

collective bargaining; the Howard Government's 'fairness' test that was 'too little too late'; gender inequalities; and the adverse consequences of *WorkChoices* for children and young people in the workforce. Chris Shiel's introduction sets the scene, with its evocation of Sidney and Beatrice Webb's views on the age-old preference by the owners of capital for individual contracts rather than collective bargaining – *plus ca change*.

Kathie Muir

***Worth Fighting For: Inside the 'Your rights at Work' Campaign***

UNSW Press, Sydney, 256 pp, \$34.95

This is the detailed story of the 'Your Rights at Work' campaign. It looks at how the unions got mobilised, how the campaign developed, the role of the media and the influence on the election that saw the Howard government removed from office. The author sets the campaign in context by looking at the general state of the union movement when *WorkChoices* was introduced and at the role of media-driven politics. It also looks at how the YRaW campaign reconnected workplace issues to broader concerns about contemporary life, including economic security and work-life balance. The story is told in an engaging way, complete with photos demonstrations of rallies, street-stalls and stills from YRaW television advertisements. There's lots of lessons here about balancing industrial, educational and electoral elements in campaigning for political economic change. The big question that remains, of course, is 'where to now?' As the ACTU prepares for an advertising campaign criticising the Rudd government's IR policies, it is clear that the struggle is far from over ...

Tom Bramble

***Trade Unionism in Australia: a History from Flood to Ebb Tide***

Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2008, 293 pp.

Tom Bramble's new book provides an account of Australian trade unionism since the second world war. The period from 1945 to 1967 is dealt with fairly briefly, and then more detail is given to the periods 1968-74 ('the flood tide'), 1974-83 ('the stand-off') and 1983-2007 (the

'ebb tide'). The Accord gets strong criticism because it required restraint of workers' wages and rejection of militant union activity in favour of 'top down' deals negotiated between the ACTU officials and the leaders of the Federal ALP government. It is regarded as paving the way for, and leaving workers exposed to, the explicitly anti-union policies of the Howard government. As Bramble writes (on p180), 'after years of declining membership, the atrophying of grassroots activism and a lack of willingness by the union leaders to fight for workers' rights, the unions were now vulnerable to a full-blown attack by the incoming Howard government'.

Later in the book there is criticism of the trades union leadership during the struggle against *WorkChoices* and of the current stance of the Rudd government. Bramble says (on p249): 'The Accord may be dead, and with no prospect of disinterment, but senior union leaders are determined to pursue the same political agenda that had such disastrous consequences for unions in the 1980s and 1990s'. The author's underlying assumption is that there is ongoing potential rank and file militancy, but that this is not harnessed, indeed is usually thwarted, by union leaderships. So he concludes (on p251): 'The current union leaders are not likely to countenance the kinds of struggles needed to rebuild trade unions, and the organised left is weaker than at any time since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.' His optimism for the future, if that is what it is, hinges on 'consolidating a sizeable socialist organisation and rebuilding the networks of militants' (p252).

Pete Thomas and Greg Mallory  
*The Coalminers of Queensland: a Narrative History of the Queensland Colliery Employees Union: volume 2: the Pete Thomas Essays*  
 CFMEU, Brisbane, 2007, 476 pp

Here is a very 'grounded' (and sometimes under the ground) look at what unions and unionists actually do. It is based on a series of articles written by Pete Thomas, a former journalist for *Tribune* and the Miners' journal *Common Cause*, and subsequently re-worked for publication by Greg Mallory. In one sense it is an official history, having the *imprimatur* of the union, but it is also full of anecdotes about industrial conflicts, the development of the Queensland coalfields and the role that particular