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978-0-521-71612-3 - Trade Unionism in Australia: A History from Flood to Ebb Tide

Tom Bramble

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TRADE UNIONISM IN AUSTRALIA

A history from flood to ebb tide

In the late 1960s Australian unionism was on the flood tide: growing in strength, industrially confident and capable of shaping the overall political climate of the nation. Forty years on, union membership and power is ebbing away despite community support for trade unionism and the continuing need for strong unions. Even the unprecedented mobilisation against WorkChoices, which defeated a government and lost the prime minister his own seat, has done little to turn the tide.

With compelling rigour, Tom Bramble explores the changing fortunes of what was once an entrenched institution. *Trade Unionism in Australia* charts the impact on unions of waves of economic restructuring, a succession of hostile governments and a wholesale shift in employer attitudes, as well as the failure of the unions' own efforts to boost membership and consolidate power. Indeed, Bramble demonstrates how the tactics employed by unions since the early 1980s may have paradoxically contributed to their decline.

Ultimately this timely book traces union-led action from the workplace to the political sphere over a period of significant change, and concludes by pointing to strategies for a renewal and revival of Australian unions.

Tom Bramble is Senior Lecturer in Industrial Relations, School of Business, University of Queensland and has been a union activist. He has lectured in Industrial Relations at tertiary level for more than 20 years.

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ACRONYMS

Acronym	Full title
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABCC	Australian Building and Construction Commission
ABOA	Australian Bank Officials' Association
ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACOA	Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association
ACSPA	Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ALAC	Australian Labor Advisory Council
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMC	Australian Manufacturing Council
AMIA	Australian Metal Industries Association
AMIEU	Australasian Meat Industry Employees' Union
AMWU	(before 1995) Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union
AMWU	(after 1995) Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union
APESMA	Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia
APPM	Associated Pulp and Paper Mills
ARU	Australian Railways Union
ASE	Australasian Society of Engineers
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
AWA	Australian Workplace Agreement
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
BCA	Business Council of Australia
BHP	Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited
BLDC	Builders Labourers for Democratic Control

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BLF	Builders Labourers' Federation
BWIU	Building Workers' Industrial Union
CAGEO	Council of Australian Government Employee Organisations
CEEP	<i>Commonwealth Employees (Employment Provisions) Act 1977</i>
CERR	<i>Commonwealth Employees (Redeployment and Retirement) Act 1977</i>
CFMEU	Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union
CMC	Council for Membership Control (AWU)
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPA(M-L)	Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist)
CRA	Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia Ltd
DLP	Democratic Labor Party
ECCUDO	Electricity Commission Combined Union Delegates Organisation
EPAC	Economic Planning Advisory Council
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
FCU	Federated Clerks' Union
FEDFA	Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association
FIA	Federated Ironworkers' Association
GMH	General Motors-Holden's Limited
HEWRR	Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements
IRB	Industrial Relations Bureau
IRC	Industrial Relations Commission
JIR	<i>Journal of Industrial Relations</i>
LHMU	Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union
MIM	Mount Isa Mines Limited
MTEA	Metal Trades Employers' Association
MTIA	Metal Trades Industry Association
MUA	Maritime Union of Australia
NDA	National Day of Action
NFF	National Farmers' Federation
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
NUW	National Union of Workers
OECD	Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
PKIU	Printing and Kindred Industries Union
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
SDA	Shop Distributive and Allied Employees' Association

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SEC	State Electricity Commission
SEQEB	South East Queensland Electricity Board
SPA	Socialist Party of Australia
SUA	Seamen's Union of Australia
TLC	Trades and Labor Council
TUTA	Trade Union Training Authority
TWU	Transport Workers' Union
VBEF	Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation
VSTA	Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association
WIRA	Waterfront Industry Reform Authority
WWF	Waterside Workers' Federation
YRW	Your Rights at Work

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PREFACE

This book represents a first attempt to tell the story of trade unionism in Australia between the 1960s and 2000s in the context of the class struggle between capital and labour. It is framed within a Marxist perspective; that is, a perspective that takes as its starting point the struggle by the working class for its own liberation. My understanding of the shifting contours of this struggle is shaped not only by my own involvement since the mid 1980s, but also by discussions with many hundreds of participants. These have included unionists, employers and political activists. I would particularly like to thank my comrades in Socialist Alternative who have taught me so much and whose thinking has made a major contribution to this book.

This book has benefited greatly from comments and suggestions by Mick Armstrong, Kaye Broadbent, Diane Fieldes, Phil Griffiths, Rick Kuhn, Tom O'Lincoln, Louise O'Shea and Liz Ross. Louise O'Shea also provided invaluable research assistance. The University of Queensland gave me the time free from teaching, and the University of Melbourne supplied me with the space and facilities to get this book started in the first half of 2007, for which I would like to thank them. During my sabbatical at Melbourne University, Christina Cregan was a valued source of encouragement. For permission to use materials or for assistance in their use, I am grateful to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (www.abs.gov.au), Stephen Bell, Frank Stilwell and Margaret Gardner. Finally, I would like to thank Debbie Lee and all at Cambridge University Press for their assistance during production of this book and Frances Wade for her care in editing the manuscript.

I would like to dedicate this book to my parents, Harry and Margaret, for raising me, and to Kaye for her love and support and for giving me the impetus to write it.