

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Immigration and American Unionism by Vernon M. BRIGGS Jr.,
Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001, 215 pp., ISBN
0-8014-3870-5 (cloth) and ISBN 0-8014-8710-2 (pbk.).

Fraser Ottanelli

Volume 58, numéro 2, printemps 2003

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007309ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/007309ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Ottanelli, F. (2003). Compte rendu de [*Immigration and American Unionism* by Vernon M. BRIGGS Jr., Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001, 215 pp., ISBN 0-8014-3870-5 (cloth) and ISBN 0-8014-8710-2 (pbk.)]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 58(2), 346–347.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/007309ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 2003

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

politiques publiques et la variété des arrangements organisationnels qui en ressort. Cela permet de faire émerger des questions comme celles de l'inégalité de traitement dans l'accès à l'emploi ou encore des délicats arbitrages à opérer

entre les politiques publiques universelles et les mesures spécifiques reflétant la variété des réalités locales.

SYLVIE MOREL
Université Laval

Immigration and American Unionism

by Vernon M. BRIGGS Jr., Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2001, 215 pp., ISBN 0-8014-3870-5 (cloth) and ISBN 0-8014-8710-2 (pbk.).

Immigration and American Unions historicizes the current decline of the union movement in the United States through an exploration of the relationship between the immigration of unskilled workers and labour and unions. Organized chronologically along a period that goes from the early phases of industrialization up to the present, each chapter is divided into separate sections that provide background information on the economic changes, the composition of the workforce, the development of unions, and finally immigration and government policies. Although acknowledging that, over time, multiple factors had an impact on union membership, Briggs establishes a causal relationship between rates of immigration and the state of the union movement. "When immigration is low or levels are contracting," he writes, unions thrive. Conversely, unions falter "during periods when immigration is high or levels are increasing" (p. 3). This connection, according to Briggs, was not lost on U.S. unions and their leaders who saw immigrants as lowering the living standards of U.S. workers and as providing a docile workforce less willing to organize than native-born workers. These views help explain and (in the author's view) justify the union movement's past support for restrictive immigration policies.

In setting up the context for his discussion of the relationship between organized labour and immigration, Briggs' study takes the form of a textbook as it provides a clear but concise survey of United States labour and economic

history. The conclusion he draws from this synthesis, however, is not convincing. While undoubtedly, there is a connection between the arrival of great numbers of unskilled foreign workers and union strength, to reduce the explanation of the weakness of organized labour in the United States to a statistical correlation between high immigration and low union membership is more deterministic than historical.

The book's argument, as expressed by Samuel Gompers' quote, that "immigration is, in its fundamental aspect, a labor problem," raises the following question: a "problem" for whom? Obviously it was a "problem" for the AFL's craft unions and their conservative leadership. The book does not explain the evident contradiction between the AFL's image of foreigners as scabbing wage-breakers unreceptive to unionization with the fact that in the textile, garment, cigar, meatpacking and steel industries unskilled immigrant workers on many occasions initiated labour struggles and often displayed greater militancy than their native-born co-workers. Initially then, as immigrant labour activism flourished, it was forced to find its organizational expression outside of the AFL. Eventually, as industrial unions for unskilled workers developed within the AFL, foreign workers were accepted but mainly through ethnically segmented locals.

In addition, while it relies on the works of Vernon Parrington, Foster Rhea Dulles and Arthur Link, the book pays little attention to recent literature

on the decline of organized labour in the United States. Several works, for instance, have focused on the role of government and business antilabour policies in the decline of union membership during the 1920s and the 1980s, or have called attention to the militancy and support for unions displayed by present-day immigrant workers in the service industry. Finally, the book would have also benefited from a comparative examination of the attitudes toward immigration by labour organizations in other receiving countries in which large numbers of foreign workers settled. Such an analysis would have shown that with the onset of mass migration at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States and elsewhere, most national labour movements initially (and sometimes violently) opposed migratory workers as an economic threat through workplace protests and calls for their exclusion. By the turn of the century, however, social-democratic (and later Communist) unions and political parties in Europe and generally anarchist or syndicalist groups in Argentina and Brazil worked effectively for the fair treatment of immigrant

workers and fostered the formation of working-class organizations that blended peoples of many nations in the interests of class unity. In so doing, the labour movements of receiving countries enlisted the support of and even relied on immigrant workers to help reinforce and indeed establish strong and militant multi-national labour movements.

Historians have long known that most labour movements of labour-importing countries influenced national immigration policies and, in so doing, helped define the forms of the incorporation of foreign workers into receiving countries both as workers and as citizens. In the case of the United States, a cross-cultural comparison with labour movements in "nations of immigrants" strongly suggests that a key factor in the weakening of organized labour in the United States was not the arrival of immigrants but precisely the hostility of the AFL to unskilled foreign workers.

FRASER OTTANELLI
University of South Florida

Personnel et DRH : l'affirmation de la fonction personnel dans les entreprises (France, 1830-1990)

par Jean FOMBONNE, Paris : Vuibert, 2001, 777 p., ISBN 2-7117-7697-2.

Le livre de Jean Fombonne retrace l'histoire de la fonction personnel dans les entreprises françaises de 1830 à 1990 en distinguant trois périodes. Une première période, jusqu'à la première guerre mondiale, est caractérisée par la mise en place d'un cadre législatif et doctrinal et par la définition d'un ensemble d'activités propres à cette fonction. Les conseils d'administration des entreprises hésitent d'abord à déléguer leurs prérogatives mais, peu à peu, la gestion du personnel devient une fonction à part entière. Au cours de la seconde période, à partir de la première guerre mondiale, de plus en plus d'entreprises créent une fonction spécialisée dans la gestion du personnel. La seconde guerre mondiale

marque une troisième étape et, à partir des années 1950, la fonction se technicise davantage jusqu'à créer ses propres critères de performance, l'audit social par exemple.

L'ouvrage est issu d'une thèse en histoire soutenue à l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, mais l'auteur connaît aussi très bien la pratique de la gestion des ressources humaines en tant qu'ancien praticien. Il s'appuie sur un important volume de sources, notamment sur l'étude de 289 règlements intérieurs de 1836 à 1900 et, pour la période de l'après seconde guerre mondiale, sur un grand nombre d'entretiens avec des acteurs.