

## Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



*Working People, An Illustrated History of Canadian Labour*,  
by Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, Ottawa, Deneau &  
Greenberg, 1980, 349 pp.

F. J.K. Griezic

Volume 37, Number 1, 1982

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/029245ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/029245ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

### ISSN

0034-379X (print)

1703-8138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Griezic, F. J. (1982). Review of [*Working People, An Illustrated History of Canadian Labour*, by Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, Ottawa, Deneau & Greenberg, 1980, 349 pp.] *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 37(1), 243–245. <https://doi.org/10.7202/029245ar>

Tous droits réservés © Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval, 1982

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**Érudit**

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

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

dividual contract of employment law is inherited from England and modified to be made applicable to Canadian conditions" (p. 53); la responsabilité de l'employeur pour le fait de l'employé (p. 91); le statut juridique des associations syndicales en droit commun (p. 127 et sq. et p. 252, sous réserve de la mention (p. 130) de l'article 60 du **Code de procédure civile**; les conséquences civiles d'un piquet de grève illégale ou de la grève illégale elle-même... Encore ici, une simple allusion (p. 220): "In Quebec, the general provisions of the Civil Code concerning intentional wrongs are applied to conduct in labour disputes", et l'analyse juridique se fait ensuite, encore ici, exclusivement en fonction de la **Common-law** (voir aussi pp. 237 et sq., sauf mention exceptionnelle de quelques espèces jurisprudentielles - **Gaspé Copper** (p. 241); **Charbonneau** (p. 245)). Il en va de même de l'effet juridique de conventions collectives, en l'absence, de dispositions statutaires (p. 253).

Certes, à ce sujet, on peut convenir rapidement que, très souvent, les résultats pratiques obtenus ne diffèrent pas tellement d'un système à l'autre et, surtout, que le «droit du travail» tend de plus en plus à trouver sa source, partout au pays, dans l'intervention législative et à affirmer une certaine autonomie par rapport au droit commun, quel qu'il soit. Toutefois, même en cela, la méthodologie diffère profondément d'un système à l'autre et c'est là toute la richesse du dualisme juridique canadien. L'utilisation du label canadien sur le plan international impose aussi de faire état de ce dualisme juridique.

**Pierre VERGE**

Université Laval

**Working People, An Illustrated History of Canadian Labour**, by Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, Ottawa, Deneau & Greenberg, 1980, 349 pp.

Canadian labour needs a scholarly, sympathetic, critical, popular and interesting analysis. This book provides a range of in-

formation on the various aspects of the development and problems of Canadian workers. Morton and Copp have been able to use their expertise as historians of different facets of Canadian society to try and fill the gaps of a general labour history. To assist, they have employed an impressive collection of photographs depicting working people's history. They state their objectives thus: the "book concentrates on...: the development of working class movements in Canada (for) "what is needed is a view of Canadian labour history that struggles to bring together the old institutional approach and the new awareness of region and localism, and that respects both the radical and the pragmatic." To what extent is this heady goal achieved in this relatively comprehensive, pleasant, empirical, well-illustrated narration?

The study is written chronologically beginning in the early nineteenth century and terminating with the late 1970s. The greatest emphasis is placed on the movements, actions and events of the last twenty-five years. The main theme centres about the problems the workers confronted from the socio-economic-political élite and the bourgeoisie when trying to defend themselves, improve their working conditions, obtain the right to act collectively, remove the obstructions and restrictions imposed by management, negotiate legally with management on an equal basis and receive a living wage. Their organizations such as the Knights of Labour, the Trades and Labour Congress, the Confederation of Canadian Unions, and la confédération de syndicats démocratiques are mentioned and discussed. The length devoted to each is not necessarily dependant on its importance but rather consistent with the authors' preferences. The excursions of organized labour into politics likewise merit attention, particularly the relationship with the moderate socialist CCF-NDP and the difficulty of retraining or solidifying reciprocal support. Workers' tactics and strategies employed to counter the aggression of management and government are considered as well.

In this regard there is no comparative chart of workers' victories and losses, but according to the authors, the plight of the Canadian working people improved inexorably as labour was institutionalized with the rest of society. It is evident that Morton and Copp subscribe to the liberal philosophy of progress. Yet progress and improvement are relative. Could there have been more equitable progress and improvement? What kind of progress is a progress where the wealthy have got wealthier and the poor poorer, while Canadian class lines have become more rigid rather than more flexible in our "classless" society? But then neither do the authors give much credence to class divisions and have steered away from such a discussion in a Marxian sense.

