are able to draw is most impressive. Even allowing for scale, it is clear that we in New Zealand lag well behind Australia in this regard.

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Roth, Bert and Janny Hammond *Toil and trouble: the struggle for a better life in New Zealand* Auckland, Methuen, 1981, pp. 180. Price: \$24.95.

Several years ago the Labour Archives Committee of the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand circularised twelve dozen trade unions and left-wing organisations. It pointed out the need for a solid archival base if historians of labour were to successfully redress the anti-labour bias in New Zealand historiography; it offered expert advice on the selection, preservation and storage of manuscript and other archival materials, and to arrange transfers of historical collections to suitable repositories on behalf of organisations lacking the resources or the will to maintain their own archives. Of the four responses, two were from unions – both lamenting that we had not contacted them before they had destroyed their archives. Well might the authors of this first, and excellent, pictorial history of labour in New Zealand aptly comment on “the lack of historical sense shown by the actors themselves” in the drama of “The struggle for a better life in New Zealand”.

For the handful of labour historians in this country problems of source loom large. As a result of such difficulties their doyen, Bert Roth, began long ago the assiduous and loving accumulation of his own labour archive, and from it he and able collaborator Janny Hammond have taken many of their illustrations for *Toil and trouble*. These they have supplemented with an imaginative and judicious selection of material from diverse collections throughout the land. The illustrations are linked by captions and commentary which competently provide an evolutionary, if somewhat staccato (because of constraints of format), account of the birth and rise of the labour movement in New Zealand and of its relationships with employers and state. Taken as a package, the book provides an eminently suitable introduction for the general public to a key facet of New Zealand history which to this day barely features in educational curricula. If there are faults, they are those of the genre, and those of the publisher's presentation of materials and subject which deserve treatment of better quality.

There are always difficulties in condensing involved history and complex sets of ideas into a form that is meaningful to a general audience but which retains integrity of authorial perception. Conscious of their vision, Roth and Hammond successfully avoid the blurring of focus which oversimplification would create. If anything, they are unable occasionally to transcend their specialised knowledge of the subject: an “in-joke” based upon awareness of sectarian bastardisations of *The Red Flag* might slip into the text, or a gratuitous “of course”, or a “slave camps” caption that is not explained for another dozen pages. But such lapses serve as a comforting reminder that one is in the hands of experts – a point which might not otherwise be readily appreciated because of the quietness of their expertise. Wisely the authors resist the temptation to be didactic, and allow the illustrations to speak largely for themselves. They do not emphasise in their text the inherent anti-labour bias of the news media, yet the reader understands fully the reasoning behind the watersiders' call in 1951 to “Beware Press and Radio Lies”. They allow Harry Holland's depiction of the original aims of the Labour Party (“a change of classes at the fountain of power”, “to end the class war by ending the causes of class war”) to produce its own stark contrast with the aims of the Labour Party of recent years. When things need to be noted they are mentioned unobtrusively: the role of women and Maoris in the union movement, say, or occasional translations into practice of the dream of international working class solidarity. At National Archives a 1900 letter in the Seddon Papers from British socialist Ben Tillett comments that the working class “are not angels, but they are the making of the country”. This, and the instruments forged by workers in the process, is what the general reader will find *Toil and trouble* all about.

Yet the book has more to offer. Labour historians will differ with it on interpretations and emphases, but will agree that the authors are too modest in describing their work as merely a “picture book”. They are presenting, rather, a precis of the current state of knowledge on a subject crucial for the understanding of the emergence and shape of

modern New Zealand. In his classic 1973 work *Trade unions in New Zealand: past and present*, to take a minor but telling example, Roth refers to a mid-1841 New Plymouth dispute as the "first recorded strike in New Zealand": Roth and Hammond update this by recording a strike by Maori sawyers two decades before New Plymouth's, whose strike is itself downgraded to "One of the earliest strikes by pakeha workers". The reviewer has located documents relating to a pakeha strike within weeks of annexation in 1840 – by police employees who, for breaking their contract to serve the state, were gaoled with hard labour. Far more so than in most areas of New Zealand history, any historical work on labour can at most be an interim report – as would have become clear had the authors of *Toil and trouble* included a select bibliography (as surely was required for a book that will be an introduction to its subject for very many people). Their interim report will lead some readers to ponder weightier issues than can be discussed in its sweeping compass, which however provides a wealth of starting points for further speculation and research.

