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Economics for Canadian Trade Unionists, (2nd Ed), by Sidney H. Ingerman, Ottawa, Labour College of Canada, 1985, 208 pp. ISBN 0-969-0345-1-1

This book is a recently updated version of a text that has been in use at the Labour College of Canada for 5 years. Its distribution, however, has widely exceeded the 60 or so shop stewards and local officers that graduate annually from the Labour College summer program. In fact, 5000 copies of the first edition of the text have circulated widely among elected leaders and union staff members in many CLC affiliates.

In some ways, the book is more of an encyclopedia of economic terms and definitions, than an exposition of economic theory. The chapter on Full Employment, for example concentrates largely on explaining how the definition of «Full Employment» has evolved politically over a number of years, with rather technical explanations of the influence of population growth, net migration and so forth.

In a similar manner, the chapters on Unemployment give simple and clear definitions of 'structural' unemployment or 'frictional' unemployment, for example, along with many detailed examples drawn from practical experience.

As a handbook for action-oriented people looking for a simple explanation of «The Phillips Curve» (relating unemployment to inflation), or a summary description of how Government deficits stimulate the economy, the Ingerman text could be useful.

Economics for Canadian Trade Unionists is at best an introductory text. Despite the author's preface in which he lists a number of new policy areas addressed in the second edition, most of these new areas are treated in an extremely summary manner.

For example, one of the new areas of discussion is supposed to be an «appraisal of Reaganomics».

In fact, only three paragraphs are devoted to «Reaganomics», mostly to say that it is an unmitigated flop and that any economic growth in the United States since Reagan's election has to be the result of classical Keynesian pump-priming. This may or may not be true, but the overall impression is more akin to a bombastic speech by Dennis McDermott than a sober analysis of supply-side Economics.

Similarly, the whole discussion of Canadian trading policy is limited to 4 pages, although here the author does a better job of outlining the opposing theories.

Ingerman has written a book that evidently fills a certain vacuum — a kind of simplified Samuelson — that can be useful for many busy union activists. However, the union movement needs a much deeper analysis of economics and politics, and a more critical look at the evident inadequacies of its own responses to current economic debates. The danger here is that the «introduction» might become the «final word» and that simplistic answers can become dogma.

The last chapter of the book, the mandatory nod towards National Economic Planning and Democratic Socialism, which is supposed to be the solution to all the ills of the free enterprise system, is the best example of this problem.

The treatment is perfunctory, and avoids any serious discussion of the limitations of, or difficulties involved in, trying to «civilise» the free enterprise system. Particularly absent is any sort of critical treatment of Social Democratic regimes in the U.K., France or any of the Scandinavian countries.

As a result, the book runs the danger of presenting the solution to current economic problems in a simplistic manner. It is not clear that this will help shop stewards or local or national officers to analyse any more acutely the various economic problems they face.

Peter LARSON