

**BOOK REVIEW**

**Labour Under Attack: Anti-Unionism in Canada**, by Stephanie Ross and Larry Savage, eds (Halifax: Fernwood, 2018). \$32.00 CND. ISBN: 9781552664780. Pages 1-224

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The robust, generalized, long run decline of organized labour has been a broadly-tread terrain of scholarly inquiry in various disciplines, for nearly half a century, since the beginning of the significant decline in the size and power of organized labour, particularly in the U.S., as early as the early 1970s. Researchers across various disciplines have provided an extremely large set of theoretical explanations for this trend, involving varied social, cultural, legal, economic, organizational, political and technological dimensions to explain this vast trend, or some dimension to it, to some degree. In that very basic sense, this book is aimed at an already widely addressed topic, worthy as it is of ongoing, continued analysis, due to its profound implications.

As a book, *Labour Under Attack: Anti-Unionism in Canada* however, provides a rather interesting and somewhat unique contribution to the overall body of existing historical and social science literature(s) that may be considered broadly as relating to union growth, decline, and/or renewal. That is, it is a collection of complementary works that collectively focus their emphasis on “anti-unionism.” This focus defined in the negative seems to run overall along two main themes. On the one hand is an emphasis on understanding the forces of constraint and coercion that confront workers in their path of collective action. While this is not exactly an entirely new theoretical lens or angle of inquiry or argument, given the larger global social context of long run union decline and the very large literature on this overall, the various chapters do provide interesting and useful theoretical and empirical examinations of various sources of constraint and coercion, ranging from an anti-union dimension in dominant media and culture, to a plethora of specific and recent managerial strategies of union suppression and coercion.

On the other hand, as a second theme, the book emphasizes in various parts the importance of improved understanding of what may be called negative union experience or “feedback” effects. That is, it places emphasis on exploring the relationship between negative attitudes about unionization amongst workers and some of the practices of actually-existing unions and unionization. Throughout, there is also helpful attention to the role and potential of worker and union agency, and an exploration of alternative strategies to overcome the various negative forces being examined. Not surprisingly, the importance of union democracy in relation to this issue of agency is repeatedly stressed. As well, the focus of the book overall is on Canadian experience, making it particularly useful and relevant for Canadian research and teaching.

One of the main strengths of this book is in its organic entirety. That is, as a collection of work with its particular focus, the whole successfully amounts to more than a sum of its individual parts. It is, quite simply, a very good, enjoyable read. The chapters that provide the relatively more theoretical treatments of anti-unionism link the empirical case studies to the larger picture in a thoughtful manner.

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The case studies are also very interesting in themselves and cover a wide range of industry contexts (manufacturing, retail, digital media, casinos, and junior professional sports), each of which provide important insights that resonate beyond their particular context. The case studies also embody fascinating stories of workplace organizing, with interesting accounts of employer and union behavior. Some of them are particularly interesting insofar as they give the lie to external appearances of the “good life” associated with certain work and workplaces, and how employer practices interact with, and to some extent seek to construct, dimensions of worker identity.

This book also seems potentially useful in teaching for a few reasons. Speaking personally, as a professor in a university with a large proportion of the student body already working in retail, and many others seeking work in digital media and analogous “new economy” workplaces (two of the case study chapters) I am sure that this research (even if only to the extent that it has improved my own understanding) will also be useful for teaching purposes. The chapters are overall accessible and appropriate for undergraduate reading, are clearly and engagingly written, and stand to collectively speak to some of the lived experiences of students who, in our time, are increasingly also workers.