The major obstacles workers confronted were excessive hours of work, poor to horrible working conditions, blacklisting, yellow-dog contracts, lack of protective legislation, lack of input into the decision-making process either in the work place or government, lack of legal status, and little or no mechanism to help improve their situation. They also had specific complaints such as assisted immigration, technical education, and the inequities of Canadian society. As the situation changed so too did their demands but not dramatically. Initially they were reformist, if not radical, in their organizational activity but after the AFL took control of the TLC this latter body became more conservative. The established labour organizations, and the TLC was the largest congress, who were seeking legitimacy, were prepared to pursue evolutionary if not retrogressive steps in order to gain that status. On the other hand there were more radicalized workers. Labours' tactics became more ingenious from overt confrontation of the strike to the general strike, to sit downs, to road blockades, to common fronts. Management's approach became more subtle, and sophisticated in trying to destroy workers' attempts to ameliorate their position. The expansion of the union movement into the blue and white collar workers, the professionals and women, demonstrated the awareness of

the potential strength to be gained among different sectors of the work force. The time-consuming bureaucratic structure created for collective bargaining and negotiations was one of the deadly responses of government and management to changing times.

Coverage is accorded to the schisms and scissions that wracked the labour movement. The splits were invariably due to ideological and practical differences over the hegemony exercised by the Americans, socialism, the type of organization to establish, raiding and jurisdictional control and whether or not to enter politics. Many of these divisions still exist.

There are some useful correctives in this study. D.J. O'Donohue's title as "Father of the Canadian Labour movement" is questioned and found wanting. With justice too Morton and Copp review the Trade Union Act of 1872, which writers in the past have pointed to with pride as an example of what can be achieved, yet as the authors demonstrate, the Act did very little for the working class and the union movement. Similarly they are justifiably critical of King, the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act; none of these showed understanding of nor protection for the working class. Useful too is the condemnation of the Borden administration's internal policy during W.W. I and their failure to try to work with labour while aligning themselves with business. It is the King government which merits criticism for its myopia regarding the union movement during W.W. II. After PC1003 and the Rand Formula the situation changed but it is evident that much remains to be done before organized labour can merit the reality of the myth of "big" and "powerful" labour. And although not a corrective, the authors provide coverage of the Québec working class even though they may not comprehend the québécois.

There is no question where the authors' sympathies lie regarding labour's politicization. They discuss the frequent ventures into politics in the early period and the arrival of

labour leaders on the provincial political scene, and of J.S. Woodsworth and others at the federal level and the formation of the CCF which became the NDP, to demonstrate the potential of such a political arm. The internecine dispute over the question of direct political involvement is also well outlined as is the reluctance of organized labour to overtly give public, moral and financial support. It is through this 'social' democratic party, it is argued, that labour can best hope for a future.

There are some problems with the study. Although the authors claim to be objective and to give equal treatment to "radical" and "pragmatist", their impartiality is difficult to discover. They are excessively critical of the OBU and damn the "first effectively conspiratorial radical movement" (p. 132) — the Communist party — but are overly sympathetic of the conservatism of the TLC and ACCI during the great depression. They are unsympathetic to communist or organizers but uncritical of labours' political flip flops. Then there are the passionate denunciations of communist-led unions, who it appears are always the sell-outs with their sweet-heart contracts, yet did not the other unions do the same thing?

There is another feature that requires comment. Regarding the October crisis the authors state that "There was some poetic justice in the mass arrest of those who had preached revolution..." (p. 282). What of those who were incarcerated for having done nothing? Who are those "social misfits" (p. 282) of whom they speak? Does this include university professors, deans, or presidents, religious leaders, intellectuals, labour leaders or others who incite or demand that the government use force, such as the police or the army, to silence critics of society?

Some slips and omissions have also made their way into the study. "In 1902 the government reported the worst record (of strikes) since 1901. The Liberals could blame the Conservative administration." (p. 103). One presumes that it is 1912 of which they speak

since the Liberals were in power in 1901 and 1902. When they discuss unionization in Québec they mention Alfred Charbonneau (p. 131) as leader, but mean Charpentier. The section on the 1920's omits one of the most bitter and prolonged strikes in Canada: that of the Saint John, New Brunswick street railway workers. In 1930 there was no Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association (p. 148). These lapses however, are not serious.

Despite these criticisms, the book is valuable. It comes close to filling the needs noted earlier. The synthesis is well done and to a considerable degree they have approximated their objectives. The photographs portray vividly the evolution of the working class. Academics and intellectuals will be pleased with the book but for the ordinary Canadian it is too bulky, there is too much verbiage, it is too imposing. It is difficult to satisfy all worlds; perhaps it should have been directed more specifically to the academic community; at any rate it should be well received there, while the working class will have to await a more popularized history.

F.J.K. GRIEZIC

Carleton University

**Historical Directory of Trade Unions, Volume I: Non-Manual Unions**, by Arthur Marsh and Victoria Ryan, Farnborough, England, Gower, 1980, 256 pp. (Distributed in North America by Renouf USA, Brookfield, Vermont 05026) ISBN 0-566-02160-9

Arthur Marsh est un travailleur infatigable et prolifique. Après avoir patiemment accumulé sa documentation depuis plusieurs années sur les syndicats, il peut maintenant livrer au public les résultats de ses minutieuses recherches sous divers aspects selon les besoins de ceux à qui il s'adresse.

Dans le dernier numéro de **Relations industrielles** (vol. 36, no 4, pp. 948-9), nous avons présenté la deuxième édition de son **Trade Union Handbook** publié chez le même