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## Union Contributions to Labor Welfare Policy and Practice

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This edited collection explores the role of organized labour in supplying human services to its members and dependents, and in promoting progressive social transformation. As such, this volume seeks to both outline a history of union endeavours in this regard, and to identify possible best practices worth emulating. However, the scope of this volume is relatively narrow: it primarily looks at the role of unions in providing professionalized social work services, rather than the friendly society role played by early unions. Approximately half the chapters deal with U.S. examples, and the remainder with a selection of mature (e.g. Japan, Canada, France) and emerging markets (e.g. South Africa, India).

The opening chapter by Paul Kurzman gives a broad historical overview of the social services provided by unions to their members, and the role of the social work profession in this regard. This chapter provides some very interesting background information as to the rise of such union activities in the 1930s, but is marred by a tendency towards oversimplification. For example, social work did not “move into the public sector” simply because voluntary agencies could not cope (p. 9), but also because of political pressures towards the welfare state. Today, a reverse process is at play in liberal market economies such as the United Kingdom. In reality, this is not because voluntary groups can “cope” better, but because progressive forces have failed to check the hollowing out of the welfare state. Furthermore, the above mentioned focus on professional social work leads to a fundamental weakness; it is argued that the employment of social workers showed “skeptical observers that it

could be done” (p. 11). However, this is unnecessarily and implicitly dismissive of the unprofessionalized provision of social services by early union activists in the developed world. There is no doubt that the broader professionalization of unions was an important development, but the role of a single profession is presented as removed from this wider story. This makes the concluding argument as to the compatibility of peer-service programmes and occupational social work less convincing than should be the case.

If the first chapter was about social workers enhancing unions, the second, by Howard Karger and Bob Lonnie explores the potential of unionization in revitalizing the social work profession. It is concluded that, in the U.S., professional associations have sought “pity” for the profession, rather than actively promoting collective voice and action. The following chapter by Lawrence Rood and Kenneth Dickinson looks at joint union-management programmes for providing union services to members; this somewhat uncritical chapter talks about the present as “a world where labor and management have a symbiotic need to work together”, ignoring the extent to which many firms have founded their current competitiveness on outright labour repression. Sheila Akabas and Lauren Gates look at the role of unions in promoting employment amongst those with mental health conditions. Whilst unions certainly have an important role to play in promoting equal opportunities and fairness, they are already very over-stretched in protecting the jobs of current members, whilst job seekers and employees struggling with mental conditions may not wish to add the stigma of union membership to their existing difficulties.

Chapter 5, by Sheila Menashe and Joseph Tronolone explores the impact of union-sponsored legal and social services, looking at the case of the DC37 section

of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. This chapter points to the possibilities for union provided social workers and lawyers to play a holistic role, but also the challenges of reconciling legal adversarialism with social work's emphasis on conciliation. Louise Simmons and Scott Harding return to the issue of union community relations, looking at how union outreach and social justice initiatives may build coalitions with community based social workers. The chapter argues that, whilst there are real opportunities, "in recent decades social work has played a less visible role in directly promoting economic justice initiatives" (p. 112). In the following chapter, Jessica Rosenberg concludes that, whilst unions and human service organizations may have common goals, any partnerships will require considerable negotiation and commitment. Human service professionals, Rosenberg argues, are well equipped to promote such partnerships, begging the question, as to why, if so mutually beneficial, more of such partnerships do not exist? Chapter 8, by Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes, Joelle Sano and Christina Matz-Costa notes that whilst unionized workplaces in the U.S. are more likely to be associated with benefits relevant to older workers, they are less likely to be associated with flexible working conditions. Sadly, the authors appear to have bought into the assumption that the latter is a generally desirable state of affairs. In practice, flexible working is often associated with insecurity, contingency and an inability by employees to choose the working time arrangements they prefer. Whilst older workers may indeed "prefer" some flexibility in their working time, older workers often are forced into jobs that allow much flexibility to the firm, and little to the worker.

The following set of chapters consists of country studies. The first, by Rick Csiernik, looks at the important role played by

Canada in promoting work and community well-being. Elizabeth Danto's chapter on France is very broad ranging to the extent of being superficial, never really moving beyond the stereotype. The chapter on South Africa, by Lourens Terblanche argues that the lack of labour commitment to employee assistance programmes reflects a historic focus based primarily on political issues. This ignores the fact that many of the independent unions that emerged in the 1970s had their origins in worker benefit funds. Certainly, the independent unions assumed a major role in the struggle against apartheid, but to suggest that this was associated with a lack of interest in supporting workers in dealing with personal problems and concerns displays a remarkable ignorance on behalf of the author. The union covered in most detail in the chapter is the Solidarity Union, whose main support base is working class white Afrikaners; Solidarity does play a major role in providing help for those within its broad constituency, but this role is closer to a tradition of mutual aid societies orientated to poor whites than the orthodox labour movement. Soochan Choi looks at the challenges facing Korean unions in dealing with the shifting needs of members, who face increased strain as a result of industrial and economic change. Other chapters in this section look at Japan, Israel, India and Hong Kong. The final chapter, by Paul Kurzman, argues that a greater use of occupational social workers by unions, and closer ties between the labour movement and the social work profession could facilitate unionization drives and revitalization. Whilst there is no doubt that relevant membership services may make union membership more attractive, and that social work professionals have valuable skills to bear in this regard, the volume is marred by a lack of critical detail and insight.

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