A 1919 advertisement by Savage and others, for example, reprinted in the Roth/Hammond section called "The Labour Party Enters Parliament", reproduces Seddon's "Last Message to Labour" without realising its irony for a parliamentary party still avowedly socialist: "there is no single act, however originally intended for the benefit of the workers, but has been turned into a means and an aid for bringing more wealth to the already wealthy classes, and leaving an ever lessening share to those whose labour produced that wealth". The Liberal leader, in thus stating the objective historical role of Liberal reformism, is here quoted approvingly by men motivated with the best of socialist intentions. But before very long they were to replace Reevesian reformism by Labourism as the mechanism which, objectively, defused any potential for the emergence of the organisation of working people along fundamental "class for itself" lines. The process of replacing the aim of capturing the state, by one of humanising it and according it neutral status as between classes, needs closer examination – including study of the adaptable nature of the state itself.

Relatedly, Roth and Hammond chart the hard-won evolution of trade unionism as the defensive response of labour to capital and state; to expect more of unionism is to misconstrue its *raison d'être*. Of course the various strands of syndicalism, viewing the attainment of working class power as arriving through industrial rather than political struggle, did expect more. It would be fruitful to trace how anarcho-syndicalist assumptions have survived to this day in the union movement. Whilst acknowledging their understandable frustrations with the severe limitations of Labourism, one might query whether it has been in the self-interest of left-wing unions to stand aloof from the Labour Party, leaving powerful right-wing unions a relatively free hand in influencing the Party's policies. Has the peripheral legacy of the Wobblies of the early twentieth century been the history of, in the words of the Mangere dispute section of *Toil and trouble*, "A bridge to nowhere" for left-wing unionism? Might not the microcosmic "problems" of industrial relations at shop floor level be a convenient safety valve from the employers' point of view, preventing a macrocosmic explosion of greater or lesser intensity by united labour against capital?

Roth and Hammond have correctly stressed union and parliamentarist developments in sketching the background to the practical shaping of the modern labour movement. They have given lesser attention to that third tier of historical labour – the various brands of socialist ideology and their organisational manifestations. This is understandable in the context of New Zealand history, where, symbolically, the Labour Party long ago abandoned even its formal commitment to socialism; a commitment to "the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange and the best attainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service" which is increasingly reaffirmed today by the British Labour Party. But the ideological vein of the left in New Zealand is rich and instructive, if sometimes an eccentric one to mine.

The other two replies received as a result of the Labour Archives Committee survey

mentioned above emanated from this ideological tradition: Christchurch anarchists accused us of being agents of the state, and the party noted by Roth and Hammond as being the "first independent workers' party in New Zealand", the Socialist Party of New Zealand, was concerned to establish its claimed credentials as the only genuine socialist party in the country since its founding in 1901. The Petone Marxian Club, pledged in 1912 to meet "every Monday night at 8.00 pm right up to the day of the Revolution", no doubt disagreed. Let us hope that Roth and Hammond, or others worthy of following in their pioneering footsteps, will produce a similar history of the evolution of socialist and collectivist ideas and organisations in New Zealand.

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### Books Received

Scott, B. *The skills of negotiating* Gower, Aldershot, 1981, pp.230. Price: \$33.00.

Spoonley, P., D. Pearson, and I. Shirley (Eds) *New Zealand sociological perspectives* Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1982, pp.396. Price: \$15.95.

## THE JOURNAL OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

*The Journal of the Industrial Relations Society of Australia*  
Editor: Professor John Niland, University of New South Wales

Vol. 24 No. 2

June 1982

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Published Quarterly. Subscription: Australia \$23, overseas \$28 (surface mail). Single issues \$5.50 plus postage. Order from G.J. Bennett Associates, GPO Box 2260, Sydney, NSW 2001, Australia.